

# 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 and today, news about the Festival of Autumn in Paris and a Nigerian Folk Opera performed there.

## MUSIC

### ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

The Festival d'Automne has taken place in Paris for the last five years and is financed by the City of Paris the Ministry of Culture and other Government agencies. This year, for the first time, the programme included a lot of events from or about Africa. Margy Brearley, producer of Arts and Africa, went to Paris for a few days and talked to some of the people who took part. We will be hearing from them in the coming weeks. But first, to find out how such a festival was organised she talked with Benoît Quésin, one of the advisors for the African programme on the Festival Committee and at present working as Curator of the Music Department of the National Museum in Kinshasa, Zaire. She first asked him why there was such a strong emphasis on Africa in this year's Festival.

### BENOÎT QUÉSIN

Well, it came gradually each year, the Festival has been mainly a contemporary music, contemporary players, dance, exhibitions, and so on. But, there was always a spot for traditional music so they had people from Turkey and they had people from Tibet. That was very successful, just one thing, just one programme with several performances. It came out so well that the

BENOIT QUÉSIN

idea came through to make something big about Africa. I think it reflects the increasing interest for Africa and African cultures among Europeans.

MARGY BREARLEY

Why do you think that's come about ?

BENOIT QUÉSIN

Well I think that the consciousness of people is expanding. They are more open and ready now to hear what is going on outside of their European tradition. Maybe it's because of jazz, because of rhythm and blues, because of soul and because of pop music.

MARGY BREARLEY

Now there's been a tremendous variety of activities in the African part of the Festival of Autumn.

Can you describe some of them for us ?

BENOIT QUÉSIN

Well, there are something like 40 African countries so you can't take them all, so it was a kind of panorama. It may be a subjective choice, but it gives a sample of different African styles. So Niger was there, and Mali, for the Sahel part. You know, griot, playing that beautiful instrument, the cora. Then people from Nigeria, the Duro Ladipo National theatre. It's a kind of neo-traditional opera, very beautiful. Then, there were people from Madagascar, also a kind of "modern-traditional" form, a "contemporary-traditional", if that means anything! Then, people from Zaire.

MARGY BREARLEY

There have also been exhibitions and other activities.

BENOIT QUÉSIN

Right. The festival has been trying to give several aspects. There was even to have been a big exhibition of traditional art, but this wasn't possible in so short a time. So we've a puppet exhibition.

MARGY BREARLEY

I found that very interesting. I wished in a way that there had been a bit more information put up about how they function and what particular roles they have in the different societies.

BENOIT QUÉSIN

Well, it's good, so you liked it enough to know more about it. That's true for all the activities of the Festival. People have been complaining about the dances and the singing, music etc. They were kind of frustrated because they didn't think they had enough information. It's very difficult to give enough information. That's about 500 pages for every culture, for every people presented. If it gives people the curiosity to go on and on, I think that's the point.

MARGY BREARLEY

What were the problems that you faced in organising the festival ?

BENOIT QUÉSIN

There are many many problems. I will give you an example. In Zaire, for instance, we had people coming from three different areas, like between a thousand and fifteen thousand miles, and those villages are far away really. It takes you a week or two to get there. So you go to see the people and ask them to come over to Kinshasa. It's a big task, big work, many, many problems. Find fuel, find trucks to transport them, and then, plane tickets, buy them some clothes, because they are usually poor people.

MARGY BREARLEY

And what has been the reaction from the French audiences. You mentioned that they wanted to know more ?

BENOIT QUÉSIN

Right, so it means that they were very interested and I think that most of the shows were very successful, both in the number of people and the kind of reception they gave. Well I think the results are pretty good.

MARGY BREARLEY

And is anything likely to arise out of the Festival in terms of more African groups being brought to France and maybe to Europe ?

BENOIT QUÉSIN

Well, what's going to come, we will see. Nobody can tell now, but the reception as I said before has been so good that we can expect that something will happen.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And I'm sure there are many people who hope so, too. Bénéoit Quésin, thank you.

Now, one of the musical groups Margy saw was the Duro Ladipo National Theatre from Nigeria. They performed a folk opera, which was entitled "Oba Koso", at the Cirque d'Hiver, a big theatre which often houses circus shows. Afterwards Margy talked with Duro Ladipo, the leader of the Company, and asked him to explain the story.

DURO LADIPO

The story is about the legend of a King in Oyo, the most ancient city in the Yoruba State of Nigeria. This King committed suicide by hanging and he has been deified and made a God of Thunder and is still worshiped today.

