

DURO LADIPO

THUNDER-GOD
ON STAGE



Remi RAJI-OYELADE
Sola OLORUNYOMI
&
Abiodun DURO-LADIPO

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University of Ibadan

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The late Professor Saburi Biobaku offered rare support from the moment the idea of a Duro Ladipo book was suggested early in 1997. In the course of collating materials and searching for publishing opportunities, we have had to depend on Professor Biobaku's advice and information. At a point, he made an offer of facilitating the publication of the book, a proposition which, unfortunately, did not materialize partly owing to his ill-health and to the logistics of schedule. It is to his meritorious memory that this book is fondly dedicated.

Perhaps the most acknowledged chronicler of the Duro Ladipo phenomenon in Nigeria and abroad is Ulli Beier. In many of his commentaries on Yoruba theatre and especially in *The Return of Shango: The Theatre of Duro Ladipo*, Ulli Beier, the acclaimed and respected persona behind the Ladipo/Osogbo revolution, has given us the privilege of his years of insight, understanding, and close and influential association with the Duro Ladipo enigma and stagecraft. It is to this man of culture and also to the contributions of other insiders contained in *The Return of Shango* (1994) that we owe a great debt of gratitude. However, much gratitude and appreciation go to Mrs. Abiodun Duro-Ladipo for giving us the rare privilege of full access to the *Archive* – letters, manuscripts and other papers – of Duro Ladipo. Her support and enthusiasm, as we worked through carefully kept materials in files and bags, have been a tremendous force of encouragement. For close to five years, since 1997, we made several, now uncountable, visits to the Bode Wasimi residence of Mrs. Duro-Ladipo in search of authentic information and other clarification about the life and times of one of Africa's most accomplished dramatists and directors in the indigenous language. Each visit to Bode Wasimi bore its different stamp, of constant query and dialogue, on the broad narrative of this book. It is therefore a matter of technical detail and honour to include her as co-author in this edition.

Special appreciation of support goes to Professor Dotun Ogundeji of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, and a renowned Duro Ladipo scholar, who graciously contributed a chapter to the making of this book. In "Postscript", Ogundeji chose to write on the Ladipo legacy in the context of contemporary developments in the aesthetics of Yoruba theatre and dramaturgy. His concluding remark is a challenge to the culture

and arts authorities, including the Duro Ladipo Estate, to be practical and committed in the course of immortalising the work of this great dramatist and composer for coming generations.

In producing this book, from scratch to finish, we have a very important group of project collaborators, including on-the-field research deputies and assistants to thank. We acknowledge the helpful research work of Yemi Owolabi, Gbemisola Remi Adeoti, Opeoluwa Awoniyi and Ireliolu Ayodele at different stages of this work; and most especially Bose Shaba and Christina Soper, for making out time to read the manuscript and offering useful suggestions. How can we forget the constant nudging and encouragement from Dr. Doyin Odebowale, Akogun Lekan Alabi, Professor Tunde Babawale, Dr. Ademola Dasyuva, Dr. O. O. Adekola, Professors Ayo Akinwale, Dele Layiwola and Dapo Adelugba? We equally feel indebted to the following for giving production assistance: Gbenga Olaoye, Stella Fasanya, Gafar Ajao, Noimot Ogundele, Oluchi Usuwa, Opeyemi Olagunju, Nur-d-din Temitayo Busari, Ohimai Amaize and Gbenga Aroyehun. In the same breath, we express profound gratitude to C.O. Ola for excellent indexing. We also appreciate the editorial and proof-reading assistance of Tade Ipadeola, Kunle Baiyere and Benson Eluma at a time we sorely needed reliable hands. In equal measure, we acknowledge our publishers: The Institute of African Studies (IAS), University of Ibadan, and IFAnet editions, the publishing arm of the culture house —the Information Aid Network, Ibadan.

Finally, we give due recognition to our families – Bola, Sola, and the children – for love, understanding and support.

FOREWORD

The renowned story of Duro Ladipo's theatrical career is here re-told by two amiable researchers and a participant and confidant of the legend. Between 1960 when he committed 'hubris' at the All Saints' Church Osogbo, and March 1978 when he passed out of his body at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, there was never a dull moment.

It is interesting to note that this great Nigerian tragedian, a re-incarnation of the fire-eating god, Sango or his alter-ego, Jakuta, pioneered the concept of historical drama in the popular theatre tradition in Nigeria. He was a keen researcher and historian of the theatre. His naturalistic approach to the Nigerian stage and his authentication of Yoruba history and spectacle has produced a tradition in protégés like Ola Rotimi and Wale Ogunyemi, both of blessed memory.

I recall, for instance, that during his last days as a resident dramatist at our Institute, Ogunyemi was particularly close to him. Indeed, when his 'voice' failed him and he needed to pass instructions to actors as they rehearsed at the Institute's courtyard, Ogunyemi would press his ears to Ladipo's lips and interpret the instructions to the cast.

Duro Ladipo and his stage companion, Biodun Olufarati Ladipo worked till the very end of Duro's life when he attained transition in a flurry of thunderclaps on a stormy afternoon.

We must continue to hope that the 'evening' will be sustained by Biodun Ladipo whose efforts may help to put some of the productions on celluloid, the medium of the new era. We must also thank his mentor, Baba Ulli Beier who had helped to establish the Mbari Mbayo Art Centre in Osogbo, an institution that is now a nostalgic mausoleum to the legendary Ladipo.

Tomorrow, certainly, is another day.

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PROLOGUE

DURODOLA ADISA LADIPO

If a man had a choice of a day to die and that man was *Durodola Adisa Ladipo*, Thursday would be the day, for an obvious mythological reason: he lived and was popular in life as *Sango*, the Yoruba god of thunder. And as comparative legend has it, *Thursday* is named after *Thor*, the Viking god of thunder and lightning who shares elemental affinity with other deities like *Vulcan*, *Amadioha* and *Sango*. As it happened, one ominous and thunderous Thursday noon of storms on March 11, 1978, Durodola Adisa Ladipo - Nigeria's foremost cultural ambassador, dramatist and composer - breathed his last as a mortal on earth. His death shook the theatre world to moments of disbelief. Could that famed *reincarnation* of *Sango*, legendary king of Oyo and thunder god, die so soon at the prime of his popularity? Why did he have to leave the stage for eternity that early? Whence cometh another dramatist and composer of imposing stature like Duro Ladipo? By the time he passed on at the age of 52, Duro Ladipo had established himself as the grand exponent of Yoruba historical drama. He was acclaimed as (or accused of) taking the business of theatre so seriously, especially in his stage role as *Sango*, that both images of man and god seemed to have merged and manifested in his real-life, offstage comportment. While Ladipo lived, he had a clinical sense of keeping records; as an experienced teacher, he cherished the act of committing memory to the permanent page of the written word. He had high hopes to turn his "House of Culture" residence at Bode Wasimi area of Basorun, Ibadan into a museum of arts or at least a gathering point for artists.*

That hope, as imagined, never materialised with his transition thirty years ago. Duro Ladipo's magical spell as an organizer of men and composer of plays went with him, but not his fame of stupendous performance recorded in several documents, diaries, correspondences, medallions, posters and other paraphernalia of the stage jealously guarded by Abiodun Duro-Ladipo, his equally talented partner of many years and reputation.

Popularly called *Oya* or *Moremi*, two of the memorable Yoruba mythical figures she had brought to life on stage, Abiodun Duro-Ladipo is the natural curator of what we choose to call *The Duro Ladipo Archive*. The materials available, yet uncatalogued, in the Archive, are a delight of many a scrupulous researcher. Apart from rare manuscripts and papers (some in Spanish, Portuguese and French), Mrs. Duro-Ladipo has managed

to keep some important newspapers or magazine reports on the Duro Ladipo enigma over three decades.

The idea of writing a light and compact resource book on Duro Ladipo's life and art as a man-of-theatre, to coincide with the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his death, occurred to us sometime in 1997 during one brainstorming session in a popular pub in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. It was felt that a reassessment of Duro Ladipo's life and contribution to the development of a Nigerian dramatic heritage would go a long way to concretize the feeling of a cultural renaissance in stage performance. We felt that such a publication as this, privileged by authoritative commentaries, was very necessary to preserve, among others, Ladipo's pioneering dramatic heritage, and to memorialize it to the advantage of Africanist scholars, libraries, research institutes, the academic community and the general readership all over the world.

A trip to the Bode Wasimi residence (*Home of Culture*) of the Ladipos at Ibadan was the necessary tonic we needed: the available materials to browse through or digest were confounding; besides, we found in Abiodun Duro-Ladipo all the encouragement to navigate the interesting life, times, tours and the theatre of one of Africa's foremost dramatists in the indigenous language whose acclaim has been felt across continents. She provided us with the names and addresses of some of Duro Ladipo's patrons and associates who contributed in their different ways to the making of this book. But most interestingly, for each lead question we provided, Mrs. Duro-Ladipo, was willing to reveal a diary of answers which invariably led us to other queries.

Essentially, this book is in part a homage to an enduring tradition of a spectacular variety of African theatre. It is also, by force of available facts, a revision of certain unresolved information on the man Durodola Durosinmi Timothy Durooriike Adisa Ladipo. Beginning with his year of birth and leading to the immediate reason for starting a secular drama group, the *untold* insider's stories of his international tours and the eternal question about the truth of his wondrous fire-spitting appearances as Sango in his classic play, *Oba Ko So*, we set out to document Duro Ladipo's passage through life, as authoritatively intimated, in the hope that this narrative shall be remembered, experienced and emulated for the greater renaissance of the soul of African art, performance and culture. Here also the reader will have firsthand information about some untold tales of a theatre legend. Let the curtains disappear, step into the compelling story of a magical,

dramatic life; step into the narrative of Duro Ladipo and his Theatre International.

Endnote

*In June 1974, Duro Ladipo completed a residential building in a suburbia of Ibadan originally called Akeke Village. He moved into the building in November 1974 while preparing for his troupe's trips to Brazil and the US. The house was named Bode Wasimi (*Fortress of Rest*). Around 1975/76, the area, and soon the entire village, became known as Bode Wasimi. Duro Ladipo's former address in Ibadan was "House of Culture", SW8/488B, College Crescent, Oke Ado.

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I

A DRAMATIC
BEGINNING

Durodola Adisa was an *abiku*, so the parents confirmed and feared. In Yoruba traditional belief, *abiku* (a-child-that-is-born-to-die-and-be-reborn) is the apt and pleasant epithet for children who play hide-and-seek with earthly life and build their comfort in the spirit world. They are children involved in a fatalistic cycle of communion with Death, so that each coming is a reminder of another imminent departure when least likely. When Durodola was born on December 18, 1926, his mother - Madam Dorcas Towobola Ajike Ladipo - strongly felt that the child was the same one that had tormented her in nine previous pregnancies. The child was approximately and vengefully named Durodola Durosomo Durooriike Adisa Ladipo. The constant nominal prefix, "Duro", means "be steady, wait, live with and experience the world". A "babalawo" (oracular priest of Ifa), a relative of Madam Towobola, was contracted to keep his oracular eyes on the spirit child. And for well over fifteen years, the Ilesa-based priest became a regular visitor to the Ladipo house at Oderinlo compound in the Popo area of the ancient city of Osogbo. The babalawo, fondly called "Baba Agadagodo" (*the-old-one-who-casts-spells-by-padlocks*), had such a masterfully overwhelming control over the young Durodola that the child became irritable and withdrawn anytime the old man stepped into Oderinlo's compound. Indeed, Duro had so great a fear for "Baba Ologun-key" or "Baba Agadagodo", that the mention of the old priest's name was enough to make him sober for the rest of the day. The saga of the *abiku* was stemmed since other children born after Durodola lived without any history of strange departures. Duro's immediate sister was Victoria Adeola (who later married Mr. Kolapo); next came Mosunmola (who married Mr. Olagunju) and Emmanuel Olugboyega Ladipo (the current Provost of St. Paul's African Church, Gbongan). A set of twins, both girls - Taiwo and Kehinde Ladipo - was the last born of Madam Towobola who had almost given up hope of having any surviving child in spite of her strong Christian faith.

Son of Reverend Joseph Oni Ladipo, an old missionary in the Anglican Church, Duro displayed an early interest in folk songs, traditional music and moonlight tales. As a precocious child who could imitate human actions and compose delightful songs at the briefest prompt, Duro would later use the dual

advantage of Western missionary education and his innate cultural creativity to commendable and popular effect. Between 1930 and 1942, he obtained the Government Middle Two Certificate, and between 1943 and 1961, Duro Ladipo taught in different elementary schools in both the old Western and Northern regions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was actually during the first decade of his teaching career that he had the practical opportunity of expressing himself in music and play-acting. At Otan Ayegbaju, he was very active in the school choir where he displayed an original knack for setting words to music. A remarkable person to have an early and lasting influence on the young composer was Mr. A. T. O. Odunsi, his headmaster at St. Philips Primary School, Otan-Ayegbaju, who wrote a full-length play *Suuru Baba Iwa* in which Duro Ladipo displayed his acting potential to an appreciative audience.

In 1947, Duro's path towards the vocation of art and performance became clearer in his chance meeting with Mr. (later Reverend.) Alex Peters, the then Headmaster of Holy Trinity School, Omofe, Ilesa. Duro had watched one of Alex Peters' Productions in Ilesa; he would later meet him in Osogbo where he volunteered to associate with Peters' Ilesa theatre group. Almost immediately, Duro Ladipo left Otan Ayegbaju for his mother's town as a pupil teacher in Holy Trinity School, Omofe, Ilesa. There, he became single-mindedly immersed in acting and music, leading the school choir to several remarkable outings.

In search of new challenges and in the travelling spirit of the *Alarinjo*,¹ Alex Peters, with Duro Ladipo on his trail, moved to Kaduna in Northern Nigeria and both of them settled in the United Native African Church (UNA) School, in the school year of 1948/49. At UNA, Kaduna, Duro Ladipo taught the Standard III pupils, directed the school's drama group and composed for, and sometimes led, the church choir. Incidentally, it was at this school that Duro Ladipo met Mabel Johnson, an Itsekiri pupil girl, who would later become his wife. With the collaboration of Mr. Peters, Mr. Ladipo led the UNA School Dramatic Society to a successful production of *Omonide* written by M.S. Ayodele. In 1955, his profile as a composer, arranger and serious playwright became highly projected with his adaptation of William Shakespeare's comedy, *As You Like It*. A year later, Duro Ladipo returned to Osogbo after obtaining the Grade Three Teachers Certificate to start, so to say, a monumental vocation, which magically turned into a career, in theatre arts and cultural performance.

Trained as a teacher, committed as an artist-composer, Duro Ladipo was initially thrown into a dilemma of choices usually experienced by ingenious and versatile personalities. About this same time, he lost virtually all the valuable property he brought back from his years of service and labour in Kaduna to

some unidentified miscreants whose actions remained an eternal mystery like the break of day. Thus, with virtually nothing and no one to depend on, Duro Ladipo became more pressed to keep body and soul. He chose the diversified option of returning to his teaching career while at the same time running a beer parlour called "The Popular Bar" on Station Road. He also worked as pay box collector and handbill distributor at Ajax Cinema, Latona area of Osogbo, the only film house in the town at that time.

In his early thirties, Mr. Ladipo continued his gradual rise towards fame, reckoning, visibility as well as controversy. As a teacher, he was a disciplinarian, a man who wielded the cane to straighten the crooked child. This attribute he would later transfer to his professional, theatre organisation. As a composer, Durodola Timothy Ladipo was incomparable. His earlier compositions were all written for the Church; this commitment later earned him a special ordination as a lay preacher at the All Saints Church, Osogbo where his father served as catechist for fifty-one years before he died in 1963.

Two years after his return to Osogbo, in 1958, Duro Ladipo obtained his Grade Two Teachers Certificate while he still continued to consolidate his stature as a talented composer, until one controversial 1960 Easter performance inside the walls of All Saints Church, Osogbo. By all creative indications, Duro Ladipo had a knack for experimentation; he felt that the conventional church songs were too classical, boring and less inspiring. Having composed an Africanised version of the Cantata in secret, Duro Ladipo, lay preacher and catechist's son, enthusiastically challenged the sober solemnity of the Saints by staging "the Nativity" accompanied by thunderous beats from *bata* and *dundun* drums, and such indigenous instruments normally considered by puritan Christians as desecrating, primitive, and idolatrous. For the first memorable time, alarm trailed the figure of Timothy, the singer. The Church, including Rev. Joseph Oni Ladipo, met, deliberated and pronounced Durodola guilty of that impetuous act against the divine order. He was stripped of his ordination as lay preacher and forbidden to read the lesson in church again. Disillusionment wrinkled the composer's brows momentarily.

About this time, Duro Ladipo had met the adventurous and art-loving German couple, Ulli and Georgiana Beier who would later become the beacon of his path to glory in the world of theatre. The Beiers had arrived in the country in the 1950s as culture and arts enthusiasts with Ulli primarily employed as a tutor in the Extra-Mural Department at the then University College, Ibadan. Duro had gone to perform at the popular Mbari Club in Ibadan, a resort for notable artists including Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka among others. His magnetic rapport with Ulli Beier led to years of artistic collaboration, a

relationship which developed into a beneficial patron-performer connection. At Beier's instance, Duro Ladipo took his "Cantata" into the less constricting square of the secular world, composing songs and staging mainly Christian, morality plays in schools and town halls. In the same year of 1960, after the disastrous experimentation at the All Saints, Duro Ladipo staged his version of Christmas Cantata, out of church, featuring students of Grade Two Teacher Training College, Osogbo.

The success of that performance greatly encouraged him to keep up his interest in the arts. He was a teacher in the day, conservative and bound by the sacrosanct formality of the profession; at nights and on weekends, he functioned as a freewheeling entertainer. The demanding routine continued for some time, until one controversial day.

Apart from running his own popular bar, Duro Ladipo also worked for Mr. Ojo Ajanaku, the proprietor of Ajax Cinema. One day, he went on a seemingly uneventful publicity trip within the town, distributing leaflets and inviting the people to a film show at the Ajax. That publicity trip of 1961 marked a turning point in Mr. Ladipo's career. He was wrongly and deliberately accused of distributing the campaign leaflets of an unpopular political party in that area of western Nigeria. Duro Ladipo was summarily relieved of his posting as a teacher but for an unrelated allegation of "negligence of duty". Not a man so easily cowed by fatal acts of other mortals, Duro Ladipo took up the challenge. With his last salary of 16 shillings and 18 pence, he bought a "bongo" drum and vowed to be more immersed in the theatre. That also was the last time Duro Ladipo would use or answer to his Christian name, Timothy, apparently because from that moment he no longer had official allegiance either to church or to school.

At this trying period, Ulli Beier guaranteed a funding assistance of about 200 pounds for Duro Ladipo. The lifeline which was provided by the South African writer, Eskia Mphahlele who was then busy in Paris, represented the seed money which effected the conversion of Ladipo's Popular Bar into the Mbari Club of Osogbo. *Mbari*, an original Igbo word for creation, and the name of the artists' club at Ibadan, was summarily domesticated by Duro Ladipo and Osogbo people; '*Mbari*' became '*Mbari Mbayo*', a Yoruba expression meaning "when I see (the act, thing or material), I will rejoice".

Out of the church, out of class, Duro Ladipo found and flaunted the desire of his heart in cultural songs, music and playacting. On March 21, 1962, the Mbari Mbayo Club was formally opened as an arts resort and theatre with a premiere of Duro Ladipo's first full-length historical play – *Oba Moro*. In attendance among others were the Beiers, Suzanne Wenger, the Austrian-born

Africanist, and Oba Adenle II, the Ataoja of Osogbo who declared the Club open.

With Mbari Mbayo as a major hive of artistes and artisans, and with a sizable number of apprentices and enthusiasts, Duro Ladipo was set to consolidate the reputation of Osogbo as a centre of culture and entertainment. The centre comprised three sections, namely, the Theatre section, the Painting section, and the Poetry-Writing section. In its first three years, Mbari Mbayo witnessed the production of classical plays, apart from *Oba Moro* and *Oba Ko So*, including *Moremi*, *Eda* and *Tenibegiloju*. Later, plays like *Kini Igbagbo*, *Obatala*, *Beyiose* and *Osun* were presented by the group during the glorious 1960s. It was also during this time that the E.K. Ogunmola Theatre achieved renown with a new play - *Aditu Olodumare* - which was premiered at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). A comparably great actor, Ogunmola took *Aditu Olodumare* to Mbari Mbayo in 1968 with overwhelming success.

The Painting section of the centre produced some professional artists like Sussane Wenger-Alarape, Asiru Olatunde, Twin Seven-Seven, Muraina Oyelami, Jimoh Buraimoh, and Rufus Ogundele whose works were exhibited not only at Osogbo but also in several places in Europe including Holland and Prague, as well as in some Indian cities. Also, there were local and international guest artists like Chief Idah, the famous Benin carver, Hezbon Owiti, from Kenya, Tafelmaier from Germany, and Harper from New Guinea. Towards the end of the 1960s, three new artists, Yinka Oyeyemi, Ayinde Mayakiri and Adegoke Oketunji were discovered in the art workshop usually directed by Wenger-Alarape or Georgiana Beier. At the Poetry section, much was done to revive Yoruba folklore and legend. Bakare Gbadamosi (later known as Demola Onibonokuta), Lere Paimo and Yemi Elebuibon all played a key role in the resuscitation of the recital of various traditional poetic forms such as *ijala*, *oriki*, *rara* and *Odu Ifa*. Two Obas - the Timi of Ede and the Ataoja of Osogbo - were particularly active in this section; but while the Ataoja was more interested in poetry, the Timi expressed his talents through the talking drum. Timi's works on the Ifa oracular verse can be described as exciting and the Ataoja's philosophical poems as remarkable.²

The selected works of artists, originally published by Mbari Mbayo, were later reproduced by the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife).

It must be noted that it was to the credit of Duro Ladipo and other patrons including Dr. F.A. Olapade (Chairman), Mr. J.A. Akinlade (Secretary), Mr.

B.O. Aboderin (Treasurer), Chief S.O. Ola, Mr. S.M. Winsala and Mr. Michael Crowder (all members) of the Mbari Mbayo Cultural Centre, Osogbo, that it became not only a museum of arts but a tourist centre. Over one thousand people visited the centre in 1966 alone. Both as dramatist and organising secretary, Duro Ladipo continued to receive support from Ulli Beier, then editor of *ODU*, a journal of Yoruba Studies, Suzanne Wenger-Alarape, and Dennis Williams. It was also at this open and rustic theatre that the first performance of *Oba Ko So*, arguably the *magnum opus* of Duro Ladipo, took place in 1963 during the first anniversary of the club.

Apart from Ulli and Georgina Beier, and Suzanne Wenger, Caroline Abiodun Olufarati also had a tremendous impact on Duro Ladipo; she was a young woman from Epe-Ekiti who had gone to Mbari Mbayo as an ordinary spectator and would later become an external collaborator with Duro Ladipo, in fact his wife, on and off the stage! As Mrs. Duro Ladipo narrated in her conversation with the Beiers and Ambassador Segun Olusola in November, 1974:

Yes, it was in the year 1963 that I first met my husband at Oshogbo. Then I was thinking of becoming a nurse by profession. So I came to Oshogbo, just to take the entrance examination to the institution. But before then I used to come to Mbari Mbayo, because I was interested in singing.³

If the Beiers were the intellectual collaborators of Duro Ladipo, Abiodun was his spiritual spine. Abiodun's father was High Chief I.A. Olufarati of the Arowosapo ruling house in Epe-Ekiti and her mother was Madam Mary Olabomode. The young princess left Epe for Osogbo in 1962 to stay with her aunt Mrs. Adefunke Wellington Alfa (now Chief Mrs Adefunke Wellington Adeyemi) in the Oja-Oba area of the town. She was introduced to Duro Ladipo at the Mbari Mbayo at a time when he was still struggling as a dramatist, and she was about to be introduced to the nursing profession. Abiodun, who had a passionate interest in singing but wasn't so confident about her acting ability, met Duro when he was in dire need of a good actress and singer. She had a reserved liking for the big, bearded man who had nurtured confidence in her within two months of contact. In return for his admiration, the princess offered to attend rehearsals and be a supporting or part-time actress even though she still hoped to be a nurse.

Surprisingly, Abiodun matured quickly as an actress and coupled with her soprano delivery of rare Ekiti songs, Ladipo, found her irreplaceable and

indispensable. Yet she would do everything to discourage him from taking her on as a full-time actress. For instance, against the rule of rehearsals, Abiodun would wear bangles and sandals or slippers right onto the stage. She was always insisting that acting was just a 'filler', something to do while waiting for a break; but Duro Ladipo, insightful in auditioning, saw in Abiodun the figure of a 'Florence Nightingale' of Yoruba travelling theatre comparable only in stature with the late Adesewa Ogunde of *The Ogunde Concert Party* and Iyabo Ogunsola (of the 'Efunsetan Aniwura' fame) of *The Ishola Ogunsola International Theatre*. Abiodun went ahead to collect the admissions form preparatory to entrance examination into Ile Abiye Nursing Home, Ado Ekiti. Her form number was 364. She never sat for the examination. Instead, she was later registered in the Duro Ladipo National Troupe as Number 44, leader of the women's group.

The turning point of Abiodun's vacillation in the Duro Ladipo Theatre was the defection of Funke Fatiregun, the lead actress in *Oba Ko So*, to the rival *Ogunmola Theatre* company after the first anniversary of Mbari Mbayo. Reflecting on the first performance of *Oba Ko So*, Abiodun noted in *I Only Want to Help Him*:

I was not the first Oya. It was another girl who took that part... So when she joined Ogunmola's company (After the anni-ver-sary), then my husband said: "There is noth-ing we can do. Now you are the next person to take this part". I said, "No, I can't take it. Why? If you can't get that girl, then look for another one, because we have many of them." Then he said: "No! Because Ulli likes you to take the part of Oya." (6)

After much persuasion, Abiodun took on the part of *Oya*, the river-goddess, wife to King Sango, god of thunder and lighting. She performed in that role and others but she's more fondly known as *Moremi* and *Oya* perhaps for the manner in which she realised these memorable female characters in Yoruba legend on the stage. Abiodun's first role in the Duro Ladipo theatre was that of Adetun, the beautiful daughter of the king in *Suuru Baba Iwa*. Another of Abiodun's major stage names was *Asake*, a role she played in the production of *Magba Alegun* in 1964.

Once the actress became more stable in the company, Duro Ladipo proposed marriage and with the reconnaissance of Ulli and Georgiana, the stern objection of Abiodun's parents at Epe-Ekiti and aunt (resident in Osogbo) was conveniently weakened. Rufus Ogundele, then the youngest male member

first Nigerian Arts Council Trophy. He would later be honoured in 1965 as a cultural ambassador with the official insignia of national merit – *the Member of the Order of the Niger (M.O.N)*. His first international trip was therefore misunderstood by many as the result of an official recommendation by the government.

On the occasion of the first historic award of October 18, 1963, *Oba Ko So* was staged again at the Federal Palace Hotel with the first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Right Hon. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in attendance. The troupe was treated like the king's company; they were lodged at Domo Hotel on Lagos Island, some five minutes walk to the reception venue. Significantly, Duro Ladipo and his dramatic ensemble became the first indigenous group among other travelling theatres to receive such presidential honour in Nigeria. The award was personally presented by Dr. Azikiwe himself at the Government House, Lagos. Duro Ladipo's joy was broad and overwhelming; but it was immediately marked by a bereavement. His father died five days after the award, but with genuine happiness and pride for a son's success. Reverend J.O. Ladipo had always felt amused at the national recognition of his son's prowess in singing, dancing and acting. With the experience of the general disapproval of his son's 1960 theatrical experiment in the Anglican church still fresh in his mind, the Reverend could barely hide his amazement at the turn of things. On one occasion Duro Ladipo returned from a trip, and when visiting his ailing father at Osogbo, he was greeted with a puzzling, long look by the old reverend. A second sigh was one of admiration after which the father remarked: "*Ah, oyinbo lo so pe ko dara, awon ra ni won tun so pe o dara!*": literally meaning, '*Baffling! The white man who says it (our culture) is worthless is the same one who turns around and gives you recognition.*'

Reverend Ladipo would contend still that his catechist son would have been more spectacular composing for the church; yet he was happy. And he died happy.

That glorious year, Duro Ladipo returned to his Osogbo base, to prepare for a burial, and a tour.

Endnotes

"Alarinjo" is the portmanteau Yoruba word used to refer to both the tradition and the membership of early amateur and professional theatre troupes who travelled around and presented stage plays in cities, towns and villages in the old Western region of Nigeria.

²The selected works of artists, originally published by Mbari Mbayo, were later reproduced by the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife).

³Quoted from "I Wanted to Help Him Because He Told Me All His Problems." *I Only Wanted to Help Him*. Universitat Bayreuth: Iwalewa-Haus, 1988. p.3.

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II

**THE GREAT TOURS AND
THE OMINOUS PASSAGE**

Between 1964 and 1977, Duro Ladipo propagated the culture of the travelling theatre beyond the African continent. On account of his national recognition, coupled with Ulli Beier's recommendation to the West German ambassador, he was invited to participate at the Berlin Festival of World Theatre (Berliner Festwochen) from 2nd to 20th October, 1964. In his interview with Nora E. Taylor later in 1975, Ladipo noted that "more than 60 nations participated. I was last to perform with this [*Oba Ko So*] opera and I came first."¹ Thus, the Duro Ladipo National Troupe made history not only by winning first prize at the festival but by becoming the first Nigerian theatre company to travel overseas with a Nigerian play and a cast of 24 actors, singers, drummers and dancers.

