

# Arts and Africa

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"ARTS AND AFRICA"

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ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome to "Arts and Africa". This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey and in this programme a Ghanaian actor talks about a new acting group he wants to set up in Ghana and a Nigerian composer tells us about his new Highlife Symphony.

SIGNATURE TUNE

TETTEH-LARTEY:

It's been eleven years now since the International Trade Centre was set up in Geneva to help developing countries find markets for their exports. But now the Trade Centre has set up a special programme to market handicrafts from developing countries in the West. These items range from woven baskets to African sculptures. Well up to now one of the main problems has been the lack of communication between the African artist and his market. Graham Romaine is the Director of the Handicraft Marketing Programme for Western Europe and Julian Marshall put it to him that pressure selling handicrafts endanger a country's culture.

GRAHAM ROMAINE:

Yes there is a danger here. I think one must be very conscious of the pressures which marketing forces can bring to bear on traditional objects one would find in tribal groupings and elsewhere in Africa, in fact throughout the developing world. I do not believe that the market is always right, it certainly is not always right, it certainly is not always right in terms of culture. I would hate to see traditional cultural objects deliberately changed, altered, adapted, to meet the demands of Western civilization if this would mean that they would be so altered as to destroy their meaning and original function.

JULIAN MARSHALL:

When handicrafts and artefacts do end up in Europe what sort of status would you like to see them as having?

ROMAINE:

Well personally I'd like to see their status changed. I don't like

the idea of handicraft pieces from the developing countries sold at below their market value and sold in many cases to people who feel that they are almost doing the producers a service in buying them. I don't agree that these articles are sympathy objects. I would like to see handicrafts sold in the high street, I would like to see them compete on an equal basis with the mass produced items that are currently sold in the western European countries. I feel that these are valuable items in that in many cases they reflect the culture of a country, they certainly embody to a greater or lesser extent the skills of the artisan and I'm quite convinced that given proper marketing, proper merchandising, these products can compete on an equal basis with some of the best products produced in western Europe today.

MARSHALL:

Is there not a danger though that with such a wide range of products, all the way from leather handbags to really quite complicated sculptures, that you're going to debase the latter, that in fact you're going to detract from its artistic worth?

ROMAINE:

Oh, I don't think so. I don't think that, by using the techniques of mass marketing, one should necessarily debase the product itself. I think that what one can do is make these products available to a larger proportion of the population.

MARSHALL:

And what about the problems of fads or vogues? What do you do about these fluctuating changes in the market?

ROMAINE:

Yes, this of course is a great danger, particularly to the producer, particularly to the small producer. I'm sure you know that in many of the African countries, particularly in outlying areas, the craftsmen have been tempted with offers by middle men of riches and what have you. He then forgets to till his fields. He might sell a few cows and gets to work making a few grass mats, only to find subsequently the market has changed, the demand is no longer there. He is virtually up to his knees in grass mats and he's mortgaged his stock, he hasn't tilled his fields, he has a very hungry few months to look forward to. I think what we must try and do is to keep at least the parastatals and the co-operatives, if not the smaller man, in contact with the changes in markets abroad, so that he is at least aware of market fluctuations and can perhaps alter his production accordingly.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Julian Marshall talking to Graham Romaine, Director of Handicraft Marketing.

You may remember that last week on the programme you heard this...

MUSIC: An extract from the Overture to "Opu Jaja" by Adam Fiberesima.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

That was a piece of music from the opera "Opu Jaja" by the Nigerian composer Adam Fiberesima which we featured in the programme last week. Well, Adam Fiberesima paid a flying visit to London recently to record his latest work "Highlife Symphony" with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. "Highlife Symphony" was commissioned by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, NBC, for the Nigerian Festival of Arts and Culture to be held in Lagos in January and February next year. At the recording session Gordon Stewart asked the composer, who incidentally is head of NBC's External Service's music department, why he was attracted to the symphonic form.

ADAM FIBERISIMA:

The thing that attracts me to the symphony is the pattern and the seriousness to it, that's the most important thing that appeals to me in a symphony and you don't sort of write the songs all over again, you're thinking in the symphonic work, you're not just writing for dance bands, just straightforward.

GORDON STEWART:

It makes a very immediate impact. It is a very interesting orchestral sound. Have you used any specific African instruments?

