

**THE PLAYWRIGHT-DIRECTOR IN NIGERIAN THEATRE PRACTICE:
HENRY LEOPOLD BELL-GAM IN FOCUS**

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian theatre directing scholars have ventured into the interpretation of not just plays written by other playwrights but plays which they authored. Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima, Sunday Ododo, Ben Binebai etc readily come to mind in this regard. This paper evaluates the contributions of Henry Leopold Bell-Gam as a Director-Playwright in the development of theatre practice in Nigeria. The paper notes that Henry Leopold Bell-Gam contributions to the growth of theatre is borrowed from the Aquatic life of the Ijaw culture and as such recommends that budding theatre scholars promote their traditional untapped culture through documentation and graphic presentation on stage and screen. This in our view will help in generating historical materials for scholars and cultural enthusiasts as well as promote peace and development within the society .

KEYWORDS; *Playwright, Director, Playwright-Director, Theatre, Practice.*

INTRODUCTION

The specific date, place and manner that theatre originated have generated serious debates among theatre historians. These debates appear to be anchored on sentiments bothering on civilization which has led to some scholars refuting existing anthropological theories on the origin of performances. In all the debates, the manner through which theatre emerged appears to be generally accepted but the actual place and date are still debatable issues among theatre scholars. For example oral and documented facts from all over the world attest to the fact that theatre emerged or developed from ritual, dance, man's mimetic impulse, festivals and storytelling. The term theatre is not a concept that can easily be defined with few words because of diverse usages and applications by different fields. The opinion of Chris confirms this when he opine that,

There is not one definition which has not been seriously questioned or argued against. The idea of theatre is too wide to be caught in a single statement or in some recipe-like descriptions, especially when theatre is thought of as a phenomenon including all kinds of performative activities. (3)

However, the term theatre has its etymological origin in the Greek word 'Theatron' which means a place for seeing. Cohen re-echoes that: 'the word theatre comes from the Greek *Theatron* or seeing place' it is a place where something is seen and the companion term *drama* comes from the Greek *dran*, 'to do'. It is something done. An action. Theatre: something is seen, something

is done. An action is witnessed.”(3) One important pointer in Cohen’s exposition on the term theatre is the companion term drama which is sometimes used interchangeably to mean the same thing. However, from the above they are complementary terms and not interchangeable. Drama is part of theatre because it encompasses what is expressed to the audience. According to Lawal the words theatre and drama are often used interchangeably. Theatre is not inherent in drama only: rather it encompasses the words and actions of our everyday activities (1) Theatre is a composite artistic processes made up of many elements –acts and scenes, plot and character, art and entertainment-and an analysis of theatre is a study of its multiple elements. In a similar vein, Adeoye notes that drama and theatre are used interchangeably and that, Conceptually, drama is ‘a form of literature’ which demonstrates, celebrates, recreates, reproduces, imitates and expresses the cultural essence of man and as a veritable act of presentation, and that which is a “performance on stage. Usually it has four basic elements, namely, the script, the actors, the stage and the audience... In some instances though, drama can occur without a script”¹ while theatre, quite interestingly, is also the (organized or unorganized) socio-cultural, religious and political activities with numerous nomenclature: a seeing place, a performance and entertainment, and in medical parlance, a place for medical operations and on stage, “a way of seeing men and women in section of observing what they do and why they do it” (217)

The development of theatre over the years has left the mere shore of Greek place of seeing mentality to accommodate other interpretations and meanings. Cohen succinctly puts this view thus: Today we use the word theatre in many ways. We use it often to describe the building ere buildings are put on: the architecture, the structure, and the place for dramatic performance-the place where “something is seen.” we also use the term to indicate where films are shown, as in “ movie theatre.” And we use it metaphorically to refer to a place where wars and surgeries occur: “ the theatre of operation” and “ the operating theatre” (9)

He adds that the definition of theatre put forward above is more of hardware definition and that the software definition denotes an activity involved in theatre. The implication is that theatre is an activity that expresses an experience of a group or an individual to an audience. Explaining the different perceptions and interpretations of the term, Allensworth, Allensworth and Rawson clearly observe that: Most people think of a theatre as a place where an audience comes to be amused, interested, entertained, stimulated, or moved by the enactment of a play on stage by actors. But people who work in this field see the word in some worth broader terms. To them, *theatre* embraces all the elements that culminate in a ‘*theatrical* experience.’ In other words *theatre* represents an art form; and like any other art form, it is a means of communication between artist and audience.(1)

Allensworth et al’s position above shades more light on the perception and application of theatre as a friendly union between performers and audience. It means that the very essence of theatre is communication of feelings, ideas and concept to an audience. Wainscot and Kathy describe it as a form of art and entertainment that happens when audience and artist collaborate: Actors perform live for people watching, listening, and reacting. They express further that, Live theatre provides a two-way communication. The audience member is not just passive observer or receiver of the message; each spectator contributes in some measure to the nature of the theatrical event (1).

