

Toward better Golden Tones

By Benson Idonije

Some of my friends are still unhappy about the poor sound quality that radio transmission inflicted on them from the Tafawa Balewa Square venue of the last Golden Tones concert. And I share their frustrations because I was in the same predicament. We all kept vigil together, listening - painfully, but with engrossed interest - till the following morning.

However, my friends have carried their frustrations a step further - and a little bit too far. They are so bitter that they have dismissed the entire Golden Tones concept as a mere product promotional strategy, a deceptive advertising technique and a massive publicity build-up that is totally unmindful of the interest and future of our musicians.

I refuse to be led along this line of reasoning (which is loose and ungoverned) because I believe that whatever silent motives are hidden behind the facade of it all, the Golden Tones is doing a good job exposing artistes of varying dimensions and music genres to live performances. It also helps to stimulate their creative abilities and challenge their professional skills. The Golden Tones is providing the relevant service that can turn Nigeria's near dormant music scene to an active and vibrant one.

The broadcasting aspect of this undertaking is really the responsibility of the musicians and the electronic media. They ought to ensure that the sound is faithfully transmitted and that the ethics of the profession are strictly obeyed.

The last concert was well attended; but loud and massive as the publicity was, not everybody was at the venue. The greater percentage of the audience listened at home. And this is the case with most concerts which could sometimes be covered by as many as 50 or more radio and television stations which have bought the rights to do so for the listening pleasure or their various target audiences. But because this target audience is listening in the quiet and relaxed comfort of their homes - as opposed to the on-location situation - they are critical about the quality of the sound they hear; and it should be ideal, if not perfect.

This should even be more so because of the status of the musicians involved. I don't know how much money accrued to the musicians as special remuneration for broadcasting rights, but even where they received billions of dollars, they still would not compromise their sound for money. They still would not allow their music to be broadcast until they are satisfied that the quality of the sound to be transmitted to their numerous listeners and viewers is right.

The reason is because an artiste that has attracted the attention of the discerning public to the point of superstardom has received this recognition because of his 'sound' identity, the quality of which, if tampered with, is capable of marring the musician's professional reputation and career.

This is why I felt particularly worried for King Sunny Ade, perhaps, the biggest artiste on the last Golden Tones bill. His music suffered a lot of reverses in terms of sound mixing where sometimes the voices were too clear that they drowned the rhythm section and at other times the guitars suppressed the voices and made nonsense of the music - all of which amounted to a lowering of professional standards.

Of all the bands on parade, only KWAM I came out fairly well because his was essentially a percussion-oriented aggregation with instruments that do not pose any intricate problems for sound-balancing.

Another concert takes off tomorrow. The likes of Lagbaja, the new highlife sensation, and Wasiu Alabi, the latest fuju sensation, among others, are joining the fold. These two artistes are hot and currently enjoying tremendous popularity. It is not in their interest for millions of their fans to hear distorted live versions of the songs they have always loved. Neither will it be fair on their careers for potential fans to get put off by what they hear. The output should be close to what they are used to on CD or cassette tapes.

It is, therefore, necessary for all the musicians to work hand in hand with sound engineers from Golden tones and producers from the various radio and television stations - as I learnt, that live coverages will be carried out by Ray Power 100 FM to serve the Western audience, with Radio Rivers, Port Harcourt, taking care of the Eastern Zone, Radio Kano and NTA Kaduna are also broadcasting the show live.

The promoters have done well to put seven groups with different musical backgrounds on the same bill to provide variety for the show; but poor production can turn this variety into boredom.

Radio and TV should go beyond sound mixing, picture and directing. One important production point which is relevant to the show is the order in which the bands perform - to strike a balance and avoid monotony in presentation and selection of material.

No doubt, Golden Tones, as a promotional outfit, is helping in a dynamic way to develop the Nigeria music industry by bringing musicians of different genres together to perform regularly. This way, new stars are known and popular artistes become established.