

Re-inventing Live Theatre Practice in Nigeria: Leveraging on the Power of the Television Medium

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Abstract

Professional theatre practice in Nigeria has become more of a thing of the past. Unlike what obtained in the early 1960s, up to the 1980s, when live theatre was vibrant in many parts of the country, even in university campuses, the situation has deteriorated to an extent where trained artists hardly think of making a living from the stage. A lot of reasons have been proffered for this unfortunate state of theatre practice in Nigeria. These include, lack of theatre venues, general insecurity, rise of TV entertainment, negative attitude of the public against the profession, non-commitment of trained artists, and poor funding. Paradoxically, stand-up comedy genre has defied the above and risen to become top flight entertainment, even at public functions. This paper argues that if there is synergy, the theatre can leverage on the power of the television medium to rise again, just as Silverbird Galleria has proved the point that cinema can be a profitable business venture. The submission is that all is not lost for professional theatre practice in Nigeria. The onus then is on trained professionals to rise to the occasion and ameliorate the situation.

Keywords: Reinventing, Live Theatre, Leveraging, Television

Introduction

Theatre revolves around a performance taking place in a venue in front of an audience. Hence, the performance venue and the audience are essentials in the art of theatre, just as live performance is an essential aspect of theatre practice. These essentials, therefore, reveal live performance as a form of Eucharistic Communion, between actors and audiences in a given space, as a prerequisite. Live theatre performance in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the people's traditions and customs. This theatre manifests in the peoples' festivals, initiation ceremonies, dances, mimes and other rituals in the daily existence of the people. Live performances, whether they are drama, songs, dances, music or folk tales, are the most ephemeral of all the arts, in the sense that they vanish within moments of being brought into existence, only remaining as a memory (Etherton 38). It is difficult to imagine any respectable assessment of contemporary African art or drama, without considering its fountain and, in particular, those images, tropes and usages, which continue to run through every stage and subsequent development of the drama – from the traditional and trado-modern theatre through the literary theatre. Modern African drama started and blossomed as live theatre until its eventual decline, having dwindled since the early 1970s till date (Ebo 168-171). However, theatre critics have adduced a lot of reasons for the unfortunate decline of theatre practice in Nigeria over the years, ranging from lack of theatre venues, general insecurity, rise of TV entertainment, negative attitude of the public against the profession, non-commitment of trained artists, to poor funding. But the truth is that the stand-up comedy business has defied the above and risen to become top flight artistic entertainment, as seen in an earlier study (Ayakoroma, "The Rise of Stand-up Comedy"). This paper argues that the theatre can leverage on the power of the television medium to rise again to relevance, just as Silverbird Galleria has proved the point that cinema can be a profitable business venture. The submission is that all is not lost for professional theatre practice in Nigeria and that the onus then is on trained professionals to rise to the occasion and ameliorate the situation.

Theatre in Nigeria

In a keynote lecture, titled, “Nigeria Theatre Practice: To be or not to be?” at the 2012 edition of the International Theatre Day (ITD). I took a critical look at the current state of the theatre profession, noting that it is the place of theatre artists to resuscitate the profession. My contention remains that unlike most other professionals: lawyers, accountants, engineers, medical doctors, and so on, in Nigeria, theatre artists have not made conscious efforts to salvage the theatre from the throes of extinction (Ayakoroma, “Theatre Practice”). Suffice to point out here that Ahmed Yerima chronicles the contributions of Geoffrey Axworthy between 1956 and 1967, and the formation of the University Travelling Theatre in 1960, informing that the idea started when students went round the Halls doing performances, climaxing in Trenchard Hall. According to him, it was used as a kind of playwriting workshop, where students were asked to write a 30-minute play without any scenery or complicated lighting. He states that the first production in 1961 was *That Scoundrel Suberu*, an adaptation of Moliere’s *Les Fourberies de Scapin* by Dapo Adelugba, Alfred Opubor, Browson Dede and Ayo Amu (Yerima 26-27). This appears to have been taken a step further because, as Saint Gbilekaa observes, while the 1970s saw the establishment of Theatre Arts Departments in Nigerian Universities, as well as several States Arts Councils, making theatre practice in Nigeria to reach its peak where artistic colour from talented actors endeared them to their audiences, the situation soon witnessed a downturn. He opines, however, that the only hope to rescue the declining state of theatrical practice in Nigeria, barring funding constraints, lies within our university system where live theatre still attracts audience.