Theatre therefore requires the meeting between audience and performers to share an experience that will be mutually beneficial radically or conservatively to both parties. Performances are

geared toward sanitizing, exposing and educating the society of issues. As a way of seeing, Barranger in his work entitled *Theatre: A Way of Seeing*, identifies immediacy, aliveness, doubleness, spaces, fictions and audiences as qualities of theatre experience that make it unique from other arts forms. According to him: Theatre as a performance art that places human experience before group of people-an audience-in the present moment and that for theatre to happen, two groups of people, actors, and audience must come together at a certain time and in a certain place. There is a story usually involving some aspect of being human (3)

Similarly, Peter Brook, in his work entitled *Empty Space*, describes the constitution of the entity called theatre with important features that must accompany an entertainment to be seen as theatre. According to him, For theatre to take place, an actor walks across an empty space while someone else is watching. In this empty space, called a stage, actors present themselves in a story about some aspect of human experience. The actors, the audience, and the space are three essentials of theatre. The fourth is the performance, or the actors' creative work in production. The performance is very often a play—a tragedy, comedy, or musical-but it need not be. Theatre performances include, puppet shows, mime, and other forms of entertainment. (43)

Importantly therefore, apart from having such necessary elements of performance, performer, performance space and the audience, theatre experience should, if possible, drive to the audience some or all of the following; entertainment, education, enlightenment and information. A good theatre therefore, ...is much more than entertainment. in its period of greatness, its playwrights, actors, directors and designers have sought for the meaning and beauty of existence with the same passion and sincerity that has characterized the works of great scientists, philosophers and theologians; for in its essence the art of the theatre rests on a common foundation with all learning's; on man's capacity to explore, wonder and reflect (Whiting 3)

Theatre, which consists of live actors who perform in real time before live audiences, is a unique art form because it exists "in the present." Theatre, however, is also deeply rooted in its past; plays seen today are often revivals, adaptations, or parodies of earlier ones. Even when they are wholly original, new plays will inevitably be compared to earlier works. Likewise, contemporary actors—like contemporary baseball players—will also be compared to their predecessors. Theatre is a living art but also a living tradition. (Cohen 221) The reaching dimension of theatre to her target audience reminds one of Eugenio Barba's position on cause and effect. According to him,

Those who have built theatres, but not with stones and bricks, and who have then written about them, have also generated many misunderstandings. They wanted their words to be bridges between practice and theory, between experience and memory, between the performers and the spectators, between themselves and their heirs. But their words were not bridges: they were canoes. Canoes are slight craft; they fight against the current, cross the river, can land on the other bank, but one can never be sure how their cargo will be received and used (qtd. In IzuuNwankwo 29).

Edward Wright quoting John Gassner has identified five "Es" which are excitement, emotional release, exaltation, enlightenment and escape as some of the vital goals of every theatre experience. However, with the current realities, economic satisfaction bothering on generating a means of livelihood for the practitioner is needed as one of the goals. Theatre provides the avenue for us to express our ideals with a view of creating an egalitarian society. Against this backdrop, Arnold Stephanie states that:

Into theatre performances we pour our dreams, our myths and stories, our struggles and fears. The conflicts that divide us and the laughter that makes whole take their place on the stage. We make a journey through space and time that is limited only in our imagination (2)

Elin Diamond has identified some of the basic questions emerging from the study of theatre that summarizes the essence and content of theatre thus: [P]owerful questions posed by theatre representation—questions of subjectivity (who is speaking/acting?), location (in what sites/spaces?), audience (who is watching?), commodification (who is in control?), conventionality (how are meanings produced?), politics (what ideological or social positions are being reinforced or contested?)—are embedded in the bodies and acts of performers. (4)

The functional and pedagogical nature of the theatre makes Thornton Wilder to see it as the greatest of all art form. According to him; I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being. The supremacy of the theatre derives from the fact that it is always ‘now’ on the stage (2)

