

# Arts and Africa

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ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TEETEH-LARTEY:

Welcome to "Arts and Africa". This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey and in this week's programme we talk to a Nigerian artist about his new exhibition, we hear about a dance troupe from the University of Zaria and we go to a reading of anti-apartheid poetry.

SIGNATURE TUNE

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Kehinde Oshinake is a young Nigerian artist, from Lagos, but now living and working in Boston in the United States, who recently opened an exhibition of his paintings, graphics and batiks at the African Centre in London. Called "Way Home 76" the exhibition is the fruit of the work of an African artist living and working in America but constantly thinking of home in Nigeria. And in fact the exhibition has an apt title because Kehinde is on his way home as he is just about to take up a travelling scholarship from the Museum of Modern Art in Boston to travel and work in Africa for a year. This will include some time in Lagos during FESTAC, the black Arts Festival. I went along to the exhibition to talk to Kehinde about some of his paintings.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

When I look at the various paintings you have on the walls I can see some which I would call traditional like that little girl carrying her brother or sister, and then next to it something which looks to me like impressionistic paintings. Now do you specialise in any particular kind of art?

KEHINDE OSHINAKE:

Actually no, because I'm trying to focus my duration, my development in the arts, to relate to the whole universe. I'm not really focusing my duration on only the Nigerian because I know there are a whole lot of black people in this country.

We never even get a chance to communicate. With my art I try to travel with it, try to relate to as many people as I come in to contact with, my abstract expression which you just mentioned. All I'm trying to do is to have the conversation of the colour to really create the forms, the shapes, which is necessary and art is something which has to be explained by the way you put it on the canvas.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes. Now Let's look at this painting you have on the wall, a painting of a lady. I think it's done in pencil?

KEHINDE OSHINAKE:

Oh yes, actually when I decided to do this painting I thought about African beauty and the only way I could express African beauty was to utilise my wife and actually I came about putting my wife on the paper - in the form of traditional way of dressing, like the head tie, you can look at the shape and to me it's really perfect, because I try to make sure every line and every shape really means something and people draw differently and this is the way I look at her.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now here this black and white painting of a man carrying a stick. What is it about ?

KEHINDE OSHINAKE:

The whole idea behind this wood-carving - seeing the man working from the darkness into the light is like seeing an Iyusa - as we call it in Nigeria - working all the way from the Sahara desert, he goes to see the sunshine and you can see with the stick he's holding, that the stick is leading the way is his direction - towards the sunshine.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now how about this rather large painting of people - who look to me like drummers?

KEHINDE OSHINAKE:

This is what I consider the African festival and the reason I put it there was really to relate to the coming all black Festival being held in Nigeria in January next year, and my motive behind it was to say something about the traditional form of dancing through visual form, and you can see this whole family affair also, you can see the native's sheep in the background, the guy on the ox, people washing, because this is the festival, this is something special, that's why the whole village has come out to give homage to the festival.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Nigerian artist Kehinde Oshinake who is on his way back to Lagos after living and working in the United States for a number of years.

Many black South African poets and writers have stepped up their political activities recently following the Soweto riots in which more than 170 people died. An institute for Black Studies has been holding meetings near Johannesburg despite harassment from the authorities to discuss the role of literature and politics with several prominent black South African expatriots like Ezekiel Mphahlele presenting papers. And here in London African writers like Lewis Nkosi and John Matshikiza are presenting readings of poetry with music by the black South African group, Jabula. Well, I asked John to read us one of his most powerful poems at an evening of Poetry and Music for African Liberation held in London's 100 Club. The poem is called AT THE DAWN:

POEM:

At the Dawn I saw Africa and pride moved in its body  
as I moved.  
And the light that we breathed was strong.  
The King was our people and the King Wanyama moved without fear  
and the light and the sun shone on the birds, the trees and the  
voices of children.  
Yesterday my people were fierce and smiled at all things moving  
in all lands beyond all seas held no fear for us.  
Today the King is dead.  
Where is that dawn I woke to when the sun was round and breathed  
light from the earth.  
Where are the sounds of the earth which rang in the trees and  
with the birds.  
My child's voice is strong but I do not hear.  
Yesterday when we were fierce and knew that we lived in all  
the lands, beyond all seas.  
The earth lived in us.  
Today the king is dead.  
O of the nation have no king.  
Today I see no light in the sun and before you, I say that I have  
died.  
Before you I say that I have died and shall not rise till the  
voices of the dawn scream forth again and the sun sings in the  
eyes of my child.  
And as I rise my King shall rise and Africa will come back ...

