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EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES OF PERFORMANCES FOR ETHNIC NATIONALITIES THROUGH EFFICACIOUS TECHNICAL THEATRE PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Theatre is an art, but technology is drafted to the performance terrain to enhance and expand the possibilities of performances for improved standard. This research endeavour on "Expanding the Possibilities of Performances for Ethnic Nationalities through Efficacious Technical Theatre Practice in Nigeria" is an astute attempt to X-ray the bareness of having performances without the necessary technical aids due to either insufficient funds or low level of professionalism. At the same time, this paper strives at illuminating the path of accrued advantages as a result of efficacious applications of requisite aids toward the realisation of the overall production objectives. Qualitative research design was adopted with primary and secondary sources being the major sources of data collection. At completion, the research outcome will be of immense benefits to both scholars as well as practitioners in the area of Technical Theatre practice. Research findings show that sufficient application of technical aids expand the possibilities of performances while doing otherwise has negative impact. The research concludes that, for possibilities of expanding performances for ethnic nationalities to be expanded beyond expectations, efficacious Technical Theatre practice in Nigeria should be rejuvenated and upheld. The research recommends among many others that Technical Theatre practice in Nigeria should be adequately funded with possible involvement by Governmental Organs and outstanding Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). When this is done, the possibilities of expanding the Frontiers of Performances for Ethnic Nationalities in Nigeria would be unprecedented.

Keywords: Possibilities, Performances, Ethnic Nationalities, Efficacy, Technical Theatre Practice.

INTRODUCTION

In every society of the world, irrespective of the size and status, there exist some elements of performative activities of one form or the other. Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy (2003:1) corroborate this position when they assert that:

> Performative elements (including dramatic and theatrical) are present in every society no matter how complex or how unsophisticated the culture may be. This elements are evident in our political campaigns, holiday celebrations, sports events, religious ceremonies and children's make believe, just as they are dances and rituals of primitive peoples. Nevertheless, most participants in

> this activities do not consider them to be primarily theatrical, even when spectacles, dialogue and conflict play large roles.

However, it is imperative to point out categorically clear that there is "a distinction between theatre (as a form of art and entertainment) and the presence of the theatrical or performative elements in other activities" (Brockett and Hildy, 2003:1). In spite of these difference or distinction, it is worthwhile to note that all categories of performances are potent sources of education, information and or entertainment.

It is in the light of this understanding that there is need for these performances to be expanded for ethnic nationalities to thrive beyond boundaries. One of the ways of actualising this objective is through efficacious application of technical aids and this knowledge culminated the birth of this research endeavour on "Expanding the Possibilities of Performances for Ethnic Nationalities through Efficacious Technical Theatre Practice in Nigeria".

THE CONCEPTS OF PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMING ARTS

In this context, performance and performing arts are concepts that share same etymological foundation because they have to do with the process of doing something that is essentially useful. Essentially useful because even the most foolish act in the eyes of one person or a group of persons may happen to be somewhat meaningful or useful to another person or group of persons. This is a truism because, meaning and beauty remain relative.

Performance as a word in isolation means to do something. According to Della Summers (2008:1220) it has to do with, "how well or badly a person, company etc, does a particular job or activity". Performance has some relevant synonyms such as "accomplishment, achievements, completion, discharge, execution, fulfilment, action" and many others (Geddes and Grossest, 2004:638). With this position, it therefore means that performance is an action word. According to Abdulmalik Adakole Amali (2007:129):

> Performance by nature is inherent to man. This is due to the fact that man's life could be defined as "performance" because of the daily activities that make up his entire existence. These activities could be religious, social, political, entertainment etc. Stories from these happenings are enacted usually to entertain, educate and inform under the theatrical genres of satire, comedy or tragedy. These stories are told in the theatrical performance with the aid of make-up, light and costumes etc which help to enhance the outwards appearance as well as giving an indepth meaning and contributing to guide the audience in having a holistic meaning of the performance.

