

**BEYOND PERFORMANCE: CONTRIBUTIONS OF SELECTED
PERFORMING ARTISTS TO SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Most people in developing nations do not see any correlation between performing arts and development. They only recognize performing artists for the quality of their productions and technical expertise in performance. Little searchlight is beamed on their off-performance contributions to social and economic development of their people. The objective of this paper is to highlight the significant contributions of some selected performing artists to the development of their nations in particular and the world at large. Five performing artists were selected from different parts of Africa: Hafiz Halim of Egypt, Youssou N'dor of Senegal, Taiwo Ajai Lycett of Nigeria, Malongo Casquelourd of Congo and Marian Makeba of South Africa.

Findings revealed that the selected performing artists have shown interest in and contributed significantly to health, education, socio-political development, tourism, cultural development, as well as provision of charity for the less privileged in their respective countries. The paper then concludes that performing arts education can only be given the deserved recognition when significant contributions of performing artists are articulated. Performing artists also need to pay more attention to socio-economic and political development and impact positively on the lives of their people. It then recommends that more efforts should be channelled by performing artists towards identifying with and contributing to societal development.

Keywords: Performance, Performing artists, Development, Charity, Society.

Introduction

The issue of social responsiveness of performing artists has remained contentious over the ages. Opinions differ with regard to the focus of a performing artist as he works on producing his work of art. Many believe that performance before the audience is essentially for entertainment and aesthetics. They emphasise that looking for any other functions beyond the two is extraneous and can also constitute distractions. Another group believes that performing artists, like other artists, must be socially responsive to their people and that a work of art should contribute meaningfully to individual and societal development.

The first school of thought with the principle of art for art's sake believes that a work of art is meant to imitate reality and create pleasurable experience. That alone is enough reason for its existence. This means that we are entertained when we derive pleasurable experience from any work of art, and that alone is enough reason for producing and patronising any artistic product. According to Arthur C.D. (1998: Par 4-14), the position of art for art's sake was first propagated by Plato and reinforced by the likes of German philosopher Immanuel Kant, French philosopher Victor Cousin, English essayist and critic Walter Horatio Pater, and American painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler. It is also the position held by the avant-garde Western artists of the 20th century.

On the other hand, the school of art for life's sake emphasises the need for social responsiveness of artists either plastic or performance oriented. It was first propounded by Aristotle in his *Poetics* and it has among its followers the traditional proponents of aesthetics of the 18th and 19th century including Carlo Goldoni, Charles Dickens; romantics such as Eugene Delacroix, and realists like French painter Gustave Courbet. The Marxist and the Freudian schools of thought also hold the same view that the functionality of an artistic work transcends its ability to give a pleasurable experience, as it must contribute to individual and societal development. This is antipodal to the position of the art for art's

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sake school as earlier mentioned. It is equally significant to note that "theatre (indeed, all performing arts) as a medium has been consistently used to promote the good of society" (Adeniyi, 1993), from time immemorial.

The Performing artist

At this juncture, let us put the performing artists being discussed here into proper perspective. This becomes very important taking into consideration different interpretations of the word 'performance' that the present day has witnessed from the time of Wallace Bacon known as the father of performance studies to the marriage of convenience between theatre director Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Cousin, which gave birth to performance studies. This also embraces J.L. Austin's 'Speech-Act Theory' (1962), with different scholars cueing up for or against the expansive understanding of the word performance, which makes almost everything we do in this world a performance.

It is in the light of this that we need to situate the performing artists being discussed here within the context of the conscious use of their talents and creativity to entertain and promote other societal functions using the medium of drama, dance, music and oral arts through performances before a live audience. The performing artist being discussed here is an artist who uses his body and presence to create or interpret a work of art such as dance, music, drama and oral arts for presentation before the audience. Thus, our performing artists in this paper are actors, dancers, musicians and oral art performers who employ their creativity to entertain, educate or mobilise their audience for social development. "The Theatre artist (all performing artists inclusive) is fundamentally a social artist" (Umukoro, M. M., 2010: 110).

