



Beyond Mt Heidelberg

Festival on the Road

From a Stage Manager's Notes

Jahman
Anikulapo

SIX hours of flight aboard a Lufthansa craft began at 11.55pm on Saturday October 12. The twelve versatile Nigerian performing artistes were full of trepidation about the prospect of their current performance tour of Germany but fortunately the three-man directorial team had past experiences to draw on - performances in Italy (1987 and 1992) on the platform of

the Kakaaki Arts company. Richard Lang, the chief strategist of the entire AFRIKA PROJEKT '96 and architect of the present grand cultural exchange with Germany was restless too. He reviewed action plans regularly with the directors.

The team arrived Frankfurt at 6a.m and ran into a haze of cold that rammed into their memory the insistent warnings of Richard and his good wife, Cora about the kind of weather to expect in Germany, and the type of dressing to take along.

Personally, I remembered Cora's words: 'if you don't take warm clothes with you, thick socks and strong tennis shoes, you will die of cold, I tell you Jahman.' Yet, the Frankfurt cold was more than we bargained for. The five ladies in the team cut a pitiable sight. Dancer Christie Okougbo, who against all warnings wore a nylon blouse was

freezing while our song-bird Stella Ayanlade already ap- peared set to take ill.

But the bowel of an aesthetically pleasing Frankfurt airport complex embraced us warmly. Its heaters seemed turned on at the highest. Hence, sorting out arrival protocols — immigration, customs, quarantine and baggage collections, were pleasant. The cast had little to worry about, anyway, as Richard took effective control of the protocols.

Richard concluded the rites of arrival, booked our connecting flight to Munich, a one-hour flight duration.

Unfirm Steps

At 8.15 on a smaller Lufthansa aircraft we headed for Munich. Unlike the one that brought us from Lagos, this flight was an all-white affair except for two black heads. But we ourselves dotted the canvas of white. Stella's traditional hair-do shuku stood out in the sea of silvery hair curls.

This flight however broke the communal spirit with which we set off from home. Unlike in the previous flight, members of the group were scattered in sitting arrangement, because as Richard informed, 'all the seats had been booked before we made our booking.'

At Munich we rode in two airport shuttle buses. Within me I queried the rationale behind the bus ride, for the distance from the aircraft to the arrival hall was actually less than a two minutes drive. We could have walked and saved ourselves the unnecessary anxiety that followed—

'Are we complete?' asked Richard as we joined the others at a corner.

'Yes, I think so', said Ben Tomolaju the project consultant.

'But, where is Saidi?' became the chorus of virtually every other member of the team. 'Could one of us have disappeared so soon?' Our eyes travelled around the flamboyant environs of the airport, deepening burrows creas-

ing our foreheads.

Just then Saidi, the lead drummer appeared behind a massive glass partition on the other side of the hall. He had actually proceeded to the next hall ahead of others.

'We have to stay together, from now on. No individual movement. Stay within the group' remarked Richard in a gentle but serious tone.

Thereafter we proceeded to join the drummer on the other side of the glass hall. The revolving automatic glass doors obeyed the command of the moving bodies, one stopped abruptly trapping one of our ladies.

'What's wrong?' asked Jide Ogungbade, the artistic director. And Richard quickly explained:

'Please nobody touches the door. Otherwise we don't go from here. It works on its own.'

...Glasses everywhere! The whole airport complex is built of glass, no wood or brick in sight. Strange, but impressive! The mass of glass accentuate the picture of permanent motions around the complex. Human traffic is reflected to an extent that everywhere is full of movement.

This glass business, explained Richard is yet an exclusive aesthetic of the Munich airport. A part of the runway flies above a very busy highway, so that planes could be seen taxing directly atop of vehicular traffic.

Of all to disappear, and cause us our third major anxiety...the long blue bag of Ben Tomolaju bearing some of our most important costumes and props. Twenty minutes of waiting and the bag would not come in from the conveyor belt.