In this context, Hussaini U. Tsaka (2014:298) opines that, "The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behaviour raises the possibility that all human activities could potentially be considered as performance or, at least, every activity carried out with a consciousness of itself". Tsaka (2004:299) further explains that, "We have two rather different concepts of performances, one involving the display of skills and the other also involving display but less of particular skills, that of a recognised and culturally coded pattern of behaviour" .

In this same vein, Performing Arts is a discipline that has to do with a type of action that combines acting, singing, dance, storytelling, film and many others to express ideas for the purposes of information, education and entertainment. It is a discipline that has contributed greatly to the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) of many countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive. By Performing Arts in this context, we are simply referring to the creative form of arts presented before individuals or group of individuals with the utilisation of their bodies, voices, or others to convey what is professionally referred to as 'artistic expression' before a live audience. This aspect of performative discipline include theatre, music and dance. It has to do with artworks specifically created through actions performed by artistes usually presented before an audience. It may be presented live on stage before a live audience or it may be recorded. It may also be spontaneous or scripted or even both. According to Parker, Wolf and Block (2009:3):

> Theatrical form in its simplest description is the communication of ideas between two groups: Performers and Audience. The assembly of audience and performers or performance is the presentation of ideas by the performers to the audience. These ideas may range from ancient to the most topical, from the profound to the absurd, and at the same time the either sentimentally obvious or intellectually obscure. Good theatre, whatever the form, is about telling a story. The personality of the actors, the physical form of the space, and the dynamic of the audience itself all affect its success. The challenge is to tell the story in an exciting, intriguing, and provocative way.

THE PLACE OF TECHNICAL THEATRE AND DESIGN COLLABORATION IN PERFORMING ARTS PRACTICE

Technical theatre is one of the inevitable areas in theatre practice. According to Robert D. Tailor and Robert D. Strickland (2005:74-75):

> Theatre is a collaborative art form; it depends upon people working together. For every actor that you see on stage, there may be a dozen people working behind the scenes to create the environment and effects that support and enhance the performance. This people work in the technical areas of theatre usually called tech.... The tech crews are the groups of people working on set construction, props, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup. Generally, a technical director or shop fore man supervises these people, collectively known as the stage crew.

Furthermore, and in agreement with the above assertion by Taylor and Strickland, Michael Gillette (1997:1), one of the world most renowned technical theatre progenitors avers that, "a great performance doesn't simply happen; it is the product of a great deal of organisation, teamwork, talent, and dedication. In the same vein, Okon Udofot Jacob (2023:18), one of the technical theatre practitioners in Nigeria opines that, "every stage performance has its peculiar technical challenges". In the opinion of Gillette (1997:1), "getting a play from the written word to the stage requires a lot of challenging work".

Talking about the place of technical theatre in Performing Arts practice, Jacob (2023:33) explains that, "technical theatre has come to be reckoned with as the essential bedrock in the development of theatre profession, without which the quality of theatre production, wherever

the setting, would have still been at the rather crude stage of development". It is anchored on the above that Taylor and Strickland (2005:75) carefully explain that:

> The set construction crew creates the set, the on stage physical space and its structures in which the actors perform.... The lighting designer decides what kinds of light are needed, where to focus them, and when to turn them on.... The sound designer decides what kinds of music and sound effects are needed and whether they should be live or recorded…. Costumes are designed or chosen by the costume designer. They may be rented, bought or borrowed. Or they may be sewn by the costume crew, who is also responsible for keeping costumes prepared and clean from one performance to the next.... In the theatre, makeup refers to the cosmetics and hair styling, including false hairpiece and false features.

It is based on the above explication that it becomes unequivocally clear that technical theatre practice in Nigeria, as well as any other place in the world, remains the potent hub in which Performing Arts practice revolves around. The different areas of technical theatre practice are directly or indirectly linked with design. Hence, Jacob (2023:47) expatiates that:

> In theatre art practice in particular and indeed Performing Arts in general, the concept of design is held as being very crucial to the profession. This is because any design process has to be seen as the defining steps toward finding or trying to find answers to identified problems in given contexts.

