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PERFORMING ARTS AND ECONOMIC SELF RELIANCE IN NIGERIA: THE ELIZADE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The fundamental concern of the Arts disciplines (Humanities) is with man and his complex nature, cognizantly his multifaceted relationships with the world around him and beyond. It is in this context that each Arts discipline tries to investigate and explain those aspects of man's nature that particularly concern or challenge him. In a more specific context, the study and practise of Performing Arts is saddled with the expressions of these realities offering opportunities to display cultures and traditions while "mirroring" the society. In recent times there has been a sudden rise in interest and attention given to the creative and cultural industries especially with the popularity of Nigerian popular music and video film across Africa and beyond. Further to this, a lot of young minds have been inspired to seek university education in this area in order to develop their artistic instinct and build their creative capacity towards economic self-reliance. This paper highlight the objectives of the Elizade University Performing and Film Arts degree programme as it experiments with the concept of 'total theatre' incorporating drama, music, dance and film. Furthermore, the idea to deviate from the traditional nomenclature of 'theatre arts' by incorporating 'film studies' into the programme is being stressed here to portend the ability to produce thorough bred professional in the field that would eventually be 'job givers' and not 'job seekers' The paper also traces the origin of the Nigerian film industry now called 'Nollywood' and asserts that in the nearest future the Elizade Performing and film arts graduate will be ready to fill the capacity requirements of Nollywood, and be part of the generation to take the industry to the next level. It is hoped that this paper will generate more interest in emphasising economic sustainability through university education using the Elizade Performing and Film arts degree programme as an impetus.

Keywords: Performing and film arts, Nollywood, Economic sustenance, Elizade University

Introduction

In every human being there exists the impulse to mime and to play. Primitive societies released this impulse through tribal expressions of hope, joy, fear, desire, sorrow, hatred and worship. To express these strong feelings the primitive man often danced and mimed. From his sacred play came ritual; poetry, music, and dance were a part of his play. Philosophy and wisdom hence found expression in words. The origin of theatre and drama can therefore be

traced to the primitive era which existed in variants of society. The desire of man to connect with a supreme being which he believes can influence his existence positively or negatively begets rituals whereby he offers sacrifices and performs specific organised dance in a specific place, wearing specific attire, either for atonement or to ask for favours e.g. seeking rain in times of draught. This dance and performance over times becomes more organized ,arranged and location specific and in the long run was exported from its ritual and religious roots into the secular arena into what we now call drama and performing arts in the modern era.

Performing arts is an expressive art form in which artists use their body and voice to convey artistic expression- as opposed to visual arts, in which artists use paint/canvas or objects. The first recorded use of the term “Performing arts” was in 1711. Concise definition has been posited as “the time arts of music, dance drama and their attendant delivery systems such as theatre, film, video and opera”. (Huberman, Pope and Ludwig cited in Adeoye, 2014:296).

The Elizade university Performing Arts programme is based on the concept of the total theatre whereby emphasis is laid on developing and producing an all round and academically sound Performing Arts practitioner versed in all the cogent aspect of theatrical productions namely: acting, dance, music, speech/oral communication and film . The concept of total theatre itself is being derived from dramatic arts theory and practise which embraces the line of thought that no theatrical element is supreme and none should be dominant over the others but rather all elements viz: dance, movement, music, visual image and the rest should be accorded equal importance while their possibilities should be explored positively in any theatrical production.

Essence of Elizade University Performing and Film Arts (PFA) Programme

Performing Arts at Elizade University as included in the University curriculum is projected to make a difference amongst other Universities that are running the programme and also positively change the lives of many of our artistically talented youths in Nigeria who have the desire or aspiration to be actors, dancers/choreographers, cinematographers, musicians, film editors, costumiers, and make-up artists and so on.

