

International Theatre Institute



THE WORLD OF

THEATRE

2011 Edition

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An account of the world's theatre seasons
2007-2008 and 2008-2009

Edited by
Ramendu Majumdar
Mofidul Hoque

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Dedicated to the memory of

Augusto Boal
Ellen Stewart
Ilona Copen
Jean-Pierre Guingané

whose legacy will always be with us

Contents

Foreword	XI	☐ Netherlands	208
Acknowledgement	XIII	☐ Nigeria	217
☐ Argentina	1	☐ Norway	222
☐ Austria	7	☐ Pakistan	226
☐ Bangladesh	23	☐ Philippines	230
☐ Belarus	30	☐ Portugal	234
☐ Belgium (Flemish)	34	☐ Romania	241
☐ Belgium (French)	47	☐ Russia	248
☐ Benin	50	☐ Saudi Arabia	257
☐ Bulgaria	55	☐ Slovakia	260
☐ Burkina Faso	61	☐ Slovenia	267
☐ China	67	☐ Spain	274
☐ Colombia	74	☐ Sri Lanka	278
☐ Congo, Democratic Republic of	76	☐ Sudan	282
☐ Congo, Republic of	82	☐ Sweden	285
☐ Croatia	91	☐ Switzerland	292
☐ Cyprus	95	☐ Tanzania	299
☐ Czech Republic	102	☐ Uganda	314
☐ Denmark	108	☐ Ukraine	326
☐ Estonia	113	Crimea, Autonomous Republic	328
☐ Finland	118	☐ United Arab Emirates (UAE)	303
☐ Georgia	123	☐ United Kingdom (UK)	321
☐ Germany	129	☐ United States	331
☐ Greece	139		
☐ Hungary	149	International Theatre Institute	
☐ Iceland	154	Executive Committee	345
☐ Iran	159	National Centres	346
☐ Italy	164	Associate Centres	355
☐ Japan	172	Cooperating Members	356
☐ Latvia	179	Committees, Forums and	
☐ Luxembourg	185	Working Groups	358
☐ Macedonia	191	Regional Offices	360
☐ Mexico	196	International Performing Arts	
☐ Nepal	205	Organizations	361



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NIGERIA

AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye

The total theatre idiom, the major aesthetic attraction of the Nigerian contemporary theatre grew beyond its borderline between the years 2007 and 2009. The theatre seasons under review also witnessed great transformation through prodigious theatrical activities that challenged existing dramatic styles and performance approaches within the literary, popular and indigenous traditions prevalent in the Nigerian theatre field. Interestingly, there was a shift in thematic concern. The shift was between ethnocentrism and multiculturalism, a clear conflict of identity and an unending struggle between centrifugal and centripetal forces in Nigeria – a country once described as a nation of nations due to her fragile political system.

Politics and the Nigerian Theatre

The subversive essence of the theatre was simply relived in year 2007, an election year in Nigeria. Consequently, the Nigerian Juju, Highlife, Hip Hop, Fuji, Jazz and Reggae musicians were gainfully employed by the Nigerian political class to chant, praise and sing for them. This is to enable them to win elections while the Nigerian living dramatists, considering the need for money, actively lived beyond the objectivity of the artists by *dramatizing everything good* about their sponsors and paradoxically too, they *activated everything bad* about their sponsors' political opponents. They heat-up the system by reviving the age-long ethno-religious rivalry in the Nigerian power relations. Expensive vehicles were bought for local musicians who followed the Nigerian politicians to perform during electioneering campaigns. Popular musicians such as Wasiu Ayinde, Sunny Ade, Obesere, Wasiu Alabi, Tuface Idibia, Abe Dosunmu, Victor Omali, Femi Anikulapo Kuti, Paul Dairo, Psquare, Timaya, Helen Paul, Dagrin, Akon, Bank-W and so on sang directly or indirectly to reap abundantly through the 2007 elections. It is important to note that the Nigerian politicians tried as much as possible to outdo themselves in the area of live theatre, radio jingles, television adverts, and the theatre of human mannequins among several others.

As a counter response to theatrical partisanship that the political theatre engenders, some vibrant Non-Governmental Organisations in Nigeria such as Women in Democracy, People's Theatre, Justice Forum, Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists, Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners, Mustapha Akanbi Foundation, Centre for Communication and Reproductive Health (CCHRS), Youth Adolescent – Reflection and Action Centre (YARAAC), Lawyers Alert, National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners, Agency for Community Security–Mobilisation and

Prevention of Crime and so on were particularly outstanding in sensitising the electorates on the power of the ballot and for the Nigerian people to protect their votes. The theatrical performances sponsored by some NGOs in three States (Kwara, Plateau and Nasarawa) of Nigeria will be discussed briefly here to support the fact that the NGOs, in fact, deserve the missing medal by considering the utilitarian essence of the theatre beyond the Nigerian politicians' selfish desires.