The above postulations clearly define the bearing with regard to the place of Technical Theatre in Performing Arts practice both in Nigeria and other climes of the world. In specific terms, technical theatre practice is categorised into five (5) basic areas of scene design, lighting design, sound design, costumes design as well as make-up design. When talking about scene design, we are professionally referring to the intentional and conscious arrangement of the performance venue with the proper placement of all the requisite sceneries and props capable of depicting the realistic locale as well as creation of mood and aesthetics. In the same vein, lighting design in the context of Performing Arts refers to the proper arrangement of lighting fixtures for the provision of general illumination as well as the requisite special lighting effects for the actualisation of the identified production objectives.

Furthermore, when talking about sound design in Performing Arts practice, we are actually referring to production and reproduction of the required sounds in form of music and special sound effects according to the needs of a particular production. Some of the frequently used sound effects in theatrical productions includes the bleating of goats, chirping of insects, barking of dogs, crowing of cocks, opening and closing of doors, moving vehicles and aircrafts and many more. In the same vein, costumes design has to do with the proper arrangements of all the clothes and ornaments worn by the actors to depict or portray the character they are representing on stage, while make-up design is concerned with all the body adornment by characters in furtherance of the realisation of intended production objectives. With these different areas working in collaboration with one another and in sync with the director, the actors and other personnel of the production team, the established production objectives are likely to be actualised irrespective of the theatrical forms. It is based on the above understanding that Parker, Wolf and Block (2009:3) explain that:

> All types of theatrical forms affect the work of the designer. The most Obvious are the literally forms, or drama, emphasising the spoken word; the musical form, including opera, book musicals and revices, in which music tells part of the story; and ballet and modern dance, in which sight and sound rather than the spoken works matter most. There are many other possible outlets for design that should not be overlooked including film and television; trade shows or "industrial" (promoting a product or company); themed entertainment "rock concerts, videos, restaurant and theme parks); museum and display design; and performance arts. Additional forms are likely to be created in the future.

The above discourse leads this research attention to a very significant area in theatrical design known as design collaboration. In this perspective, Parker, Wolf and Block (2009:5) succinctly expatiate:

> In all cases, designer must have a general understanding and appreciation of other areas of design. As collaborating artistes, the scenic, costume, and lighting designers make an important visual contribution to the dramatic form and working in collaboration with the director, they form an artistic team to create the world of the play. In fact, none of the designers can, with integrity, design without concern for his colleagues…. For this reason, involvement of all the designers in the initial stages of conceptualisation is highly desirable.

Therefore, the success of technical theatre practice with a view to expanding the frontiers and possibilities of performances for ethnic nationalities is predicated upon design collaboration birthed by efficacy and proficiency.

PERFORMANCES AND ETHNIC NATIONALITIES IN NIGERIA

The sole focus of theatrical performances are human beings and its environments including other animate and inanimate objects around. Theatre x-rays or mirrors one activity or the other in a given society. Edwin Wilson (2007:6) in corroboration with the above assertion says that, "theatre focuses on human being. This is true even though different plays emphasize different human concerns, from profound problems in tragedy to pure entertainment in light comedy". Okon Udofot Jacob (2024:142) in his own opinion avers that, "dramatic work in Africa have always served as the bastion for the propagation of traditional culture of the people". Wilson (2007:4) sums up this discourse by saying that:

> Theatre is arts, and as such it mirrors or reflects life. It does not try to encompass the whole life at once; rather, it selects and focuses on a part of the total picture. A key principle of all arts, including theatre, is selectivity; through selectivity, various forms of arts can achieve a degree of clarity, order, and beauty rarely found in ordinary life.