However, in examining the present state of Nigerian Theatre practice, I had noted that the University Travelling Theatre of the University of Ibadan, which later metamorphosed into the University Performing Company (UPC), heralded the birth of other professional university performance companies, like University of Calabar Performing Company (UCPC), University of Ilorin Performing Company (UIPC), University of Ife Performing Company (UIPC), and University of Benin Performing Company (UBPC), among others. All of these performing troupes, among others, aimed at making theatre business self-sustaining. Unfortunately, as I had noted, the socio-economic conditions were not propitious to the survival of these theatre companies; and so, before long, life was snuffed out of them (Ayakoroma, “Theatre Practice”).

In highlighting the political imperatives in African dramaturgy and theatre practice, Femi Osofisan maintains that, in terms of political engagement, the theatre has a great role to play by ensuring that it forms part of the struggle for the political and economic emancipation of our country. He stresses that it is imperative for practitioners to stand up to face the immense challenges of reviving the arts in Nigeria, particularly theatre practice. He argues that live theatre can be used to preach “the virtues of socialism,” since the old doctrine of “arts for art’s sake” has gradually been relegated to the background, and that there is no denying the fact that the theatre can indeed go beyond just being for entertainment or mere formalistic experiments (Osofisan, in Asagba 15-20). Incidentally, this more or less a re-iteration of his position, elsewhere, that in order to turn the theatre effectively into a medium of change, the first imperative is to revamp the theatre itself (Osofisan, “The Terror” 91). But then, how do we resuscitate the theatre when it has become relatively non-existent?

Austin Asagba re-echoes this position when he argues that to revive the practice of theatre and drama in any given society, it is imperative for one to deviate from the old fashioned mentality about the arts and make conscious analyses of the economic and political development. Since the social commitment and relevance of theatre to the people cannot be isolated from the historical processes of the society, it behoves dramatists to create new methods that interpret the social reality. He suggests the use of community theatre for social restructuring, popular education, entertainment and national development, the theoretical concepts and practice of an art form that is popularly drawn from indigenous cultural repertoire, to serve as inspirational guide to contemporary theatre practitioners. This, he believes, will not only bridge the current gap evident between trained professionals and the masses, but also explore the theatrical and cultural potentials of the indigenous language as well as place emphasis on collective participation and involvement (83-97). In the view of Izuu Nwankwo, though nothing seems to have come out of the numerous observations about the deplorable state of Nigerian theatre, its practitioners and stakeholders should not be pessimistic but keep on proffering solutions to the dilemma of the theatre profession. He cites Osofisan as positing that to revive the downward trend in the practice of theatre in Nigeria, there should be a re-definition of what we know as theatre making it more profitable as it used to be, thus.

A productive venture where practitioners can earn a decent living from the boundaries of theatre in Nigeria need to be re-interpreted and defined to conform with contemporary reality so as to appeal to the interest of the present generation youths, who due to the absence of live theatre activities, are migrating their talent of art forms into other like venture performances like stand-up comedy and video films (23).

According to Nwankwo, if theatre performances flourish in institutions of higher learning and outlying communities, it is the responsibility of practitioners to transfer these “flourish-ness” into the entire society, and not allow it to “just crawl into the safe confines of university departments or to sneak into the comfort of textbooks that only decorate shelves of some less-patronised library” (29). As he rightly surmises, this situation has necessitated the proliferation of newer forms of performances, for instance, stand-up comedy. Therefore, if performances could be remodelled into these various forms of live entertainment, the dearth of theatre in our contemporary society would be ameliorated, in the sense that these various forms of live performances possess a good number of characteristics of theatre: embodied enactment of gestures, movements, oral and aural accompaniments, as well as costume, lighting and scene designs, as well as live audiences.

