International Theatre Institute

THE WORLD OF THEATRE

2008 Edition

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THEATRE

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An account of the world's theatre seasons
2005-2006 and 2006-2007

Edited by
Ramendu Majumdar
Mofidul Hoque

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International Theatre Institute
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NIGERIA

Interoduction

The 2004-2006 period may be regarded as one in which Nigerian dramatists and theorist/critics came forward in good numbers and with submissions of relatively good quality. By and large, drama and the performing arts have in recent times received a great deal of support from the indigenous publishing houses, three of which deserve special mention-Kraft Books under the leadership of Steve Steymore Shaba, Caltop Publishers under the leadership of Ayo Arowosegbe and Bookcraft under the leadership of Bankole Olayêbi. It is perhaps a matter of sociological significance that all three publishing houses have their headquarters in the ancient city of Ibadan.

Among significant plays published during the period under review are works of the Artistic Director of Nigeria's National Troupe who now doubles as the General Manager of the National Arts Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos, Dr Ahmed Yerima. Dr. Yerima is himself a theorist-critic and a skilled actor and director, and, for now, a part-time University lecturer. Yerima's plays published in the last few years by Kraft Books are: The Angel and Other Plays (2004), The Limam and Ade-ire (2004), Ameh Oboni, the Great (2005) and Hard Ground (2006). Yerima's scholarly publications include Basic Techniques of Playwriting, Kraft Books Limited, Ibadan (2003), Fragmented Thoughts and Specifics, Bookplus Nigeria Limited, Lagos (2003), Ideology and Stage-craft in the Nigerian Theatre (jointly authored with Professor Olu Obafêmi), Bookplus Nigeria Limited, Lagos (2004) and Modern Nigerian Theatre: The Geoffrey Axworthy Years, 1956-1967, published by Kraft Books (2004).

Many indigenous publishing houses brought to the light of print anthologies of poems, novels, short stories, collections of essays and plays both in the realist and in the anti-realist modes.

The new home video culture continues to be dominant, but, nevertheless, a few notable films in the proper cinematic mode were made by such committed persons as Ola Balogun, Saddik Balewa and Eddie Ugboma.

The Thirty-six States

Nigeria is a multi-cultural nation with 36 States including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This report focuses on one of the thirty-six States, KWARA STATE, whose drama/performing arts output in the period under survey may rightly be described as emblematic of similar activities in the other 35 States of Nigeria. A brief survey of activities in a few towns outside Kwara State is included in order to broaden the base of the report.

The Example of Kwara State

In 1967, a multicultural State known as Kwara State was created by the then Supreme Military Council of Nigeria under General Yakubu Gowon, now retired. The capital of Kwara State is Ilorin and it radiates the aura of cosmopolitanism, while retaining, at the same time, the image of peasantry and communalism. Kwara State, the pot of knowledge and the State of Harmony, is populated by Yoruba, Hausa, Nupe, Gobirawa, Fulani, Baruba, Beriberi, and a few other ethnic groups. This multicultural image of Kwara State also accounts for its diversity in culture, language, religion, politics, governance and administration. Out of the three Senatorial Districts (Kwara Central, Kwara South and Kwara North) there is a sense of monolithic hegemony among the last two named Senatorial Districts. They are mostly populated by the Yoruba and the Nupe/Bariba, while Kwara Central, the District of the Emirate which houses the State Capital, Ilorin, exudes the best of cultural dynamism as a result of many contending heterogeneous variables.

Interestingly, the theatre, in all its ramifications, stands as the voice of the helpless, and its artistes, the agents of correction, in spite of the Ilorin Emirate and Islam's supposed hatred for and condemnation of theatrical performances. What the Emirate and Islam will not allow is the near-total or total celebration of nudity in theatricality. Semi-nude theatre such as Richard Schechner's production of *Dionysus in 69* (an adaptation of the *Bacchae* by Euripides) where 'so many naked bodies had been presented on a New York stage before a public audience' (Waldman, 1972:97) has no place in the Ilorin Emirate and Islam's cultural/theatrical heritage.

Theatrical performances in Kwara State also fall within the literary, popular and indigenous traditions, although with various competing types and modes. This is so because 'attempts to classify drama in Nigeria along developmental stages have yielded an avalanche of contradictions and inconclusive details' (Obafemi, 1988:54). Interestingly, the current democratic regime in Nigeria in general and in Kwara State in particular encourages the promotion of theatrical performances, because the government uses theatrical performances to promote, educate and inform the Kwara citizens and denizens about government's 'endless' programmes and activities mostly rendered in sugar-coated language and portrayed in the neon lights of what the government calls the 'dividends of democracy'.

