
**THE PERFORMING ARTS IN NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND
DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT: *From the primordial to the modern society, the performing arts have always played very essential roles in bringing people together, to develop cultural norms and values that are paramount to human co-existence in society. From the very simple theatrical forms to the most sophisticated development in movies, the performing arts have always united, corrected, educated and entertained members of society, thereby contributing to national development. Like sports, the performing arts' ability to do this is natural, spontaneous and legendary. This paper examines the traditional roles of the performing arts (Drama, Music, Dance, etc) in uniting and developing society, from the classical to the modern society, in different societies of the world. It examines the current state of these arts worldwide, denouncing their negative uses and extolling their deployment for responsible uses. Operating on the theory of functionality of Arts, it goes on to identify in very concrete terms, how performing art forms could be used to enhance human resources development and make society a better place to live in.*

KEY WORDS: performing arts, national integration, development, human society

INTRODUCTION

Art has been described as 'the creation of works that are in form, content and execution aesthetically pleasing and meaningful' (Landau 1978:40). It is a manifestation of man's ability to arrange or adapt natural things or conditions to his own uses. The works that are created by such arrangement are called Art. Similarly, the *Macmillan School Dictionary* defines Art as "The application or exhibition of skill, aesthetic principles and creative imagination in the production of the beautiful or the meaningful, as in painting, music, literature, dance or drama" (J.S. Levey 1993:68). This definition is apt for the purpose of this paper.

Over the years, attempts have been made to demarcate between the various forms of art. Three broad classifications which would serve our purpose are (a) the Literary Arts (which includes the three genres of Literature – Drama, Prose and Poetry – all of which are encapsulated in African Orature) (b) The Visual Arts – works of Fine Arts that are appreciated through human sight such as drawings, paintings, carvings, sculpturing (the art of fashioning three-dimensional figures, busts, and abstractions in stone, clay, wood, bronze or metal). (c) The Performing Arts – works of art that are acted out or performed by artists in the presence of live audiences or telecommunicated to audiences through electronic media. These include Live theatre, Movies, video, Music, Dance, Mime, Circus shows and Carnivals.

Synergism

It needs to be stated that, although various artistic forms exist independently, there is a degree of synergy and interconnectedness between the forms and contents of the arts. For instance, such literary art forms as drama and poetry dovetail into the Performing Arts when they are performed on stage or in movies. The often very beautiful stage settings, scenery and set construction that come up in stage performances and movies are usually the works of visual artists – Painters, carvers and others. Generally, in the realm of the arts, an artist usually employs a collaboration of various art forms to achieve the quintessence of a particular art. For example the performing arts utilise fine art forms such as painting, designs and carvings to embellish theatrical productions.

The Unique Nature of the Performing Arts in the Task of Human Development

Although all art forms are created for appreciation of man in the society, the performing arts have a more direct and more effective impact on the society than the other art forms. The reasons for this are not far-fetched. Performing Art forms are normally staged before live audiences or to media recipients who are usually in groups and who are capable of giving immediate, spontaneous reactions to what has just been presented to them. Performing Art forms are usually designed to elicit reactions from the audience for particular purposes. The intention may be, amongst others, to educate, conscientize, mobilize for revolutionary action or to propagate (promote or oppose) ideas. In the Performing Art forms, there is direct communication between the artists and the audience. The situation is so dynamic and flexible that thematic preoccupations and aesthetic devices could be adapted to suit the needs of particular (target) audiences in different places. Since performances are designed for popular appreciation by audiences, audience reactions to the works are very important. Whereas a visual artist may create an abstract art form that appears meaningless to majority of the public and still be regarded as a great artist, a performing artist dares not produce a work that is not appreciated by his or her target audience. This is because the performing arts are forms of mass communication: the more the number of people the artist communicates with, the better. In terms of effective communication, mass education, mobilization and mass entertainment therefore, the performing arts play the leading role among all the artistic forms.

According to Frank Whiting (1969:6), the Performing Arts make their appeal on two levels: the aesthetic and the intellectual. While the aesthetic appeal contributes to the emotional needs of man and his hunger for the beautiful, the intellectual appeal ensures that works produce ideas that are great and relevant to the upliftment of the human society. It is our view that the greatest art works are those which combine aesthetics with functionality; that is, while making the works beautiful, they should also be made functional. Such utilitarian values include uniting society and helping society to develop.

