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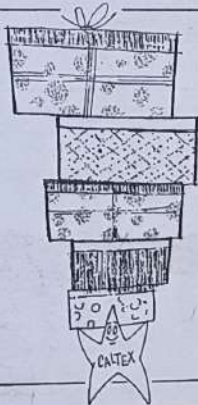
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IN KENYA — UGANDA — TANZANIA

THE QUEST FOR A NATIONAL THEATRE

By PETER CARPENTER

Director of the National Theatre of Uganda.

Peter Carpenter first visited East Africa in 1959. He was Adjudicator at the Kenya Drama Festival in 1961, and since then has been Director of the Uganda National Theatre at Kampala. Bearing in mind his many years' experience in theatre management and administration in the United Kingdom and elsewhere prior to this appointment, we felt sure that his views on the functions of a National Theatre, particularly in an East African context, would be of great value, and have pleasure in offering them to Drama Festival audiences in the following article.

The National Theatre of Uganda is nearly five years old. The National Theatre of Kenya is somewhat older. The British National Theatre is not yet built although it has been talked about for a hundred years and has at last, since a year or two ago, achieved an entity. The National Theatre of France is, one supposes, the *Comédie Française* which is essentially the home of French classical theatre. In Germany there is no national (i.e. Federal) theatre but many state and municipal theatres. There are theatres which are national in all but name, and others which have the name and little else. So the question arises — what is a National Theatre?

An accepted definition has been hard to come by, possibly because the term has different meanings in differing circumstances. But I would describe it as an opportunity for the presentation to the public, of a country's best dramatic writing, music and choreography — past and present, performed by the best of that country's performers and embellished by its best artists and technicians, together with the means of encouraging, training and developing writers, musicians, artists, actors, dancers and so on, and also providing an opportunity for the dramatic best of other countries and cultures to be seen and enjoyed as well. I agree that this is a clumsy definition and could probably be summarised in a pithy phrase by someone more capable than me. But I think the essentials are there — opportunity and encouragement, development and training — to reflect the country's life and spirit in terms of the living theatre. This is a tall order and I'm not sure that every national theatre can meet it. What is the situation in East Africa?

The National Theatre of Uganda, which I have the honour to direct, does not meet my definition yet, at least not to the fullest extent, although I think we are slowly moving along the right lines. A great part of the difficulty lay in the legislation under which the theatre was created

(this may be the case in Kenya, I don't know), whereby the Board of Trustees, appointed by Government to administer the Theatre (as part of the National Cultural Centre), were empowered only to be landlords, that is to acquire, hire out, maintain and dispose of property. They were not empowered to run a theatre or to promote performances in it, although obviously they could rent or hire the place to others to do this. Legislation to alter this ridiculous state of affairs is now before the National Assembly, although this has taken a long time. A National Theatre, in my opinion, cannot justify its name if it is a merely passive affair — a place which the managers *allow* to be used for dramatic entertainment. It must be a positive entity, offering positive encouragement to writers, actors, artists, composers and the like. Secondly, this positive attitude must be in line with a particular policy, so far as possible. What that policy is must depend upon circumstances, but it could and should include

- (1) ways and means of raising standards of performance and presentation;
- (2) encouragement of writers through commissioning, competition, festivals and other inducements;
- (3) opportunities for training and development of actors, artists, technicians, etc.;
- (4) performance of dramatic and musical works (in fact all the performing arts) representative of the different cultures which constitute the nation, not only to those to whom they are familiar, but to a wide public. Art is international and borrowings from other countries have often inspired a nation's creative artists.

In Uganda, the National Theatre housed (for want of a better term) sixty different presentations during the year July 1964 to June 1965. These included plays, dance programmes, and variety in Gujarati and Hindustani, plays and variety programmes in Luganda, visitors from abroad, drama festivals, concerts, European plays and musicals, and shows with multi-racial casts. The European plays ranged from "Midsummer Night's Dream" to "Doctor in the House", concerts from talent spotting 'pop' variety in Luganda to the Bamberg Woodwind Quintet from America, drama festivals included the Uganda (Adult) Festival, the Gujarati Festival and the Students' Drama Festival. The Uganda National Dance Company 'Heartbeat of Africa' recently playing at the Commonwealth Arts Festival, gave many packed performances between visits overseas.

