

STAND-UP COMEDY AS POPULAR ART AND THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Theatrical traditions are ever so dynamic. A particular form that is popular at a time soon gives way to another one, sometimes totally within that period, and sometimes, under a situation where the old form still competes for relevance with the new. In other words, throughout the history of theatre, from the classical traditions in Greece to the modern American social drama, one tradition has had to give way or give birth to another in a way which has made the development of theatre and theatrical entertainment, exciting and progressive.

In Nigeria, the history of the evolution of different entertainment forms and their development from the mainstream live theatre is not different from the patterns known elsewhere. The entertainment sector has been quite busy right from the theatrical beginnings of Hubert Ogunde and his Concert Party in the early 1940's, and the activities of Wole Soyinka's Orisun Theatre and the Mbari Mbayo Club of Ibadan in the late 1950's and early 1960's. This paper examines a new wave in theatrical entertainment known as "Stand-up Comedy". The essay takes a critical look at its origins and evolution, its impact on the Nigerian society, especially the theatrical entertainment scene; its prospects and the challenges that it might have to grapple with in the near future. The paper also examines its popularity vis-à-vis other forms of entertainment, with suggestions on how it can be consolidated and employed to enhance other genres, especially the live theatre.

Introduction

Comedy is the most elusive of the dramatic modes to define because it is multi-dimensional in nature. The generally acclaimed definition according to Martin Esslin in *An Anatomy of Drama* (1978) is a play with a happy ending. Lanre Bamidele, in his book *Comedy: Essays and Studies* (2001:1), thinks that this popular idea

about comedy makes it appear as an unserious, therefore, very frivolous art when compared with tragedy. Comedy, in general, strives to elicit smiles and laughter using the elements of wit and humour. According to Hugh Holman (1980:89), the comic effect, arises from a recognition of some incongruity of speech, action or character revelation. He says the incongruity

may be mere verbal, as in the case of a play on words, exaggerated assertion, etc, or physical as when stills are used to make a man's legs seem disproportionately long; or satirical, as when the effect depends upon the beholders' ability to perceive the incongruity between fact and pretence exhibited by a braggart.

In another sense, comedy deals with people in their human state, restrained and often made ridiculous by their limitations, faults, bodily functions and animal nature. In contrast, tragedy may be considered to deal with people in their ideal or godlike state. Comedy has always portrayed human beings more realistically than tragedy, and drawn its laughter from the spectacle of human weakness or failure; hence its tendency to juxtapose appearance and reality, to deflate pretence and to mock excesses.

Wylie Sypher, in his Introduction to *Comedy* by Bergson and Meredith (1956: ix), says comedy teaches us to look at life exactly as it is, unmitigated by scientific theories. He states emphatically that,

Comedy banishes monstrous monotonousness. It teaches us to be responsive, to be honest, to interrogate ourselves and correct our pretentiousness. So, the comic spirit is born of our united social intelligence, which shows us our individual countenances and thus keeps us alive. The comic spirit is the ultimate civilizer in a dull, insensitive world. She watches our vanity, our sentimentalism, with a birch rod; she strips us of our affectations. In comedy, is the singular scene of charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honorable laughter.

Both Meredith and Bergson take comedy as a game played in society and used as a discipline of the self. They believe that comedy is a premise to civilization, but they conclude that it is not only a social game, it is also an art. For instance, Henri Bergson (1956:65) emphasizes that "to understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all, must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one. According to Bergson

Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social signification (p.66).

Comparing comedy with tragedy, Bamidele (2001:2) reports how Antonio Riccoboni, in his essay "The Comic Art", attempts to raise the status of comedy to the level of tragedy and put both genres on the same artistic pedestal. Comedy, like tragedy, he argues, also uses the rhythm of dancing, harmony and conversational language or metre, and both genres observe the laws of time, happening in one circuit of the sun. According to the accounts of Aristotle, though they both have the same dramatic elements as fable, character, thought, diction, melody and spectacle, the difference is that while tragedy imitates upright action, comedy imitates immoral and base action. Also, tragedy effects the purgation of the mind through pity and fear and comedy through pleasure arising from the ridiculous.

Origins of Comedy

The origins of comedy are uncertain, but it is believed to have commenced with the use of phallic symbols at the procession of the Dionysian Festival in Greece in the 5th Century B.C. The word 'phallus' refers to extraordinary large attachments hung around the groins of its male carriers to amuse the crowd and make jest of the audience. The growth of comedy as dramatic art came with the dramatic presentations by the Greek comic writers pioneered by Aristophanes with Old Comedy, later followed by Menander with

Middle Comedy, progressing towards the New Comedy of Classical Rome, exemplified by the arts of Plautus and Terence.

