

# The return of real drama on radio

By Benson Idonije

Determined to revitalise radio drama so that its former glory can come alive again, committed veterans and experts have come together to approach production from a purely professional standpoint. Already broadcasting programmes on selected radio stations all over the country, the whole idea, is to use drama as a tool for developing the society.

Called African Radio Drama Association, the team is guided by the demands of modern day writing and production techniques and includes established names like Ihria Enakimio and, Femi Jairet who have made considerable impact in the profession.

Another professionally committed member is Mrs. Dada Phido, a fine writer and the association's programme officer who has had an exciting stint with the British Broadcasting Corporation in the area of the team is Kola Ogunjobi, who has also made his mark writing for radio and stage.

The team has embarked on two different aspects of our national development, and 15-minute drama productions are already being recorded and broadcast. The first one is on "Conservation and the Environment," and the client is the "World Wide Fund for Nature," sponsored by Ford Foundation."

The script idea is based on "Bugu Town" which exists in the imagination of the writers, a town that represents Nigeria, with different tribes and cultures.

Some of the issues dealt with include desertification, industrial and traditional fishing, climate changes, waste management, erosion among others. Broadcast on RayPower 100FM on Fridays at 15 minutes past nine in the morning, it is also syndicated all over the country." English and it is intended to reach a wide audience with programmes that will run serially for 26 weeks.

According to Femi Jarett who is also the executive producer, "the main objective is to create awareness about the need of every Nigerian to be environment, the environment will take care of us."

Actually since October 1, 1997, listeners to BCOS, Ibadan, have been having a rewarding experience every Wednesday evening at 6.45 when "Abule Irete," is mainly targeted at women, and deals with reproductive health issues like pregnancy, child birth, problems associated to marry, when to have children, how to space them and when to stop having children among others.

The programme also highlights sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhoea, syphilis, AIDs, how to go about safe sex, menopause and its psychological effect on women. All these and more the series are to be discussed for the education of the people with fifteen minute programmes the scripts are first written, in English and then translated to Yoruba.

For script idea and concept, Abule Irete is geographically located at "Mosa Doni," a rural village and "Ado Odo," an urban area, a setting which allows the imagination of the writers to blend characters from two different backgrounds to illustrate the essence of the plays.

As a powerful vehicle for instruction, the serial drama of Abule Irete is built around popular characters in the two communities for teaching. And this can have a great

influence on the listener. Sponsored by Mac Arthur Foundation, "Abule Irete" is billed to run initially for 26 weeks.

However, the very first play that ever came to ARDA was a UNICEF project for which 13 scripts have been written, awaiting production. Titled "Home Sweet home" it has to do with the ideals of a good have, like safe motherhood, immunisation of children, malnutrition, fake drugs, careless dumping of refuse, harmful traditional practice, breast-feeding among others. Broadcasting will commence in April 1998.

One of the challenges of this drama team is to bring back the standard which was attained in the '50s by "Shakey shakey," the adventures of Alao, the master driver broadcast by the then Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. Produced at the time by Yemi Lijadu, it featured the likes of Ralph Okpara and Bob Nwagoro among others. It was a popular programme.

Even though things are falling apart, Radio Nigeria is reputed for excellence in radio drama production. Apart from "Shaky Shaky," programmes such as "Money Miss Road," "Gandu Street," "Play of the week" and "Citizen Muda" among others have enjoyed tremendous listenership.

Aside from Yemi Lijadu, the late Sam Iyamu. tunde Aiyegbusi. Tunde Soge, Ihria Enakimio, Agbo Sikunde, Jide Akingbade in that order all have taken radio drama production to great heights. The efforts of outside contributors like AGS Momodu, Lindsay Barret and Rasheed Gbadamosi cannot be easily forgotten.

On the other hand, there was a dearth of actors and actress who included Christopher Kolade. Eldred Fiberessima, Solomon Ayagere, Tosin Ojosipe, Patricia egbuson, John Chukwu, Jab Adu, Ted Mukoro, Ted Ovbiosu, Ron Ngbatogu, Tony Ibegbuna, Segun Adebisi, Ibidun Allison, among others.

Some of these people are dead, and others are ageing. For continuity therefore, radio drama requires a new crop of actors, actresses, writers and producers. And the African Radio Drama Association needs all these people to be able to cope with their present volume of work.

For now, the few episodes already broadcast are able to recreate in the listener's mind, the writer's original ideas. As a result, the listener is far from being disorientated as he is able to supply his own mental images in response to the beautiful dialogue dramatised by actors and actresses; and the painstakingly selected effects, mood music and other sound elements that presently help to create the illusion that the series require in terms of production for stretching the imagination.

To sustain the standard already set by the few programmes broadcast, ARDA needs more hand. For the association, it is like the case of the biblical saying, "the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few."