As it were, Austin Akpuda’s examination of the efforts of Sam Ukala in theatre practice, from the 50s through the 60s till date, is instructive. As an African Theatre advocate, Ukala, in his theory of “folkism,” believes that the African folktale in performance is a very good example of a total theatre construct unique to the African experience. Similarly, Austin Asagba presents Ukala as treading the path which other playwrights before him, like Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Zulu Sofola, and Wale Ogunyemi had fashioned; just that Ukala differs because he is driven by a sense of artistic mission anchored on the need to radically change the landscape of Nigerian theatre practice, in form, style and content (82).

Ofonime Inyang, on the other hand, examines the link between theatre and modernity to establish that theatre in its performance orientation is a flexible art, which adopts diverse routines of self-reinvention. This is in the sense that the creative dynamism of theatrical arts is one that permits the sustainability of its practice in different cultures and environments. He concedes that though live theatre currently faces challenges in Africa, with the massive invasion of new technologies into the entertainment world, it (theatre) has the wherewithal to engage the ‘new society’ through rethinking process and experimentation by practitioners. He argues that Ukala did a linkage of the stage and the screen in producing a film version of his stage play, *Akpakaland*, an effort that had been attempted by Soyinka in the first Nigerian fictional film, *Kongi’s Harvest*, an adaptation of his play, a production that was built on his theatrical training and relying on a repertory of professional actors with ample stage experience, a clear crossover from the stage to the screen. Thus, Inyang submits that considering the current state of intervention, the development shows the prospects of theatre practice in Africa. He states:

Ukala’s technique is not only creative but it also vividly orchestrates the African total theatre experience in its liveliest offer. Music, dance, mime, chant, incantation, proverbs, wise sayings, epigrams, mores, and stylization are all fused to offer the play a communal energy and artistry.... The screen adaptation is most timely and useful. It opens a new direction of practice in the African theatre environment.... The screen format acts as a cultural documentation archive for traditional materials used in crafting the story (Inyang 187,188, 189).

In documenting his personal experience, Sam Ukala highlights four main areas, namely, funding, dwindling publishing prospects, low fortunes and poor or no tutelage for young playwrights, as factors militating against professional theatre practice in Nigeria. He recalls that a paper he had written in 2005, titled, “Two Decades of Directing Educational Theatre: The Problem of Funding,” foregrounds the anti-art policy of the Federal Government exhibited in the 60-40 admission quota by Nigerian universities, for the Sciences and the Arts, respectively, had adversely affected poor funding or lack of funding of the Arts, especially Theatre Arts. He said that, from the time of Alarinjo through the Ogunde era to the recent past, the theatre had endured the common perception of being the calling of vagabonds and rogues, the unserious and the unscientific, free dancers and jesters. Added to low fortunes from live theatre productions, which is disheartening and poor or no tutelage for young playwrights to the extent that many aspiring playwrights do not know the difference between the demands of a stage play and a screen play, which Ukala highlights, it could be surmised that live theatre needs to be repackaged, if it has to breathe a breath of fresh air in the realm of artistic entertainment. Proffering options for theatre workers in sustaining theatre practice in Nigeria, Rasheed Musa identifies two major factors responsible for the change of tone in theatre practice in Nigeria.

First, institutional problems, which have to do with irregular review of curriculum for theatre courses, extreme politicking, finance, lack of manpower, institutional bureaucracy, and low motivation of artists; and second, individual problems, which have to do with the hatred for performances, conferences and seminars by theatre artists, lack of commitment, and the get-rich-quick syndrome. He posits that if theatre practice must be sustained in Nigeria, there has to be code of conduct for practitioners, review of theatre curricular and performances, virile theatre marketers, stakeholders realising that theatre practice is the spine of theatre development, and all concerned being patient and accepting on-the-job trainings (Musa 31-35). However, Innocent Ohiri discourages over-reliance on gate-takings in the contemporary theatre business, bemoaning the fact that young theatre graduates, who had been in the forefront of promoting live theatre, have abandoned the profession to seek non-theatre related jobs. He is of the view that artists should be encouraged to explore other sources of income as a way of discouraging gate-takings, adding that theatres today depend on revenue, not only from tickets sales but increasingly from other sources as well. He posits that in Nigeria, like most third world countries where funding of the arts is negligible, young theatre practitioners can rely on individual gifts, donations and bequests, and concessions, among others. Co-terminously, CaniceNwosu proffers a survivalist strategy for reviving and sustaining live performance in Nigeria, taking Imo State as a case study. He observes that while the stage remains the “mother” medium for theatrical productions, it has continued to lose its audience to the screen in Nigeria because practitioners failed to device survival strategies. He concludes that though the screen has taken a greater percentage of the audience, a development which is not in the overall interest of the theatre industry, practitioners should realize that live theatre remains the oldest form of theatrical entertainment and that other media should depend on it.

