

Arts and Africa

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ARTS AND AFRICA

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ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Hello and welcome to this last Friday broadcast of "Arts and Africa". This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey and, like our signature tune, I'm appearing for the last time. Starting tomorrow, a new programme takes over, and I'll be giving the details at the end of today's programme.

In my opinion, 1987 has been a remarkably good year for the arts of Africa. There's so much happening that there isn't time for nostalgia. Instead I want to give the African arts scene the chance to show its vitality. It's a happy coincidence that one of Africa's major arts awards was announced the day before yesterday - just in time for us to pass on the news. It's eight years since the Japanese publisher Shoichi Noma created the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. Over the years the Noma Award has spotlighted some outstanding publications from all over the continent. Florence Akst was at the declaration of this year's winners on Wednesday and here she is to tell us the news.

FLORENCE AKST

And it is that the winner, published in Ivory Coast, is "Villes de Cote'Ivoire". This two-volume study of the growth of towns in Ivory coast is, the commendation says, "The product of ten years intensive research by its author, Pierre Kipre". Its published by les Nouvelles Editions Africaines in Abidjan.

The runner-up from Ghana was described by the judges as "A remarkable publishing achievement, produced under difficult conditions". It's a compendium of contributions from a large number of predominantly African medical scientists and edited by Badoe, Archampong and Jaja. The book's called "Principles and Practice of Surgery, including Pathology in the Tropics" and the publisher is the Ghana Publishing Corporation.

Then six other titles were read out, all deserving "Honourable mention". And they included a publication on Arabic linguistics from Tunis, Swahili poetry by Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany from Nairobi and Ken Saro-Wiwa's "Sozaboy: a Novel in Rotten English" published in Port Harcourt.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Thank you Florence, for bringing the good news. And I would like to add my own personal congratulations to everyone else.

One of the outstanding publishing events of the year, but published here in London, was the appearance of Chinua Achebe's new novel, "Anthills of the Savannah". And it received added attention because it's nearly twenty years since his last novel, "A Man of the People" came out. It is more than twenty years since Lenrie Peters highly regarded novel, "The Second Round" was published though his poems appear from time to time. Well, it seems as though 1987 has been a creative year for him, too. While continuing his medical career in The Gambia he's been writing another full-length novel, so far its untitled. Baboucar Gaye's persuaded him to tell us a little about it before it's published.

LENRIE PETERS

It is really about the crisis of leadership in African politics.

BABOUCAR GAYE

This is not another Chinua Achebe 'what's wrong with Nigeria'?

LENRIE PETERS

No, it's not. What I've tried to do is to give the novel a broader basis so that we stop thinking of Sierra Leone writers, Gambian writers.....we are African writers. You know: Europeans can write about Europe but Africans must write about their little corner and I'm trying to get out of that.

BABOUCAR GAYE

And you think that there is a crisis of African leadership?

LENRIE PETERS

I think that is our main crisis on the continent.

BABOUCAR GAYE

And how does your book look at it?

LENRIE PETERS

As a matter of fact there was, in the thesis of the book, curiously before the mass demonstrations in Manila and in Haiti, that eventually the people themselves take over because they are concerned about the future and particularly the women. The women come forward and take a more active role in leading society.

BABOUCAR GAYE

And how do you see the women coming over. I mean the African societies, at least those I know of, inherently suppress women. Would it be through, for example, the help of NGO's and other outside bodies or would it be through some sort of revolution in the African home?

LENRIE PETERS

No, I think there is a momentum and dynamic within the African context. Everywhere I go in Africa I observe the fact that the whole business of the African woman being suppressed is, to some extent, mythical because the woman is very dominant in society. In every African society the men are leaders superficially but the women are the people who run the societies. So they have great power and they can have this dynamic which can motivate them to move mountains if it comes to that.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Lenrie Peters. Now we wait to see the book in print. And a welcome for Ablade Glover from Ghana who's been able to join me in the studio because he's here in London to put on a new exhibition of his paintings. Ablade is Head of Kumasi University's Department of Art Education and a painter best known for his oil paintings of urban scenes. Ablade, now, what's new? You've established a style of painting a great sprawl of roof-tops by using tiny blobs of paint, are you keeping the same technique in 1987 or are you trying something new?

