

# Arts and Africa

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ARTS AND AFRICA

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ANNC. AND SIG. TUNE:

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Welcome to Arts and Africa. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey with a report from Uganda, a film about Lesotho and a promising young playwright.

SIG. TUNE:

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Newspaper reports from Kenya say that the burned bodies of Byron Kawadwa, director of the Uganda National Theatre and five of his actors, have been found at Klagi, 24 miles east of the Ugandan capital, Kampala.

At the time of the deaths, the Uganda National Theatre company was rehearsing a play called "St Charles Lwanga for the centenary celebrations of the Protestant Church in Uganda, in June.

Lwanga was a Christian martyr who was himself burned to death in 1885. The Kenyan newspaper reports have claimed that the play angered President Amin. Mike Popham called up Victoria Brittain in Nairobi and asked her about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Byron Kawadwa and his fellow Ugandan actors.

VICTORIA BRITTAİN:

They were reported in only one of the two Kenyan papers - the most reliable one "The Standard" and their source was said to be a refugee. Now although they have been quite scrupulous in not, as far as one can tell, exaggerating stories and the fact that they had the exact place, 24 miles east of Kampala, where the 6 bodies were said to have been burnt, that does add creditability to the story. On the other hand, you cannot absolutely be sure that they are dead as there is no way of their relations seeing the bodies and there are plenty of refugees in Nairobi who claim that they have already been reported dead and they are now using another name for security reasons. There is an outside chance, I think, that these people could turn up. But on the other hand,

they are exactly the sort of people, intellectuals who have a following in Uganda, and are known outside Africa, who are most likely to be targets of the purge that is going on.

MIKE POPHAM: Could you tell us a little about Byron Kawadwa and the work of the Uganda National Theatre ?

VICTORIA BRITTAIN:

Well, he is the Director of the Uganda National Theatre and I think the original hopes for the Uganda National Theatre were quite ambitious. That it should be rather like the British National Theatre and that it should stage plays not only by African writers, but by famous modern and old writers from Europe and America. And as Director he was bound to be very much in the public eye and he was bound to be the kind of person who would be a real object of hate to the sort of people who are doing the killings. He was also the leader of Uganda's delegation to Festac and I think, had quite a success there.

MIKE POPHAM:

Is there any indication that he created an unfavourable image with President Amin about this new play that he was going to put on to celebrate this Christian martyr ?

VICTORIA BRITTAIN:

No, there is absolutely nothing known about that, except that Amin is thought to have approved the staging of this play in June in Uganda, to mark the centenary anniversary of the Protestant church in Uganda. That original plan is thought to have been O.K.'d if not by Amin personally, by people pretty high up in his entourage. Though, I think the change of feeling about that play came quite recently, specifically after the death of the Archbishop, who is thought by Amin to have been implicated in the plot against Amin. And the Christian purge that followed that was absolutely bound to include anybody who was doing anything as tactless and as daring as staging a play specifically meant to be a very moving reminder of the death of Ugandan martyrs nearly 100 years ago.

MIKE POPHAM:

And it's ironic isn't it that the subject of the play, St. Charles Lwanga, who died in 1885, was himself burnt to death.

VICTORIA BRITTAIN:

Yes, it's that detail, in a sense, that makes me feel most convinced that the story is probably true. I think that sort of following of history is exactly the kind of thing that is happening in Uganda at the moment.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Victoria Brittain talking to Mike Popham on the line from Nairobi.

Lesotho, the tiny African state, which is entirely surrounded by South Africa, is a wonderful place to make a film because of its magnificent mountain scenery and its picturesque villages. At the moment, Lesotho hasn't got a fully-fledged national film industry - it obviously has other more pressing development priorities, but more and more outside film makers are being attracted to Lesotho. One such film director is David Eady, a British film maker, who has recently made a film in Lesotho called "Echo of The Bad Lands". Now David is in the studio with me and first I asked why the title Echo of the Bad Lands.

Now David the title of the film makes it sound like some kind of Western ?

DAVID EADY:

Well, the title was chosen deliberately to interest the audience, which is basically 6 to 12 years. It's a childrens audience and the film was made specially for children. So that is the explanation for the title. Although the "Bad Lands" is part of Lesotho, the remoter part of the mountain area.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

What's the story ?

DAVID EADY:

The story is a very simple one. It's based on the fact that a lot of the villages in Lesotho are fairly poor and the government is trying to help them by giving them new breeding stock for their herds of cattle, and in our story the village which we photograph, has been presented with a prize bull and they have promised the first male calf to be born from this bull to a neighbouring village up in the "Bad Lands".

Unfortunately after this calf is born, the father becomes sick and dies and the Chief of the village won't give the calf away when the representative of the "Bad Lands" comes to pick it up. So he decides to take the law into his own hands and steals the calf while everyone is away at the Market. The result is that the herdsboy, a boy about 10, is absolutely terrified because he knows he will get into trouble with the Chief for not looking after the calf properly. With 2 European children, a boy and a girl, who have come over to spend their holiday with an uncle, who's a doctor at the medical mission at Mantsonyane go off in pursuit and the rest of the story is a chase situation of the two European children, who are of course totally lost in this environment, have to rely more and more on this local boy to help them, they chase this baddy and eventually catch him, get the calf back and bring it in triumph to the village. That is the story.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Did you have any problems while shooting this film ?

