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THEATRE STUDY SERIES

THE NIGERIAN STAGE is published bi-annually (March and October) by INNOVATION THEATRE in conjunction with the Theatre Study Group of the University of Ilorin. We welcome contributions under any of the following sections:

RECENT STAGE: Critiques of performances of new plays or revivals of old ones; Insiders' accounts of the creative process of new works; Interviews with or statements by composers, choreographers, directors, etc. on new works;

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: Special series running for the first three issues; usually commissioned, but relevant contributions may be accepted;

OTHERS: Reports of conferences, workshops, symposia, etc.; Dissertation abstracts; and other items relevant to the study of Nigerian theatre.

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A DIARY OF MAJOR PRODUCTIONS,
MARCH - DECEMBER 1990

Compiled by Segun Oyesoro

The sheer volume and rich diversity of stage performances in Nigeria during the period under review are evidence of growing creativity; but even more encouraging is the realization that theatre practitioners of the literate tradition are showing greater concern for the popularization of their art. Theatrical activity in Nigeria is often classified into two broad categories: the popular travelling theatre (whose major language of communication is the vernacular), and the literate tradition (which features plays by university-based or university-trained people whose medium of expression is usually English). Now, there is greater evidence of the continuing exploration of the form and style (and in one notable instance, the language) of the popular theatre by the latter category. The "outreach programme" is also evident in the increasing number of plays showing at venues other than university campuses. The performances have not directly emanated from the universities themselves, but they have been largely the result of the effort of products of the various theatre programmes in the country.

Altogether, there has been during the period an interesting variety of new plays and revivals of new ones. Some foreign plays have been produced by Nigerian directors, and a few foreign companies have toured parts of the country.

For ease of reference, we shall categorise the productions into four: University Theatre, Companies, Individuals, and Visiting Troupes. We intend to make some observations on each production that may be useful for an understanding of theatre trends in the country.

UNIVERSITY THEATRE

Universities remain the source of the greater number of theatrical performances in the country, and this is not surprising as there are at least ten of them which offer courses in theatre. In any given academic year, there are a number of class projects which begin as studio work but must finally be presented to the public as part of students' training in public performance. There are also works created by students on their own initiative, usually as part of their local or national body's activity. However, the works we consider as major are those conceived and produced at departmental level usually with some member(s) of staff being responsible for the creation and/or directing.

University of Ibadan

The University of Ibadan houses Nigeria's pioneer theatre department and continues to be a leading force in the study and performance of theatrical works. At the tail end of the 1989/90 academic year, it organised a "Late Theatre Season" featuring five plays, three of which deserve mention.

The first two plays ran for ten days each, an experiment in long runs, considering that plays on university campuses hardly run for more than four nights at a time. This effort is important for the sustenance of a steady audience for theatre, and it may have economic implications as well. Although college theatre is not run on a commercial basis, attendance should be considered as part of the success of a production so that students are not misled into ignoring the importance of the box office. The experience of the department in this regard will determine the future of the experiment and whether it is worth emulating by others.

The first of the plays is a new one by Femi Osofisan, "Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest", a parable on the political transition programme with an all-female cast. Unlike the premier of many of his plays, this one was directed by Sumbo Marinho, a technical theatre person of great talent for whom the production was a major challenge. A departure from the pattern of plays directed by their authors, the production employs song and dance along with dialogue in

what is now recognizable as typical Osofisan style. It ran from July 17th to 28th.

August brought another ambitious production directed this time by Femi Osofisan. There could not have been a more appropriate contrast to "Yungba Yungba" than *The Road*, one of Wole Soyinka's most complex plays. The audience that saw the first production could not have missed the point that this one involved an all-male cast. But more importantly, it was a rare opportunity to see one of Soyinka's plays that are more often discussed in literary and critical circles than seen on stage.