Before that trip, something dramatic happened. The West German embassy had issued visas to all members of the troupe; but the Nigerian officer in charge of the provision of passports simply declined to process the passports insisting that there were too many people registered for the tour! Duro Ladipo was furious: this was a trip sponsored by a foreign government and yet a compatriot was trying to make things difficult. Ladipo threatened to drown in the lagoon if all the passports were not duly processed. That was the extent of the seriousness, theatrical as it seemed, that the dramatist attached to the opportunity of attending the festival. Mr. Ladipo had his way. Once at Berlin, the organisation was smoother; the troupe was well accommodated; and the performance was spectacular.

That achievement marked the beginning of the great tours. While the Berliner Festwochen was taking place, little did Duro Ladipo know that his company was being monitored by the organisers of the Commonwealth Arts Festival which was to be held later in 1965. The suggestion of an invitation was made but then a formal notice had to be sent. However, instead of doing so directly, the organisers, through the British government, requested the young Nigerian nation to send representations to their festival of arts and culture. There was now the formal competition for a Nigerian government-sponsored tour of Britain. Organised by the National Council for Arts and Culture, the finale of the competitions took place in Lagos

between April and May 1965. It was at this occasion that four groups, based on regional representation, were selected. These were the John Ekwere theatre group from Eastern Nigeria, the Dumas dancers from Northern Nigeria, the Ikegwegbe Cultural Troupe from Mid-Western Nigeria, and the Duro Ladipo National Theatre from Western Nigeria.

It must be noted that the choice of Duro Ladipo's *Oba Ko So* from the Western axis was very controversial for Kola Ogunmola, his townsman and a dramatist renowned for his superior acting abilities, who also participated in that competition. In the words of Muraina Oyelami, recorded in *My Life in the Duro Ladipo Theatre*:

Certain people believed that the selection of the play was politically motivated, because they thought that Duro had the backing of politicians who were in power at the time. They would rather see E.K. Ogunmola's new play *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (written by Amos Tutuola and adapted by Ogunmola) representing the country at the festival, while others believed that *Oba Ko So* was the right choice, because of its authenticity. This created animosity between the two good friends...It even spread to members of the two groups. It was Ulli Beier who helped to resolve the fight...There was a feast at Mbari on that day of reconciliation, and all three drama groups of Osogbo, namely E.K. Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo and Oyin Adejobi gathered to eat and drink together. (8-9)

The decision of the panel was upheld and once again the Duro Ladipo National Troupe began its preparation for the show in Britain in September 1965. Meanwhile, Duro Ladipo had concluded arrangements with Mr. Klaus Bérenbrok, Bérenbrok & Co. of Intereuropa Produktion, Dusseldorf, to go on an extended tour of Europe in what would later be seen as the post-Commonwealth trip to Holland, Austria and West Germany. And in order to add variety to the troupe's overseas performance, a new play entitled *Eda*, first performed at the third anniversary of Mbari Mbayo on March 13, 1965, was refined for the European tour. This play, an adaptation of the morality play *Everyman*, was written by Ulli Beier under the pseudonym Obotunde Ijimere for Ladipo's group.

As the Commonwealth festival approached, another serious visa problem ensued. Duro Ladipo was requested to pay for the members of his troupe. He strongly declined on the grounds that his appearance at the

festival was formally supposed to be on the invitation of the British government and supported by the Nigerian government. The problem was eventually settled and the troupe left for London on September 17, 1965. During the three-week period of the festival, *Oba Ko So* was performed in four major cities, namely Liverpool, Cardiff, Glasgow and London, with the show at the Royal Court Theatre, London, reported as the most impressive. There were also memorable shows at the King's Theatre in Glasgow and the Scala Theatre in London. Each member of the troupe was given a sum of two pounds as pocket money per day while the festival lasted. Though they were well accommodated in places like the Liverpool University hostel and the Royal Hotel at Woburn, they were not conveniently located to eat cheaply and thus had to walk long distances to find second-rate restaurants.

While in Britain, two indelible episodes which challenged the survivalist and ingenious character of Duro Ladipo as a theatre director and manager occurred. After the performance at Liverpool, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in Cardiff contracted him to do a compact version of the play for its viewers; Ladipo demanded some remuneration for the members of his troupe. But the BBC refused claiming that the Festival officials had included free television performance in their contract with all national groups. Curiously, it was only the Duro Ladipo ensemble that was 'mandated' to put up the TV appearance at that time. A formal complaint was taken to the professional theatre union of Great Britain - the British Equity (BE). To Duro Ladipo's relief, the BE strongly supported the Nigerian troupe's request for proper remuneration. The second episode was the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of the big construction set for *Eda*. As the festival drew to a close without any sight of the set specially made for the European tour, Duro Ladipo became very apprehensive and restless. He had signed a contract to perform *Eda* with Mr. Berenbrok, and nothing, he insisted, would make him break that arrangement. So, Georgina Beier was asked to produce a new, improvised set in the London studio of one of Ulli's friends.

Before leaving the UK, the Duro Ladipo National Troupe was honoured with a medal at Buckingham Palace for outstanding performance. The impressive mark of *Oba Ko So* became highlighted when an old woman fainted as King Sango emitted fire from his mouth; on recovery, the woman expressed delight for witnessing that show in her lifetime! After the performance, there was a standing ovation of a type never seen before by members of the troupe. The cast took a bow, another bow, and yet another

bow but the ovation continued. Trying to find a way to stop the applause, individual members of the cast took their bows, but the ovation persisted. Overwhelmed and seemingly unable to direct his cast for the unending bow, Duro Ladipo sneaked away. Abiodun, equally dumbfounded, thought that Ladipo, Sango himself, should come forward and take the final bow to put a grand end to that memorable night of song and dance. She looked around and discovered that Ladipo had exited. With other members of cast, Abiodun took an unusually awkward exit, bowing and waving at the audience. Once offstage, she went in search of Duro Ladipo, finding him in a crouch behind the dark fringe of the curtains, clasping his fingers in utter embarrassment!

The post-Commonwealth trip was no less interesting and memorable with multiple cross-city performances before several appreciative audiences in Amsterdam, Liege, Brussels, Stuttgart, Bonn, Cologne, Salzburg, Vienna and finally in Frankfurt. Out of all, the Vienna experience was most intriguing. It was in Vienna that the *ose Sango*, the wand of the Thunder God, was stolen; again, a new wand had to be improvised for the performance. It was also in Vienna that the troupe was accorded the most overwhelming reception ever. As reported in the Daily Sketch of Wednesday, September 25, 1968, Duro Ladipo himself recalled, "In Vienna, I signed more than two thousand autographs. The way people came to see our production at every session was terrific."

After that successful extended tour of Europe, the troupe left for Lagos on October 31, 1965 and arrived amidst the strained political situation of the period. It took them some reconnaissance and camouflaging to return safely to Osogbo. Soon after arrival in November, Duro Ladipo was invited to the Government House, Ibadan to be officially presented with another national award: the honourable award of the Member of the Order of the Niger (M.O.N). Actually, the award had been announced on Independence Day in 1964; the letter inviting him to its formal presentation was dated 11th September, 1965, Ref. No. G.580/2/331. The Private Secretary to the Military Governor, Brigadier R.A. Adebayo, who signed the document, had requested Duro Ladipo, in company of "two nominees who may be either your relatives or friends", to report at Government House by 8.45 a.m. for a rehearsal of the ceremony which would be held "on Saturday 25th September, 1965, at 10.00 o'clock a.m." The letter was apparently received after the troupe had left for Europe. In his reply, in a letter dated 20th September, the Troupe's Secretary noted that "as he (Duro) is expected to be back to Nigeria in November, I doubt his being able to appear

for the ceremony at Government House on the stipulated date.”²²

Between the end of 1965 and early 1973, the Duro Ladipo National Theatre did not embark on any overseas trip; rather, it concentrated on performances in local secondary schools, teachers' colleges, town halls and other recreation centres in the three regions of the country. During the first quarter of 1966, the troupe travelled to the East for special performances in Enugu and Nsukka. That trip, which was originally at the instance of the Students Union of the University of Nigeria, was exploited by Duro Ladipo to associate himself with other notable cultural groups in the Eastern region. The national tour also took the troupe to places like Jebba, Bauchi, Kaduna, Zaria, Kano and Maiduguri in the Northern region. Soon, the clouds of the Civil War were gathering; yet, Ladipo never relented in his effort at the theatrical propagation of his indigenous cultural heritage. It was about that time, precisely in 1969, that he founded the Cultural Entertainment Group of Nigeria “with the aim of having a Country wide Theatre...” According to Ladipo, the objective of the cultural tour was “to experiment on the possibility of having a national group of Hausa boys and girls in our team” and “to create an impact on cultural exchange as a means of promoting unity in Nigeria through entertainment.”²³

The year before, 1968, Duro Ladipo arranged a week-long festival of six of his own plays to mark the troupe's first five years anniversary of international recognition. The festival which was held from Monday, 30th September to Saturday, 5th October, was supported by the Western State government and launched by Chief Kolawole Balogun, Commissioner of Economic Planning and Social Development. The special attraction at each night's performance was the display of Yoruba magical art and acrobatic dances. In expressing the troupe's practical patriotic fervour for the young Nigerian nation, a large percentage of the proceeds from that festival was donated to the “Troops Comfort Fund” inaugurated by the national government to execute the task of keeping Nigeria united. At the end of the Civil War in 1970, the troupe marked its seventh anniversary of international recognition with renewed vigour. Actually, 1970 marked the ninth year of Duro Ladipo's full presence on stage starting with the first performance of *Oba Moro* in March of 1961.

In celebration of his theatre's coming of age, a “Duro Ladipo National Theatre Festival of Yoruba Cultural Plays and Dances” was organized with the cooperation of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. The one-week programme, which held from November 3rd to November 14th, featured plays including *Ajagun-Nla*, *Aare Akogun*, *Aaro*

Meta, *Ominira Alajobi*, *Moremi* and *Oba Ko So*. Each performance was preceded by traditional *egungun* acrobatic dances and songs at four different locations including Obisesan Hall, Mapo Hall Auditorium, University of Ibadan's Trenchard Hall and the Institute of African Studies. Ladipo employed the occasion of the festival to showcase his deep knowledge and interest in Yoruba culture and history, drawing heavily on Oyo and Ife legends to produce plays like *Moremi* – “an Ife Heroine Story”, and *Oba Ko So*. Two other plays – *Are Akogun* (an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Othello*) and *Ajagun-Nla* (a story of Esu, Yoruba trickster god and his bloody power game with war leaders) - evidenced the dramatist's capacity to research into cultural symbols for popular presentation. The 1970 festival was officially declared open by Mr. M. A. Omisade, Western State's Commissioner of Information & Home Affairs. As far back as 1970, the accomplished dramatist had a clear vision of what kind of legacy he would pursue and bequeath to others in propagation of contemporary Yoruba culture. Play after play, Ladipo presented superlative production of historical dramas coupled with energetic dances and memorable compositions to the local audiences; he had succeeded in placing the best of cultural Nigeria on the Commonwealth stage; and he was ready to conquer the rest of the world, Europe and the Americas.

In March of 1973, the troupe was invited to participate at the Festival Mondial du Theatre in the city of Nancy, France. Unlike earlier experiences, Ladipo did not encounter any problem in obtaining visas for his company. The main constraint was with the costs of travel. According to Abiodun Duro-Ladipo, the organizers insisted that the troupe should source for flight fees to Nancy with the concession that they would take care of feeding and accommodating the troupe for the three-week trip. *Oba Ko So* was presented with modification for each act to suit the foreign audience. The troupe was met with high commendation and each member was offered special gifts by host-families. Eventually, the Nancy organizers of the festival paid the fare for the troupe's return to Nigeria. The Nancy appearance opened other doors for a number of trips that would continue until 1977. Zurich, Switzerland was the site of an international cultural programme called “Yoruba Festival” which held in September/October, 1973. At the four-week fair, Duro Ladipo International Troupe performed *Oluwari* (researched by Ulli Beier and adapted from the Ijaw-based legend, *Woyengi*) to great success. The tour was sponsored by the Migros Association, Zurich, the Nielberg Museum, Ethnological Institute of Zurich University, and the Cultural Section of the Town of Zurich. The

performance of *Oluweri* was so well received that an encore was requested at the glass-roofed court of the University of Zurich. The play was presented on September 14, 1973 at the historic Kongresshaus.

About the same time, the troupe featured prominently in the Afro-Asia World Festival. This multiple tour of *Oba Ko So* and *Oluweri* would take Duro Ladipo and his cast of seasoned and experienced performers to the Bitef International Festival in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, the seventh Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis in Iran, and the Arts Festival in Rome, Italy. The most memorable of the performances was at Shiraz-Persepolis. After Rome, the troupe was billed to move on to Israel. The plan never materialized because of the war situation in the Middle East. Of that experience, Abiodun Duro-Ladipo would recall:

At Shiraz, there were so many white stones. The heat was so much and we were lodged in the university. We were fed with watermelon. We spent only one night in Rome. We wanted to go to Israel but we were advised against it because of the war. We were stranded. There was no plane. We had to sleep for two days at the airport while they looked for another plane. They went to the Nigerian embassy. The official said there was no provision for us in the regulations since the theatre organization was a one-man business. They could not help us. *Baba* (term of endearment for Duro Ladipo) was very angry. He explained to the members that we have always had problems with our own people. Later they took us to a slum without making provisions for feeding. We were very hungry. They provided a plane the following day.

By the end of 1974, Duro Ladipo had presented four major plays to the international audience – *Oba Ko So*, *Eda*, *Oluweri* and *Moremi*. No other play matched the stature, the magic and rave reviews that attended each production of *Oba Ko So*. The troupe also had the honour of being the first Nigerian cultural organization to present full-length plays before formal audiences in West Germany (1964), England (1965), and in France (1973). Duro Ladipo's dream had always been to perform on American soil. It was to him the highest attainment of international exposure; he was aware of the large presence of African Americans who had cultural ties to Africa, particularly to Yorubaland. He was eager to display the talent of the African in America. To achieve this, he contracted the services of an agent to

begin the process for the tour which was originally planned for the first quarter of 1974. The agent, Mr. Mel Howard, sent a telegram (March 12th, 1974) informing Duro Ladipo of a postponement due to some economic handicap. He wrote to:

*DURO LADIPO HOUSE OF CULTURE OKE ADO 33 COLLEGE
CRESCENT IBADAN SW8-488B NIGERIA.*

*WITH DEEPEST REGRET NEW FINANCIAL AND TRANSPORTATION
PROBLEMS CAUSED BY ENERGY CRISIS FORCE US TO POSTPONE
THIS SPRINGS TOUR STOP WITH YOUR PERMISSION NEW LONG
SOLID TOUR INCLUDING NEW YORK RUN WILL BE BOOKED FOR
NEXT SEASON SAME PERIOD STOP DECISION PAINFULLY
INAVOIDABLE LETTER FOLLOWS.*

- MEL HOWARD

Between March 12 and December 23, 1974, an exchange of letters and telegrams between Howard and Ladipo ensued, updating the travel arrangements and other allied procedures. While plans moved on, another tour of Brazil was organized by Mr. Lola Martins, then the Managing Director of *Afro Beat Nigerian Magazine*. Specifically, the troupe had wide acceptance and popularity in major Brazilian cities including Sao Paulo, Port Alegre, Curitiba, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Belo Horizonte, and Brasilia. But the sour part of the historic tour was that the promoter caused the troupe a lot of anxiety with awkward organizing. The troupe had left Nigeria on September 14, 1974. On landing, there was no pre-arranged accommodation even though there was assurance that a residence awaited the group. Disillusionment set in until a black Latin American medical doctor called Dr. Jose Mendes Ferreira intervened by accommodating and feeding the troupe of twenty-six men and women for their three months stay in Brazil.

Up until death, Duro Ladipo remained ever so grateful to Jose Mendes Ferreira who himself felt honoured to host a world acclaimed and talented 'brother' from Nigeria. Apparently after his contact with Duro Ladipo, Ferreira transformed into a culturally involved Africanist, becoming a leader of the African population of Sao Paulo. He was later initiated and re-named by a Yoruba traditional king as "*Oba Dr. Jose Mendes F. Ge' ju Adelabu III*" ruling from "*Agbala Oba Akoko Ti Ile Brasil*". (Oba Adelabu III maintained constant touch with Abiodun Duro-Ladipo as evidenced in

a letter dated January 17, 1998).

In the streets of Bahia and Sao Paulo, Duro Ladipo was widely admired and treated with especial reverence, almost deified. He was to many the modern reincarnation of Sango, the legend whom he re-created on stage and upon whom his own fame crystallized. In the words of Ulli Beier, "the performance in Bahia in 1969 was the most gratifying to Duro. A large section of the audience was composed of Yoruba descendants, and many were *olorishas*. The emotion aroused by this performance was so powerful that Duro sat down that night and wrote me a long, moving letter – the only letter he ever wrote to me in his whole life."⁴ Before leaving Brazil for the USA, the troupe was awarded a Grand Medal by the Mayor of Sao Paulo. For the American trip, members of the troupe were divided on whether to return to Nigeria first or to move onto the US from Brazil. Ladipo persuaded all on the advantage of cutting cost and travelling straight to North America from the South. He had another reason. He was sure that once his members got to Nigeria, they would likely take the liberty of going on an extended leave from his demanding rehearsals. He did not want to miss the chance of performing to the world in the USA.

Between February and April, 1975, the Duro Ladipo Cultural Theatre International performed at the Third World Theatre Festival and appeared in city after city including Chicago, Boston, Ohio, New York and Washington D. C., achieving greater acclaim. Of his dramatic output, it was noted in the brochure produced by *The Arena Stage*, introducing him to the American audiences, that Duro Ladipo "has written 43 plays, eleven of which have been published and three have been translated into English, German and French."⁵ Another show was staged at Victoria Island in Canada. Mel Howard proved to be a great promoter. Accommodation was comfortable and feeding was very fine. But fatigue soon set in. The troupe had been on the road for six months. It was becoming difficult for Ladipo to get the attention and cooperation of all. Once, in Canada, the drummer who was hired from the court of the *Alaafin* (King of Oyo) refused to disembark from the troupe's bus. Abiodun Duro-Ladipo remembered:

He (the drummer) complained that another member of the group (a co-drummer) was rude to him and that he would not have anything to do with him. And he added, if anything happened to him, the *Alaafin* would hear about it immediately.

Another, the masquerade of Ede declared that he was tired and he wanted to leave. He had stayed for too long from his ancestral home. He threatened that he would use *egbe* (Yoruba transportation talisman) to return home to Ede. To this, Duro Ladipo simply said, "Be careful when you use *egbe*, for you may end up in the ocean!" At the end of this tour, the troupe got another award for the performance of *Oba Ko So* from the Mayor of Washington D.C. Other places where the troupe performed in March of 1975 included Cambridge, Massachusetts at the Harvard's Loeb Drama Center, Sackville, New Brunswick, at the Marjorie Young Bell Convocation Hall under the Mount Allison Performing Arts Series, at the Mechanics Theater, Baltimore, the Westport Playhouse, Connecticut and at the New York City Community College Festival of the Arts. Of note was the coming of age of the showing of Duro Ladipo's magnum opus, *Oba Ko So*, to the international audience. With Mel Howard's assistance, Ladipo produced the American version of *Oba Ko So*, compact and timed, shorter in length and flourish than the original version. First produced locally in 1963, and attaining international status in 1964, *Oba Ko So* had been revised several times for specific audiences that in 1975 it reached almost the ultimate of versions.

The last major international tour of the Duro Ladipo Cultural Theatre International came two years after the American trip, months after FESTAC (2nd World Festival of Black Arts and Culture) which had held in Lagos in January and February of 1977. And this was a special invitation to perform at the Third World Theatre Festival in Paris (House of Culture, Rhonnes), in October. The troupe was sponsored by the International Theatre Institute. After Paris, the troupe made another appearance in Bonn, West Germany. In November, 1977, the great tours wound to a close.

What would have been Duro Ladipo's greatest showing to the international world audience was almost aborted. FESTAC '77, as the Second World Festival of Black Arts and Culture was popularly known, remained the turning point of a great African Renaissance, eleven years after the first fiesta in Dakar, Senegal. All the nations of black people and black cultures were represented, with Nigeria the host nation presenting regional, zonal and state delegates at the month-long multi-million naira festival. For a troupe that had established itself as cultural ambassadors of Nigeria to the outside world, it was the case of the prophet dishonoured in his own homestead. Duro Ladipo, confident and self-assured, would have nothing of the political intrigue that would deny him the opportunity of meeting and conferring with the best of other nations in the art world. On opening day, he appeared, accompanied by two drummers, at the gates of

the National Stadium, Lagos. Breaking protocol, the dramatist, incarnate of *Sango*, at the very height of his popularity, swayed and moved majestically to the deep sonorities of *bata* drums. Duro Ladipo had practically embarrassed the forgetful officers who missed him out in the list of invited troupes. His brief appearance was electrifying, causing the Head of State, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, to point questions in the direction of the Local Organising Committee of the festival. Subsequently, a letter was dispatched from the Cultural Division of the Federal Ministry of Information on 27th January, 1977, Ref. No. CD/CUL.110/T/75, inviting Duro Ladipo and his troupe to perform at the grand finale of the festival. The letter reads:

I am directed to inform you that His Excellency the Head of State Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo has given the directive that there should be a Command Performance to mark the end of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture currently taking place in Lagos.

2. Considering the immense contribution which you have made in the field of Music and Entertainment in Nigeria, I am therefore directed to invite you and your group to take part in the Command Performance coming up on the 11th of February, 1977. You are therefore requested to report at Hotel Bobby, Ikorodu, latest on Sunday, 30th January, 1977 for rehearsals.

3. I am to add that the Federal Government would be responsible for your transportation costs, accommodation and feeding.

4. Please treat as urgent.

Yours faithfully,

Signed

(Dr. Garba Ashiwaju)

Federal Chief Cultural Officer

for: Permanent Secretary

After the Paris-Bonn trip, Duro Ladipo returned to Nigeria to devote more time to two main projects. First, he had dreamt of turning his Bode Wasimi

residence to a mix between a museum of antiquity and a resort centre for artists, more like a return to the early days of the Mbari Mbayo of Osogbo. The other project was his renewed interest in using both the television and the film/cinema as the media of connection with his established local audience. Since 1963, Duro Ladipo had been involved in TV drama series. One of his features was a play entitled "Agbelebu Jesu" recorded for the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV/WNBS). Later, he presented some of his historical plays in the popular Play-of-the-Month Series. His last television series was *Igbo Irunmale*, an adaptation of D. O. Fagunwa's novel - *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* (translated by Wole Soyinka as *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*). He had also ventured into the film-making industry; Ladipo played a major role as actor, composer and music director in the production of *Ajani Ogun* (by Ola Balogun with English & French subtitles), regarded as the first Yoruba film shot on location in Ekiti, 1976.

Amidst this activity, the authorities of the University of Ibadan concluded arrangements to appoint Duro Ladipo as the first indigenous Artist-in-Residence at the Institute of African Studies. His appointment at UI started in January, 1978. Less than three months after, the great dramatist was dead, succumbing to a brief illness which nobody imagined could claim his life. He left this stage of a world, living through life like the very epitome of his patron god, Sango - fiery, theatrical, and bestriding the space like a true and unforgettable colossus.

There were different but related accounts of ominous events about the time of his passage. He would leave the way of great individuals who departed, leaving enigmatic tales and sometimes unresolved matters trailing their steps. Duro Ladipo was, after all, the mortal and artistic representation of *Sango*, the legend and the myth all rolled into one. He must have breathed his last in a hail of storms and lightning on March 11, 1978. The heavens opened up; thunder struck; and when Nature's anger subsided, the news wafted in sheets of rumour: "Duro Ladipo is dead". And then, there were prophetic statements ascribed to the dramatist by his wife and close associates. Ademola Onibonokuta, one-time important member of the troupe, confided that two weeks before (precisely March 1, 1978), Duro Ladipo told him that he was ready to go somewhere yet unknown; Ladipo was said to have added that if he did not return from his 'undisclosed' destination, a statue of his should be erected at the Railway Junction in Osogbo. Wale Ogunyemi (1939-2001), collaborator and Research Fellow at UI Institute of African Studies, once disclosed that Duro Ladipo had

stopped drinking wine one year before his death. Ogunyemi was surprised at this and queried his colleague's withdrawal from wine. Ladipo looked at him and said offhandedly, "Ah, ma wo e. Mo ti nku lo die die" (Don't you see? Am dying, slowly!)

Reports of Duro Ladipo's burial were no less enigmatic. With the full participation of the Western State governments of Oyo and Osun, the dramatist was buried on Saturday, March 25, 1978 in the precinct of Mbari Mbayo, his first home of culture in Osogbo.

Endnotes

¹Nora E. Taylor, "Introducing 'All People to My Culture' in A. Ladipo, *I Only Wanted to Help Him*, p. 33.

² From *The Duro Ladipo Archive: Papers, Letters, Manuscripts and Magazines*

³ "Autobiography", From *The Duro Ladipo Archive: Papers, Letters, Manuscripts and Magazines*.

⁴ In *The Return of Shango: The Theatre of Duro Ladipo*, U. Beier, ed., p. 27.

⁵ In "About the Artist". *Direct from Nigeria: Oba Ko So*, p.12.

III

OYA ON SANGO INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ABIODUN DURO-LADIPO

Q: How did it all start, between Oya and Sango?*

A: The details are enormous and the strands, quite diverse. Once, while Duro Ladipo was trying to court me, he and Ulli Beier resorted to all forms of antics, one of which was to send Bakare Gbadamosi with *aroko* to the Kabiyesi of Epe Ekiti, who in turn sent for my father. My mother was more vehement in her opposition to Duro's proposition and she would not allow him to step into the house. Sensing this hostility, my father quoted a passage from the Bible to the effect that it is a curse to reject a stranger. His intention was to diffuse the tension. It wasn't so much that my parents were disposed to imposing a spouse on me. I guess they wanted me to pick a husband of my choice without any sense of pressure. Yet they were themselves wary of letting go a daughter and princess with such family ties to an artist. It was that complex in those days. For a generally shy person, I am sure that Duro's confidence must have been partly encouraged by his German friend, Ulli Beier, who had pronounced almost in a strange tone: "Duro, if Asake goes away, you're finished."

When Duro eventually showed up in our house, he caused quite a stare with his beard and height. He called me aside and said he would wish that we were not separated, but that if we were to get separated, we should still be friends, to which I retorted: "Wherever have you heard of any relationship between a young girl and old man?" This was in 1963.

Duro could be quite dramatic even at the personal level. Quietly, he would remove strands of his grey hair and drop them in our house, as a show of his commitment to me. On another occasion, he visited my sister's house in Osogbo, where I was then staying, and lied to her that my parents had consented to the relationship. We then sneaked to a nearby eatery, I think it was Akeju Hotel, where he went on an extended talk, trying to persuade me and alleviate my fears. He delved into his childhood and told me moving stories of his upbringing, his wife and children, and yet how he felt for me and wished we could be partners. When I consented, it was in the spirit of assisting him. I only felt like helping him... I sort of took pity on him. Shortly before we went to

receive the national merit award which he had just won, he took an oath with the Bible that his proposition to me was honest. Only then did I agree to go with him.

Q: In specific terms, what were the factors that attracted you to him?

A: He had the ability to study a personality deeply and assign the proper role to him. This quality of his insight also informed why I developed interest in him. But my family was initially opposed to our relationship. I once went to him swollen-faced but didn't wish to disclose the reason. He wanted to know the cause and I explained that I would prefer not to be cast in any major role because of this problem. He however reorganized rehearsal schedule to favour my attendance. This touched me tremendously because it struck me that here was an extremely sensitive man.

Q: What was the nature of your quarrels?

A: We once had a quarrel over my Parker pen. I treasured it so much but had to lend it to him after some persuasion. When he lost the pen, I grew pretty angry and told him to go and buy another one. On another occasion I delayed his rehearsal because I wasn't able to leave home since my sister was around. My sister would have yelled at me saying that how could I be doing a useless, worthless job? When I eventually got to rehearsal, Duro Ladipo tongue-lashed me severely, saying that I didn't show sufficient seriousness.

Ironically, I was quite happy at this, since this gave me an opportunity to leave. But Duro Ladipo devised a method of reporting me to my uncle, saying that I'd been very rude to him. My uncle didn't know that this was merely a ploy to get me back. So when my uncle said I should kneel down and apologize, I refused and this became a source of embarrassment to Duro Ladipo who eventually apologized to my uncle. Somehow, we found a way around it when I put my point straight to him on my problems at home.

Q: What were the challenges of maintaining the theatre company?

A: Once we were rehearsing, I think *Oba Moro*, members of the cast felt they should organize a boycott on account of a grievance. After the resolution of the disagreement, all the troupe members, except Karimu Adepoju, returned. This is the genesis of how Adepoju (popular as 'Baba Wande') went to the Oyin Adejobi group. He explained that he couldn't afford to be seen as a traitor since he was only abiding by a group decision.

Then there came a point when I thought my world was collapsing. Members of the group felt I was depriving them of higher income, while members of the extended family also thought along the same line. But the real situation was totally different from these assumptions. In reality we had to take loans from my parents to sustain the group. They were soft loans, that is without interest rate. And they were usually repaid. There were times when my family would send us foodstuffs; all of this greatly helped us to stabilize. Then we also took costumes from my father, some of which we never returned. Yet the accusation piled against me from members of the group. I thought of it all and decided to call it quits. I called my husband and told him just that. In response, he went theatrical again by reporting to Mr and Mrs Oduntan that Oya had decided that she wasn't interested in the relationship any more. So the couple came and reprimanded me severely, though they acknowledged the rather difficult situation I was going through. Apart from this couple, hardly did anyone else know about these problems, such that one of the wives once complained that our husband was always picking quarrels with her while he was always more understanding with me.