Traditional performances in Kwara State, till date, remain the people's means of cultural promotion and the defence of the people's most cherished heritage. Annual masquerades such as *Egungun Ellwe*, *Atipàko* and a host of others were celebrated and performed with fanfare in the years 2004, 2005 and 2006 in the Kwara South Senatorial District, while, *Nupe Kuti*, a masquerade performance which is usually performed through the aesthetics of 'Gatee drum' where each 'Nupe community sought for local fame based on their aesthetic implantation of ritual devices. Each area such as Binis, Kyadya, Batachidzi, Chekpan, Ebangi, Kusochi, Kintichi, Gbedegi, Ebe and Dibo created independently, each carving its own style' (Ibrahim, 2003:85) and *Igunnu* masquerades were also celebrated with vigour with local politicians using the festival to promote themselves preparatory to the not too distant 2007 State and Federal elections, which Nigerians await with anticipation.

Socio-political organizations and associations also celebrated their annual 'Days'. For

example, the last Oro Day was celebrated in September, 2005, and this ceremony was attended by who-is-who in Nigeria. Traditional performers are now collaborating with politicians to advance the frontiers of political mobilization, publicity and cultural celebrations. However, their performers 'have been relegated to the level of sycophants whose erudition serves the wish of their masters alone. They are 'sellers' of prospective candidates and, as retired artists, money is probably one of the main reasons for their activities.' (Musa 2003:48)

The Kwarans also use the theatre of religion to sell God. There are so many theatre and drama groups who have staged quality performances that were used to promote the tenets of Christianity and Islam. Most of these religious theatre outfits are housed at Ilorin, the State Capital. They include, Christian Drama Ministry (C-SEM) which was founded by Pastor Moses Owoseni in 1995, and this drama group is under the umbrella of C&S Church Movement, Evom Christian Ministry (founded by Brother Shola Agboola, who is the Secretary of All Nigeria Conference of Evangelical Drama Ministry – ANCEDRAM in 1998), Kay-Boards Technical Productions (founded by Evangelist A.M. Fatola), Christo-line Drama Ministry, Progressive Drama Ministry (PRODAN), The Reconciliation Ministry (TRECOM), Mount Zion Faith Ministries International and so on have, among other things, produced live and screen plays. The NASFAT (Nasrullahi Fathi), an Islamic religious group, also produced some play-lets which were used to entertain the Muslim followers during the last Maolud celebration which took place at Tanke Area, Ilorin, in June, 2006.

Three theatre groups (Ishola Ogungbesan Theatre Group, Fadex Drama Outfit and Lumex Creations) were, however, outstanding in the production of live and screen plays. Although Lumex Creation was founded by Ray Eyiwumi on October 15th, 2005, it nonethelesss produced popular films such as 'Sòkòtò' and 'Life for Love' under Olumide Akinola, who is the current Executive Producer of Lumex Creations. Through Alhaji Fatai Adeniyi Dan-Kazeem, Fadex Drama Outfit (founded in 1991) spent three million naira to produce the award-winning 'Iwonikan' in 2004 and 'Abawonla' in 2005. Professionally, 'Abawònla' was marketed by Gemini Film Productions. Ishola Ogungbesan Theatre Group, perhaps the oldest modern theatre group in Kwara State, also produced stage performances during the years under review. The thematic pre-occupations of these three theatre/drama groups include the dramatization of the vanity of human existence, love, political gangsterism, betrayal and religious intolerance, moving from the profane to the ludicrous and from the dialectic to the eclectic.

Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture is another strong culture pillar in the promotion of theatrical activities in the State. Established in 1976, the Council has, till date, participated in the annual NAFEST (National Festivals of Arts and Culture), and has promoted the social worldview and cultures of the numerous ethnic groups that make up Kwara State. The Council's Department of Performing Arts also engages in the production of music, dance, drama and traditional sports. As the State's cultural organ, the performing artistes of the Council have more or less become publicity instruments. Also, the Council signed a bilateral agreement with the Alliance Français (French Cultural Centre), Ilorin, for the production of theatrical performances. The over-celebrated play in their repertory, *The Fight between Sango and Ogun* was also produced

at Alliance Français in Ilorin in 2005. Numerous dances (which were smartly choreographed into dance-drama) have also been used to entertain visiting political personalities. They are almost as regular as the Department of Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, in terms of frequent production of plays.