From these views by different scholars, it becomes imperative to observe that the dynamic nature of theatre cannot be overemphasized. Theatre is a communal gift and those who cherish it, guard it. Theatre is therefore, a communion that presents to her audience issues not how they want it but how it is or should be. The emergence of the playwright in the theatre has been copiously documented by western scholars including Aristotle to have come from Ancient Greece. Oscar Brockett has also documented the efforts of the Greek festivals in promoting theatre practice globally. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides have been documented to be among the earliest playwrights who competed for prizes in the Greek classical theatre. Historically, they are attributed to have performed the role of director prior to the emergence of the modern director with the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. Brockett informs that ;

The contributions of such Greek tragic and comic playwrights in the development of theatre practice in particular and the art in general is not in doubt. On the issue of directors on the Nigerian stage, Abdulrasheed Adeoye has classified directors on the Nigerian stage according to their functions and where they operate. The manner and style in which they express their ideas are also used in identifying them such classifications include; Community/traditional theatre director, playwright-director, literary or academic theatre director, actor manager theatre director, the professional theatre director and the student/apprentice theatre director. By definition, Professor Henry Leopold Bell-Gam falls under the playwright-theatre director class. Adeoye defines this class as a class of directors who writes and direct their plays. This paper will therefore, evaluate the creative efforts of Bell-Gam through playwriting and directing.

On Bell-Gam’s Academic Training

The Opobo born director-playwright attended St. George’s School, Egwanga, Opobo Rivers State of Nigeria for his primary education, Regina Coeli Secondary School, Essene Opobo, Anglican Grammar School, Port Harcourt, Wilcox Comprehensive Secondary School, Aba for his secondary education, Université de Paris III, Paris, France, for the Diploma, B.A., M.A. and Ph.D.

Bell-Gam as a Playwright

Bell-Gam's effort in championing a better society as a playwright is visible when one accesses the numerous plays to his credit. In his plays, cultural preservation, leadership, child abuse, corruption, ethnic conflict and the poor relationship between multinational companies and the Niger Delta communities, which has in different occasions led to youth restiveness and pipeline vandalization that breeds poverty amongst the populace are creatively articulated. Bell-Gam's demonstration of in-depth knowledge of the African tradition, culture and the quest to preserve and promote it readily comes to mind when one evaluates his creative exploit in *Orukoro*, a play published in 1990. Bell-Gam's use of Richard Wagner's theory of Artistic Synthesis projects him as a total artist. His manipulation of songs, drama, dance, music, ritual, mime, festival, worship, incantations and local crafts which markets the aquatic life of the Niger Delta region especially the Opobo area of Rivers State. *Orukoro* presents a clash of cultures between the indigenous African religion and the Christian faith. The search and validity of the superior mode of approaching the creator as well as the ideal search for purposeful leadership dominates the dramatic actions in the play.

The story unveils the usual tussle for kingship prevalent in most underdeveloped nations between King Perekule, a custodian of the Okoloama tradition and Tumni, a born again of the Christian faith. In this battle, Tumni using his new found approach to God destroys the Oru shrine and successfully murdered King Perekule, thereby attracting the wrath of the villagers and the gods. The dramatic action resolves as the community collectively hunts Tumni to suicide while Idawari is chosen by the community and the gods as the right leader to pilot the affairs of the community.

In *Orukoro* Bell-Gam has carefully defended the dictum that 'leaders are chosen by God and the people and not through coercion'. The rejection of Tumni and his new found Christian faith portrays a society that is resolute in the ideals that promote peaceful coexistence and cultural approach in choosing their leaders. His presentation of the Christian faith as propagated in the character of Tumni and the triumph of Oru-Ogolo, the messenger of the gods is an indication that African mode of approaching the Creator is not inferior as presented by the missionaries of the Christian faith.

In *King Jaja* which was published in 1996, Bell-Gam narrates the life and times of the legendary nationalist and business mogul, King Jaja of Opobo. The play gives a dramatic account of the genealogy of Jaja from the Mbanaso to the Jubojobo and the subsequent expedition to the West Indies. In this play Bell-Gam interrogates the concepts of imperialism, colonialism, slavery and betrayal. The play does not only provide readers on the historical antecedents of King Jaja but calls to question the effect of slavery and colonialism which Africans suffered.

Similarly, Bell-Gam's handling of the issues of child labour, rape, trafficking, ritual killings, corruption and oppression in *Erebie* portrays him as a human right activist and a playwright who is armed with reality of the times. The character of Erebie is used by Bell-Gam to show the ordeal and the vulnerability of children who are pushed by their parents into child labour and the consequences thereof. The character of Ofeghe and Chief Nwakwo represent the millions of corrupt, ritual killers and rapists who terrorize Nigerian citizens on daily basis and breed insecurity and fear amongst the citizens. The introduction of the police and subsequent trial of the culprits demonstrate Bell-Gam's general interest in the need for justice to all victims of sexual and child abuse. The collective need for the society to protect the girl child is carefully advocated for by Bell-Gam in the play.

