

Arts and Africa

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ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE

ALEX' TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey. Well, what's in "Arts and Africa" today? How about a new film from Tanzania, and more money for musicians?

SIGNATURE TUNE:

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, I did say money. And the question we're raising today is: who does traditional music belong to? This is the sort of music I mean.

MUSIC: The Music of Africa - Women's Chorus from Gabon.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Those women were recorded in Gabon and they're singing about pacifying the spirits. Now the clash between traditional attitudes to payment for music-making and the modern, imported legal rights, means that more and more musicians need pacifying. That music from Gabon is an example of the copyright belonging, in this case to the BBC whose record we're playing, and not belonging to the women singing.

It's a subject that came up the other day when I was talking to Meusa Isaiah Mapoma who's a research fellow in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Zambia in Lusaka. And I soon found out that he was in no doubt who the music really belongs to.

MEUSA MAPOMA:

Traditional music belongs to the people and you therefore find a musician who operates within the traditional environment who feels that what he does doesn't really need any kind of copyright. A

problem has however arisen as a result of an ethnomusicologist, or a musicologist, or just interested private people from the western world going in to record that traditional music which belongs to the people, and when it goes out, because of the way the copyright operates in the western world, that music is immediately subjected to a copyright condition. This therefore means that that music which belonged to a private person in the villages, when it appears on the record, belongs to the person who collected it, completely ignoring the musician himself who provided the material. I would like the royalties for example to be negotiated between the artist himself and the recording company. The governments could come in and we are going to restrict perhaps the movement of music from one area into another or from one country into another, thereby protect this controversial issue, but that is going to solve it very amicably I'm afraid.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

In traditional society, do you have anything which is the equivalent of the western concept of copyright?

MEUSA MAPOMA:

Yes. There is copyright which is practised by some people, the royal musicians. These are musicians who during a certain time in the year, move from chief's area to chief's area and as they move from place to place, all the villages that they pass through, they have to stop and perform there, before they reach their final destination. Normally travelling from place to place is called "ukombela". An ingomba who gets on this trip should not sing the music of another ingomba at all. Should he ever sing that music he should not be paid for it. It is allowed that way and when you're in a social gathering you can sing any music which belongs to another ingomba, as long as you're not being paid for it. But immediately you sing it when you're on this trip and people give you presents, then you're infringing the traditional copyright, which is also another way of making a musician really very prolific in his production of music, because he's not allowed to copy another person's music.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Meusa Isaiah Mapoma. And here is a royal musician - "Kalulu".

MUSIC: "Kalulu" - Zambian Music.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

And while we're on the topic of copyright I'd like to mention a booklet packed with information for poets, playwrights, in fact for any African authors and their publishers. The booklet is called

"Copyright in Developing Countries" and concerns the written word, not music. It's a revised and updated version of the pamphlet published by the Commonwealth Secretariat three years ago. It deals with such topics as the various individual rights incorporated in the general term copyright. What the author's rights are and what the publisher's are. Whether an author has any say in the design, illustration and production of his book, and there are several others. These are very useful little tit-bits which authors will find very handy. The booklet is only a few pages long and very easy to handle. If anyone would like a copy, the price is 25 pence by the way, let us know and we'll pass on your order to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

And now for the film. It's the first feature film to be made in Tanzania by Tanzanians and it's called "Fimbo Ya Mnyonge". Well, Elizabeth Blunt who's here with me now has recently come back from Tanzania and she's come along today to tell me about "Fimbo Ya Mnyonge". And before you explain what it's about, Elizabeth, can you translate the title for me? I imagine it's in Swahili.

ELIZABETH BLUNT:

Yes. "Fimbo Ya Mnyonge" most literally means "The Poor Man's Crutch" but in this sense more "The Poor Man's Salvation".

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Crutch in the sense of support?

BLUNT:

His support.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes. I see.

BLUNT:

His help.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now what is the plot of the film?