In Plateau State, for example, the Global Rights Partnership commissioned Theatre for Development (TfD) animators under the leadership of Tor Iorapuu of the University of Jos to carry out research in some communities around Jos, the capital of Plateau State with the hope of transforming the people from their state of inertia to become responsible citizens. At Panyam, a rural community in Plateau, these animators, according to Iorapuu did a good work by exploring "the cultural space of the community for clear political action". The performance involved enthusiastic members of the community who were mostly youths and leaders. Their previous political errors (collecting bribe from politicians, rigging, violence, killing and so on) were built into the performance and after the performance which took place in April, 2007; the Panyam people embraced the core tenets of democracy by shunning all anti-democratic tendencies in the 2007 general elections. The same transformation, through the deconstruction of the old habits, was witnessed at Lafia, the capital of Nasarawa State by the same animators and their leader, Tor Iorapuu. Three communities were visited for the assignment and Iorapuu reported, after a follow-up, that the members of the communities where the drama took place 'reacted violently' against the attempt of the political class to rig election.

The tension in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital, two days before 14th April, 2007, the actual date of the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections can be likened to a state waiting for the commencement of war. Politicians were involved in last minute calculations which were characterised by intrigues, horse-trading, betrayal and outright deceit. While this was going on, over four thousand partial military men in full military regalia drove round the city of Ilorin chanting war songs, dancing and battle-ready as they intimidated the electorates. This show of shame never deterred the performers of People's Theatre founded by the present writer in the city of Uyo in 1997 from performing a political sensitisation play titled, *Do it Right* for the Ilorin audience. It should be noted that People's Theatre was commissioned by YARAAC in association with CCRHS and sponsored by Joint Donor Basket Fund (JDBF) for UNDP to produce the play. Adopting the TfD approach, the play was performed at the popular Saw-mill Garage at Ilorin, Offa and Omun-Aran – three cities in Kwara State. The desired result was achieved because the would-be-electorates in the three cities where the Kwara experiment took place refused to collect bribe and the theatre was the winner. The same scenario was witnessed through Mustapha Akanbi Foundation's sponsored play, *Sin no More* that condemned violence in the Nigerian democratic space.

The Theatrical Aesthetics of Corporatism

The theatrical aesthetics of corporatism is our coinage for the corporate social responsibility in performance sponsorship through the provision of required funds and

enabling environment for the theatre to triumph. Between 2007 all through 2009, most multinational companies sponsored major performances beyond the expectation of theatre practitioners that radically altered the face of the Nigerian entertainment scene. Productions such as “STAR TV Game-Showing”, “Let’s Dance”, “Celebrity Takes 2”, “Malta Guinness Dance show”, “GLO Naija Sings”, “Maltina Family Dance Show”, and “No Stop Dance Competition” among several others were sponsored by Zenith Bank, GLOBACOM, MNET, Union Bank and Bank PHB in Nigeria. Guinness Nigerian Plc also continues to sponsor “Guilder Ultimate Search” where winners are carting home millions of Naira and the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) is also a beneficiary for the Station has also reaped abundantly from this corporate intervention which led to cultural revival in the Nigerian nation.

Closely related to this are the corporate organisations such as MTN, Zain, Multi-choice Nigeria and some banks in Nigeria who sponsored the now popular Abuja Carnival, Calabar Carnival and Lagos Carnival. These corporate organisations also sponsored popular traditional Nigerian festivals such as Osun Osogbo festival, Ofalla festival, Eyo Masquerade festival, Olojo festival and so on. The prosperity of the Nigerian theatre was also enhanced by the three tiers of governments who also contributed in no small way to the promotion of the Nigerian numerous cultures. An objective conclusion is that billions of Naira was expended in the Nigerian theatre in years 2007 to 2009 to remake the Nigerian theatre.