Thus, there is no gainsaying the fact that all of the above positions paint the sorry state of theatre practice in Nigerian. It could be surmised that for theatre to rise from the present comatose state, from the total depression it is experiencing, there is urgent need to adopt strategies for its re-invention. One of such approaches is leveraging on the power of the television medium, as stand-up comedy and the film (Nollywood) industries have done successfully in the Nigerian entertainment landscape. It is pertinent to briefly examine the dynamics of the television, as a medium of mass communication, before highlighting the possible areas of synergy that will be invaluable to the contemporary theatre practice in Nigeria.

The Dynamics of the Television Medium

Television, as a form of electronic broadcasting, has gradually forced itself into millions of homes around the world. As mass communication theorist, Marshall McLuhan, put it, television has turned the world into “a global village.” With the advent of network and cable satellite broadcasts, television has further widened the scope of people’s participation in events, vicariously. TV brings into the comfort of the living rooms of millions of people around the globe, real-life images of moments of disaster, of sadness, and joy. For instance, close to fifty years ago, Americans at home saw President John F. Kennedy’s assassination, specifically on 22nd November, 1963, and the state burial on 25th November, 1963; they saw, on 24th November 1963, Jack Ruby shoot and kill Lee Harvey Oswald, who had been held by the police for President Kennedy’s murder; about one billion people, in about 40 countries, were said to have watched the Papal Inaugural Mass of Pope John Paul II on 22nd October, 1978; and the world saw live coverage of the wedding of the then royal couple, Prince Charles and Lady Diana on 21st July 1981. Ted Turner’s 1980 dream, Cable News Network (CNN), has even made the world a much smaller global village to the extent that Nigerians took part in the Gulf War, tagged, “Operation Desert Storm,” from 2nd August, 1990 – 28th February, 1991, right in their homes. The same applies to the historic open murder trial of the American football star and actor, O.J. Simpson, from 24th January, 1995, to a verdict on 3rd October, 1995, a case that was described as the most publicized criminal trial in American history as at that time. Live coverage of state and national events in Nigeria to reach a mass audience are in vogue because of the high level of spontaneity. Nigerians now sit at home every time to vicariously share in the victories and losses of national football teams, for instance, the Confederations Cup in Brazil, the Under-20 Football Competition in Turkey, the Olympic Games in Brazil, respectively. This underpins the view that TV is, an electronic magic carpet that transports millions of persons each day to faraway places. It is a 20th century innovation that has transformed much of the world for the past two centuries, and its impact on our social, political, and cultural life becomes more profound each year (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 3: 309). Television is an engaging medium of mass communication, in the sense that the viewer has to devote time and attention to it, totally, to receive the mass communicated message or derive maximum satisfaction from the viewing experience.

This explains why it could be likened to a “jealous god,” in the sense that it does not allow “service” to any other “god.” Unlike Radio, one cannot be watching TV and at the same time be reading, eating, cooking, stitching, or sleeping. It is unique in performing its mass communication functions of surveillance of the environment, correlation of parts of the environment, transmission of cultural heritage and entertainment. Communication scholars have since expanded the list considerably and television, unlike other popular mass media, has a unique opportunity to perform all of these functions extremely well because it has its audio and visual properties (Sobowale 16-17). By its design, TV makes use of *sight*, *sound* and *motion* to convey its message – the viewers *see* real people, *hear* them talk, and see them *moving* and doing various things.

