

Arts and Africa

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ARTS AND AFRICA

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ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Hello, this is Alex Tetteh-Larty welcoming you to 'Arts and Africa'. Last week you may remember we had two Nigerians who were in agreement about their experiences as theatre producers. Well, this week, we have two Ghanaians, talking however, on totally different subjects.

Ivan Annan will give us his opinions on a form of "musical politics" in Broadcasting, but first an old friend, Josephine Thomas is here to talk about her new poetry.

Josephine, in your poetry, one particularly attracts me, and that is about striptease! Now this is not a common subject, particularly in Africa. What made you decide to write about it?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

I was watching a film, it was set in Egypt and there were many men, I think it was a kind of disco, and the lady was dancing and stripping herself and these men were sitting there and watching and I thought, god, all these men, most of them are married what are they looking for? I mean, they have got their wives and yet they go and pay money and sit there and watch a woman strip. I mean what else do you want. I thought maybe they were dissatisfied or something, so I wrote a poem.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Oh you weren't amused?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

Not amused, I was thinking that there was no need to but then at the sametime maybe they got satisfaction by watching a naked woman.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well can we hear it?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

Yes.

JOSEPHINE THOMAS READS HER POEM "STRIPTease"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Alright, well we now move to more serious topic. You are quite good at describing political scenes in your poetry and you've got two poems here. One about the contemporary situation in Ghana. What's the title of it and what inspired you to write it? Did you just want to tell the world about what is happening or did you have some other sort of inspiration?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

Well, it is just that when Rawlings took over, I felt that he has got something to do to Ghana. I felt the same when Acheampong, came; But after a while I don't know what happened, everything just went. So I was wondering is Rawlings going to do the same. Is he also going to start nicely then let us down? I was thinking about this and ...

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So it was your doubts about the future?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

It was the doubts. And I don't think that if Rawlings should work it again, I could do anything really, because I haven't got the guns or anything. But if I have my way I will put him somewhere. If he should fail us.

JOSEPHINE NOW READS HER POEM "FIRE IN YOUR EYES"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

You put it very keenly. That is unfair to those who were executed.

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

Yes it does, especially Acheampong, because when he first came, in the first two years, things were changing and we thought it was going to be for the good. I don't know, maybe it's the fault of the Ghanaian Society; people never seem to criticise, they sit back in their houses and complain. If we can all come out and complain and demonstrate in big groups I don't think that Ghana has the prisons to lock up a whole country. People want change, but they don't do anything, they just wait until there is a coup and then they come out to talk.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well how about the next poem, "The Voice"? which is also political.

JOSEPHINE NOW READS HER POEM "THE VOICE"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

You describe Nkrumah's political career, his exile and his death, but you say you still hear the voice. What are you trying to tell us?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

That he is not dead. His voice is with us and I think it's to encourage all Africans as well as Ghanaians.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Did you write this as a reaction to the present situation in Ghana? In other words as a follow up to your poem to Rawlings?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

Yes that is part of it. And in fact, I have met people who support Progress party and all the time they talk as if Nkrumah was a crook, and that he didn't do any good for Africa; and I think they have been giving the wrong impression about him to the British. That is one reason why I wrote this poem.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, one would have thought that after the military and Rawlings, and the promised return to civilion rule under the PNP, you would write a poem welcoming this return. Instead, you look back, to Nkrumah. That suggests that you don't think anybody could replace him?

JOSEPHINE THOMAS

Maybe. I always thought that nobody would be as good as he was in the whole of Africa. It is my personal feeling that nobody gets close to what he was; also I never felt strongly about Dr Limann; maybe I never heard of him before; maybe that is the reason.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, people will hear from Dr Limann from now on as the new President of Ghana. Who knows, perhaps Josephine will grant him the honour of writing a poem about him!

And now we talk about the state of traditional music in Ghana; and for this we turn to Ivan Annan. Ivan has been with us before, when we had an interesting talk about the Ghana Film Industry.

Welcome back Ivan: today the thing that worries you is the way people in Ghana are now turning away from the traditional music, and you say it is now dying. Why do you think that?

IVAN ANNAN

The genuine or authentic Ghanainan music has now been taken over by a group of guitar musicians who have been given more facilities than the traditional musician. Mainly by the Broadcasting House, and indirectly they are being used as a weapon to establish a single culture in Ghana; which is a Twi culture. Sometime ago we had people who attempted to do some improvised versions of traditional music, like, Guy Warren, E.T. Mensah; Yebuah Mensah, Squire Addo. But suddenly their music has indirectly been banned by people whose interests are in these little guitar bands, like the African Brothers and that type. These don't have any musical value either Ghanaian or universal.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Are you suggesting that this is official policy, or is it just that the popular type of music you've just mentioned is being given a lot of air space because of public demand.

IVAN ANNAN

Well, it is not official policy that this music should be banned. But people have taken advantage of their position in Broadcasting House. I am sure you will remember the days when you and I used to work in Broadcasting House; there were certain procedures that one had to follow. You can't play the same record about three or four times a day, but now they play the same record any amount of times without anybody saying, "well they shouldn't go-over the air". There is no control, and there have been feuds between Guy Warren and some personnel in Broadcasting House, so his signature tune "Africa speaks America Answers", which has been used by Voice of America and GBC in Accra, has been taken off the air without the authority of the people in power. For a long time now there hasn't been any direction regarding amount of music which can be played, most of which has no value at all. These are the ones that we hear most often from Broadcasting House; like the African Brothers, this one and these are, the ABC band, the Parrots and so on. They have no musical value outside the TWI speaking areas.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

When I visited Ghana a couple of years ago there was an experiment being carried out called Anokyekrom where an attempt was being made to woo back the people to traditional music and I thought it was succeeding then. Are you saying that it hasn't had much affect after all?

IVAN ANNAN

Anokyekrom has not generally been doing the revival. It's one man, Koo Nino who has been reviving the indigenous music and playing it as he knew it from his infancy. Why the other ones like the African Brothers come to Anokyekrom, I don't know. Music to them is compiled and played, it has no sense of direction. But during the days of Guy Warren or E.T. Mensah, Squire Addo and others, there was a great pattern. Swuire Addo was going into ragtime music with highlife. Guy Warren used Ghanaian traditional instruments, added American jazz flavour and the improvised modern jazz instruments like the saxophone, trumpets and all that. After a long spell Fela Ransome-Kuti who was also looking for new material, had come out with something based on the same strong African rhythm which Guy Warren used in his "Africa speaks America Answers". So these are two main musical factors which are helping new development and at the same time hanging on to the authentic rhythmic patterns and music of our people.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So you couldn't really be accused of being ultra-conservative in any sense of the word.

IVAN ANNAN

I am for development. But at the same time I don't want us to lose

the authentic material which will allow us to lose our identity; because it is the source of our being.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, I hope after people have heard this they will sit up and take note of what you have said. And if Radio Ghana doesn't broadcast your type of material, probably some people will get up and protest.

IVAN ANNAN

Well, I have been protesting for a very long time. But it is one man's voice and there is a lot of confusion going on among the Musicians Unions, a big controversy, which doesn't have anything to do with music itself. It's all money, money, money; they are fighting over money and nothing else. So music has been left in the background and what I intend doing is to continue collecting these materials and preserving them, and perhaps in some years to come, people will find it interesting to look at.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well thank you, Ivan I hope so too.

And that's all from 'Arts and Africa' for this week. Our thanks to our friends, Josephine Thomas, and Ivan Annan; and from me Alex Tetteh-Lartey its goodbye until next week.