The rationale for this essay

It is important to note that many performing artists over the ages have maintained multiple personality of being artists in addition to being other

things in different areas of human endeavour. In spite of this fact, however, most discourses on these artists have always focused on their performative acts leaving out what I called their non-artistic, non-performative contributions to human development. These contributions are often made in the areas of politics and good governance, environmental protection, health promotion, education, employment creation and charity. Through these, they have made significant contributions to human and social development such that sometimes it becomes extremely difficult to determine where their greater contributions actually reside.

It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to reveal the other side of these artists and provoke aggressive documentation of their non-performative contributions to their different societies. The five performing artists under discourse have excelled in their respective countries not only in their artistic contributions, but also in other non-artistic areas in the development sector, away from the performance arena.

It is equally important to note that contributing to societal development beyond performance has been evident in many artists since the beginning of drama in Classical Athens. It would be recalled that one of the foremost literary artists in the Classical Greek period was Aeschylus who, apart from being a playwright, also served in the army and was part of the Athenian force in the battles of Marathon and Salamis against the Persians, not as a warfront entertainer, but as a soldier fighting for the territorial integrity of his land (Worthen, W. B., 2004:23) Apart from Aeschylus, other popular dramatists and performing artists have equally made tremendous contributions in the non-performative sector. The contributions of George Bernard Shaw to medicine and business as a co-founder of London School of Economics are significant, while Pedro Calderon De La Barca and George II – Duke of Saxe-Meiningen – also served in the army and participated actively in governance (Worthen, W. B., 2004:387).

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It is in the light of this that we are looking at the significant contributions of the following performing artists to the social development of their respective countries in particular and the global arena at large beyond the use of the performance space. Shaw has emphasised that artists should be more concerned about "the improvement of society through the improvement of each of its members" (Worthen, W. B., 2004:652). This means that our concern as artists should not be limited to entertaining, educating and mobilising the people through our creative works but also engaging in initiatives that will directly benefit individual members of the society and improve their quality of life towards a strong and sustainable society.

The performing artists were purposefully selected from different parts of Africa, with different performance and artistic modes being represented. It is important to note that performing artists that are doing extremely well in other areas of human endeavour are very many in Africa and the choice of the five performing artists in this paper does not mean that these are the ones that have contributed most in their areas of non-artistic operation. This is just to project how many of our performing artists have been impacting positively on life and living in this part of the world. Regional and gender considerations were also taken into account in the selection of the performing artists for this paper, involving artists from South Africa, Congo, Nigeria, Senegal, and Egypt.

The Selected Artists

1. Hafez Abdel-Halim of Egypt (1929-1977)



Hafez Abdel-Halim also known as the King of Arab Music was a live performing artist. He did not record any of his music while he was alive. He was a musician, an actor, a music teacher and a businessman. Even though he was a live performer and never released an album in his lifetime, his recorded songs packaged into albums and CDs after his death sold more than that of any other Arab artist. Three hundred of his songs are already recorded. He also featured in sixteen classical films while he was alive. He died of Bilharzias in King's College Hospital, London and was buried in Al Rifai mosque in Cairo. As a result of his humanitarian posture and how he touched the life of the underprivileged, at least four women committed suicide by jumping off the balcony during his funeral march (Wikipedia, 2011).

His Artistic Contributions

He fought tradition to promote music in the Arab world and increase Arab youth's access to entertainment. He provided a platform for social interaction between the sexes. He also succeeded in projecting the image of the African Arab throughout the world particularly in Europe and

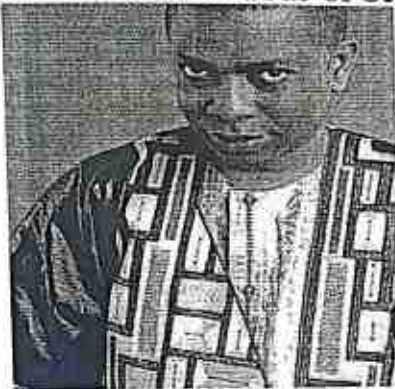
America by using his music to dispel myths and misconceptions about the Arabs. He was very popular and performed in sold out arena and stadia in order to contain the huge crowd that usually watched his performances. He introduced different instruments to Arab music like the drums, piano and guitar. He preached patriotism and equality in his songs. Most of the songs sung during the Egyptian revolution that ousted the former President Housni Mubarak in 2011 were his patriotic songs (Wikipedia, 2011).