Despite the trivial attention paid to Old Comedy, the great master of comedy did show us that comedy could also be for social commentary and not just to titillate the audience. Aristophanes used some of his plays, such as *The Frogs* and *The Wasps*, to contribute to national debates of his days, thus demonstrating practically that comedians or comic writers are not just fun-makers. For instance, he commented on the leadership crisis in society, as well as on the Peloponnesian War, talked about the participation of women in politics and advocated for an egalitarian society.

English comedy developed from native dramatic forms growing out of the religious drama, the morality plays and interludes, folk games, plays and performances of wandering entertainers, such as dancers and jugglers. Hugh Holman (1980:90) informs us that during the Renaissance, the discovery of Latin comedy and the effort to apply the rules of classical criticism to drama, profoundly affected the course of English comedy. Foreign influences have also been important, like the French influence on Restoration comedy or the Italian influence upon Jacobean pastoral drama. Some of the prominent authors of English comedy include, Robert Greene, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, William Congreve, Oliver Goldsmith, Oscar Wilde, to mention a few.

In Nigeria, comedy has also been used to address social issues. Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, is a parody of religious debauchery, while Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is a hilarious political satire, two of the many contemporary Nigerian comic plays that draw attention to critical social issues. Satirical comedies lead us to the ironic conclusion that comedy, in spite of its apparent triviality, can take on serious issues and provoke serious thought.

Over the years, comedy has unfairly been treated as an inferior art to tragedy. Bamidele (2001:4) notes that with succeeding generations, 'the import of comedy as an unserious genre takes over', resulting in a series of derogatory terms, derived from the

manner of presentation rather than the theme presented. Comedy has more sub-genres than tragedy because of its feature of light heartedness. Thus we have such branches of comedy as high comedy, low comedy, realistic comedy, romantic comedy, tragi-comedy, sentimental comedy, comedy of manners, comedy of errors, farce, burlesque and satire. Farce and satire are the most dominant comic modes. While farce thrives on the ludicrous and the incongruous, satire as a genre, is a form of social art which employs the weapons of irony, parody, invective, sarcasm or wit. Farce as a mode of comedy has no pretensions beyond provoking laughter, by broad, visual humour that reduces the normal to the ludicrous through extravagant exaggerations, although it is, more often than not, a serious and intellectually stimulating art form. Osofisan's *The Engagement* and Rotimi's *Holding Talks* are good examples of farcical plays with clear satirical messages, making us learn as we laugh. Political satire has become one of the most dominant forms. As Lanre Bamidele (2001:8) also notes,

political wit can be directed against social groups, circles or strata whose social positions are contested, the nobility, the nouveau rich, the conqueror, the police, the judge, doctors, priests, religious leaders. These people become the butt of satirical jibes or jokes when they act at variance with the norms of civilized society.

No theory of comedy can be complete without paying attention to the psychology of humour and laughter. The ironic truth is that it is through the laughter generated by comedy, rather than the agony inflicted by tragedy, that certain realities about man are better exposed and appreciated.

Menander's transitional Middle Comedy deals superficially with comic situations of contemporary urban life, with plots which tell of family matters, missing children, delayed marriages, mislaid treasures in all of which a wily and astute slave plays a leading part. It is markedly different from the Old Comedy of Aristophanes, being more pleasantly humorous and politically

inoffensive, and paving the way for the development of New Comedy during the Roman phase. Phyllis Hartnoll (1985:60) reports that

it was this type of (new) Greek comedy played in the vast Hellenistic theatres with their high stages and elaborate scene buildings which the Romans came in contact with as they extended their empire southwards into Greece.

The major cultural and artistic revival in sixteenth century Europe known as the Renaissance resulted in further developments in the comic art. In Italy, one of its earliest ports of call, a new and popular form of entertainment known as *commedia dell'arte* developed, with major impact elsewhere in Europe, particularly in France, being one of the significant influences on Moliere's comic art. This form of theatrical entertainment which paralleled the growth of the serious academic theatre in Italy depended primarily upon the actor and not the playwright. According to Hartnoll (1985:61),

its dialogue is improvised and this is from a simple exchange between two comedians to a full scale play involving a main and a subplot and a number of actors. There were also long stock speeches which once formulated, written down and learned by heart, could be adapted to almost any circumstance.