The Theatre carries a permanent staff, apart from myself, which includes a Technical Director, a Resident Stage Manager, Assistant Stage Manager/Electrician, box office and accounts clerks, bar stewards, front of house stewards,

a carpenter and general duty men. Nearly all the scenery used in the theatre is built by theatre staff and, increasingly, being painted by them. Visiting companies use the resident staff for electrics, scene shifting and so on. The theatre runs the bars, sells the programmes, sells the tickets, co-operates in publicity and gives every possible help and assistance to the companies performing at the theatre. An extremely cordial relationship exists between theatre staff and visiting groups. Many of the theatre's patrons belong to the Theatre Arts Club, in the Cultural Centre, which costs 5/- a year subscription and offers various concessions and facilities to the members (drama-library, bar, magazines, etc.).

A drama class operates three nights each week with, currently, about a dozen students. Lectures and film shows are given in the theatre; the Green Room adjoining the stage is used for classes, rehearsals, lectures, meetings and recitals. The theatre foyer is used for exhibitions of paintings permanently throughout the year. (The Kampala Camera Club is exhibiting East African photographs next week).

All of these activities indicate a little of what I mean by a positive attitude, although I would need more space to discuss playwriting competitions, production conferences (which the Technical Director and his staff hold with every group playing at the theatre), productions undertaken occasionally for groups by myself and our Technical Director, advisory services to schools and training colleges, talks and lectures and so on.

Now, it is true that all this costs money and I would like, here and now, to state dogmatically that without subsidy a national theatre cannot do its job. A national theatre that pays its way is a contradiction in terms, and frankly, does not exist anywhere in the world. But, apart from money, determination is needed to inspire the creative and performing artists resident in a country to create the spirit which is necessary to a national theatre. Such determination will encourage drama and playmaking in schools, inspire writers, composers, and choreographers to write for the national theatre, cause plays, music and dances to be performed in towns and villages throughout the country, encourage the development of actors, singers and instrumentalists — all of these things in order to portray, though the medium of the performing arts in a national theatre, the past achievements and future aspirations of the national culture and to introduce to the people the arts of other lands.

Kampala,
October 1965.

KENYA DRAMA FESTIVAL 1965

October 12—15 at 8.30 p.m.

October 16 at 5.30 and 9.00 p.m.

Final adjudication, Friday, October 15

Adjudicator:

PETER CARPENTER, ESQ.,
(Director, Uganda National Theatre)

For the East Africa Theatre Guild (Kenya):

Festival Committee:

Chairman and Festival Organiser:

ROBERT BUTLER

Secretary	...	Iris Eastwood
Stage Director	...	Peter Chiarletti
Assisted by	...	Peter Campbell
Publicity	...	Norman Montgomery
Programme	...	Robert Kingston Davies
Front of House	...	Gordon Wallace
		Winifred Ferguson

For the Kenya National Theatre:

Manager	...	G. T. Stoneham
Assistant	...	E. Norris, D.F.M.
Theatre Electricians	...	George Watson
		Ted Hughes
		Mukund Vyas
		J. D. McMaster

TUESDAY, 12th OCTOBER

KENYATTA COLLEGE DRAMATIC SOCIETY
presents

**"THE FARCE OF THE WORTHY MASTER
PIERRE PATELIN"**

translated from the French by Moritz Jagendorf

CAST

Master Pierre Patelin, a Lawyer	...	Peter Kiliswa
Guillemet, his wife	...	Monica Ngwabe
Joceaulme, a prosperous Draper	...	Benson Mackutwa
Lambkin, a Shepherd	...	Andrew Oure
The Judge	...	James Ndungu

Produced by Robert Grosshans

Stage Manager	...	Ulric Joanes
Decor	...	Stephen Mugambi, Mariam Lavignia, Panna Barot, Michael d'Souza
Costumes	...	Arthur Lewis, Zubeida Aboo, Rehab Kimani

The scene is set in a little town in France about the year
A.D. 1400.

TUESDAY, 12th OCTOBER

THE KENYA DRAMATIC SOCIETY
presents

"THE HAPPY FACES"

by Oliver Musila Litondo

CAST

An old man	...	Mutua Mboya
Margaret (his daughter)	...	Veronica Kavete
Voice of an African	...	Duncan Kimani
Odhiambo	...	Cleotas Ochieng
Mwangi	...	Joseph Mwangi
Shibutes	...	Abigael Njeri

Crowd

Produced by David Kalatto

The scene is set in City Square: Time, the present.

Scene 1: Early afternoon.

Scene 2: Later.

