

# Arts and Africa

**BBC** AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

ALS 4/5/c/1/30

BBC COPYRIGHT MATERIAL

ARTS AND AFRICA

First B'cast:13.11.83.

516G

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey welcoming you to another edition of "Arts and Africa".

GRAMS

CORAL DA DANCA TUFO.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

A traditional song from Mozambique sung there by the Coral da Danca Tufo.

And it's in Mozambique we stay with music, traditional and modern, and take a look at what's happening in the literary world. Fiona Ledger has just returned from a visit to the country. Fiona welcome to the programme.

FIONA LEDGER

Thanks very much, Alex.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Did you hear any of that sort of music when you went about or is Mozambique yielding the modern trend in Africa of going for pop music?

FIONA LEDGER

Well it's a funny sort of combination. The pop and high life, the modern scene is just beginning to get off the ground. The whole scene is, in fact, highly centralised in the sense that radio Mozambique has a monopoly really of all the broadcasting of music and recording of music.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And I understand when you went there you met Alfonso Fonseca who is a former producer and now a director at the station.

FIONA LEDGER

Yes, that's right. He's very concerned, I think, to gather together the traditional music that exists and to get it recorded. But as he explains to me there are problems.

ALFONSO FONSECA

We have here in Mozambique, in the traditional music, very very good groups like "Marimbeiros De Zavala" and we haven't yet recorded groups like "Marimbeiros De Zavala" on disc.

FIONA LEDGER

Why not?

ALFONSO FONSECA

We have only recordings on tape because "Marimbeiros De Zavala" is a unique group in Mozambique. They have about 100 people playing marimbas and dancing.

FIONA LEDGER

So you haven't got a studio big enough here to fit all the people in?

ALFONSO FONSECA

No, we can't fit this group in the studio. We must go to the place where they are.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Fiona, Mozambique is a very poor country and we know it's struggling very hard to raise the level of the economy. How can a record industry survive?

FIONA LEDGER

I'm not quite sure, Alex, but it does survive. But the fact is there is enormous popular demand and I think that, in a way, helps those people in Mozambique get something together. I was surprised actually at the extent of just how popular the records are.

ALFONSO FONSECA

In the last year we have recorded about forty groups. But I can say about three hundred or four hundred have been recorded for broadcasting from the north, the middle and the south of Mozambique.

FIONA LEDGER

How can you be confident that you can sell the record when it is made?

ALFONSO FONSECA

It's very easy to sell the records. We press about, for single

ALFONSO FONSECA

records, about ten thousand records and for L.P's about ten thousand. And it's funny, in one day we sell all the records. The preference of the public is Funy Fumo who is a very big artist, he has a very good voice. And another is de Alexandre Langa. He plays guitar, he plays saxophone and he is a very nice singer.

GRAMS

"WAHIDANSIA" - de Alexandre Langa.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

(Laughs) I like that piece of music, it sounds a bit South African.

FIONA LEDGER

It's jolly isn't it?

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It's very nice. And that was "Wahidansia" by de Alexandre Langa and his group. Now Fiona how about the future plans of the radio station? What has Alfonso got?

FIONA LEDGER

Well I think what they want to do is they realise they can't sit in splendid isolation in Africa and they want to get into the European markets. But Alex I think I should mention before we move onto the literary scene, one particular personality who I met who is a great star on the Mozambiquan scene. She's actually Irish, she's an Irish flautist and her name is Jessy Marney. She does work in Radio Mozambique as a producer but she is primarily a musician. I had a long chat with her and she explained to me that although she was a musician in Great Britain and in Ireland, when she came to Mozambique which was some seven years ago, she didn't have any kind of musical career guaranteed at all but she soon became pretty popular.

JESSY MARNEY

I came here on a contract to teach English as a foreign language.

FIONA LEDGER

But you brought your flute with you?

JESSY MARNEY

Oh, of course, of course. At that point in time the flute was like my sister, a constant companion. And it wasn't long before I actually started working here and I was contracted by people who heard that there was this person who played the flute. Also my husband plays saxophone and we were interested in jazz. I think I was in the country two months before I started rehearsing with what came to be known as the International Jazz Group of Maputo. From there I played with an established Mozambique group, "Okolokwe", established in the

JESSY MARNEY

south, in the capital. I'm a foreigner here but I'm not a foreigner to the stage. I travelled up country with them, playing flute and soprano sax.

