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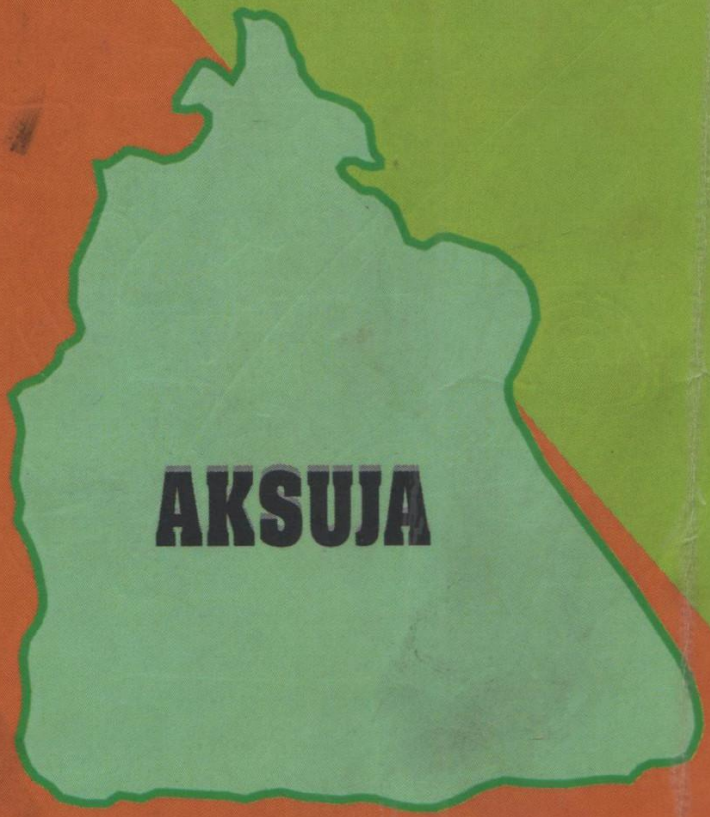

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Assessment of Educational Theatre Houses: Chinua Achebe and Crab Theatres

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Abstract

The study assesses the relationship between theatre architecture, structure, facilities, the use of space and personnel with regard to the evolution and development of the theatre. It discusses the architectural design of theatre structures, having in mind the necessary things needed to build a well equipped and professional Theatre House. The study also examines how those theatre houses have evolved, identifies the overall usability of theatre architecture as well as the physical arrangement and environmental adaptations to suit and accommodate varieties of productions and performances. It also examines the development and growth in design and technology. It assesses how functionally relevant and result-oriented the architectural spaces are, measurable by their ability to facilitate and enhance technical practice and process. The study made use of both the primary and secondary methods of data collection which included field work, personal observation, photographs and documentary method. There was an extensive use of library, oral interviews and discussions with persons associated with technical theatre practice in the two playhouses. From the findings, the playhouses in Nigeria are not adequately planned, structured and constructed by professional theatre architects and designers. There is also a progressive decay in these structures and production infrastructure which is due to poor management and insufficient funding. The study recommends that educational playhouses should adequately planned, structured and constructed with safety measures by professional theatre architects,

designers and builders. Theatre-houses/playhouses should be made inviting for audience members and practitioners: they should give delight to visitors and provide pride for owners and artists/artistes. They should be able to support performance, inspire and encourage intense intimacy of the audience, giving good feelings, anticipation and anxiety. These anomalies have to be rectified if theatre profession is to survive the stiff competition from other media of entertainment, education and information in this 21st Century of Information and Communication Technology.

Introduction

The Playhouse is an environment in a theatre in which the event occurs. The Playhouse or the Theatre House is one of the oldest existing forms, which deal with created environments and places in which plays are presented in the view of an audience. In his opinion, Mullin asserts that, "a Playhouse is a living organism inseparable from the plays produced within it. Just as the perfect house must be designed particularly for the persons who will live in it, the playhouse must be designed specifically for a producing group" (1).