His Non-Artistic Contributions

As a result of his humble background, Halim developed a high sense of empathy for the poor and the underprivileged. He spent a large part of his resources in assisting the poor and the less privileged in Egypt and beyond. He provided money and food to many of them. His regular pastime was to visit orphanages and hospitals not only in Egypt but also all over the Middle East where he donated money, food and other materials. He devoted his entire life to helping the poor and promoting equality between the rich and the poor. During his visits to orphanages and hospitals, he often gave hope and encouragement to the less privileged and promoted their sense of self worth. In promoting equality irrespective of economic status, his key message was: "we are one and equal before God".

Halim was a friend to the poor, the rich, and political leaders throughout the Arab world. As a result of the high cost of accessing health care services by the poor and in order to make health services to be accessible and affordable to the poor, Halim built a hospital in Egypt in 1969 to help the people. In terms of employment creation, Halim was one of the main founders of the famous Egyptian recording company, Soutelphan, which was founded in 1961 and provided employment opportunities for many. The record label continues to operate to this day as a subsidiary of EMI Arabia

2. Youssou N'dour of Senegal (1959-Date)



Youssou N'Dour is a successful griot, famous all over the world for the quality of his music. He has contributed to cultural and sports development in Senegal as well as all over the world. He was named the African artist of the century by the Folk Roots Magazine, and 'one of the "world's greatest musician" by the New York Times. He is a Grammy Award winner in 2005 for the Best Contemporary World Music Album. He was also nominated Goodwill Ambassador of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations on 16th of October 2000.

His Artistic Contributions

He has popularised the culture of his people worldwide and has earned respect for its nationals in different parts of the world. He participated in many concerts aimed at mobilising resources for the poor and underprivileged. He organised a concert to call for Nelson Mandela's release from prison during the apartheid regime. He played active role in many human rights related concerts and tours as facilitated by the

Amnesty International. He also featured in the film *Amazing Grace* in 2006.

His Non-Artistic Contributions

N'Dour has contributed greatly to employment generation through the establishment of his recording studio in 1991, a record label in 1995, ownership of a national newspaper outfit *L'Observateur*, and a radio station, Radio Future Medias (RFM), as well as the TV channel, TFM. Apart from that he has contributed significantly to his society in the promotion of girl-child quality of life and prevention of their abuse. He contributed in the promotion of educational development in Senegal and increasing access of people, particularly those in the rural areas, to ICT through his project with Hewlett Packard popularly known as 'Project Joko'. The aim of the project was to open cybercafés in different parts of Senegal in order to connect Senegalese communities around the world.¹

In the area of politics, he has shown tremendous interest in the political process in Senegal. N'Dour declared his intention to contest for the post of Senegalese President as an independent candidate in 2012 but he could not gather the number of signatures required by the electoral law to contest the election. He has also worked with international agencies like the Amnesty International to promote human rights and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to promote food sufficiency in conflict-prone areas where food has become a problem for the people.

3. Taiwo Ajai-Lycett of Nigeria (1941-Date)



Taiwo Ajai-Lycett is a Nigerian acting icon and perhaps the greatest Nigerian actress of all time. A multi-talented actress, singer, dancer, journalist, advertiser and educationist, she was born in Lagos, Nigeria, on 3 February 1941 but started her acting career in 1967 in Royal Court Theatre London and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) between 1969 and 1976. Like an enigma, she combined acting on the UK stage, television and films with print and electronic journalism. Ajai-Lycett performed in all major theatres in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe. She performed in popular theatre houses like the Covent Garden, The Bristol Old Vic, The Royal Court Theatre, The Palace Theatre, The Hampstead Theatre Club, the Royal Opera House Westcliffe, and The Mercury Theatre, Colchester.

