



Script Service for Africa

PO BOX 76 BUSH HOUSE STRAND LONDON WC2B 4PH★ CABLES BROADBRIT LONDON TELEX

ARTS AND AFRICA

No. 332.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Hello and welcome to "Arts and Africa" from Alex Tetteh-Lartey. And our first guest in the programme is going to introduce himself like this.

MUSIC - DRUMS

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, that drum belongs to Jimmy Scott who's brought along a couple of the many drums he plays as he travels around Britain and the rest of the world. It's more than thirty years now since he got off the boat in Liverpool and became a sort of missionary of African music, and here's a sample of the message he preaches.

MUSIC - DRUMS

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Jimmy, that was exciting. Now I'd like to begin by asking you this question; upon one hearing your name one wouldn't have guessed you were Nigerian at all. Is that your proper name, "Jimmy Scott", or is it just a stage name?

JIMMY SCOTT

It is a proper name.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

I see. Now tell me what are you doing in this country.

P.T.O.

JIMMY SCOTT

I came here as a member of a ship's crew around 1948, working here and there, doing jobs in factories and I found out that bongo drums pay money. A friend of mine who played the bongo drums said: "Do you know what I got paid today?", I said "for what", "for playing bongo drums", and he can't play! I went home and I said to myself that I would give it a try, a show came up and I gave it a chance.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

I see you were playing at home. What sort of drumming were you doing?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh, I played for my people, Itsekeri.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

Do you have drumming in the tradition of your family?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh, yes. Eguru, Sapele, Warri, because my grandfather Lin Erene as the feast man for the whole of Erene, feasting and entertaining.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

What sort of drums did you use there? Surely not drums like the ones you are now playing?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh no, no, these are a different style, but this one is made in Africa, in Ghana.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

And they are made out of.....

JIMMY SCOTT

Fibre glass with a wooden inside.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

And you tighten it with metal?

JIMMY SCOTT

Yes, and you can tune it.

F.T.O.

(3)

MUSIC - DANCES

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

What is the smaller one called?

JIMMY SCOTT

It is called "Tomba".

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

And what about the larger one?

JIMMY SCOTT

Tomba too.

MUSIC - DRUMMING

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

Well now you are drumming here because it pays. Do you drum solo or are you accompanied?

JIMMY SCOTT

I do everything. I play solo, I've got my own band.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

What sort of band is it? Is it a pop band or is it.....

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh Soul, Blues, Afro-Cuban jazz.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

And before what kind of audiences do you play?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh every kind. I play for school children, for colleges, universities, with Georgie Fame, I've played all the universities and now we are doing the same thing for schools and everywhere. In 1948/49, if I played bongo drums in a club they'd stop me, they did stop me many times.

ALEX TETTEH-LARNEY

Why?

JIMMY SCOTT

Because the drums made too much noise. Today, everybody likes it; the children want to hear more; times are changing.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, I am quite sure that the school children appreciate very much what you are doing, especially the traditional thing, but how about the adult audiences, do they react favourably to your music?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh, they are catching up fast.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well now, I understand that you have cut a record in this country.

JIMMY SCOTT

I did.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

When was that?

JIMMY SCOTT

In 1969, and nothing happened. I tried to make another one, I gave myself five years, then it became ten years and me and my wife and the children we travelled around the world, Spain, Germany, Istanbul and other places, and then we came back.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now what was the title of that record?

JIMMY SCOTT

The first one?

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Yes.

JIMMY SCOTT

Alolu Part 1, Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da

TAPES

OB-LA-DI OB-LA-DA.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well Jimmy, I'm looking at the record and I see that there's a sub-title, Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da, and it reminds me of a record by the Beatles. Your music doesn't sound like their record but what's the connection between the two titles?

JIMMY SCOTT

It's my title. 'Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da: Life Goes On'. Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da is my title. It's in my letter heading. It's been everywhere for donkeys years.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

You mean you recorded it before the Beatles?

JIMMY SCOTT

Yes, a long time before, but the trouble was that I didn't register the title. It wasn't in copyright then, because when I met Paul McCartney as a friend, he told me: I don't like the phrasing but if we're going to do something about it, it may be good. And he did put words to 'Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da: Life goes on, blah'. You know what "Blah" means?

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

No.

JIMMY SCOTT

Exactly!

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

(laughter) What is it?

JIMMY SCOTT

Blah means "you, me". Everybody is Blah. When it comes to a man, as a friend, he is blah (Oko Ru Ko Kwo Fwo) - Blah. So Paul did the record, I didn't even know that it was recorded. I was home on the Saturday and they come with a car: "You must come to the studio, Paul wants to see you". When I got there, there was "Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da" swinging away. I said: "Paul, what's happening?". "Oh, Jimmy cool down, relax. Everything is going to be all right. If this record hits the top you've made it."