FIBERISIMA:

Percussion, maracas, the bongos, the side drums, I mean even the snare drum could be called African.

STEWART:

How do you find the problem of interrelating African music with European music?

FIBERISIMA:

Well European music has nothing too different from the African pattern apart from the harmony which is quite different, but I think music all over the world seems to be the same as far as I'm concerned and even though the Europeans might think theirs slightly different from the African, we are repetitive in our own type of music as you know, sounds repeated over and over again and that depends on the area, the part of the country. For instance in the southern part of Nigeria we seem to have this sort of harmony which is quite easy to follow, two part harmony, you orchestrate thirds and fifths, but up north,

which is rather different from the south, the singing there is mostly pentatonic, pentatonic scale, and they use quarter tone at times. This must be an influence from the north. These are popular tunes, as I said, from all over Nigeria. Every man can sing this, hum it in the market, or even the house boy, or whoever it is, can hum these tunes easily. They're well-known all over the country but it's only highly orchestrated that's different.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Adam Fiberesima talking to Gordon Stewart during the recording of his latest musical composition "Highlife Symphony", which listeners in Nigeria will be able to hear when it receives its first performance at the Nigerian Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos early next year.

Victor Nunoo is a Ghanaian actor who has appeared in many plays produced in the BBC's African Theatre series. Now Victor is planning on returning to Ghana where he hopes to set up his own theatre company. Victor's with me now. Victor tell me more about what you intend to do in Ghana towards the improvement of theatre work.

VICTOR NUNOO:

What I want to do in Ghana is to try and bring the theatre to the people, like in the old days we had the mobile cinema, which was driving from village to village. I want my theatre to be that, just taking a simple story which our elders tell the villagers, dramatize it and then put it on stage for them to see. Again I want to encourage Ghanaian writers. It's very sad to me in England here, where all the plays, all the African plays I've been in happen to be Nigerian plays. For some reason I think Ghanaians ought to be encouraged to write their plays. Now if they know that there is somebody who is prepared to perform their plays I think we'll get more Ghanaians to write plays. If a school is taking a particular book for the school examinations, like in Ghana we have got Shakespeare and all that as the literature part of the syllabus, I want to form a company that would be able to interpret this play to the schools concerned. This is mainly the reason for my going to Ghana.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

I'm interested in what you said about going to the villages in particular and performing plays with, I suppose, folk themes. By that are you suggesting that you feel that we should go back to the miracle play style? You see rather than build on what you've already got at the moment, whatever we've borrowed from the western world, by way of theatre.

NUNOO:

You see drama is life. The theatre is life, and whatever one learns from another country. I came here to learn the technical part of the theatre. When I go to Ghana I'm not importing the British way of life to them, it is their own life which is going to be shown on the

stage for them to see, so it's not a question of asking them to throw away what they have and me bringing in a new thing, it's not new at all. I'm merely going to Ghana to see the way of life there and I think it has changed a lot since 1964 when I left the place. Now at the moment they're developing. Plays must be reflected on the development of Ghana. You see we've got this idea of whenever there is an African culture, part of our culture being portrayed, it's always been drums and dancing, drumming and dancing. Africa is not all drumming and dancing. We've passed through our independence and we're building up a nation. People go to work, they come back, they have problems at work, they would want to see that as a form of entertainment. And so this is all it is about. It's nothing new.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

What would you suggest then we do with what we have at the moment?

NUNOO:

What we have at the moment can be improved upon. I mean what we have or what I know we had was light entertainment. You get Bob Cole, you get Kakaiku and the rest, and then they come in, tell a joke and then sing a song, dance and that's it. A lot of it is good. They've got a lot of good plays, but they were all improvised. Nobody wrote them down. I mean Kakaiku and Bob Cole can go on stage, do things that they've been doing for years, there's no script there. I can ask them to produce me a script of what they have done and we can polish it a bit and present it in another form. Now all this is part of it.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

So what you really want to do is to popularise the theatre?

NUNOO:

Exactly.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

That was Victor Nunoo who's returning to Ghana soon to start his own theatre company. And that's all we have time for. Until next week at the same time this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye for now,

MUSIC: "Limpopo" by Jeremy Taylor.

\*NB Typing error in "Arts and Africa"  
No. 113. Please read Senghor for  
Senglior.

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