Ajòn players, a University of Ilorin based private theatre outfit founded in the early 80s by the ebullient playwright/director, Professor Olu Obafemi, also has a place of pride in the history of performances in Kwara State in particular and in Nigeria in general. In the year 2004, Ajòn players produced six plays at the Africa Hall auditorium of the University of Ilorin in the year 2005. *Dark Times are Over?* was produced by the group and commissioned by the University of Ilorin authority to welcome the new Council Chairman, Professor Ayo Banjo, and to condemn, in totality, the rising incidence of cultism, nudity, prostitution and other vices among the Nigerian youths. Written and directed by Olu Obafemi, with Rasheed Abiodun Musa (a playwright, director, actor, stage manager and production manager for Ajòn players) serving at the standing Assistant Director, *Dark Times are Over?* is placed on a sound total theatre experimental dramatic footing and the attempt to produce and take the play round the country led to a fatal road accident in which seven people lost their lives on May 19th, 2005: Are dark times over? This play was published in 2005. Ajon players also produced Femi Osofisan's *Kolera Kolej* in honour of the playwright, Femi Osofisan at sixty, on the 15th of June, 2006 at the Africa Hall of the University of Ilorin.

Established in the 1981 academic session, the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin is the big masquerade with multiple rhythms in performance articulations and presentations in the entire Kwara State for the period under review.

The following is a chronology of the Department's celebrated performances between 2004 and 2006. First, the year 2004 performances :

1. *Madam Tinubu by* Akinwumi Isola: director; Jide Ibrahim, under the artistic supervision of Dr. S.E. Ododo and Rasheed Abiodun Musa.
2. *The King Must Dance Naked* by Fred Agbeyebe: director; Kemi Bamidele, under the artistic supervision of Professor Zikky Kofoworola.
3. *Yemoja* by Ahmed Yerima: Director; Seun Okinbaloye, under the artistic supervision of Ayo Akinwale and later Rasheed Abiodun Musa and Felix Emoruwa.
4. 'Nsibidi', a dance theatre: choreographer; Dotun Oyebade, under the artistic supervision of Jeleel Ojuade.
5. *Aida* by Guiseppe Verdi: Musicologist; Ada Takon, under the artistic supervision of Ikibi Solomon and Austin Emielu.
6. *Mountains of Wealth* by Ayo Akinwale: directed by Ayo Akinwale; assistant direcor, Rasheed Abiodun Musa.
7. *The Lion and the Jewel by* Wole Soyinka: directed by Rasheed Abiodun Musa.
8. *Grip Am* by Ola Rotimi: directed by Ayo Akinwale, assistant director, Rasheed Abiodun Musa
9. *Efunsetan Aniwura by* Akinwumi Isola: director; Reuben Ezekiel-later by Ayo Akinwale and Rasheed Abiodun Musa.
10. *Sunset at Noon* by Felix Emoruwa Sina Adegbite and Peju Shuaib: director; Tayo Arinde.

Next we present the most notable productions in the year 2005 in Kwara State.

2005

1. *Nana Olomu* by Matthew Umukoro: director; Kehinde Orire, under the artistic supervision of Zikky Kofoworola.
2. *Wonyegi* by Obotunde Ijimere: director; Ojo Moses, under the artistic spervision of Rashed Abiodun Musa.
3. *Drums of War* by Bakare Ojo Rasaki adapted as 'Drums of War', a dance-theatre: choreographer: Yemi Adeboye under the artistic supervision of Jeleel Ojuade.
4. *Iphigenia Finds Aiyelala* by Ben Tomoloju: director; Ezekiel Peter, under the artistic supervision of S.E. Ododo.
5. *Kiriji* by Wale Ogunyemi: director, Bisoye Ikupoluyi, under the artistic supervision of Ayo Akinwale.
6. *Placenta of Death* by Sam Ukala: director; Labiran Mayowa, under the artistic supervision of S.E. Ododo.
7. *Mammy Water's Wedding* by Bode Soweande: musicologist, Olalusi Taiwo; under the artistic supervision of Austine Emielu.
8. *Palmwine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola: musicologist; Ike Chima, under the artistic supervision of Solomon Ikibe.
9. *Alajota* by Yeside Dosunmu: choreographer; Tope Kolawole, under the artistic supervision of E.R. Isibor.
10. *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola: director, Ayo Akinwale; assitant director, Rasheed Abiodun Musa.
11. *One Legend, Many Seasons* by Femi Osofisan: director; Ayo Akinwale, assistant directors; Rasheed Abiodun Musa and Felix Emoruwa.
12. *If...* by Ola Rotimi: director, Ayo Akinwale, assistant directors; Rasheed Abiodun Musa and Felix Emoruwa.
13. *The Hatchets* by Omolola Adamu: director, Omolola Adamu.

