

# Arts and Africa

**BBC**

AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

ARTS AND AFRICA

No. 167

(7R 50 S 167 P)

ANNOUNCEMENT AND SIGNATURE TUNE:

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome to "Arts and Africa". This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey with a look back at Festac '77.

SIG. TUNE:

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

As you know, for the last few weeks we've been running several on the spot reports on Festac '77 from Florence Akst in Lagos. We'll today, we're going to look back at Festac with two journalists who've been covering the Festival. They're Ahmed Aminu of the BBC's Hausa Service and Alex Pascall from Granada in the Caribbean, who presents a weekly programme called "Black Londoners" for BBC Radio London in the UK. They're both with me now:

Welcome gentlemen to "Arts and Africa". First of all Ahmed, you come from Nigeria ?

AHMED AMINU:

Yes I do.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

How did you feel, going back to the country ?

AHMED AMINU:

It has been a very emotional kind of "going back to Nigeria", being inside and outside at the same time, present as an overseas journalist to cover Festac, and I was absolutely taken away, carried away by the atmosphere of Festac. It has been such a great thing not only for the Nigerian government, but the black race in the whole world that Festac '77 has been such a great success.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Well, we'll come back to you, but let me turn to Alex. Now you as an outsider, how did you find Nigeria, Festac in particular ?

ALEX PASCALL:

Well, as an African born abroad and going to Africa for the first time ever to meet Africans all told, brother it was one of the greatest feelings I have ever had and I think it will be a memory printed on me no one could wipe out. My touch down by plane in Kano was very emotional, I hesitated to walk out of the plane and when the doors opened and I touched that little air, I registered on my mind, the smells of Africa! That was the beginning of Africa for me. Many people who didn't have the chance to go now that I'm back and telling them my memories, they are feeling in their own way as if they were in Africa and I can tell you, we'll be talking about it for a life time. I've got a letter this week from a lady who listened to my programme last week and she says "Alex, it was so good hearing you talk about Africa", she said "from the time I was small, Africa has been in my mind and I was really hurt that I couldn't go", but on the other hand she felt she didn't hear enough about it and she says "luckily I didn't go because I might not have come back and leave my husband and children in England"! Now that is what we might call over-sentimentality, but this would be the feeling of a lot of people I can tell you.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, now Ahmed, back to you. What aspects of Festac did you find particularly useful to your programme?

AHMED AMINU:

Well, most of the dancers and singing and various art exhibitions were very interesting and they have been very useful for the Hausa speaking listeners because a lot of them, for example, you'd see a dancing troupe from Australia with all the musical instruments looking quite akin to the ones in some parts of Nigeria. So the listeners enjoyed it very much and I was there taking the feedback while the programmes were being played from London. People told me that they're so emotionally involved into the whole thing and they believed that the black world is such a small thing and everything looked almost the same wherever it had come from.

I did enjoy various exhibitions of arts and culture from the various countries who staged the exhibitions at Tafewa Balewa Square and particularly I was very very taken away with the Guinea Bissau stand. It looked to me as though I was in a stand of an exhibition mounted by people from Benin with all the superstitious feelings and other things associated with art works and things, the culture and tradition. The everyday to day affairs of the people of Guinea Bissau. Also the exhibition of the modern dressing by all the participating countries, particularly Senegal, New Guinea, Papua. Everything looked almost the same and it looked as if we were back to a very big reunion from where it all started from.

ALEX PASCALL:

One man called it Alex, a black cultural bath and in a way, yes. Let me take it from the village because whatever we did started in the village. I spent the majority of my time in the village. In the evening around 6 O'clock you begun. You'd live as if you

were actually in Africa. You'd go from Ghana to Mozambique into Uganda, into the various parts of Africa. Then you have Americans mixing in, you have Australia, The Caribbean mixing and all these people of different shades, even shades of black got together.

Now even in Nigeria everyone cannot speak each others language and you see everyone fighting to meet each other "brother, where are you from, tell me about this and about that". Now one African fellow I remember well, a Nigerian born, he grabbed me one night and said "ah my brother, Festac has brought me to know you, do you know all the years I've been hearing about the Caribbean and I never thought my brothers were the same like myself".

when

Now/this thing grips you man, you must stand up and say is that really true that black people are one under the same roof for the first time not quarrelling, as many people always think we can't get on the roof together to exchange views. We've had terrific nights of exchange in poetry, a colloquium in every room. It was fantastic to hear.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Were there many other people from the Caribbean there ?