Comedy generally calls for a high degree of skill and witticism. The practitioners of *commedia dell'arte*, for instance, were said to be unequalled in their profession, combining the attributes of dancer, singer, acrobat, and pantomimist, together with incredible agility of mind and body. A good command of gesture was also essential, because the actors wore masks and so were denied the use of facial expression. The practice of improvisation was no doubt helped by another outstanding peculiarity of *commedia dell'arte*. The company was made up of actors who always played the same part. This was not *type-casting* as we know it today, but the life-long assumption of a disguise

resulting in the creation of a distinct personage. Hartnoll reports that

in many cases, the actor abandoned his own name for that of the character, and so made it even more completely his own (61).

They were most renowned for their performance tours and from the mid sixteenth century to the mid seventeenth, many comedy troupes from Italy were said to have travelled all over Europe, to France, Germany, Spain, Russia and even as far as England. Some of the most popular stock characters were Arlecchino, Pantalone, and Capitano whose real names, as noted earlier, were hidden behind those of their masks. The Nigerian experience, the focus of this essay, is found to be strikingly similar, when considered against this long and chequered history of European comedy.

The Evolution of Comedy in Nigeria

The emergence of Moses Olaiya, (popularly known as Baba Sala), on the Nigerian stage in the late 1950's gave rise to the proliferation of comic drama groups in Nigeria. As against the serious historical, mythical and political plays of his predecessors such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola, Olaiya concentrated on farce to arouse hilarious laughter. He perfected the use of incongruity for comic effect on the Nigerian stage. He injected the idea of mechanical encrustation upon the living, developed a character that one might describe as "outlandish" with a protruding, pillow-stuffed belly, an outsize wooden bow tie, multi-coloured three-piece suit and a big table clock casing as wrist watch, to complete a weird physical appearance, consistent with his decidedly farcical mode. The stock figure, Baba Sala, is often seen in the characteristic paradox of the mischievous fool, the cunning cheat, the clever rogue, the stupidly wise man, the self-conceited coward who challenges the thunder but ducks at the blink of lightning; the assertive but effeminate husband who is

humiliated by his wife; the charlatan who sets out to get the better of his opponent, but gets finally outwitted. For instance, in one of the episodes of his television programmes titled *Alawada* he owes a certain businessman (Adisa), some amount of money. In a bid to avoid payment, he hatches a fake-death plan with his daughter (Sala). When the creditor arrives, he finds Baba Sala on the floor, stiff and still, while his daughter weeps over the supposed corpse. Adisa, the creditor, arrives the scene and soon sees through the pretence, resulting in Baba Sala ultimately receiving a sound beating.

According to Bamidele (2001:56), Baba Sala can be described as the "La premier farceur de Nigerian", meaning, "The foremost and popular comedian in Nigeria". Baba Sala communicates in both Yoruba and Pidgin English in most of his plays, and has also shown that the language of comedy is both "verbal" and "gestural" because his gestures and clowning also draw out laughter from his audience. Following the Baba Sala tradition, several other comedy troupes emerged, such as, Ajimajasan Theatre, Awada Kerikeri Organisation, Lere Paimo Theatre, and so forth. These troupes who usually toured with their productions from town to town, have produced many popular comedians such as Aluwe, Aderupoko, Ojoge, Dento, Baba Wande, Baba Suwe, Elesho, Mr Latin and Baba Ijesha to mention a few.

With the advent of Television in the 1960s, the touring activities of the troupes went down and many of them turned to producing comedy series for Television. Apart from this, several other Television comedy programmes sprang up. These include *Village Headmaster*, *Masquerade*, *Second Chance*, *Icheokwu*, *Koko close*, *Why Worry*, *Jagua Half Hour*, and *Papa Ajasco*. Some of the popular names that emerged from these programmes include Dejummo Lewis, Funso Adeolu, Gorimapa, (*Village Head Master*), Chief Zebrudaya, Alias 4:30 and Okoro (*New Masquerade*). Also, during this period, the names of some veteran artistes and media practitioners such as Tony St Ikye, John Chukwu, Bisi Olatilo, Sunny Iraboh, and Mohammed Danjuma, also came to the

limelight. In addition to their television and media careers, these artistes were also engaged in anchoring events as comperes and Masters of Ceremonies at major concerts, award ceremonies, beauty pageants, including society weddings where they displayed appreciable talents in stand-up jokes, quick wit and humour.