In *Igbuduogu* Bell-Gam interrogates the popular issue of power tussle which has eroded several values in African society. The play unveils the inordinate ambition of Igbuduogu to overthrow Opualabo, the Amanyanabo of Okolobiri which he serves as deputy. His primary interest is to overthrow the king and take over the control of the leadership structure of Okolobiri which he believes the Opualabo is not handling well. His power hungry nature is clearly visible when he accepted to sacrifice even his deformed and only daughter even when she was rejected by the chief priest to achieve this inordinate ambition. Apart from the human sacrifice, Igbuduogu paid the sum of seven thousand naira to the chief priest to perform the sacrifice which should actualize his ambition. The resolution of the play which ends the gladiators in court for the resolution of the disputes shows Bell-Gam's campaign of using the court as the last hope of the common man rather than resorting to violence and traditional/diabolic means of resolving conflict. The failed effort of Igbuduogu in ascending the throne as the Amanyanabo of Okolobiri and the subsequent ascension of the throne by Okorie the so called slave is an indication that one does not need to struggle to lead a people. Power is given by God and not by manipulating efforts and spilling of blood. The play also calls to question Nigerian politicians who in an attempt to get into elected offices sacrifice human blood and may not get it at the end

Henry Leopold Bell-Gam in *Ube Republic* interrogates the issues of citizen's political participation, human intrigues, corruption as exhibited by followers and leaders and inordinate ambition that are prevalent in African countries especially Nigeria. The central character presented by Bell-Gam is Prince Eremadu, heir apparent to the throne of Banana Community. The character is presented as a greedy ambitious individual who tricks the electorates, chiefs and the priests to support his political aspiration as a senator to represent them in the national assembly to the detriment of the community leadership which he should provide upon the death of his father. Eremadu's concealment of the demise of his father whom he is supposed to succeed because of his ambition of receiving double royalty as a senator reveals the extend Nigerian politicians can go for the sake of power and money.

Bell-Gam's thematic thrust in *Ube Republic* is a clarion call on members of the society on the dangers associated with greed and corruption which is predominant among Nigeria leaders. The play condemns the attitude of Nigeria political leaders in our dear nation whose actions are driven by selfish desires rather than service to humanity as demonstrated by the character of Prince Eremadu and other characters that epitomises corruption in the play. The need to shun greed and champion development, youth empowerment, transparency, effective representation, and service to humanity is what Bell-Gam has preached in the play. The resolution as captured at the end where the community massively invades the hospital in search of their king and Prince Eremadu committing suicide is a lesion that must be embraced by such misguided leaders.

Using the surrealism approach, Bell-Gam in *Mrs. Manfred's Dream* addresses the issue of HIV/AIDS. The story unveils the outcome of excessive jealous wife Mrs. Manfred over her husband Mr. Manfred. In an attempt to protect her husband Mr. Manfred from extramarital affairs, Mrs. Manfred engages the services of a native doctor, Ogbokiri to help prepare a charm that will enable her husband hate every other woman apart from her. Ogbokiri refuses after considering the consequences of making a man impotent advises her to go and relate properly. Determined to achieve her desire, she engages the services of Akatikoro, another native doctor who prepared the charm to make her husband Mr. Manfred impotent. However, she forcefully withdraws the money she paid to the Akatikoro with a position that she will pay after the charm is effective on her husband. On her way home, she meets a young man whose manhood

disappears after receiving the money from her. This led to a mob invading her until a disguised Akatikoro comes in to demand that Okoro returns the money to Mrs. Manfred and immediately his manhood is restored. The crowd insisted that Okoro must test his manhood with her and without protective method, she contracted HIV. The discovery of this frustrates Mr. Manfred to a point of trying to eliminate her for good. The attempt of this force Mrs. Manfred wakes from her sleep only to discover that it was a mere terrible dream.

Bell-Gam's technique of using dream to pass a very serious message of over jealousy which is predominant in most families is an attempt at simplifying it with the aim of sending across the message to the audience. The exposition of HIV/AIDS as the probable consequence of greed and selfish desires creates an important material for the fight against HIV/AIDS.