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So you haven't received anything as a result of the success of the Beatles record?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh no, since then I've never seen Paul again.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Have you had any difficulties at all. I know that the West Indians have been able to break into the musical field in this country and Africans have not quite made it. Have you had any difficulties, personally?

JIMMY SCOTT

Like my record, I took it to my agent and he wanted me to sing it in English. If we can learn English, why can't the English speak a bit of African for a change.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So you think the difficulties are one of the language?

JIMMY SCOTT

That's the way the agents and producers put it.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Do you think at any time in the future African music is going to take over?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oh yes, we're coming, we're coming, it's only just a matter of time.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

You think the language problem is going to be overcome, or do you think people will forget the language and listen to the music?

JIMMY SCOTT

They will be learning. They dig it now, not the words, they dig the sound.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well Jimmy, can we listen to your new release. What is it called?

JIMMY SCOTT

Oku Ru Ko Kwo Kwo - Life goes on.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Oh it's similar to the idea you had when you played Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da?

JIMMY SCOTT

It's the story of Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da.

TAPE

MUSIC OKO RU KO KWO KWO.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Jimmy Scott and Oko Ru Ko Kwo Kwo. But don't think we're only going to play that little bit- stay with us 'till near the end and you'll have the chance to listen to more.

There's a novel newly out that speaks of the struggle of an African in fact a Nigerian like Jimmy Scott, to come to terms with living in England. It's a reissue of a book first published more than twenty years ago and written, not, as you'd expect by a fellow Nigerian but by the British writer and novelist, the late Colin MacInnes. 'City of Spades' is the title, using a slang term for black people and the city is London. A novelist who is Nigerian and has come to terms with living here in London is Buchi Emecheta and she's here with me now to tell us how well an Englishman can portray an African. Buchi, would you tell us about this Nigerian character? What's he called and what's he doing in London?

BUCHI EMECHETA

The name of the hero in the book is 'Johnny Fortune'. You know, when black people have gone to England, in Lagos in particular, they are usually called 'Johnny', women are called 'Janes', so Johnny Fortune again, I think that it implies that he is looking for his fortune in London. So the author knows a lot of Nigerians, especially Lagos Nigerians, and what was very common in the 50's, with everybody coming here to live and like 'Michael' in the narrative poem by Wordsworth, Johnny Fortune came here, he tried to make good. But again he fell among evil people, evil blacks, and he couldn't make it. Unfortunately, in this story, the evil that follows Johnny Fortune was sowed by his father, because his father left a half-caste disobedient boy with an English woman in London and when Johnny was leaving Lagos the father gave him an introduction look up this boy, and of course, that landed him in trouble. It's a very nice, strong story-line and I think, as I said, he knows a lot about Nigerians, but I'm not quite sure about his knowing about Nigerians in Nigeria because he made some funny remarks about a mother carrying an eighteen year old boy to the wharf, dancing to the drums, which I found very, very difficult to accept, because I can't imagine myself carrying my eighteen year old son all the way to the wharf! But he's got the image of the drums and everything, and I feel he was using the imagery of the time. Don't forget this book was set in 1950 and this was before the age of the race relations and all the worries we've got now. So he's used the language of that time to describe us. In England here, he really got into Nigerian feeling. He knows a lot about them and he even laughs about his own people because he knew how untruthful the police can be and how young boys are treated because this boy was only eighteen, and by the time he's nineteen he's already been forced to go back, without making the fortune.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now when you say he writes very well about Nigerians in this country, what sort of things do Nigerians here do?

BUCHI EMECHETA

I think he really got into it, because the English character which I think probably must be him, became a social officer and tried to help the colonial students coming here. In that way, he was able to go with them into their house, into their pubs and into their private lives. That way he was able to write convincingly because he became very, very sorry for the plight of the blacks in this country. I don't like it very much when he became very, very, you know, 'the lady bountiful' sort of thing, wanted to 'do good'. Reading it as an African I don't like that part very much.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

You think he was being patronising?

BUCHI EMECHETA

A patronising attitude; I don't think I like that very much. But as I said, I found it very amusing, easy reading and very, very interesting.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, Buchi Emecheta thanks for coming along to tell us about 'City of Spades' by Colin MacInnes. It's published by Alison and Busby and costs £2.50 in the United Kingdom.

Time for me to say goodbye but not before keeping my promise and here's Jimmy Scott again to complete the programme. So goodbye from Alex Tetteh-Lartey until 'Arts and Africa' this time next week.

TAPE

OKO RU KO KWO KWO.