

Arts and Africa

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ARTS AND AFRICA

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ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Hello, this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey welcoming you to Arts and Africa, which opens this week with a report on a music festival held in the town of Apala in Lira, Uganda. Kari Blackburn went to the Cultural Affairs Office in Lira, where she spoke to one of the organisers of the Festival, Mr. Lawrence Esangu. They began by going to listen to the opening ceremony where the Apala Oganga group sang a song to welcome Uganda's President Binaisa - a song that had a political edge to it as it points out that since the Amin days the people have no salt, no soap, in fact none of the usual things that they would like to have to welcome an honoured guest.

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The Apala Oganga group welcoming President Binaisa to the Lira Music Festival. Kari Blackburn asked Cultural Affairs Officer Lawrence Esangu about the sort of dances they would be seeing at the Festival.

LAWRENCE ESANGU

There are about five types of music and dance, the one you've just heard - Okembe, and then there is Ekoche, that's mainly for youngsters, it's a vigorous dance, and then there is the Bulango mainly for elders and some people call it the talking drums of Lango and then there is the Rudi and Otool two male flutes blown by mainly old people.

KARI BLACKBURN

These festivals, did you have competitions like this during Amin's time?

LAWRENCE ESANGU

Yes, we had, but we had to be very very careful indeed, especially because Amin's people didn't like big crowds. But then luckily for us they didn't like traditional music they would rather go for jazz music, so when we had these traditional music festivals none of them would really go except when they see a large crowd.

(cont.)

KARI BLACKBURN

You're the Cultural Officer for the whole of Lira. How easy is it for you to get to the villages, are there places where there may be songs which even you as Cultural Officer don't know about?

LAWRENCE ESANGU

The trouble is how to get there, the transport is not available. We had a little land-rover, which was hijacked during that time, looted anyway, and now we don't have any transport at all so we can't really get to the people we want to get to, especially my boys, most of them are in the villages not in towns and then the best ones, as I said Apala 19 miles away and there is another one 40 miles away in Apach.

KARI BLACKBURN

So how easy is it to get all these people to come to the festival?

LAWRENCE ESANGU

You see the local festivals like the Abuda are normally arranged in the vicinity of many groups, about a radius of 20 miles, they do walk to the festivals, and they do walk just a day or two before the festival itself so as to arrive there on time in fact you are marked more now, when you first arrive in the arena, so the judges actually judge you according to your arrival in the arena.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Lawrence Esangu talking to Kari Blackburn. Kari and Lawrence then listened to another song, this time one praising Presidents Binaiisa and Nyerere for saving the people from Amin.

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Lawrence Esangu went on to explain to Kari what instruments are used by the Lira groups.

LAWRENCE ESANGU

Ukembe is a thumb piano, or the Sansa, this is a wooden box but with metal keys which are mounted on the wooden box and they are struck by the two thumbs to produce the music.

KARI BLACKBURN

Some of the Ekembe music, it sounds very much like music from the Congo, from Zaire, now do you think there is any kind of direct influence from Zaire.

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LAWRENCE ESANGU

Actually the Ukembe is supposed to be foreign to Lango, that was copied from the Congo, that's why you might have heard when you passed through Soroti there's something called Akogo taking it from the Congo and here it is called Ukembe, now that was supposed to have been copied from 1940 in fact, roughly about that time.

KARI BLACKBURN

How was it copied from 1940, did people from Zaire come up to Lango then?

LAWRENCE ESANGU

Yes. The Congolese then, they are now called Zaire, but the Congolese who came to work in the sugar industry, in the Madhveni, I think got in touch with the Lango who also went to work there and then the idea was brought forward to Lango and, you know improved the way the Lango would like it. But you will find the beat of it is sounding like the Ekoche, which is the authentic dance of Lango, the beat of it sounds like Ekoche. Lango also happened to be recruited there, to work there, copied the idea and improved on it in their own style, but that's why you get it sounding in fact like jazz from Congo, from Zaire.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Cultural Affairs Officer Lawrence Esangu talking there to Kari Blackburn about the recent Lira Music Festival. And now we move just north of Uganda and hear some rhythmic sounds from the Sudan, the beat of coffee being pounded with a pestle and mortar.