Some Theatrical Events Outside Kwara State

The following performances were given in Lagos which seems not to have ceded its earlier place of leadership altogether to Abuja. Some would argue-incorrectly these days-that Lagos can be considered Nigeria's cultural capital. Even if this is untrue, Lagos is not without its special delights in the entertainment world.

Dance Meets Dance

An annual event organized by the French Cultural Centre to marry Anglo-phone and Francophone dances and dancers. The two-week programme involving 15 Nigerian dance companies and 6 foreign dance companies usually takes place between February and March every year.

Love is Blind

Written by Mufu Onifade, it was directed by Yemi Oyewo for new students ('Jambites'). It was staged at the Theatre Hall of the University of Lagos. The play x-rays the activities of 'Stalites', 'Jambites' and 'Aristos' within the school environment.

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The Strong Breed

Written by Wole Soyinka and directed by Ahmed Yerima, was staged by the National Troupe of Nigeria at the MUSON Centre, Onikan, Lagos. The turn-out was very encouraging, despite the fact that it was by special invitation.

Orisa

Written by the late Associate Professor Bode Osanyin, was staged by a group called Ivory Ambassadors. The director of the play was Nissi George and the play was in honour of Fred Agbeyegbe who celebrated his 70th birthday.

Budiso

Written by the birthday celebrant, Fred Agbeyegbe, was staged alongside Orisa by students of Lagos State University (LASU)

Eleru Gberu E

This is a comic drama written by Tunji Sotimirin and directed by Segun Adefila. It satirises new students ('Jambites') in the new environment of Nigerian campuses while also underlining the do's and don'ts of Nigerian universities.

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again

Written by Ola Rotimi, it was staged at the National Theatre by the students of Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin. It was directed by Hafis Oyetoro primarily for one of the social events in the school.

The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen

Written by Ahmed Yerima and performed by theatre veterans such as Olu Jacobs, Kunle Bamtefa, Toun Oni and a host of others. Ahmed Yerima doubled as Oba Ovonramwen in the play. Directed by Bayo Oduneye, it was staged at the National Theatre, Lagos.

She Stoops to Conquer

Oliver Goldsmith's play She Stoops to Conquer was directed by Israel Eboh. It was performed at the National Theatre for secondary school pupils to aid their comprehension of the text, a set-book for West African Examination Council (WAEC) Literature in English Examination.

Exodus

This play was put together on a guerrilla theatre forum and it was staged by Crown Troupe. The intention was to highlight the vices and other problems associated with the determination of Nigerian youths to travel out of the country by all means. This play has also been staged at the opening of the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP) Office in Lagos as well as at the arrival of Peter Badejo in Nigeria when he came to declare open the Festival of Dance Arts (FEDA) for Nigerian dancers in the month of June 2005.

Once Upon Four Robbers

This play written by Femi Osofisan was performed by the students of the Creative Arts Department, University of Lagos, spiced with some professionals. It was directed by Wole Oguntokun, a Nigerian lawyer who has a passion for the theatre. The play was performed at the MUSON Centre, Ikoyi, Lagos.

Kongi's Harvest

Written by Wole Soyinka and directed by Ben Tomoloju. It was sponsored by the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP) as one of the 2005 Festival of Nigerian Arts (FESTINA) plays. It was staged at the National Theatre and at the Museum Kitchen in Lagos.

Yemoja

Written and directed by Ahmed Yerima, it was produced by the National Troupe and performed at the Cinema Hall II of the National Theatre. This play was later taken on tour to Mexico.

Ameh Oboni

Written by Ahmed Yerima and directed by Bayo Oduneye, it was performed at the closing ceremony of the Abuja Carnival 2005. It was also staged at the MUSON Centre, Ikoyi, Lagos.

Who's Afraid of Osanyin?

Written by Otun Rasheed in honour of the late Bode Osanyin, the play is a quasi-biography of the late playwright and it satirises Osanyin's character and mannerisms both at school and at home.