Her Artistic Contributions

Ajai-Lycett featured in Sydney Porter's *A Warm December* and several television soaps including the popular *Some Mothers do 'av 'em*, *Crown Court*, and *Comedy Playhouse*. She has also appeared in numerous UK Television drama productions for the BBC (TV & Radio Drama), ATV, Granada, COI, ILEA and Thames Television.

Back home in Nigeria, she has featured in many stage and television productions. Her stage productions include, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Lion and the Jewel*; Wale Ogunyemi's *The Divorce*; J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat*; and Fred Agbeyegebe's *The King Must Dance Naked*. The television appearances include Laolu Ogunniyi's television series, *Winds Against My Soul*; Jab Adu's *The Young Ones*; and Nigerian Television Authority's *The Honourable*; as well as *For Better for Worse*, and many others. She also featured in Tade Ogidan's movie, *Hostages*. She has a training school for actors, make-up artists and costumiers.

Her Non-Artistic Contributions

In the area of education, Taiwo Ajai-Lycett was a Roving Lecturer at various institutions of Higher Education in Britain. She lectured on African Arts and Craft and on African Theatre for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). She is also a Roving Lecturer for the Commonwealth Institute, London, at various institutions of Higher Education, and Teacher Training Colleges in Britain, on African Art, Music and Dance. Her passion for education motivated her to establish her own school – Talhouse Private School in Lagos. She is at the moment, the President of The National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools in Alimosho LGA of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Taiwo Ajai-Lycett also showed a high level of commitment in promoting the quality of life of girls and women. She is a woman-development and gender activist. She is on the advisory board of the National Council for Women Society (NCWS) in Nigeria. Apart from

that, she launched and edited *African Woman*, a political, economic and social magazine for Black and African men and women in the Diaspora. She is a youth mentor who has organised and facilitated various youths and leadership programmes to empower and prepare youths for future challenges. She has promoted the reading culture in Nigeria through the African Network for Book Development, and participated actively in advertising. Together with her late husband, she founded Partnership Advertising Limited and won many awards for her contributions to advertising, communication and marketing.

4. Miriam Makeba of South Africa (1932-2008)



²Miriam Makeba of South Africa
(1932-2008)

Sources of pictures:

² Picture retrieved at www.nairaland.com on Oct. 20, 2011

xii Picture retrieved online in Oct. 20, 2011 at www.mischalke04.wordpress.com

Miriam Zenzile Makeba was a Grammy Award winner for the best folk recording in 1966. She was one of the first set of artists from Africa that popularised African music in the United States of America and elsewhere in different parts of the world. She was best known for her famous song *Pata Pata* which was first recorded in 1957. She started her music career in the 1950s with the Manhattan Brothers before she started her own all-female group known as The Skylarks.

Her Artistic Contributions

Makeba's first record *Pata Pata* was very popular and was frequently played on all the radio stations in South Africa as far back as the later part of the 1960s. Her contributions towards the release of Nelson Mandela from prison were unquantifiable. She staged a musical concert to demand for Mandela's release in 1988 at Wembley stadium, London. The concert was broadcast to 67 countries and had an estimated audience of about 600 millions. The concert was tagged "freedomfest". Her famous hits include; *Pata Pata*, *Malaika*, *Quogothwane*, and *Sangoma*. She also took part in an anti-apartheid documentary titled *Come Back, Africa* as well as taking a lead female role in a South African musical *King Kong*.

