

# Arts and Africa

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ARTS AND AFRICA

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ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Hello, this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey. Welcome to "Arts and Africa and welcome to today's guest, Anima Misa Amoah. Anima is an actress. She is also the author of the first production in the forthcoming African Theatre Season. (The BBC African Service's annual season of plays begins on Sunday the 24th of November and continues for the next five Sundays.) The season kicks off with "Aisha" and Anima Misa Amoah has come along to tell me about her play.

Welcome Anima.... I'm going to let listeners hear one of the scenes from "Aisha" before we get going. Alright?..... Well, here it is.

EXTRACT

"AISHA" by Anima Misa Amoah.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well Anima I don't want you to give away your plot but I've gathered from that little scene that that man and that woman - are they husband and wife? - are not only in the middle of a very dramatic scene, they are also well matched. Can I ask you very bluntly if you are advocating in that play women's liberation, freedom for wives if you like?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Yes and no. I don't like to use the word women's 'liberation'. I don't like to use that expression because it gives people a very funny idea and men get on the defensive the moment you talk about women's liberation. I think it's really a change in the whole society for both men and women. Yes, I think women should have a bit more freedom than they have at the present time.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And when you talk about freedom, from the scene we've just heard, it looks as if you're asking for freedom for her to move about and associate with as many men as she likes because the man is also doing it. I don't think that is a very good reason.

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

It's not exactly like that. The point is it's very difficult for men to think that a woman can also have dreams and think about other men and want to go out with other men. I want the men to understand that women also do have

these kind of feelings and not to take it for granted that a woman can never go out, and once she's married she's married to you and there's no chance of her going out with other men or anything. I think the men have to learn to accept that that's a very high possibility and if a woman is pushed to do it she will.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Isn't that the fault of African society, in that the women wait for the men to come for them so that the man naturally assumes that it's the man's business to go for the women and therefore when it happens the other way around then it becomes a scandal?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

I agree to a point that maybe it's the fault of society and that's the point of this whole play. There are things that change, times change you. If these things have been accepted in the past as the right thing we have to know that things have to change and there has to be a lot more understanding on the part of the men.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

How did you come by the title, "Aisha"? It sounds Arabic or Turkish.

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

It's an East African name actually, Aisha. But I just liked it and I don't like to limit my names to maybe just Ghanaian or something West Africa. I usually like to just cut across Africa if I can and that's why I chose that name.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now how many plays have you written?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Well this is the first one that's been done on radio. I have lots 'in the closet' if you see what I mean. I write a lot but I wanted to see how this would be accepted. Most of the others have been seen in schools because I went to a film school and I wrote then but they were all school work.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Full length plays?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

They were thirty minutes and one hour, that sort of thing.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

But none of them have actually been produced in public, as it were?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

No, just for schools. This is the first time one of mine's been produced for public.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

So now I suppose this is a starting point?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Yes it is.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

You'll be bringing out the rest?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

(Laughs) I hope so.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

When you're writing a play do you always put in a message? It's very tempting for a first timer or somebody who has not had plays produced publicly to try to make a serious point for that is what would capture the public's imagination. Are you tempted to do that? Do you, in fact, have a message in your plays?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Yes I always try to. I think there are so many things to comment about, so many serious things to talk about, and I think that really art is one of the ways society can be changed. I don't know whether it is strictly just for first-timers as such but I think that a lot of writers do try to give a message and I try to do that whenever I write.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

What sort of messages do you give, moral, political....?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

I think so far I've been a lot more concerned with the moral side. I've been a lot more concerned about the status of women and that runs through most of the themes that I've used. I haven't gone into politics and stuff like that yet.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now in this play you take the leading part, Aisha. How do you feel playing a part in your own play?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Very funny (Laughs)

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

First of all as a lead character.

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

It wasn't very easy. I mean I hadn't really written the part for myself, you know, so when I was invited to do it actually I was a bit

reluctant and then I thought: why not, let's just try it and see. So I did but I can just say that it wasn't too easy to do a part in my own play.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Yes, exactly, because I assume as the writer you tried to dissociate yourself with, stand outside, the character and give it its own life and then when you are put in the part it's a different thing altogether. Now, how do you think about playing a part which you have in your own mind and being directed by somebody else? You know exactly what you are thinking of.

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Yes. (laughs) That's all part of the difficulty because I mean I had to be an actress and take my directions from the director and I had to be a writer and see the play in my own way. So when I decided to take on the part I just allowed myself to be directed because a director can see the total thing and, to my mind, make the best judgement. So I allowed myself to be directed.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

But were there situations where you felt that perhaps the producer didn't have exactly what you intended the thing to be?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

No, fortunately no. I mean we talked about it so long before we actually did the performance that we had agreed on most of the things before we went into it.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Do you act for a living?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Yes, when I do get a job. You know, most of the time I'm out of work. It's quite normal for actors and actresses but when I do get a job yes, otherwise I do little things on the side whenever I can.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And where are you based? In England or in Africa?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

In England at the moment, for the next few years I suppose.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

What sort of audience did you have in mind when you were writing this? You said earlier on that you tried to cut across national barriers, that's why you chose the name "Aisha" from East Africa. Are you thinking in terms of an African audience or is this sort of universal?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

Well, I did think of an African audience but I also think that the theme is quite universal, this particular theme.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And have you had the courage to submit any of your plays for publication

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

No (Laughs)

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Why?

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

I don't know. I guess I'm too critical for my own work. I mean I write and then when I look at it I just ask myself why should I want somebody to read this, what reason can I give. It would have to be a very good reason. Most of the time I find so many flaws and half way through I decide it's not even good enough so maybe I'm just too critical of my own work.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Anima thank you very much indeed and I'm very much looking forward to hearing the full play.

ANIMA MISA AMOAH

It's a pleasure.

MUSIC

"UGANDAN LULLABY"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

We included this lullaby from Uganda in a recent programme about songs for babies and small children and it introduces another selection today. So far babies haven't contributed anything themselves. Well, we're now going to remedy all that. Here's what I can only describe as a duet recorded in Malawi. The woman is singing in Chewa but I'm not sure about the baby.

MUSIC

"MALAWI LULLABY"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

I'm not too sure who won that round so here is what I can only describe as a second bout.

MUSIC

"MALAWI LULLABY"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And to clinch her victory the girl in this recording sings 'Alulu Kalele Mwoma'.

MUSIC

"MALAWI LULLABY"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

But for a more peaceful conclusion here's a lullaby - also from Malawi - this time in Manganja and it's sung by Chiriko Phiri. It's called Kulera Mwana?

MUSIC

"MALAWI LULLABY"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

There is some even more soothing music to end today's programme. Before we play it let me invite you to join me for more "Arts and Africa" at this time next week. For now from Alex Tetteh-Lartey it's goodbye.