It should be noted that most established universities in Nigeria offering programmes in Theatre or Dramatic Arts subscribes to the traditional theatre studies’ curriculum which without doubt, and over the years produced quality graduates that have made immense contributions to the development and advancement of the creative and cultural industries in Nigeria and Africa in their various capacities as administrators, policy makers, performing artistes, film producers, educators and so on. However, for us to take the industry to the next level especially with the recent happenstances within the Nigerian film industry that is receiving greater attention worldwide with her output being positively reviewed with a global perspective, Elizade University believes now is the time for re-assessing Performing Arts

education in the country to have graduates that can adequately fulfil the manpower requirement needed to take the film industry to even higher heights. It is based on this summation that a detour was made from the 'traditional' to a more pragmatic route to inculcate 'Film' into her programme hence the Elizade University 'Performing and Film Arts' degree programme, which has been aptly backed up with the provision of qualified manpower and state of art technical/digital equipment needed to run a film unit effectively, among other components that constituted the programme.

Music and Dance Units of Elizade PFA

Having established the fact that performing artists use their body, voice, or objects to convey artistic expression, music therefore is an important aspect of any dramatic performance. Music may be classified as a performing art, a fine_art, and auditory art. It is an appendage of culture which is dynamic and "in Nigeria as in any other African society music has always been a strong medium of expression and, apart from its aesthetic value it serves various purposes from entertainment, communication, and preservation of socio-cultural values to ... rituals and [other] symbolic functions."(Adedeji 2010:48)

In the modern dramatic and film practice the role of music cannot be over-emphasized as it enhances and embellishes dramatic piece as it unfolds before our eyes, Most of the times we are not even aware of that music which is what the composer or director strives to achieve-a seamless synergy between music and drama, Music is like a "fourth dimension" that further triggers our emotions. You only need to watch that scene with and without the sound to see how music influences the impact of the mood of the scene. Composers make a lot of efforts to ensure viewers doesn't notice their work as good drama music should be "seen and not heard".

Within the context of Elizade University performing arts programme, music is paramount and the curriculum. Offers an opportunity for a potential graduate to specialize in music at an advance stage of the programme, Hence music courses is being taken from 100level to 400level with emphasis on theory of music, choral studies, Popular and African music as well as practical. This is complimented with our state of art sound room where students can learn all aspect of digital production and recording, a facility where the school anthem was recorded and mixed with the process of duplication in progress. Through the music unit it is apparent that the vision of Elizade University is to produce high-class graduates in Performing arts that will prominently feature as total-theatre performers either in Drama or Music in Nigerian film or music industry will be a reality.

Where ever there is music, there is dance which is an inexcusable part of the performing arts and the total theatre experience. From the draft PFA curriculum hand book, the philosophy of the dance programme is to produce graduates that "are also expected to become dancers and

dance trainers for concerts, choreographies, musicians' video recording, etc;” Thus the emphasis seem to be on producing practical oriented dance graduates that are much needed in the Nigerian dance scene. This is evident in the design of the courses where practical disposed courses took six out of the eleven available direct courses in dance in the 4 year programme.

Right from the first year the students are introduced to; Intermediate Modern Dance, Basic choreography at the second year and Advanced Choreography I and II at the third and fourth years respectively. With courses like Dance Workshop and Advanced Dance Workshop to complement at the third and fourth years, there is no doubt the graduates of this programme will be well equipped to fulfil the philosophy of the department for the programme.

However, the need for the full development and independence of the dance arm among the performing arts as a full department has been the concern of many dance scholars over the years. Akinsipe, (2008: 77) posits emphatically that “until dance is taught in a department of dance, the various aspects of it that can produce a sound dance scholar cannot be undertaken”. A dance programme should be able to produce dance graduates out of which some can focus on being; dancers, choreographers, choreologists, librettists, critics, historians, therapists, ethnographers and teachers.

In the meanwhile, the Elizade approach to dance training is tailored towards the need of the Nigerian market and the marketability of the dance graduate anywhere in the world. Having taken courses in music, drama, speech and film; the horizon for survival and career prospect is unlimited. It the newest and worthy approach to the 21st century total theatre experiment.

Drama and Play Production Experience at Elizade University

The fundamental concern of the Arts disciplines (humanities) is with man and his complex nature, especially his multifaceted relationships with the world around him and beyond. It is in this context that each Arts discipline tries to investigate and explain those aspects of man's nature that particularly concern or challenge him. Specifically, the Performing and Film Arts concerns itself and the expressions of the realities surrounding it.