TUESDAY, 12th OCTOBER

NAIROBI CITY PLAYERS

present

an excerpt from Acts III and IV of

"THE DUCHESS OF MALFI"

A Tragedy by John Webster

CAST

The Duchess of Malfi	...	Phina Simmance
Antonio (her husband)	...	Desmond Harney
Cariola (her maidservant)	...	Judith Harney
Daniel de Bosola (Master of the Horse)	...	Peter Pearce
Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, (brother to the Duchess)	...	Alan Simmance
Servant	...	Denis Patience
Executioners	...	Rurik Ronsky, Anthony Bresson
Children	...	Bridget St Aubyn, Diana Shand
Madfolk	...	Walter Hinds, Dorothy Patience, Frank Horley, Mac Spence, David Coolbear

Produced by Leonard Pierrepoint

Stage Manager	...	Mac Spence
Setting and Decor	...	Meryl Evans
Costumes	...	Mary Epsom

Jealous of her marriage to Antonio, who is not of noble birth, Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, threatens awful revenge upon his sister, the Duchess of Malfi.

The Duchess persuades Antonio to flee for safety to Ancona with their eldest son.

Scene 1: Before a Shrine

Scenes 2 & 3: The prison cell of the Duchess

Comments on the evening's entries by the Adjudicator.

WEDNESDAY, 13th OCTOBER

CHEMCHEMI THEATRE COMPANY

presents

"SONG OF A GOAT"

by John Pepper Clark

CAST

Zifa	...	...	Catalyzer Kirima
Ebiere	...	...	Rose Levine
Tonye	...	...	Ricky Kiambuthi
Masseur	...	...	John Njiru
Dode	...	...	Michael Karuoya
First Neighbour	...	...	Mick Peter
Second Neighbour	...	...	John Njiru
Third Neighbour	...	...	Johnson Kamau
Orukorere	...	...	Francis Getimu

Produced by Ezekiel Mphahlele

Decor and Costumes by the Group

The scene is set on the Niger Delta in Eastern Nigeria.

WEDNESDAY, 13th OCTOBER

THE RAILWAY PLAYERS

present

"A MINIATURE BEGGAR'S OPERA"

Adapted from the original of John Gay by Constance Cox

CAST

Beggar	...	...	Robert Grosshans
Peachum	...	...	Trevor Lamb
Filch	...	...	Petter Finne
Mrs. Peachum	...	...	June Parker
Polly Peachum	...	...	Helen Bowyer
Macheath	...	...	Wilfred Moore
Dolly Trull	...	...	Alice Warwick
Betty Doxy	...	...	Sally Vivian
Mrs. Slammekin	...	...	Cynthia Webster
Jenny Diver	...	...	Nancy Nordin
Lucy Lockit	...	...	Celia Keegan
Lockit	...	...	Paddy Purchase
Mrs. Trapes	...	...	Rosemary Gardner

Produced by Andrew Warwick

Stage Manager	...	Jim Stone
Choreography	...	Jennifer Butler
Set	...	Jim Stone and Harry Mayhew
Musicians	...	Jim Fenton, Dr. D. A. V. Dendy, Bill Hill, Pat Ollershaw

The scene is set in London in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Comments on the evening's entries by the Adjudicator.

THURSDAY, 14th OCTOBER

NAIROBI AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY

presents

"THE TRAP"

CAST

Mrs. Roberts ... Winifred Ferguson
Shirley, her daughter ... Pamela Bull
June, her daughter ... Carolyn Davies
Auntie, her aunt ... Yvonne Helliwell

Produced by Norman Montgomery

Stage Manager ... Ron Gray
Set Design ... Norman Montgomery
Decor ... Derry Shannon

Scene: Mrs. Roberts' kitchen.

Comments on the evening's entries by the Adjudicator.

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FESTIVAL RESULTS, 1965

1. Kenya Drama Festival Challenge Shield (presented by Mr. A. A. Monnas). (Won in 1964 by Nairobi City Players with "The Valiant").

Winners:

2. Kenya Drama Festival Figurine (presented by the Molo/Turi Arts Club). (Won in 1964 by Nancy Roe for her performance in "The Valiant").

Winner:

3. Kenya Drama Festival Bowl (presented by I. E. Nathoo, Esq., and H. E. Nathoo, Esq.). (Won in 1964 by Robert Butler for his performance in "Waiting For Godot").

