

4/72/3/39

Arts and Africa

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

"ARTS AND AFRICA"

No. 138

(6R 53 S 138 G)

ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE TUNE:

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey to a new line in story-telling and to one of Africa's most popular musicians n today's "Arts and Africa".

SIGNATURE TUNE:

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Our well-known musicians comes later in the programme, but you might like a clue to his identity. Here's how he describes himself.

MANU DIBANGO:

I'm a twentieth-century man, I am a musician, I'm black and I'm a Cameroonian. All these things I try to put in to my music.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

And if you're still puzzled, here is a musical clue.

MUSIC: Camerooun Africa by Manu Dibango.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

I'm sure you've got the name by now but if you're in any doubt we'll be hearing from the man himself later on. Just for the moment, though, I'm looking at some paperbacks lying here on the table. They all have the same bold title - "Scorpion l'African" and some very dramatic pictures on the covers. Here's a man with a pair of hands round his neck strangling him; another is of a ferocious crocodile chasing a swimmer and here's one - a woman screaming, with a dead man lying across the bed.

They're all part of a new series of thrillers written in French and published in Paris. What's new about them is that they've been written with an African audience in mind and three

out of the four have African settings, in Kingshassa, in Monrovia and the Sahel. They're fiction of course, not fact, but there's plenty of politics to make them realistic. Let me read you this page in English to show what they're like:

" Addis Ababa was sleeping in the furnace of a sultry afternoon ... nothing stirred, except in slow motion, like the coming and going of the guards in front of the modern building of the OAU.

Scorpion had passed by that imposing building and had stopped his car in front of a modest-looking one. No one could have imagined that behind the anonymous facade lay hidden the brains of one of the most active agencies in all Africa, the Special Intervention Bureau (the SIB) - an autonomous organisation financed by the independent countries of Africa and responsible for the most effective secret missions performed in the service of the African continent.

In the jargon of its agents, the SIB became the 'Zoo' so called because, for a pseudonym, each agent had taken the name of an African animal".

Well, from the titles it seems that each book has the same hero, the Scorpion. Sette Toure has been looking at the series for us and so I was able to ask him why such a frightening name as Scorpion had been given to the, no doubt intrepid, special agent.

SETTE TOURE

I think it was named after Col. Adekunle who, during the civil war in Nigeria, was such a brilliant fighter that everybody was trying to take the same course as him.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Briefly, what's the theme of the stories ?

SETTE TOURE:

Well, in a nut shell, I think the writer is attempting to restore the confidence of Africans because the fact that many books of this kind have been written by foreigners must have eaten deeply into the fabric of our self confidence in Africa. Well, the first book I read was about African athletes who were sent to take part in the Olympic games in Montreal and unfortunately no sooner had they arrived in that country than they were charged with smuggling drugs into the country and Scorpion happened to know about it and left the headquarters of the Special Intervention Bureau in Addis Ababa to join them in Canada and settle matters before it was too late.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

That's the theme of one book - how about the other ?

SETTE TOURE:

Well, the other one - you know, some of the countries in Africa, especially South of the Sahara - had been hit by the drought and they needed a lot of help from other countries. Food supplies were to be sent to them by the FAO which is a special agency of the United Nations, the headquarters of which is in Rome, Italy. Unfortunately the food supplies, instead of being sent to Africa, were sold rather to Russia. This operation was carried out by some members of the Mafia. Scorpion here again moved in, because he knew about it and went to Russia and informed some of the Cabinet Ministers about it.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

It looks to me like a James Bond kind of story, the sort of thing you might read by Ian Fleming or Agatha Christie, Why did the writer choose this particular style ?

SETTE TOURE:

Well, it is difficult to get rid overnight of our usual habits in Africa. For instance, in my case I'm a Senegalese, a French-speaking person. I've been reading books on the same lines as James Bond for years. If somebody comes out with something very similar to James Bond books, I would rather settle for that than if they came out with something absolutely new which is a far cry from it.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now these books are obviously meant to entertain. Are you likely to pick up one of them, for example, and after reading the first few pages and getting the theme, as you've just narrated, put the book down, or is one compelled to go on reading to the very last page ?

SETTE TOURE:

It's really compelling. I think it's action packed. The more you read them the more you enjoy them.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

So they are both meant to be serious and also entertaining at the same time ?