In *No Sacrifice, No Marriage*, Bell-Gam presents the problem of greed motivated by selfish ambition through the character of Florence. Florence selfishness makes her to demand full control of her lover Michael through oath taking. Michael, a young man with dreams of making it in life feels reluctant in accepting the demand from Florence that he sacrifice his manhood not to be useful to other women except her. Her aim is to have full control of Michael to prevent him from seeing other women. It is later revealed in the play that Florence husband died as a result of his failure to obey this oath. Michael's attempt to escape from this unholy act meets a brick wall through the manipulation of Egbeleku, a witch doctor who through his magical powers returned Michael to meet his waterloo. Michael is at the end is fully married to Florence after the manipulation of the fake pastor who performs marriage joining. Bell-Gam again in this attempt deconstructs the potent nature of diabolism which women engage in to secure the emotional faithfulness of their lovers. The end of this dramatic excursion by Bell-Gam indeed, indicates that there was actually no sacrifice and truly no marriage

Bell-Gam and the Directorial Processes

Bell-Gam's directorial effort can be evaluated from his choice of play, audition and casting, rehearsals, relationship with production collaborators and his audience interest. His handling of these different production areas drives an understanding of his directorial style and approach.

Choice of play is an integral responsibility of the director which authenticates his approach and style. Choice of play in this context will refer to a director's selection or acceptance to interpret a given play for an audience. Factors such as understanding of the text, author of the text, number of cast, funding, duration of the play, technical requirements and the audience factor are possible considerations by the director. These factors guide a director to personally select a play or accept a given play for interpretation. According to Bell-Gam choosing a play is, the first function of the artistic director. It is his right to choose a play of his interest. Several conditions guide his choice of play. These include: purpose of the play, number of cast, social and cultural relevance of the play, the thematic contents; the budget, venue of the proposed performance, the dramatic genre, the availability and adaptability of the actors and actresses and the target audience. (qtd. 15)

Bell-Gam's choice of play is predictable and remarkable. In an interview with the researcher, Bell-Gam's insist that there are three major factors that attract him to a play. These factors are large cast with crowd scenes, dominance of dance and culturally rooted thematic thrust and topicality in the message of the play. His confession is verified when one evaluates most of the plays he has directed which includes, *Orukoro, King Jaja, Ube Republic, Hidden Treasure*,

Dreams of Obio, *Minina Missionama Odumegege*, *Tumbara Zubai Aguda*, *St. Remy Whispers of the Gods*. These plays are dominated with large cast with crowd scenes dance and culturally rooted subjects and topical messages. His directing of different regatta displays for different festivals is another testimony of his unique way of choosing his scripts. Bell-Gam sums up with some guiding questions in his choice play thus; is the play culturally viable? Do I understand the culture of the environment where the story is situated? Do I have the facilities to travel to the concerned environment and conduct research? What is the social relevance of the play? Does the play conform to the social realities of the environment?

Another important area that Bell-Gam demonstrates his creative directorial effort is through his unique approach to audition and casting. Bell-Gam's auditions are usually lively and very entertaining. His interest is to ensure that whoever comes for the audition is successful and he believes that no one should be rejected during an audition experience. He does not believe in the close audition which Ohiri defines as a method of recruiting actors that is done without the view of others who came for the audition but the audition panel only, rather he believes in the open audition which is done in the full view of all those who came for the audition. In a chat with the researcher, Bell-Gam informs that he prefers the open audition because it is democratic and places those who came for the audition as members of the audience. This, in his view boosts the confidence of the actor and prepares them for the main production. In Bell-Gam's auditions, all you need is to attend and he will find a role for you. His casting approach is highly democratic as he relies on the cast of the production and stage manager as well as the actors involved in evaluating who wins a role. The first two weeks of Bell-Gam's rehearsal is dedicated to casting where actors demonstrate their competence to sustain a tentative role or win a role. Bell-Gam can try all the actors with physical attributes and voice level of a character to get the most suitable. Bell-Gam does not subscribe to the table casting approach irrespective of your residency in his production company. For him audition and democratic approach to casting should not be sacrifice on alter of favoritism and unnecessary familiarity. Another important aspect of Bell-Gam's approach to casting is the use of known actors which he calls guest artists which he will still audition for the tentatively assigned role. Another major feature of Bell-Gam's casting technique is his application of double casting method which is the allocation of two actors per role. This method prevents disappointment in case of an unforeseen circumstance affecting one of the actors. In his inaugural lecture, he confirms in the following statement thus; 'I remained very consistent in double casting other roles in the same play'



Bell-Gam addressing members of cast in the production of Orukoro in 2007 at the Niger Delta University in a rehearsal session