The third major production in the series was the Sowande/Lemour adaptation of Amos Tutuola's novel, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. The play brings to two the number of novels by the same author that have been adapted for the stage, the first being *The Palmwine Drinkard* which was adapted from the novel of the same title by the late Yoruba dramatist, Kola Ogunmola, in the mid-sixties. From the point of view of subject, it also differs significantly from Sowande's plays of a sociopolitical concern which are often set in contemporary Nigeria.

Outside the late season plays of the department, another new play came up at the Arts Theatre very early in October. It was another adaptation by Bode Sowande, this time of the French play *L'Avare* (*The Miser*) by Moliere. Also directed by Bode Sowande, the play explores a mixture of Yoruba, Pidgin and English and is important as an experiment in naturalistic language on the stage. (Cia Rotimi had tried something similar in his play, *Hopes of the Living Dead*.) Sowande's production also employed techniques borrowed from the Yoruba travelling theatre tradition--an opening glee, *kokoma* (a popular Yoruba music of the fifties) and a generally exaggerated acting style that is in tune with the *commedia dell'Arte* tradition of Moliere. The production was sponsored by the French Embassy and was taken to Ilorin, Abeokuta and Port Novo in Benin Republic (where there is a large Yoruba-speaking community).

University of Ilorin

The University of Ilorin, a second-generation university,

runs a unique theatre programme that tries to give equal emphasis to Music, Dance and Drama in a total theatre tradition. Many of the new works emanating from the department reflect this concern, as does "The Eclipse and the Fantasia" written by Zulu Sofola for the occasion of the meeting of Nigeria's Vice Chancellors held at the institution in April. Directed by Ayo Akinwale, the play's plot is advanced at various points through music, dance or drama, or a combination of them. The play lampoons the 60/40 (Science and Humanities respectively) government policy on university admission.

Later in the year, a dance theatre was commissioned for the institution's 1990 Convocation ceremonies in November. Titled "A Festival of Power" it was choreographed by Chris Ugolo, and it uses the Edo creation myth to comment on power struggle, a familiar feature for the African political scene.

COMPANIES

PEC Repertory Theatre

PEC Repertory Theatre based in Lagos is the brain child of J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, a retired university professor, and one of Nigeria's and Africa's first crop of writers. The aims of the theatre are two-fold: (1) to present Africa's best plays with a resident troupe of professional players for the entertainment of a subscribing audience, and (2) to provide workshops on theatre for the benefit of schools in Lagos. The seat of the theatre is the J. K. Randle Hall, a building that has historical significance because it was preferred for purposes of entertainment of an African origin by the growing elite that was involved in the nationalist struggle in the forties.

In spite of its avowed objectives, the theatre has featured a number of foreign plays. One of them was *Fences* by August Wilson which was directed by Saidat Garuba in May. And as part of its "Season of American, African and Nigerian drama in October, the theatre presented three new Nigerian plays: "Greener Grass" by Rasheed Gbadamosi (directed by Bakare Adeoye), "God Dey" written and directed by Chuck Mike and "Rain", Biyi Bandele's award winning play directed by

African countries. Its founder and director is a trained dancer, and the professional status of the group is evident from the high quality of its performance. The dance drama, "Commander Jupiter", received great applause at the University of Ibadan Arts Theatre where it was performed as part of the activities of the Association of Nigerian Authors early in November. There were other performances of the dance drama in Lagos and Kaduna within the same week.

The production was not just a sensational piece, it offered food for thought in its depiction of the life of a young man, Kofi, who in spite of being mixed up with criminals, channels his creative energy purposefully and is the means by which many others like him are reclaimed. The action takes place in Abidjan, but it could well have been any African city where crime and drugs are fast becoming a way of life among youths. The Koteba director studied sociology in addition to his dance training, which explains his intimate depiction of the problems of youths in a modern African city.

We intend to end this account of recent major productions by making a few observations which may be important for the development of theatre in Nigeria, especially the literate tradition.