The Performing Arts and the Responsibility of National Development through the Ages

From times immemorial, the performing arts have played very important roles in nation-building and national integration of citizens. During the classical period in Greece and Rome, theatre assumed a very important position in the society. Encompassing acting, mime, music and dance, it became the means of national entertainment and education, the

main means of bringing people together at a particular season, in unity and solidarity, to relax and enjoy the arts. Theatre was of so much importance that during the season scheduled for it, every other thing – business, politics and even war came to a standstill (Whiting 1969: 14) Kernodle G et al (1985:3) also attests to this:

For the annual festival of drama, the shops would close, all government business would cease, and the priests would lead the procession to the magnificent theatre, carved out of a hill side, with its altar dedicated to the life-renewing spirit of the god Dionysus. For months the best poets had been polishing their works, the most gifted actors, singers and dancers had been rehearsing, and now they would don heroic robes and tragic or comic masks to recreate before the eyes of the entire city, the inspiring legends of their ancestors.

Great performing artists like Aeschylus (525 – 456BC) and Euripides (485 – 406Bc) were elder statesmen, national educators and opinion leaders in Greece. According to Whiting (Ibid: 3) in the periods of greatness of the performing arts, playwrights, actors, directors and designers have sought for the meaning of existence with the same passion and sincerity that has characterized the work of great scientists, philosophers and theologians: for in its essence the art of the theatre rests on a common foundation with all learning: on man's capacity to explore, wonder and reflect.

He goes further:

To great playwrights, theatre provided a means of probing honestly and fearlessly for the meaning of life and mystery of existence. As an imitation of life it eventually embraces almost everything that life embraces, including much of life's chaos and confusion. (p. 4).

Evidence abound en masse, to prove that the performing arts (especially theatre) were used through the ages to sharpen and reform the human society. The works of comic playwrights like Aristophanes and Menander were particularly tuned towards this. The Mystery, Miracle and Morality plays of the medieval period were written to sharpen society on the paths of moral rectitude and righteous living. Renaissance performing artists used their arts to seek for new, more realistic meanings to life, through renewal of interest in those things that made life meaningful and buoyant during the classical period in Greece and Rome. During the Elizabethan period, performing artists like William Shakespeare, John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe and others made their imprints on their nation's psyche, educating the citizenry and advocating the right norms and values for the society. For instance, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is an evergreen play that will teach modern day criminals the dangers of selling one's soul to the devil in order to achieve wealth, fame and power. In the modern perspective, the importance of the performing arts could be seen in the roles they play in the society. They portray life and the challenges of living in the world. They teach and guide the citizenry towards understanding the vicissitudes of life. They serve as imprints of their periods and veritable tools for historical comprehension of reality at those periods. This is so because a dynamic relationship exists between the arts and the society that produces them – a policy of perpetual inextricability. When the society sinks in welfare, this is reflected in the performing arts which often seek solutions to ameliorate the situation. For instance, absurdism did not just start in the modern period. Traces of it could be found in such, plays of Euripides (c 485-406BC) as *The*

Trojan Women, as the Greek golden age sank into diminution and death. The same tendency is found in the plays of Middleton, Tourneur and Webster as the Elizabethan (Jacobean) period fell into decay. As Spain's Golden age fell, some of the plays of Calderon De la Barca showed signs of doubt concerning the nature of reality. In the modern period, the Avant-Garde tradition generally signifies the prevalent disillusionment with life, occasioned by the stark realities of the negative possibilities and realisation of science, technology and industrialization. In his foreword to the Rockefeller Panel Report, *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects*, John D Rockefeller III states that "only in our time have we begun to recognize the arts, as a community concern" it goes on. It is obvious that the arts administrator must, as never before, be a man of the community. Once only dependent on a world of backers, press agents, talent agents and theatre owners, the performing arts impresario today is also in close touch with leaders in government, education, industry and politics (Langley: p.358).

According to Langley (1974:358) the arts are no longer the luxury of the few but has become the right of the many. He gives a pragmatic exemplification of the effects of the arts on the society. A community hears fewer sounds of discontent as it resounds more to the rhythms of art. Where the creative artist is successful in his work, supporting labourers will be required, business will benefit, government will be remembered, educational institutions will be justified and real estate values will go up. Proof of this may be found by reversing the process: remove the theatre, concert hall or museum from a neighbourhood or city and the tangible qualities of life in that area will register a decline that is swift and penetrating. Examples of how the arts have upgraded life both in the immediate and distant past for a neighbourhood or for a nation, make it difficult not to concur with Shelley's claim that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world".

