The Second Phase of the National Theatre Movement in Ghana*

This statement on the National Theatre Movement is addressed to all who are working for the development of the Performing Arts in the interest of the people in Ghana. It is also addressed to national institutions and organizations, which need the arts and the artists. They are Film, Broadcasting and Television, and the Ministry of Education.

There is a pile-up of issues in relation to creator-consumer interdependence which must be cleared if the Theatre Movement is to proceed through proper care towards its fulfilment for the benefit of the whole country. An open discussion of such issues by representatives of the national training schemes and the national establishments listed above ought to be a great help towards coordinating facilities and finance to give the Movement the help its present tempo demands.

This paper is offered as a basis for such a discussion, which, it is hoped, will lead swiftly on to the implementation of agreed objectives and solutions. The National Theatre Movement is only just beginning to achieve the character to which several important statements and actions by the President of Ghana aspire. I believe that in the plan for the construction of a National Theatre the first item of expenditure should be the cost of developments such as are suggested here, which will provide the artistic power to give life to the edifice.

Lessons from the first phase

It is very nearly ten years since the idea of a National Theatre Movement was first projected. For a development of its creative nature, more years will pass before its substance and character become definable and permissible of assessment within a proper perspective. The passing decade, however, presents a record of experiences

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and products gained from training schemes, artistic output, and organizational experimentation. This record is clearly one of a first-phase development, which, so to speak, has surveyed and cleared the ground in readiness for seed, rain, and cultivation. The task has engaged the mind, talent, and toil of individuals and groups, the majority of whom have voluntarily rallied in support of the idea of a National Theatre Movement. From their trials, their losses and gains, and their hard-won perceptions, important lessons have accrued to help determine, shape plans, and direct effort for the second phase of the Movement. What are the lessons?

- Talent and efficiency were lost to the Movement because of constant withdrawals from training programmes, of people who could not continue to engage their interest and ability for the realistic reason that they had to earn their living elsewhere. After the first few years the need for full-time trainees had become obvious.
- Problems of standards made the demand for a permanent training scheme for developing professionals both essential and urgent.
- Peculiar problems exist which need to receive special attention in training programmes. For example:
  
  (i) The gap between theoretical knowledge and actual performance ability in Music is a very common condition. It is in the interest of projects such as the National Orchestra, and of musical development for drama and dance, to concentrate on closing the gap.
  
  (ii) Actors are faced with a serious frustration of their talent when they perform in English. To build up their capability to turn that language into a more natural vehicle for art demands a major operation.
  
  (iii) Dancers come to their training with no more than their familiarity with the dances with which they grew up. Several difficulties naturally characterise the breaking-in period when they are given fundamental training in other dance idioms, and orientated to the new demands on dance by the Theatre Movement.

Of all the factors signifying the end of the first phase of the National Theatre Movement, the most disquieting is the slowdown in output of creative material, particularly dramatic literature. Two of the underlying reasons deserve notice:

1. The Movement did not begin on the strength of an adequate supply of creative material. Furthermore, as it has gathered momentum over the past five years, it has so strained personnel resources, that even the few people capable of supplying creative material have been sucked too heavily into organization, teaching and training.

2. Planned research on a comprehensive scale in the interest of new creative development has become possible only in the last three years.

No significant advance is possible during the second phase of the National Theatre Movement unless the problems of content and direction are faced in positive terms. Much more writing of dramatic literature, more musical and dance compositions,