ABLADE GLOVER

What I've done recently is quite different from what I exhibited three years ago in the same gallery. Looking at the few that were left against those I bring it's quite astonishing. The situation astonishes me to.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Can you give us a little detail about what the difference is?

ABLADE GLOVER

Three years ago I was using a lot of colour, a lot of really lively colours, red, yellows, they were on the canvas. Today I seemed to have mellowed down, maybe the English training is coming through, I don't know, but the browns are coming alongside the reds; this is particularly visible. Then I think the forms are becoming clearer, I don't know why. The roofs are becoming roofs now. But that's about it, I think that's about the difference.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

You are mellowing probably as the years are passing?

ABLADE GLOVER

Maybe I'm growing up. (laughter)

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Now about the art scene in Ghana in general, are there any new things happening?

ABLADE GLOVER

Yes, it's very, very vibrant I'm particularly encouraged. The amazing thing is that students are now coming out to paint full time which is particularly encouraging. Before, we trained students who went out looking for jobs, they went into teaching, they weren't brave enough to face up to the rigours of being practising artists. Artists like myself always practise on the side. It becomes a sort of side job, but presently we are having students who are coming out to paint full time, very good ones too, and I think that is an indication that contemporary art in Ghana is in the upward swing. And it's exciting, yes. Vibrant, I'd like to use the word 'vibrant'. It's particularly exciting, yes.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Ablade Glover thank you very much indeed it's been a pleasure to meet you.

Poetry? 1986 was an excellent year for poetry collections. There haven't been so many this year. But we can celebrate the publication of two substantial poems by Mangane Wally Serote. Some South African poets write in protest against their predicament. Serote's poems convey the sensations of being black in South Africa. "A Tough Tale" is the title of one of the new poems and of the book. Here's Mangane Wally Serote reading the opening of "A Tough Tale" especially for today's programme.

EXTRACT FROM: "A TOUGH TALE"

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Mangane Wally Serote reading from "A Tough Tale", his new collection of poems published by Kliptown Books and it costs £3.00 in the United Kingdom.

If our own BBC African Service "African Theatre" is anything to go by, African drama must be thriving. Fiona Ledger, producer of this year's six African plays has just joined me. Fiona before I ask you what's new, am I right? Is radio drama thriving?

FIONA LEDGER

Well, in Africa it depends on which country you're talking about. Southern Africa, they've cut back on it: Nigeria is just as lively as ever and I think Ghana, if it had more resources, would be able to match Nigeria: and you go to somewhere like Cameroon, which is French-speaking and English-speaking, it is very lively. They have French-speaking writers who write the satirical, humourous plays and they put them onto disc after they've been transmitted and then they sell them as records and they make rather a lot of money. But it's the old problem of costs, because thirty minutes of radio drama costs about ten times as much as thirty minutes of current affairs.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

How about this year's lot of plays?

FIONA LEDGER

Well we got a huge response because we did more publicity this year than we did last year. And because of that we've got about 140 to 150 plays so we've a bigger choice. This isn't definite but we might be doing a sort of cabaret play which will be a one-woman show....in fact, there's going to be more parts for women. I'm sorry to tell you this Alex....

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

.....you're being chauvenistic now.....(laughter)

FIONA LEDGER

.....there's going to be more parts for women. Our first play is actually by a woman, a Ghanaian, Anima Amisa Amoah, which is very much about a woman's predicament. We've got a lot to choose from including a play on AIDS from East Africa and from Ghana a play about a deadly form of disco music which can kill! I still haven't come to a final decision but that's the way it's looking at the moment.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

It's a tremendous amount of plays to go through. Fiona Ledger thank you very much indeed. And the date to remember is Sunday, 22nd of November. That's when the curtain goes up on this year's African Theatre season.

And now, for me, the curtain goes down. It's been a pleasure presenting the programme and thank you all for listening. Tomorrow and every Saturday, a new "Arts and Africa", at a new time and a different length. Saturdays at 1500 and 1715 GMT is the time to tune in for a full half hour's review of the Africanart scene plus reviews of a wide range of new books. That's for tomorrow - for today it's goodbye from Alex Tetteh-Lartey. Goodbye.