SETTE TOURE:

For those you want really to see the serious side of it I think it could be and for those who only settle for the entertainment side, I think both are combined in these kind of books.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Well, with that commendation from Sette Toure I'm wondering when "Scorpion l'African" will make his appearance in English. There's always a demand for popular reading with an African slant.

MUSIC: "Cameroun Africa" by Manu Dibango.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

And if Manu Dibango was your answer to our puzzle then you were dead right. 'Cameroon Africa' which we've just been listening to is one of his oldies. This is the sound that Dibango is making these days.

MUSIC: Makossa Music which is entitled "Oboso".

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Manu Dibango spends much of his time travelling but he was back home in Cameroon not long ago, auditioning players for the proposed Cameroon National Orchestra. His visit gave Kongnso the opportunity to talk to him on our behalf and first of all Kongnso wanted to find out how Dibango has managed to make such a mark in the world of popular music.

MANU DIBANGO:

This is very difficult because I cannot say that myself, it's up the people. I can only say that I work very hard and maybe I am lucky, a lucky man, because it is very difficult to rise in show business and there are a lot of people better than me but without a chance so I am very happy that, fortunately, something happened to me. But behind that I think the best thing and the main thing is to work really hard.

KONGNSO LAFON:

Well, Mr. Dibango, I know you are always so humble about yourself and you reserve making comments about yourself.

MANU DIBANGO:

No, not exactly humble. I am realistic, if I can say that.

KONGNSO LAFON:

But probably you know the qualities that you bear in your music. When we listen to Manu we know he is putting some elements into his music - your music of today sounds American, because the soul music you have been playing, let's say for the past 4 years, has really moved the world. How did you come about this?

MANU DIBANGO:

There is Manu Dibango the man and Manu Dibango the musician and we try to live together. I am mostly an instinctive man.

KONGNSO LAFON:

Yes, I think the success, if I can give you some elements from my own appreciation of your music, is that you have been able to combine your traditional background with modern music. How did you weave the two in order to come up with such success?

5
MANU DIBANGO:

Mainly because I lived a long time outside my country. I was travelling and maybe my mind is open to the outside - I want to know exactly what happens outside Africa. I am a 20th century man, a musician, I'm black, I'm African and I'm Cameroonian. These things I try to put out in my music.

KONGNSO LAFON:

Maybe your background contributed to your success. Could you give us a little bit of your background as a musician from your young days up to now ?

MANU DIBANGO:

Well, I started playing, learning music when I was 18 and at that time I was in Paris, France. I grew up listening to a lot of jazz and in that way maybe I was lucky because a lot of people here don't know exactly what is the history of black music, the history of jazz. I think it's good to know, to have a chance to start playing music by playing jazz and then going back again to my roots.

MUSIC: Makossa Music "Soul Makossa" by Manu Dibango.

KONGNSO LAFON:

Well, Manu when we talk about your success we really think first of all of the Soul Makossa. I think if I'm not making a mistake, that is what really brought you up to the limelight of international music.

MANU DIBANGO:

Yes, yes certainly I did this record maybe 4 years ago and the black African people made me, a black man, an African man, known all over the world.

KONGNSO LAFON:

Now, do you have any collaborators who work along/you all over the world ?

MANU DIBANGO:

I don't actually have a band. When I am playing in Cameroon I play with a local band. I like to play with local bands as I said I learn very much and maybe I give something too.

KONGNSO LAFON:

Well, you say your music is Afro. Do you in your music try to put out a message, a cultural message somehow ?

MANU DIBANGO:

I don't know. I try to make people happy, that's all. I like people to be happy and forget their troubles, that's all.

6

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

And Manu, believe me, there are lots of your admirers who are grateful to you for helping them forget their troubles for a while. Let's have some more of your special music therapy, while not for getting that there'll be more 'Arts and Africa' this time next week. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye.

MUSIC: Makossa Music "Soul Makossa" by Manu Dibango.

BROADCASTING RIGHTS: FREE FOR
USE IN BROADCASTING OUTSIDE BRITAIN IN
ENGLISH OR TRANSLATION.

PUBLICATION RIGHTS: NOT FREE
FOR USE IN PUBLISHING OUTSIDE
BRITAIN IN ENGLISH OR
TRANSLATION.