Bell-Gam's attitude to rehearsal is unique, fun filled, educative and full of discoveries. He is time conscious and very determined to allow the actor participate in the creative process of the performance. The atmosphere of his rehearsals is usually not tensed, unnecessarily stressful and scary. Actors in Bell-Gam's rehearsals can suggest ideas and he will immediately ask the actor to try it. If it works with his general approach, he will sustain it, if it doesn't he will diplomatically reject it. His rehearsal rules include punctuality, effective scheduling, exercises to warm up the body for physical and mental capabilities. In his inaugural lecture Bell-Gam copiously documents his rehearsal processes thus;

I begin my rehearsals with warm up exercises especially at the preliminary stages. The reason for the exercises is to keep the actor alert and ready for the interpretative process. After the exercise section, I commence serious group play reading. At this level, I listen to the different actors I have cast to play different roles and confirm or disagree with my casting. This group play reading affords me the opportunity to also listen to the voices of the actors and their levels of rhythm and reactions to other characters

His view above is verified by the researcher's personal experience in the production of the adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *A man of the People* in 2011 where the researcher functioned as the stage manager. Every rehearsal in Bell-Gam's production is preceded with exercises usually led by a member of cast or the Stage Manager before the business of the day. In his interpretation of the above play members of cast were shared into groups with group leaders where he listens to each group read. In a conversation with Judith who has actively worked with Bell-Gam in his fertility dance as playing the character of a virgin on Bell-Gam's approach to rehearsals and relationship with cast and crew, he submits that

For Prof any day and time I will long to work with him because he is liberal and gives the actor freewill to express himself and is quick to commend good acting effort. However, sometimes, Bell-Gam's liberal attitude on the rehearsals floor makes some actors to take him for granted

As much as one seriously agrees with Judith that society especially some artists tend to abuse the simplicity of the director. Bell-Gam's liberal attitude on the rehearsals floor may have sustained his directorial inputs for years. His liberal style encourages amateur actors be confident in approaching him for a role with the mind of getting it. Another disciple of Bell-Gam who participated in the Sheffield tour experience and is currently a colleague, Faith Aminikpo gives a vivid account of Bell-Gam's directorial characteristics on the production floor thus

It was a great deal working with Bell-Gam on his famous Orukoro. I recalled Bell-Gam practically moving the characters of the corps to different areas of the stage with different body position of dead characters. In his words which was usually very funny because of the meaning in reality 'you, stand, come and die here' 'you die well' you, come here, you don't know how to die, go and learn how to die'. During rehearsals, we usually experienced prolonged repetition of actions in a given scene which makes his attitude quite remarkable. he will always drag the flow of action by asking the cast to repeat the action again and again which brought the popular phrase take it again as is popular rehearsal style of achieving a perfect interpretation Personal Conversation

Bell-Gam's repetition of actions during rehearsals gives the actor confidence and full knowledge of the character he is interpreting and full communion with other characters on stage. Repeating actions on stage during rehearsals brings perfection and gives a better performance for the audience on the performance night. Aminikpo's submission from personal experience is valid and is a pointer why Bell-Gam's productions where usually audience delight. Another area of evaluating Bell-Gam's directorial style is his use of appropriate production elements such as costume, makeup, props, set, lighting, sound and sound effect and the general management of the box office which are inputs from the different collaborators. His relationship with cast and crew is cordial and professional. Bell-Gam believes in the meticulous delivery by the collaborators in the production experience. One area that stands out in the production of Bell-Gam is his use of costumes and other visual elements. His investment in colorful costumes which is usually handled by Tess-K theatre is phenomenal in his productions. This is not unconnected with his drive to project the African indigenous culture which costumes play important role. His use of indigenous props materials, location revealing set and believable make up is predicable in his interpretative approach. Bell-Gam will insist for detailed research by the different collaborators including actors to understand the demand of the role and the play. Bell-Gam once reports that;

I had to travel with some of my major actors to Azumini to research on the drumming and reactions of the priestess of Oru. This created an opportunity for the actor to fully understand his character and give a better interpretation.

Cast and crew in Bell-Gam's production are always willing to work with him in subsequent productions because of his cordial and fatherly disposition toward the production goal. His relationship traits appear to have been influenced by Harold Clurman's proposal on the director's qualities. According to Clurman,

The director must be an organizer, a teacher, a politician, a psychic detective, a lay analyst, a technician, a creative being. Ideally, he should know literature (drama), acting, and the history

and above all, he must understand people. He must inspire confidence. All of which means, he must be a “great lover.”

Indeed, Bell-Gam is an organizer, understand people, and inspire confidence and definitely a great lover in his directorial exploits.