In spite of these robust talents and activities, however, stand-up comedy was not practised professionally until John Chukwu opened a "Comedy Café" in Lagos in the early 1980s. It was an arena in the likeness of a night club where fun seekers converged everyday to wine and dine, dance and also, to laugh at the jokes of its proprietor. Ngozi Emedolibe, reports in the *National Mirror* of 8th September 2006 that, "John Chukwu's comedy café proved to be a successful venture, though the club went down after his death". However, John Chukwu seemed to have planted the seeds which were later to germinate and bear the fruits of contemporary comedy business in Nigeria. Today, there is a deluge of comedians in Nigeria acting as comperes and masters of ceremonies, thus creating the viable sub-sectoral industry in the theatrical entertainment scene known as the *stand-up comedy*. In the words of Emedolibe (2006:10),

with the exit of John Chukwu came the era of Mohammed Danjuma who, in many ways, commenced the stand-up comedy genre as business. But like some progenitors, Danjuma's grip on that sphere was wobbly, probably because he lacked the glamour to take it beyond the ordinary limit. This was then compensated for by Ali Baba, a chip off the then *Charley Boy show*. It was Ali Baba who brought glamour into what is today Alliknown as stand-up comedy in the country.

Describing Atunyota Alleluya Akporobomerere, popularly known as 'Ali Baba', as the father of the modern day stand-up comedy in Nigeria, Sheddi Baba, one of the fast rising comedians in the country, is quoted by Emedolibe in the same write-up as saying,

Ali Baba gave a lot of us the platform to showcase our art. He is unique in a lot of ways. He started comedy as a

structural business, setting up an office and grooming young ones who have what it takes to perform. He brought glamour into the business, he defined the terrain where comedians began to appear in designer apparels to entertain their audience. In his presence, a lot has changed and the business has become more fashionable.

It should be noted that stand up comedy is a global phenomenon. In Britain and America, it had its roots in various traditions of popular entertainment of the late 19th century including the vaudeville, English music hall, minstrel shows, and the comic works of humorists such as American writer, Mark Twain, the pseudonym of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910), who is best known for his broad, often irreverent humour or biting social satire. Notable British stand up comedians who rose through the music halls include Arthur Askey and Max Miller, Bill Connolly, Lenny Bruce and Victoria Woods (who was reported to have sold out the Royal Albert Hall for 15 nights in a row in 2001). The leading exponents of American stand-up comedy, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Bill Cosby, Fred Allen and Frank Fay all came from the vaudeville. Stand up comedy later moved from comedy clubs, bars and coffee houses into concert theatres, sports arenas, resorts and big amphitheatres, with no real restriction on where the craft can be performed.

In Nigeria, the popular contemporary stand-up comedians include Ali Baba, Basket Mouth, I go die, Gandoki, Maliki, Omobaba, D. Don, Owen Gee, Holy Mallam, I go save, Julius Agwu, Gbenga Adeyinka, Gordons, Klint d drunk, AY, Teju Baby Face, Koffi, Princess, Lepacious Bose, Okey Bakassi, Basorge Tariah Junior, Buchi, Seyi Law, Sim Card, Tee A and a host of others. What is interesting about these comedians is that each one has created a unique brand not only with his/her peculiar kind of jokes, but with a characteristic way of presentation. For instance, Klint d drunk comes on stage playing a perpetual drunk, staggering and slurring, even as he renders his jokes. Princess calls herself a Professor and very often, dazzles the audience with "sensational"

grammatical expressions. Omobaba, who is not particularly good looking, first jokingly passes uncomplimentary remarks about himself before descending heavily on others. Most of their jokes are on broad issues relating to politics, religion, culture, economy, environment, business and the general human condition, covering diverse themes such as love, marriage, governance, power, class discrimination and so on. For instance, in October 2005, Ali Baba directed the following satirical joke at then President Olusegun Obasanjo, during a State dinner at the presidential complex in Abuja, popularly known as Aso Rock:

...I salute our President, he is a very prudent man. We learnt that the Environment Minister brought a proposal to him, on the beautification of Aso Rock environs especially the road leading to the Villa. "Baba" liked the idea and he requested for the budget. In the minister's budget, one of the statues meant to adorn the Aso Rock road is Baba's statue and it was to cost N5,000,000.00 (Five Million Naira). Baba exclaimed, and told the minister to give him the money and that he would physically go and stand there himself as the statue, live.