Although the claim of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to be reaching 60 million Nigerians is unsubstantiated, there is no arguing the fact that TV is no more an exclusive preserve of urban dwellers, judging from the multiplicity of antennas that dot rural communities. Unfortunately, NTA and other state and TV private stations do not currently have in place systems for measuring audience reach and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has only just begun to strategise towards developing such a system. But then, there is one national free-to-air television channel, the government-owned NTA, linked to its 97 NTA affiliate free-to-air stations throughout the country. At the states levels, apart from the NTA affiliates, there are about 32 free-to-air stations, owned by State Governments and a further 14 private-owned stations. In Lagos State, for instance, viewers have access to 11 locally/regionally-based television stations, in addition to a little over 20 radio stations, compared to about 16 radio stations in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory.

As it were, television has been (and will continue to be) a source of advertisement and income for companies: the advertiser and the broadcaster, respectively. For example, Akinwunmi Ishola avers that if you want to reach the masses, the best medium is television and video film (Adeoti 150). This shows the importance of re-inventing live theatre practice in Nigeria through the power of the television medium. It is not surprising then that while Ishola attributes video film as one place that helps spread theatre, many have seen the coming of Nollywood as what brought about the decline of live theatre. While Emmanuel Ebo observes that lack of attractive theatre buildings has also contributed to the decline of live theatre, he contends that its revival and survival border on ensuring balance in theatrical productions – in the live stage, television, cinema and home video, because the technological transformation which the theatre is passing through should accommodate the interrelated nature of these media (171).

However, Campbell, Martin and Fabos go further to opine that when television is involved in cultural promotion, value is added to it. According to them, when we listen to music, read a book, or watch television, we are not asking, “Is this art?” but, instead, trying to identify or connect with something or someone. To them, therefore, culture is a process that delivers the values of a society through products or other meaning-making forms (5-6). This is why the speech of the then Premier of Western Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, during the opening ceremony of the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV), on the 31st of October, 1959, encapsulates the potentials of television in re-inventing artistic entertainment. The late sage stated, thus: few events in my life have given me so much pleasure as to come before you tonight, to open formally the first television network in Africa. Western Nigeria Television is already being emulated by other parts of this country, as well as a number of other African States. I know that you will all gain much from this great medium of mass information and instruction. It is a powerful influence for good. I am confident that in due course, it will assist in making our great country greater (Lasode 15).

The relevance of the above in re-inventing live theatre cannot be overemphasized. For instance, Awolowo is also quoted to have stated that television will serve, “as a teacher, entertainer, and as a stimulus to us all to transform Nigeria into a modern and prosperous nation” (Lasode 7). Jonathan Haynes confirms this when he informs that some of the leading Yoruba Travelling Theatre companies capitalised on television appearances. For instance, in 1965, early in his career, Baba Sala’s Alawada Theatre won a “Talent Hunt” contest, sponsored by WNTV Ibadan, which eventually led to a regular weekly half-hour slot on prime-time television. Baba Sala recalls the television experience thus: They (NTA Ibadan) did much to promote my theatre. I will say I owe more than fifty percent of my present success to them. For about two to three years from 1965 we concentrated mainly on our television programmes and appearances. We became very popular with our Yoruba-speaking audience. After that we ventured out with our plays, our audience was ready made, the television had done it (Lakoju 39-40).

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that once theatre events are given prominence on television, through strategic promotions, the target audience will respond positively and eventually take the necessary action: patronage of the theatre.

Leveraging on the Television Medium to Re-invent Live Theatre

Having examined the power of the television medium, it is necessary to enumerate some of the strategies that could be adopted to re-invent live theatre practice in Nigeria. The platforms, which are by no means definitive, include News Reports, Promos/Adverts, “On Stage LIVE,” “Follow-Spot,” “Theatre Panorama,” “Children’s Theatre on TV,” “TV Play Reading Sessions,” and “Talking Theatre,” among others; what, for now, could be termed, an 8-Point Agenda.