Q: How did he compose?

A: Each time we wanted to write a new play, we would travel to my home town. There, Duro seemed to get his inspiration. Even the croaking of the toad gave him inspiration; the whispering palms; the chirping of the bird; basically all of that rural set up gave him a creative push. It was usually after such a trip, when an initial draft would have been written, that we got back to the city and other parts were filled in.

Q: Did he ever write you into his script?

A: Not directly. He once dedicated a play titled "Ma Gb'ara Lewon" [Don't Trust Them] to me. The storyline revolves around a girl whose parents attempt to bring her up in a noble manner. Against all pressures she refuses to be carried away by the lure of wealth and fame even when kings and princes request to marry her. She marries a man from a humble home. After a while with her husband, things begin to turn sour because of the family's financial misfortune. A friend of hers seizes upon this moment and advises her to divorce her husband. But the girl perseveres until she discovers that her adviser was trying to upstage her.

Q: What sort of problems did the troupe encounter over this period? Can you remember other incidents?

A: On one occasion I couldn't go for a rehearsal of *Ija Ominira* because I was pregnant. This created a problem of substitution. On another occasion, Duro complained that some members of the cast had gone to drink. When he decided to reprimand them, they retaliated by throwing stones at the company's vehicle. Also, some of the girls weren't particularly happy that they could not develop private relationships with him, an attitude that was quite popular among theatre practitioners of that era. He would flog any erring girl in the manner of the teacher that he was once. One of the artists came complaining that he had lost his father and Duro gave some generous sum for the burial. For some curious reason, the same fellow returned after about three months to recount the same story. Maybe he thought that Duro would have forgotten! A group of artists were then sent with him to enquire and they returned with the shocking information that there was no death in the first place.

An equally funny incident took place while we were on tour to USA. When we got to our destination, one of our *dundun* drummers simply refused to come down. We returned to the bus and found him complaining about Adesina, another drummer. When he was told that he could simply die of exposure to the cold weather, he replied by saying that was precisely what he wished. The root of the problem, as we later found out, was that there was petty rivalry between the two. You know how jealous *dundun* drummers can be? Don't forget that the *dundun* drum 'talks' just like the human voice and its message can be as equally potent. We had to resolve, or at least minimize, the conflict since they were usually paired in performance.

On our return from the Commonwealth Festival of 1965, we discovered that an attempt had been made to burn down our house as a result of the election crisis of that period, ostensibly on the assumption that we belonged to an opposition party. We slept in the bush for seven days. To save the family from further harassment, we had to display the symbol of the ruling party in front of our house. But immediately after the military coup, soldiers moved around town removing flags and symbols of political parties from public places and residential houses including our own. It was a relief. That was the first time I would see a large number of military men coming to town in broad daylight.

Q: Out of the four plays you took to the international stage - *Oba Ko So*, *Eda*, *Oluwari* and *Moremi* - there is no doubt that *Oba Ko So* was the most warmly received by your audiences.

A: Yes, and it was the most widely travelled of all, since 1964. We had different versions of *Oba Ko So*. We produced the English version in 1987.

Q: Can you compare other productions of *Oba Ko So* after 1977 with the ones in which Duro Ladipo himself acted Sango from 1963 through to his death?

A: Incomparable. The ones we did after my husband died, and the ones others have tried to do, are mere child's play; they don't have the quality of the original productions.

Q: This reminds one of the story of the fire-spitting appearances of Chief Duro Ladipo on stage. We heard that in Brazil he actually emitted fire from his mouth. Is it true?

A: Ah, not just anybody can do it.

Q: You mean it actually happened. Nobody can do it?

A: Yes, nobody except that person is *well* [read *metaphysically*] supported.

Q: So he alone can do it?

A: (Laughter) I mean anybody well protected and equipped can do it. Oh, you don't understand. I mean, except, emm... don't you know? *Enikan ni nbe leyin Oro, t'Oro fi n'ke*. [It is the human support of the Oro, that gives the masquerade the potency of a piercing voice]. That is what I mean.

Q: One remembers that when we used to act *Oba Ko So* in our secondary school days, the Sango character would put kerosene in his mouth and blow it holding a lit match far away from himself. On one occasion, the actor nearly got burnt in the process. But how is it possible to emit fire in the mouth without the use of kerosene and matches? How?

A: At the Commonwealth Festival in 1965, the man generally believed to be the best photographer tried to snap the picture of that fire coming from Sango's mouth. He failed. He tried for a whole week but failed. The man almost cried. If we want to act *Oba Ko So* or put it on screen now, we will have to use effects.

Q: But how is it possible for anybody to spit fire, real fire?

A: Oh, you don't know, isn't it possible?

Q: Is it?

A: It is not possible? (Laughter). *Ah, nkan nbe l'abe orun* [Strange things abound in our world]. Our fathers have powers. Okay, look at those

magicians who cut their tongues and join them again. What about those *Alarinjo Apidan* (magicians of the minstrelsy tradition) who can transform into large-size pythons?

Q: Is it true that Sango received the support of traditional rulers, worshippers and cultists. Some people claim that he was initiated into some prominent Yoruba cults.

A: Hmm... He received the support of kings and chiefs. He needed them, for without that, those things we did would be impossible. This is why I feel bad and terrible when I see some people planning to do *Oba Ko So* without due recognition. Oh, when I think of all we went through, through night and day.

Q: That means you took the play *Oba Ko So* more than a play. It was a serious affair.

A: Well, it depends on what you mean. We had to go in, we had to learn the roots of Yoruba culture from elders. We had to get close to them, otherwise it would be impossible.

Q: Let's talk about the form of your plays. Your stage-plays do not have 'opening glees' as it was popular then with the tradition of Yoruba theatre.

A: You mean specialized dancing at the beginning of plays? We don't have opening glees at all. But we do have the closing glees in our typical production. At the end, we would sing a song on the moral message of the play; then we would complete it with the Osogbo 'national' anthem.

Q: One gets the feeling that in getting supernatural acts into stage performance, there may be times when the process will malfunction. Do you remember such moments if any?

A: Not in our group. But indeed, there were occasions when voices of actors were "seized". But we were hardly bothered in our own group since we ensured that we pay our homage properly. By this I mean that we acknowledged the supernatural and gave them their dues. The Sango costume which Duro Ladipo used was essentially wet. Once we had to propitiate with a life fowl during one of our tours abroad. Our European hosts thought anything could do and thereby proposed a roasted chicken. We would have nothing of that. After a while we got the life fowl and the ritual was offered to appease the deities. The production went as we expected.

Q: During the World Festival of Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977, your husband made a brief dramatic appearance as Sango. Is it true that he “gate-crashed” the event, that your troupe was not formally invited?

A: Yes, we were not invited to the festival. This was after our return from Europe and America. My husband wanted to go to prove his worth before the international audience. He said there were troupes and other people who would be coming to Nigeria on account of his reputation. Actually, some of his friends abroad had written that they would be visiting. So he felt it would be shameful for him not to appear at the festival. He said he would go, though uninvited. He knew he was taking a risk and told me not to follow him. He asked me to turn on the television for the live broadcast of the opening show. He said he owed the security operatives at the festival only a bullet if they must refuse him entry.

He took along two drummers. With the help of somebody, he found his way into the National Stadium. He was in full *aso-oke*; he wore beads, a chief's fan in his right hand and the *Oya* totem in his left. He danced and danced and stole the show. After that, our troupe was invited to do a command performance of *Oba Ko So* at the grand finale of the festival.

Q: You had children while on tour. How did you manage?

A: I managed well. I went on stage even when I was pregnant. I was always performing. It's only in the last month of each of my pregnancies that I used to stay away from the stage. You know, nobody is certain about the delivery period.

Q: Did you anticipate his death?

A: Shortly before he died, he started behaving differently. I remember that he began to visit some places, which we would have both attended, without me. Then he stopped drinking. The colour of his eyeballs changed. You needed to see him when he was alive. He had bloodshot eyes. I once complained that his eyeballs were turning more bloodshot, he replied by saying I should not expect anything less from the god of thunder. He said I should be worried only if his eyes turned white. So when that tiredness came and I saw his eyeballs whitish, I feared for the end. This was actually what frightened me the most. Towards the end, he requested that I should come and chat him up. I replied that he should give me time to finish plaiting the hair of one of the girls. Then, he told me to start packing my belongings in the house. He went on to seal the adjoining door to our rooms, so that to get to his room I had to go through the living room. I was very angry and spoke harshly to him but he was not angry.

He only replied that the door would be opened in the third month. Truly enough, the door was opened by the third month but by someone else because that was when he died. He also told a childhood friend, Mr Alabi to come over in a fortnight for a last supper. His friend replied lightheartedly that the phrase was meant for the Bible. He just laughed. Mr Alabi overlooked his comment, suggesting that it was the unusual way of artists. The supper did not hold.

Q: How did you cope with the education of the children?

A: I remember that when elders are asked of their past and beginnings, they reply with an extended grunt, "ooh". I guess that such a lengthening of response is a reflection of the crests and troughs of living, which they are trying to capture. In specific terms, I really cannot believe how we pulled through. Just before Duro Ladipo died we were hoping to get a vehicle because the old car got stolen. I did a thirteen-episode play titled *Binaku* in 1981 on N.T.A. It was a two-hours-per-episode play. Since I had no other job, I was fully married to the theatre. It was difficult getting by. I really can't remember how I pulled through, especially with the responsibility of finding the kids' school fees and upkeep. I think it was the divine grace of Olodumare, the Almighty.

Q: What is the story behind getting *Oba Ko So* into celluloid?

A: The idea became very dear to Duro Ladipo's heart soon after the 1977 tour, which turned out to be his last international outing. When he joined the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ibadan, he made a proposal for the sponsorship of the film. In the plan, Wale Ogunyemi would be the writer of the script while Tunde Adeniyi would be the photographer/cameraman. He approached one wealthy man in Ijesaland. I think his name is Ajijola. A deal was struck and he was happy because his pet dream was coming to fruition. But then death came calling. The wealthy patron died unexpectedly and the hope for the film was shattered. The Institute had the technical know-how and was ready to assist us in filming *Oba Ko So* for posterity, but the Institute lacked the financial resources. We tried after his death.

Q: One notices that you have preserved a substantial part of the Duro Ladipo heritage. How did you acquire this sense of documentation?

A: When I saw that we were making progress, I sensed the need to also remember how we came and got to the present situation. I guess I had the gift from childhood. This also endeared me to my husband. There were playlets

and scribbles which were given up for lost but which I simply produced from the countless piles I had been keeping for him. I generally couldn't cope with things not being valued even if we didn't have an immediate use for them. I started cutting and clipping news documents since 1964. There were moments when we would be set for the stage and suddenly discover that an important item was forgotten. Somehow, I would usually have taken note of such items and would produce them.

I was also inspired to keep documents by an experience I had while in the United States. An American actress who had lost her spouse created a mini-museum which not only preserved the memory of the deceased but was also patronized by lovers of art. I was impressed.

Endnote

*In the play, *Oba Ko So*, Duro Ladipo acted and became stylized as *Sango*, god of thunder; his second wife, Abiodun (nee Olufarati) came to be known by her stage name – *Oya*, the river goddess. *Sango* and *Oya* are husband and wife in Yoruba mythology.

IV

**IJUBA
WORDS ON THE MARBLE**

The individual voices which make up this chapter are representative of the wide range of reflections of close friends, associates, patrons and critics of Duro Ladipo. For the stature and experience of this man-of-theatre, any attempt at making reminiscences, paying homage or drawing comparisons cannot be exhaustive. And so we are well aware of the shortcoming of not being able to register the comments of others who would have complemented the image of the man of culture and accomplished dramatist that Duro Ladipo was. Recorded here is a welter of intimations and observations, as homage to the composer, director and actor, the man Duro Ladipo.

Pa A.T.O. Odunsi (former Headmaster, St. Philips School, Otan-Ayegbaju)

"Duro challenged me to write a play"

...In 1946, I was transferred from St. James' Oke Bola, Ibadan to St. Philip's Central, Otan-Ayegbaju. I was appointed as the Headmaster. Duro Ladipo was one of the pupil teachers at St. Philip's and it did not take long for me to discover the young man's talent. His parents were leaders at St. Matthew's Church in Ila-Orangun. His father studied missionary work under a white man called Archdeacon Mickay in Osogbo around 1897. His mother hailed from the family of Chief Laseinde of Ora, who was the town's first Christian convert and who popularized the religion in the province. I recognized Duro as a scion of strong and notable Christians. His parents had high hopes that their child, whom they believed was eight times over an *abiku*, would grow to be a priest and serve the church. Before I arrived at Otan-Ayegbaju, I had noticed how schoolchildren loved dances and songs composed by Hubert Ogunde; I guessed that learning by pupils would be enjoyable if we could employ stage plays as done by Ogunde in schools. A man called P. A. Dawodu (then a Manager of National Bank, Ibadan) founded a drama group and I was an active member until I left Ibadan for Otan-Ayegbaju.

I introduced stage-play performances to the town. Duro Ladipo was experienced in such performances. As pupil teacher, he was the one who prodded me regularly on the need to establish a group in Otan Ayegbaju. One day, Duro brought an exercise book to my office as a gesture to challenge me to write a play. That was how I was 'compelled' to compose songs and write a play entitled "Onisuru ni i se oko omo Alahusa" in which Duro played the lead role of farmer. That was the breakthrough. The performance was memorable. Duro excelled and that perhaps was the day he realized he could be on the way to stardom if he continued acting. In short, Duro Ladipo moved to Ilesha where he developed full interest in stage plays and where he associated with Mr. Alex Peters whom he later followed to Kaduna producing plays even though both of them were school teachers primarily...

If it was said that I introduced Duro Ladipo into acting and Alex Peters developed him into actor-director, it would be right to say that Mr. Ladipo himself sustained his enthusiasm and talent for original composition and dramatic performance. He grew to be highly respected as a composer and chronicler of African cultural heritage.

From 1959 (the year I returned from the USA) till his last days, Duro Ladipo always referred to me and sought my contribution for all of his plays. I was always ready to give these before and after the production of his plays. However when he staged *Oba Ko So*, I was not happy because of the tragic nature of the play. I hid my feelings from him; instead, I encouraged him to continue with the production. I said 'even if you present this play a thousand times, do not be tired, improve on it.'

Duro Ladipo soon became the popular champion of Yoruba culture. He travelled overseas many times with different plays. Once he returned home, he brought with him a trumpet which he introduced to his stage orchestra. I advised him to make use of traditional musical instruments instead of Western instruments. Duro researched into indigenous materials; he became immersed in the course of traditional African philosophy; and he never looked back. Can I confirm that Duro Ladipo was an Orisa worshipper? My answer is 'No! Duro was a staunch Christian. He was an important member of the Youth Christian Circle of St. James's Cathedral, Oke Bola, Ibadan. He always attended church armed with a tape recorder which he used to record both songs and sermons for replay both for his and his friends' benefits...

In my own view, Duro Ladipo was an honourable man. He's someone who had true love and was a cheerful giver. Relatively comfortable,

he could go to any length of sacrifice in the search of traditional Yoruba culture, lore and philosophy. I should think that this deep interest must have caused him to join the R.O.F (*Reformed Ogboni Fraternity*), the membership of which was not known to me till his burial day.

I greet you, Duro Ladipo, M.B.E., M.O.N. Sleep well, rest in peace.

From *Text of an Interview granted to a 3-man panel of a Yoruba programme on the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Ibadan; translation by Authors.*

Ulli Beier

"He was a lateral thinker"

"Duro will always be remembered as the playwright whose insight into Yoruba history and religion caused a whole generation to perceive their tradition in a different light. Although for years he had to suffer taunts of 'olorisha' and 'idol worshipper', by the time he died he had become a veritable hero. When people called him Shango, it was in terms of the highest respect. It would be wrong however to think of Duro as a narrow traditionalist, let alone a conservative. He had learned to enjoy the splendour, the intrigue and the wisdom of Yoruba culture, but his mind was wide open to other ideas, from all over the world. He had a healthy curiosity, was a lateral thinker and was prepared to use any material for his plays, from whatever source, if it fired his imagination.

He would use biblical material as easily as Johnson's *History of the Yoruba*, he incorporated material from other Nigerian cultures and even tried his hand at European plots. He was always curious about theatre in Europe and asked me to tell him about German plays. In the days when he had to come up with a new TV play every week, he actually adapted the plot of an 18th century German play *Nathan der Weise* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing."

From *"Border Crossing" in The Return of Shango: The Theatre of Duro Ladipo, p. 43.*

Chief Segun Olusola

"The stage was his home"

I met Duro Ladipo about 1959, 1960, when we were collecting materials for the new TV station in Ibadan and I was privileged to be one of the founding producers of that station. We attempted to introduce theatre into the programme fare.

The idea then was that Nigerian theatre was not suitable for

television; we were going to depend on a lot of imported films or plays from abroad. My search for materials took me necessarily to Osogbo because Ulli Beier, my personal friend who is in his late 70s now, was also very keen in ensuring that the materials used on television were local materials. Ulli Beier had also made contact with Duro Ladipo and so his name came up. I saw him, he was already a working theatre artist with a lot of people around him, and I thought that the material he was working with were the kind of materials that we would need for the new TV station at that time. You will see that I have not put an exact time to it, because our relationship grew to the extent that I would go from Ibadan to Osogbo to rehearse what materials he has that would be suitable for television and the earliest recollection I can have is that of my going to Osogbo to make him put together a play on the nativity – the birth of Christ Jesus and how to modify this for television and I remember rehearsing sometime in 1960 on the premises of the local Anglican Church and the priest in charge of that church came out, it was on his premises, and he was shocked that we were attempting to use palm wine for the last supper! For instance in the story of Jesus, we were trying to use *akara* (Yoruba *bean-cake*) for the bread that was broken not to talk about the costumes we were designing for the disciples of Jesus. To the priest, what we were attempting to do was like a travesty; but the rest is history.

Duro Ladipo's Nativity and the Bible stories became very popular long before he then went into writing and producing the cultural ritual plays of the great kings and gods of Yorubaland like *Oba Ko So*, *Oba Waja* and several other productions.

It was an unbroken relationship from 1960/61 right up until the mid-seventies because, although I had left Ibadan for Lagos, in 1964, we were still in close touch up until that time. Duro Ladipo passed on at a rather early age for a theatre person but the record of his work is there for everybody to see. He made very significant contributions to Yoruba theatre. As a person, he lived a life of innovation; he was a leader who must use what he has to push forward, to advance his artistic interest. Such things like having more than one wife, for instance, such things as making sure that women in his life also became so related to him as a person that he could call on them at any time to work for the arts which are the same traditions set up by the late Hubert Ogunde who was reputed to have married many wives, and so he was not doing anything unique in his personal life that had not been done before. He made use of the people around him, his relationships to advance his artistic interests.

As for the stature of his work, I think it is the number of younger artistes who related and worked with him and what they made of their lives subsequently that would confirm the influence that Duro Ladipo's life and work had on people. We had people in those days who were very young, artistes who worked very closely with him, talking about Muraina Oyelami, Twins Seven-Seven, Rufus Ogundele who had since passed on, talking about several of them who were not primarily just actors and dramatists but artistes interested in costumes, drawing, painting, singing and their gifts in their various art forms found expression in relating with Duro Ladipo. He gave them ample opportunities to become members of the Duro Ladipo group not only as actors, stage assistants but also opportunities for them to develop their own art forms in the plastic arts, singing, and in drumming. Muraina Oyelami ended up being a master drummer, one of the most outstanding *dun-dun* drummers of our time. He worked with us in several productions using the drums as his base.

Duro Ladipo used the people around him to advance the vision of his art; and with respect to the content of his work and art, he influenced people beyond the theatre like most fine artistes mentioned earlier. I had one of his plays translated by Ulli Beier and the title is *Oba Waja*: "The Oba has ascended to the loft," a way of saying "The Oba has passed on." It is in the reading of the translation of his work that you'll see the beauty of Ladipo's poetry, dirges, and incantatory compositions. I personally think that his mastery of Yoruba dirge and his staging of "war dance" are two very significant contributions that he, as an artist, made to Yoruba theatre. The dance of confrontation he created, for instance, for Timi and Gbonka, in *Oba Ko So* remains for me one of the most outstanding uses of Bata drums that I have ever seen. I'm talking about an event of over thirty years ago, that caught my attention and still reverberates. The dirges in *Oba Waja* are so remarkable that they're not easy to match; even in translation, I still find them exceedingly quaint when I go through them.

Unfortunately not all his works got a complete translation into English for performing the way *Oba Waja* came to us. I first produced it for television in 1964, and now I don't know if there's any record of it anywhere because *Oba Waja* contains some very unforgettable dirges. I hope I can still lay hands on it.

Naturally, Duro Ladipo would have done more than he did if he had lived longer. But it is neither here nor there, he passed on when he did, his mission accomplished. For every human person there can be nothing like 'if you give me one more day, I'll achieve more.' As you come into this

cycle of life you are given a period to achieve what you can and there can be no questioning the Almighty. But nobody knows whether one more year for Duro Ladipo could have been one more year of disaster and I mean it could have been unproductive and afflicted by other impediments that would have made it impossible to improve on what he had done. But given the last 10 years of his life and his readiness to go into film for instance, one would have wished as a human being that had he lived longer, he too would have made significant contribution to cinema which was what we said of the older man Hubert Ogunde when he too passed on in the midst of a cinematic career that was like launching him into another career. Well, we thank God for Duro Ladipo's life, we believe his mission had been accomplished, we believe those he worked with and handed over to, who have now been able to also add their own contributions to the legacies are sufficient for us to say of Duro Ladipo, "He led a very productive life, his legacies will remain for all times because the people who related with him and learnt from him keep producing newer, perhaps even better works which is in the nature of the creative process."

Duro Ladipo was a very, very influential person who saw himself, having been gifted with the talent of the theatre arts, as the centre of influence, of generating ideas, who saw himself as the leader of a movement and he tended, in his life time, to forget that in fact, there could be other people doing much the same things but in different formats even in languages other than the Yoruba. He came in to learn about Kola Ogunmola for instance, and it took him sometime to accommodate the fact that Kola Ogunmola had been there before him although his talent and skills lay in the content of his work in a slightly different dimension. Kola Ogunmola was more contemporary, modern in that sense of interpreter of life and his plays are more everyday, with very little of the historical sources that Duro Ladipo had. But Duro Ladipo had seen himself as somebody who brought images from history, from the ancestors and who has sole proprietary right to such images. Of course we now know that is not quite right. Ancestors, history, culture, tra-ditions belong to the whole world, not to any one genera-tion, it's a pool that people must draw from. Duro Ladipo was one of the first to draw from this pool of culture, tradi-tion, history, but was certainly not the only one. Duro Ladipo was a leader, actor and he lived like a lead actor in many respects; that is probably why the members of his group could co-heir together along this lofty, huge leader-image of a master director and I think he made his mark. There can never be another Duro Ladipo and when you see him on stage, for me his role in *Oba Ko So* was

unique. There can never be another 'Sango' the way Duro Ladipo would play it.

It is a sad loss that when you look back at the losses this country has suffered from Kola Ogunmola to Duro Ladipo, to Hubert Ogunde, to Bobby Benson, to the great man himself Orlando Martins, and much more later on to my dear friend Art Alade. These are very sad losses, I hope that it would be possible for those who are responsible for the arts and culture in this country to start developing memorials, memory jotters, inspirational references against these people who had made significant contributions to the arts and culture of the land.

Duro Ladipo lives on in those songs, in those dirges, certainly, in the imagery of the Sango that I would bear with me for all time.

Susanne Wenger

"The Theatre was his ritual setting"

If you know my ritual son, Sangodare who lives with me here, you'll notice a striking resemblance with Duro Ladipo. They look like brothers. Duro Ladipo was really an *Olorisa* and *Onisango* and he held a high title in the Ogboni cult.

Duro was a genius. He was the first that really made the myth of Sango and other Orisas alive on the stage. You know there are many poets and writers in English history, but there is only one Shakespeare.

It was Ademola Onibonokuta who taught Duro Ladipo the *Oriki* of Sango, before the latter came to become knowledgeable in it. He was the one suggesting *Oriki Orisa*, of which he knew a lot and still collects more, to Duro Ladipo who was very gifted and enthusiastic. So, with Duro Ladipo and the older Ogunde, it was possible to get the religious experience on the stage, but we the *Olorisa* who make the *ebo* (ritual offering) couldn't stand to sit in the theatre and watch because in making *ebo* you don't have people standing all around taking photographs. It somehow violates the necessary privacy in such ventures.

But the theatre also needed its own atmosphere. Perhaps we were as disturbing to Duro as the theatre was disturbing to us the *Olorisa*. I was then married to Ayansola, the traditional drummer and once we had to go to see *Oba Ko So*. Though it was a good showing, midway into the performance we had to leave because, steeped in ritual as it was, it came to us like a violation of taboo, a violation of privacy. The truth is Duro Ladipo was quite deep and more intense than Kola Ogunmola for instance. The late Hubert Ogunde too, was a modern version of the *Orisa* religion.

KAWE

"The gods are wicked to Duro"

Duro Ladipo did not come my way accidentally. He was my elder, I knew him during my teenage days at Osogbo, Otan Ayegbaju and Ila Orangun. While Duro was the restless son of a devout catechist at Otan Ayegbaju, I was tender in age, learning from the Reverend Fathers. The white priests were stationed at Osogbo and I served them as a mission boy. For Sunday services, we often traveled to either Otan Ayegbaju or Ila Orangun. And on several occasions, Duro was always around to lead the young to the bush after the service – killing rats, hunting rabbits, stealing yams, playing pranks...

The first public performance of Duro was the drama competition organized by him with the assistance of Mr. Beier after I had left college. I was then teaching at the Saint Francis Girls' Modern School and my students won the first prize. With this group, Duro staged the plays – Christmas cantata and "the Stations of the Cross" which were well received by the people. By then, Duro had allowed his father's house in the town to be used as a Cultural Centre. It was called MBARI and in it, traditional activities were mounted every day. It was a real cultural renaissance. The late Kola Ogunmola was also around. There was the Fakunle Major Band, I.K. Dairo was also playing occasionally at Gemini Bar owned by a Syrian who is now dead. Oyin Adejobi was also active with his ever distinct plays which were presented in more serious Yoruba usage of words...

We had disagreed sharply after he realized I was no more interested in propagating some aspects of Nigerian tradition. I told him I was fed up with mysterious science which for centuries has never aided our civilization, instead, we sink daily in backwardness, ignorance, poverty, wickedness, jealousy and lack of brotherly love. He was bitterly opposed to my idea of condemning FESTAC and could not see the wisdom of Kawe, a former advocate of Nigerian culture criticizing the motive behind the mounting of the blacks' cultural fiesta...

Alas! Duro had already succumbed to my idea and was about writing plays on these views when his gods took him away. We expected the black gods to allow longevity and not premature death as a reward for Duro who spent his whole life propagating their power and the way they had influenced and retarded the blacks in the world at large.

From *Daily Sketch, Wednesday, March 15, 1978*. p. 5.

Prof S. O. Biobaku

"He was a rare genius"

I became aware of his activities at Osogbo. He was very popular as a composer and a man of theatre. When I arrived at the Institute of African Studies (University of Ibadan), it occurred to me that more cultural activities such as projected by him should be integrated in the project of the Institute. In fact the activity of the Institute was relatively unknown then. So when in 1977 I got the idea of introducing him as artist-in-residence to the Institute, the Vice-Chancellor Professor Tekena Tamuno bought the idea. As artist-in-residence, he was expected to participate practically in the cultural programme of the Institute. He was also supposed to write, compose and stage plays, under the auspices of the Institute. His appointment in August was to be for the first nine months. He was not graded as a Lecturer. We were just beginning to enjoy his stay before his unfortunate death. I will describe him as a man of good and huge physique and wonderful presence, a rare genius who was devoted to the propagation of the culture of his people. Once you meet him, you will never forget him. As Mrs Pat Oyelola said, "He is a big big man." He has had a tremendous influence on Yoruba theatre and its practice. And apart from Hubert Ogunde, he was a magnetic character of incomparable stature.

Interviewed March 10, 1998.

Robert G. Armstrong

"He was a trail blazer"

The opera ends with a blaze of song on the words *Oba Ko so*, "The King did not hang!" All things considered, Ladipo's opera is a fine, trail-blazing work. If it has flaws, we may measure them against the obvious flaws of most opera, which is a big, hybrid art in which it is difficult to manage all the variables. So far as poetry is concerned, where Ladipo is writing his own lines, he is competing against the magnificent traditional verse that he has himself introduced into his drama. Few individual poets indeed would come off well in such a competition.

If the words that the author gives Sango to say sometimes come off badly beside the splendid things that were said *about* him, still they have the virtue of being concise; and Ladipo himself is such a magnificent Sango figure on the stage that we are willingly swept along by his enthusiasm and the verve of his company.

* From *the Duro Ladipo Archive: Papers, Letters, Manuscripts and Magazines.*

Professor Adedeji Awoniyi*"He was a god of drama"*

Unknown to many, Chief Duro Ladipo had his cultural roots in Ila Orangun and Otan Ayegbaju in Osun State. As contemporaries at Ila Orangun, we found him to be unique and unnatural. We often thought and sincerely believed that he was a reincarnation of one of the Yoruba gods. The way he looked, mysteriously and piercingly or behaved and dramatized as a young man, even at play or when we drank traditional palm wine together, baffled us.