The most important of all the corporate sponsored productions in Nigeria is that of Chams Plc who created the Chams Theatre Series in year 2008 to bring back, the dying culture of live theatre in Nigeria. In year 2008, they adapted *ògbójú Ode Nínú Igbó Irúnmolè*, a Yorùbá novel from one of the popular Nigerian novelists, D.O. Fafunwa into the live theatre. The same novel was translated into English language and produced to the delight of the Nigerian audience at Abuja, the Federal capital of Nigeria, Ilé-Ifè (Osun State), Ìbàdàn (Oyo State) and Lagos State. In year 2009, another thriller from D.O. Fafunwa, *Ìrèké O?ibùdó* was staged and adapted by Professor Akinwumi Ishola as *Ìrèké Onibùdó: Aghára Ifè* to illuminate the place of love in the novel’s postcolonial message. The same novel was translated into English by Professor Femi Osofisan of the University of Ibadan as *The Fabulous Adventures of a Sugarcane Man*. The two stage plays were also produced in several cities in Nigeria. For Chams Plc, our culture should be promoted and for the artists, the pay is good because Chams Plc has succeeded in engaging experienced performers, playwrights and directors of more than 40 years standing. Tunde Awosanmi and Kola Oyewo (two seasoned directors) on the Nigerian stage directed the 2009 edition of Chams Plc productions.

The Literary Tradition

Due to relative stable university calendar in most Nigerian universities, the university theatres through productions in various Theatre/Performing/Creative/Dramatic Arts Departments across the Nigerian nation made the literary tradition to maintain its lead. Convocation productions were professionally handled at the Universities of Ibadan, Calabar, Port-Harcourt, Ife and Ilorin. In fact, University of Ilorin produced a musical opera out of Femi Osofisan’s *A Restless Run of Locusts* and Don Pedro Obaseki’s *Azagidi*, an African tragedy of power and powerlessness, discontentment,

vengeance and man's social dislocation as a result of betrayal of sincere love in years 2007 and 2008. Another play, in the neo-traditional style, with a medley of the Brechtian aesthetics, *Hello Prisoners* written and directed by Professor Ayo Akinwale with directorial assistant from the researcher also made a lasting statement on the psyche of the Ilorin audience in year 2009. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria also led the literary theatre tradition in the Northern part of the country through the sustenance of the Theatre for Development practice. ABU also produced *Tough Man* (written and directed by Emmy Idegü in 2009), *Emotan* by Irene Salami was directed in year 2008 by Jenks Okwori while *Funtoje: Our Love* (written by Ziky Kofoworola was directed by Jenks Okwori in 2007). Importantly also, the Association of African Universities (AAU) commissioned the Universities of Ilorin and Abuja to perform two plays for them at their 12th Annual meeting and Conference at Abuja. The two productions; Bakare Ojo Rasaki's *Drums of War* from the University of Abuja and *Time for Change* from the University of Ilorin were subsequently produced. The Ilorin production condemned the systemic failure in the African educational system through inconsistency in policy formulation and implementation while the Abuja play preaches against war and its aftermath.

New plays such as Otun Rasheed's *The Third World War*, Emmy Idegü's *Ata Igala The Great*, Ziky Kofoworola's *Queen Ghasengeh*, Irene Salami Agunloye's *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, John Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*, Julie Okoh's *The Trials*, AbdulRasheed A Adeoye's *The Smart Game* (a Neo-alienation script) and *The Killers* (a social drama) among several other plays were published in the theatre seasons under review.

A new Department of Performing and Visual Arts was established at Kwara State University, Malete while Nasarawa State University, Keffi also established Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies. The two new departments were established in year 2009 while ABU Zaria's Drama Unit of the then Department of English and Drama changed its name to Department of Theatre and Performing Arts. There were theatre infrastructural developments here and there while the major one was the 140 million naira New Performing Arts Building of the University of Ilorin built through the Nigeria Education Trust Fund and commissioned in 22nd October, 2009.

Giant Strides of the National Theatre

The Nigerian foremost theatre house, the National Theatre through the National Troupe of Nigeria took Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* round some States in Nigeria, and ended the year 2007 with the production of Wole Soyinka's *Bacchae of Euripides*. The management of the National Theatre has created the town in gown theatrical programme where a university will perform a good play for the audience of the National Theatre. Consequently, Olu Owolabi's *Lisàbi Agbòngbò Akàlà* directed by Sam Kofoworola and produced by ABU students in year 2008 made the town in gown's concept a theatre lover's delight. The National Troupe of Nigeria also toured the world with various productions and the Theatre's management has continued to encourage private and state-owned theatre organisations such as AY Show, Crown Troupe of Nigeria, and State Council for Arts and Culture and so on to be alive to their artistic and cultural responsibilities.

Conclusion

The relative peace in the Nigerian nation has contributed to the giant strides recorded in the theatre seasons under review. Although the Nigerian theatre developed more rapidly in the cities in the last two years, local theatrical cum cultural productions were also re-worked and demobilised from rituals to the living stage. Globalisation has also affected the Nigerian theatre in a positive and negative way while the Nigerian culture industry and most importantly, the Nigerian artists have benefited from the rejuvenated and creatively dynamic Nigerian multicultural theatre.

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