



# Script Service for Africa

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## ARTS AND AFRICA

No: 331

### ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Hello, this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey welcoming you to another edition of Arts and Africa. Last week we had musicologist Jean Jenkins in the studio to join our team talking about Ghanaian music, this week she's back to talk about her own work, a brand new record of music from Sierra Leone. But first news of a new magazine, Black Seeds, which plans to present to a world audience the living arts of Africa. Its first issue has just appeared and contains material as varied as poems from Senegal to an article on Jamaican Rastafarianism in Britain. One of the contributors is Sudanese author, Jacob Akol, and because Jacob is also a broadcaster we asked him to interview the editor Ethiopian, Alem Mezgebe. Jacob began by asking Alem what sort of material he thinks Black Seeds will be featuring in the future.

### ALEM MEZGEBE

I am interested in material that reflects art, literature, culture and life style as well as the history of black people and communities throughout the world.

### JACOB AKOL

You have been talking about this magazine now for over three years what has been the problem, why has it taken so long to come out?

### ALEM MEZGEBE

You see there are one or two problems. First of all production costs are all extremely high, in the United Kingdom. And the second problem was the British market is extremely shy because there is no sense of risk and business adventure, they always want to see whether it is going to succeed. All the conditions are so

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strong that it is very difficult to break through and say; "Look, I am doing this, I know it is going to succeed". And that was one of the reasons why, because distributors want to know the quantity of your print order and then they want to find out whether you have adverts, whether you have a national backing, there are so many problems which I didn't realise before. Now, of course, I see it differently and I think I am more pragmatic than I was before.

JACOB AKOL

Now how are you going to overcome this financial problem?

ALEM MEZGEBE

I have a couple of friends who have some money and who are backing the magazine, otherwise there is no sense in launching a magazine without having the money to run it.

JACOB AKOL

Where do you hope to sell this magazine? Where is the market for it?

ALEM MEZGEBE

The market envisaged, because we cannot spread our wings everywhere at the same time, about 5,000 copies would be sold in the U.K., and the remaining 10,000 would be sold mostly in Nigeria and other parts of Africa and the Caribbean, in the U.S.A., and some in Continental Europe.

JACOB AKOL

Alem, can you quote from what has been published in this issue just to indicate the sort of things that goes into "Black Seeds"?

ALEM MEZGEBE

Well, I can tell you in this issue at least 25 black communities in Africa and in the Diaspora are represented in one form or another, either through pictures, poems, short stories, feature articles, profiles, diaries and so on and so forth. And then, on top of that, the editorial composition is such that ten editors representing ten nations that took part in EBSTAC 1977, are represented there. If we add up all that, it comes to about 30 black communities are represented in one form or another.

ALEX TAPPEN-LARNEY

Jacob Akol talking to Editor Alem Mezegbe about his new magazine, "Black Seeds". And now to music.

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MUSIC FROM SIERRA LEONE

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

That piece of music was an extract from an LP recorded by Jean Jenkins entitled; "The Traditional Music of Sierra Leone". Now Jean, how did you come to record this music?

JEAN JENKINS

Well, I planned this trip for about a year beforehand, read all I could about the country, the people, whatever I could about the music, which was very, very little I may say. I wrote to various people who live there asking them about it, asking them could they find me the best musicians in each area and so on, and then when I got out there, I went from one village to the next village in search of these best musicians and recorded them actually in place. Of course, sometimes I had the good luck to find festivities going on and so I recorded those. This particular piece of music that we have just listened to is very interesting music to me, it was recorded about twenty kilometres from the Guinea border in the extreme north of Sierra Leone. It had two musicians playing tiny little lutes, pierced lutes with very small bodies and long necks which go right straight through the body and you know what is so interesting about that, if you look at Egyptian tomb paintings from about 1500 B.C., you can see the identical instruments, the tuning is identical, the way the strings are fastened, the whole look of the instruments are absolutely identical. Would you like to hear an example?

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

Yes.

JEAN JENKINS

Here is some xylophone music that was going on at a time when the entire village was in the middle of a celebration.

MUSIC FROM A VILLAGE CELEBRATION

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

Well, you say that you recorded that at a wedding. Were people just sitting and listening or were they dancing?

JEAN JENKINS

Well, there were people dancing in one section of the thing, but there were lots of people, in fact, just sitting. There were, of course, a number of Big Wigs sitting on their haunches listening

as they almost always are and, of course, there are always praise songs being sung in their honour and, in fact, the very first one that you heard was a praise song. On the other hand, you get music where sometimes it's a whole village but sometimes, at least in Sierra Leone, it's a whole secret society, either a men's or women's secret society, because that's how the whole of the social life is organised. But I found that quite often, even though these are secret societies, if we made the arrangements in advance, they said well you know alright we will permit you, perhaps. And so if you would like to listen now to some of the best drumming I have heard for ages, this is the Insururu Society which is a Temini group, a very large ethnic group in Sierra Leone and I think it is marvellous music because it has the terrific incopation in terms of African music as opposed to the rather dull beats of European music and I think that's quite a good thing to listen to.

MUSIC - DRUMMING

ALEX WESTER-LARNEY

Well you know I have heard this thing, I don't know what is typically Sierra Leonian about it, it could be from any part of Africa, surely?

ALAN JENKINS

No, I don't think so. You know there is a great deal of difference and I think most Africans, they are so familiar with their own kind of music that they tend to see all the other African music in terms of their own. But I think that I have now got a broad enough spectrum of African music to say that when I make a disc about traditional music of the country, what I have chosen are things which are specific to that country although, in fact, they also exist in certain forms in neighbouring countries. But you can't say you'd ever hear anything like that in say, East Africa. You were remarking on the photograph on the cover which I may say I feel very proud of because if I ever take a decent photograph, I do feel proud of it. Most of them were taken on £1 instamatic camera, but at long last I have a decent camera now. But the point about this man is that he is a praise-singer, and I think he is typical of the northern part of Sierra Leone. He is playing a three string harp and he is a semi-professional musician, he is not really Griot, he doesn't go around all over the country, but he is a farmer, but he does sing and get part of his livelihood being paid as a singer. He sings the praise songs and perhaps that is what you want to hear now as typical, I won't say you can never hear it in Guinea, because the border is an artificial border, but nevertheless, you would only hear it within a very circumscribed area.

MUSIC

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well Jean, how long did it take you to make this recording?

JEAN JENKINS

Oh it was a long go, and it is true of most of them because you have to have a varied selection to make sure that what you are going to present to people as the music from an area is not only typical music, but good music, the things that they would feel is very good music. Otherwise what do you do, you present a distorted view of the music of that area.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now Jean, what are your plants for the future?

JEAN JENKINS

I have just come back from being a Professor at the University of California, at Berkley, where I shall go again at the end of next year, but inbetween that I hope to go to China for three months recording music that ties up with music I have recorded in Mongolia, in Outer Mongolia, and it ties up with the Islamic music which I have recorded in North Afghanistan and in Northern Pakistan, in North West India and so on and it also ties up with music that I have recorded in Northern Thailand, so that's more or less next year's programme.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well that's quite a handful. Well Jean Jenkins thank you very much indeed. We'll now leave you with another extract from the LP, "The Traditional Music of Sierra Leone". This time it's a song by a school boy and it's entitled; "The Fula Flute Solo", and from me, Alex Tetteh-Lartey, it's goodbye.

MUSIC - FULA FLUTE SOLO