Her Non-Artistic Contributions

Miriam Makeba was a civil rights activist who took part in many concerts aimed at promoting human rights in different parts of the world. She was a promoter of peace and won the 2001 Otto Hahn Peace Medal in Gold by United Nations Association of Germany (DGVN) in Berlin. She testified against the apartheid regime before the UN which led to the revocation of her citizenship by the then apartheid regime. Apart from that, she fought against hunger among the less privileged in hunger endemic areas in Africa and was made the Goodwill Ambassador by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2000.

At the dawn of democracy in South Africa, she worked with the then First-Lady of South Africa to mitigate the impacts of HIV/AIDS in the country. She also contributed in the areas of protection of child soldiers and physically challenged individuals. To achieve this, she established Makeba Rehabilitation Centre for girls and the vulnerable, particularly the physically challenged and the girls that have been physically and sexually abused, to take care of their social and emotional trauma. Miriam Makeba died of severe arthritis on 10th of November 2008.

5. Malonga Casquelourd of Congo (1947-2003)



**Malonga Casquelourd of Congo
(1947-2003)**

Malonga Casquelourd was a distinguished African choreographer, dancer, master drummer, singer, actor and teacher. He started his formal training in the art of dancing in one of the indigenous cultural centres near Brazzaville. As he perfected the art of dancing, he joined the National Congolese Dance Company. With this dance company,

Malonga toured different parts of Africa, Europe and the United States of America. He soon became a principal dancer in the troupe.

His Artistic Contributions

After spending some time with the national dance troupe, Malonga decided to establish his own private dance troupe. Malonga later moved to Europe as choreographer and principal performer and resident choreographer with Le Ballet Diaboua in Paris. He co-founded TANAWA, the first Central African dance company in the United States in 1972. In 1979, Malonga established the first African dance and drum camp in the US in 1979 and this has become a statutory practice till today. In Oakland, he helped establish Everybody's Creative Arts Centre, which later became the Alice Arts Centre and subsequently named after him after his death as 'Malonga Casquelourd Centre for the Arts' in 2005.

His Non-Artistic Contributions

In terms of his non-artistic contributions to Congo in particular and the world at large, Malonga has contributed significantly in broadening the access of the western world to knowledge about Africa's rich cultural heritage particularly across the United States, Canada and Europe. This was done not only through his superlative performances but also through his teaching of African dance. He taught dance in these academic institutions: Hunters College, New York (1973-1974) Clark Center for the Performing Arts, New York (1973-1976) York College, Queens, N.Y. (1975) New York University (1974-1975) and New Jersey State University (1974-1975).

In the area of employment creation, Malonga's popularity and the visibility which he gave to Congolese dance turned dance to almost a national profession as large numbers of Congolese youths developed interest and engaged in the dance profession. This drastically reduced the

rate of unemployment as youths with passion for drumming and dancing became gainfully employed. He also contributed significantly in the area of facilitating international exposure for Congolese and many other African dancers. He provided a platform for international exposure by facilitating their participation in international tours and festivals in Europe and America.

The resultant effect of Malonga's popularity and wide acceptability of Congolese dance stimulated a huge interest in people wanting to know more about the Congo, his country, which happened to be the source of such a spectacular dance. This led to annual influx of people from different parts of the world to Congo to explore the tourism potential of the country. This has tremendously improved the nation's earning from tourism, promoted local businesses and also created a more balanced understanding of Congolese people in particular and the Africans in general.

Conclusion

In the course of this paper, we have highlighted significant contributions of the five selected performing artists to their countries in particular and the world at large. We have articulated the other side of the coin which is rarely mentioned: their non-artistic contributions particularly in the areas of education, health, human rights promotion, charity, and employment creation. In the light of this, it must be emphasised that the popularity of performing artists also places on them the huge responsibility of contributing significantly to the improvement of the quality of life of their people. A performing artist must balance his or her contribution to society both from the artistic and non-artistic sides. This is what makes them unique and also endears them to their people long after they have left the stage both physically and spiritually. The greatest award is neither the Grammy nor the Oscars, but the grateful hearts of those whose lives have been positively touched by their various contributions, both artistic and non-artistic.

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