

# Arts and Africa

**BBC** AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

BBC COPYRIGHT CONTROL

ARTS AND AFRICA

First broadcast 26.12.82

470G

## ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey welcoming you to "Arts and Africa" in which we meet a singing Oba from Nigeria, take a bird's eye view of the Zimbabwe poetry scene, and hear about a campaign to control exploitation - exploitation that can sound something like this:

## MUSIC EXTRACT

### THE DRUM OF TUNISIA

## ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well it's the ownership of Africa's traditional music that's been, for some time, a subject of discussion by African members of UNESCO. And it's from the Paris headquarters of UNESCO that Mick Delap, writer on African affairs for the BBC, has just returned. Mick, tell me, how is it that musicians are being exploited? What's the fuss all about?

## MICK DELAP

Well, UNESCO have, for some time now, been involved in trying to answer a request for African members to help them protect African folklore, and African music in particular. What happened was that UNESCO, back in 1963, organised a meeting for African countries interested in folklore and at that meeting most African countries simply said: "Help us stop the exploitation of our folklore". Now by that they meant that people, very often Western musical experts, would come in and would record African traditional music and take it out of the country (as they were entirely able to do under the legal system) put it on record and sell the records. And if you were back in Africa and you wanted African traditional music for your broadcast library or for your own library, you had to actually buy the stuff and pay good money abroad. UNESCO have been exploring ways of trying to produce a draft copyright law, not applying to books or to modern music but one that would apply in particular to traditional music. And they have produced a model law. This is based on the experience of the seven countries who actually now have laws which protect traditional music, led I think by Tunisia who were the first.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So it's not UNESCO who is going to enforce the law? It's drawing up a model for countries to assimilate into their own law.

MICK DELAP

That's right. UNESCO is acting as a kind of midwife to try and help African countries to produce their own laws which they will then be able to enforce.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now I find it very difficult to understand how this can really work out. Sometimes you have, say, somebody going to Africa asking a group of performers to perform for him. He may record the song on tape. He brings it back to say, England. He uses a bit for broadcasting from the BBC. How is the royalty thing going to affect him?

MICK DELAP

Well, let's say I made that recording in Tunisia. First of all, if I were going to bring it back to use in the BBC or in any commercial way, I would have to go to the appropriate Tunisian ministry to ask permission and I would have to pay, I'm assured by the Tunisian expert I spoke to, a fairly small sum but nevertheless I would have to pay a sum to use that material. If I didn't and a record appeared with Tunisian traditional music on it then the Tunisian authorities would be after me and would sue me for breach of copyright as they would if I had plagiarized a book or anything else like that. That's how it would work in my case but of course there's the problem of what would happen to the money. The Tunisians have set up a body which distributes the money back to artists. It's a sort of general fund.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now, what happens in a case where the musician records an old folk tune but he has improvised, he has added to it, he has modified it in one way or another? Will that still count as traditional music?

MICK DELAP

What happens in that case is that the body concerned with copyright, with folklore copyright, would actually sit down and listen and they would decide that it was maybe fifty per cent traditional but that this man had brought new material and fifty per cent was therefore his.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now what about what has already been recorded. There's a vast amount of material already recorded in Europe.

MICK DELAP

I think that has slipped under the net and got away and has gone out of African control. But for those countries that now have the law, they are concerned to stop that process and UNESCO report considerable interest in a number of other countries, Ghana and Kenya in English-speaking Africa in extending this protection from these eight countries that have it to other countries that would like to have it.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well thanks Mick Delap for bringing us up to date. I only hope that traditional musicians learn about their rights speedily.

MICK DELAP

Well, to help them, UNESCO are organising a major conference in 1983 in February, Dakar, Senegal so that should also help the process.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Once again thank you very much Mick Delap. Twelve years ago Colin Style held an important position in the literary scene in Rhodesia. He was a prolific poet and, together with his wife, edited a magazine of poetry called "Ophir". Those days are over. Rhodesia is now Zimbabwe. Colin Style recently returned to Zimbabwe to examine the changes on the literary front and when he arrived back in London he came along to the "Arts and Africa" studio to tell me what he'd found. First of all, though, what special contribution had his magazine made in those days long ago?

COLIN STYLE

We used to keep the pot boiling in terms of poetry and we also liked, at that time, to encourage young black poets and writers who were coming forward. We used to put them into our magazine, too. In fact we brought out a record of what we called then Rhodesian poets which was readings of Shona, Ndebele, and white writers. It didn't have very good sales, unfortunately, because at that time the content was a bit too Black African orientated for the current tastes of 1970 which was very much the time of the UDI heyday.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now you were also there during the fight for independence. I wonder whether any poetry written by the guerrillas was published during this time or was it too risky to do so?

COLIN STYLE

Oh, very much too risky in terms of being inside the country. You see, as soon as one bought out a poem that was pro-guerrilla in any sense, the government would come down like a guillotine, so to speak. But there was a lot of stuff being written outside the country and broadcast from Mozambique and Lusaka, (Chimurenga songs) poetry and that sort of thing. So it was coming in, in a way,



(4)

from boundaries where the white government couldn't reach. Now, of course, the black government and the black majority is firmly in the driving seat. They want to do their own thing and this extends as far as the cultural scene is concerned as well. They want to re-create the literature of the country in black terms and this is something the white must adapt to, or not be part of the cultural scene.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now you've been back lately to Zimbabwe. What is the present position on the literary scene?