Every other bag emerging from the belt's hollowness seemed to resemble the blue bag. Ben's face got oily suddenly and bore a deep frown....

'Ah, ah... look our boxes,' announced Richard. Behind us a big wooden box bearing drums and other materials for the stage set had come up

through the lift — it was too big for the belt - and was being trolleyed down the hallway by a huge-chested guy who must have been cursing in his mind the owners of the monstrous, heavy box that indeed looked out of place amidst the flurry of cute leather bags littering the sides of the conveyor belt.

Richard met the big guy and announced that the guy has said he was charging us 10dm (N500.00) for every 15 minutes the box rested on the trolley. We were all alarmed. So much money for an ordinary trolley that you get for the whole day just with a bribe of N20.00 in Nigeria. I remembered another of Cora's words: 'Germany is very expensive. You pay for everything, including water.'

But then, Ben's bag is yet to be found and that means for as long as we waited for it, we could be running a bill on the trolley. What to do? Crosscheck all the luggage tags, in preparation for lodging a formal complaint in the luggage office. Richard sorted it out, tore it off the lump of tags on his ticket, handed it over to Ben.

'You get to that office (pointing behind us) and wait, they will attend to you. The rest, let's go.' Ben strolled off eastward, with a confidence that marvelled me. The rest of us passed through a gate, which indeed should be aptly tagged, Gate of No Return—actually it is marked 'No Entry' on the other side, which means once you pass through it, you can't go back into the luggage hall. In fact, there were these two stern-faced security men in mufti who eyed everyone entering.

Just then a soul-lifting occurrence: we walked out of the gate into the arms of a sixtyish couple, Huber and Antonie Konrad. Surprise, surprise... the Mayor and first lady of Haag, an ancient but very popular Bavarian village about twenty kilometres from Munich. Haag is the home of Hans Laschinger, a most significant Bavarian folk musical artiste, who has spent over four decades of his career documenting the old Bavarian

folk music and dance for the purpose of restoration, preservation and promotion.

Of all honour, a troupe of African artistes full of expectations and anxieties about what Germany and its people would offer on their very first cultural mission, being welcomed into Germany by the head of one of the most profound of the old Germanic civilisations! It surpassed all our dreams.

The Konrads had gladly resolved to accompany Hans to the airport to welcome us because Hans, the blind hero of the Bavarian cultural revivalism is a most significant son of Haag. Hans had granted the request by Richard Lang, his friend of many years, to play host to the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the troupe, on a rare occasion of exchanges. Ben offered a seat but they declined.

'No, we stand', they replied flashing an even broader smile.

Humility apart, I wondered that at their age they could stand the stress of waiting.

Richard emerged from behind the glass walls, embraced and spoke briefly with the Mayor, his countenance bright as he announced loudly:

'Hey, my friend Hans is waiting for us in the bus. This is great! Hans is a very big musician of the Bavarian tradition and culture. Very popular in Germany.'

Hans waited to give us his warm

welcome. He could not see, was suffering from a genetic eye disease that claimed his sight and that of his sister, beautiful Margareta. Yet came all the way from Haag with the Mayor to receive us.

At 2⁰⁰ Munich was not particularly a pleasant host to the crew of Afrika Projekt 96. The severe cold contrasting sharply with the very hot weather we left behind at home. Joke Muiwa gave a shout: 'Ha, otutu yi le o' (This cold is severe). She seemed to unseal the lips of other members of the team.

Norbert Young: 'Chei, see Taxi. Na Mercedes dem dey useless like this.'

Lara Sodunke: 'Abeg, no make me think o.'

Omokaro Okonredo: 'No worry. When I get back (to Nigeria) I go go, tell the Ambassador say I know from where he buy im car.'