- 1) ***News Reports***: This is one of the formats in television programming. Giving prominence to news coverages on theatrical activities is very strategic. There is a popular saying by mass communicators that, if you are important, you appear on television; and if you appear on television, you are important. It is in consonance with the above that James Watson extrapolates the strategic nature of news, thus: The news is as much about perceived importance of self and other as it is about ‘reality.’ As perceptions of importance – significant events, occasions, developments – change, so does reality definition.... news as a version of reality is skewed by a cultural bias and the specificity of situation.... Television news suggests that what we see is what there is, that we are being presented with mirror images of reality (Watson 121-122).The more theatre productions feature in the news telecasts, the more the public will develop interest in theatrical conventions.
- 2) ***Promos/Adverts***: Well-packaged promotions or adverts on stage productions will be invaluable in audience cultivation in professional theatre practice. This entails using clips from rehearsals, costume parades, or run-throughs of given productions. This is what the Nigerian video film and stand-up comedy industries have leveraged on. There is hardly any Nollywood film that is not promoted on television networks, usually ending with catch phrases like, “Coming Soon!” or “Watch Out!” This is in addition to being part of the trailers in earlier films. Incidentally, most of such promos are done in English, Pidgin and the indigenous language, for maximum coverage. For instance, if a theatre production is taking place in the South-West, the target audience will comprise more of Yoruba, so the TV promos would be more effective in English and Yoruba; for the North-West, North-East, and North-Central, they would more likely be in English, Hausa, and Pidgin; for the South-East, the ads will be more effective in English and Ibo; while for the South-South, they will more likely be in English and Pidgin. The patronage will be impressive if the production features actors that are already popular in other media: film, music, stand-up comedy, and so on. This explains why stand-up comedy shows are packed with various acts: dancers, acrobats, musicians, comedians, and so on.
- 3) ***“On Stage LIVE”***: This is a platform conceptualised to re-broadcast live recordings of stage productions in order to generate viewers’ interest on stage performances and the star actors. Patrick-Jude Oteh’s Jos Repertory Theatre, for instance, organises an annual Festival of Plays in Jos, Plateau State, and sometimes brings one or two of such productions to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. This is just as Jerry Adesewo’s Arojah Royal Theatre, Abuja, in 2012, organised a “Festival of Barclays Ayakoroma’s Plays,” at the French Cultural Centre, Abuja. Unfortunately, just a few persons, who probably find time to read papers or listen to radio, attend such productions. Like the stalagmite theory or status conferral theory in mass communication, the persistent broadcast of theatre performances will confer status on the actors and the stage. For example, Nollywood got its breakthrough, at inception because most of the actors, who starred in *Living in Bondage*, were already popular on television; they had featured in many soap operas and viewers had already identified with them. The weekly showcase of previous performances will gradually profile stage actors and the audience will gradually identify with them. The process will be facilitated if the productions feature popular star actors.
- 4) ***“Follow-Spot”***: Like the follow-spot in theatre lighting, this is a programme conceptualised to project the background of actors in given stage productions, the playwrights and the directors of plays produced, the making of such stage productions, the poster designs of the productions, the billboards that were used to advertise such productions, the audiences’ responses and reactions to given productions, as well as impacts assessment of such productions, and so on. The idea is to entertain the audience with captivating behind-the-scene information about various productions, either in the form of a documentary or magazine programme. This is a form of adverting for subsequent productions, and the impact will be invaluable.