FEDA Festival of Dance

The festival of dance was organized by the National body of the Guild of Nigerian Dancers. It was staged at the National Theatre and the French Cultural Centre, Ikoyi. The festival witnessed the participation of 30 dance groups in a keen dance competition in order to give awards to the most outstanding dance groups and individuals.

Kurunmi

Written by Ola Rotimi, the play was staged by the 2004/2005 final year students of the Theatre Arts Unit of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, as their final year practical project. The performance took place at the Main Auditorium of the University. It was directed by David Bibem.

The Gods Are Not To Blame September

This play by Ola Rotimi was staged by the National Troupe of Nigeria. Directed by Prof. Niyi Coker from America, the play was first staged at the MUSON Centre before it was taken on tour to the United States of America.

Opera Wonyosi

This exciting play by Wole Soyinka, adapted from John Gay's The Beggar's Opera and Bertolt Brecht's Threepenny Opera, was directed by Makinde Adeniran and staged at the MUSON Centre for the MUSON Festival. The play featured many known actors and actresses such as Felix Okolo, Yemi Adeyemi and Seyi Fasuyi, to mention but a few.

Abaji

This play, based on the Niger-Delta crisis, was written by Boyle Adikiba. It was performed by Ivory Ambassadors Dance Company to commemorate its 12th Year Anniversary at Glover Hall, Lagos. The play was directed by Steve James.

Owiwa Shall Rise Again

Written by Hope Eghaha, it was performed by a combination of Creative Arts students and students from the Department of English, University of Lagos, for their practical examination.

Monkey Post

This play, which chronicles the 'maradonic' style of governance by some of Nigeria's leaders, was put together by Crown Troupe under Segun Adefila. It was performed at Pec Theatre, Onikan, Lagos.

The end of the year 2005 witnessed an explosion of comic strips, especially from stand-up comedians such as Julius Agwu, Okey Bakassi Tee A, Klint de Drunk, Ali Baba and so on. They came up with shows like 'Princess and Friend', 'Crack Ya Ribs' and so on. The most popular of the shows was the one organized by Ope Williams titled 'A Nite of a Thousand Laughs' which made its debut in Lagos five years ago at MUSON Centre, but has been moving to different locations like Port Harcourt, Abuja, Asaba and so on, in Nigeria. It is a combination of music and drama sketches from comedians all over Nigeria.

Vibrant Theatre All the Way

Before moving back to Kwara State and listing the highlights for 2006, it must be remarked that there was vibrant theatre in all thirty-six States of Nigeria during the 2004-2006 period under review.

Kwara State 2006

The highlights are as below—

1. *Who's Afraid of Solarin* by Femi Osofisan; directors; Rasheed Abiodun Musa and Felix Emoruwa.
2. *Oba Mama by* Isiaka Aliagan: Directors; Rasheed Abiodun Musa and Felix Emoruwa.
3. *The Plague* by Ayo Akinwale and Rasheed Abiodun Musa, produced and directed by the duo for the 9th Annual Inter-School Sports at the Federal Government College, Ilorin-Kwara State.
4. *Time to Celebrate* by Ayo Akinwale and Rasheed Abiodun Musa, produced and

directed by the duo for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Queen School, Ilorin in May, 2006.

5. *The Shadow* by Oludolapo Ojediran: director, Peter Adeiza.

The following plays were also produced by the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin between August 1st and September 6th 2006: *Edewede* by Julie Okoh, *Azagidi* by Don Pedro Obaseki, *Muntu* by Joe de Graft, *Death of Sonponna* by Femi Fatoba, *Muje Muje* by Ben Tomoloju, *Treasure Chamber* by Kwesi Kay, *The Sultan's Dilemma* by Taofiq al Hakim, *Otaelo* by Ahmed Yerima, *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* by Tim Rice, *Bamigbose Sango* by Esikinni-Olusanyin, *Omobo* by Yemi Remi and *Joromi* by Steve James. Most of the plays produced by the Department were performed at Ilorin (at Africa Hall or at the Science Lecture Theatre, Unilorin or at Alliance Françoise, Ilorin). Others were performed at the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, Queen's School, Ilorin and Federal Government College, Ilorin, and so on.

This article was prepared by Dr. Gbemisola, Remi Adeoti, Mr. Rasheed Abiodun Musa, Dr. Adebisi Ademakinwa and Professor Dapo Adelugba.