Everybody laughed. Making it to the side of the bus we heard a powerful accordion tune waft out from the bowel of the bus. Hans, the blind minstrel was at work and he was doing it with all his inner strength and zeal. His finger moved dexterously on his shimmering silver accordion, his head tilted to one side. Soga our multi-instrumentalist perched himself beside Hans, grabbed his keyboard and sneaked into Han's tune with a mellow back-up. Thus began a jam session which saw two musicians providing inspirational music for the rest of us. The two-some broke into an African spiritual medley led by Soga and backed by Hans. Jide Ogungbade, a gifted evangelical singer broke into Ben Tomoloju's *Odo misan were*. The jam session took on a vibrant colour, uniting two divergent musical traditions and genres.

The session ended but a disappointing note surfaced. The ladies were unusually silent, forcing Jide to chide them: 'Please sing now. Oya Lara, Stella.'

No! The girls were inexplicably silent and sullen, as if unsure of themselves. For me, this was shattering. I couldn't reconcile the many nights of

noisy singing and chanting of hymnal songs back there on Red Street, where our camp was situated, with this current timidity; or was it standoffishness? Christie and Agnes gazed endlessly through the window.

But Jide would not give up as he picked up song after song, backed by Soga, myself and Saidi. I prayed that Ben would join us to strengthen our effort. Now I remembered the lovely singer Salome Ikuologbon, who in any case ought to have been in the team, as she had always been on other projects involving the Kakaaki fraternity. During Italy '92 while touring Italy with Tomoloju's *Mujemuje* and driving between Turin and Chieri where an international festival of theatre was holding Salome and the Kakaaki collective sang throughout the journey, from 10pm in the night till the following morning. Next time, we had to have Salome with us, I resolved.

Presently Ben came into the bus with Richard having sorted out the wooden box. He illuminated our singing with the *Ilaje* spiritual — *Olorun mi iwo ni masin titi aye* (My Lord, I will worship you forever). Their performance was animated as the entire bus trembled to the power of Ben's sonorous vocalising. Hans and Soga abandoned abruptly a low tone discussion to which they had escaped in frustration, since no song would come from our girls; they resumed works on their instruments.

Song flowed after song as the bus, driven by a young lady, Monica snaked its way through the impressive road network, heading toward the outskirts of town enroute Haag. Ben broke into Benin royal songs lifted from *Aratasin*, a dance drama he had packaged for the Atlanta '96 outing by Nigeria.

His entry solo on the song ushered us into our first sight of rural Germany, Deggendorf Langenshut, a vast canvas of greens. This was a half kilometre to Freising, famous for its brewery. The atmosphere was foggy and so all the vehicles on the road put their headlamps

on. The peace of the environment was affective. Trees were robed in the colourful garb of autumn in transition.

Now we came into a more colourful scape with the leaves wearing orange and rose drapes. Living quarters sprouted like dots in the vast land mass.

Oba ugboriri, gh'oba, ghoba... The heart of the bus palpitated to the pulsating refrains of the royal song which Norbert and Okonedo now energised, simulating the royal drum with intense hand clappings. It is the music of their ethnic root, anyway.

Still wrapped up in the lure of lush

Freising was peaceful despite its huge name and desolate in spite of its fairly big population. In Freising is located the oldest brewery in the world, Weihestephan now about 1000 years old.

Water spirits joined us with Agnes leading us to sing *Oluweri* a riverine, fisherman's song of appeasement to the goddess of the fertility cult (also from *Aratastin*). Ben led. *Aja kubo*, his ever-green Ijaje ballad taken from his 1987 play *Jankariwo*. This is Richard Lang's favourite Yoruba song and he led the infectious response to the solo of Ben,

trees, flowers, gardens. But where were the people?

Richard: 'many of the people here are very rich. They work mostly in Munich but come here every night to enjoy peace in the village with their family.'

Haag was so quiet that our loud outbursts in the bus were out of harmony with the environment.