Imo Edward who is a former student and presently a colleague and Senior lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies of the University of Port Harcourt, summarized his view on Bell-Gam’s relationship with his production team having worked with him at various points. According to him;

Henry Leopold Bell-Gam is one of the few Nigerian playwright -directors in the mould of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Ahmed Yerima. My experience working with Bell-Gam clearly reveals him as a highly flexible and accommodating director. He gives his actors the free hand to market themselves by allowing them to come up with their respective approaches to role interpretation including movements. Bell-Gam's actors are always free to adopt their own approach to picturization especially if their spatial relationship conforms to Bell-Gam's overall directorial vision and concept. Bell-Gam is also a caring and kind director who creates a conducive work environment for his cast thereby motivating them to put in their best in the production.

Bell-Gam’s impressive outings within and outside the shores of Nigeria and the caliber of sponsors he has attracted is a glaring testimony of his successful directorial seal. His performance of *Orukoro* which he wrote and directed attracted different audiences across the shores of Rivers and beyond as well as reputable companies which include Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG), AGIP, ELF, Rivers State Government and the University of Port Harcourt. Members of the audience are usually not tired of watching Bell-Gam’s creative works especially when it is advertised that he is the director. The niversity of Port Harcourt campus life is incomplete without the viewership of Bell-Gam’s *Orukoro* especially in the 90s. In his choice of play, Bell-Gam places the audience on a priority level because he believes that a production must appeal to the audience to be adjudged successful

Henry Bell-Gam’s Selected Productions Credit

S/ N	TITLE /AUTHOR	PRODUCER	VENUE	YEAR	ROLE
1.	Six acts en Public	Directed by Fennette-Vander	Université de Paris Viii Theatre, France	1979	Actor (Dactyl du Temps)
2	Le Sacret de DocteurNoyc	A Film Production by Monsieur Mbagga	Paris	1979	Actor
3	“Austerity” Written by Julie. Okoh	University of Port Harcourt	Uniport Arts Theatre	1985	Artistic Director
4	<i>Ube Republic</i>	Shell Petroleum Development Company Port Harcourt	Shell Club	1986	Playwright, Artistic and Director
6	<i>The Explorers</i>	University of Port	Uniport Art	1988	Artistic Director

		Harcourt Theatre	Theatre		
7	Ugheli Cobra- Performance of Ugheli Cobra Written Chief Ideozu			1988	Artistic Director
8	<i>Orukoro</i>	Rivers State Government	Government House with Military Governor of Rivers State Col Anthony Ukpo	1987	Actor, Dancer Choreographer, Playwright, and Artistic Director
9	A Wife Forever	Women Organization of Shell Development Petroleum Company	Shell Club, Port Harcourt	1989	Artistic Director
10	<i>Orukoro</i>	Nigeria Star Artist	World Universities Games and Cultural Festival Sheffield, England.	1991	Role played, actor, dancer, choreographer, Playwright 1 Artis tic Director
11	Orukoro dance drama	Nigeria Star Artist at the World Universities Games and Cultural Festival	Convent Garden, London	1991	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
12	Orukoro Fertility Dance Drama	Nigeria Star Artist at the World Universities Games and Cultural Festival	Grave Theatre, Sheffield, England	1991	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
13	Orukoro fertility dance drama	Nigeria Star Artist at the World Universities Games and Cultural Festival	Irish Centre, Sheffield, England	1991	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
14	Orukoro fertility dance drama	International Night Eleme	Eleme	1992	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
15	<i>Orukoro</i>	, Rivifest '96	Port Harcourt Rivers State	1996	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
16	<i>Dreams of Obio</i>	Obio-Akpor Local Government Council,	Obio-Akpor Local Government Council	1998	Playwright and Artistic Director

			Secretariat Rurnuodamaya, Port Harcourt		
17	<i>Dreams of Obio</i>	Shell Development Company	Shell Club, Port Harcourt	1998	playwright/artistic director
18	<i>Dreams of Obio</i>	Obio-Akpor Local Government Council.	Rivifest '97	1998	Playwright/Artistic Director and Choreographer
19	Orukoro fertility dance drama	Tam-Trano & Co	Easter Festival of the Arts, Port Harcourt	1998	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer Playwright and Artistic Director
20	Orukoro Fertility dance drama	Training of Miss Wendy Elaine Reid, an American Chemical Engineer from U.S.A		1999	Dancer and Choreographer
21	Orukoro fertility dance drama	Tess K. Entertainment Company and Jet Research Theatre	Crab, Uniport Port Harcourt	1999	Choreographer and Artistic Director
22	<i>Orukoro</i>	Command Performance for World Cup celebration of Nigeria 99 by the Rivers State Government	Liberation stadium	1999	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
23	<i>Orukoro</i>	Festival of culture, choral and arts renaissance organized by Rivers State, Government	Port Harcourt	1999	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
24	<i>Ube Republic</i>	Shell Petroleum Development Company Port Harcourt	Shell Club	2000	Playwright and Artistic Director
25	Orukoro fertility dance drama	Command Performance, Michelin Nigeria Limited	NLNG Hall Port Harcourt	2000	Playwright and Artistic Director
26	Orukoro fertility dance drama and variety	Command Performance Gender Studies Conference	Uniport Arts Theatre	2000	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director

