

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 we talk to the editor of "Africa Woman" magazine about African fashion and we hear about a new publishing venture for black writers in South Africa.

SIGNATURE TUNE

TETTEH-LARTEY:

This month's cover story in the second issue of the new magazine "Africa Woman" is on fashion in Africa. For some years now African designs and jewellery have had a growing influence on the fashion-conscious women in the West. But what is the state of fashion for African women themselves? And to what extent does fashion thrive on the Continent itself? Taiwo Ajai, the editor of "Africa Woman", wrote this month's cover story on fashion for the magazine and she's with me now.

Well, Taiwo, what section of African womanhood are you aiming this magazine at?

TAIWO AJAI:

I think a very, very broad spectrum of opinion and readership in Africa and I mean by that, anybody who can read, from our so-called elite to the office girl, you know the secretary, the typist, anybody who can read anything can pick up "Africa Woman" and read.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

That broadly corresponds with the urban population doesn't it?

AJAI:

It does indeed, because those are the educated people, but I'd like

to think also that even though it's only the urban African women reading "Africa Woman" that opinions will percolate to the rural areas, and people who influence events and form opinions are actually alluding to opinions of women in the rural areas.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

And there's already fashion among the rural areas, and even in the urban areas. What do you think you are adding to what is already existing?

AJAI:

Well, in the new African consciousness, African awareness, there's a wave, a spate of African fashion on the continental and international level and one is hoping that we would become increasingly more aware of the wealth and diversity of African fashion and not just go on the old craze, and temporary glamour value of wearing African fashion, but actually go back to exploring our own fashion and jewellery and I hope that by doing something, highlighting African fashion, that those women who go abroad and wear African fashion, do stay at home and patronize the ordinary rural designers who are making fabrics, and who are actually cutting and sewing fabrics, so that in that way the rural women can benefit from those who have the money, and I think that makes for greater development and faster development of many African economies.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

You talk about wanting to make women conscious of the wealth that there is in fashion. When you talk about wealth, what do you mean, are you talking about cultural wealth or are you talking purely in financial terms?

AJAI:

I'm talking really on that point about cultural wealth. I don't think we fully realise, most of us who have been lucky I suppose, or been cursed by education, modern education, that we can actually make use of what we have, we can develop what we have, and still stand on the same footing with the world. Some of us tend to feel that in order to be glamorous, in order to be sophisticated, we don't wear anything African because that obviously marks you as very, very low and not 'with it' and not sophisticated. So if there is a need now, it is not just to use African fashion as a shock value, as an exhibitionistic value, but as very normal, which most of us are doing now. I have been privileged to see so many women on the international scene in their flowing robes, beautiful hairdos, and they look stunning and usually, if you like for the wrong reasons, steal the scenes from other women because people just look at them in admiration. Well, it's fine, but I doubt that the women themselves realise the impact-making effect of their gear, and I think if they go back to Africa and start working on that, we can start developing factories if you like and fashion houses, instead of what we have now of most of our women who can afford to, going to Paris or Oxford Street or Italy or America to get their wardrobe filled. They can actually have the traffic the

other way round. People in Europe and North America going to Africa to get dressed! But they do go to Africa to get dressed, but on a different level, exploitative level, because people realise how beautiful jewellery from Africa is, they realise what wonderful fabrics they are making, so they go to Africa, to Somalia, to Ethiopia, to places like Nigeria, and pick up the odd antique jewellery, which they buy 'for a song' as it were and bring here and sell for God knows what, and they make a fortune out of us. But we live with these things and we don't realise how valuable they are, and how beautiful they really are.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

I'm very happy you've mentioned this last point about people going to Africa and bringing things out. In fact I was going to mention that myself. So I admire your idea that people should be encouraged to go from here to Africa, that's the source of all the wealth, and fashion themselves there. Now in Africa itself unfortunately, as far as I know, they tend to look more on western fashion as the thing and therefore I think you've got a lot of work to do to convert them to your point of view. How much ice do you think you're going to cut with them?

AJAI:

I think, a lot. I think because, as I said, on the international scene now they're getting a lot of attention, women are getting a lot of attention from their European counterparts, European friends, saying "Oh what a wonderful dress you have on, what a beautiful hairstyle you have on", instead of what used to appear before, to happen before, where people were scared of looking at them if they had something done to their hair.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

I think you're going to be very popular with those who have nationalist feelings towards the African and his personality. Thank you very much Taiwo.

AJAI:

Thank you Alex.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

And now for some film news from Nigeria, here is Anne Bolsover.

ANNE BOLSOVER:

The "New Nigerian" reported recently that Doctor Ola Balogun, the well-known Nigerian film producer, has started work on a new film in colour titled "Ajani-Ogun". The new film in Yoruba, based on a script by Dr. Balogun is the first Yoruba authentic film in colour, with a full cultural background on Ogun - the God of Iron.

Well-known and newly-discovered actors and actresses in Nigeria, including such names as Adeyemi Folayan of the Adi Love Theatre, Chief Duro Ladipo of "Oba Koso" fame, and the leading female star Mope Ilori from Ekiti in the Western State, Roxy Mayford-Ide, a well-known cabaret, stage and television star, and Idowu Adepisi of Oyin Adejobi's theatre.

Dr. Balogun's last film "Amadi" received great critical acclaim within the Nigerian film industry, and his latest "Ajani-Ogun" is now eagerly awaited.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

Thank you Anne. And we hope to be able to talk to Dr. Balogun sometime in the near future on this programme.

MUSIC "Mozambique" by Bob Dylan from "Desire".

TETTEH-LARTEY:

"Mozambique", a track from Bob Dylan's new album "Desire" which has just been released. I wonder if Bob Dylan really had any feelings about Mozambique when he wrote that, or perhaps he just used the title because it rhymed with 'week'. But knowing him as I do, as a great musician and a genuine lover of the freedom fighter, I have no reason to doubt his authenticity.

David Philip is an enterprising independent South African publisher who's best-known in his own country for publishing the later works of South Africa's best-known writer, Alan Paton. Now though he's planning to publish a series of works by black writers. George Somerwill asked David Philip to tell him more about his plans.

DAVID PHILIP:

Well, there is a book called "Black Perspectives on South Africa" which will be a collection of the writings and sayings of prominent black politicians and statesmen and writers.

GEORGE SOMERWILL:

Obviously you apply the same criteria to a prospective black writer who might send his work to you, but do you think that part of the criteria is that the market for a black writer in Southern Africa may be fairly limited?

PHILIP:

I think the market for a black writer in South Africa is not necessarily limited. "The Poems of Oswald Mtshali" I think proves the

reverse. He had a tremendous success with his poetry. I think they sold over twenty thousand copies in a very short time. These voices are not heard very often, and when they are heard, people want to hear them and they buy books by them.

SOMERWILL:

What is the state of black writing in Southern Africa at the moment, particularly with regard to the sort of very volatile political climate?

PHILIP:

The state of writing within South Africa as a whole, is very active. There is a tremendous diversity of opinion and it is being expressed. Black writers may find it more difficult to be published than white writers. We all know only about one in a hundred of the scripts that arrive on a publisher's desk ever gets published and we do receive a fair number of black writers. We are in Cape Town, which is removed from the centre of black literary activity which is based mainly in Johannesburg, and to this extent we are not really qualified to speak of black writing in South Africa.

TETTEH-LARTEY:

David Philip, South African publisher, talking to George Somerwill.

And that's all from this edition of "Arts and Africa". Until the same time next week this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye for now.

MUSIC "Limpopo" by Jeremy James Taylor.

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