ALEX PASCALL:

Yes, Jamaica was represented unofficially. In that way Jamaica couldn't spend the money as they just didn't have the money to send people. Trinidad is the country which took Festac by storm. "The Mighty Sparrow" in his witty way on stage, then the Steel Band, part of it was built in Nigeria. They brought the makers to build it in Nigeria and some of the Steel Band really made everybody work. Festac village, had couple of nights before it ended, had this big carnival. We/Antigua, which was very good to see, a tiny island being represented. In the finale I saw about 4 people holding up their flags and I felt proud of them. Well the Bahamas of course. But I, who am from the island of Granada which didn't have anybody, thought to myself, damn it I will represent my people !

AHMED AMINU:

One of the greatest nostalgic things of Festac was the fact that you know, I heard a story saying the Cubans were trying to send a very large contingent to Festac. Nigeria, being very short of accommodation, with all the 56, in fact in excess, countries coming to Festac, said they couldn't afford to have 1000 members of the Cuban troupe in Lagos and the President said never mind about this. And so they took along a ship with everything they needed in this world and they said they didn't need any accommodation, any feeding, they simply wanted transport to convey them to the various venues of the Festival. So every morning bus loads of them would be conveyed to the stadium, the National Theatre and in the evening would be conveyed back to their ship where they spent the night.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Yes, I am a greater admirer of Hausa culture. I'd like to come

back to the Hausa in particular. Were there any aspects of Hausa Hausa culture shown at Festac ?

AHEMD AMINU:

Well, the greatest show of Hausa culture was the "Grand Durbar" in Kaduna on two occasions and besides in the Nigerian troupe there were a lot of Hausa cultures, traditional music and famous regalia in dress and that kind of thing. But the biggest, and I have been told by many journalists who came from the USA, from Sweden, from all over Europe and all over the world including Australia, the greatest thing they have seen at Festac is the "Grand Durbar" because there was the culture of people dating back to more than a 1000 years and with all the massive regalia of the horses and the horsemanship, the art, the oneness, the spirit of brotherhood that was put into the whole spirit of "the Durbar", commemorating special occasions and things like that.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now, Alex, I was listening of the telly the other day and Tina Turner, the famous American singer, was saying that when she went to Africa she felt rather out of touch with everything. She didn't enjoy the food, she didn't like this and that and she was very disappointed. Now you don't share this point of view.

ALEX PASCALL:

You know she's wrong with her. That she never related in Africa. This is what happened. Now you see there are a lot of blacks who would talk about Africa, talk about Africa from a superficial point of view. I've been relating to Africa and many of us since the age of 8. Personally, going to Africa for the first time for me was, oh one has heard so many things that are odd about Africa, was something in itself. I'll show you why. In the Caribbean we are either from the Yoruba people of the Ibo people therefore I had to trace my steps and find out which one I belong to. Before I said a word, the African man picked me up and said that you're a Yoruba descendant. How right he was because our ways of speaking, the shango drums at home that I used to beat myself. When I left home I said I was going to the UK to do two things. One to begin journalism, two to go to Africa to do two things. One to begin journalism, two to Africa to study the drums of Africa, which I'll end up doing. Could you imagine standing there brother and really seeing a shango, this man with a cutlass in his hand, a chicken in his hand to be killed and the whole sacrifice live in that big stadium, what it means, a terrific thing. Tina Turner what she needs is a little bit of bathing in the real true oil of Africa.

Apart from Tina Turner, OK we heard about that, but the people who were there and came to the village, no more stars. Stevie Wonder, Miriam Makeba, Oscar Peterson, we were so surprised to know that here it is, everybody the same in the village. Unbelievable. Ted Jones the poet, lived in the village, Aubrey Williams is world wide known as a painter, lived in the village. Name it man, all the big people weren't in hotels. In actual fact, those who stayed in the hotels realised that the village was the place, so they left their hotels and spent all their time with us down in the village and enjoyed it. Eating the food, mixing with the people. It was a thrill. What thrilled me was the sand I had to walk upon. I was back

in the roots of Africa, that was the thrilling factor to me, getting the smells, meeting the people, eating with them the yams in the morning, taking a piece of sugar cane, stripping it across my mouth. That's Africa.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now Ahmed, what do you feel hearing Alex say all this about your Festival ?

AHMED AMINU:

Well, I quite agree with Alex. Alex himself has seen the real live Africa, the traditional, real ancient Africa, having gone to Kano.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

So all in all, you think the Festival was worth while.

ALEX PASCALL:

That goes without any doubt.

AHMED AMINU:

And I believe it will take a long time for such a gathering to be accomplished again as Festac '77.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Well Alex Pascall and Ahmed Aminu, thank you very much.

And that brings us to the end of this weeks programme. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye and hoping you'll join me again at the same time next week for more "Arts and Africa".

PLAYOUT MUSIC: "Take me to the Mardi Gras" by Bob James Trio.

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