

Arts and Africa

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"ARTS AND AFRICA"

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SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Hello and welcome to 'Arts and Africa'. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey inviting you to join me and listen to the sweet sounds of African nationalism.

SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Did you think you could escape from politics by tuning to 'Arts and Africa'? No such luck! I'm afraid this time. Because today we thought we'd listen to one of the most effective weapons in a politician's armoury - and it can sound like this:

ANGOLA BEVRIJDT - MPLA MARCH

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

I expect the words MPLA came over clearly enough for the march to be recognised as a song that has accompanied one section of the Angolan Liberation Army throughout its campaigns.

We do have more liberation songs from Angola for you but we've also selected some that express the national fervour of Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia. They're powerful stuff. And people who write the songs know this.

RIECKS RALLY
MORAKE:

As soon as you tell them in the form of a song, automatically they learn the song and by repeated listening of that song the message sinks automatically into them you see. And now, they quickly remember the message because they sing the song themselves repeatedly.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

That's the opinion of a song-writer from Botswana, Riecks Rally Morake, and remembering the Independence days in Ghana I'd say I totally agree with him.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now, listening with me in the studio is Graham Mytton who's heard a good many East and Central African political songs in his time. Well Graham, I know you've heard that MPLA song often enough. Did you actually hear it in Angola?

GRAHAM MYTTON:

No Alex but it is the theme song of the MPLA broadcasts from Lusaka in Zambia for the past few years and it's sung in many different forms. And one thing one notices about the liberation movements in Southern Africa and particularly in Angola and Mozambique is that they have produced an enormous amount of political music, political songs.

ANGOLA JETU MUSIC

GRAHAM MYTTON:

A group of women there singing about Angola. Very common in this part of Africa, I don't know about West Africa, for women to gather in a circle and for one of them or perhaps two to sing the lead song and the rest to join in, in chorus. They can make up a song as they're going along. They may take a traditional tune and turn it into some contemporary meaning. And of course the talking point in Angola is the liberation of Angola and the future independence of Angola. So this is the theme of many songs at the moment.

The thing one notices about women singing in much of central Africa is that they sing generally on their own without any musical accompaniment, sometimes with drums but women don't tend to play melody instruments. They don't play guitars or thumb pianos or whatever. This is a little different with the men and there are a large number of solo and group male singers, as this one here, the song in praise of the MPLA leader, Agostinho Neto sung by a singer with a guitar.

MATTA NETTO MUSIC

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

In fact praise songs are a tradition throughout Africa. And here is a song by Leonard Mpundu, who's called a 'Imishikakulo', that is the singer of the song. And the song praises a chief and it's based on a poem from the Luapula Province in Zambia.

ZAMBIA NATIONAL TROUPE - PRAISE SONG

GRAHAM MYTTON:

A lot of these praise songs of course are halfway between being poetry and being music. Some of them are accompanied with a friction drum or with some other kind of musical instrument. That was in praise of a chief. But of course the same traditional forms of praise song or praise poem are used nowadays in praise not of local, parochial or chief leaders but in praise of national leaders e.g. from Tanzania in praise of the leader Nyerere.

NYERERE PRAISE SONG

GRAHAM MYTTON:

That's a song in praise of Nyerere sung by the Wagogo people of Dodoma in central Tanzania. I don't know whether you noticed, of course, that there was quite a range of singers with a solo singer, some male voice chorus and also female as well; no instrumentation. It's a very traditional form but in praise of a national leader. Beautifully balanced that. I mean, the balance of sounds and the melody and the harmony and that I think is quite lovely. An unusual sort of thing to say about a political song in a way!

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, now you're talking about politics in Tanzania, I think one of the most important events in the political history of Tanzania has been the Arusha Declaration. Is there any song on that particular theme?

GRAHAM MYTTON:

Hundreds of songs about the Arusha Declaration. I mean these songs, political songs are not just about political leaders or independence or whatever. They are about events as they happen and the Arusha Declaration in 1967 was a very exciting event which caught people's imagination and there were very many songs in very different styles about the Arusha Declaration.