Winner:

4. Kenya Drama Festival Cup for best decor (presented by Miss Leslie Crease). (Won in 1964 by Mary O'Hare).

Winner:

5. Producer's Trophy (presented by Barbara and Peter Fleming). (Won in 1964 by Robert Young).

Winner:

6. Best Supporting Players' Trophies (presented by Mr. John Karmali). (Won in 1964 by Anne Garbett and Graham Ramsden).

Winners:

7. The East Africa Theatre Guild Award for best original play (Won in 1964 by Mrs. Rebecca Njau with "The Scar").

Winner:

8. Award for Best Up-Country Entry (presented by Mr. and Mrs. A. Ross). (Not awarded in 1964).

Winner:

9. The Audience Award (by vote of season ticket holders) (Won in 1964 by Nairobi City Players with "The Valiant").

Winners:

THE THEATRE IN KENYA, 1964-65

There is still life in the "live" theatre in Kenya, but the overall pattern since the last Kenya Drama Festival has been one of transition, fluctuating public interest, and a losing struggle for survival among some up-country societies. The theatre movement in Kenya still lacks the guidance and sense of direction which an active, forward-looking National Theatre might provide, and we live in hopes that the coming year may bring some significant progress in this connection. Meanwhile we cannot but deplore the fact that so little use is made of our National Theatre building, which with all its faults is a far more comfortable and better-equipped home for the drama than is to be found in most towns the size of Nairobi.

The Dead or Dormant —

Up-country, the saddest among the year's casualties was the Molo-Turi Arts Club, which was forced to close down the admirable little theatre at Molo which members had designed and built themselves. Ten years ago this group became the first (and, so far as I know, the only) one to enter three plays in the Kenya Drama Festival. Another little theatre which went permanently "dark" was that of the Longonot Players at Naivasha, who made a brave end by handing over quite a tidy sum, their accumulated savings, to the Naivasha Sports Club. In Nairobi, a similar fate overtook the short-lived Studio Theatre Club, which failed to attract the minimum amount of support needed to realize its modest plan for a studio theatre at the Arboretum. Other groups of which nothing has recently been heard include the Equatorians at Nanyuki, and also those at Kericho, Kisii, Muguga, Sotik, Thomson's Falls, and Turbo. However, we may hope that some of these may only be hibernating and will come to life again as the climate improves.

— And The Very Much Alive

Turning to the brighter side, groups at Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu, and Kitale appear to be still regularly "in business" with three or four shows a year, while the Nyeri Players, the "Nandi Bears", the Kiambu Players and the "Dandies" (based on Mowlems camp at Dandora) have all come up with one or two productions during the year. Two groups in particular, the Kitale Theatre Club and the Uasin Gishu Arts Society at Eldoret, report a similar and encouraging revival of interest. At Kitale they were "in the doldrums" last year, while in Eldoret the Society's membership reached "an all-time low". Since then both groups have been revived by a few enthusiastic members, and the response from local supporters has been so great that Kitale has already completed ex-

tensive improvements to the theatre, while at Eldoret the year's programme included four full-scale productions and four "Green-Room Rags".

What Went On

Glancing back over the year's theatrical ventures (and with apologies for any errors or omissions in our list), we may note that in the last months of 1964 the Nyeri Players presented (as who hasn't?) "The Reluctant Debutante"; Kiambu Players, "The Bride Comes Back"; Uasin Gishu Arts Society, "Bell, Book, and Candle", and the Nakuru Players that grand old palaeo-Aldwych number, "Thark". In Nairobi, the City Players scored their usual resounding success with a resounding presentation of "Oklahoma", though on second thoughts it would be the dancing rather than the singing that will live longest in the memories of those who saw this expert and colourful production. In the early months of 1965 there was the annual Kenya Regiment panto, "Allova Dinn and his Wonderful Gamb", the Dandies produced "Love on Easy Terms", the Railway Players, "Love From a Stranger", Mombasa Little Theatre Club "Carrington, V.C.", and the Aquinas-Huruma Dramatic Society a triple-header under the perhaps rather misleading title of "African Trilogy", since these were three separate one-act plays, winners of awards in the East Africa Playwrights' Competition sponsored by Caltex Oil (Kenya) Ltd., and by no means constituting what is normally known as a trilogy. Trilogy or not, Nairobi theatre-goers deserve little credit for the meagre support they accorded this brave and at times exciting effort to put contemporary Africa on the Nairobi stage. Following this production, two of the other plays entered for the competition were successfully staged by David Kalatto's Dramatic Society at Jericho and Ofafa Halls.