Carlson and Carlsonalso add that "thePlayhouse provides a space for the performance of a dramatic text, cultural movement, a site of display for a dominant social class, an emblem of depravity and vice, a centre of political activism, a haven of retreat from the world of harsh reality" (8). From these assertions, the playhouse is a very important element of a theatre performance, structure and design process. According to Albright, Halstead and Mitchell, there are six methods of locating the stage action. These are "Formal (where background is neutral), Simultaneous (where several unrelated locales are represented at the same time), Multiple (where background is formalised with no suggestion of the specific locale), *Arena* ("primitive" organisation), Actualistic (where more or less 'environment' is believable) and Theatrical Staging (where action is located with a specific locale by means of scenery)" (146). The architectural design and structure contribute immensely to a dramatic performance by its method of organisation while the structure, style and architectural organisation of the playhouse have differed throughout history. This difference has heavily influenced the construction methods known to particular cultures. However, irrespective of their glaring differences, there are still

significant common tendencies, and functional similarities. They vary from culture to culture, from tradition to tradition and also within different theatre philosophical goals and objectives. Their interiors are mostly organised with fixed or movable seats in rows or layers, raked, dished and sometimes a fan shaped arrangement is used mostly in schools, placing the audience in layers. The architectural structure of theatre houses determines how an audience sees the performers on stage, influences the movements on the stage and establishes the relationship between the performers and scenery. It should be noted here that the period, architectural design, size, shape and arrangements of a theatre house are important factors in the functional use of a performance space. A theatre cannot function without the usefulness and the relevance of the structure of a theatrical building.

For any theatre to serve its purpose, the architectural design and structures must give a theatre its physical form, spatial configuration, purpose and function in preparation, production and presentation. The creation of space for theatrical performance needed for production purposes must consist of the stage, backstage, dressing rooms, utilities, work and storage spaces, the audience space, box office and parking lot.

The Origin and Evolution of Educational Theatre Houses in Nigeria

Educational Theatre is a place where theatre activities are taught, learnt and carried out through practical performances, in order to examine and assess the student creatively, theoretically, practically and intellectually. According to Banham, Hill and Woodward, "the Universities in the Anglophone nations of Africa played an important part in developing theatre activities from the late 1950s onward, both through the establishment or encouragement of imaginative performance venues and initiatives" (6). Archer, Cynthia and Hood give an insight into what could best be called Educational Theatre which "refers to production programmes generated by universities, colleges, secondary schools and primary schools, often as a part of their curriculum" (57). The Educational Theatre in Nigeria has undergone interesting evolution since about 1960 and its birth was pioneered by University College, Ibadan in the Department of English under Professor Molly Mahood, with Spearheads, Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham. In recognition of this move by Geoffrey Axworthy, the University gave approval for the development of the Arts Theatre as a centre for the promotion of cultural and academic

interests. The University of Ibadan Arts Theatre which was opened in 1955 is notably the first of such modern University Educational Theatre buildings of that time. It was originally conceived and designed to be a lecture hall/cinema house in which the staff and students could put on performances occasionally. From meeting with the University Council, the physical structure called the Arts Theatre was turned into a living Theatre. It was architecturally built to house a proscenium stage with about 300 capacity seating auditorium. The University Dramatic Society in 1961 making an experiment, took performances round the campus to student audiences in their Halls of Residence on a make shift stage. The aim of the Mobile Theatre was to spread the experience of good theatre to places and even outside the campus to demonstrate to schools and colleges as well as the community dramatic groups. The University College, Ibadan Dramatic Society (UCIDS) also embarked on taking drama to the people, by staging one-act plays written by members of the group to non theatre students using "dining halls". Gbilekaa asserts that "wherever they could find an audience, any empty space became a stage" (24).

According to Enendu in an oral interview with these researchers, the history of Nigerian theatre development cannot be complete without recognising the effort of Dexter Lindersay. He was a product of Yale, and a founding father of Nigerian theatre design and technology. He helped with the technical installations in the areas of scenery, lighting and other theatre equipment. Between 1970 and 1990, more university theatres and playhouses were built with the opening of more academic departments of Theatre Arts in Nigeria. It was a period that witnessed the development of the academic curricula of several Nigerian universities to include Theatre Arts, Performing Arts or Drama and English departments. Within this time, there was need to provide these institutions with performance areas, venues and studios.