Meleegbe, another of Ben's classics sprouts out, just as the bus veers off to climb a gentle hill dotted by even more beautiful living quarters. The climb was to en-

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flora, Ben branched off into the Hausa-Fulani folk song, *Akwai Wata Gari* aided by thunderous clappings led by Soga, Hans tapping on the frame of his accordion. The Konrads too were stamping their feet and clapping as Richard made obvious that he had better grasps of African rhythms. Monica, our female driver was nodding when Lara led the way into Ijaw land, singing *Ogiri fie fie* and *Saara mabote* (all from the *Aratastin* repertory)

stealing time out to explain the source of the song to the Mayor, his wife... Hans couldn't be bothered as he ground heartily on the keys of his accordion.

Haag

... flows in solemnly through the fluid melody of *Aja Kubo*. Time was 11.20 a.m., a sign indicates that Freising is 12 kilometres behind us. Haag was sleepy, desolate, but so beautiful. Houses,

able us turn off to the other side of the road. Outside, a signpost read 'Haag a.d Amper', meaning Haag village by the river Amper.

11.30 p.m. We arrive Hans Laschinger's house.

A vast but modest set-up compared to other houses in the surrounding. It is on a hill just at the point where the Moostrasse descends into a sleepy slope.

'This is the house you are going to stay', Richard announced as the bus

pulled up by the roadside and we descended into an even harsher cold climate, smoke belching out of our mouths. The bliss of the rural setting was however soothing.

Richard quickly summoned a meeting of Ben, Jide, the Mayor and Hans to review the programme of activities for our brief stay in the village. 'It is a tight schedule we have today,' he had warned us earlier.

Still standing out there in the cold, a call-response choral rendition began, with Hans still backing on the accordion. We had been joined by the very warm middle-aged woman, Marqaretta who had driven seven kilometres from Moosburg, Richard Lang's village to receive us into Hans' place. Hans' friend and helper, Elizabeth was unavailable at the time of our arrival, even though we had been fore told about her great warmth and the fact that she had been expecting us, by Richard.

Jide who after the brief meeting had been lecturing the Mayor and Monica and our female driver on the magic of the talking drum began to sing *By the Rivers of Babylon*. Everybody joined and thus began a carnival by the road side. Saidi refused to back the performance on his talking drum, saying he was afraid the cold might damage the delicate membrane. And if that should happen, we would be better off returning home. The drum is the backbone of our performances. That was why we devised a special wrap for it, anyway. However,

clapping sufficed and the lonesome road linking Haag to other villages sipped deeply from the street performance.

The Konrads excused themselves to go and prepare for a unique church programme scheduled for that night and in which they had planned a role for us.

Hans' one storey place sits on a large basement concealed from the main road by the steep of Monstrasse slope. The white house has an attic room panelled with well polished white wood. The Germans it seemed have perfected the

use of wood in the shelter provision.

The men would have to stay in the attic room called *Ober Zimmer* littered with sleeping bags, blankets and slim mattresses, obviously purchased newly for us. To get to the room, the men had to climb a 12-rung ladder, standing straight up against the wall of the dining room/kitchen on the first floor. The ladies took a room downstairs, in the farthest innard of the ground floor. Norbert regretted that he wouldn't be able to drink as much as he would, for 'if man go get drunk and piss catch am for night, how he wan do? E go be suicide trying to rush down this ladder o.'

Soga was fascinated by the various musical instruments and other accessories littering the room, mostly, Hans' collections from India and some parts of Europe where he had visited. These prompted our discussing the Bavarian music and culture with Hans, and we saw the driving force behind his life-long resolve to document the art; for as he said, what you see in the cities is not German culture, that is Western. The real German culture is exemplified by the Bavarian culture founded on a humanistic principle of art elevating man, promoting oneness and spreading the gospel of fulfilment. He regrets however that not much state-driven support is being given to the preservation of the culture.

We went into the St. Johanness kirche, an old church with a very interesting story. Inside, it bears 15th century Gothic architecture and had only re-

cently being renovated. The legend of the father of Protestant Christianity Martin Luther bestrode the church, as Richard was to relate the history of the Germanic tribe and their relationship with the former colonisers, the Roman Empire, detailing how in the 1750s, a German, Ceasar was the king of the Roman Empire and he ended up regaining for his people part of what they had earlier lost to the Romans.

