



ISAIAH KEHINDE DAIRO ^{MBE}

1931 - 1996

Dapo
Adeniyi

FOR years, it had seemed to me that two separate I.K. Dairos existed. The one who was the popular musician, whose fame completely embraced the whole of the West African sub-continent in the early 1960s, possibly the entire African continent or even the whole world! (Afterall wasn't he the one who roused the English royalty during a 1963 invitation to the United Kingdom by Queen Elizabeth II, who also awarded him the MBE? He performed at the Westminster Theatre in 1964 where his audience included the late Nasser of Egypt and members of the House of Lords).

And then there was the other I.K. Dairo whom we knew within the walls of our own compound in Ijebu-Jesa and also in family circles in Lagos simply as 'Daddy I.K.' And so, it was little surprising that the man should die twice.

Before the decease in Lagos on February 7, he had fallen ill, immediately following his return to Nigeria from a year-long residency programme in the United States of America where he was available as a resource person to American Universities. Word about the illness even frittered through to the Nigerian press and thus prepared the public mind for what became the inevitable. But still, is not in any way near what I described as the 'other death.'

Two years ago, a female rushed into our home in Lagos and announced between gasps for breath that Daddy I.K. was dead. The consternation, disbelief and bewilderment experienced differently by individual recipients of this news in the household goes beyond description. We remained in this state for about a half hour before word came to us again that it was not our uncle the famous musician that died but rather the father of a friend to one of our younger cousins living some streets away from us; that friend to our cousin was nicknamed 'I. K' and it was her daddy who had died; our first informer misheard.

Therefore when two weeks ago a much older relation arrived in the morning and woke us to the news of yet another death we somehow hoped for an eventual annulment of the death for a second time but, this time was not to be; in less than an hour afterwards his old-time records began to waft out from the different national radio bands with continuity announcers bemoaning the passing away of a legend and a phenomenon, and with it, a whole musical era.

And if Dairo indeed died two times, it is no wonder, with hindsight, that he should have lived two lives. Over the years I have tried to reconcile the public figure with the private figure, finding very little resemblance between the two - beyond perhaps the facial, the demeanour; for whether at home or at the marketplace our own Daddy I.K. maintained that benevolent facial

expression much resembling a fixated mask which he ensured that he never once took off, saving of course that this one mask was much capable of distensions and pleasant muscle movements.

Before I fall into the temptation of eulogising, I may hasten to say that nearly every person with a public image lives more than one life — from the great statesman, the athletic star to the scientific inventor or church reverend, and others. Public perception is often not nearly a good replica of the other life lived in the private, beyond the glare of strangers. It was at home that they were reduced to human beings, and shown to be capable of chattering excitedly among friends or sitting uninhibited at supper behind a high mound of eba or pounded yam.

At home, he certainly was not a musician. No evidence, beyond the usual clump of BLUE SPOTS bandboys who milled around the outer block of the vast family compound in Ijebu-Jesa, that he was musical in any way. No drum strayed into the living quarters, no disused guitars, and Daddy would never hum at home. As a boy I compared the tremulous voice from the phonodisc album that spun atop the ancient 'changer' or resonated from the radio with his, in private conversations at home and found no correlation. I could have sworn that they were two distinct persons and certainly concluded that he did so deliberately. Also, we mixed freely with the bandboys, most of whom indulged us boys with shining 'shilling' (actually ten kobo) coins; some offered us discreet lessons on the rhythm and bass guitar - but we knew Daddy would disapprove. Time also proved our instincts to be correct. The first person to get into trouble was an older cousin, Victor, spawned by Taiwo Dairo (thought to be the twin of Daddy I.K. Truth however was that Baba Taye is the elder, their mother having excelled above all the other larger family wives in her ability to spawn twins repeatedly; Baba Taye's Kehinde had died early, only for their mother to deliver another set of twins. The Taiwo of the other set died too and left Daddy I.K.).