AZIMIO LA ARUSHA POLITICAL SONG

GRAHAM MYTTON:

Well I won't give you a translation of all that but the song right the way through, roughly speaking, says the Arusha Declaration has arrived; Tanzania is now becoming a Socialist country; we must be self-reliant; we must not be parasites; we must all work hard; we must see an end to colonialism and near-colonialism and the future depends on us. The themes of the Arusha Declaration expressed in very simple terms that everybody can understand. This song, which I think you'll agree is a lovely tune, very catchy, people singing it a great deal, it was very popular at the time 1967-1968. You still hear it occasionally today. And I think going back to what our Botswanan friend said just now that a song can be very valuable and very important in illustrating an idea; this particular one is by the Tanu Youthly Choir so in that respect it was, if you like, an official song. Interesting there to note the style. Well, that's if you like a four-part church harmony. And of course there's a very different style, the modern more swining kind of style.

"TAREHE" BY THE DAR-ES-SALAAM JAZZ BAND

GRAHAM MYTTON:

Well, that song has a curious title. It literally translates the date, 5th February 1967 and it's a song about that day and that was the day the Arusha Declaration came out. That band there plays regularly, or played, at dances in and around Dar-Es-Salaam and one of their repertoire was this song Tarehe - the date, 5th February 1967, The Dar-Es-Salaam Jazz Band.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, I'm not surprised that it's a dance song. It reminds me very much of Congolese music, the Congolese rumba which I very much love.

GRAHAM MYTTON:

Well, the Rumba music now in Tanzania is very very popular and some of the bands there have, in my view, done better than the Zairians in this respect. All of them or nearly all of them though, have at least one political song in their repertoire. It's also so in Zambia. Perhaps we could hear a political song from Zambia in similar style?

"LET US ALL FOLLOW THE RULING PARTY" - ZAMBIAN POLITICAL SONG

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Well, that song says "Let us all follow the ruling party, UNIP." But songs do not always exhort, they sometimes explain. Mr. Morake now talks about the necessity of explaining the function of the Government's Community Development Department in Botswana, which is why he wrote the song.

RIECKS RALLY MORAKE:

'Boipelego'. That's another one which is used by Community Development people. Now here, I'm explaining to the people to the nation as a whole what these departments are for. what the government expects them to do in the line of self-reliance.

MUSIC 'BOIPELEGO'

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Morake has also written songs even to encourage people to vote at election time. Now Graham, all along we've taken a starry-eyed view of political songs. They're popular, they're edifying, they're inspiring and all that. But surely, people surely will get tired of them?

GRAHAM MYTTON:

Well, there are fashions in all kinds of popular music. I think fashions come and go and I think in Tanzania now there are fewer songs about the Arusha Declaration. There is less excitement about politics and therefore less music. The same is true elsewhere. I think you'll see in Angola over the next few years that there'll be fewer songs about Angolan freedom; the same in Mozambique.

Of course, one thing we must remember, all these songs have been positive, as well about politics. Songs needn't be positive. You can have the opposite of a praise song. You can have a song which condemns a leader. Let us not forget during the anti-colonial period that the number of songs there were which were critical of the British or the French and these songs were part of the liberation struggle in many parts of Africa. And the same can happen today. People can write songs about their government or about political leaders that they don't like. So songs are an expression of people's feelings about all aspects of life and politics is one aspect of life. So people will go on writing and performing songs about them.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Well, Graham, our thanks to you. I fancy some traditional music to end with. Now how about the Warangi people from Kondoo in Tanzania?

TANZANIAN POLITICAL MUSIC

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

And if you don't understand the language let me tell you that they're praising the Arusha Declaration - as I said, there's power in music! But for now it's goodbye from me Alex Tetteh-Lartey until next week's 'Arts and Africa'.

TANZANIAN POLITICAL MUSIC

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