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

At the Dawn, a powerful poem from the black South African writer, John Matshikiza.

Dr. Andrew Horn is Head of performing Arts at the Centre for Nigerian Cultural Studies at the Ahmadu Bello University of Zaria where he runs a performing arts company. The Company of 23 full-time dancers and actors performs throughout Nigeria and is now on its first overseas professional trip touring extensively in England, Scotland and Wales.

Well Andrew, how did the troupe originate ?

DR. ANDREW HORN:

It began as a fairly informal group of young people in Kano in Northern Nigeria who got together under the centre's auspices to do traditional dance. We were able to get a bit of money from the Federal Ministry of Information to tie them over and feed them a bit, and last year were able to constitute the company officially under the umbrella of the University. So now all of our performers are salaried members of the University staff.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

How long have they existed ?

DR. ANDREW HORN:

For about 4 years now.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

What's the purpose of forming the group - is it just as part of the Universities activities or did you form it in order to perform dances for the public ?

DR. ANDREW HORN:

Well, it's really both in a way. We contribute to training of students to some extent but really we're more community orientated. The group initially was concerned to preserve the traditional performance cultures of the peoples of Northern Nigeria and as the years go on we do more and more experimentation and we try to generate new theatre ideas for popular audience - this is the main thing. We want to reach out to the people in urban and rural areas and not be tied in by the universities walls.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

How do you do your recruitment, how do you select the people to form the group, on what basis ?

DR. ANDREW HORN:

The initial group started off with a group of people who just hung around our centre - very informal indeed. Since then we've had formal auditions to expand the numbers in the group. Now that we've become a formal outfit we do things in a formal way.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

What specifically do you look for. I mean by way of talent - do you look for dancing talent or singing, voice talent ?

DR. ANDREW HORN:

We haven't done very much singing. We are primarily concerned with how people move, even if it's not necessarily moving in a dance fashion, how they move on the stage, because we're as

interested in actors as we are in dancers and musicians.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

One would have thought that having come from Nigeria to perform African dances, the first place you would have gone to would be African countries rather than overseas.

DR. ANDREW HORN:

Very true indeed and certainly there needs to be a lot more interaction between African countries in terms of cultural exchanges, especially at the grass roots level. Unfortunately this invitation came and because we aren't all that rich, we take up invitations as they come.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

I see.

DR. ANDREW HORN:

If an African country can help to maintain us on tour within their country, we would be more than happy to send the company to visit throughout Africa. Actually our primary orientation is to Nigeria. We want to spread our cultural activities to the various regions, various ethnic groups within Nigeria. Next it would be nice to go to neighbouring countries, both anglophone and francophone, and then places like East Africa and perhaps some of the countries in Southern Africa. We hope to be able to do this kind of thing perhaps through the OAU or through other international organisations.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Since you have said this I think the best point to start this would probably be at the Black Arts Festival to be held in Nigeria next year. Are you thinking of doing anything at the festival?

DR. ANDREW HORN:

Yes, we very much hope to. At the moment the final schedule of the festival's activities has not been issued to us in Nigeria. We anticipate participation in Nigeria's entry to the festival. As you know the Festival is much scaled down from its original plans and originally universities were to participate, but now everything comes under the national umbrella.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Have you got anything specific in mind that you plan to do at the Festival if you do turn up?

DR. ANDREW HORN:

If we do turn up, probably what we already do in repertoire is the production that we are performing now in Britain which is called "Faday Kamwa", which in Hausa means "Warnings", and it's a collection of 6 very short one act plays which are performed in dance and mime, we don't use language at all which makes it possible to perform before any audience speaking any language and perhaps one or two of those plays.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

§The title sounds threatening to me - why do you call it "Warnings".

DR. ANDREW HORN:

We call it "Warnings" because all of the plays are about some kind of human failure: greed, lust, things like that. They're comic plays but each is meant to say "watch out, don't behave in this fashion".

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Andrew Horn, thank you very much indeed and we hope all the best for you.

DR. ANDREW HORN:

Thank you, thank you very much.

Dr. Andrew Horn, Head of Performing Arts at the Centre for Nigerian Cultural Studies at Ahmedu Bello University and that's all from "Arts and Africa" for the moment. Join us again some time next week. Until then this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying, goodbye.

MUSIC: Limpopo - Jeremy Taylor

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