Naturally, the whole hall went up in wild laughter at the rather expensive joke which, though was meant to portray official prudence, actually connoted immeasurable greed on the part of the president, who could do virtually any ridiculous thing for the right fee. Stand up comedy business in Nigeria has come of age, with an increasing size of followership over the years. Quite frequently, comedy concerts are now being organised in different venues across the country. Emedolibe (2006:10) corroborates this view as follows:

Nothing has helped the comedy phenomenon than the various comedy concerts held periodically in the country, championed by Mr Opa Williams of Virgin Productions with, *Night of a thousand laughs*.

'Night of a thousand laughs' was the first stand-up comedy concert in Nigeria, and it had its debut at the Law School Auditorium in Victoria Island Lagos in 2001. The show featured comedians such as Ali Baba, Tee A, Sam Loco Efe, and musicians like Sunny Nneji and Plantation Boys. It turned out to be a huge success to the extent that the audience looked forward to its presentation every year, while the videos now sell widely across the country and beyond.

Form and structure of Nigerian stand-up comedy performances

A typical stand-up comedy show is a presentation, where a comedian performs for a live audience, usually speaking directly to them with the aid of a microphone. Stand-up performances are characterized by units of multiple short jokes where the comedian recites a fast-paced succession of humorous stories in monologues. Sometimes, he teams up with one or two others to perform short drama skits, with improvised dialogues.

Stand-up comedians make use of the different performative elements and arts of the theatre such as music, dance, choreography, pantomime, including various stage props, visual effects and acrobatics to enhance their acts. Although this form of entertainment is not particularly new, as it had existed in what was popularly known as "variety show", "one man show" or "solo performance", the new stand-up comedy events are however designed and packaged as full theatrical concerts, sometimes with lavishly decorated and branded backgrounds. Examples are Koffi's *Bursting loose* at Muson Centre in 2008 and Agwu's *Crack ya ribs* at Eko le' Meridian in 2009.

Content and structure: A cursory study of the content of stand-up concert reveals the presentation of a potpourri of entertainment items with the employment of popular forms such as music, dance and choreography as special attraction. There is also heavy dependence on established names in the music sector (such as Tu face Idibia) who come on stage with professional dancers to thrill the audience with modern dance and choreography. Then, the comedians come out in turn to perform. A show could have a long

list of about ten musicians, five dance groups and ten comedians, each individual or group entertaining for about five minutes.

Venue flexibility: Stand-up comedy shows can take place in any available open space. So, there is really no need for purpose-built theatres. In other words, an average comedy concert does not require all the technical stage facilities needed for a formal theatrical engagement. Although most of the shows are heavily branded with elaborate multimedia stage equipment such as public address sound systems, lighting equipment, visual effects and backdrops, of both the sponsoring organisation and the producing company, minimal items with simple stage set and background are the basic requirements.

Branding: Stand-up comedy shows are usually branded. This distinguishes one from the other giving each one a character and uniqueness all its own. The trademark or brand positions them for marketability, both in terms of securing sponsorship and attracting the audience. The name of the show remains the same every year, but the line up of artistes may differ. This style and technique of branding is what Fosudo (2008) refers to as commoditizing of entertainment products. Some of the very popular brands include, *Rhythm Unplugged*, *Crack ya ribs*, *Nite of a thousand laughs*, *Lord of the ribs*, *AY open mic competition*, *Stand up Nigeria*, *Comedy Titans* etc. Also, there are now some popular television comedy programmes such as *Comedy Zone*, *Laugh mattaz*, *AY Live*, *Teju Baby Face Show*, *Time out with Tee A*, to mention a few.

Mode of rehearsal and preparation: The rehearsal pattern for stand up shows is more or less through individual and personal preparation. This also gives room for flexibility, cost cutting and freedom from several days or weeks of rehearsal, which is characteristic of live drama productions. Although all the contracted artistes may converge for a general dress and technical rehearsal a day or two to the performance, this procedure cannot work for an average ensemble theatre production, where a minimum of four to six weeks of intensive group rehearsal is

standard practice. Some of the artistes billed to perform in some of the comedy shows do not even show up at all for the technical rehearsal. Also, on the day of performance, some of them arrive in the middle of the show, perform, collect their pay and disappear, possibly to another venue. Full length drama presentations cannot operate in quite the same manner. The "ensemble" spirit is forever the driving force behind such productions and that is one of the factors that make them compulsively "experiential". Confirming the view about mode of rehearsal and preparation, Omobaba, in an article titled "My Mother Scolded me for joking about Clerics" in the *Daily Sun* of Friday 18th August 2006, says

I have never rehearsed before going for a show. All the jokes come to me naturally. This is really where creativity comes in. I could just look at the mood of someone or a group of persons and start talking about them and within the twinkle (sic) of an eye, I would have started making them laugh (14).