Taking cognisance of the existence of the educational theatre in Nigeria, it is glaring that it has been made possible through contact with those of European origins. Through their coming into the country, some with their special interest in the art of the theatre; some universities as at that time were able to benefit from this contact and were also provided with facilities to be used in Theatre Arts studies. The Universities of Ibadan and Calabar and a few others benefited from this contact. A

number of technical facilities like lighting equipment, dimmer board, special effect lanterns, colour wheel, cables, electrical appliances, electronics, makeup kits, technical tools and materials were also imported to the schools. Nzewi asserts that like "the modern physical stage in Nigeria there is an unimaginative transfer of the Euro American stage" (437). Most of these features are found in most of the educational theatre houses in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as can be seen in the description below.

The Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre, University of Calabar

According to Enendu, before the formal commissioning of the theatre-house of the University of Calabar, productions and workshops in the institution made use of an assembly hall, courtyards, gardens, and other informal venues including the refectories in the halls of residence in the University. Thus, every performance used a makeshift stage. The *Arts Theatre* of the University of Calabar was initially conceived and designed as a central lecture hall in 1976. The design was by *Arch-Design Associated Architects and Housing Consultants* (*ADAHC*). When the plan was mooted that this lecture hall which had capacity for 365 should be converted to a standard theatre, a new design was needed. Therefore, professional firms and organisations were incorporated. *Anwana and Associates*, a consultancy engineering firm was invited to take care of the structural works. *Associated Quality Surveyors* along Marian Road, Calabar prepared the bill of quantities; *G.F. Appio and Associates* was responsible for the electrical installations, *Light Limited*, member of Theatre Project Group, 10 Longacre London, was supervisory consultant; *Asuquo Works Limited* took charge of the physical construction of the building. The Chief Architect in the Works Department of the University monitored the progress of the entire project.

The Pioneer Head of the Department was K. W. D. Lyndersay, a Trinidadian and graduate of Yale University, USA, who took charge of the facility. The building was then called the *New Arts Theatre*. Lindersay, a specialist in technical theatre, who initiated the idea for the construction of this new theatre was supported by the then Vice Chancellor, E. A. Ayandele. In 1996/97 academic year, Prof. Kevin Ogon-Etta became the Vice Chancellor of the University of Calabar. He undertook to name streets and buildings in the University after famous Nigerians. It was then

that NAT (*New Arts Theatre*) was named after Africa's foremost novelist, Chinua Achebe as the *Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre*, the name which the building bears till today.

Architectural Design in Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre

The building has a "simple" architectural form and functional theatre spaces. There is a main drive way in front of the Theatre. On the sides, left and right, are smaller foot entrances into the theatre. Behind the theatre is the main gate into the university. On the right, looking from the front view, is a lecture hall belonging to the Faculty of Agriculture. On the left is a storey building that was formerly used by Law Faculty. The entrance to the Theatre is an 8-step stairway, leading into the foyer with two and a half meters wide corridor. This is marked off by an inner wall of short pillars linked by horizontally arranged two-inch galvanised metal pipes raised to about waist level. In between the entrances is the box office and the canteen; there are three doors on each side of the foyer leading into the Auditorium and four doors in front located in pairs on both sides. These four doors serve as main entrances into the theatre. There is also a small door in front of the foyer which leads into the control room and projection room. The box office is accessible through a door from the main auditorium. It has large units of windows compartmentalised into four with burglary proofs and each window serving as sales box for tickets during productions.

In the Arts Theatre building is the control room that controls the electric switch panels, fire alarm, control panel, inter-communication switch systems, and stage lighting and sound control systems. The control room is made up of about twenty-three and a half square meters space area reached from the foyer through a wooden door with four steps. The control room is on a higher level than the auditorium floor with an unobstructed view of the stage through glass screened sound-proof windows. The control room has its front on the back-wall of the auditorium after the last rows of seats. It has white painted walls and terrazoed floors. Illumination is from two sets of twin fluorescent fittings and wall-mounted lights of 100watt lamps with cupped reflectors and a long adjustable extension arm.

In the control room is the master switching system of the electrical units, the inter-communication system, load-selector switches

for both the stage and the house lights, advance manual control (AMC) system with the identification of red, white and blue presets and the sound console. The cables run in solid drawn heavy gauge screwed conduit to avoid any kind of interference. The sound control console is powered from a standard 13amp plug located on the wall at the base of the equipment. There are two record turntables with pick-up arms, a grow locating device and pick-up arm dropping device, two tape decks with recording and play-back facilities, one real-to-real magnetic tape and portable deck for a compact disc.