The Performing and Film Arts unit has not only impressed the University populace but also members of the Ilara- Mokin community who have watched its play productions. Over the last two semesters, two plays- “Diary of the Dead” and “Alone and Frightened”- both written and directed by a Lecturer in the department have been staged at the University's Performing and Film Arts Theatre. The unit then, just starting up consisted of only three students that were assisted by enthusiastic students from other departments in the University.

In staging the play “Diary of the Dead”, the unit and the students were tasked to their limits. It was the first play that would be staged; students were just getting to know the rudiments of acting; nearly all the students actors and actresses were non- professionals. After spending days and nights rehearsing under the watchful eyes of their Director, the play was staged on the 19th of December 2013. The play which was the 2013 Matriculation Play received wide acclaim from the audience which included the University’s Founder, and Management. To show how impressed and excited he was, the Founder, Dr. Ade-Ojo promised to see that the play and its songs were upgraded to recorded formats. Not only that, students from other departments especially engineering want to change to the Department of Performing and Film Arts.

Film Arts unit and Nollywood

Motion picture which is also popularly referred to as film developed out of dramaturgy whereby performances are now enacted for the screen instead of the stage. Here actors were recorded through the aid of technology in an audio-visual device that can be kept and viewed repeatedly over times. It is apparent that “more than most arts, film depends on complex technology. Without machines, movies wouldn’t [exist]... and Filmmakers would have no tools”. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2010:1)” Film is a young media, compared to most other media like painting, literature, dance, and has rapidly established itself as an energetic and powerful art form. As an expressive art form serves the purpose of communication as well as education and it’s also a form of entertainment in a world of ‘make believe’ which is magical that has held audience captive for many years and more to come. The Nigerian film industry has an antecedent that can be traced back to the colonial period when film was used by the British as an agent for enforcing and propagating the ideas of colonialism. At that time film and all its paraphernalia in terms of production, screening or distribution was under the exclusive purview of the colonial government through the Colonial Film Unit (C.F.U). As corroborated by Okoye. 2007:

Not only were these films methodically chosen to glorify the image of the colonizer, but they also denigrated the humanity of the colonized...documentaries that deified the Queen of England and demonstrated English etiquette and technological wizardry were made for native consumption. When Africans began to be visually represented on the screens, they were portrayed as undignified and primitive. (p.22. c.f. Arthur 2014:102)

The propagandist disposition of the British Empire through motion picture was utilized to the fullest during the Second World War when “films were used widely by the British government for propaganda effort to make people in the colonies ... understand why they should fight in the wars. [Hence] Mobile cinemas were used all over Nigeria to communicate

the news of the successes of allies and defeat of the Germans”. (Alawode and Sunday 2013:114)

Post independence Nigeria through the capital city Lagos witnessed proliferation of Yoruba cultural art forms in terms of music like juju, fuji afrobeat and theatrical performances with plotlines from familiar television dramas. These were to later become the progenitors of the country’s popular culture (Adedeji 2010: 67-69, Arthur 2014: 102) among which is the present film industry. “Nollywood” as the Nigerian film industry is called now to a larger extent is an offshoot of the Yoruba popular theatre which evolved out of the Yoruba travelling theatre or *alarinjo* a quasi-professional group of performers whose roots has been traced to the Yoruba traditional ancestral worship *egungun* and later degenerated to mere court entertainers whose performance is mostly characterised by enactment of legendary heroic deeds of heroes or heroines. This is spiced with spectacle of trance, mimicry singing, dancing and heavy costuming (Oyewo 2005:97). This predisposed the first set of film produced in the country which was *Ajani Ogun*, directed by Ola Balogun in 1977, in which the protagonist is a hunter and symbolically resembles an incarnation of the Yoruba immortal, Ogun. (Passchier. 2014:24) This was exclusively shot on 35mm celluloid as well as other Yoruba films that followed in the seventies.

Economic downturn and the reverse of oil boom to oil burst in the late seventies made celluloid film production out of reach which signalled the end of that era, The structural adjustment programme of the eighties also had adverse effect on the Yoruba theatre groups that have characterised the National television screen through patronage as they were now being dropped due to lack of funding. Undeniably, there arose a need for theatrical activities to be sustained and made available to the people as film houses was extant and television was rid of screen plays due to withdrawal of government subsidies. To fill the gap as Haynes and Okome wrote:

It was Igbo businessmen who understood that a larger market could be opened up by the retail sale of video cassettes. Kenneth Nnebue, then an electronics dealer and film promoter, led the way. He produced a Yoruba video film, *Aje Ni Iya Mi*, for the late Sola Ogunsoola. It was made as cheaply as possible, shooting with an ordinary VHS camera and using a few VCRs to edit. Few of the actors were paid anything at all. His investment was a mere -N-2,000, and he made hundreds of thousands back ... (p 109).