Victor had shown more than a mere interest in Juju music. At school in Ede, near Osogbo, he enrolled in the college choral group and began to try his hands on the talking drum. Soon, Victor's craft

began to be known around the schools in the local division, his reputation being obviously enhanced by his association with his famous musician uncle. A divisional competition among schools became Victor's crowning event; he revelled on his drum with such craft that he won himself a new gangan drum and certificate of excellence.

If Victor had been only wiser! He brought his trophies home and brandished them before his parents expecting praises. Daddy I.K. could not be more displeased; Victor only narrowly escaped taking a scar back to his college on his back!

Looking at it again now, Daddy's demurral of his siblings' treading the same path as he must have had its root elsewhere and not merely in a wish to have us try other professions outside of music. My own trouble with him on the same subject will bring this out more clearly. Victor, to be sure, earned I.K.'s reproof perhaps because it was in Ede, the location of Victor's secondary school, that I.K. himself started out in life, first as a local tradesman's apprentice with one Jewole and later, as the story goes, with another Osomaalo, Bolarinwa Ajilore. He also worked at Ede and its environs under the civil construction company, Cappa and D'alberto, stealing off to associate with inchoate juju groups during their weekend gigs. The harshness of those years, and their sheer waste, in Daddy's own estimation (considering that he was blundering from profession to profession - he even tried to be a carpenter -) must have contributed more directly to his disapproval of Victor's 'blundering' into music whilst at school.

But so did Ranti, another of his nephews in our own college in Ijebu-Ijesa, and I. (Ranti's father is Oye, the only member of the Dairo family in the Blue Spots Band. Oye will be I. K's successor now, after the decease). How mine began is hard to recall beyond the fact that I started first to be attracted to the person of one of the teachers, Alfred Nana Osei, a Ghanaian, who owned an electronic guitar, shipped in from Ghana, complete with its pristine amplifier and home-built loud-speaker. I was assigned from the dormitory to take water to Osei when I met him twanging away in his quarters. He dismissed me with difficulty that first time but could not prevent more frequent calls.

Ranti had the same idea and before we knew it had brought in more of our friends, girls included, to form the school's highlife band. Ranti and I had drumming backgrounds from the church of the Cherubims and Seraphims which we attended at home but Ranti also distinguished himself as a vocalist. Word did not leak to the town about our activities, but that was until I had more ideas of my own. I pestered my mother for funds (needless I say, that included inflating the costs of school books and boarding house requirements) which got me a brand new box guitar! Since the instrument had to follow me home from school, it did not take long before questions began to be asked about how I came by it, and so on. And unfortunately, Daddy I.K. had just returned from one of his tours and therefore was on hand to witness my 'court-martial.' His was a combination of remonstrance and bemusement:

'You actually intend to go on and play music?'

'No Daddy.'

'But this guitar... why then did you go and buy it?'

Others jeered and suggested my instant withdrawal from the school and be enlisted with the Blue Sports Band. Daddy however did not find it funny. Shrugging, finally, he said,

'Not that I am totally opposed to your playing music... you see, you have to understand the nature of handicap which some of us had to experience. You need education, son. If you will only be patient... read your books first... you can even go to England and read music.'

I wanted to let him know that I already had acquired the application forms to the Trinity College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music, both in London but knew it wouldn't help my case.

I watched I.K. transform elegantly and gradually from his private self to the public whenever the opportunity presented itself to ride with him in his brand new 'civilian' bus on his musical outings around Ijebu-Jesa town and suburbs or to Ilesa. Sometimes we accompanied him on his visitations to acquaintances of his and friends. If he had but known that I would

later stray out of school and follow one of Ilesa's juju bands on their nightly engagements, having made my own contacts through Mr. Osei with Kayode Okere who enlisted me as an unofficial apprentice but guessed nothing of my filial ties with their great hero.