In spite of the increased theatrical activity earlier observed, the impact of theatre is felt mostly in a few large cities, mostly state capitals and university towns. The vast majority of people living outside those areas still remain excluded from the exciting works, old and new, that are ironically attracting greater attention from the outside world. The various experiments with language, form and technique are designed to make the theatre more accessible to its primary audience, but popularity remains an elusive concept when one considers the size and range of the audience that actually comes into contact with the works.

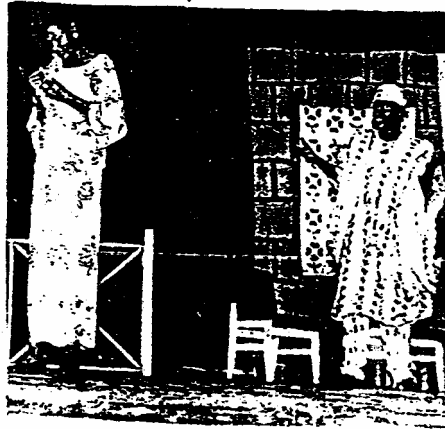
The effort being made by theatre practitioners themselves to popularise their art is commendable, but it is becoming increasingly clear that it has to be complemented by contri-

butions from other sectors. Funds are the major problems standing in the way of most young theatre groups, and it is a good thing that companies and other bodies are beginning to promote theatre. However, what obtains now is like the proverbial drop of water in the ocean. Even local entrepreneurs and business concerns can be of immense assistance to young talents by sponsoring performances of their works in and around the community.

Government, of course, can always encourage the theatre through its programmes and policies. For all its avowed objectives of rural development and mass mobilization, the Nigerian government does not seem to have given much attention to the contributions that theatre can make towards the well-being of its citizenry. The time has come for someone to impress it firmly on those in authority that art and culture are an integral aspect of the well-being of a society, and that providing a modest structure for stage performances, for example, could be as important to a community as constructing roads and building schools.



Scenes from "Commander Jupiter and his Black Nouchis" by the Group Koteka of Alidjan



AZEIGBE (Kayode Ayoola) attempts to
seduce ADUNNI (Moni Fadeni) in Arede
Owo, Bode Sowande's adaptation of
Moliere's L'Avare

SUMMARY OF MAJOR PRODUCTIONS FROM MARCH TO DECEMBER 1990

DATE	PRODUCTION	VENUE
March 4-22	Shakespeare's <i>Macbeth</i> by the London Bubble Theatre	Lagos, Enugu, Calabar, Jos, Kano, Kaduna, Ibadan
April 4-20	<i>Fences</i> by Auguston Wilson, directed by Saidat Garuba	PEC Repertory Theatre, Lagos
April 11	"The Eclipse and the Fantasia" by Zulu Sofola	University of Ilorin
May 9-23	"Escape from Drugs" and "Hotline Aids" by Funsho Alabi	Universities of Calabar, Nsukka & Ilorin
July 17-28	"Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest" by Femi Osofisan, directed by Sumbo Marinho	Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan
August 2-11	Wole Soyinka's <i>The Road</i> , directed by Femi Osofisan	Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan
August 8	"Mujemuje" by Ben Tomoloju, Kakaki's premiere production	National Theatre Lagos
August 22-25	"My Life in the Bush of Ghosts", an adaptation by Sowande & Lemour	Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan

August- September	Season of American, African & Nigerian Plays, featuring "Greener Grass" by Rasheed Gbadamosi (directed by Bakare Adeoye), "God Dey" (written and directed by Chuck Mike), and "Rain" by Biyi Bandele Thomas (directed by Niyi Akanni)	PEC Repertory Theatre, Lagos
October 2- 12	"Arede Owo", written and directed by Bode Sowande	Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, and University of Ilorin
November 2-7	"Commander Jupiter and his Black Nouchis" by the Group Koteba of Abidjan, Ivory Coast	Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, Kaduna and Lagos
November 10	"A Festival of Power", choreographed by Chris Ugolo	University of Ilorin