This began the journey of what was to be referred to as “Nollywood” the Nigerian film industry. In 1992 Kenneth Nnebue released his own home video film titled *Living In Bondage* which sold over 500,000 copies followed by the sequel *Living In Bondage 2*, while the success of both films actually consolidated the Nollywood industry. From the nineties thereafter, there has been no going back for this industry which has gone from strength to strength with recent incursion of new generation producers and actors that has taken the industry to a higher height and now being ranked as the second film industry after Bollywood

in terms of volumes produced with estimate of 50 films a week which is roughly 1,500 to 2,000 films per year, with an annual turnover of \$320 million, employing more than 200,000 people (Barrot 2008:13).

Nollywood is an industry that developed out of necessity and over the years has turned an informal economy to a global financial phenomenon and becoming “an undisputed cultural powerhouse of cinema from the street” (Okome 2007: 2). This film industry has risen due to its prolific output, gaining spectacular popularity with its ability to reach remote and non-elite audience making it the most radically developed to date in the history of African media (McCall 2007: 94). In line with this positive development of an indigenous institution that became a global colossus, Elizade University have the vision of partnering with this industry through her Performing and Film Arts programme to produce the next generation of skilful and talented graduates who will contribute in different areas to take the industry to the next level and be a part of this “African led industry that offers anyone with entrepreneurial spirit the hard earned satisfaction of creativity, remuneration and even stardom” (Saro-Wiwa 2008: 26) and be the awaited future film makers and storytellers of Africa.

The film and Drama runs concurrently on the principle of total theatre and the curriculum ensures the students are well grounded in theories and the history of performing and Film Arts right from the 100 Level, here they are also introduced to the practical aspect of the course through production workshop courses which is compulsory. The Film unit has the necessary equipment in terms of digital HD cameras and a standard film editing suite fully equipped with state of art software and hard ware with an adjoining viewing room for the projection of edited films.

Film production workshop is of equal importance and the department is getting ready to shoot a mini flick titled “Dreams” in the next couple of weeks. Here students are taken through the standard procedure of translating screen play into a movie. having a location experience and the opportunity of working with a professional cinematographer. This is geared towards equipping them with the technical capability that hitherto students in similar courses elsewhere only get after graduating. Our students through this project will under study each units that makes a film production crew and translates what they have learnt in courses like, Acting and technical skills, Basic Film Tools, Directing, Screenplay etc into reality. The highlight of this will be the post-production in terms of the editing which will take place at the editing suite on campus with full student participation including the laying and recording of the soundtrack in conjunction with the music unit at the departments’ sound room.

Summary

The benefit inherent in this programme, is that our graduates are expected to join the labour market with confidence as self- reliant and competent professionals with diverse skills to

function within the entertainment industry, which we believe is next to crude oil in terms of revenue generation. The impact of our unique modules will afford such graduates the versatility of total theatre personnel who have acquired general and profound skills in the Performing Arts, with specialty in any one of its five units of drama, music, dance, speech and film. Therefore, our graduates will be world class performers, choreographers and movie specialists well refined and marketable that will be able to rub shoulders with their peers anywhere in the world.

At Elizade University we believe creativity is only meaningful and admirable when it is refined through education. With education they would be thoroughly tutored and practically well guided. These are some of the reasons we think the establishment of Performing and Film Arts in Elizade University is necessary to help these young talented and aspiring youths achieve their dreams and be connected to their destinies. The structure and academic curriculum of our Performing and Film Arts degree programme is an experiment worth emulating by other universities as it is geared towards producing graduate that can adequately face the challenge of the professional world having being armed with the necessary skills and the intellectual capability of a sound mind. They have been trained to have an entrepreneurial mind set to create employment in this field and rather not to seek which in the long run solidifies the countries' aim of achieving economic sustainability – here through the creative and cultural industries.

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