With Daddy I.K.'s decease, they are now mostly gone, beginning with The Historian (the writer's father); the guard of uncles and fathers have severely dissipated. Dairo hardly recovered from the loss of The Historian (who kept family records of mostly births and deaths and national catastrophes) when our dearly beloved General de Gaulle, older than I.K. by a few weeks (says The Historian) followed the same way. The proceeding year swallowed Barber, another uncle and his wife Bernice, the washerwoman; she was a cherished companion of mama Wuraola, I. K.'s own mother, and Itanola, I.K.'s immediate older sister, who together pursued a proud career as washerwomen in Ijebu-Jesa. February 1996 had not elapsed when S. O. Dairo, the carpenter, also had a failed surgery in Ibadan and died.

The Unfinished Portrait

For us in the house, it signifies that a generation is passed, drawing all of its own with it. For Nigeria it signifies no less, that a musical phase of its history is concluding. The last decade has in like manner seen the transition of icons like Adeolu Akinsanya (Baba Eto), Roy Chicago and Bobby Benson. For me, the twin signifiers are, first of all the depletion of the human operators whose work helped to define the generation in the first place. Secondly is the succession of stylistic types (among the musicians) which depart essentially from their older types, however much they are linked.

Dairo is undoubtedly a national loss, a loss shared passionately by the whole world of music. The inevitability of death notwithstanding, he died at a youthful age of 65; qualitatively, a man of that age has not finished his work. For instance, he had been increasingly involved with educating musicians and students of African music in recent years. This regrettably has been appreciated more and sought by universities outside Nigeria. The death then means in essence

that a vast treasurehouse of musical ideas has gone up in flames.

Much earlier than the events of my boyhood venturing into music was a sort of obsession with fine art. In fact it held no fascination as such as a college subject but as private pastime. I found my latent ability, waiting only to be released, in the area of drawing. I could observe phenomena and trace my perspective out on paper, with pencil. Then, I turned to the almanacs on the walls of the parlour of our home. My favourite initially was a coloured almanac of Jesus with outstretched arms, the words, 'This I Did for You' inscribed boldly on it. My hand-drawn version became quite precise about His curly hair and face, which struck me at that time as uniquely Indian. Even indifferent, illiterate elders stopped by to comment about the adroit replication of the 'sacred heart' and the streams of blood that made fine impressions on His cheeks, seeping right into His tubular garment.

Next I turned to two framed photographs in the bedroom. The first was that of, we were told, a dear friend of I.K.'s, whose name pronounced as 'Igbinedoh' (Chief Igbinedion of Benin). He donned a suit, and flashed such impressive, robust cheeks. It was he, according to one of the boys, who endowed I.K.'s outsized truck, a brand of the Hino. Rested on the wardrobe was a photograph of I.K. himself, resplendent in ofi tops and headgear (handwoven cloth). No doubt he was conscious of the historical significance of this one picture and gave his best pose. There was the usual hint of benevolent smile on his face. I turned on this photo and carefully carved it out with as much precision as I could muster, tracing the hat first and then the frame of his face. But I never went beyond the arena of nostrils; somehow something about the slab of nose resisted replication, and remained so even after days of greater sweat-soaked effort. In the end I had to be content with the portrait unfinished, and abandoned it.

This like hundreds of such childhood recalls receded into the fog of memory. But that is, until the occurrence of the death last month. Somehow, this same photograph resurfaced in Lagos and was mounted in the house in Lawanson, Lagos!

Under it lay the visitors' condolence register. Under it also were the great memories of I.K. Dairo's unsurpassed honours inscribed by his hordes of fans and journalists which thronged the house.

They include among several, his representation of Nigeria at the 1965 World Negro Arts Festival in Dakar, Senegal and the World Popular Music Festival in Tokyo, in 1972 where he was

named among the world's best six musicians; he was also awarded the MBE two years ahead of The Beatles. **GR**

First Ghana International Book Fair

THE first Ghana International Book Fair (GIBF) will be held at the International Trade Fair Centre, Accra, from 6 to 12 November, 1996.

