

Arts and Africa

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

BBC COPYRIGHT CONTROL

ARTS AND AFRICA

First Broadcast: 18.4.82.

434G

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey welcoming you to a very Ghanaian Arts and Africa. If you had been in Ghana's Black Star Square in Accra in the first week of March, you would have heard this.

TAPE

ACTUALITY - MR. LIONEL IDAN

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

That speech of welcome came from Mr. Lionel Idan of The Ghana Association of Writers, and it began a musical and arts festival which formed part of Ghana's Silver Jubilee celebrations last month. The theme, as you heard Mr. Idan say, was "Voices and Visions of our time". This is of particular relevance as it was not only Ghana's and therefore Independent black Africa's 25th Birthday, but it came two months after the takeover by Jerry Rawlings. Stuart Sutton-Jones was in Ghana at the time and is in the studio with me now. Stuart, I know this arts festival. It happens frequently. Did it differ this time because of the takeover by Jerry Rawlings.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Yes I think so because as it was soon after the takeover, the artists and the writers got together. They felt that they had to express very much the themes that were being expressed in the revolution. For example liberty and unity and all the songs and the dances and all the poems that came throughout that evening, it was a very long evening, pushed those themes, of liberty, of unity of purpose and of also the economic liberation. Remember this is Ghana's 25th anniversary. There were several references to Jerry Rawlings speech on Independence day itself, the day before this arts festival when he had said that although Ghana had been independent for 25 years as there was no economic independence, the country had never really been free. So people looked upon that week, that 25th anniversary as the beginning of a new start.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

As it was such an important occasion I suppose a lot of people turned out?

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Oh yes, yes. There was many, many thousands of people. Practically every available place was taken and there were crowds stretching 10 or 15 deep. Also it was interesting to see there were many members of the diplomatic community there. Many of whom stayed to the end which is not always the case. (Laughter)

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, who were the performers? Were there any notable names among them?

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Oh yes. There are many, many people who would be well-known to Ghanaian audiences and many known outside Ghana, especially in West Africa. I'm thinking of the Wulomai, also Atukwei Okai the poet who, inccidentally, has just been appointed the Regional Secretary for Greater Accra. Also the Odapagyan Cultural Troupe who performed this piece called "Three Hundred Years".

TAPE

MUSIC EXTRACT - THE ODAPAGYAN CULTURAL TROUPE.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

That's the Odapagyan Cultural Troupe and "Three Hundred Years". As you can hear they were saying that we are bound to come back some day and again pushing the idea that liberty is going to come through cultural expression.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now what was the structure of the evening? How was it all put together?

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Well as I said it was a very long evening. It lasted several hours. The organisers brought in revolutionary poems, they had poets from the university and also student poets. They had various singers, they had actors, they had dancers, many, many famous names and various cultural people from Ghana. One of the major devices they used to make the evening flow more easily with so many people to perform over a long period of time, they used The National Folkloric Troupe which is one of the National Cultural Troupes of Ghana as you know. They performed all the way through whenever a scene change took place. At one particular occasion they were given free reign and they were able to perform on their own in their own right instead of merely providing a back drop to other people. On this one occasion in this sort of music that you're hearing now, they processed all the way around this very large arena and they had banners and they were doing their dancing and performing acrobatics. It was like being in one of the regional centres of culture. It was a lovely, lovely occasion.

TAPE

MUSIC EXTRACT - THE FOLKLORIC NATIONAL TROUPE.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Now really nothing could be more Ghanaian than that sort of drumming and those rhythms. But that was the National Folkloric Troupe. Now Alex, I think you know this next man.

TAPE

MUSIC EXTRACT - KOO NIMO

STUART SUTTON-JONES

OK who was that?

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It's very difficult to judge (laughs). Who is he, tell me? Is it Koo Nimo?

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Yes, Koo Nimo, right.

TAPE

MUSIC EXTRACT - KOO NIMO.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

That's Koo Nimo Alex. I think he's been famous since the '50's.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Yes well the theme he uses has certainly been famous since the '50's when Koo Nimo came on the scene. In fact the flavour of his theme is very reminiscent of Nkrumah's early days at rallies where this traditional war yell was made.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Mmm. In fact it's interesting that you should mention Nkrumah because here we are, the 25th anniversary of the day that he stood in Black Star Square and celebrated Independence for Ghana. Many people were saying, on this evening when I recorded this music. "Ah, this is just what Nkrumah would have wanted. (Laughs)

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

(Laughs) Yes.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Anyway I then heard Mr. Asiedu Yerekyi, who's the Provisional National Defence Council, the Government Secretary for Culture and Tourism, the Minister for Culture and Tourism. He gave a rather long speech of instruction to the vast crowd. He paid particular attention to the new cultural nationalism of his government.

TAPE

ACTUALITY - MR. ASIEDU YEREKYI.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

The PNDC Secretary for Culture and Tourism, Mr. Asiedu. And his message of national regeneration through Ghana's artists was taken up by the singing group, "The Voices of Labone" in their song "Power to the People".

TAPE

MUSIC EXTRACT - THE VOICES OF LABONE.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now Stuart I read in one of the recent Ghanaian papers that Mr. Yerekyi has called for Western music to be banned because as he says, it distracts the peoples attention from their own culture. Is this true?

STUART SUTTON-JONES

He didn't put it quite like that. There was a very lurid headline in one of the national newspapers in Ghana. In fact, it did not express at all what Mr. Yerekyi said. The headline said: "Alien music to be banned on Ghana radio". Now what he actually said was that there should not be an emphasis on foreign music to the suppression of Ghana's indigenous music. And, of course, that can't be argued against. But, of course, it sounded a very shrill headline and people got a bit worried about that. What he actually wants is for there to be an emphasis on Ghana's local music and local cultural life so that it can become once again the centre for West African music. The emphasis recently, because of the economic problems in Ghana, has shifted over to Lagos in Nigeria because that's where the money is and where the recording studios are. But people say "Ah, the money's there. But the talent is in Ghana".

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

(Laughs) Well that's very fair. Now about these revolutionary songs composed for this festival or generally being composed now, do you think the composers are genuine in their feelings or are they just trying to please their new rulers?

STUART SUTTON-JONES

No I really feel they're genuine. What people feel at the moment is that there is now at least a chance for a new beginning.

STUART SUTTON-JONES

Things are by no means rosy or particularly good but there was a feeling of numbness almost at the end of last year and now despite the problems, people really do feel that there is a chance of a new beginning. They are for the revolution, they're for the rhetoric, they're for the exterior manifestations of the new changes happening in Ghana and I think that there's not the slightest doubt that the artists and the singers, the performers, are solidly behind the new direction of the country. I asked about it and it certainly came out not only in performances but also in my conversation. This was echoed in the words of Mr. Lionel Idan of the Ghana Association of Writers who we heard at the beginning of the programme.

TAPE

ACTUALITY - MR. LIONEL IDAN

TAPE

MUSIC EXTRACT - THE DAMOS CHOIR.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Stuart Sutton-Jones thank you very much for a very refreshing report. But I'm afraid that's all we have time for this week so we end with this music by the Damos Choir. It's called "We are all involved". Till the same time next week, this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey in London saying goodbye.

TAPE

MUSIC EXTRACT - THE DAMOS CHOIR.