With regard to Performances and Ethnic Nationalities in Nigeria, Jacob avers that, "Performing Arts practice in Nigeria can be traced down to the traditional performative activities inherent in the culture of virtually every community because most societies in Africa have story telling traditions with some accompaniment of songs and music" (88). This is why 2024 was regarded as significant to theatre practitioners in Nigeria because it marked "the 110th anniversary of the historic amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates

into what we have today as Nigeria" (Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) International Conference/AGM 2024 Flyer). Therefore, Nigeria as a country, full of vibrant performative activities is expected to judiciously utilise the available potentials in furtherance of expanding the possibilities of performances for ethnic nationalities and one of this potentials is through efficacious technical theatre practice.

EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES OF PERFORMANCES FOR ETHNIC NATIONALITIES THROUGH EFFICACIOUS TECHNICAL THEATRE PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Theatre is an art that is immensely supported by technology for the purposes of efficiency and effectiveness. Although there were profuse performative elements within the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria before the advent of colonialism, the issue of technical theatre practice actually manifested during the colonial era. This is why Jacob (2023:87) is of the opinion that "in every society of the world, there are some percentage of performative activities which take place in form of music, dance, festival, storytelling and many more. This performative activities have been in existence using languages spoken by the inhabitants of given societies since time". From then, theatrical activities of one form or the other have been functioning as a potent means in which different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria struggle for liberation or fight against corruption. It is in this regard that the flyer for Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) International Conference/AGM 2024:1 comprehensively explains that:

> With the arrival of the British in the 19th century, theatre began to take on a more functional role in politics. At the time, theatre was the pivot for nationalism struggles and protest against colonial rule. The theatre has helped to shape Nigerian history and society through its artistic representations of the unique multicultural nature and nationalist aspirations of the various regions of Nigeria. Bequeathed as an ethnically diverse country with many ethnic groups, the estimated population of over 230 million people, comprising large and smaller ones with multiple nationalities, makes her unique. These multiple nationalities have their own unique cultures, languages, histories, heritages and performative contexts that embody diversity and could be harnessed for sustainable cultural and theatrical entertainment locally and internationally.

This shows how relevant the roles of theatre are impactful in the overall polity of a country such as Nigeria.

However, it is pertinent to note that theatrical activities of any kind thrives effectively with the application of one form of technical aid or the other. This technical aids belong to the area of theatre practice known as Technical Theatre. This area of theatre practice is encapsulated in Design and Technology, which is in vogue in the modern day digitalised era. In Nigeria today, due to the high exchange rate, most theatre practitioners, (both academic and commercial theatres) hardly can afford the cost of purchasing sophisticated technological equipment needed for efficacious technical theatre practice in Nigeria. This has impacted negatively on the quality of performances churned out in the country today, hence this research on "Expanding the Possibilities of Performances for Ethnic Nationalities through Efficacious Technical Theatre Practice in Nigeria" was birthed. This paper is therefore concerned with "how theatre and film continue to play the role of giving Nigerians a sense of community, education, and time to think and contribute to the conversations about how to

effectively manage Nigeria's diversity for sustainable development" (SONTA Conference/ACM 2024 Flyer). Parker, Wolf and Block (2009:3) are of the opinion that:

> Theatrical form in its simplest description is the communication of ideas between two groups: performers and audience. The assembly of audience and performers, or performance, is the presentation of ideas by the performers to the audience. These ideas may range from the ancient to the most topical, from the profound to the absurd, and at the same time be either sentimentally obvious or intellectually obscure. Good theatre, whatever the form, is about telling a story. The personality of the actors, the physical form of the space, and the dynamic of the audience itself all affect its success. The challenge is to tell the story in an exciting, intriguing and provocative way.

It is against this backdrop that Okon Udofot Jacob and Godwin Edet Effiong (2024:131) are of the opinion that, "no writer should ever write in isolation. His inspiration should always be sharpened by the drive to expose and bring to the fore the contradictions and apprehensions that have engulfed his society. For theatre to perform its primary functions, it is worthy to reiterate that the Technical unit must be well equipped if the possibilities of performances are to be expanded for Ethnic Nationalities because most theatre audiences are heterogeneous in nature.