BLUNT:

Well the poor man is called Yomba Yomba and he's a peasant farmer and at the beginning of the film he's living in the traditional way in

Tanzania in a very scattered settlement, and he's working very hard, and he's not making any money at all and his wife nags him all the time because she sees people going to the towns and coming back with good things, and she tells Yomba Yomba that it's up to him to go to the city to make himself rich. So in the end he gives in and there's a bit of trickery where he gets money to go by selling the family goat for an enormous price and he gets his bus fare and off he goes to Dar es Salaam to make his fortune. Only, of course, when he gets there he finds that it's not easy, there are no jobs and he gets robbed by thieves and beaten up and when he does get a job it's pulling a vegetable cart for a small capitalist where he works very hard and still makes no money. So then he tries to organise his fellow workers and point out how exploited they are. But that doesn't get him anywhere because his fellow workers don't thank him for it and he loses his job. In the end he has to leave Dar es Salaam, and some villagers find him hiding in the bush. Now these people are living in an Ujamaa village and this is the government's idea for bringing people together to settle in bigger villages where facilities can be more easily provided and where some of the farming can be done communally. These people find Yomba Yomba so he stays with them and he sees what they're doing and this village is quite new but they take him to a nearby Ujamaa village where more progress has been made and people are beginning to be more prosperous. And he's very impressed and so at the end he goes back to his wife and he's still got no money but he's learnt that the way to get on is not to rush off to the city but to live together and to work together and gradually things get better.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

It's rather a sad story but I think the moral is quite clear from what you just said.

BLUNT:

Oh it's a very moral story. I mean it was made to try and show people the benefits of Ujamaa living really.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

And where was the film shot?

BLUNT:

Well, the Dar es Salaam sequences were obviously in the city, the villages were in Iringa Region, which is very pleasant hilly country in the south-west, and they used two Ujamaa villages. That was something in fact I talked about to the editor of the Tanzanian film company and the assistant director of the film, a man called Musa Musa.

MUSA MUSA:

There were chosen two Ujamaa villages - one the one which we started with which was not very much developed but second the one which was more developed than the other.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

How did the villagers get on then? How did the people in the village react?

MUSA MUSA:

Of course at the beginning they didn't understand what the real thing was that we wanted to do, so we tried our best to use something like three weeks to do some rehearsals and show them how we are going to work together - we technicians and those actors. The shooting, or cinematography to them is the new thing. We had first to educate them what they should do, for example looking at the camera, or working while the other actor is doing another thing, or to keep in the same place for all the three weeks or one month while you're going to shoot, to tell them why we wanted them to keep in the same place, for matter of continuity.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Well it looks to me as if the villagers were completely in the dark about this film, but the film crew themselves were not experienced people?

BLUNT:

No, not at all. For both the people I talked to, in fact for all the Tanzanians on it, it was their first feature film. Their sound recordist Charles Mutakyamirwa, he talked to me about this.

CHARLES MUTAKYAMIRWA:

By saying "new" we're saying that in the standards of Europe where you find a lot of technicians have got experience of ten, fifteen years, but here the experience of the technicians is relatively very short. But even though we had help from the expatriates we had from Denmark, they helped us a lot, but having one expatriate out of ten when people are learning is not very easy because film making is just teamwork, everybody must know it works very well.

BLUNT:

What job did the man from Denmark do?

MUTAKYAMIRWA:

He was production mangger but he played the role of being director and also being the editor and there was also a cameraman from Denmark.

BLUNT:

And had you worked on a feature film before?

MUTAKYAMIRWA:

Well it was my first one. I started as a continuity boy, sometimes assisting our director since he didn't know any Swahili, and of course I went on to assisting in editing. In the editing of course we need understanding of a language, in fact I had to do almost eighty percent of the editing.

BLUNT:

The people who helped you, the villagers near Iringa, are they going to have a chance to see this film?

MUTAKAMIRWA:

I think they have because after showing the film in Dar es Salaam it went to Iringa and it was screened for them but because it was in 35 mm we screened it in town and we had to bring the villagers into town to see it.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Who are the people in Tanzania who are supposed to see this film?

BLUNT:

Well of course there is this problem that all the cinemas are in the big towns and the message of the film is really for the people, not only in Ujamaa villages but the most scattered people right out in the country. They hope there is going to be a solution because although the print at the moment is 35mm, they're going to get 16mm copies and these can be shown in film vans and then the film can be taken on the road and it can tour round, certainly to Ujamaa villages and to other areas where people can come and see it and it'll get right out into the bush.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Is there any intention to show it elsewhere in Africa?

BLUNT:

Yes. I think the distribution will be more on a basis of politically sympathetic countries than countries where Swahili is the main language. In other words I think it's more likely to go places like Mozambique and Zambia than it is to say Kenya or to Uganda.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Thank you Elizabeth Blunt. And as "Fimbo Ya Mnyonge" is largely set in the Ujamaa villages of Tanzania, here's a song of praise of the concept of self-help - "Jitegemee" - it's called and the Western Jazz Band are playing it to close the programme. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye, see you this time next week with more "Arts and Africa".

MUSIC: "Jitegemee" by The Western Jazz Band.

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