The theme is:

'Books - Essential Tools for Development.'

The book fair will bring together publishers, booksellers, writers, printers, librarians, journalists, distributors and various book lovers within the sub-region. It will be a meeting point for literary specialists from Africa, Europe, USA and other parts of the world.

Accra, with this event, reasserts itself as the gateway to the rich and vibrant book market in West Africa and it will host the Ghana International Book Fair every two years. There will be other events like conferences, seminars and workshops.

The first Ghana International Book Fair is being organised by the Ghana Trade Fair Authority and Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ghana Book Development Council, the Ghana Book Publishers Association, the Ghana Booksellers Association, the Ghana Association of Writers, the Library Association, the Ghana Printers and Paper Converters Association and the Children's Literature Foundation.

Activities

The Book Fair will be held in Pavilions D, E & F in the spacious Accra International

Trade Fair Centre. The first two days, 6 and 7 November, 1996 will be set aside for trade visitors. The Fair will be opened to the general public (schools, colleges, etc.) from 8 to 12 November, 1996.

Stand construction will be undertaken within the period 25 October - 2 November, 1996.

Seminars, conferences and workshops on various topics will be organised for publishers, printers, writers, librarians and booksellers during the Fair.

The prestigious Noma Award for 1996 will also be presented during the Fair.

Facilities

The Ghana International Trade Fair Centre covers approximately 49 hectares. It is within easy reach of the Kotoka International Airport, and the sea-port of Tema. It is about one kilometre from the Atlantic Ocean.

The Centre has spacious enclosed pavilions. The Conference halls are fully air-conditioned. There is a children's play-ground as well as an open air theatre. The scenery of the fair grounds is as refreshing as it is delightful to the eye.

The Centre provides business services which include postal, fax, telex, telephone, IDD and secretarial services. There is a clinic, police post and full-time banking services. There are over twenty restaurants serving both local and international dishes.

The Centre offers a secure environment for

business. There are also generous car parks.

Exhibition Space

Exhibition spaces are as follows:

International Exhibitors

Type A - 2 x 2m2 (four book cases) - US \$450.00

Type B - 4 x 2m2 (eight book cases) - US \$900.00

Type C - Open spaces (Indoor) - US \$100.00 per m2

African Countries

Type A - 2 x 2m2 (four book cases) US \$225.00

Type B - 4 x 2m2 (eight book cases) US \$450

Type C - Indoor/Open spaces are allocated in multiple of 25m2 each

The Organizers will provide the following at each stand:

(a) Book cases (with four adjustable and detachable shelves) made from Ghana's rich 'Sapele' wood with veneer finishing. Each book case measures 1m x 2.5m.

(b) 1 Table

(c) 2 Chairs

(d) Fascia board with exhibitor's name

(e) Catalogue.

Accommodation

Ghana has hotels of high international standards. It has three to five star hotels within a five-kilometre radius of the Fair Centre. The Organisers have made special arrangements for competitive

travel and accommodation rates for visitors and exhibitors.

Tourist Attraction

Ghana is noted for its rich culture and festivals. There are coconut fringed beaches, forts and castles, wildlife parks and tropical rain forests.

Vital Information on Ghana

Country size - 239,460 sq. km.

Population - 15 million

Capital - Accra

Language - English is the official language. The major languages spoken are Akan, Ga, Ewe and Hausa.

Religion - Christianity, Islam and other African traditional religions.

Communication - IDD CODE 233 - 21

Foreign currency - Foreign currencies are freely exchanged at numerous forex bureaux and banks. Credit cards are accepted by major hotels, airlines and some shops.

Currency - Cedi = 100 pesewas.

Applications for further enquiries may be addressed to:

The Director-General

Ghana Trade Fair Authority,
P. O. Box 111,
Trade Fair Centre
Accra, West Africa.

Tel: (233-21) 776611-15,
772376

Fax: (233-21) 772012.