

African Culture and Performance Dynamics in the Dramaturgy of *AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adegoye*



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An Analysis of Director and Choreographer Collabouration in AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye's Productions



Felix A. Akinsipe

Introduction

A theatre performance often includes the interplay of two or more theatrical elements into an aesthetically pleasing whole. In this lights, Akinsipe (2000 p. 197) aptly notes that “although dance and drama are two separate and independent media of communication in the theatre, they have both been used very often together as supportive of each other to enhance the communication process of a performance in the theatre”. He, however emphasises that “dance need not be used within a dramatic work at all. There are straight plays and pure drama where dance/music does not feature”. Dance, as an art on its own, can blend with other arts in the theatre. The use of dance in musical, dramatic and total theatre performances attest to this fact. Akinsipe (1999, p. 87), again stresses that the romance between dance and drama started in the middle of the 15th century, when choreographers were assigned to arrange dances as embellishing parts of a dramatic or musical performance produced in the Italian courts of the Renaissance.

This symbiotic use of dance in other arts makes the collabouration of the choreographer with other artistic personnel—directors (dramatic or musical), composers and musicians unavoidable. Agreeably, “the theatre is an art which reposes upon the works of many collabourators” (Thomas, cited in Johnson, 2005, p. 12) to achieve its communicative drive. The collabourations, however, have not been a very smooth one between choreographers/directors/composers. For example, Stiefel (2002, p.65) posits concerning the choreographer and composer collabouration thus;

The collabouration between choreographers and composers is complicated for variety of reasons, most of which concern issues of dependence and control within a given production that potentially conflict with the sense of independence and autonomy these art forms as professional networks enjoy

outside the production... But of particular difficulty to the choreographer/composer relationship is that the training received by composers and choreographers, and the aesthetic assumptions they adopt consciously or unconsciously can make for misunderstandings of one another's art form. The "structure" of the collaboration—what I am calling a complex of factors ranging from creative processes to professional relations within a "dance world" and/or "music world"—brings with it certain features that limit the freedom and range of both sides in any potential collaborative effort.

About four fundamental points of conflicts are identified below which border on:

- i. the issue of independence/autonomy and control. This surfaces because the personnel are all independent masters of their specific area of arts.
- ii. the types of trainings which are completely divergent. The mode of communication through dance, music and drama are not just the same.
- iii. the artistic or aesthetic vision. No two artists see or perceive ideas the same way and, in fact, there is no one method of doing things in the theatre.
- iv. the structure or the professional understanding between the collaborators. This is where anyone may feel or act superior to the other, thereby generating misunderstandings.

It is worth noting that even within a dramatic piece, the question of who is the boss between the playwright, director and the actors have remained controversial. Wisdom (2005) cited in (Johnson, 2005, p. 4) captures it appropriately:

The history of new plays in production is often a volatile one; it includes playwrights raging at directors and actors for destroying a promising script, directors furious at the meddling writers who do not understand the theatre and explosive scenes, which end with the playwright walking out in high dudgeon, or being excluded from rehearsals by a director or a producer trying to salvage some semblance of calm working environment. The basic conflict always returns to a fundamental question: who is the creative artist and who is the interpretive artist?

It is therefore, more complicated and tough when the artistic heads of two or more different media of the theatre are brought to work on one production. The choreographer in working with these personnel, is placed under some restrictions, which invariably affects his output especially by directors who see the choreographer just as any other crew member or worst still, a subordinate rather than a "co-director" of such performances. This treatment has led to so many frictions between choreographers and directors, creating unnecessary

tension in the theatre.

Collaborations between the director and the choreographer can be the most complex of all unless those involved are highly professional. This is because directing and choreography are merely different names or terminologies for the same assignments in different media. Some explanations on these terms are therefore, necessary at this point.

Directing/the Director and Choreography and the Choreographer in the Theatre

Directing according to Brockett (1996, p.317) is about, "how to work with other human beings (cast and crew). It is also the art of bringing a psychological effect on a group of people who came into a theatre to experience that effect". It, therefore, entails putting all artistic qualities and managerial competence together in working with people, to realise or translate a play script to live performance on stage. The director is therefore the personnel who interprets the script, designs or formulates production concept that will shape the staging of the play, casting of the actors, working with the designers, rehearsing with the actors, and integrating all elements of the play into finished production (Brockett, 1996, p.319).

Choreography is the art of creating/composing dances. It entails originating or forming of new movements, putting them together and arranging them to make sense and beauty on stage. Beiswanner (cited in Oko-Offoboche, 1996, p. 63) is of the opinion that:

To choreograph a dance is to compose it. This means that the materials in which a particular dance consists are shaped up into some kind of ordering design as the dance is being made... the term choreography is used to designate the design or order which a dance has, the shapes which are ultimately achieved as they create satisfactory artistic or aesthetic patterns.

The choreographer is the artistic personnel who undergo the art of creating movements, teaching dancers, arranging the movements in logical manners, as well as other elements of the theatre (lights, set, costumes, make-up...) on stage for a performance or production. Evidently since the emergence of modern dance, the choreographer has become a boss in the theatre-composing (writing); dance, creating or designing movements (choreography); and arranging dancers on stage (directing) as well, (Akinsipe, 1999, p. 88).

From the above, it is pertinent to note that choreography and directing are the coordination of various stages in performance process in dance and drama respectively while the choreographer is to dance production what a director is to drama productions. The conflict arises when an artistic director is invited to participate in a dance production or when a choreographer is invited to work in a drama production. The question of "who's the boss here?" according to Johnson (2005, p. 12), moves stealthily in.