When he blossomed as a dramatist (we were again together at Osogbo), we were never surprised because his latent talents were divine and original. In all his plays and acting, he played god in human form. He lived and died supernaturally as a god shaking his world before and after his death. He lived in the hearts of his admirers. When he spitted fire in his acting, or when he played the majestic Oba in any of the plays, he transformed mystically.

Only few believed that he was born by earthly parents. No wonder, years after his death a few still believed he never died (but disappeared like Enoch to heaven). He lived on forever in the hearts of his colleagues, contemporaries, admirers, and critics both in Nigeria and abroad. Goodbye, Duro Ladipo, the god of drama.

Interviewed on January 11, 1998.

Muraina Oyelami*"He was a great manager"*

[*With Duro Ladipo*] I learned that one can create great things with little or no money, as Duro had done. We gave Duro a rough time – we did not always fully appreciate the heavy responsibility that rested on him: the strain of having to keep the company together, of having to feed us even in meager times. Today, with the perspective of time, we can appreciate his achievement better.

From *My Life in the Duro Ladipo Theatre*, pp.15-16.

Lere Paimo (a.k.a Eda)*Duro Ladipo: A Man Of Honour*

Duro Ladipo, my master, was extremely committed to African culture and art. He was concerned about his name and his honour. The old masters - Ogunde, Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo - all of them had total commitment to

the theatre. We cannot compare their time with this period. The young ones now are less concerned with the art; money is the in-thing. Duro Ladipo wanted to display his talent, first and foremost, not minding the material gain or loss.

Interviewed (1998).

Jimoh Buraimoh

“Duro had great endurance...”

I vividly remember the day of the first coup on January 16th 1966. We were supposed to play at the Mbari Club in Ibadan, but we were unable to perform, because the soldiers were swarming about everywhere. That was the day on which Akintola was killed. So we rushed back to Oshogbo. From Mbari Mbayo I went home with the driver, whose house was opposite mine. On the way, we saw the house of a politician burning. He was a member of the NNDP. Big flames were shooting up. Then we knew there would be trouble that night. I went home straight but soon some thirty or forty people emerged near my house. They were talking inside the petrol station. I went on pretending to be one of the people buying petrol. They were saying that they were going to burn the houses of NNDP supporters. They mentioned names; and before they could mention three, I heard Duro’s name!

Then I knew they wanted to burn Duro’s house and maybe even kill him. So I decided to go and warn him. I switched on a red bulb in my room so that my father would think I had gone to sleep, when he came home. Then I went to Duro’s house. I didn’t realize that I was going to spend nine days there!

I met him drinking beer and relaxing. He asked: ‘Why did you come back?’ I said: ‘There is trouble coming.’ He said: ‘What kind of trouble?’ I told him I had overheard some people saying they were going to burn down his house. He said: ‘They cannot do that. What have I done?’ As we were exchanging words, a stone flew against the window. Then I had to carry the children into the wardrobes and we started packing Duro’s belongings. Duro ran to the little house that was the back of Mbari, but there were some young boys there who shouted: ‘Duro is here! Duro is here!’ Then he went and stood between the tall cocoa yams at the back. He stood between them till daybreak. And I had to carry his property to the other house that he used as a museum...

Working with Duro had actually made me grow up. It was like going to another school – a school of discipline and a school of thought.

Many times I travelled with Duro, we talked about life – and I gained a lot from that. He was a man of courage. He taught us to be prepared for all eventualities. If you set out to do something, however hard you try to make it a success, just keep this thought at the back of your mind: ‘If I am successful – good. If I fail – no regrets.’

From “*Lighting Up the Theatre*” in *The Return of Shango*, edited by U. Beier, p. 110-111.

Ademola Onibonokuta

“He was a special teacher and prophet”

‘Duro never took a play to the stage without thinking very deeply about it. He was not satisfied with only entertaining his audience or enjoying their applause. He wanted his audience to go home thinking about his work, and put themselves into particular situation of the play. Many people liked to see his plays again and again because they always learned something new, everytime they saw it. He had to develop his audience: at first many people were not ready to understand him. They said that Mbari Mbayo was a place for idol worshippers. What Duro really wanted with his plays was for people to respect their history and their tradition. To him Mbari Mbayo was a place where everybody who respected his culture could come to discuss and practice his interests. Mbari Mbayo was a living place where past and present became one. Duro used his plays and songs to advise us all, to guide us in any situation we might find ourselves in. For many years to come it will be impossible to find another person like Duro. Like any other person he heard about this world in heaven and decided to try his luck on this earth but unlike most of us who come and go without a trace he left an indelible footprint behind. Many people have referred to Duro as a great playwright, director and organizer. But to many of us who worked closely with him Duro Ladipo was a messenger of God who came to preach to the world through the stage and through his angel-like songs. He was part tutor prophet and towards the end of his life he carried the spirit of our ancestral gods on his head.’

From “*The Works of Duro Ladipo*” in *The Return of Shango*, p. 93.

Chief Yemi Elebuibon

“A very unique man, ...he was always ready for death”

I met Duro Ladipo in 1962. After the Mbari club was founded in Ibadan, where prominent writers and artists like Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark,

Demas Nwoko featured, Duro Ladipo met with Ulli Beier and expressed his intention to have an Mbari club also in Osogbo. Both of them collaborated to establish an art house in the town. I got close to him first during the annual Ifa divination festival in the palace of the Atoaja of Osogbo. After I had divined for the king, Duro Ladipo called me and expressed delight in my performance. He said he was happy that in spite of my young age, I displayed a deep knowledge of the ancient wisdom of Ifa. He then proposed that I join with his drama troupe so as to bring authenticity to his theatre. Before 1962, he used to visit my master – Baba Faniyi Agbongbon, whose house was not that far from Mbari, for spiritual advice. He offered me the position of “cultural adviser” in his troupe. He said that by working for him at Mbari, I would have more exposure to people and ideas. And indeed, he introduced me to a lot of people; he was instrumental to my popularity both as a practising babalawo and actor. He never called me by my name. He always called me fondly, and with respect, as “Baba, baba”. He would introduce me to people as “my babalawo”.

I participated in a number of his productions, either as a priest, or as chief, or as elder. More than appearing in his plays, we were involved in a lot of things on daily basis, our interaction was like that of a family. I always remember him as a very unique person. When I look back at his life in this world, there is always something to learn and to always remember about him. He lived his life as if he knew he would not live long. All the time, he was always ready for death; he was always referring to death and he never feared death. He was conscious of himself as an Abiku. Whenever we returned from a journey, and the plane landed, Duro would say, “Ah we survived Death today, we are alive this day.” He had premonitions about death all of his life; and he predicted rightly how he was going to die. He predicted there would be rain and thunder on the day he would die.

So many things to recall about him. One day we were going on a journey and we passed the Sango cemetery (in Ibadan) where we saw the notable carver, Lamidi Fakeye, being interrogated by the police for carrying an expired driving licence. Fakeye’s licence was seized by the policeman who then moved away to control the traffic. Duro Ladipo intervened; he walked up to the policeman and demanded for the licence. The officer hesitated. Then Duro looked at him intensely and said “Bring the document young man, *Sango* speaks...” The policeman promptly returned the licence, to everyone’s dismay. Fakeye always refers to that episode. He was an enigma. He would always advise us to be hardworking

and self-reliant. He would say that artistes should not depend on the patronage of government though he believed that the department of culture and the art council should be supportive of the arts. He joked that government may not be able to do much for him, but they would do one great thing: his death would be announced nationally and he would be given a fine burial! It was after he died that his words became more forceful and more significant.

He was working as Artist-in-Residence at the Institute of African Studies (University of Ibadan) before his death. He was appointed by Professor Saburi Biobaku who took over as Director of the Institute from Professor Armstrong. Duro sent a letter to tell me about the new position, and he invited me to come for a special Ifa divination session at the Institute. When I visited Ibadan then with two babalawos, he informed me that he had been ill for some days. His eyes had turned white. He asked me to come with him to the hospital in Jericho where he was admitted. Chief Tubosun Oladapo was also visiting him at that time. Duro asked me if we had been given our honoraria, to which I said no. He said we would be taken care of, but that everything was now up to me and the rest. I wanted to know what he meant by that. He said, "Afára ti fẹ já báyí" (the bridge is about to fall now). He then directed me to ask his first wife who had the last born for him to come with the child, warning me strongly not to let his own aging mother know about the errand. Days passed by, and he was transferred to the University College Hospital (UCH). When I went to see him in company of his reverend brother and Ojeniyi Amoo (Akaraogun on stage), he invited me to his bedside; he held my hand, rubbed it for a long time and spoke words that I didn't understand. Hours after then, in the early morning, about 2.00 am, he passed on. And it was at that moment that it began to rain and thunder heavily. At Jericho, he had a tape with him on which he recorded instructions on how he was to be buried, what should be done, and what should not be done once he was gone.

As a singer, composer, director and actor, he was highly talented and devoted to the theatre. He was always involved and very absorbed in his performance. With him, I acted in *Oba Koso*, *Ajagun-Nla*, *Beyi o se*, *Moremi*, and numerous television plays. I gained so much from him. He taught self-discipline, hardwork, humility and dignity. For him, a better name is better than a wealthy person. No day will pass without remembering his wise words and good teaching. He contributed greatly to the development of Yoruba theatre and his name is known worldwide. Duro Ladipo will always be remembered.

Interviewed on November 23, 1998.

Anon. 11th January 1977

"More About Duro Ladipo"

"Sitting down before Nigerian Opera as sampled at the Commonwealth Arts Festival, white regisseur signed admiringly. Here was something Europe simply cannot do. The sample was Oba Ko So (The King Did Not Hang). In this work a medieval Black emperor is so grieved by fractious generals and nagging Politicians that he strangles himself, posts straight to heaven, and watches thence over his people with occasional tenor harangues and dread peals of thunder. Technically the score is simple. In the Scala pit, no seventy-piece orchestra: instead, four or five virtuoso drummers sit in the OP wing with exotic drums. One of the drums has a graduated fringe of bells. There is no vocal part-writing: nothing but simple though telling tunes for soloists or unison groups. The tune-flavour mingles jungle with plainchant.

But the point is that the drumming and the singing go like clockwork, inter-locking flawlessly with brilliant mime, comic face play, out-and-thrust dialogue and sharp bursts of stylized dancing - all without a conductor. In our own theatres such ensemble feats are unheard of. Nor do we have a Duro Ladipo, the man who wrote the Opera, produced it, directed it, and plays the main part like an angel.

The London critic who reviewed Duro Ladipo's OBA KO SO' thus in the SPECTATOR of 1st October, 1965 would not have guessed that this highly professional group was only a few years old. The company was formed in fact as part of the Mbari Mbayo club in Oshogbo, Western-State. The club, which was founded by Duro Ladipo in 1960, has branched out into many activities; it runs, among others, an art gallery and a museum of contemporary African art. Its artistic efforts have already been exhibited in Berlin, Amsterdam, Prague and Jerusalem.

It was the club that gave the founder, Duro Ladipo, the stimulus and the initial support to start a professional theatre company in 1962. But he had already been a practicing musician for many years.

Ladipo was born in Oshogbo, Western Nigeria on 18th December, 1931; he did not receive much formal education: after finishing primary school he went straight into teaching as a pupil teacher. For many years he worked as a primary school teacher. But earlier on, he showed great interest in music and play acting. His earlier compositions were all written for the church, mainly because his father was a catechist in the Anglican

Church.

Ladipo's attempts to Africanize Nigerian church music soon brought him into conflict with the church authorities as they objected to the use of drums in his Easter cantata. Ladipo soon drew the consequences; he began to perform his Easter and Christmas music in schools and town halls. This naturally led him to Yoruba theatre. The best plays in this genre are usually social satires. The music is derived from Yoruba church hymns on the one hand and from the popular Highlife dance music on the other. The qualities of the plays usually lie in the charming and lively performance rather than the subtleties of the text or the intricacies of the composition." From *the Duro Ladipo Archive: Papers, Letters, Manuscripts and Magazines*.

Professor Tekena N. Tamuno (former Vice-Chancellor, University of Ibadan)

"Chief Duro Ladipo, late Artist-in-Residence"

Chief Duro Ladipo was, until his sudden death at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, on Saturday, 11 March 1978, an Artist-in-Residence in the Institute of African Studies of our University. His appointment at our Institute began in January, 1978. His brief, but momentous, service with us brought colour and dignity to the cultural and artistic programmes of our Institute.

Chief Duro Ladipo was, in many respects, an Ibadan man. His links with this University began in 1963 when he attended the Extra-Mural Drama Course of our then School of Drama. He attended a further course in 1964. I learnt with great respect that our team of medical professors and other doctors at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, spared no effort in their valiant attempts to save Chief Ladipo's life when they knew of his critical condition in the early hours of Friday, 10 March, 1973. Born in December 1931 at Osogbo, he died too soon in the service of the University of Ibadan and Nigeria as a whole.

Chief Ladipo, author of over 36 plays, was a super-star among the luminaries in the field of Nigerian Dramatic Arts. He was, in his lifetime, more than a national treasure. Chief Ladipo successfully brought honour and glory to his fatherland as its cultural ambassador to the African continent and the wider world.

I, on behalf of the staff and students of this University, join the family and friends of our beloved Chief Duro Ladipo in mourning his painful death. May his soul rest in perfect peace."

Text from the University of Ibadan Official Bulletin (Special Release), No. 452, 13 March, 1978.

Professor Wole Soyinka

"An intense artist"

I set up a repertoire once, after we spotted and captured a bungalow which belonged to the government close to Government House Agodi, Ibadan. We lived there for a while before I brought in Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola. Everybody rehearsed in the compound at different times; we interacted stylistically and we would tell Orisun Boys to "go and watch what they were doing". We attempted to use some of their theatrical idioms in some of our sketches. Duro Ladipo's group was very interesting and most independent and had a very strong and rigid concept of the kind of theatre which we wanted.

Duro was a very serious and intense artist. He is what we call an open personality with a temperament different from Kola Ogunmola's. He was also committed and as you probably know, he underwent initiation into the Sango religion. He became an insider and always prepared himself spiritually before he went on stage. His collaboration with Oya was a marvelous one. He enjoyed life. I remember we met in the States when he visited a student, a research student, he is the kind of person who after dinner-drinks will pick up the bottle and tuck it under his armpit. It became a popular thing amongst all of us – just tuck the bottle under your armpit. When we say: "Ah Duro gbe 'go yen le", (Ah Duro, drop that bottle) he will say: 'O ti o, a'ir'ajeku Oro!' (Never, the spirit leaves no leftovers!); and off he goes (laughter).

Interviewed (1997)

Professor Dapo Adelugba

"An Inspirational Man"

Our friendship goes back to the 1960s but the Mbari Movement preceded our knowing each other. And I was familiar with the intricate issues made of this knowledge of the traditional theatre and culture and of the exposure to people like Ulli Beier, Peggy Harper, Wole Soyinka, and so on; people with a strong background in Western culture and theatre.

Duro Ladipo was familiar with the Mbari Movement and his closeness to Ulli Beier perhaps facilitated his contributions. Later, he made the stage available for the Osogbo Wing which he called Mbari Mbayo. I think the term 'Mbari Mbayo' evolved almost casually not that Duro Ladipo went

home and heard but by natural flow of the imagination and in his interaction with his Osogbo community. The Mbari he saw at Ibadan became the Mbari Mbayo at Osogbo.

I learnt that Duro Ladipo got in touch with Ulli Beier when he first visited the Mbari place at the West End of Ibadan. Ulli himself worked with the Extra Mural programme at the University of Ibadan and he must have visited Osogbo several times; so, whether he and Duro Ladipo met at the Ibadan Mbari or at Osogbo I am not quite sure.

But to talk about the Osogbo Mbari, Duro Ladipo developed it and it was from there that plays like *Oba Ko So*, *Eda*, *Oba Moro* and the rest were rehearsed and produced. I need to preface this with the fact that when Wole Soyinka began his Orisun Repertory in 1964, he had the idea of an integrated forum whereby he would work out some programme for all theatre groups to interact.

Duro Ladipo theatre was one of the troupes Soyinka worked with in 1964. He also got Kola Ogunmola and Papa Ogunde, but I don't know if Papa Ogunde had the time to participate in the venture. The Orisun Repertory was the major show done by Soyinka with Duro Ladipo. They were doing different plays at the old Obisesan Hall. One night it will be Duro's group, the next night, Soyinka's and then Ogunmola's group. That was an important landmark but Duro Ladipo did not know what to make of the Orisun Repertory. I think he was not quite sure about Wole Soyinka's intentions. Even in the late 60s, Duro Ladipo had his own reservation about university theatre persons. Then he wanted to be quite close to the International Theatre Institute, Nigerian Chapter but he wasn't quite sure whether Prof. J. A. Adedeji, who was then Chairman, really wanted the travelling theatre troupe or not. I think it borders on a kind of mistrust between the Yoruba Travelling Theatre groups and the University people.

Ladipo and I got to know each other very well during the early 1970s when we both worked together for the Festival of Arts Committee at the old Western State under the leadership of Mrs. Fola Ighodalo and later on under Mrs. Teju Alakija. And between 1969 and 1973, Duro Ladipo and I used to be part of the talent-hunting groups that went round the Western State combing the region for talents, trying to help in the evaluation of who and what should go into the Zonal Festival, the State Finals and the State's representation at the annual National Arts Festivals.

I was invited by the Western State Government to direct the drama representation of the State at the 1972 Festival of the Arts, and that was when we had that disaster and eighteen people died in a road accident. I

was the director in Kaduna of the Western State drama presentation. The play we did for the Festival was Wale Ogunyemi's *Eniyan*, a Nigerian adaptation of the medieval *Everyman*. There were also music and dance presentations by other members of the Western State Festival Troupe. Although Duro Ladipo was not in the drama troupe, he was one of those Mrs. Ighodalo used as consultant for the State. When Duro heard of the deaths, of the eighteen members of the Western State contingent, he flew immediately to Kaduna not only to express sympathy but also to check on what could be done to deal with the emergency that had just arisen. So, it was in that year, 1972, that he and I became quite close and thereafter, anytime he had occasion to need actors and actresses for his productions, he readily came to the University of Ibadan Department of Theatre Arts to request assistance.

When I then became Chairman of Oyo State Council for Arts and Culture in 1977, I was very happy that he was nominated to serve on the Osogbo Zonal Arts Council. From July 1977 till early in 1978, we must have had a few meetings at the Zonal Headquarters. I was very close to his work and I believe that he was one of the travelling theatre leaders who devoted himself fully to the research and creative aspect of the performing arts.

Interviewed (1998).

Akogun Lekan Alabi

"Duro Ladipo talks about his life as a youth who took early interest in drama while at schools in Otan Ayegbaju in present day Osun State. From there, he graduated to producing school plays when he became a pupil teacher. 'I introduced native drums to church music in order to change the monotony. It shocked everybody', he explains in the film... On getting to the scene in the film where Sango threatened to hang himself, the generator spluttered to a stop. All efforts to restart it failed, thereby making it impossible for us, the audience, to see whether Sango carried out his threat or not. Someone in the audience described the generator failure as a confirmation of the long-held belief that the original Sango did not commit suicide, but ascended to heaven (*Oba ko so*)."

From "An Evening of Tributes to 'Sango': recalling the occasion of viewing the documentary, *The Creative Man*, by American Educational Television. *The Comet*, Sunday, February 24, 2002; p.8.

Mr. Emmanuel Olugboyega Ladipo (Duro Ladipo's brother; the Provost of St. Paul's Cathedral, Gbongan, and Assistant Bishop of the diocese).

"They went to our father to destroy his son..."

My reminiscence on Duro? Hmm. It was clear from very early in life that he was interested in acting, in drama and theatre. He also worked in the church as a catechist, and this religious background partly explains his creativity.

Apart from this he had a variety of influences, one of whom was Pa Odunsi, his former headmaster at Otan Ayegbaju. Duro took a prominent role in the morality plays of that era, honing his art from St. Philips Primary School, Otan Ayegbaju. He was very much on the move in the early days, staying for a while at Ila-Orangun where our father was, moving up north and working in the church while also teaching at a primary school.

My brother was a lay reader in the Anglican church. We were from a poor family, our parents managed to train us all. Duro was looking intensely on how he could use the common available materials around him to make theatrical statements. Hence, he used *adire* on stage and people were mocking him then, but it has turned out that he pioneered that experiment which is now commonplace.

For him, it has been one long life of struggle. It was not rosy at all, for instance, he got his lorry on hire purchase, and quite often found it difficult paying his staff. When the German theatre enthusiast, Ulli Beier, came along he greatly assisted Duro, but not financially. The mode of support was in relation to making contact for performance on his behalf. No one gave Duro a chance until "Oba Ko So." He later found the Mbari Mbayo club and Beier organized workshops there. Many very successful artists today started out with Duro and if they realize how they started they would return to his family for a token of appreciation. Duro really slaved for the essence of theatre, oh how he slaved and the tragedy is that in spite of his efforts, he did not stay long enough to reap the material benefit. We thank God that he had such a dedicated wife who threw everything in to support her husband. If she considered wealth, she wouldn't have married my brother in the first place for she comes from a wealthy background.

About the same time that Bishop Philips was at Osogbo, my brother had a performance in which the *dundun* drum was introduced. This happened to be in the church and Duro was accused of introducing Orisa into the church. The pressure became more intense when Duro staged "Oba Ko So." I tried to call our father's attention to the falsehood and

calumny in the claims against my brother. Looking back it is all so painful, and I think they went to our father to destroy his son...

Our joy is that we walk the world today and there is the name Duro Ladipo. What can be more rewarding?

Interviewed (1998).

Femi Osofisan

"Sleep Softly Big Brother..."

I did not know much of Duro Ladipo as a man. All I remember was the figure I saw on stage a few times – a tall, heavily bearded fellow with a leonine head and fiery eye; a magnetic presence. He was, in short, just the image of the character he played on stage, the incarnation of Sango himself. That he could have a private, domestic life was simply unthinkable. Thus the manner of his death did not surprise me. It was most appropriate to the image that he should leave on a night shaken by thunders and shredded by lightning.

It is as an artist therefore that I have felt close to the man. And what I remember most is the way he was able to show, not only the grandeur, but also the humanity of Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder. His play, *Oba Ko So*, had reinstated the god into our colonised and brainwashed consciousness; but it had also, as I saw it, demystified the god, by revealing his very human dimensions. Like every tyrant, Sango had succumbed in the end to the temptations of power, and paid tragically for it.

But nevertheless, the play had also left many questions unanswered. This is what I want to talk about, this morning, about my response as an artist, to Duro Ladipo.

As some of you will know already, I was invited some years back by the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, and asked if I would like to write a play on "classical" Yorubaland. For the artists at this theatre - which, you recall, is the biggest and the most prestigious repertory theatre in the American midwest - "classical" Yoruba land meant simply the world of Amos Tutuola, and what they really wanted, in the end, was an adaptation of the book you all know too well, *The Palmwine Drinkard*. I went up to my hotel to consider this proposition. And the more I thought about it, the less I liked it. There were, as you know, already quite a number of adaptations of *The Palmwine Drinkard* in the market. And besides, I was beginning to have strong misgivings that the project would constrict me.

So should I turn down the project, and miss this wonderful

opportunity of an African author being asked, for the very first time in the theatre's history, to write for the Guthrie audience? And then, quite abruptly, as it often happens at such moments, the memories of Duro Ladipo came welling up before me. I saw his face, as I used to see it several years ago in those stupefying performances. And I remembered those old questions which his *Oba Ko So* had stirred up in me, which were still unanswered. And the idea immediately came to me, that perhaps this was the moment at last to attempt to answer them.

In the morning, when I went back to the theatre for the meeting with Garland Wright, the Guthrie's Artistic Director, the play I would write was already forming in my mind. This was what became *Many Colours make the Thunder-King*, the play which premiered last year [1997] with such extraordinary success at the Guthrie, and was subsequently chosen by the Graduate Acting Program of the New York University for performance this past February [of 1998].

Unfortunately, because of its heavy demands in terms of production and other costs, I am probably not going to be able to mount the play in Nigeria here in the immediate future. (Such is the sad reality which the contemporary African artist is obliged to accept, that nowadays, our works are promoted and consumed in the main by external patrons). But when you eventually read the play – and I can't say when this will be possible either, as the text is available now only in a limited edition published by the Guthrie itself, and I am not offering it to any Nigerian publisher - but when you do read it, you will discover that the spirit of Duro Ladipo breathes through every page of it!

His *Oba Ko So* was my starting-point. Or rather, if you wish, it was the scaffolding around which my story constructed its own *beingness*. Such is the seminal impact of Ladipo that no re-reading of Sango's legend can be possible any more without reference to his *Oba Ko So*. Thus the arteries along which my story grew its branches were those old questions which Ladipo's play had raised.

And now, at this juncture, I can tell you some of them. There were just too many disturbing silences, I found, in the play. First, there was this question of the king's household. Sango, like many Yoruba men, must obviously have had many wives. But why do we hear only of three of them, and even among these, only two are specifically privileged? Why are Oya and Osun among the more prominent deities in the pantheon, while Oba, the third wife, is not?

Furthermore, at the summit of their careers, these three wives dissolved into rivers. Is this act of magical transformation to be interpreted as an apotheosis, or a vulgar disgrace; a tragedy or comic anti-climax? In any case, who, or what, were these women before they came into Sango's palace? Why do we know so much of Sango's biography, and so little about his wives? Is this just another instance perhaps, of gender manipulation by the traditionally male authors of our oral historiography and mythopoeisy? Or something more insidious and more ominous?

I am thinking particularly of the paradoxical, unresolved conundrum of the King's final disappearance – this suicide that was not a suicide; the hanging that happened but did not happen; the death without a corpse?! How come that the destruction of an entire town, through what we are told was a wilful act of arson, led to the deification of the culprit, even if royal? How come that his worshippers chose to feed, unchallenged, on such naked terrorism against the afflicted victims, each time the god spoke in the form of a thunderstorm? And what are the implications of such extortionate rituals for the society's ethical health? So many questions about our god ... Of course I am not forgetting that Prof Akinwumi Isola, in his brilliant thesis, had revealed to us that there was not only one Sango in our past, but in fact, many "Sangos" – that is, several hero-kings whose courageous activities became assimilated, in the normal process of myth-construction, into the profile of the primordial deity. I believe we are all familiar with this process. My problem however is that, even if this were true – and Isola is an authority that I am certainly too feeble to contest – it would still not resolve the question of the more fundamental aesthetic, socio-political or metaphysical impulses that authored the narrative. To express it more simply, I mean, what objectives precisely did our ancestors intend to accomplish with this riddling paradox? And why has it endured?

I have tried, with only partial success, I admit, to tackle some of these questions in my play, *Many Colours*. But I could not even have embarked on such an adventure, without the help and the inspiration of the man we are celebrating today. Even though my play and my interpretations differed from his at some cardinal moments, his was still the radiant beacon which guided my exploring craft. Duro Ladipo did what masters and giants do: they fertilise the landscape, and then provide their shoulders for others to climb upon and reach beyond themselves. Through the instigation of their own genius, we who follow are empowered to see beyond the surrounding banality into a horizon of grander visions and scintillating dreams. Duro Ladipo has been a positive influence therefore in my career. And in

my script, his voice continues to speak in manifold accents. So who says then that he has died? Our big brother is only asleep. And all we should say then is – *Sun-un re o, Duro omo Ladipo! Arinnako, o doju ala!* – yes, we shall always meet again, each time we touch upon the great dream which all artists share!

Presented at the Duro Ladipo Memorial Symposium at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, March 11, 1998.

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POSTSCRIPT:
**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF DURO
LADIPO TO NIGERIAN DRAMA
AND THEATRE**

Philip Adedotun Ogundeji, PhD

It is now three decades since the passing on to the great beyond of Duro Ladipo (Ṣàngó), the traditional theatre nationalist. In a country like Nigeria, where recent histories are easily washed away from human memory, these twenty-five long years are enough to wipe off completely the impact of that great ambassador of our national heritage. Many children of the new generation would probably have heard nothing about the fire-spitting Ṣàngó who set the Nigerian stage ablaze and illuminated it before the international audience. Hence, this attempt to reflect on the invaluable contributions of Duro Ladipo to the Yorùbá theatre in particular and Nigerian, nay African theatre, in general.

Before Duro Ladipo came into limelight in the early 1960s, the Yorùbá 'operatic' drama had been popularised and the 'concert-party' version of it well known through the efforts of Hubert Ogunde in particular and others such as E.K. Ogunmola, A.B. David, G. I. Onimole, A.A. Layeni, H. A. Olufoye, P. A. Dawodu and T. K. E. Phillips in general. Ogunde had, since 1945, inaugurated the first modern professional itinerant theatre company. He took his dramatic productions to major cities in Nigeria and to some West African countries. Ogunde was then popularly known for his biblical plays and socio-political satires.