27	<i>Ube Republic</i>	20 th Convocation Ceremony, Rivers State College of Education, Rurnuolumeni,	University Auditorium	2000	Playwright and Artistic Director
28	<i>Ube Republic</i>	Shell Club Port Harcourt	Shell Club Port Harcourt hall	2001	Playwright and Artistic Director
29	Orukoro fertility dance	Graduation ceremony of Don BOSCO Training Dances centre Obosi Courtesy of Nigeria Agip oil Company, Port Harcourt	Port Harcourt	2001	Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
30	<i>Ube Republic,</i>	College of Education, Rumuolumeni	Port Harcourt	2002	Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
31	<i>Orukoro</i>	College of Education, Rumuolumeni Convocation ceremony	Port Harcourt	2003	Actor, Dancer, Choreographer, Playwright and Artistic Director
32	<i>Ube Republic</i>	Command Performance of University of Port Harcourt	Uniport Arts Theatre	2006	Playwright and Artistic Director
33	<i>Whispers of the Gods by Perp” St. Remy Asiegbu /</i>			2006	Artistic Director
34	Ekpete indigenous dance	Opobo cultural festival	Opobo Town	2007	Stage Manager and Animator
35	Ngunume indigenous dance	Opobo cultural festival	Opobo Town	2007	Stage manager and animator
36	Aguda by Tumbara Zubai	University of Port Harcourt Convocation ceremony	Uniport Arts Theatre	2011	Artistic Director

37	Boat Regatta Display	Rivers State Government	A performance in reception of the Heir to the British Throne, Prince Charles and his wife, Lady Diana in Port Harcourt.	1990	Fleet Admiral and Artistic Director
38	Boat Regatta Display	Rivers State Government	A performance in reception of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and the Nigerian Head of State, General Ibrahim Gbadamosi Babangida in Rivers State, Nigeria.	1993	Fleet Admiral and Artistic
39	Boat Regatta Display	Rivers State Government	A performance in Honour of His Excellency, General Olusegun Obasanjo	2000	Fleet Admiral and Artistic Director

The table above demonstrates the effort Bell-Gam has put in the practice and promotion of theatre. His interpretation of such plays which he authored to different parts of the world is captured in the table. However, this table does not exhaust the entire production credit of Henry Leopold Bell-Gam

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that Bell-Gam is not just a playwright and director but also an actor, choreographer and a singer. Among his written plays, Orukoro received both local and international attention as evident in the audience demand at different events. His consistency in

practicing African indigenous theatre is very novel and immortalizes him as a culture ambassador not just for the Opobo people but the entire Ijaw race and the African continent at large.

The analysis of Bell-Gam's effort in directing obviously presents him as a liberal director who is conscious of the collaborative inputs of the different collaborators in a production. His attitude portrays him as a man who believes in practicing what he preaches. His identified attitude on the directorial floor is also manifest in his plays, as leadership, tolerance and preservation and promotion of culture runs through his plays. From *Orukoro*, *Ube Republic*, *Hidden Treasure*, *Erebie*, *King Jaja*, *Mrs Edwin*, *No Sacrifice No Marriage* to *Igbuduogu* the issue of leadership, tolerance and peaceful resolution of conflict through dialogue are more prominent. His use of crowd scenes, chief priest/witch doctor/native doctor and traditional names are indications his undying love of the African culture and tradition. These are characteristics of the African communal existence.

His application of the *Duex Mechina* to resolve most of the conflicts in his plays and productions demonstrate his opinion on the role the gods play in the affairs of man. Indeed, Bell-Gam places serious premium on the unavoidable interference of the gods on the daily existence of man. Although, Bell-Gam was academically bagged his tertiary degrees in France his African belief system never left him as reflected in performances. Although, a Christian from the Anglican Communion, he has never failed to present and perform productions that showcases the African belief system.

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