Outside, is a tall blue and white pole that is only a bit more shapely than a broadcasting antennae. 'What is

this?' I ask, continuing 'I have seen it in almost all the villages we passed through.

'It is called malbaum. You find it in every village and all these pictures you see on it are sculptural motifs representing all the trades and vocations you will find in the village. So that by seeing it you know quickly what kind of trade the people in that village engage in. Let's say you need a mechanic for your car, you will know whether you can get one here.'

I was amazed. 'So its that functional,'

BACK in Haag, I took a special note of the malbaum and there was a full figure of Hans blowing heartily on his trumpet. An attestation to the thoughtfulness of the people about information networking. For, to ask for a vocationer, no one, with the 'tree' needs go knocking on anybody's door; the tree simply bears the information.

Joke interjected. 'Yes', continued Richard, 'even in Haag, you have it and Hans, our host has just had his picture added to the one in Haag, so you will know that there is a big artiste living in the village.'

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on anybody's door; the tree simply bears the information.

We went to the Haag church in response to the Major's invitation, a few metres away, where we would witness a new experiment that the church was undertaking.

We walked the distance and found that it was already filled up to capacity. We arrived just as a Rock music band invited from outside of Munich started its first number.

The mayor was keen on our team, having listened to us sing some spirituals in the bus on our way from Munich. He thought that we would be able to see how they are blending tradition with modernity, by revolutionising the content of the church programme. They invited the Rock band to perform gospel as back up to sermonisation even amidst a conservative service. The aim, we were told was to provide something of interest to youngsters who were daily turning their backs on church.

We were shocked witnessing the chaotic performances of a Rock band situated in the very heart of the altar. The first rock number stops, the elderly priest assumes the lectern and reads from the Holy Book, after which three young women gave testimonies.

Then the band of five youngmen in tee shirts and denim jeans trousers strike out again performing 'Where is my Way'. There was no mistaking the Aerosmithian kind of charge up rhythms and rumbling guitar works laced with explosive drumming. The music is exquisitely loud and moving that I personally restrain myself from dashing out to the pulpit and dance it all out. However, I observe that in spite of the mood of the music, there is stillness in the full house typical of the usually penetrating concentration of German audiences.

Berlin

The forty kilometre drive from the airport to the heart of Berlin was full of gists and quick plans on our very first performance on the tour. Sitting in the

front cabin with Matthias and Jide, the two directors, we ran through the programme for our debut.

Expectation is high about the performance, warned Matthias informing that a lot of people were curious and the press a bit sceptical.

'Two weeks ago, they staged Soyinka's recent play *Beatification of Area Boy* here and they had a bad press. They said it is folkloric, without the fresh theatrical idea or style', Matthias said injecting despair into one's heart. 'But I am sure we will be well received' Matthias reconsidered. 'I trust our production', Jide agreed.

We stayed off the topic and joined the other occupants in the bus in admiring the organised chaos of Berlin as one mighty structure after the other assailed our sights.

Berlin smells of history and it is very conscious of its recent historic profile.

A huge banner with very bold and assertive letterings welcome our entourage to the Hebbel Theatre, which from outside has a rustic bearing. It is said to be over 100 years old. 'It is the dream of many European actors to perform on the Hebbel stage,' disclosed Matthias our guide who has worked long in the theatre. Calmly he noted: 'so we are lucky to be here. This is Berlin's most important and oldest theatre, with a lot of history behind it. All the important critics and media men come here and they can be very harsh in their comments.' My heart jumped again. Well, we disembarked at

the back of the theatre building and noticed that there were several smaller posters announcing that 'Rotom/Kakaaki groups from Lagos' would be performing at the Hebbel.