- 5) **“Theatre Panorama”**: It could be argued that the passion Nigerians have for the English Premier League (EPL) or the Spanish La Liga, among other foreign football leagues, to the detriment of the Nigerian Premier League (NPL), is due, largely, to the overwhelming promotion on TV: good facilities, massive audience, good picture quality, and excellent broadcast quality on DSTV. This has made Nigerian football fans to know virtually all the football stars in Europe; but they do not know the home-base footballers playing in their backyards. The concept of Sim Card’s comedy show, “Groove Your Team,” where the conditions for admittance into the event were a valid ticket and appearing in one’s favourite football club jersey, is instructive (Ayakoroma, “The Rise of Stand-up Comedy Genre” 12). In the various stadia, during EPL or La Liga match days, parents are seen carrying their little children on their shoulders to watch the game of soccer. Such children grow up fanatically identifying with their favourite clubs. Thus, “Theatre Panorama,” either in documentary or magazine format, is conceptualised as a platform for the surveillance of theatrical activities in the country to generate audiences’ emotional attachment with the stage, which has psychological immediacy.
- 6) **“Children’s Theatre on TV”**: This programme design is to create awareness in the target audience – children – and cultivate their interest in live theatre performances. The fact is that children are very impressionable: they are easily influenced by what they see on television, as obtain in adverts of goods and services targeted at them. They never relent once they latch onto something. It explains why a father will carry his child on his shoulder and go to the stadium to watch football, basketball, rugby, or tennis. The thinking here is that once the theatre catches them (children) young through broadcasts of children’s theatre performances on TV, parents will have no option than to take them there anytime there is a performance. This is also what Silverbird Galleria and Stand-up comedians in Nigeria have leveraged on.
- 7) **“TV Play Reading Session”**: Jerry Adesewo’s Arojah Royal Theatre, Abuja, for example, organises a monthly Play Reading Session, but it has been like the Biblical “lighting a lamp and putting it under a bushel,” because the attendance is almost always discouraging. But then, Play Reading Sessions have the potentials of gradually arousing interest in the theatre. We are living in a country, where people hardly read even newspapers, not to talk of novels, plays or other inspirational books. More worrisome is the fact that even theatre arts students protest when they are told to read, say, ten plays for a course, arguing that they have too many books to read and too many assignments. Once there are televised Play Reading Sessions, not just as news, but as recorded and post-produced programmes, which when broadcast on prime time television, will provide prospective audiences an opportunity to share in the play reading sessions vicariously.
- 8) **“Talking Theatre”**: Every morning, on radio and television, Nigerians tune in to programmes like “Platform,” “Political Platform,” “Political Panorama,” “Focus” or “Nigeria Today,” among others, to get diverse views from social commentators on current political issues. Thus, the idea of “Talking Theatre” is a creative platform for the discourse of issues that affect the development of live theatre in Nigeria. For instance, on Thursday, 4th of June, 2013, at the occasion of the unveiling of the ‘Fascinating Nigeria’ tourism brand, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan disclosed that the National Theatre, Iganmu-Lagos, will be developed to a duty-free entertainment centre and that government was committed to completing the National Cultural Centre, the Millennium Tower, in Abuja (Adetayo 8). This hint is an impetus for panels of experts to incisively discuss and analyse the “how” and “when” these theatre projects will be actualised, so that the public will be virtually abreast of the developments.

Recommendations

At this juncture, it is pertinent to proffer some recommendations which could be invaluable in the bid to re-invent professional theatre practice in Nigeria.

1. Theatre artists should rethink theatre by giving quality time to the profession: as performers, audiences, or financiers of productions;
2. Producers need to package productions very well: choosing good plays and using relatively known artists to enhance the final product and the prospects of audience patronage. It explains why somebody would pay a whopping ₦1million for a table of eight, to see a show by Ali Baba;
3. Producers should be consistent in staging productions in order to gradually cultivate audience patronage because running a theatre is like running a school: you have to make the name before making money;

4. Theatre arts departments should sustain educational theatre practice in universities, especially through students' practical project works because there are ready theatre audiences in campuses; and such productions should also be open to audiences in the immediate campus environments;
5. Producers should source for funding to ensure that the plays are well packaged and artists are well paid; Stand-up Comedians, TV Reality Shows, GLO Campus Jamz, Maltina Dance All (MDA), Big Brother, and so on, get sponsorship from corporate bodies, it is possible for theatre productions to have sponsorship;
6. Producers should give productions very wide publicity, just like Stand-up Comedy and Musical shows are doing; and
7. Adopt the 8-Point Agenda, in the Nigerian parlance, posited in this paper, among other strategies, to make the information on productions as obtrusive as possible.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been posited that live theatre has the prospects of being re-invented if leveraged on the power of the television medium. The argument is that if there is synergy between the theatre and the television medium, live theatre practice can rise again, just as Silverbird Galleria has proved the point that cinema can be a profitable business venture, and other organisations are following suit. The prospective strategic platforms that have been identified for the re-invention comprise programme formats like, News Reports, Promos/Adverts, "On Stage LIVE," "Follow-Spot," "Theatre Panorama," "Children's Theatre on TV," "TV Play Reading Session," and "Talking Theatre." Adopting the aforementioned "8-Point Agenda" and packaging productions with competitive edge will go a long way in re-inventing live theatre, making it to be "born again" and having a new lease of life for the younger generation of theatre artists. On an optimistic note, it could be submitted that all hope is not lost for professional theatre practice in Nigeria. The onus is actually on trained theatre professionals to rise to the occasion and ameliorate the situation.

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