He also confessed that sometimes, too, people might not be happy with his jokes, but he would normally continue until he succeeded in winning them over.

Financial viability: Stand up comedy has become big business in Nigeria and many of its practitioners have made fortunes in the act. Apart from the fact that their shows are massively attended, some of them now charge as much as one hundred thousand naira (N100,000.00) for single tickets. Also, they practice what is known in marketing as "price discrimination", whereby tickets are made available for different categories of patrons using the factor of seat locations. In other words, apart from the regular seats which may go up for about ten or twenty thousand naira, they have other categories such as VIP (Very Important Personality) seats which may be charged at fifty thousand (50,000.00) naira; VVIP (Very Very Important Personality) seats charged at one hundred thousand (100,000.00) naira and "Table for Six" (a special category) which

may attract as much as five hundred thousand (N500,000.00) or half a million naira.

In addition, because of their popularity and celebrity status, some stand-up comedians also get contracted as models and product ambassadors. For instance, Biodun Alao reports in *City People* (18th October 2006) that, "Bright Okpeocha popularly called Basket Mouth just returned from South Africa where he went to shoot commercials for Malta Guinness. The deal, it was gathered, will give the comedian N15 Million in cash and another N10 Million in sponsorships."

Stand-up comedy in Nigeria: prospects for the future

There is no doubt that stand up comedy has become a major source of theatrical entertainment in Nigeria today. It offers a lot of career opportunities for its practitioners and, in recent times, has witnessed a large influx of comedians. Just like the video film sub-sector, which took the shine off live theatrical entertainment for over two decades now, stand up comedy has also established itself as an emergent popular stage art, which further deprives live theatre of its pride of place.

However, the sector is also fast becoming an all-comers affair. There is a gradual proliferation of stand up comedians in the country. Apart from the fact that there are some live and television programmes such *AY open mic competition*, *Stand up Nigeria* and *National comedy challenge*, meant to hunt and discover new talents in that area, several young people who believe or assume that they have the natural gift have found solace in a sector which appears to be for now, an "open market" or an all-comers affair. In the *National Mirror* of Friday 8th September 2006, Julius Agwu, one of the leading lights in the sector opined that "joining the comedy business is so easy, but breaking even is a different ball game." He elaborates:

It is so easy to join. Anybody can join, but your success depends on a lot of factors. First and foremost, anybody willing to join must be talented, then you mix up and

appear in shows and then, your ability to move a crowd is what matters (10).

In view of the above, care must be taken not to allow the sector to become oversaturated. This may begin to affect its credibility and subsequently, patronage. The proliferation of comedians will make competition stiffer and possibly lead to negative practices such as double standards, discrimination and even cheating. To confirm this point, Omobaba also laments as follows:

Sometimes, I feel like quitting comedy because I have the problem of knowing and meeting the right people... sometimes, a show that is expected to generate a huge sum of money for a comedian would not yield the expected profit. This is because we are the ones jostling or lobbying to feature in it. In such situation, the reward is usually low and we would not have a choice than to accept the meagre income (14).

Julius Agwu, in addition, confesses that in spite of all the glamour and wealth, being a comedian also has a negative impact on the person of the comedian, as "nobody takes you seriously" anymore. Even when you are not on stage, whatever you say is most often taken for a joke, although you are speaking in earnest. Agwu believes this is one of the challenges an average comedian faces in his day-to-day life off the stage.

Conclusion

In view of the fact that stand-up comedy is a growing popular entertainment form in Nigeria, it should be encouraged and supported in such a way that it will continue to gain more audience and win greater patronage especially in terms of corporate support for the entertainment sector. It is recommended, however, that for live theatre to benefit from this artistic re-awakening, comedians should develop means of collaborating with live theatre practitioners once in a while, to put up full length drama presentations in the comic genre. This way, our Theatre Artists will find relevance and also be enabled to provide creative and

technical support for the comedy concerts to make them even greater. Investigations revealed that most of the stand up comedians are theatre graduates. To this extent, they should let the training they have received from the theatre rub off positively on the theatre profession.

In addition, it is high time the leaders of the stand-up comedy sector began to think of forming an association to protect the interests of their members and regulate activities in the sector including, membership policies, ethics and professional standards in order to avoid proliferation and negative influences within the industry. They should also organize workshops, seminars and training programmes to build capacity and explore opportunities for greater skills acquisition and development for their members, to ensure a sustainable high standard.

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