We off-loaded, and were briefly introduced to the technicians who would facilitate our production. Everyone seemed to have noticed Inse Koepke, (The stage technician) a tall, slim girl, perhaps in her early 20s who in spite of her work dress looked elegant; her face

like a sculpted piece. She particularly shocked me by her energy, after lifting alone our heavy iron box and putting it on the trolley.

I glanced at our girls and felt repulsed by their pretences and undue call for attention. They wouldn't even help to off load our luggage, instead were clutching their chests. Then I noticed that Norbert Young kept staring at Inse. On the next day when we got to the theatre he wanted to learn the German

H

EBBEL is an intriguing theatre. A massive auditorium with two upper sitting areas. The stage has depth, so much depth that we had to divide it into three parts for our performance. It sits about 600 in its cosy bowl which in spite of age still looks regal. But for an African performance with loud drumming and singing, it could be dysfunctional.

words with which to enquire after Inse. Then he would be heard hollering: 'Wo ist Inse? Wo ist Inse?'

We re-encountered the real Matthias during our very first rehearsal at the Hebbel. We had projected that he would allow us to run for him what we had revived of Oedipus after three months of break since our May performances. But we were quickly reminded of Matthias' peculiar directorial style, which created frustrating moments at rehearsals back in

Lagos. Running the play holds no fascination for the director. We were hardly two minutes into the first scene when, he stopped us. That henceforth was the mode of the rehearsals. No problems though. We knew our director's style.

Hebbel is an intriguing theatre. A massive auditorium with two upper sitting areas. The stage has depth, so much depth that we had to divide it into three parts for our performance. It sits about 600 in its cosy bowel which in spite of age still looks regal. But for an African performance with loud drumming and singing, it could be dysfunctional.

Its acoustic is boxed up, so that the sound keeps circulating within a restrained orbit. Our singers and drummers had problems coping because the sound travels into the box almost 60 feet above, gets trapped in there releasing a late feed back.

Rehearsal resumed in the theatre at about 7pm, but still we made little progress because it was frequently interrupted by the director's interjections.

Guido and Christina arrive with a very warm and handsome friend, Frank. His hair style was Afro and cute. Frank would speak Yoruba very fluently at the slimmest contact with it. In less than 10 minutes, he had the right intonation and his diction was good.

Frank is the first German to imbue us with confidence on the prospect of our performance being well accepted. Sitting through segmented rehearsals of Oedipus he rushed back stage, congratulating us and thanking us for bringing such a 'good show to Germany.'

Matthias seems more relaxed this Monday morning. The cast members are expecting the opening night. The rehearsal is more relaxed and enjoyable.

'Waow, they have destroyed our stage,' lamented the dancer Christie, when she saw what he had been done to the gate that cost us so much money and energy to build in Lagos.

Gabi, spouse of Matthias, a theatre set designer who had with Uwe

Wagner visited Matthias in Lagos in the last week of his six-week stay in Lagos, has dismantled the gate we brought from Lagos and sawed out of it something else — two thin poles with a more perfectly finished arc crown. Once mounted, the gate shines brilliantly under the stage light, while the thin poles seem to have reduced the visual impact.

We concluded the morning rehearsal on an inspiring note. Matthias smiled for the first time since yesterday, whistled and did a bit of body wriggling.

I remained on the set with technicians as they laboured to complete their jobs. The entire cast is contemplative. We are confident of a good premiere at the Hebbel. Matthias' words haunted our souls: 'You have got to give your best. This is the most important of our shows. A lot of people are looking forward to seeing you.'

With the pep talk which followed Matthias' we got set...

And PRONTO!

The production was over and the ovation just won't stop. The house which had remained absolutely muted throughout the 80 minutes of Oedipus erupted in loud clapping. We are on the fifth call! Even Richard Lang, our most critical observer gave us a good score.

'You guys surpassed yourselves'. He repeated this for most of the 360 kilometres to Chemnitz Dresden for our next set of performances.