While the East African literary colossus, Ngugi wa Thiongo sees a similarity between the works of theatre artists and politicians in society, (1981:73), Augusto Boal's opinion is that "Theatre is politics, Politics is Theatre" (Boal 1979:Vi).

Niyi Osundare (2007:12) using biblical allusion, pontificates that it is the responsibility of artists to lead their people up the mountain, and on getting to the top, to show the people not only the promised land, but also the way to get to the promised land. A literary colossus of the functionalist school, Osundare, regards "Art shorn of the human touch" (that is art that does not deal with human reality) as useless for the service of humanity. He, thus, regards "Art for Art's sake" as "Art for Ass sake", the ass an ingenious symbolism for stupidity. Suvin (1972:311) contends that the Performing Arts are ontologically political because they usually examine the state of health of their communities and often proffer ways of healing the society.

In Africa, the Performing Arts have been used to conscientize the society (what Paulo Freire (1972:1) calls "pedagogy", to mobilize society for constructive action and to develop human resources. Such pioneer efforts as Hubert Ogunde's plays are worth mentioning because of their effects on the Nigerian society. He wrote "Bread and Bullet" and "Aba Women's Riots" to chastise and correct the maladministration of the colonial administration in Nigeria. He wrote "Yoruba Ronu" (Yorubas, think) to caution Yoruba

leaders against misbehaving, and to ensure the solidarity of the Yoruba race. It was written during the western Nigerian crisis. Wole Soyinka's Gucrilla Theatre of the 1970s and 1980s also went a long way to check the excesses of Nigerian leaders, both military and civilian. His other plays such as *Opera Wonyosi* has the Nigerian populace as its target audience as it preaches against wastefulness, vainglory, corruption and irresponsibility.

In April and May 1989, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria made use of performing artists to propagate its Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER) programme. Some of the top performing artists used include Kollington Ayinla, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister, Majek Fashek, Sony Okosun, and two International musicians – U Roy and Eric Donaldson. The musicians were used to propagate the MAMSER message in some major Nigerian cities.

The late Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a Nigerian musician with international acclaim, also used his music to educate the masses, to move them from their acritical states to a state of critical consciousness. In very bold, unveiled and vitriolic satires, he exposed the corruption, ineptitude and deception of insincere leaders, and the stark realities of the Nigerian state. Anikulapo – Kuti's works are examined by Tejumola Olaniyan (2001:76) who sees him as a "Cosmopolitan Nativist".

In Kenya, the Kamiriithu Community Education Centre that was facilitated by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o used plays and musical performances to develop the community, to make progress and achieve greater heights in education and development of resources. In the late 1970s when the hue and cry against apartheid was at a topmost ebb, the apartheid Prime Minister (John Vorster) quickly got a group of young, talented, beautiful and obviously well-fed black South African singers together. He arranged for them to go on international tours to many countries. He did this to launder the image of apartheid and create an impression that the blacks in apartheid South Africa were comfortable and living luxuriant lives.

Utilizing the Potentials of the Performing Arts

We have gone this far to show that the performing arts are, by nature, very suitable for the purpose of national cohesion and development. We have seen how they have been used in the past, either to project images, to mobilize citizens or to teach people. In this era of globalization, when the whole world has turned to one global village, the effects of these arts are even more profound. In several decades past, it takes some time (sometimes up to a year) before a box office hit in the U.K. gets to America or Germany, because of logistics. With the internet and the digital satellite technology today, this is possible within seconds. With further developments in the video and movie industry, more people have access to the performing arts. The attendant effects of this on any human populace are obvious. It is very important therefore, that serious attention be paid to the development and proper utilization of the performing arts in every human society. In some African countries, the arts are taken as unserious ventures which are unworthy of government attention. They are often left in the hands of businessmen who are usually only interested in the commercial value of the works, not in the effects such works can create in the society. Consequently, such

meretricious vices as Pornography, Sexploitation, Fetishism, Criminality and Hedonism creep into the arts.