Even though Ogunde's *Africa and God*, *Igbo Irunmale* and *Ṣeranko Ṣèniyàn* (*The Black Forest* and *Half and Half* respectively) are believed to have initiated a modern theatricalisation of folkloric tales, nonetheless it is to Duro Ladipo that the credit of the popularisation of folkloric plays should go. This assertion is informed by the fact that Ladipo elevated the hitherto relatively insignificant status of folkloric tales to a

fully developed theatricalised status. He made use of folk tales, legends, myths and histories for thematic and plot constructions. He also employed in his dramatic constructions a lot of traditional poetry and musical materials including other cultural elements. *Ọba Kò So* is the most celebrated of his plays in this category. Others include *Mòremí*, *Ọba Wàjà*, *Ọba Mòrò*, *Ọbàtálá*, *Ajagun Nílá*, *Ọsun*, *Ọrúnmilá*, *Béyíí Ó Še*, *Olúwèrì*, *Alájobí*, *Ọgèdèngbè*, *Èwé Ayó*, *Ààrò Mèta*, *Ìyèrú Ọkín*, *Odùduwà*, *Ikú Bàbà Yèyé*, and *Olójú Mèrin*. When Duro Ladipo adapted stories from other sources, he made sure that they were properly domesticated to the extent that any member of his audience who is not aware of the original source may not be able to distinguish such play from the folkloric ones. To this group of domesticated plays belong *Èdá*, adapted from the medieval *Everyman*, the biblical plays, *Kọ Bí Ìdì*, *Jáléyemí*, *Afoláyan* and *Olúorogbo* adapted from the stories of David and Goliath, Samson and Delilah, Joseph the Dreamer and the Nativity respectively, and also his Shakespearian adaptations, *Aarẹ Akogun*, *Károunwi*, and *Omọ Nidẹ* from *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *As You Like It* respectively.

Duro Ladipo was wholeheartedly committed to cultural rejuvenation, re-presenting a cultural heritage at the verge of complete extermination in the face of the craze for modern technology without any consideration for indigenous socio-psychological background. More than any of his contemporaries, Duro Ladipo has presented vigorously the dying divinities, heroes and heroines of the Yorùbá people on stage, therefore giving them fresh lives and making them relevant in the context of the newly acquired civilization. Šangó, the divinity of thunder and lightning, is the most powerfully presented of such deities and heroes. He is portrayed in three different plays: *Ọba Kò So*, *Ọbàtálá* and *Ọsun*. Other divinities, heroes and heroines presented in his plays include *Ọbàtálá*, *Ọrúnmilá*, *Ọgún*, *Èšù*, *Mòremí*, *Ọbà*, *Ọya*, *Olúorogbo*, *Ajagun-Nílá*, *Oníkòyí*, *Arèsà* and *Olúgbón*. Other dramatists writing in Yorùbá and English who have since followed the pioneering example of Duro Ladipo in the dramatic adaptation of myths, legends, folktales and histories include Işola Ogunşola, Oyin Adejobi, Lere Paimo, Jimo Aliu, Akinwumi Işola, Adebayo Faleti, Lawuyi Ogunniran, Wọle Şoyinka, Ọla Rotimi and Wale Ogunyemi.

In presenting the grandeur of traditionalism, Duro Ladipo demonstrated a great degree of objectivity for he presented along with the gloomy sides, the odd and problematic aspects, therefore making the works thematically relevant to contemporary situations. The experiences of Yorùbá in their attempt to solve knotty communal and individual problems

of life are the thematic essence of Duro Ladipo's folkloric or mytho-historical plays. Themes such as patriotism, heroism, tragedy, suffering, conflict and morality are therefore treated. All these are usually linked directly or indirectly with the aetiological purpose of the apotheosisation of gods and heroes.

In *Ọba Kò Sọ*, as in some other of the folkloric plays, the heroic and godly qualities of the protagonists are not appreciated fully until a catastrophic ending has brought about their death or transmogrification. Thus the Yorùbá proverb "bá a kú là á dèrè, èyàn ò sunwòn láàyè" (One's godly quality is not appreciated until after one's demise; one is considered bad when alive) is in such cases emphasized. For instance, attention is drawn to the selfless sacrifice that informs the patriotism of Mọrèmi in the play *Mọrèmi*. The play also clearly emphasizes the importance of the contribution of women to peaceful social life and polity. *Ajagun Nílá* is a play used not only to portray the four Yorùbá ancestors, Ajagun Nílá (Fágbàyílá of Ilá-Ọrangún and Igbómìnà fame), Olúgbón, Arẹ̀sà and Oníkòyí (of the Ọyọ Yorùbá) as great war generals but also to show that internal wrangling, conflicts and animosity had been among the different Yorùbá tribes for long. It is a play that can be said to have a similar socio-political relevance like that of Ogunde's *Yorùbá Ronú*. The topical context of Ogunde's play seems to be the major difference. The following song used as part of the closing glee, to underline the lesson of *Ajagun-nílá* brings out the said message:

Ẹ gbimò pò
 Ẹ jẹ ká gé igi oró
 Ẹ gbimò pò
 Ẹ jẹ ká gé igi iyà
 Ẹ gbimò pò
 Ẹ jẹ ká gé igi òtẹ
 Igi oró
 Igi iyà
 Ó ti bú mi ná
 N ò bá a şeré
 Ó ti nà mí ná
 N ò bá a rìn
 Ẹ gbimò pò
 Ẹ jẹ ká gé igi òtẹ
 Igi oró
 Igi iyà

Trans:

Join hands together
 Let's cut down the tree of wickedness
 Join hands together
 Let's cut down the tree of wretchedness
 Join hands together
 Let's cut down the tree of disunity
 The tree of wickedness
 The tree of wretchedness
 He has abused me
 I won't play with him
 He has beaten me
 I won't walk with him
 Join hands together
 Let's cut down the tree of disunity
 The tree of wickedness
 The tree of wretchedness

Another song used as part of the opening glee for *Oòba Móòròò* points to the intended patriotic message of the play:

Ọlá orílẹ̀ wa ni ká maa wá o
 Ọlá orílẹ̀ wa ni ká maa wa
 Ọlá orílẹ̀ wa ni ká maa wa o
 Ọlá orílẹ̀ wa ni ká maa wa
 Bí a bá lówó
 Tí o sì níláárí o
 Ọlá orílẹ̀ wa ni ká maa wa

Trans:

The honour of our fatherland is what we should seek
 The honour of our fatherland is what we should seek
 The honour of our fatherland is what we should seek
 The honour of our fatherland is what we should seek
 When we are rich
 And wealthy
 The honour of our fatherland is what we should seek.

With reference to the two songs above, we can now go on to consider the dramatic constructions in Duro Ladipo's works and try to locate areas in which he has made remarkable impact. We have dealt in

other works with the erroneous impression created by earlier scholars that Duro Ladipò made no use of the opening and closing glees. The example of the above excerpts is a proof that he used the two glees. We have shown in the early works that he started with full length opening and closing glees but later made them brief and tended not to use them at all when performing for the literate audience (e.g. on university campuses or elsewhere outside the country). This innovation is informed by the occidental theatrical convention where a performing period of two hours is the norm. The inclusion of elaborate opening and closing glees may make the performance longer. Duro Ladipò however made up for the brevity of the two glees or the lack of them by incorporating a lot of traditional musico-poetic elements in his plays. The two glees were in fact usually rendered in the neo-traditional, church and pop musical melodies and were used by virtually all the theatre practitioners. It is however, in the extensive use of oral musico-poetic materials that Duro Ladipò has made an indelible mark.

Yorùbá indigenous traditional poetry is usually classified according to their modes of rendition into three: the recitational, the chant and the song modes. Duro Ladipò made use of a wide range of poetic types in the three categories. He used a lot of oríkì (praise poetry) ọfọ̀ (incantation) ẹ̀ṣẹ-Ifá (Ifá divinatory poetry) and ọ̀wẹ (proverbs) in the first category. These are also called the feature types by Olatunde Olatunji because they can be differentiated by their structural features. These poetic forms also make up a considerable part of the context of the chants and songs. *Rara* (social chant), *Èsà Egúngún* (masquerade chant), *Ẹ̀ṣàngó Pípẹ̀* (*Sòàngó* chant), *Ìyẹ̀rẹ̀ Ifá* (Ifá chant) and *àsamọ̀dò* (an Èkìtì social chant) are the principal chants used by Duro Ladipò. Prominent among the songs found in his plays are traditional festival song, folktale songs, children songs and war songs. The *bàtá*, *dùndún*, *ìgbìn* drums and the *èkútù* and *tòròmágbè* flutes together with *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* and *agogo* are the traditional instruments that provide the accompanying music in his plays. Duro Ladipò, unlike his predecessors such as Ogunde and Kọ̀lẹ̀ Ogunmọ̀lẹ̀, was not known to have used modern day musical instrument like the trumpets, saxophone or guitar.

An examination of the use of oríkì and ọfọ̀ in *Ọ̀ba Kò So* will be sufficient here to illustrate Duro Ladipò's creativity and point out his contribution in this area. The play *Ọ̀ba Kò So* presents the story of Aláàfin Sòàngó, the fourth ruler of Ọ̀yọ̀dò in a complicated triangular power struggle between himself, his two war lords, Gbọ̀nka and Timì, and his civil lords, the Ọ̀yọ̀mẹ̀sì. Oríkì is employed in the play for a fine delineation of the characters of Ẹ̀ṣàngó and his warlords; this dramatic function of oríkì, it

should be noted, is adopted from its social use among the Yorùbá.

Ẓàngó's oríkì is chanted either in the *Ẓàngó Pípè* mode by the four royal wives, or in the *èṣà egúngún* mode by the *ìwàrèfà*. *Ẓàngó Pípè* fits into the dramatic context properly since it is a mode of chanting dedicated to *Ẓàngó*. *Èṣà egúngún*, it should be noted, is not incongruous in the dramatic context because the *egúngún* cult is historically and musically connected with *Sòàngó*. *Sàngó* is believed to be the one that introduced the *egúngún* cult to *Ọyò* and it is not surprising that the *bàtá* drum accompanies the two chants today. The oríkì employed in the portrayal of the two warlords is unlike that of *Ẓàngó* chanted only in the *èṣà* mode. It is further clearly distinguished from that of *Ẓàngó* because it is rendered in self-praise by the warlords themselves. Though self-praise is not unknown in the performing contexts among oral poets before their audience, it is not common in the royal court context among the Yorùbá. Duro Ladipo's adaptation is therefore a novelty primarily aimed at distinguishing the warlords from *Ẓàngó*, the supreme overlord.

If the common mode *èṣà* and medium (self-praise) of the two warlords' oríkì can be seen as drawing attention to the similarity and comradeship of the war lords, it is in the content of their oríkì that the differences between them is indicated. Whereas *Gbõnka's* self-praise is full of incantatory statements, *Tìmì's* is made up of bits and pieces of declaration (*ìwérénde*) about his war powers. It is in his deployment of such folkloric materials in his plays that one can establish the point that Duro Ladipo has pioneered a sophisticated Yorùbá literary dimension, though he was operating within a popular tradition.

Today the use of incantatory altercations in dramatic dialogues is very popular in Yorùbá plays. This, we believe, is due to the spectacular nature of the accompanying actions with the involvement of violence, the mysterious and the supernatural. It should be put on record that Duro Ladipo, in his *Ọba Kò Sò*, is a pioneer in the use of this dramatic device. In the two confrontations between the warlords, *Gbõnka* is made to use a mesmerizing incantation on *Tìmì*. The use of incantation here, though mono-directional since *Tìmì* is unable to respond with a counter-incantation, is within the context of a duel between two characters. Today in many Yorùbá plays, it is usual to find two characters exchange incantations for some time before one of them finally wins.

Because of his orientation towards traditionalism, Duro Ladipo worked extensively with indigenous oral artistes more than his contemporaries. He did not only collect material from them but also recruited

some of them into his troupe. Through this effort, Duro Ladipo also helped to bridge the gap between traditional and modern artists. Among such traditional artistes he helped to groom for the modern stage are Abidoye Ojo, Ojeyi Amoo, Lasisi Gbẹ̀bọ̀laja, Adebisi Faṣaanu and Aḍesina Adetoyii. It is through the association that some of these artists have had with Duro Ladipo's troupe that they got into limelight and gained recognition in Nigeria and abroad. Some of them were later recruited into the Oyo and Oṣun States cultural centres.

In his premiere of *Mọ̀rẹ̀mi* in 1966, Duro Ladipo invited the Otu Osemeze group cultural dancers from Agbor (Ika Igbo) to support the portrayal of the Igbo setting of the play. I have suggested in an earlier work that this pioneering experiment probably encouraged Wale Ogunyemi in making an elaborate effort at juxtaposing different Nigerian oral traditions and cultures in his adaptation of Fagunwa's *Ogbójú Ọ̀ḍẹ̀ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalẹ̀* as *Láńgbòdó*.

At the beginning of television in Nigeria, Duro Ladipo's plays dominated the screen for quite some time before other dramatists like Kọ̀la Ogunmọ̀la, Oyin Adejọ̀bi and Akin Ogunḡbe started featuring prominently. The four stages of the development of Yorùbá television drama identified by the present writer in an essay titled "Yorùbá Drama on Television" are:

1. The early beginning when Yorùbá plays were presented in a thirty to forty-five minutes slot once or twice a month.
2. The development of weekly Yorùbá tele-play series. Each episode in the series was an independent play in its own right with its beginning and ending. The thirty to forty-five minutes slot is still maintained at this stage.
3. The development of full-length Yorùbá tele-plays that runs for between one to two hours.
4. The latest development is that of serialised Yorùbá tele-plays where actions in each succeeding episode are directly linked with the previous one forming a continuous story line. The whole serial, which runs at times for thirteen or more weeks, is therefore a single play. A slot of about one hour is also allowed for each episode in the series.

Duro Ladipo featured in all the four stages. He has been said to have dominated the first stage. Some of the tele-plays he produced during this time in the early sixties include *Gbádéḡeḡsin*, *Alágbára Má Mèrò*, *Igbéraga Níí Śíwájú Íparun*, *Sùúrù Baba Íwà*, *Ọ̀lọ̀gbọ̀n Ayé*, *Ènìyàn*

Şoro, Ewé Ayó and Òmúlèmófo. Bodè Wáàsimi was his major contribution to the second stage of the development. Many of Ladipo's full-length staged plays that were later adapted for the screen may also be seen as his contribution to the third stage. Prominent plays in this category include *Ọba Kò So*, *Morèmi*, *Ajagun-Nlá*, *Ọba Wàjà* and *Édá*. The last stage of the development was pioneered by Duro Ladipo in 1975 when his adaptation of Fagunwa's *Ogbójú Ọde Nínú Igbó Irúnmalè* was serialized on the Ibadan Channel of the NTA. The serialization method is being perfected today and has become very popular.

Duro Ladipo and members of his group cooperated with Adeyemi Afọlayan in producing *Àjàní Ọgún*, the first Yorùbá feature film in 1976. With the success of this experiment, the cooperative performance system between members of different theatre troupes became the order of the day. Although this cooperative tendency had existed among the theatre groups before the advent of the film and it can in fact be seen as a carry-over from the general Yorùbá or African cooperative culture, it is Duro Ladipo and Adeyemi Afọlayan that extended it to the film making business. Duro Ladipo's theatre troupe with Adeyemi Afọlayan and others also cooperated together in the making of the very successful first Yorùbá socialist film *Ìjà Òmìnira*, an adaptation of Adebayo Faleti's *Ọmọ Olokun Èşin*. It is, however, unfortunate that none of Duro Ladipo's own plays was filmed in his lifetime.

Among all Nigerian theatre practitioners it was Duro Ladipo who owned the first personal theatre building, the Mbárí Mbáyò Cultural Centre at Oşogbo. Apart from a theatre space, the centre also housed an art gallery. It was opened in May 1962 by Ọba Adenle II with the premiere of *Ọbá Mórò*. The centre served as training and practising grounds for many theatre and fine artists of our time including Ademọla Onibon-Okuta, Ọjẹniyi Amọ, Lere Paimọ, Lasisi Gbẹbọlaja, Fẹmi Dada, Adeniya Ademokoya, Jacob Afọlabi, Jimọ Buraimọ, Twins Seven Seven, Bisi Fabunmi, Muraina Oyelami, Aşiru Ọlatunde, Adebisi Adeleke and Yẹmi Èlẹbuibon. Theatrical competitions were organized for school children and youth associations at the Mbárí Mbáyò Cultural Centre and some Yorùbá literary texts were published from the centre.

Nobody that we know of today has surpassed Duro Ladipo in the exportation of Nigerian indigenous language drama to the outside world. According to Garba Ashiwaju, the then Federal Chief Cultural Officer, in the *Entertainer* magazine of March 1982, Duro Ladipo participated in nine international cultural festivals between 1974 and 1977 alone. There is

no doubt that Duro Ladipo lived a life totally dedicated to the dramatic and theatrical arts in particular and to the Yorùbá and African culture in general. His marks on the dramatic map of Nigeria no doubt remain indelible. Of him we can cite from the Ìrèsé lineage poetry:

Bónírèsé ò fíngbá mọ́
Èyí tó ti fín kò leè parun

Trans:

Even if Onírèsé (the master calabash carver) carves no
more
Those that he has carved can never be destroyed.

Since the death of Duro Ladipo in 1978, it should be put on record that Biḡdun, the beloved wife, has remained faithful to the call. Despite the enormous socio-economic and domestic factors militating against her continued steadfastness in the business of the dramatic and theatrical art to which her husband committed his whole life time, she remains unshaken and has continued to fly high the flag and blow loud the trumpet of the tradition. After Ladipo's death, the mantle of the leadership of the group fell on her. The first performance of the Duro Ladipo's Repertory theatre was that of *Olúwẹ̀rì* on 28 August 1978. In collaboration with other faithful members of the group, she took *Ọ̀ba Kò So* around in 1985 to commemorate the seventh anniversary of Duro Ladipo's death. The play was staged at the Ọ̀yọ̀ State Cultural Centre, Mọ̀kọ̀la Hill, Ibadan on 9 and 10 March, 1985 and in Trenchard Hall, University of Ibadan on 12 March 1985. The play has also been taken to Ogun, Lagos and Kwara states since then. In 1987, Biḡdun, at the invitation of Arthur Hall, went to Philadelphia in the United States of America with two members of the troupe to assist with the performance of an English version of *Ọ̀ba Kò So*. Many other plays have been performed from the troupe's repertory since Duro Ladipo's death. They include *Ọ̀tún Akọ̀gun*, which was given the new title *Ọ̀rùka Ifẹ́* (an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*) and *Ajagun-Nlá* among others.

Mrs. Biḡdun Duro-Ladipo has also added new plays to the repertory of the troupe. She did a thirteen week television series called *Bíná Kú* for Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Ibadan in 1981, and another titled *Ọ̀yìn bó Ajélè̀dò* in 1986 for the Television Service of Ọ̀yọ̀ State (TSOS) now Broadcasting Corporation of Oḡyọ̀ State (BCOS).

She also did a musical series called *Oya Sings* for NTA Ibadan in 1979. In 1997, the privately owned Galaxy Television featured *Èsẹ̀ntáyé*,

another thirteen-week series of the troupe. She would later compose yet another series, *Ayélàágbé* for the same station in 1998.

Without doubt, the new works of Biòdun Duro-Ladipoò are clearly in the tradition of her husband's theatre. *Óyìnbó Ajéḡḡè* and *Oòya Sings* are reminiscent of Duro Ladipoò's *Ọbá Wàjà* and *Bodè Wáàsìmi* and the songs of Duro Ladipo which Adebayo Faleti recollected producing for the radio service of the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service in the sixties. The roles of Mòrèmi and Ọya, for which Biòdun Duro-Ladipoò became popular in the performance of *Mòrèmi* and *Ọba Kò So*, continue to stick on her even after her husband's death. These two roles inform, most of the time, the way in which she is cast in other plays today. The example that easily comes to mind is that of "Iya Agboòmoòla" in *Èsèntáyé*. The same is true of the roles she plays in other collaborative works she does with other theatre practitioners. In Chief Hubert Ogunde's *Aropin Teniyan*, she plays the role of Erelú and in Adeyemi Afọlayan's (Ade Love's) *Ìjà Orogún*, she plays the role of Ìyá Èwè.

There is no doubt that with the continued efforts of Biòdun Duro-Ladipo and others who are following Duro Ladipo's footsteps, the dramatic and theatrical traditions of Duro Ladipo have not died with him. Having said this, there is an urgent need to vigorously document the hitherto unscripted works of Duro Ladipo. It is high time we had a collection of the complete works of Duro Ladipo; as many of the works as possible should also be put on video. Funds could be made available by philanthropists and other relevant cultural agencies. The custodians of Duro Ladipo's works, Biòdun and other members of his family would, however, have to cooperate with scholars on the project.

APPENDIX I

OSOGBO NATIONAL ANTHEM

Words and Music Composed by:

DURO LADIPO (M. O. N.)

OSOGBO ILU ARO
OROKI ASALA
AARE O PETA
AARE PETA, WON GBA A O
OSUN OSOGBO PELE O

TIMEHIN RORA O
LARO MA MA PELE O

OGIDAN O MAA RORA O
OSUN OSOGBO OLOMO YOYO
ATEWOGBEJA NI A NPE NI ATAOJA (2ce)
OSUN OSOGBO OLOMO YOYO
SELERU AGBO, AGBARA AGBO
LOSUN FI NOW 'MO RE
IYA BA MI SE
BA MI SE OSUN BA MI SE O
BA MI SE O OSUN BA MI SE.

APPENDIX II

Oriki of the Ladipo Family (from undated manuscript)

Omo Elerin, Erin moje omo saaja
 Erin moje t'oje ba lapa je
 Won ni gbigbun lapa omo gbun.
 Sigun-sigun, e ma d'Erin sigun
 Ororo mo f'ogun mi r'Erin wo
 Erin-moje bo ba ta won lofa
 Bi won o ba ku

A sa won logbe ori kanranmoyan
 Omo igi kan gagara
 To wo dina lerin nigbo olowe
 Igi ko j'Erin yo ko, Igi ko j'Erin yodo
 Oyaju kan, oyaju kan
 O rele re e medun wa
 Ko to de, igi d'agoro ide
 Igi dejigbara okun, mo ko lona Erin
 Omo o ja ni popo ja laara.

Bi Erin ti nfolo yagi
 Ojola olumo lapa
 Omo a gun bi igba aago
 Olumomi dade
 Nwon ni ko rile yan
 Ojola ni tani ni abe ilosun
 O ni ta n ni abe iholo
 O ni ta nlabatabutu
 Baba odokodo
 Ta nladagun nla baba omikomi
 Omo oniwigbon
 Agba ojola olumomi o ma rile yan

Ojola ko bi mo ni juku aa gbe je
 Ti won ba bi teere, won a maa mu jo ara won.

Omo bale loke ore
Oke ore kiki i gbede
Nibi emoso po jomidan lo
Omo ojo ro sagbon lasan.
Omo omi amu dun n we
Ti kete ni i tu ni lara
Omo eeke nile erin
Olubodun, oju nile oorun
Omo a fokuta wo loke ore
Omo re e sun, isu fere e jinna
Omo eni a ni oj'Elerin to ko
O ni bara Oluokan lo ya on lara.
Omo a musu laja obinrin gunyan je
O sonsa nigba iyan

O gunyan je nigba enikan o nisu
Omu ewuro agbamu.
A b'iyarin lomido.
Tete omo a te mo lu Apa
Ara ita Ogbolu
A rode wewe b'owo omo
Omo eni osire gbagbe idi
Nigba o dijo kerindilogun
Ni won ree medi wale
Ni gbogbo re ba toro motan

APPENDIX III

DURO LADIPO: MILESTONES (1926-1978)

Born 18th December, 1926 in Osogbo, Osun State of Nigeria (Western Region of Nigeria)

Educational Qualification

- (a) Government Middle Two Certificate, 1942
- (b) Teacher In-Service Training Grade III Certificate, 1955
- (c) Teacher Training In-Service Grade II Certificate, Wusasa, Zaria, 1953.
- (d) Attended Extra-Mural Drama Course, School of Drama, University of Ibadan, 1963
- (e) Attended yet another Drama Course at the School of Drama, University of Ibadan, 1964.

Teaching Experience

Was Primary and Elementary Teacher from 1943 – 1961 in both Western and Northern Regions of Nigeria including St. Phillips Primary School, Otan-Ayegbaju: 1943-47; Holy Trinity School, Omofe, Ilesa: 1947-1948; United Native African Church School, Kaduna: 1949-1955

Plays Written and Produced: Type/Media

1. OBA MORO (Historical).....1962
2. OBA WAJA (Historical).....1963
3. OBA KO SO (Historical).....1963
4. BANUSO (TV).....1964
5. KOBI IDI (TV).....1964
6. OLOGBONAYE (TV).....1964
7. ASAKE (TV).....1964
8. ADETOUN (TV).....1964
9. SUURU BABA IWA (TV).....1965
10. EDA1965
11. MOREMI (Historical).....1965
12. ADEGBOYEGA1966
13. IRUBO ISIAKA (for Muslim festival).....1966
14. OMINIRA1967
15. EWE AYO1967
16. BEYI O SE (Historical).....1968

17. OBATALA1969
18. OLUBORI1969
19. ALAJOBI1970
20. ORILOYE1970
21. ORUNMILA.....1971
22. OSUN.....1971
23. AYOTETI.....1971
24. OLOJU MERIN.....1972
25. BABA ISALE.....1972
26. AJAGUN-NLA.....1973
27. IYERU OKIN.....1973
28. AARO META.....1974
29. KAROUNWI.....1974
30. OTUN AKOGUN.....1975
31. BODE WASIMI *Television series*.....1975
32. OLUWERI.....1975
33. ODUDUWA.....1976
34. OGEDEMGBE.....1976
35. IKU BABA YEYE.....1977
36. IGBO IRUNMOLE *Television series*..1977.

Plays Published:

- 1) OBA MORO – Mbari Publications, 1964
- 2) OBA WAJA – Mbari Publications, 1964
- 3) MOREMI (In *Three Nigerian Plays*) — Longmans Green & Co. 1967
- 4) MOREMI – Macmillan, 1971
- 5) OBATALA – Longmans Green & Co., 1967
- 6) OSA KO SO – Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1964 (Yoruba and English)
- 7) OBA KO SO – Macmillan Press, 1964 (Yoruba and English)
- 8) OBA KO SO – Mbari Publication (English Version), 1964
- 9) EDA — Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1964
- 10) ITAN ERE DURO LADIPO – Longmans Green & Co., 1972

Gramophone Records Produced:

1. OBA KO SO – Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1964
2. EDA — Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1964
3. OBA KO SO – Curt Wittig Recording Company, Washington, DC, 1976
4. OBATALA — Philips Recording Company, 1974

5. ORISA OKO – Philips Recording Company, 1974
6. MOREMI – Philips Recording Company, 1974
7. AYOTETI – Philips Recording Company, 1974
8. AJAGUN-NLA – EDA Records (Duro Ladipo's new label), 1977
9. AJASORO – EDA Records, 1977

Plays Recorded on Audio Tape (All for the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan):

- | | | | |
|----|-----------|---|------|
| 1) | MOREMI | — | 1968 |
| 2) | EDA | — | 1968 |
| 3) | OBATALA | — | 1968 |
| 4) | OSUN | — | 1969 |
| 5) | BEYI O SE | — | 1969 |
| 6) | AJAGUNNLA | — | 1970 |
| 7) | OBA KO SO | — | 1969 |

National and International Awards:

1961 First Nigerian Dramatist to receive National Arts Trophy for Best Performer of the Year.

1964 Awarded First Prize at the International Theatre Competition at Berliner Festwochen in Berlin, Western Germany for OBA KO SO.

1965 Awarded the National and Republican Nigerian Honour and Insignia of M.O.N. (Member of the Order of the Niger); Awarded a Medal at the Buckingham Palace in London during the Commonwealth Arts Festival for Outstanding Performance of OBA KO SO.

1975 Grand Medal presented by the Mayor of Sao Paulo in Brazil for OBA KO SO.

1975 Awarded Medal by the Mayor of Washington, DC representing the President of the United States at the reception of OBA KO SO at Museum of African Art in Washington, DC.

International Festivals Attended

1964 Berliner Festwochen in Berlin, West Germany with OBA KO SO.

1965 Commonwealth Art Festival in London, Cardiff, Liverpool and Glasgow with OBA KO SO.

Extended tours of:

- (a) Brussels, Belgium
- (b) Amsterdam, Holland
- (c) Vienna, Austria

- (d) Cologne, West Germany
- (e) Frankfurt, West Germany to perform OBA KO SO and EDA.
- 1973 Festival Mondial du Theatre du Nancy, France with OBA KO SO.
- 1973 Yoruba Festival in Zurich, Switzerland with OLUWERI.
- 1973 Afro Asian and other Art Festivals:
 - (a) Belgrade, Yugoslavia
 - (b) Shiraz-Persepolis, Iran
 - (c) Rome, Italy

Performed plays: OBA KO SO and OLUWERI.

1974/75 Tour of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Sao Paulo, Brasilia and Port Alegre with OBA KO SO.

1975 Third World Theatre Festival in the United State of America, including Washington, DC, Chicago, Ohio, University of Boston, New York City at Madison Square Garden, and Victoria Island, Canada with OBA KO SO.

1977 Third World Theatre Festival, House of Culture, Ronnes, Paris, France; MOREMI and OBA KO SO.

1977 Bonn, West Germany with MOREMI and OBA KO SO, sponsored by International Theatre Institute, Paris.

Films: Production and Appearance

- 1) Acted in Esso World Theatre Production, *Culture in Transition*, 1964
- 2) *Creative Man* starring Duro Ladipo by American Educational Television, 1966
- 3) *Ajani Ogun* by Ola Balogun with English & French subtitles, starring Duro Ladipo, Composer and Music Director. It is the first film produced in Yoruba and produced by Duro Ladipo; shot on location in Ekiti, 1976.
- 4) *Ija Ominira*, Friendship Motion Pictures. Second Film in Yoruba with

English and French subtitles. Music composed by Duro Ladipo. Starring Duro Ladipo and Ade Love. Produced by Duro Ladipo and directed by Ola Balogun (yet to be released at the time of Duro Ladipo's death).

Died **March 11, 1978**. Was married with four wives, and survived by fifteen children.