Oedipus at Hebbel was quite an experience but it was riddled with performance anxieties typical of premieres. we had also been told that Chris Funke, the dreaded Berlin and in fact German theatre critic was in the house. Our performance at Hebbel had been largely sponsored by the Deutschen Theatre which, unable to accommodate us in its busy schedule had requested the Hebbel to host us.

And so to Chemnitz we proceeded. Matthias was too overwhelmed by his success (the press actually swarmed around praising him) to drive, although

he claimed that he was too tired and so would want to sleep through the journey. Lang took the wheel.

Freezing on the Mountain

We found ourselves enwrapped in the bowel of a vast cave that is Heidelberg. Mountain heights glanced down menacingly at us as if aiming to gobble us up. We were esconced in the warmth of our bus, excitedly gyrating to the Highlife-oriented beats of Fela. Our bus pulled up in the compound of the 'Eine Welt Zentrum' (One World Centre) and some of us jumped down. In same breath, they rushed back into the bus — the cold in Heidelberg was fierce, unsparring.

Thereon every one was handicapped as they tucked their arms under their warm clothes. Teeth clattering and caps drawn firmly over the ears.

Simone, the small and agile woman who administers the centre sprinted out of the theatre and rescued us from the cold as she herded us into the relieving warmth of the diminutive auditorium.

The One World Centre overlooks a gigantic mountain rise whose base is lined by a scenic lagoon that even in calmness bears witness to a lovely picnic site. The Centre is part of a three-dimensional complex, also including a two-storey shopping mall atop a cafeteria opening to the main road, but concealing the auditorium behind it. In the rear of the theatre is also another mountain, all accentuating the feeling of our being hugged by heights. A blissful feeling nonetheless! Sitting only about 300, the auditorium has intimacy.

The stage is a peculiarly small 16 & 16ft. But has far more lighting than the two cinema halls in the Nigerian National Theatre, Lagos put together.

To situate the floor plan for a performance of the play Amona on this small stage space was trying. Just making that decision alone took almost one

hour of debates, trials and mock settings before we arrived at a manageable design.

Paul, the technical director in the theatre and I got into an argument over the appropriate place to put the sound amplifiers and monitors. He wanted them down stage left, in full view of the audience and would have none of my argument that that would jeopardise the run of the play, especially since we were already constrained by the little space available after mounting the set. I had my way. And then fresh problems! There is only one entrance door to the stage and there is no gangway as such, except a staircase to the left side of the auditorium linking the stage. So we had to experiment with creating more entrances right on stage, further cheating into the little space we had left in the acting arena.

Again, not being a normal theatre structure, One World Centre lacks facilities such as platforms, flats, set props etc. Simone however helped us to convert their numerous tables into platforms and flats and we achieved the near impossible. A similar situation of inadequate facilities that taxed our imagi-

A GAIN, not being a normal theatre structure, One World Centre lacks facilities such as platforms, flats, set props etc. Simone however helped us to convert their numerous tables into platforms and flats and we achieved the near impossible. A similar situation of inadequate facilities that taxed our imaginations awaited us in the Frankfurt Hof, Mainz where our last show on the tour held the next day.

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We mounted our three textile pieces on the improvised sets and did many 'knocking together' just to realise something close to the fragments of the normal *Amona* set. It worked.

We played intimately, and ran the 2.25 minutes play in 1.52 minutes. The audience comprising largely youths, the typical rock music concert crowd, among them students and young school leavers, fell in love with us. This was our second standing ovation.

This crowd was particularly exhilarating as the members seemed to respond to every line, including the deeply poetic and metaphoric rendered by priest Amona. And it was not difficult to see why - this crowd has seen performances, literary sessions and exhibitions from virtually every part of the world.

• A new edition of *Afrika Projekt* billed for 1998 recently commenced audition and rehearsals in Lagos with a premiere of Femi Osofisan's adaptation of Mark Frisch's *Andorra* scheduled for February and a new play *A Horse on My Back* developed from the story submitted by Mike Ugorji, a university of Lagos undergraduate also scheduled for performances in April. Both performances to tour Germany in October.

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