The Performing Arts should be used to guide leaders and rulers, as Hubert Ogunde did with “Yoruba Ronu” (Yoruba people, think) during the western Nigerian crisis of the 1960s. They should be used as sentinels, to keep guard on the activities of those entrusted with the responsibility of leadership. They should be used to propagate the acceptable norms and values of the society, while discouraging those wrong values that are detrimental to the welfare of society. They should be basic tools in the education of the citizens. They should be used to encourage virtue, discourage vice and combat social problems such as political or religious intolerance, crime, etc. The Performing Arts should be used to unite the citizens. This could be done through a promotion of common interests and an amelioration of differences of interests among the various ethnic and religious groups existing in the nation. The performing arts are also veritable agents of showcasing the rich culture and tradition of each nation, thereby promoting tourism, greater social understanding and interaction. They are often invaluable in the promotion of government programmes and in making the citizens subject to the rule of law.

Plays could be written to teach citizens the importance of their duties and obligations such as payment of taxes, voting during elections, assisting the police in law enforcement, respecting the rights of others and maintenance of law and order. A panel of discussants, reviewing the Nigerian elections of 2011, was of the opinion that there was an embarrassingly high percentage of nullified votes in the elections because the national electoral body organized very little political education to assist the electorate. Political parties too only utilized television adverts largely to campaign, excluding such other effective means as playlets, musicals and sketches performed at grassroot levels to teach the electorate how to thumbprint the ballot papers. The only drama sketch used during the electioneering period was the one by Chief Zebrudaya Ngworibe of “Masquerade” soap opera fame, who preached that there should be no need for violence in elections. In the sketch, the chief advised a fully kitted boxer, who said he was practising because of the national elections, that he should remove his boxing gloves, as he would not need to box anybody. It was a very effective and hilarious sketch, as the boxer had earlier on, on reflex action, given Chief Zebrudaya’s protruding stomach a vicious jab! This very effective and commendable drama advertorial was sponsored in Nigeria by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

Expected roles of Government

There is need for governments, at all levels (local, state or national), to monitor what goes into the media through the arts because of the serious effects they could have on the citizenry.

Funding of the Arts should be prioritized. This should not be left in the hands of business men or governments alone. NGOs, corporate bodies, foundations, private individuals and business organizations should be encouraged to take part in the funding of the arts. The examples of Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Fulbright, the Leventis Brothers and others should be emulated by all. When enough funds

are available, artists will not fall prey to rich business entrepreneurs who are only interested in maximizing profits, unconcerned about the terrible effects of the arts which they are promoting on the society.

Institutional theatres should be encouraged and equipped to be effective repositories of culture and tradition. They should maintain effective troupes that would be training grounds for young and upcoming artists. Governments should realize that the humanities and human values are equally important to society as science and technology. Science and technology without humanity is likely to end in disasters. Unfortunately the latter seems to be the craze and main preoccupation of modern day governments. According to Booth Tarkington (1941:2). A country could be perfectly governed, immensely powerful and without poverty; yet if it produced nothing of its own in architecture, sculpture, music, painting or in books, it would someday pass into the twilight of history, leaving only the traces of a creditable political record.

Whiting (Ibid: 1969) is of the opinion that America faces this challenge. He reminds Americans that Rome once excelled in the things America excels in today (wealth, energy, military might, material power etc). Yet after five centuries in control of the entire western world, Rome left very little to excite the minds and admiration of men, comparable in lasting glory to the artistic contributions of the little Greek city of Athens. According to him, one Greek play, *King Oedipus*, probably outweighs all the words and deeds of the entire Roman Senate! (p. 5).

CONCLUSION

Great Art is eternal, it cuts across continental barriers, religion, creed, race or nationality. Its fervour is evergreen. As a great servitor of the society, it is always relevant to humanity and is used to pattern the life of the society politically, socially and economically. The Performing Arts are of great use in bringing diverse elements in the society together, to achieve unity and to put the society on a higher, firmer and more stable pedestal. When there was violence and very serious political disturbance in Jamaica during electioneering campaigns in 1974 Bob Marley was called in to restore order. His technique? - He played at a "Peace Concert" where he was joined on stage by the leaders of the two warring political parties. The move worked like magic as the violence subsided dramatically (Sandiford: 1988:24). That is an example of what the performing arts could achieve. The earlier governments at all levels realized the importance of the Arts, especially the performing Arts, the better it would be for humanity.

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