Points of Convergences and Divergences in the Director and Choreographer's Assignments

Collaborations between the director and choreographers in the production process are sometimes knotty. These are usually related to the usual crave for total artistic independence in the production process. These conflicts also often arise because of the divergence and arrays of artistic possibilities with different interpretative approach. The conception and expression of an idea through dance is definitely not the same through drama. Thus, the approach of a choreographer towards the same idea is most likely to differ from that of a director. Abbe (2017, p.294), observes that "creating a dance for a drama presentation will definitely be different, when the aim is strictly for a dance outing". But if the objective of the director and the choreographer is to team up to do the same performance, there must be the need to mingle. This is where attitude, understanding and professionalism come in.

A professional choreographer working on a dramatic piece must concede the headship to the artistic director, because drama is the focus at that point in time. The dances must not dominate, distract or compete with the dramatic essence. The same way an artistic director invited to a dance production must concede headship to the choreographer, because dance is the medium of performance. Both must accept and allow the peculiarity of the nature and medium of communication to thrive in their specific areas. Adelugba (2006, p. 214) warns concerning dominance in the collaboration of the arts when he says: "the main point to bear in mind about auxiliary relations is that the auxiliary should really help and not take over..."

This writer will therefore, draw conclusions from his choreographic experience with AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye as director in the last three years, specifically in the productions of *Palm Wine Drinkard*, by Kola Ogunmola, the University of Ilorin convocation production for 2016; *Eda*, an operaby Duro Ladiipo, the University of Ilorin convocation production for 2015 and *The Killers*, by AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye, the University of Ilorin convocation production for 2014.

AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye in Collaboration with Choreographers

AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye is a (drama) director who believes so much in the efficacy of dance in his dramatic productions. He employs dance to drive his plot and to enliven his productions. Accordingly:

Dance, like the sea octopus with sprawling tentacles is the language of a constant universal art. Dance is not a hypothesis crafted in the mask of guessing. It is the reality of human existence. For dance, in its entertaining

power, reflective energy, cultural revisionism or didactic essence – celebrates people's culture. In Africa, dance is the life-wire and the undying living art in the total theatre aesthetics, (Adeoye, 2014a, p. ix).

His concept of directing is the African concept of total theatre where all arts (music, dance and drama) blend to give a whole performance. In relation to total theatre (Adeoye, 2014, p.297) posits thus:

The core of African theatre is the total theatre idiom. The total theatre performance is a theatre of collective rhythm in all its ramifications... the total theatre idiom weds and marries many performance aesthetics into one unique, cumulative, entertaining and educative whole.

Adeoye believes in the use of choreographers, he does not assume taken over their roles. A choreographer is always included as a part of his crew from the beginning even for a short performance of less than ten minutes. There is usually a meeting where he expresses his intention and expectation from the choreographer. At this point, he allows suggestions and takes to some of them until the best agreeable conclusion is reached between him and the choreographer. This is unlike most directors who according to Abbe (2017, p. 296), will call on the choreographer few days to the production to create a dance for the drama and extempore too.

Then he dedicates some time or days during the rehearsal period to the choreographer to work with the cast. At such times or days he does not attend the dance rehearsals to give the choreographer free hand to do his job. Whenever he comes to see what the choreographer had done, he commends the efforts so far, appreciates the ones he likes and makes further suggestions on the areas he is not satisfied with while also giving more time for the choreographer to effect the suggestions/corrections. AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye realises the need to give a choreographer some time to do a thorough job. Thus if the urge to use dance in a scene occurs to him suddenly, he transmits it to the choreographer and asks for the job in the next rehearsal.

He encourages the actors and musicians to also dance, even though some groups may exist to do some definite movements for dance experts in the production, there are areas where everybody on stage must be involved in the dance. This may pose some challenge to the choreographer who will have only dancers to contend with in a straight dance production. However, since AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye will give time to the choreographer and the casts to work together the challenge is often surmountable.

He uses dance to spice up the flow of his work, thus, there are occasional dances that are not too relevant to the story that are infused, just not to allow a dull moment. This style invariably makes his works heavily dependent on dance for its sustenance. Without the dances for instance, his plays may lose a large part of their appeal. This is also because dance,

by its spectacular nature has the tendency of "stealing the show". Therefore, a member of the audience who had the opportunity of watching a play spiced up with dances will not have the same satisfaction if he should see the play again with all the dances removed.

His rigorous engagement of dancers like actors is a pointer to his tendencies to overwork them. AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye believes in long and many rehearsals. The play must be run over and over as many times as possible for the casts to flow seamlessly with the performance. So, the term "take it again" is common to him in the rehearsals. However, this may not augur well for the dancers in such performances. The energy required and consumed in dancing is far higher than what drama requires. Therefore, making dancers repeat steps over and over or keeping them in rehearsal for too long will wear them out and can result in a weak performance. The choreographer working with AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye must be assertive on the need for the dancers to rest. When you convince him he consents.

Conclusion

The need for collaborations among the various artistic personnel in the theatre cannot be over emphasised. There is no art that is actually complete on its own. The Choreographer Is More involved with other personnel in the theatre especially with the director. For many reasons as stated above, the collaboration between a director and the choreographer has the tendency to be volatile. Conversely, the choreographer's collaboration with a director like AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye is less hectic because of his understanding of the nature of the job and his respect for the choreographer. This is worth emulating for better and healthier relationships of artistic personnel in the theatre.

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