

# Arts and Africa

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ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey. And today - more music from Zambia and a poet from South Africa.

SIGNATURE TUNE:

TETTEH-LARTEY:

His name is Adam Small - a good name for a neat, intense person whose mixed blood and tension seemed, when we met, to typify the South African situation.

He's labelled by apartheid as 'coloured' rather than 'black'. And although we were talking freely in English and I knew that he wrote some of his poems in English, Adam confirmed that his first language is Afrikaans.

ADAM SMALL:

I'm Afrikaans-speaking, I speak English only reasonably as you can hear. But I'm Afrikaans-speaking in the first place, by that I mean simply that that was the language my mother taught me.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Can we come to your actual works? What sort of subjects do you treat?

SMALL:

Yes, thank God, almost I should say, I have a sense of humour, and because I have a sense of humour I write satire, satire has sustained me in that situation and I think satire has perhaps saved me also from having any of my works banned so far, perhaps even from personal

banning, I'm not sure, and you can quote me! But the question is sometimes raised at home also, why has none of my work been banned. There is a very simple explanation for that, namely that my work is Afrikaans, mainly I'm writing English these days also, but I am Afrikaans and well, if you will read between the lines, Mr. Forster is also Afrikaans. Culture works like that. And of course there is another angle to my work where what I would like to call a pure bitterness speaks. I'll read to you a poem written in the colloquial of the Cape Coloured people. The title of this poem is "What about the Law?", and it is about the white girl and the coloured boy who fall in love, and in South Africa they are not allowed to fall in love, and the people, her people, his people, family, ask "What about the Law?" In South Africa that is a very important question, and so the story goes on until they commit suicide ultimately, and there have been these cases and the people still ask ultimately "What about the Law?" I think that is satire.

POEM: "What about the Law?" Read by Adam Small.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

It's very much like an incantation. It's a really dreadful subject isn't it?

SMALL:

You have quite correctly said 'incantation'. I think you will find much of my work in the way of incantation.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Can we come down to the actual creative activity going on in South Africa? Which part of the country do you find as the breeding ground of the greatest activity?

SMALL:

I think there's a tremendous flowering at the moment of black writing all over the country at the moment. Perhaps in and around Johannesburg the creative impulse is stronger than anywhere else. There are very beautiful things happening, especially also in drama, poetry certainly, but in drama perhaps more meaningful than anywhere else.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Do the black artists and the coloured artists get widely publicised?

SMALL:

This unfortunately not. Another worrying aspect of the situation is that black artists in South Africa do not have much communication

with each other. We meet each other of and on but there is no confrontation almost, creative confrontation if you like, and we should really do something about this.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

What is the real reason why they are not so widely publicised? Is it because of fear of what they write, that they might broadcast their ideas? Or is it because...?

SMALL:

I think this is a very real problem even when it is not really the case, and even when the risk can be taken without it really being a risk, simply because of the general atmosphere we have in the country, one is inclined to think that almost anything you might write is clandestine. Artists do not really organize themselves enough, and then also we have a financial problem. This is very, very important. There is no money for literary journals. I'm not so sure that it is not the most important problem.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Perhaps you would like to read us one other work from your collection?

SMALL:

Could I read an English poem just to show you that I can handle English?

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, sure.

SMALL:

I'm going to read to you a poem which has no satirical content whatsoever. It is dedicated to Ingrid Jonker. Ingrid Jonker was the Afrikaans poet who walked into the sea in 1965, she committed suicide, and she was at that time just beginning I think to write very, very good poetry perhaps it is true that apart from all the other problems, Ingrid was concerned very deeply with the thing which we call the South African situation. I call it "There was a Body! In Memoriam Ingrid Jonker".

POEM: "There was a Body: In Memoriam Ingrid Jonker". Read by Adam Small.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Adam Small thank you very much indeed.

SMALL:

Thank you.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Zambia is also a part of Southern Africa, though the mood of the programme changes sharply when Mwesa Mapoma joins me again to tell us more about music research at the University of Zambia at Lusaka. As well as collecting traditional music Mwesa and his colleagues take an active interest in new developments.

MWESA MAPOMA:

You have some jazz-type music and I'm sure you have heard of the Rumba or Zairian music, and you have the Highlife which is a new form of music which has come in, but it's not traditional, but it is African. So here we have therefore a project where we look into new music and where we are mixing the new music and African music and so you have people like the Mapoma Brothers, a number which I have here for you, who have just taken a simple song "Shikiti Shikiti" which is a children's song, but they have put into a form which incorporates western vibrato or western rallentando all those characteristics which don't exist to such an extent in our African music, and they come up with something which is pretty interesting.

MUSIC: "Shikiti Shikiti" by The Mapoma Brothers.

MAPOMA:

Well here you have my brothers playing "Shikiti Shikiti" and just to show you the traditional way it is sung... (Sings it). In their music there they sang it.. they sang it like this. (Sings it). Some people say "Well, that sounds very interesting. We should sing that". But the children in the villages always like to go "rrrrr... (copies children) and spit it out.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

By the way what is it about, I'd like to know?

MAPOMA:

Well it's about little children who are trying to pass a little pebble and they kick one away and say that you have to find out who has the pebble, and they pass the pebble from one hand to another and then the other one who is at a distance comes and says, "mmrrr..." and he hits his chest. Now as he cries, Imm owomba (phonetically), which is a big black bird.

"What are you crying for?" "I am crying for that little pebble which I saw you holding while I was perched up in a tree". Then he says, "Now everybody look at me" and the guilty one should look a bit guilty, but you know how it is.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, it was beautifully harmonised there.

MAPOMA:

This is again another aspect which some people have talked about. They say harmonisation here is western harmony. It isn't really. It is just African harmony, but the thing which makes it sound like western vibrato where they are blending it and slowing it down here and there. Music came from the Bemba people. In that aspect we harmonize in thirds and traditionally you harmonize a third below the melody, but in this presentation they harmonize a third below the melody and a third above the melody.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

And these people are not trained musicians are they?

MAPOMA:

Well they are not trained in the western way. Those guys there haven't been to any western school to learn how to sing and what not, we just sang at home and we have gone on like that.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes. I'm sure you'll agree that the singing of the Mapoma Brothers is most refreshing. Let's listen to them again. I'll see if I can identify Mwesa's voice among them. Meanwhile it's goodbye from me, Alex Tetteh-Lartey, hoping to meet you again in "Arts and Africa" this time next week.

MUSIC: "Balichiweta" by The Mapoma Brothers.