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That sound effect, from the Sudan was recorded by Anne Cloudsley who lived in the country for many years. She has recently written a book entitled The Women of Omdurman which highlights the often hidden world of the Sudanese women. Of particular interest are the techniques of make up that the women use. Great skill is required here and these forms of personal decoration become a means of personal and artistic expression. Anne Cloudsley is here with me today in the studio, welcome Anne. We hear very little about these people.

ANNE CLOUDSLEY

Yes. This true because most of the toiletries are done in privacy in their homes, they only use it just before they

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are getting married, so for about 15 to 21 days after a marriage has been arranged these toiletries begin and it is really quite an ordeal, there's a good deal to be undertaken. The girl must take a smoke bath every day for about 15 days, this takes about half an hour every day. The impurities from the skin tend to be removed because of the heat on the skin, then after that's done then she has this Delka put on her skin, now Delka is made from millet flour, which is pounded and is mixed with sandal oil and scents and it is also smoked, rather like she has been smoked, but this is all prepared before the day that she uses it and it's a sort of brownish colour and has a very lovely smell of sandalwood and sandal oil, and this is put on the skin, used on the skin as a sort of abrasive to take off all the smoke, take off all the impurities and as it's taken down the skin so they use a little bowl of sandal-oil to just brush it off as well and this is done very systematically over the whole of the body. The aroma from the Delka is very lovely, a woman passes you with her Tobe on over head and she's covered except for her face, her hands and her feet, but you could smell this very delicate sandal oil as a result of this constant use of the Delka, so really you could say that much of this make-up is of a sexual nature, the smell of the sandal oil is supposed to be very sensual and a very important part of the sexual life of the people.

ALEX TETTEN-LARNEY

Are there any other parts of the body which are decorated?

ANNE CLOUDSLEY

Yes, the hands and the feet and, of course, the eye shadow, or the kohl as they call it for the eyes. Unlike us in the West they place the stick in between their lids and get a line passing along on the inner side of the roots of the eye-lashes and this, I think makes the eyes look bigger and it's more beautiful than the way we do it.

ALEX TETTEN-LARNEY

And then about the hands, what kind of decorations do they have?

ANNE CLOUDSLEY

The decorations on the hands and on the feet are done with henna. Henna is a small leaf, rather like a bay leaf, which they dry, then they pound and then they sieve it so that it's fine, mix it with water and possibly scent or sandal oil and then it's placed on the foot, for example, particularly on the sole of the foot, very thickly, making a very delicate line just round the edge of the foot, so that it looks

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rather like a little slipper that a Japanese might wear or a Chinese, very delicate and beautiful. The traditional method was to have a very straight, delicate line with perhaps slight undulation and this does look very effective, more recently they have used a little pattern above this little slipper, so to speak, and within the last two or three years when I went back to Sudan, this is probably due to the oil boom in general, a little more affluence and the henna has started to be taken up the foot to the ankle. There's a very special way to put the henna on the hands, the finger tips and the thumb is covered, rather like the sole of the foot with very heavy thick henna and this has to be done at least three or four times, though it takes about an hour to two hours to complete. Then when that is completed, there's little caps of dark brown finger-tips which cover the finger nails. On the insides of the palms of the hands they will make traditional patterns, or they will make their own patterns up, and sometimes they put a pattern on the back of the hands, it is done, perhaps once a week, once in three weeks, or for special parties, for example for a naming day. If they have a friend whose child is to be named on the tenth day, usually the seventh or tenth day, there's a big party and everyone arrives and, of course, is specially made up, the eyes, the hands and the feet, or for a Zar ceremony which is specifically a woman's occasion. The Zar is conducted by a Sheika, who has her own drums and arranges exactly how the Zar shall be conducted. They feel they can relax and they can smoke and take beer and dress up as men and dance and they have a goat and they kill it and they take the blood from the neck and they put it on their foreheads and so on, the Sheika is in charge of all of this. It can be a very exciting party and also they become sometimes very hypnotised, they use a special sort of movement of their shoulders which helps to produce this hypnotic effect and it's a sort of figure eight with their shoulders, they bring one shoulder up and then forwards and down and the other shoulder goes up, forwards and down and this gets faster and faster and some of them take up strange contorted positions and kneel and bump their heads on the ground and some people are very worried about this and others are completely in their seventh heaven and after about three or four days the majority of people feel very much better for it.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Anne Cloudsley thank you very much indeed. And that's it from Arts and Africa for this week. We leave you with a little more music from the Sudan, and from me, Alex Tetteh-Lartey, its goodbye.

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