APPENDIX IV

Exact Reproduction of a Contract of Stewardship

Rekia Balogun on 7 Desember ti mo wa si bi si odo duro Ladipo. Ayo ati ife mo ni lati se ise ere sise omo ni mi ogboigun. – iyabo yesufu.

This girl came in today 7th Dec 1969 to learn Theatre work. She is 19 years old. The father is a native of Owo by name Yesufu Balogun of Ogbo-Igun – Owo. She will be under training for some time while equiries to her parents will be made.

Properties brought
2 Accra wrappers
5 gowns
1 buba – Accra
2 pairs of sandals
Cash £12/6d

Signed
Duro Ladipo
(7/12/69)

Father's Address
Yesufu Balogun
No 9 Iregun Ijebu Owo

APPENDIX V

Of Theatre Management and the other palavas

The successes and failures of a professional theatre troupe depend largely on its publicity (media relation) and much so on the patronage of promoters and art managers. In sixteen years of active and involving productions, Duro Ladipo had fruitful collaborations with various personages who contributed immensely to his development and exposure. Apart from his friends and mentors of many years, Ulli and Georgina Beier, there were others including Segun Olusola, Wole Soyinka and Saburi Biobaku. These personalities belonged to the intellectual group, those who offered suggestions and commentaries on Ladipo's productions. But the other group of collaborators, that is the advocate group, included those who functioned as go-betweens, promoters, and commercial patrons of the troupe at different times. Among these were Messrs. Berenbrok of Intereuropa, Mr. Lola Martins, Mel Howard and Arthur Hall.

Attempts to defraud the group and exploit its immense creativity by occasional hustlers dogged the trail of Duro Ladipo's theatre all through his lifetime. The story was told of a popular Lagos socialite acclaimed as widely travelled and one of the best cultural promoters in the land in the early 1970s. Once he tried to sweet-talk Duro Ladipo into an overseas production deal of *Oba Ko So* and one of the other popular plays. In the deal, he would act as the Manager of the company; he would secure accommodation for the troupe while Duro Ladipo would source for travelling fund; the expected gate takings would be shared in such a way that the Manager/Promoter would end up pocketing two-thirds fraction of the whole amount. Ladipo saw through the sleight and the cunning and would have none of that.

On the contrary, Abiodun Duro-Ladipo was too trusting of any offer of assistance or patronage in her role as the leader of the troupe. In 1987, a decade after Ladipo's death, "Oya" got an invitation from a Ms. X. in Philadelphia, requesting her presence in a Center that September to give general coaching lessons on *Oba Ko So*. X had the idea to perform the English version of the award-winning play with an All American cast. Abiodun's assignment, X explained, would be to train some American actors and actresses on drumming, dancing and costume, in preparation for the

performance of *Oba Ko So*. To accompany her, Mrs. Duro-Ladipo picked Ayankunle Ayanlade and Lasisi Gbebolaja (the group's lead *bata* drummer and dancer respectively). And for her remuneration, X's letter dated July 23, 1987 remarks:

"I have deposited \$4,500 in Barclays Bank in Ibadan for you to receive with proper identification. These funds are for you, \$2,500 as half of your \$5,000 Honorarium, \$1000 as half for your drummers' honorarium of \$2,000 and \$1,000 as half Honorarium for a dancer at \$2,000."

On the strength of this commitment, Mrs. Duro-Ladipo got herself engaged with the cast for six weeks running from mid September through October 1987. Indeed, X had gone further to honour Oya with her suggestion that her copyright fees - television and radio rights/film rights and video recording rights - "*shall be as you dictate*". During the course of the rehearsal, X remitted the agreed sum to Nigeria through the Barclays Bank (now Union Bank) and got her guest to confirm it. However when Oya's children approached the bank in Nigeria for remittance from Lagos to Ibadan, they were informed that the agreed sum had been recalled to the United States.

"Oya" approached Ms. X who simply told her that there must have been a minor administrative error on the part of the bank. And to further allay her fears, X promptly gave her half of the honorarium as agreed; she assured her guests that she would 'fix' the problem of the other half of the agreed honoraria. But on return to Nigeria and making fresh enquiries herself at Barclays Bank, Mrs Duro-Ladipo was shown ample evidence indicating that X engineered the cable order that recalled the money! A flustered and furious Oya complained to anyone who cared to listen. So what did she do? "Ah, I complained. I protested. I sent a letter to the Mayor of Philadelphia who had commended our efforts when we were in America. I got the American embassy in Lagos to know the manner of woman that was this Ms. X."

It seemed all suggestions pointed in the direction of Philadelphia. Mrs. Duro-Ladipo was advised that the fund would qualify as 'taxpayer's money' since the event was sponsored by the Arts Council of Philadelphia. On the strength of her petition, apparently, X got the heat and fled Philadelphia. It was later revealed that X had conned many victims in a similar manner over the years.

That was an experience Abiodun Duro-Ladipo has not forgotten in a hurry. "I had spent so much preparing for that trip, so much." Oya kept saying even many years after, each time the subject was broached.

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APPENDIX VI

STATE HOUSE
DODAN BARRACKS
LAGOS, NIGERIA

Ref. No. 1908/Vol. IV

16th March, 1978

Brigadier D. M. Jemibewon,
Military Governor of Oyo State
Military Governor's Office
IBADAN
Oyo State.

My dear David,

I have learnt with deep sorrow of the death of Chief Duro Ladipo at Ibadan at the untimely age of 52. I wish on behalf of the Federal Military Government and on my own behalf to express to you and members of his family the most sincere and heartfelt condolence on the loss of a man who contributed immensely to the development of Arts and Culture in this country.

The late Chief Duro Ladipo came into limelight in the early sixties with his introduction of mystical effects into his plays based on Nigeria's past history and cultural heritage. Since then, he has developed and widened the scope

of his subject to the extent that it did credit to black people and culture all over the world. A playwright, dramatist and entertainer of international stature, the late Duro Ladipo's talent earned him the National Honours Award of M.O.N in 1965. His performances have, over the past 15 years, greatly enriched blackman's cultural heritage and will continue to do so for a long time to come. His loss at this time when black arts and culture has just assumed its proper place of pride in the world cultural arena is indeed a sad blow to this country in particular and the blackman's world in general.

While I enjoined his family to seek solace in Chief Duro Ladipo's contributions to the arts and cultural life of this country, I pray God in His infinite mercy to grant his soul eternal repose and the family the fortitude to bear the sad loss.

Yours in sorrow,

Signed

(LT-GENERAL OLUSEGUN OBASANJO)

Head of the Federal Military Government

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

APPENDIX VII

DEPT. OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES
& LITERATURES
FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIV. OF LAGOS
LAGOS, NIGERIA
Telephone: 41361 (10 Lines) Ext. 639

Our Ref: FA/DALL/E/6

Your Ref:

Date: 20-3-78

Sí

“Oya”, Agba Obinrin
Opo Olòdgbé Dúró Ládiípò
Ati awọn mọ̀lẹ̀bi gbogbo
Bodè Wáàsìmi
Ita Başorun
IBADAN.

L’oruko gbogbo awọn ojişè ati gbogbo awọn omọ-egbe ti Ijinlẹ Yoruba (Eka Eko), mo ki yin tokanṭokàn pe ẹ ku ifarada, ẹ ku idàrò, ẹ si ku afeku eni wa (Olóyè Ònkòwé àti Òşèrè àti Olùkóni Dúró Ládiípò) eni ti Ikú mú kúrò l’áyè ni lólóló yí.

Nigba ti a gbo iku re, àyà wa là gààrà nitori pe ojo ogbo re si jinna. A daro re pupo pupo nitori gudugudu meje ati gèdègèdè mēfà tí ó ti şe fun igbélékè èdè YORUBA, èdè abíníbí wa, èdè omọ Oòduà, àti fun àpónlé oríşiríşì ogbón àti awọn àşà dárádára t’ó jé àdáyébá fun iran ‘Káàárò! Ó ò jùire?’

Olódùmarè yóó foríjì òkú; iwájú tí òkú kojúsí yóó dára; èyìn t’ó fi silè kò ní í bàjé. Aşè.

Kí ẹ mọkànle, kí ẹ túraká pẹ̀lú ìrètí pé, bí adùn ti ni kẹyìn ewúro, àtubòtán ikú eni wa tí à ni wí yòd dára lágbára Ọlórùn fun awọn omọ ati opo ati mọ̀lẹ̀bí t’ó fi silè.

Iree o!

Lati owo

Signed

Ọjogbón-Agba Adeboye Babalọla
Alagba Egbẹ Ijinlẹ
Yoruba (Eka Eko)

APPENDIX VIII

REVIEWS CULLED FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

MEL HOWARD, NINON TALLON KARLWEIS,
and
THE FESTIVAL OF THE THIRD WORLD, CORP.
present
DIRECT FROM NIGERIA

OBA KOSO
THE YO RUBA FOLK FESTIVAL

Written and Directed
By
DURO LADIPO

WITH
DURO LADIPO'S NATIONAL THEATRE

(In alphabetical order)

OLAYEMI AINA/ OJENIYI AMWO/ A J A N I
ANIMASHAUN/ AYANNIYI AYANDA/ ADEMOLA AYINDE/
BOLATITO AJEOGE/ LASISI GBEBOLAJI/ YEMI ELEIBUIBON/
ABIDOUN LADIPO/ FUNKE LADIPO/ ALAKE MAKINDE/
OLUREMI OLABODE/ OLUFUNKE OLADIMEJU/BISI LADIPO/
DURO LADIPO/ AJEWOLE OGUNKORODE/ AREMU IYIOLA
OYELAKIN.

Musicians

KAYODE AKANBI /ADESINA ADETOYI /AYANKUNIE
AYANKADE/ LADEJI AYANYEMI/ ADEBISI FASANU/ ADEBISI
OLORI / ISIAKA ONAOLAPO

Lighting by OLATUNDE OGUNTOLA

Stage Manger: LANREWAJU LADIPO

Settings by the Oshogbo Artists of Mbari Mbayo

Tour Director: Atlee Stephon

Exclusive Management

MEL HOWARD

143 East 27th Street New York, N.Y. 10016

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Thursday, March 6, 1975

NIGERIANS BLEND SKILL WITH POWER

By Thomas Willis

"OBA Koso" means "The King did not hang" in Yoruba dialect. The story of Duro Ladipo's musical play, which had a single performance at the Auditorium Theater Wednesday night by the Nigerian Folk Opera, has all the elements of classic theater the world over - violence, magic, power struggles, and poetic force.

Nigeria being a foreign country to me I am making that statement based on the program's translations of plot and crucial poetic segments. The unison songs, extended monodies, and fragments of conversation in this tribal opera are in a language and style known to most of us only from anthropology classes or high life recordings. But the drums speak a universal language and the mime and dance can be appreciated by anyone. Its participants possess a blend of good nature, nonchalance, and professional skill which is practically unknown in the hard sell West. Perhaps the best comparison is with a crackerjack jazz combo in a busy club. Anyone not playing is relaxed, and listening. But when it comes time to do his turn, the voltage rises with switched-on suddenness.

THE STORY could be from Kabuki or Greek. Sango - a 16th century Yoruba chief - has trouble with two of his generals. One is a shifty archer, the other a specialist in potions. Shifty is exiled to the western front, where he becomes a hero and rebel leader. Witchman is sent to quell the rebellion. He does, with the aid of strong magic. Returning home, he reenacts his victory, then overthrows Sango, who hangs himself. In the finale, he becomes the voice of thunder, martyred to bring his tribe peace and happiness.

Except for the colorful backdrops, everything on stage is constantly in motion. The Yoruba men, including three virtuoso warriors from a current chieftain's entourage, specialize in a sort of barefoot tap dance, with each muscle locking or twitching with isometric precision. The girls have the loose shoulders and reined-in hip movements that are a standard third world

import.

The drummers - seven in all - take turns introducing the acts with short dances or virtuoso rifts. Like western operas, Ladipo's has its set pieces and stylization. Most moving of these was a restrained lament by the deposed leader's wife, who conveys fear and grief with the simplest of understated gestures.

THE BOSTON GLOBE

Thursday, February 13, 1975

MANY DIMENSIONED NIGERIAN TROUPE

By Bob Garrett

If we wanted to tell the story of George Washington and the Revolution using dance, how would it be done? The minuet?

Duro Ladipo's National Theatre, a Nigerian folklorique dance company, has no trouble with its legends. Its syncopated drum-beat history of Alafin Sango, mythic king, is an extraordinary show at the Loeb Drama Center in Cambridge, through Saturday night.

After seeing the production, memories of most folk-lorique dance offered by European country X, Y or Z suddenly di-minish to so much costumed maypoling and leaping bravura. That's an exaggerated judgment, perhaps, but it spotlights the something extra the Nigerian troupe offers: storyline ratio and dramatic punch.

The backdrop is vibrant African artwork that looks like Picasso. (Actually, of course, it is vice versa.) Eight costumed drummers provide a rumbling commen-tary to the action. Supple women villagers are plugged into the rhythmic current, almost always vibrating, and positively shuddering in reaction to the theatrical entrances of each major character. The women act as Greek chorus, sometimes wailing haunting melodic supplications. But often they are slyly humorous. This legend is laced with human foibles. The great king, Sango, after much initial ado paid him, is actually a bit of a blowhard, and treacherous at that. Though in the finale Sango is enshrined in the land of his ancestors from where he thunders tribal advice, in between

our sympathies turn to a pugnacious army general named Timi. This cocky warrior, with a flashy smile and eye for the ladies, is a great arrow shot and a lightening dancer. We call it charisma. He might have made a fine leader, but for the king's double-dealing and a debilitating magic spell. The power of the spell, from rattle and drum beat, pulses over the floodlights to the back of the auditorium.

The warrior Timi (player's name is not in program notes) shares confidential asides: jokes, hard-put-upon tales, tragedies. None of it is in English. Nevertheless we are won over to someone who at first appears as villain. It is a nice dramatic twist.

The playwright and head of the company is Duro Ladipo. One of Nigeria's most prominent theatre names, he also plays the king. Duro Ladipo put together the production from ancient drum rhythms and myths of the Yoruba people, a segment of the West African Coast nation. The musical, titled "Oba Koso," has travelled the world. Nigerian village audiences reportedly are enraptured by the company; even over the culture gulch, so was the Loeb.

CHICAGO DAILY NEWS
Thursday, March 6, 1975

FOLK OPERA "OBA KOSO" CAPTURES NIGERIA'S SPIRIT **By Dorothy Samachson**

If you couldn't manage a trip to Nigeria this week, you should have taken the shorter trip to the Auditorium Theater Wednesday night. "Oba Koso," an opera composed and performed by Duro Ladipo, one of Nigeria's leading theater artists, was presented in a one-night-only performance.

"Oba Koso," which translates roughly into "The King Didn't Hang," is a folk opera, inspired by the traditional poetry, music, dance and legends of the Yoruban people who live in the southwest corner of Nigeria.

THE YORUBAN culture is an ancient one, dating back to at least 300 B.C., when an iron-working civilization flourished, and its mythology is a rich one. Some of its legendary customs had rather unusual ways of coping with oppressive kings. When a ruler became too repressive he was invited to either commit suicide or escape into exile.

"Oba Koso tells the story of Shango, God of Lightning, his wife, Oya, whose tears gave birth to the River Niger, and how Shango's wars

and plots led to the tragic denouement — suicide. The opera was performed in the Yoruba language by Ladipo and his four wives. It was presented with the utmost good humour, with lively acting and dancing, and the dialog was sung in a rhythmic speech-song.

The costumes were colorfully imaginative, traditional in style, and symbolic sets were supplied by stunning abstract panels of cloth. The musical accompaniment was played by seven drummers.

BACKSTAGE

Friday, April 4, 1975

“OBA KOSO”

Reviewed by Carol Pearce

For two hours, *Duro Ladipo*, with his national theatre company theatrically transported the audience from La Mama's Annex to his homestead of Nigeria. The drama, bearing strong resemblances to classical Greek presentations, traces the Yoruba folk legend of how King Shango became Shango God of Thunder. The company consists of Ladipo, author and director, and five of his real-life wives, including Oya, his first wife - who plays the Queen.

The on-stage group of 7 drummers features an 11-year old virtuoso on the “talking” drum. Indigenous instruments used throughout create uniquely beautiful music. Vibrant costuming makes the production a living painting in shapes, textures and color. Add to this the guilelessly honest performances and the result is fascinating theater.

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

Thursday, March 6, 1975

LADIPO A DANCE LEGEND IN HIS OWN RITE

By Wynne Delacoma

“Oba Koso,” the Yoruba musical, performed by singers and dancers of Duro Ladipo's National Theater. Auditorium Theatre.

An ancient Nigerian legend was told in song, dance and drum music Wednesday night in the Auditorium Theatre. But “Oba Koso,” a Yoruban

musical written 10 years ago by Duro Ladipo, should sound and look familiar to American audiences used to jazz music and discotheque dancing.

Ladipo, a leading theater figure in Nigeria, used ritual dances and music for his musical but filtered them through the music and dance Nigerians are doing today in their Highlife cafes. An American jazzman or teen-aged dancer would feel very comfortable in one of them.

Ladipo has written 43 plays and performs throughout Nigeria, working often with cults whose legends, music and dance he is interpreting for wider audiences. He wrote, produced, directed and starred in "Oba Koso," which was done in Chicago only on Wednesday night. This appearance is part of the theatre's first American tour, hopefully the first of many.

The story of "Oba Koso" is told in verse that is sometimes declaimed and sometimes sung. Ladipo took the leading role of Sango, God of Thunder, who is having trouble with two recalcitrant generals. Sango, an amiable man of linebacker proportions, strolled around the stage wearing a beaded jacket and robes with casual authority. A group of musicians played continuously, beating intricate rhythms on small drums. They wore flowing robes, but they smiled and swayed their way through the evening like jazzmen who know they've got a good set going.

The female dancers, wearing sarong-like robes, moved with the jivey grace Americans expect from the Supremes. Arms swinging loosely from their shoulders, they shrugged and rocked with casual sophistication. But each movement was based in ritual dances and often each portion of their bodies was responding to different rhythms from different drums. The women smiled and tossed their movements off with easy grace, but not a beat or gesture was out of place.

Several performers did solo dances as the hand-painted geometric-patterned backdrops were changed between acts. Again, the intricate movements were based on ritual but performed with a swinging, loose-limbed ease that would bring a "Right on" from onlookers in an American discotheque.

Sometimes folk music or dance productions from other cultures are so exotic we can only view them as interesting or beautiful objects. Or they have been jazzed up for American audiences and seem unauthentic and slick. But "Oba Koso" has neither of these drawbacks. It was performed Wednesday night as it is performed for Nigerians. But evidently there is a lot of Nigeria in American culture. Can you dig it?

THE BOSTON GLOBE, Wednesday, February 12, 1975

**WEST AFRICAN FOLK MUSICAL AT LOEB,
FIRST TIME IN US**

By Judy Jackson, Globe Staff

"Oba Koso" is a West African folk musical. Written 10 years ago by the Nigerian playwright, Duro Ladipo, it is a popular production in that country, internationally and at the Loeb Drama Center where it opened last night. Presented for the first time in the United States, and performed by The National Folk Ensemble of Nigeria, "Oba Koso" is based on a famous Nigerian legend that tells the story of Shango, God of Thunder, and his wife, Oya.

Shango as king has promised peace for his village, but in the opening scenes it develops that he has gone too far in rewarding Timi and Gbonka (pronounced BONKA), popular, strutting, battle-craving generals. On the advice of his wife, Oya, and the other chiefs, he sends Timi to another enemy village, hoping Timi will be killed. This fails, Timi is crowned by the enemy, and the final solution rests in pitting Timi against Gbonka.

Shango arranges for a public duel. Both generals welcome the show of strength. But, Gbonko implores super-natural forces before battle and emerges more powerful than Shango. When Oya deserts him, when the other villagers (those who survive Shango's murderous frenzy) follow Gbonka, then Shango feels he has no choice but to hang himself.

In the end Shango speaks from the sky. Asking for future obedience and worship it turns out he has not been a bad king after all.

"Oba Koso" is Yoruba theater and the story is told by drum, song, traditional dance, in Yoruba and in English, each scene explained briefly before it is enacted. The six drummers use traditional and talking drums. The lead drummer is about 13 years old, and his rhythms tell the dancers where and how to move their legs and arms. For this reason the dancers might vary their steps in each performance of "Oba Koso" though the ceremonial, ritual and modern are the basic dance types.

As a legend "Oba Koso" can be performed according to thematic and physical interpretation. And while the color red is chosen for worship of the God of Thunder in this Yoruba production, a different tribal affiliation will require a contrasting style.

"Oba Koso" is performed at the Loeb at 8 p.m. through Friday, and at 5 and 9 p.m. Saturday.

THE BOSTON GLOBE

Wednesday, February 12, 1975

“OBA KOSO”
Review by Didier Delaunoy

It is a pity that Mel Howard Productions and La Mama ETC did not try to keep the Nigerian musical “Oba Koso” longer than they did. I understand that prior commitments prevented them to do so, but it is hoped that the tremendous response the show received will encourage them to bring the company of 30-odd singers, dancers and musicians back to New York for what will be a long engagement.

Though performed entirely in Yoruba, the show is easily understandable, thanks in large part to the informative synopsis distributed to the audience, and thanks to the fact that it is, basically, a very visual spectacle.

In fact, were one not informed of the show’s actual story, its explosive vision would be largely sufficient to make it a unique theatrical experience, colorful and dynamic.

The plot tells about King Shango who, confronted with dissension among his people, and after losing face to two of his general decides to resign and commits suicide before being sanctified by his former subjects who proclaim him God of Thunder.

The entire story is punctuated with native chants, explosive outbursts on the singing drums, extraordinary dances, and other theatrical devices that find their origins in ancestral customs.

“Oba Koso” is now scheduled to tour the country. If it comes back to New York, make sure you catch it - it is an unforgettable experience.

Ed. Note: The show is scheduled to play a return engagement at the Felt Forum later this month.

THE BLACK AMERICAN, Vol. 15, No. 16.

CONTAGIOUS PULSATIONS
Theater Review by David Richards

Duro Ladipo’s National Theater of Nigeria literally raises the dust on a stage floor and sends it billowing toward the rafters.

Currently on its first North American tour, the 27-member company will be presenting the Yoruba folk play, “Oba Koso,” for the next two weeks at the

Kreeger Theater. Discounting the lights, the blackouts, a microphone and the usual contingent of late-corners, you could easily be in any West African hamlet at nightfall, when the drums begin to assert their entrancingly counterpointed rhythms and the high-pitched song of the villagers cuts through the air.

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED by Ladipo, "Oba Koso" delves into Yoruba mythology for its story of Shango, the god of thunder, his wife Oya, whose tears gave birth to the River Niger, and the internecine warfare that racked their kingdom. The legend is performed entirely in the Yoruba tongue, but patrons, armed with the synopsis in the program, shouldn't have any difficulty following developments.

I suspect the chief delight for Western audiences, however, lies in the contagious pulsations that emanate from the stage. Seven musicians set the pace with drums of assorted shapes and tones, to which the performers add their ritual chants, producing a mixture that sounds not unlike an atonal version of contemporary African Highlife music.

Much of "Oba Koso" is danced, the more spectacular turns being undertaken by the Elewe War Dancers. Largely earthbound, their movements nonetheless have a definite acrobatic intricacy, enhanced by the basic braggadocio nature of the performers themselves. In fact, although "Oba Kosa" tells a tale of rebellion and beheading, magic spells and exile, its most conspicuous equality seems to be its good nature. The legend is presented, not relived, and it is definitely presented in an atmosphere of celebration.

THE SCENERY is provided by vibrantly painted panels of cloth, abstract in design and the cast is traditionally costumed in bold fabrics that look as if they were created in an exploding paint box, and then further adorned with shells and beads.

Decidedly exotic in flavor, "Oba Kosa" is also a curiously hospitable experience.

WASHINGTON STAR-NEWS

Thursday, February 20, 1975

INTRODUCING 'ALL PEOPLE TO MY CULTURE'

By Nora E. Taylor Cambridge, Mass.

It is not only the talking drums that speak: faces do, too, in Duro Ladipo's National Theater from Nigeria. Seven drums, three batik-like curtains,

and his and his dancers' sumptuous handwoven robes are all the equipment that Mr Ladipo, the 26 performers, and two technical men are toting on their first tour of the United States and Canada.

Mr Ladipo is author of a Yoruba musical, or opera as he himself calls it, entitled "Oba Koso" and it is based on the tribal legend of King Sango. It is a satire full suited of color, emotion and delight which has won all sorts of praise in all sorts of places from Nigeria throughout Europe and the Mediterranean world.

Mr Ladipo's first chance to take his productions to the "outside" world came in 1963. "Nigeria was offering a sort of arts trophy to outstanding artists to celebrate 'republichood.' I was honored with the insignia of member of the honor of the Niger, and I was presented with the arts trophy by the then president. The German Ambassador in Nigeria saw a performance and we were invited to participate in that year's Berlin Festival of World Theater. It was competitive. More than 60 nations participated. I was last to perform with this opera and I came first."

TOURING THE WORLD

Since then, he has conducted his troupe to Berlin, London, Shiraz, Dubrovnik, Nancy, Ossake, Accra, and the Commonwealth Arts Festival in Britain. And now, the United States has opportunity to see it.

The company opened in Cambridge, Mass., at Harvard's Loeb Drama Center, and from there it moved on to Washington Arena Theater. Then it goes to Columbus, Ohio, March 2; Chicago Auditorium, March 5/6/1; 'Canada's Maritimes, March 8/9; Bowie State College, Md., March 12; Mechanics Theater, Baltimore, March 11, 13/14; New York Community College, March 15/16; La Mama Annex, New York, March 18/20 evenings; Brooklyn Academy for children's performances March 20/21; Westport Playhouse, Conn., March 23; childre performances at Town Hall, New York, March 24/25; and Cleveland, Ohio, March 26/27.

Between performances at Loeb Drama Center Mr Ladipo shed the American top coat he had donned over his intricate woven cotton robes -- to combat the snow and ice of a New England winter. His pink trousers were tucked into high rubber boots. "I am adapting to the American climate," he smiled.

His great desire, he says, is to "introduce all people to my culture."

In Cambridge, Mr Ladipo said, at least six blacks in his audiences asked

if they could join his dance team. First, he explains, they would have to learn the "talking drums", and the dances.

LEARNING THE DANCES

The seven drums of differing size and timbre "ask the dancer to bend down, to move forward, to go back, to shake his head." That is a complex language, and "it takes two or three years to learn," Mr Ladipo says. "Dancers have to study the drums first. And drummers must be dancers

too because they must understand the message they are sending." His company, Mr Ladipo says, is composed of Yorubans who are Sango (pronounced Shango) worshippers. "We are all members of the same family," he remarked, although it was obvious he meant a tribal, rather than a personal family.

Audiences in Osogbo and other towns in Nigeria pay small sums for tickets to performances of his theater, Mr Duro Ladipo explained, but the moneys are insufficient to take care of the company's daily needs. However, "I am a good farmer," he explained. "Every morning I go to farm. I don't grow cash crops. I grow food because I have many people living with me, members of the troupe, their children, their wives. We can't afford to buy food. Most live in the same house with me. I have a country house far from the city. We built the house with mud. It's very cheap to build. It has some 16 rooms. Each wife has her own room."

"OBA KOSO" IS A JOYFUL MUSIC

By Mel Gussow

OBA KOSO, Yoruba musical, written and directed by Duro Ladipo. With the Duro Ladipo National Theater. Presented by Mel Howard, Ninon Tallon Karlweis and the Festival of the Third World Corporation. At La Mama Annex, 87A East 4th Street.

After a 12-year run in Africa and a successful America tour, including a recent stand at the Arena Stage in Washington, "Oba Koso," a Yoruba folk musical, is at the La Mama Annex (through tomorrow evening).

Such an inter-nationally acclaimed presentation would normally be found at Lincoln Center or at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, but it is probably even more at home in these informal surroundings.

This is a 500-year old Nigerian tale, as interpreted by Duro Ladipo, author, director, and also star of the show. Mr Ladipo, a large bearish man in beautiful kingly regalia (he portrays King Sango), has an energizing stage presence.

Five of Mr Ladipo's wives are also in the cast, along with the Elewe War

Dancers from the Court of Oba Adetona Ayeni, King of the Ila Oragun (the rhythm of those words is reflected in the music). A seven—drum

band, featuring a phenomenal Isiaka Onaolapo, who is 11 years old, plays the bata, the ekiti and dundun, the talking drum. I am not sure which is the dundun, but, together these unusual instruments talk; they fill the Annex with a thunderous, unifying beat.

The story, summarized in English in the program, is acted in Yoruba (one should read the plot summary, but the plot is easy to follow). It is about an ambitious king trying to pacify two warlike generals. There are duels, decapitation and suicide (Sango kills himself and becomes a god.) Despite the remains joyous, mostly by music, shoulders convey bloodiness of the events, the musical For American audiences communication is mime and dance. Feet are fast, and emotion. The entire body participates.

Visual arts play an important part in the production. Pieces of African sculpture strategically placed become a watchful chorus. Sango stalks onto the stage carrying two figures (one appears to be an axe), presumably the badges of his high office. A tall totem of a cylinder, with an unseen man inside, snake back and forth, up and down. There is considerable use of masks and ceremonial robes. Picasso-like curtains brightly signify changes of scene.