TAPE

"MANINHA" - flute music.

FIONA LEDGER

And that song, Alex, "Maninha" - well there you could hear Jessy playing the flute and her current musical partner, Fernando Luis on guitar.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Ah, a sweet piece of music there. It was lovely, very soothing. Now it looks as if the record industry is doing very well. How about the literary scene?

FIONA LEDGER

The literary scene is getting off the ground again too. Mozambique, as I mentioned before, does suffer from a sort of linguistic isolation because Portuguese isn't a language that other countries in Africa are familiar with. It's a difficult language. But things are, I think, improving. There's a lot of poetry being published and when I spoke to a man, Michael Wolfers who produces a programme called "Bookshelf" he gave a very good idea of the whole drive to bridge the gap between English speaking African literature and Portuguese speaking African literature. He also told me about the problems of an audience listening to his programme which is in English going out mainly to South Africa. They're listening in English about books which are written in Portuguese.

MICHAEL WOLFERS

It's a problem in the sense that you can't expect the audience to have read the writers you are talking about unless they've appeared in English translations and unfortunately not enough of them have. I mean we have, in Mozambique, Luis Fernando Honwana who is well-known in English translation. But what I do in the programme is I include material from the authors but translated. So that if it's poets, I'll include some poems that I've translated in English for the audience. If it's a prose writer, I will include a short extract from the book to give the flavour of the writer because the audience can't normally reach them in the original Portuguese.

FIONA LEDGER

And you're translating yourself, are you?

MICHAEL WOLFERS

Almost entirely because in the case of the best known authors here, only a little of the work has been translated into English before and I'm also concerned to bring alive some of the new writings which has been done in the last three or four years.

FIONA LEDGER

If you look at the kind of writing that's being generated in Mozambique, what sort of things stand out in terms of the type of literature, novels, poetry or what?

MICHAEL WOLFERS

Well I think overwhelming there's poetry. All kinds of people write poems, not always publishing them, sometimes for reasons of shyness, sometimes for other reasons. But you scratch almost anybody in government, out of government who can find a poet. What is relatively lacking is prose writing. It's almost none, there's very little prose writing being done. Poetry is very much a feature of everyday life.

FIONA LEDGER

Does that have traditional, historical reasons? Are the people of Mozambique traditionally good at writing poetry?

MICHAEL WOLFERS

I think there are a mixture of factors that have come together. One is, of course, that there is an oral tradition in Mozambique literature as there is in many African countries. So you've got a tradition of expressing things which tends to be in a poetic rather than a prose form. Secondly you have the history of repression in the colonial period where it was relatively easy to pass a poem around, rather quietly, much more difficult to produce long prose works and have them circulated. So there became a practice of concentrating on poetry in that period. Thirdly, people who have been through the educational system, whether it was the colonial or the new system, have poetry as part of their educational experience. So you've got three factors coming together to give more emphasis to poetry rather than to prose.

FIONA LEDGER

Now your programme goes out to the whole of southern Africa so you're building bridges in a lot of different directions. What do you see the future as for publishing and translating into Portuguese literature and English speaking literature?

MICHAEL WOLFERS

Well all kinds of people are trying to break down these ex-colonial divisions and I, for example, was just in Zimbabwe where they published a translation I did into English of Pepegela's "Mayombe", an Angolan novel which is coming out next year in the African Writers Series by Heinemann. Now that is part of a programme in Zimbabwe to publish, in English, books from French Portuguese for an audience there. They're also getting involved in putting into the Portuguese language some of the most relevant material. For example they're publishing a very good history book about a people that straddle the boarder between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. That book, published in English, will probably be appearing in Portuguese so young Mozambiquans can read about the history of their country through the scholarship in Zimbabwe and there are all kinds of initiatives being taken in that direction to try and overcome the historical accident of these language divisions and to take advantage of the geographical proximity

MICHAEL WOLFERS

language divisions and to take advantage of the geographical proximity that actually unites rather than divides.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Michael Wolfers, producer of Radio Mozambique's External Services "Bookshelf" talking there to Fiona Ledger.

Well that's all for this week's "Arts and Africa". Thank you for joining me, Fiona. Let's end with some more music from de Alexandre Langa - Rosa Maria. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye.

GRAMS

"ROSA MARIA" - de Alexandre Langa.