

# 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 another edition of Arts and Africa and this week we will be looking at an art that is truly African but we will begin with one that, although it does not originate in our Continent, is practised to perfection by an African as you can hear now.

TAPE

Richard Graves - Étude II in G flat major.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

That was part of Chopin's Étude in G flat major, played by Ghanaian pianist Richard Graves. He is in the studio with me now. Tell me first were you born in England?

RICHARD GRAVES

No, I was born in Ghana, in Cape Coast in 1955 but I came over to England at a very young age, about the age of 2.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It is interesting that you say you were born in Ghana, do you happen to belong to the family of the Graves of Cape Coast who are very well known musicians?

RICHARD GRAVES:

Yes I do. I would like to think that that is where I get any musical inclinations that I have, I probably inherit them from my father's side, I believe my grandfather was quite an eminent musician in Ghana but the interesting thing is that all my family were self-taught which makes their success even more interesting. I feel very lucky that I have been able to come over to England and get a formal musical training.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, I remember one of them taught us music at Achimota School. At what stage in your education did you decide that you were going to stick to music more than to anything else?

RICHARD GRAVES

About the age of 16 or 17 I felt that perhaps this was what I really wanted to do and I was spending more and more time at the piano and in a sense not so involved with other things. Obviously I was at school and involved with studies but that seemed to be second, somehow I was always orientated towards the piano.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, you've got some photographs here of some of the sculptures. Could you describe to me this rather odd looking creature.

JOY KUHN

Yes, he's very bizarre. Some of the sculpture is very bizarre, very ugly, so you would have in this case instead of a nose, it's a horn, he's actually in a state of change he's changing either back from animal into human being. This particular chap is going the other way. It's very grotesque, half animal, half human being.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It looks like a rhinoceros to me with a horn for a nose and also a horn at the top of the head.

JOY KUHN

Yes, and of course some of these figures are depictions of dreams. The sculptors often depict their dreams and because they are so conscious of spirits, one of them in fact Bernard Takawira told me that his dreams are constantly haunted by these shapes which he will then sit down and work on in stone in the morning.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Would you say that all their ideas came from their instinct or the dream experience or would you say that they have probably seen examples of this kind of art elsewhere?

JOY KUHN

No, it comes completely from their own experience.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Individual experience?

JOY KUHN

Oh, individual experience. They were not subjected to any outside influences in spite of the fact that McEwen came in as an outsider and worked with them he believed very strongly that one should not subject them that it would come naturally so they weren't subjected to anything at all.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Would some of the forms be the result of social teachings things you have learnt about these creatures from their parents?

JOY KUHN

Oh, yes yes very much so.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Does art completely consist of depictions of their cultural beliefs of their gods?

JOY KUHN

More or less. They would certainly depict the witch in her changing form. They would show, what they call the chipungu which is a limbless creature or they will show the moment when the spirit leaves the body, so much of the sculpture has pointed heads as the spirit goes out from the top of the head. People often wonder why the strange pointed heads and that is the reason and of course the creatures into which the witch can turn will be an owl. The owl is very feared and the hieyna, the bat and the ant eater.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So is the art wholly religious do they do anything else outside their religious beliefs?

JOY KUHN

No not really. There will be family groups, they are obviously very family minded people so you will get a family group depicting the solidity of the family feeling but other than that in the main it is all animalistic beliefs that are reflected.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now when they produce their work of arts or a particular sculpture what do they do with it?

JOY KUHN

Well there were two movements in Zimbabwe Rhodesia. First you had the Salisbury Gallery with the school that grew out of it. At the same time up on the border with Zambia at Sipililo a sculpture village grew up set up by an artists son, a farmer Tom Bloomfield and there it happened very naturally. Tom was sculpting in his garden and a chap called Lemon Moses who was actually working with him sat down and he began to sculpt and the two of them sculpted together and Tom was very impressed with Lemon Moses work and took it down to show Frank McEwen to say this chap is very talented and by the time he got back to Salisbury some other people had popped in and were sculpting as well and this became a sculpture village. The Salisbury Gallery Movement itself really died out, the artists who came out of it are now working individually and are now selling through galleries in Salisbury. Tom's village has stayed static, it was in a very troubled area and there is a legend attached to the village in that one of the sculptors a chap called Chauriica, his great uncle Chimbewere is said to protect the village and no harm will ever come to anybody who lives in it. Tom has a small gallery in Salisbury. His work has been sold very well outside Africa, it has found its way into the museum of modern art, it's found its way into the galleries round the world. There are some very talented people involved. I think obviously it has been affected by the situation so that people were not going in there to buy to the same extent and many of the sculptors working on their own have had quite a difficult time. They have been given exhibitions out of Zimbabwe Rhodesia but I think they will be very pleased that things are settling down and they can get on with their work.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

What direction do you think art among the Shona is moving towards now. What's the future likely to be?

JOY KUHN

Well of course it will develop but the more prominent of these sculptors have already developed individual styles. Some of the others are still working fairly schematically. It will become more and more individual but this is the way any real natural art movement starts. The village of Tengengenge may be turned into a national institution which would be marvellous, it was something that was hoped for and it is quite unique.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Joy Kuhn thank you very much indeed and that's it from Arts and Africa this week. We leave you with some more music from Schuberts A minor sonata played by Ghanaian pianist Richard Graves. And from me, Alex Tetteh-Lartey, it's goodbye.