Because "Oba Koso" combines aspects of so many different arts and deals ritualistically with classic themes, one is inevitably reminded of Kabuki and Noh theater. A major difference is that this show lacks artifice. But it does not lack theatricality. Even for non-Yoruba-speakers it is a festive entertainment.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Friday, March 21, 1975

FAMILY AFFAIR

Playwright Duro Ladipo's "aba Koso" is "The Fantasticks" of Nigeria, a musical that has been running 12 years in West Africa. The road company has now reached New York at the La Mama annex. Brimming with vitality, it stars Ladipo and his five (count 'em) real-life wives.

The title translates "The Kind Did Not Hang" (you'll have to figure out for yourself how the Nigerians pack five words into two) and relates a 500-year old Yoruba legend of how the great King Shango becomes the god of thunder - but not until after his wife's tears give birth to the River Niger, which takes a lot of tears. The story, in the Yoruba tongue, is more folk opera than play, but a delightful one. The women are vital and sinuous and the men have an unaffected swagger, and the dances, to a variety of drum beats, are marvelous. All in all, a job well done by the National Dance and Theater Company of Nigeria.

DAILY NEWS

Friday, March 21, 1975

"OBA KOSO": PERFECT UNITY

By Alan M. Kriegsman

One could easily begin by describing in raptures the individual enticements of "Oba Koso," the Yoruba festivity by the Nigerian National Dance and Theater Company, which began a two-week engagement at the Kreeger Theater last night under the direction of the company's founder, author and principal performer Duro Ladipo.

One could rhapsodize over the spell-binding drumming by the native Yoruba tribesmen, the thrilling dancing, the haunting declamation and song, the stunning designs and colors of the costuming and sets. But this would be to put the cart before the horse, the dazzling parts before the still more impressive whole that they constitute.

Perhaps it is enough to say that anyone who truly loves the art of theater, or the arts of theater, rather cannot afford to miss "Oba Koso." For what this magical company is showing us, in its North American debut tour, is theater of in that pristine state of vibrancy and integrity to which all theater throughout history has aspired.

What "Oba Koso" discloses is that perfect unity of means and purpose for which we Westerners have so long revered the classical drama

of the Greeks, and which the literati of the Renaissance tried so hard to recapture; which Monteverdi and Gluck and Wagner and others attempted to instill into the world of opera; and which our most radical modern thespians, from Grotowski to Peter Brook, have striven so diligently to emulate. It is that fusion of arts that our partisans of "multimedia" have been shouting about. Only they are obliged to approach it from the outside in, trying to synthesize disparate pieces, trying to restore wholeness to a conglomeration of separate identities.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Thursday, February 20, 1975

"OBA KOSO": A FUSION OF ARTS

In "Oba Koso," however, the unity resides in the material from the outset - word, song, movement and plastic design all are aspects of one and the same dramatic entity. All of them, moreover, merge into a single expression of a vision and a feeling that are the common property of an entire culture. "Oba Koso" is a tragic tale with a happy ending, based on the history and creed of the Yoruba people. It's about a great ruler in search of peace; about a society torn between hawks and doves; about politically ambitious generals hell bent on destruction. Ultimately, the ruler's despair leads to the shame of suicide. But as he joins the gods and becomes one of them, his people affirm his nobility and deny his disgrace with the tumultuous shout. "Oba Koso," which means, "The King did not hang!" Despite the gravity of the events, though, "Oba Koso" is a jubilant affair, its predominant tone one of fervent joy.

One piece of advice - read carefully the synopsis of the plot, which is spelled out in the Yoruban tongue by the players— before the lights go down. The complexities will be perfectly clear on stage if you do.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Thursday, Feb. 20, 1975

DURO LADIPO: SYMBOL OF A NATIVE CULTURE

By Alan M. Kriegsman

"We have made our real historical heroes into gods," said Duro Ladipo at Arena Stage's Kreeger Theater Tuesday, where the National Dance and Theater Company of Nigeria, which he founded and directs, was rehearsing for the opening of its two-week run last night. "So, if George Washington had lived in Nigeria among the Yoruba people, we would have made him a god, too, and worshipped him."

Because Yoruba theater is intimately connected with tribal religion, it too deals in god-heroes. "Oba Koso," the Ladipo play that has been staged for 10 years with great success both in Africa and Europe and is making its United States bow at Arena, is a chronicle in song, dance and mime about Shango, the Yoruba god of thunder.

Dressed in the multicolored robes of the "Oba Koso" costume, Ladipo cuts an imposing figure, large and erect and muscular enough to suit the portrayal of divine beings. His conversation is punctuated with sharp, lusty bursts into laughter, and he speaks in a quaint-sounding, melodious English. English is the official tongue of Nigeria, the one cultural element binding together the more than 250 tribal groups that make up its population of over 60 million, the largest in Africa. The English language is also the last relic of the nation's colonial history, left behind in 1960 with the establishment of Nigeria as a free, independent state.

Curiously for one who has become a symbol of Yoruba culture, Ladipo did not acquire his native heritage by a very direct route. "I was born right in the center of the Christian church," he'll tell you. "My father, who died in 1963, was an Anglican missionary for 52 years."

"Because I was his first son," Ladipo explains, "my father wanted me to become a pastor like himself. I, however, was too much interested in our native culture." Pursuing that culture to its roots was no easy task for Ladipo. "The worship of Shango and other Yoruba gods was attacked by the missionaries. As children, we were forbidden to go to the Yoruba festivals, which were so full of wonderful music and dancing - and food. But dance I had friends among the tribesmen and used to sneak away. The punishment was usually great. My father would flog us and he flogged me mercilessly when I was caught."

"Yes," Ladipo recalls, "every Sunday I had to read and recite parts of the Bible. I had to memorize it by force. To this day I know the Bible from Genesis to Revelations." These chastisements, however, were not enough

to curb Ladipo's growing fascination with Yoruba rites and legends. But it was to be a while before he would answer the call openly. At the start, he had no intention of a theatrical career for himself and, after his own primary school education, went into teaching. "I was much interested in children, and I loved to teach them songs and dances and exercises. I really had everything I wanted as a teacher. But I also continued to take part in my father's church services. I used to be the choir-master and played the harmonium (reed organ)."

The idyll broke down when Ladipo tried to inject some distinctively Yoruba elements into the services. "I wanted to use the native drums in the church. I even composed a sacred Yoruba cantata on the life of Christ, but using Yoruba music. In rehearsing I carefully kept the drums out of reach of the bishop and the reverend, because I knew their attitude. When the bishop heard drums in the church he was horrified. "This is devilish," he said.

"Why should the son of a reverend pastor bring the works of Shango into the church?"

It was this disputation that led Ladipo to his initial resolve to form a theater group, in order to have a legitimate framework for the performance of his cantata. The irony, as Ladipo himself observes, is that since then, the use of native drums in Christian services has become standard practice throughout Nigeria. In any case, Ladipo went on to mount his performance in his native city of Oshogbo, and it was such a thumping triumph that it was awarded a special trophy by the Nigerian Government.

"Even with the trophy," Ladipo recalls with a rueful smile, "my father remained unhappy with my 'pagan' activities. He died resenting it. But nevertheless, he gave in a little bit. He blamed my success on the authorities and the government. "They are so stupid," he once said, and he made me some prayers before his death, telling me: "May God be with you."

THE WASHINGTON POST

Thursday, Feb. 20, 1975

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Book 5



Madam Dorcas Towobola, mother of Duro Ladipo (middle), with Duro Ladipo and the sister, Adeola.



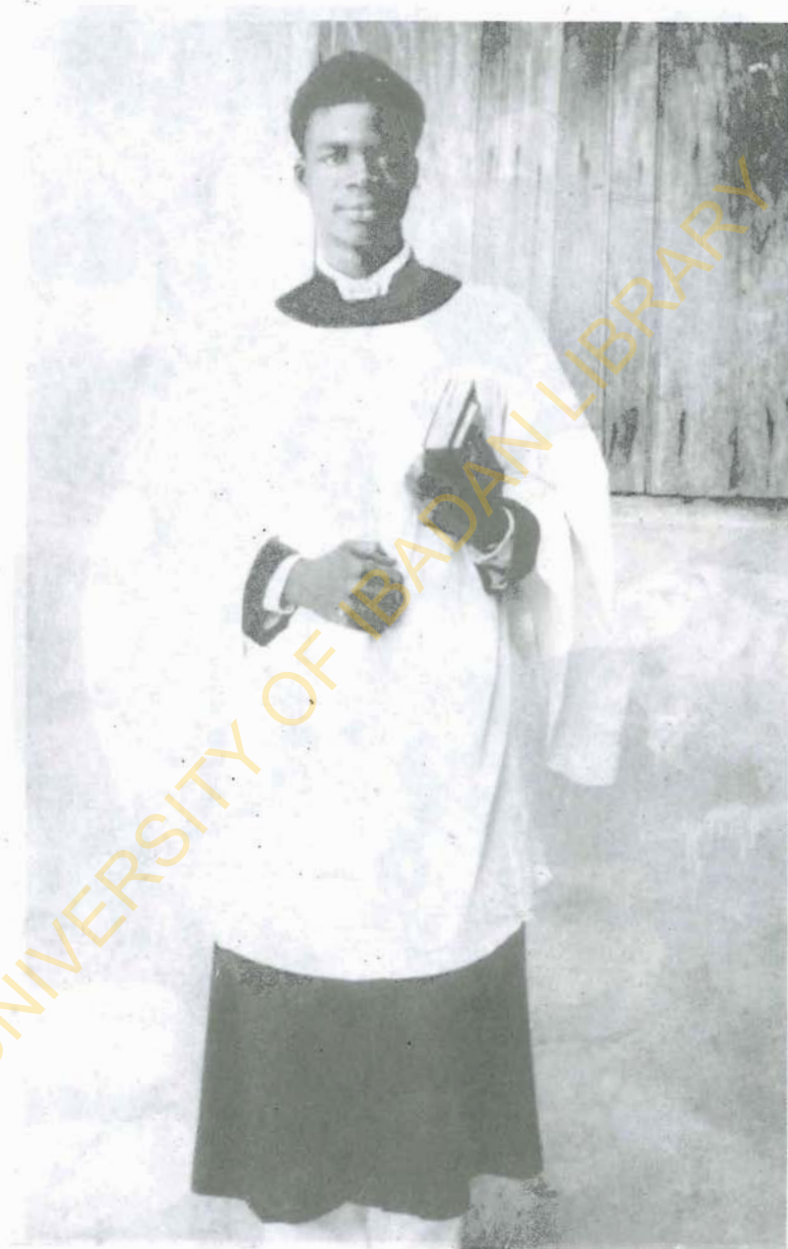
1941: Otan Ayegbaju (standing extreme right).



An adolescent Duro Ladipo.



1950s: In Ilesha as school-teacher (standing extreme left).



1952, Kaduna, as a lay reader



1950/52: As school-teacher in Kaduna (sitting extreme right).



1963/64: "Ekundayo" on set at the WNTV/WNBS, Ibadan.



Early sixties: In a practice session in front of Mbari Mbayo.



January 4, 1964: Mr Lewis (standing), Gbadamosi, Karim Adepoju (Baba Wandé) on the eve of the Ladipos wedding.



1964: Berlin, Timi being carried off (this is the first cast of the Duro Ladipo Group).



January 5, 1964: Royal Bridal Ritual.



January 5, 1964: Royal bridal initiation.

*Early 50s, Ms. Mabel Johnson
(later Mrs Mabel Duro-Ladipo).*



*1959, Ms. Abiodun Olufarati
(later Mrs. Abiodun Duro-Ladipo).*



July 24, 1963: Osogbo, Rehearsal of "Oba Moro".



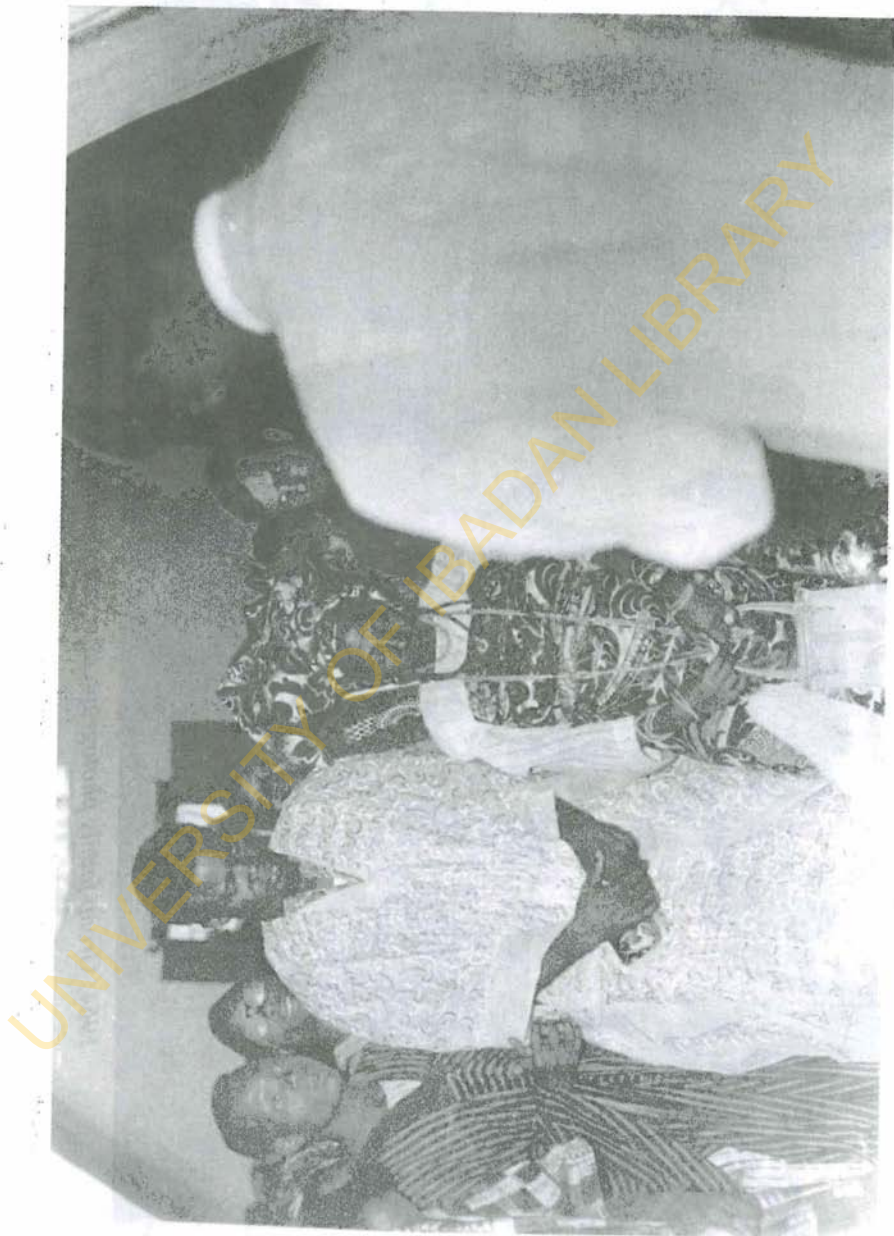
1963: "Oba Moro", Performing free to a standing audience.



The couple with the bride's relation.



January 5, 1964: Wedding Day at Epe Ekiti (in present Ekiti State).



January, 1964: Church service on Wedding Day.



1964; Group family photograph after the wedding ceremony at Epe Ekiti.



Mr & Mrs A. T. O. Odunsi, mentors to Duro Ladipo.



January 5, 1964: Honourable Adekunle, John Beetlestone & wife, Mr. Lewis (L-R).



1970: Picture taken at the Atoka (Yoruba play magazine) office, Lagos



Mr. & Mrs. Duro Ladipo, with Gov. Adeyinka Adebayo, of the old Western Region.



January 1965: About setting out from home.



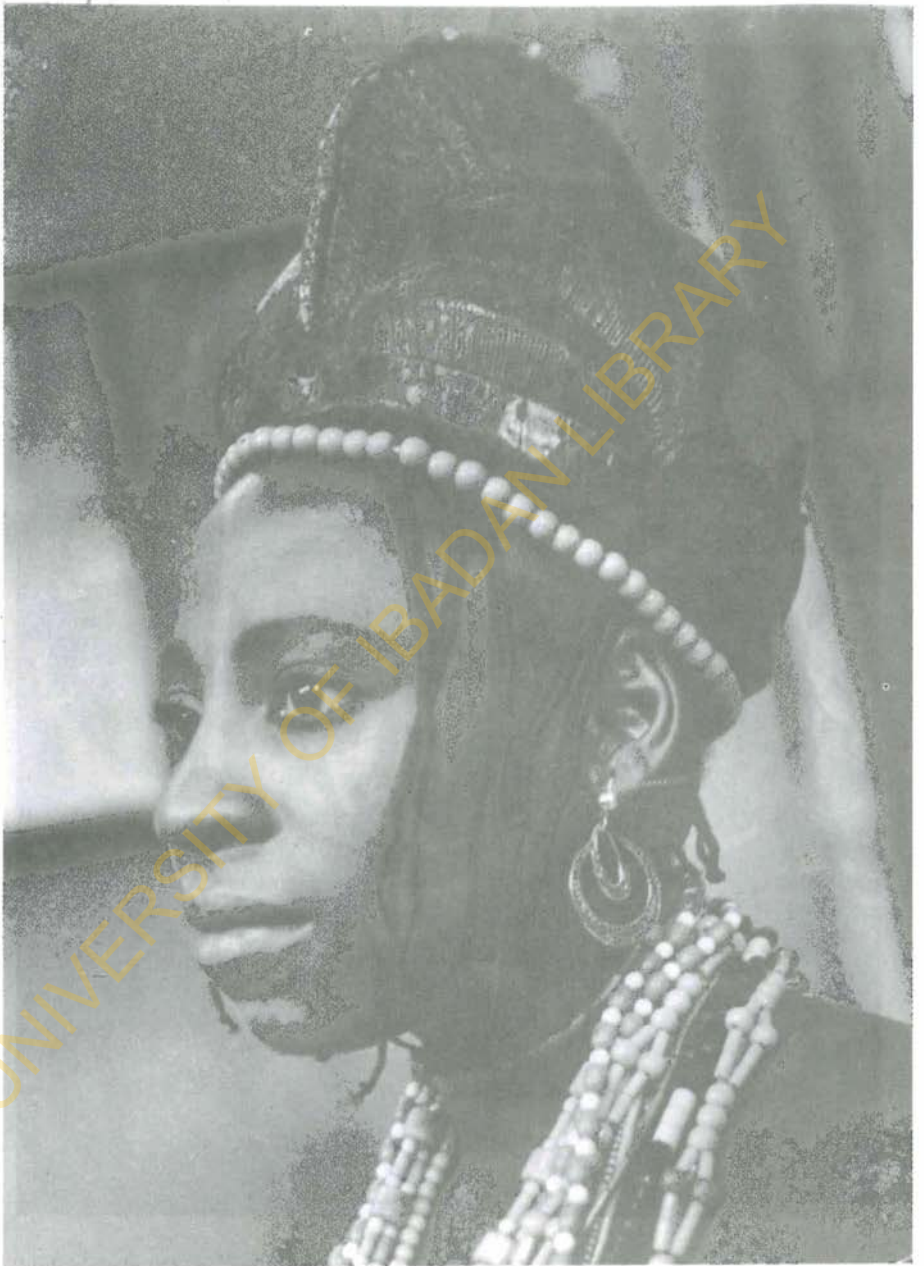
Duro Ladipo and Abiodun Ladipo were popular as Sango and Oya among their local and international audiences, after their most enduring roles in "Oba Koso." Sango (middle) Oya (left) and Iwarefa (Ojeniyi Amoo).



Early stage: "Oba Koso".



“Ajagunla”: Yemi Elebuibon, Duro Ladipo and Abidoye Ojo as Babalawo, Ajagunla and Aresa.



The sixties: Oya, Sangó's wife



“Oluwari”: Abiodun Duro-Ladipo and Oyedolapo D-L as Orisawemi and Ojuolape’s child.



Lasisi Gbebolaja playing "Egun Elewe".



Early stage: WNTV/WNBS, "Oba Adeboyega".



Oya pose in New York, 1975



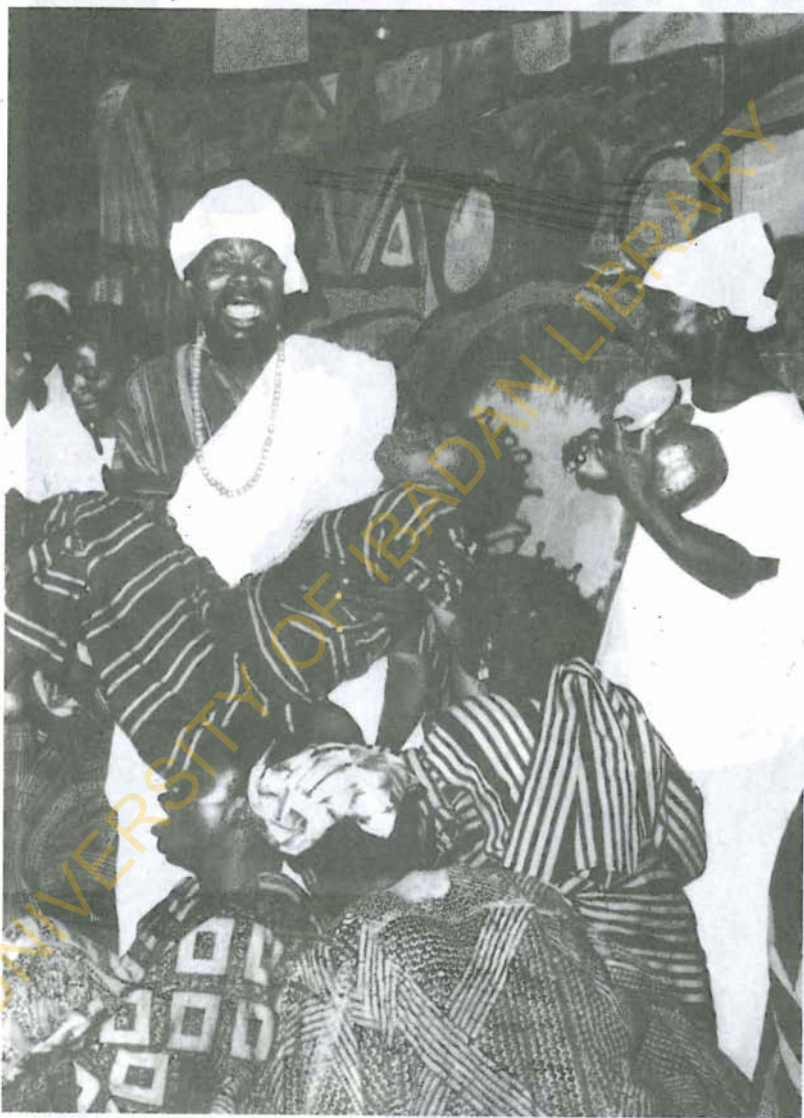
“Aro Meta”: Lasisi Gbebolaja as Oluode.



1973, Zurich: "Oba Ko So", Sango in his fiery temper.



"Oba Koso" costume off stage.



Moment of grief, Duro Ladipo in "Orunmila".



*Early 190s: "Oba Moro" at NBC-TV Channel 10, Lagos.
Foreground is Ojeniyi Amoo (Ologbo in the play).*



1966: Abiodun Duro-Ladipo playing "Moremi" shortly after childbirth.



1963: At WNTV/WNBS during the quarterly acts.



"Ewe Ayo": Clement Oni and Aijfowowe as Kokoro Aro and Foluke.



Early Sixties: Lere Paimo and Adebisi Adeleke as Ewe Ayo and drummers.



October 18, 1963 in Lagos: Savouring the joy of the 1st Nigerian Arts Trophy, with Chief Kola Balogun.



1966: Moremi immersed in Esinmirin River.



Early 1966: Moremi in Igbo town.



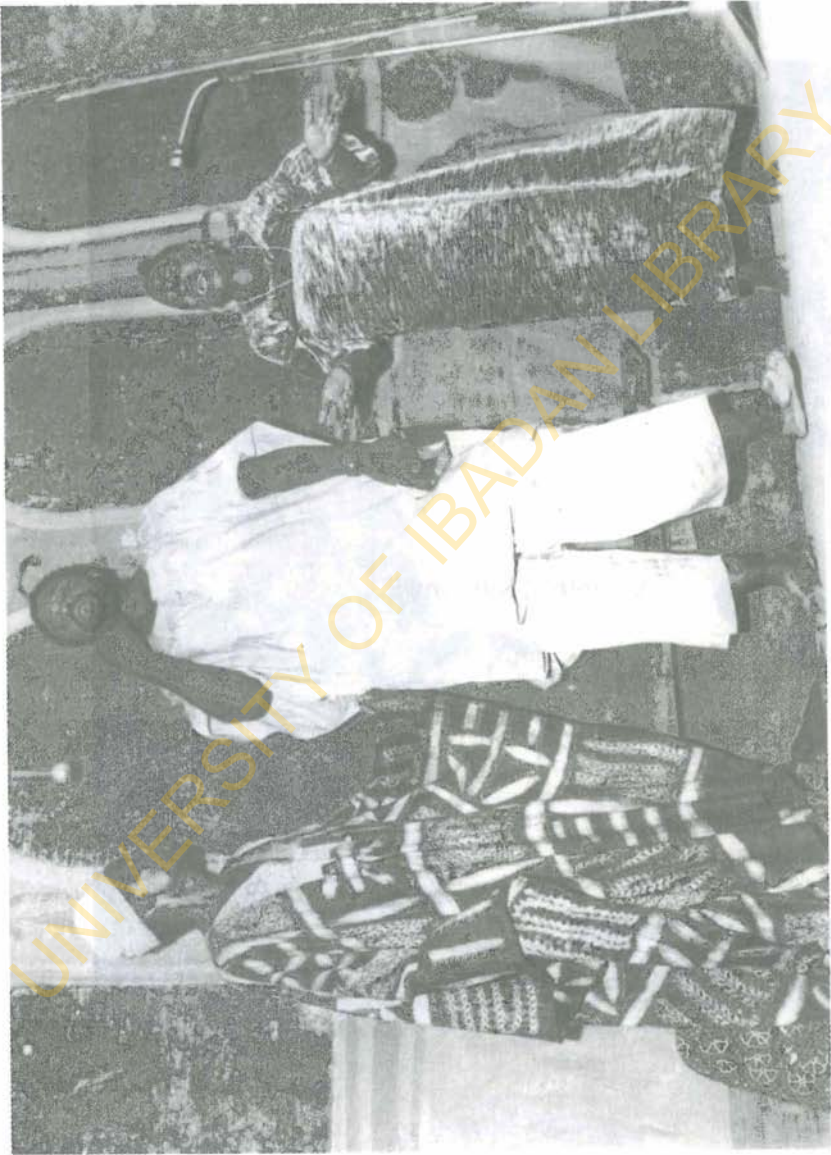
1966: Iya Osun, an Osun priestess coopted into the production of "Moremi".

For communal well-being, Moremi's child Oluorogbo, is offered for sacrifice.





1960s: "Karounwi".



On set with "Karounwi".



Sango expressing disappointment in Timi. Production for the Atoka series.



Late 1960s: With Ajifowowe, Duro Ladipo and Abidoye Ojo as Ayelaogbe, Orunmila and Onibode Orun.



1969: Slaves in "Beyiose".



1969: Abiodun (right) in "Beyiose" with the Ooni, played by Lucas Agbeji.



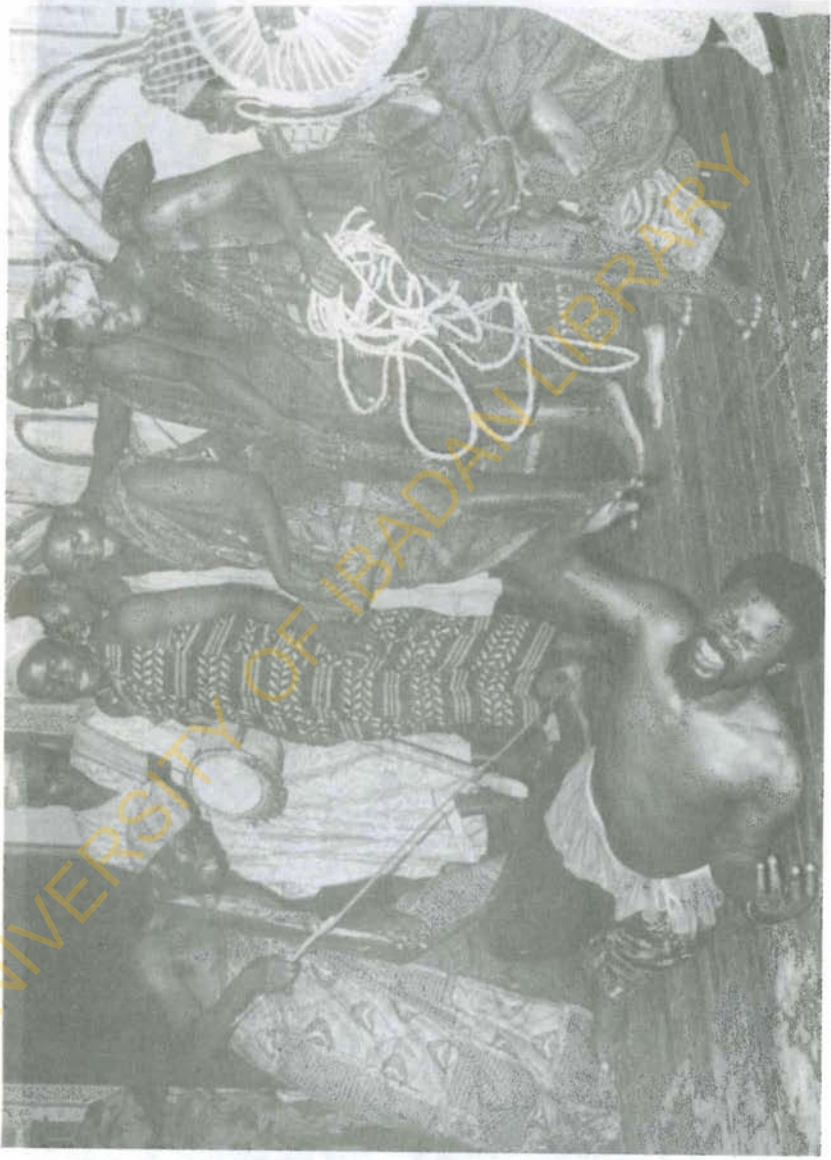
1969: Abiodun (right) in "Beyiose" with the Ooni, played by Lucas Agbeji.