SUMMARY

Right from its inception, theatre has been used as a potent means of x-raying or mirroring societal ills or as a tool for societal construction and re-construction. Therefore, this research endeavour has made it clear that theatre organisations in Nigeria are capable of contributing immensely to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria through efficacious Technical Theatre practice, thereby expanding the possibilities of performances for ethnic nationalities because most theatre audiences are heterogeneous in nature and "the playwright uses drama as tool for the propagation of gender justice, inclusivity and social equanimity" (Okon Udofot Jacob, 2024:32).

The summary of this research therefore, is that, considering the potentials inherent in the theatre industry in Nigeria, the industry is bound to surpass its previous achievements if more attention is focused on the technical components of theatre practice so as to enhance the qualities of performances that would in turn expand the possibilities of performances for ethnic nationalities. It is quite glaring that theatre organisations in Nigeria are capable of contributing immensely to the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) of Nigeria because there are potent means of fighting corruption, injustice and maladministration in the practice only if the area of Technical Theatre unit is properly funded towards efficacious Technical Theatre practice in the country. In the same vein, the management of the theatre houses under review are expected to explore the available technological advancement and develop the technical aspects of theatre practice in their different organisation and by so doing, the much needed possibilities of expanding performances for ethnic nationalities would be actualised.

CONCLUSION

After a close examination of the activities of theatre and film industries in Nigeria through observations, experimentations and participations, it is worthwhile to conclude that Performing Arts industry in which theatre and film are integral components in Nigeria should

not be neglected in spite of the depressed economy. Rather, it should be supported by different quarters in order to enhance the viability of the technical area of theatre practices otherwise referred to as Theatre Design and Technology. By so doing, there will be chances of expanding considerably, reasonably and remarkably the possibilities of expanding the frontiers of performances for ethnic nationalities through Technical Theatre Practice Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After this research within academic, state owned, and commercial theatres within the South-South region of Nigeria on the chances of Expanding the Possibilities of Performances for Ethnic Nationalities through Efficacious Technical Theatre Practice in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered:

i. Theatre practice should no longer be seen as a profession for drop-outs and good for nothing persons in the society, but should rather be seen as a noble profession capable of creating wealth, employment opportunities and also as a potent tool for protest and agitation against maladministration, corruption and injustice.
ii. The profession should be adequately sponsored and funded by all levels of government, non-governmental organisation, religious bodies as well as private individuals in furtherance of Expanding the Possibilities of Performances for Ethnic Nationalities through Efficacious Technical Theatre Practice in Nigeria.
iii. Modern digitalised technological equipment should be procured for the practitioners of technical theatre in Nigeria so as to enhance efficiency within the profession.
iv. Technical theatre Practitioners in Nigeria should be trained and retrained in order to be equipped with the contemporary know how in respect of the nitty-gritty of the profession.
v. Technical theatre professionals should be given opportunities to practice their arts within the different theatrical institutions ranging from private to religious, as well as government owned.
vi. In a situation where the available technological equipment are so expensive to procure, the technical theatre practitioners in Nigeria should not neglect the possibilities and opportunities inherent in fabrication of equipment from the locally available materials and human resources as skills abound in the country for the fabrication of most of the needed tools, equipment and machineries.
vii. Improvisation is another possible way of making achievement from the available material and human resource because if what is exactly needed is not available, the nearest option should be preferred or utilised.
viii. There should be collaboration between designers in one theatre organisation and the other to make room for cross fertilisation of ideas and equipment utilisation.
ix. The local fabricators and craft men should be co-opted into the technical design team, because, within them, there abound very intelligent and skillful technicians that can be of immense advantage in this aspect.
x. Round table discussions should be frequently organised amongst technical theatre practitioners for possible exchange of ideas within the discipline. This should take different dimensions such as conferences, workshops and seminars to mention but a few of them.

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