MARGY BREARLEY

Now there's a lot of dancing and drumming all the way through and there's actually no interval and it goes on for about two hours. How do you all manage to keep going ?

DURO LADIPO

We kept going because we were able to use the story to get the dancing and the singing and the drumming together. We want to tell a story of the life of this man, the Great King, and also his death and also his being made a God. So we could see it will be too boring if we continue to speak in Yoruba and we had to make it into a dance drama, which is one of our latest achievements.

MARGY BREARLEY

I wished I could understand Yoruba too, because I thought there was a lot of humour which I couldn't get really because I didn't understand it. The Nigerians sitting next to me were laughing a lot.

DURO LADIPO

Yes, this happens because there are certain key messages that could direct both the drummers and the actors. That's why we've kept this in songs and not in dialogue.

MARGY BREARLEY

A lot of the music is traditional sounding to me and the dance seems traditional. How much have you written the music?

DURO LADIPO

Most of the songs are traditional songs. I have written them in the style of the old tradition and we have followed the drumming with the poetry, all woven together, to keep a standard cultural piece of work.

MARGY BREARLEY

Now there are twenty-five people in your Company. Where do they come from ?

DURO LADIPO

Oh, they consist mostly of my own family, myself, my wives, my children, my uncles, my brothers, and some of those who have founded the theatre with me. We are mostly farmers, hunters and tailors.

MUSIC

MARGY BREARLEY

When did you actually found the theatre ?

DURO LADIPO

About 11-12 years ago we founded it and we became international just about ten years ago.

MARGY BREARLEY

And you are based in Oshogbo, I believe ?

DURO LADIPO

Yes, Oshogbo is our town. That is where we base most of our activities, but we have our headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria.

MARGY BREARLEY

Now you play a lot in Nigeria itself. Have you travelled all over Nigeria ?

DURO LADIPO

We've travelled all over Nigeria and we do this once every year. We have seasons by which we go to each State.

DURO LADIPO

There are 19 States in Nigeria and during this time we go from one State to the other, play about because it's a sort of travelling theatre.

MARGY BREARLEY

And what about other African countries ?

DURO LADIPO

This will happen after this tour we are now planning to go to all African countries starting from Abidjan, Cotonou and all the rest of it.

MUSIC

MARGY BREARLEY

Now when you are in Nigeria performing, do you tend to perform in people's compounds or do you perform in a theatre itself?

DURO LADIPO

There are no limitations to places. We perform anywhere we find we can create an arena, any place that could hold a stage. If there is no stage, we gather chairs to sit down on. We perform anywhere we can perform, whether there is stage or not.

MARGY BREARLEY

Do you find it more difficult performing in a big theatre like this, the Cirque d'Hiver ?

DURO LADIPO

Well, it's not difficult at all because we use the style of playing to the audience in a circular form, and we are used to this type. We've even played on a boat.

MARGY BREARLEY

On a boat ?!

DURO LADIPO

Yes, in Amsterdam. We were crossing the whole city of Amsterdam in a boat.

MARGY BREARLEY

Oh, fantastic. And how do you find French audiences ?

DURO LADIPO

Oh, they are quite friendly.

MARGY BREARLEY

There is not quite so much participation as in Africa though, is there ?

DURO LADIPO

I could see them getting enthusiastic each time they found good dances and they are all happy to see it along. Since we came here, we have had about seven performances and we have been having good audiences all the time.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It's good to hear they have been having such good audiences. and what does the future hold in store for them ?

DURO LADIPO

Oh, my future, I want to do films. I am now embarking seriously in movies, because I believe, after some time, I will be getting old and I want most of my works, 25 plays I've already written, to be in the movies. This will capitalize everything and it will make it live forever. That's my plan.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Duro Ladipo, thank you. It's obvious he's not alone in wanting to preserve his folk operas, for here are some of the comments from some Nigerians whom Margy spoke to in the foyer of the Theatre after the show.

VCX POP

- (1) It's a type of idol in Africa, in Nigeria.
- (2) Well you know that Shango, he was a warrior during his time. So, it's one of the remarkable plays that comes from Africa.

MARGY BREARLEY

Can I ask you, what was the bit you found the funniest?

WOMAN

Obakoso is the Yourba culture in Nigeria. So many jokes! I'm from Nigeria. I was in Paris for three years.

MUSIC

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And so we come to the end of this week's programme. We leave you with a song called "Sanu Olu" by Ebenezer Obey and His International Brothers.

MUSIC.