The second quarter of 1965 began with a bold challenge to Nairobi audiences by the City Players with their dashing production of William Wycherley's "The Country Wife" — so dashing, in fact, that one critic complained that though present, he missed the first Act altogether. Very gorgeous were the costumes provided by Mary Epsom for this piece, and a good mark goes to Nairobi audiences for coming to see it in quite large numbers in spite of the demands it made on them. The Railway Players produced "The Bride and the Bachelor", and Kisumu A.D.S., "Dial M For Murder". Also at Kisumu, the Makerere University Drama Group gave a programme of African one-act plays, which was very well received, and the Luo Association staged "The Winslow Boy", while at Mombasa the Little Theatre Club delved into Aldwych prehistory with "Rookery Nook". Uasin Gishu A.S. included two very worthwhile one-acters, "The Laboratory" and "The Bespoke Overcoat", in their Green Room Rags. They fully intended to carry all before them at this Festival with the latter, but unfor-

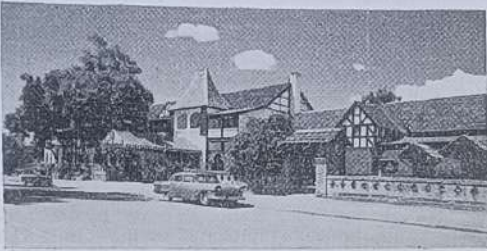
tunately got fouled up over dates. (Or so they said). "Macbeth", the annual Railway Players' tribute to The Bard, came and went at the National Theatre. Then there was the Nakuru Players' Show-week comedy, "Pools Paradise", a Gujarati comedy, "Abhi Abhi To Aaayi Ho", presented at the National Theatre by the Orient Art Circle, and our own (Theatre Guild) open-stage production of "The Seven Year Itch", which won honeyed words from the critics but, to our pained surprise, didn't do as well at the box-office as did our (one would have thought) far more risky venture last year, "Under Milk Wood". Finally, the last few months have seen "The Bridge of Estaban" produced by the Little Theatre Club at Mombasa, "Sailor Beware" by Uasin Gishu A.S., Daphne du Maurier's "Rebecca" by the Kitale Theatre Club, "Love's a Luxury" by Kisumu A.D.S., "A Murder Has Been Arranged" by the Nyeri Players, "Arsenic and Old Lace" by the Nandi Bears, "Goodnight Mrs Puffin" by the Nakuru Players, and (a few days before you read this) yet another offering by those busy people at Eldoret, "Murder Mistaken". Nothing, it will be noted, at the National Theatre in the Great Metropolis for approximately the past four months. Yet at Kampala, one is told, it is unusual for the Uganda National Theatre to be untenanted for even a single week. It really looks as though they manage these things better over the border.

Pros' Style

The Donovan Maule Theatre has continued to provide Nairobi with a suitably varied diet of plays grave and gay, and it is good to hear that their membership is now gradually building up again after the disastrous three-year slide of 1961-4, when it dropped by more than half. It is always interesting to compare the work of these experienced professionals with that of our local amateurs: the pros don't always have the best of it, but when they choose a play like "The Heiress" (which the D.Ms did in August), needing restrained but tightly disciplined playing by every member of the company, then I think they really can teach us amateurs a thing or two.

To conclude these notes, mention must be made of another way in which Caltex Oil (Kenya) Ltd. has been helping the cause of 'live' theatre in Kenya. Besides sponsoring a Playwrights Competition and contributing towards the cost of producing several of the prize-winning entries, this company is acquiring the wholly admirable habit of sponsoring special matinees at the Donovan Maule Theatre for secondary school children. So far, more than five hundred school children have thus had the opportunity of seeing, free of charge, the Donovan Maule productions of "The Merchant of Venice" (May 1964) and "A Man For All Seasons" (March 1965); and similar arrangements are being made for the current production of Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest".

R.K.D.



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Since then the Guild has organised the Kenya Drama Festival each year, and with the help of the Ministry of Education and the British Council has also established an increasingly popular annual Schools Drama Festival. In addition, it has presented several productions of its own at the Kenya National Theatre, and has done its best, so far as its resources permitted, to raise local standards and to sustain public interest in, and support for, the amateur drama (and in particular the Kenya National Theatre).

This year, the rapidly changing situation in Kenya, coupled with the decrease in the number of dramatic societies, convinced us that changes in the Guild's constitution (especially as regards membership) were advisable. As a result, individuals are now invited to join as full members at an annual subscription of only Shs. 10/-, while all schools and other recognised educational establishments, as well as dramatic societies, are now eligible for membership at an annual subscription of Shs. 40/-.

If you are interested in the amateur theatre and would like to be associated with our efforts to plan a flourishing future for it in Kenya, this is a good time to become a Guild member. There is a vast amount of dramatic talent and appreciation latent in Kenya, for which the Guild has already done a good deal, through the Drama Festivals, to provide an outlet; with a larger and more active membership we could, without doubt, find other ways of furthering the cause of amateur drama in the future. Subscriptions paid now will last until the end of 1966. If you would like to join, tear out or copy the application form overleaf.

The Hon. Secretary,
East Africa Theatre Guild (Kenya),
P.O. Box 20332,
NAIROBI

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

(Please write name and address clearly in block capitals)

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