DAVID EADY:

Well, no problems from the point of view of the help we got from the authorities and the local population, who were absolutely marvellous. The main problem in filming in Lesotho is communications and unfortunately, when we were filming it was the rainy season and once you get out of Maseru, the capital, we had a thirty mile drive along a dirt track road, which is beautiful in the summer weather, when it's dry, but becomes totally impassable when it starts raining and one can just about get through at ten miles an hour, if you've got a four-wheel drive vehicle. Fortunately we had two of these vehicles, our third vehicle most of the time we couldn't use because it got bogged down. Communications are certainly the biggest problem.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

I remember you said something about an accident that happened to the vehicle you were using ?

DAVID EADY:

Yes, this was one of the Toyotas which we had sent off to Mantsonyane to pick up this calf, which was kept there as we were filming about 15 miles away. I send the sound recordist and his assistant to pick up this calf and about 5.0 in the evening I got a frantic message that the vehicle had been involved in an accident but nobody was hurt. What had happened apparently, was that they had got bogged down in the mud and a passing lorry offered them a tow. The assistant had climbed inside the Toyota at the wheel and as they were being towed off the edge of this road which is very high up in the mountains, with a big fall down into the valley, the rope broke and the Toyota went backwards, turned over 6 times and landed at the bottom of the valley. The sound recordist stood at the top looking down, already composing in his own mind the telegram he was going to send to this man's wife "I very much regret etc ...." and to his amazement the assistant came out of the Toyota, bruised, but in no way hurt at all and even more incredible, he went down back to the vehicle, turned it up on its wheels and were able to drive it 3 miles along the valley and back on to the main road. I did a very stupid thing, because that particular Toyota was one we were going to use in the filming later on. It was supposed to be the vehicle used by the doctor at this mission hospital and of course, although driveable, very badly damaged.

This was a yellow and white Toyota, yellow on the top and white on the bottom. Fortunately we had another Toyota with us that was identical except that it was the other way round, white on the top and yellow on the bottom. So the production manager leapt into this vehicle which was undamaged, drove it down to Mantsonyane and found a highly efficient firm who were able to respray it the other way round within 24 hours, and we had it back in time to do the filming. So I must say, all tribute to the people who run garages in Mantsonyane.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

That's an amazing story I must say. Is this film going to be shown in Lesotho ?

DAVID EADY:

Well, naturally. I understand that the foundation have indeed, sent copies out to Lesotho and we believe that they will be widely shown to interested people out there. I very much hope that the local people who acted in the film who were all marvellous, will all get a chance to see it.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Marvellous David, thanlk you very much.

David Eady talking about "Echo of the Bad Lands", his new film set in Lesotho.

Now listen to this voice .....

TUNDE IKOLI:

I started writing when I was 17 and that's when I wrote the play that is on now .....

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Npw, what accent is that ? ..... cockney yes you're right but it belongs to a budding young playwright called Tunde Ikoli who's new play "Short Sleeves in the Summer" has just opened in London. Tunde has a Nigerian father and a British mother and after seeing a performance of his play, I asked him to tell us about it.

TUNDE IKOLI:

Well, it's autobiographical in that it's about myself when I was about 17/18 and was actually trying to find something different. It's about a boy who isn't married, but is living with a girl who he's got pregnant and he girl wants him to get a job and support her and the baby when it comes and the house. But he feels that he's got something in him which he can do but he's not sure what it is. So he doesn't want to get a job in case the job forces that idea out of his head.

It's about the problems he has with his girl and his friends. Trying to find out what he wants. In the end which didn't happen to me but did happen to him, is that he's disillusioned and has to go out and find an ordinary job in a factory and has to give up his ideas of grandeur.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

I thought there was a great deal of truth in what you said. How could you, at your age, have amassed all that experience?

TUNDI IKOLI:

I don't know, I mean you get stuck into a position that, if you actually do find that you're 17 and you are living with a girl and that she's pregnant, that you do get that experience. I mean, life does become very hard. But I found the way that I did it is that it has given me a wealth of experience to write about.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now when I came to see this play, one in my position, expected to see an African play, or a play with an African theme ?

TUNDI IKOLI:

You see, the problem is although I identify very much with Africa, I believe I'm as much African as I' English. But I've never been to Africa, to Nigeria anyway. You live as an English person, you have to survive anyway and it had no African slant in this play. But the one I've just finished is about my dad and about the problems he has had in this country and about what he wanted before he came to this country from Nigeria. So I hope that one has more of an African slant.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Are you familiar at all with African plays ?

TUNDI IKOLI:

Not really. I know Yemi Ajibede and I've worked on one of his plays and I like his plays very much. And I've seen some plays at the Africa Centre. But I'm not that familiar, not as familiar as I should be. But what I really want to get familiar with is Nigeria and actually go there some time and do something there. I mean it's very hard to identify with African plays in this country without having actually seen any part of Africa myself and I feel I need to see it before I actually get myself totally involved in African plays in this country.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Now did you try to submit this play to Festac ?

TUNDI IKOLI:

Well, I thought about submitting the play to Festac. My dream was to take the play and my dad back to Nigeria, who hasn't been back since 1945. But I'm afraid the play came on too late. It opened in London just as the Festival was closing in Nigeria. But I hope at some time that I can take the play to Nigeria and my dad as well.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

Tundi Ikdi talking about his play "Short Sleeves in the Summer"

MUSIC: "Take Me to The Mardi Gras" by Bob James Trio.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY:

And that brings us to the end of our programme for today. Join us again next week for more "Arts and Africa". Until then this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye.

MUSIC: "Take Me to the Mardi Gras" by Bob James Trio

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