COLIN STYLE

Well, the literary scene is, in fact, much more active than it was before. There's a host of black writers now coming forward and, in fact, the publishers are very hard-pressed completely to fulfil all the manuscripts that are being produced. In fact, there are two tendencies going on: the one tendency is to de-centralise culture - that is, to develop the minority language groups in Zimbabwe, develop their literature, develop their interest, their song, their dance and their music, give the needs of the people round the countryside their say. On the other hand there is the need to unify the country's literature and to make a total literature. Time will tell whether or not these are incompatible. But at least it makes for dynamics. Of course the black poets who used to be outside the country like Dr. Solomon Mutswairo are now back again and Mutswairo I would say is the new Laureate of the country. He's written anthems and that sort of thing. On the other side there are the very young poets like Musa Zimunya who also is publishing and producing in writers seminars and there's Dambudzo Marechera who wrote "The House of Hunger". He is now back in Zimbabwe, he's a very dynamic individualistic, an iconoclastic sort of writer. He is doing his own thing. Once again there's a culture pull - because Dambudzo Marechera wants to write in English but he wants to write in an English that is his English whereas there is a trend now in Zimbabwe for people who want to write in Shona and Ndebele so Dambudzo and the others are having a clash about this. But you see a lot is happening.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Colin Style. And we've invited Colin Style to join us in the near future to say more about the new poetry - especially about the considerable output in Shona and Ndebele. This voice, however, is singing in a Nigerian language, in Urhobo.

MUSIC EXTRACT

"UGO"

(5)

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

The Urhobo traditionally live in Bendel State, not far from Benin City and this recording we're listening to, it's brand new, is the brainchild of the Oba of Urhobo. David Wekpe takes his duties as Oba very seriously. Not only is he the King or temporal leader of Agbaro and the surrounding towns but also the apiritual leader and healer. So, when he was good enough to visit us in the "Arts and Africa" studio I asked him: Wasn't it unusual, even strange, to have an Oba cutting records - if I could put it that way?

DAVID WEKPE

On the contrary. It is more meaningful, it is another way of passing the knowledge, the message. The record itself has got meaning. If you were to understand what is said in the record then you would know it's only someone in my position that can use those words. There are some words, or call them incantations, that the ordinary person is now allowed to use.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So you are actually trying to give respect to the traditions of your people, that's why you have undertaken to do this?

DAVID WEKPE

A great respect for the traditions. And at the same time there are also so many philosophical sayings and advice that we want people to realise and be wide awake to their intuitive leads.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now what's there so special about your people that you want the world to know about them?

DAVID WEKPE

It's not just my people. What is special about my people is in other people because, for instance, water, there is water everywhere. If I mention the element of water in the U.K. that's the same element that is in various parts of Africa, in India. It's everywhere so it is the understanding of what things stand for. I am just bringing this out for my people to understand more. Those who are in the dark should know more about what is happening.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now you say you want your people to understand more. Are you talking about your particular group of people or are you talking about the whole of Nigeria, are you talking about Africans as your people?

DAVID WEKPE

No, I'm talking about the world at large. The only difficulty here is that it is not very, very easy to translate this into the English language, to sing it in English. If it were I could take the world as one people.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now you seem to be placing a good deal of religious significance on this record. Do we take it that this is a cultural thing, a spiritual thing, rather than an ordinary pop record?

DAVID WEKPE

It is very cultural and very spiritual . The only thing is we've managed to modernise the music with the help of my able friend, Mr. Roberts to make this possible. The pure African traditional music doesn't sound like this. So for the younger generation, they could dance to it and at the same time get the value or special knowledge.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It is very interesting that you are, apart from the originator of the idea, you are also the vocalist. Are you a musician?

DAVID WEKPE

Yes I'm a musician. I play the keyboard and the synthesizer there. I was playing the accordion. This I played without effort or forethought. Nobody taught me how to play it. But Mr. Roberts, being a musician, he taught me how to play the keyboards.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Who else is there in this production?

DAVID WEKPE

Oh well the names are there. There is Cosmo Roberts, Emmanuel Aryee who is a Ghanian and, in fact, to make it complete Bernard is from the West Indies.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So how did you come to assemble such a mixture...

DAVID WEKPE

It's just mysterious. I can't explain (LAUGH)

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now are there any special songs on this disc which have a particular significance for you? I know they are all important in one way or another.

(7)

DAVID WEKPE

Yes, well one which I would say has a particular significance is Aganoghene-E which means "Nothing challenges the superiority of the great living god".

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well we can listen to it now.

DAVID WEKPE

Oh that will be fine.

MUSIC EXTRACT

"AGANOGHENE-E"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

The Oba of Urhobo and his group, Ugo, meaning Eagle, in a track from their first disc which they've entitled Ame or Water. Ugo are going to play us out. Thank you for listening; hope you'll join us at the same time next week; for now it's goodbye from Alex Tetteh-Lartey, goodbye.

MUSIC EXTRACT

"AGANOGHENE-E"