1969: Getting rough for a Prince in "Beyiose".



1969: Manacled in "Beyiose".



Aole, Prince of Oyo being flogged by the Baale of Apomu for flouting the orders abolishing slavery by the Alaafin



*From "Otun Akogun" restyled "Oruka Ife" by the WNTV/WNBS,
Abiodun Duro-Ladipo as Eesanyan, wife of Aare Akogun.*



Sixties: The troupe's van with posters of Moremi and Oba Koso.



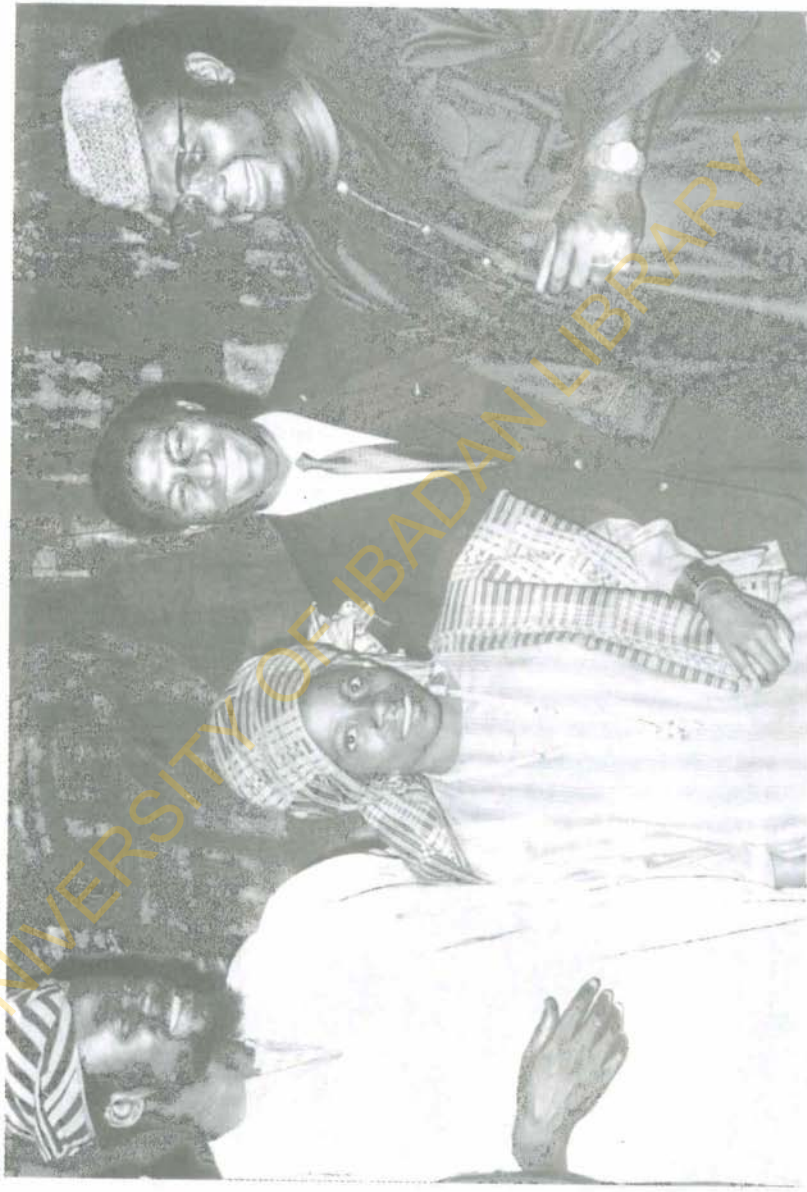
*First Tour and Foundation Troup: Duro Ladipo Theatre International
in Berlin - 1964*



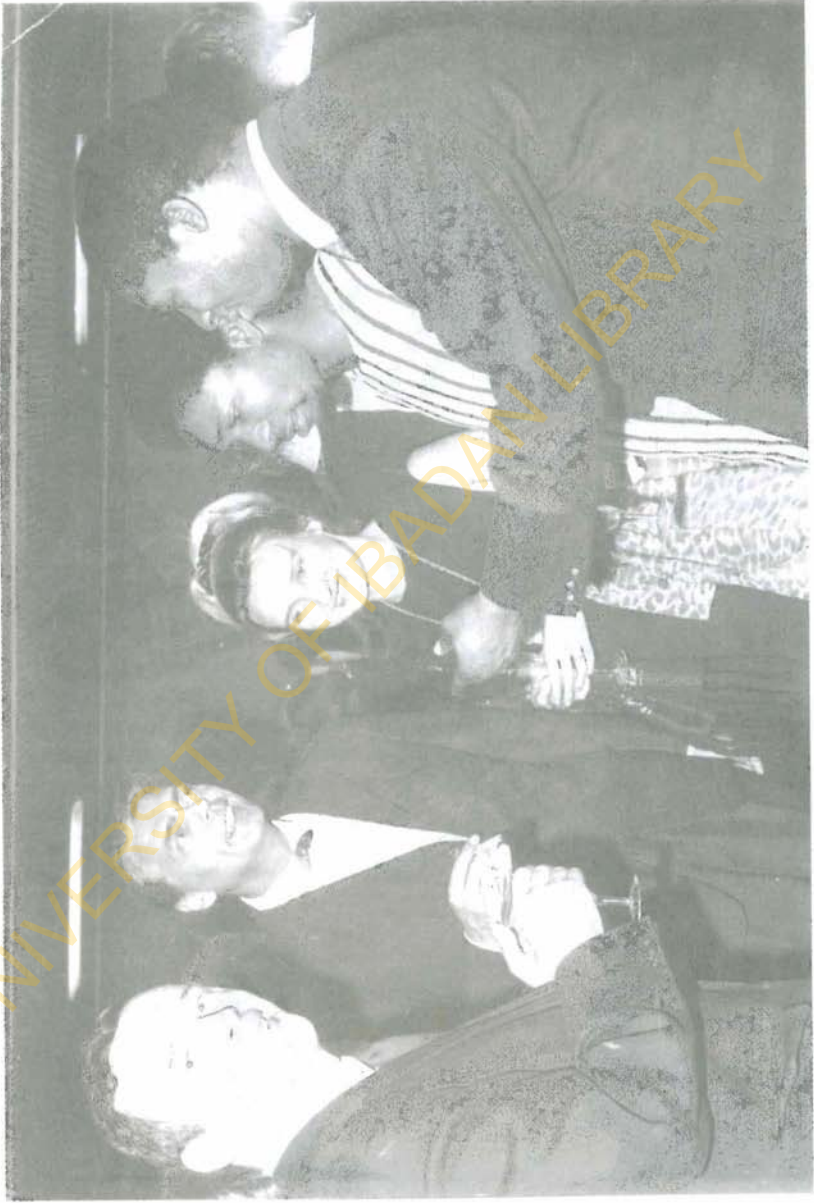
Ulli (middle) with Georgina Beier.



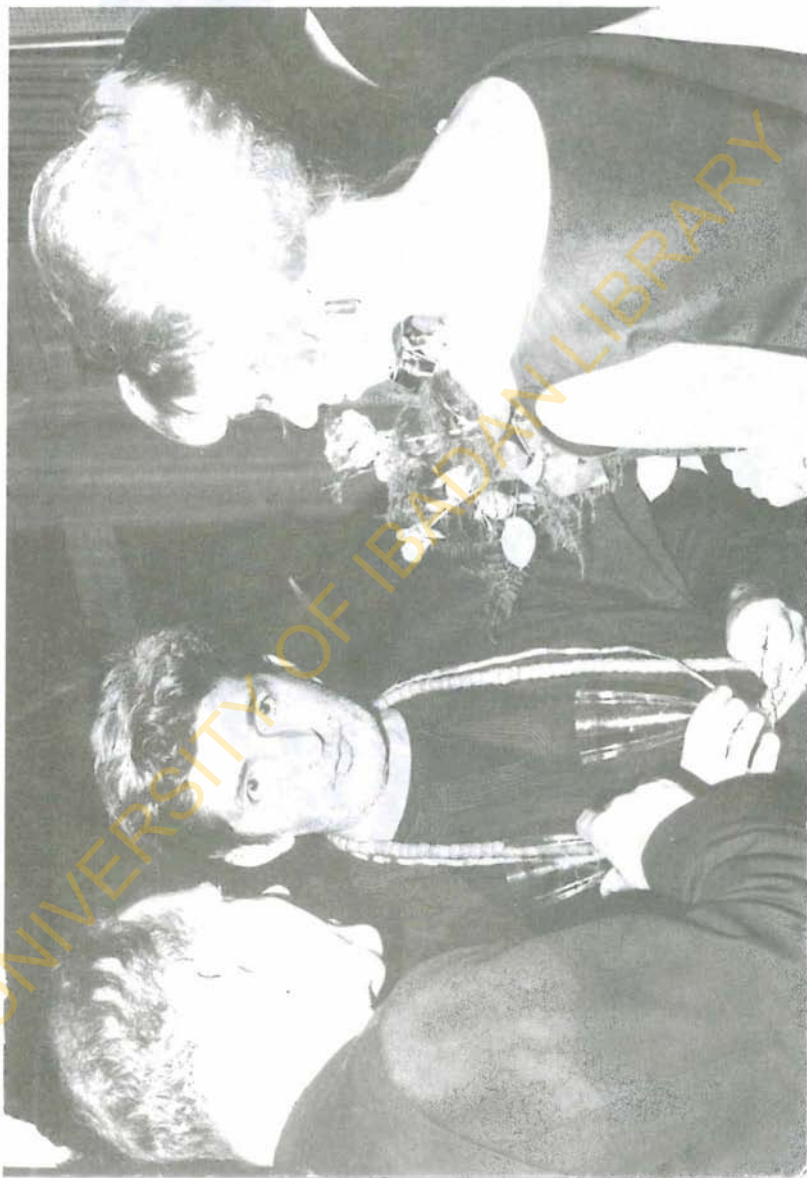
Ulli, Georgina, and a friend (L-R)



With Nigerian Ambassador to Germany (extreme right) after the performance of "Oba Koso" in Berlin - 1964



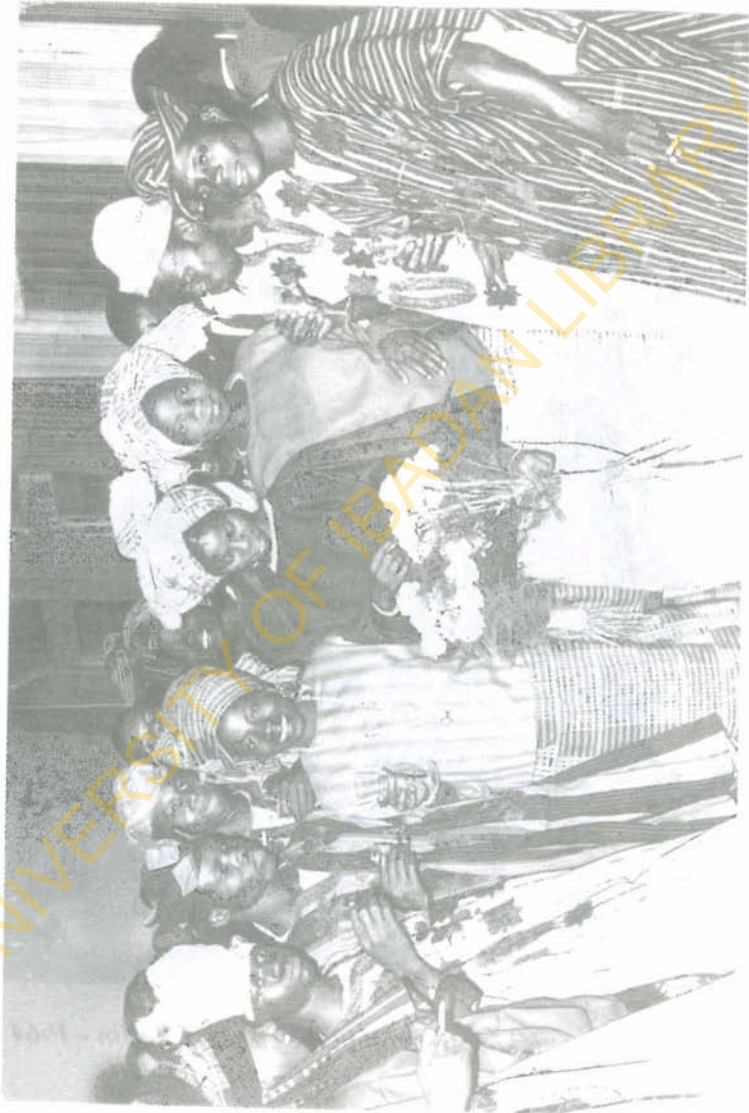
With Wole Soyinka (second right) in Berlin - 1964



Beier (middle) and Georgina in Berlin - 1964



Post-Production dinner with the Director of the Berlin Arts Festival, 1964.



Cast making a toast after performance



Members of the troupe taking time off in the street of Berlin - 1964



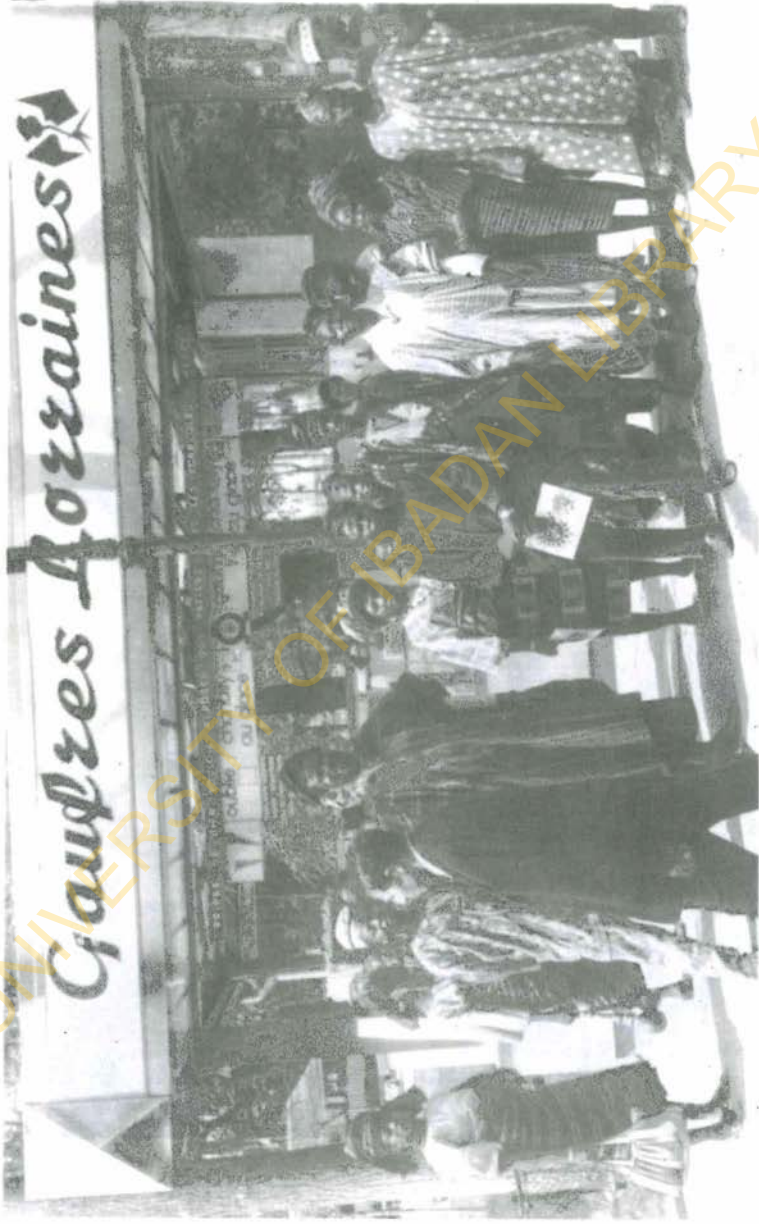
Friends and Admirers during the 1975 US trip.



Outdoor performance during the 1965 Commonwealth Festival of Arts.



New York - 1975



Second Major Tour: Nancy, France, 1973, Commonwealth Festival of Arts.



Duro Ladipo flanked by Alex Peters (left) and Ulli Beier.



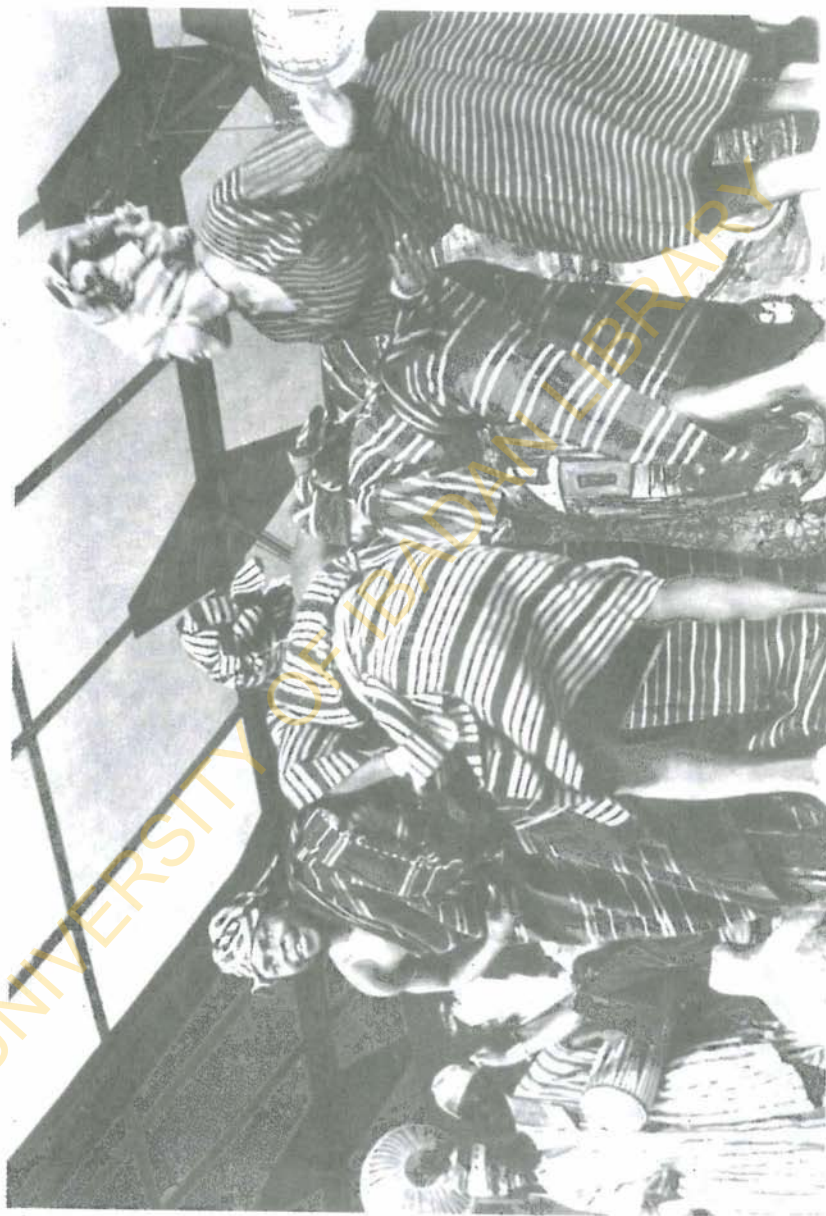
1973, Nancy, France. Group Photograph.



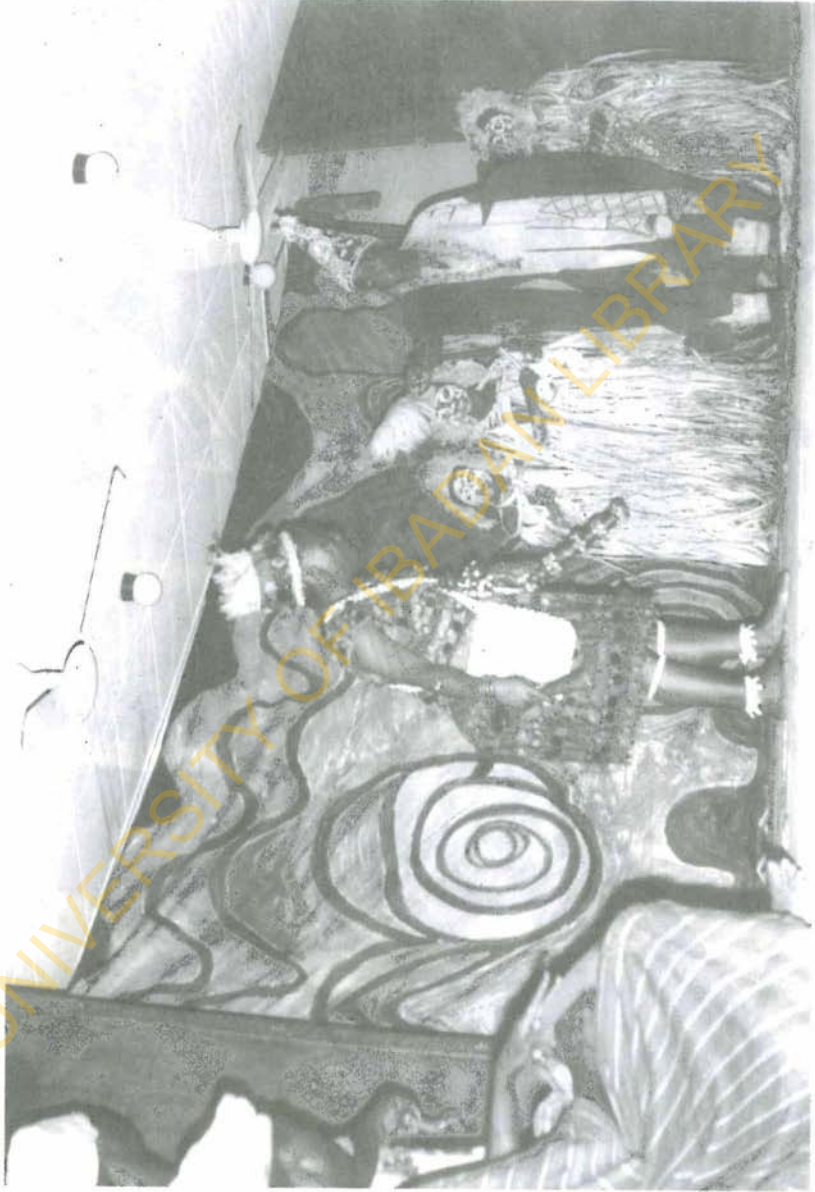
"Oluwari" - 1973



1973, Zurich; the six children who acted in "Oluweri"



'Oluvert' in Zurich - 1973



"Oluweri" - 1973



"Oluwari" in Zurich - 1973



Orisawemimo conjures the spirits in "Óluweri", 1973



Brazil, 1974/75.



Brazil, 1974/75.



Brazil, 1974/75; Dr. Prof. Jose Mendes Ferreira. Hosted troupe for three months, November - January.



At Cocoa House, Dugbe Ibadan.



At the Voice of America, Washington, DC



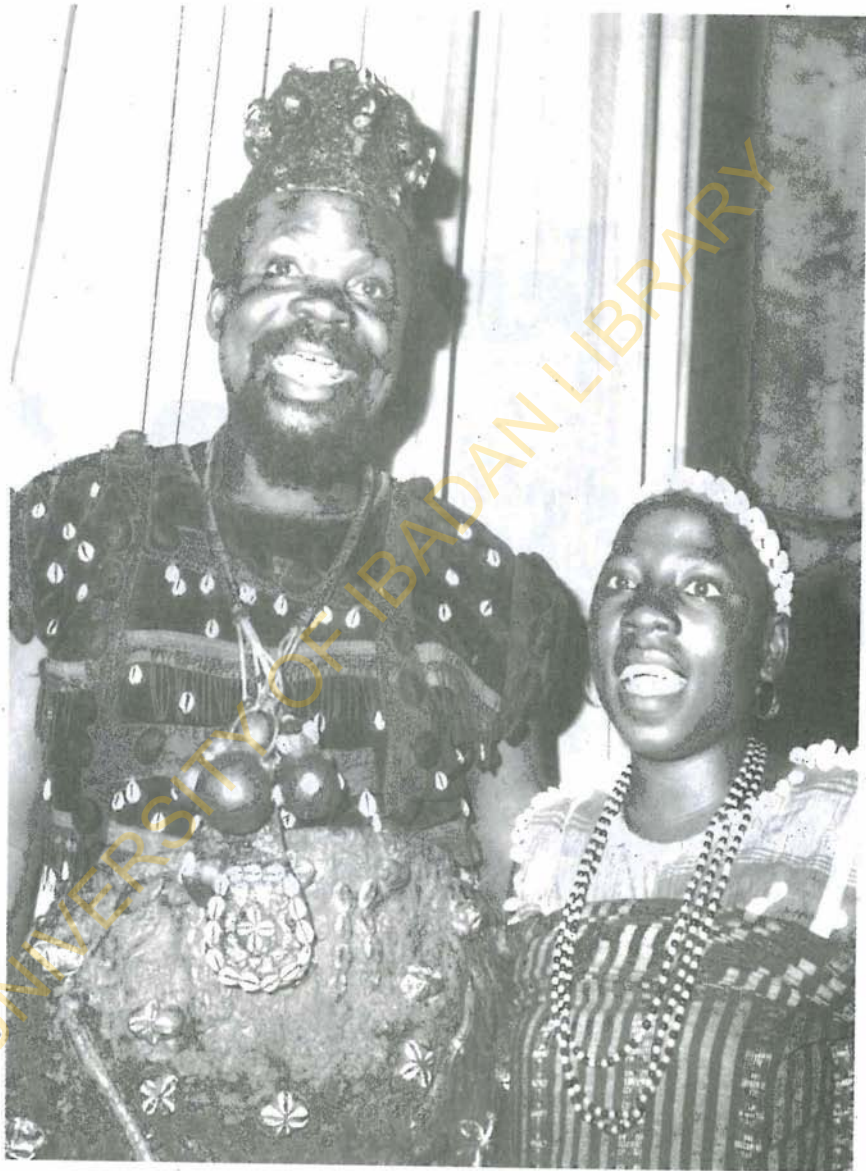
Pointing to Nigeria's place on the African map. Extreme right is Mr. Lanre Ladipo, Duro's friend.



Dancing with the Western State Commissioner for Information, Youth, sports and Culture, 1972.



March 15, 1975 in New York.



"Ajagunla", 1967-71



"Ajagunla", 1967-71



"Ajagunla", 1967-71



1971; The cast with Duro Ladipo's soldier friend, Mr. Atitebi, after the Nigerian-Biafran war



“Ajagunla”, 1967-71



: (L-R) Lasunkanmi, Lere Paimo, Duro Ladipo, Abidoye Ojo, Olugbon, Onikoyi, Ajagunla, Aresa.



At the 7th Year Anniversary Mrs. Duro-Ladipo, Professor Olatunde Olatunji Professor Dapo Adelugba, Late Dr. Babayemi.



On the 10th Anniversary of Duro Ladipo's demise, 1988: Keynote address by Alhaji Bola Adedoja, Oyo State Commissioner for Information, Youth, Sports and Culture.



In the spirit of the theatre: "The show must continue"... Biodun Ladipo and Adeniyi Ademokoya - in "Otun Akogun" in the eighties after Duro Ladipo's demise.



Art is Eternal: Mrs. Abiodun Duro-Ladipo. After Duro Ladipo's exit, as "Agbomola" A 13-episode for Galaxy TV in "Esentaye".

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What strikes me as hugely significant about this book is its use of a privately-held archive as source for its historical reconstruction. In our part of the world, historical scholarship of a literary and cultural form is often hindered by the deficiencies and unreliability of our public records and archives. There is therefore an urgent need to access and explore the alternative archives of written material and memories that are held by various individuals and communities. Working from one such archive, the authors of *Duro-Ladipo: Thunder-God on Stage* have set us an inspiring example on how this can be done.

Harry GARUBA
Poet and Scholar
University of Cape Town, South Africa.

This is an important work of insight into the life and work of one of the pioneers of modern Nigerian drama, a remarkably inspiring story of a turn-around from career failure in education into unqualified success in culture entrepreneurship.

Toyin AKINOSHO
Literary and arts connoisseur
Coordinator, Committee of Relevant Arts (CORA)

Duro was a very serious and intense artist,... an open personality, committed and, as you probably know, he underwent initiation into the Sango religion.

Wole SOYINKA
Nobel Laureate of Literature,
Playwright and director

About the Authors

Abiodun Duro-Ladipo: theatre practitioner and leading member of the Duro Ladipo International Troupe; **Sola Olorunyomi:** scholar of Performance Studies; and **Remi Raji-Oyelade:** literary scholar and poet.