The projection booth is directly above the control room. It is reached through a cat-walk by ladders. The booth also links the control room which commands an uninterrupted and unobstructed view of the stage through the large plain glass panel. There are also sliding sound proof windows left and right of the booth. In the projection booth are two 35mm film projectors, two patt. 818 2000 watts, follow spots lights and the dimmer rack system. The control room and the projection room are air conditioned to help reduce heat from the control systems. On the left and right sides of the auditorium is the rest room (lavatory) for male and female users respectively, covering an area each of about eleven square meters.

The Theatre Space in *Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre*

The auditorium covers a total space area of about 887.7 square metres and seats about 365 spectators. For better seeing, the auditorium is made of a gradual raked floor, separated into seven equal horizontal tiers by fifteen centimeter risers. Each tier has three rows of deep blue plastic chairs and each on the same elevation to the next tier with removable back. The seats are in twenty-four straight line horizontal rows. There are two central vertical aisles and two side aisles of two and a half meters wide each and one large central cross-over with two others in front and behind the rows of seats. Each seat has two arm-rests and folding wooden slap that serve as support for writing pads/notes during lectures. The general spacing accommodation of the seats is about thirty centimeters each. There are wooden louver blade windows fitted onto two bays also on the lower and the higher parts of the wall.

The Stage

The theatre has a stage that is one and a half metres higher than the auditorium floor. There is no designed orchestra pit, although there is a good space between the stage and the auditorium to be used as orchestra pit. The stage is structured after the conventional proscenium style. It is about five-metres deep from the proscenium line, with a demountable fore-stage. The fore-stage is extended into the auditorium by about seven metres. There are five runs of wooden risers to drop from the stage with a height of over forty-three centimeters. On both sides of the fore-stage is a narrow concrete step unit with over five risers terminating towards two double leafed wooden doors that open to the outside, usually used for loading the stage and for actors. The proscenium opening is sixteen meters wide and five meters high. It has a false proscenium for narrowing the width and height of the proscenium opening. There are also wing spaces on both sides of the stage extending four and a half meters to five meters wide on the stage left and right respectively. The floor of the stage is made with two layers of hard wood, in units of ten centimeters wide and eight centimeters thick joined mostly by screws, tongued and grooved, well treated. The stage floor has a dark brown stained finish, to avoid reflection of stage lighting.

Stage/Staging Equipment

The stage has permanent, semi-permanent and flexible stage equipment and installations to facilitate the use and operations of stage scenery. There is stage loft or tower which houses the flying mechanisms and systems. The stage tower is about twenty-one meters. On each side of the stage is a flying gallery of about five and a half meters high. There are curtains, which have a dark red background for regular use and velvet milk for ceremonial use. The curtain is tied to pipe batten and operated in a counter-weight system to provide safety and easy operation. After the house curtain is the false proscenium: it is a device in flexible use of two dimensional fabrications in two and three inches galvanised hollow angular pipe framing. It is a unit of three pieces-two vertical tormentors parallel to the proscenium wall, left and right of the proscenium openings and one horizontal unit, the teaser, which runs across the upper units of the opening with thickness receding upstage. The false proscenium of the Arts Theatre reduces the proscenium opening by 20 percent for an intimate, indoor, interior and realistic staging.

There are five sets of permanent, but flexibly fixed masking units between the false proscenium and the cyclorama. They are made of black velvet cloth or velour to mask and mark out the offstage areas from the view. They are the leg drop, back drop, border drop, translucent drop. They are cloth pieces of different sizes in width and length suspended on two-inch galvanised hollow pipes on the fly, with some weight of chained long sand-bags attached to the base in a folded sewn porch to impart strength to the cloth usually flown up, stored in the loft when not used and mounted on the counter-weight lines. The third and the fifth leg drops are large and when operated, cover the whole breadth of the stage with black velvet cloth. The upstage limit of the stage is marked out by a large plain, off-white, sheet of cloth, the cyclorama (CYC). The Cyc is rigged unto a two-inch galvanised hollow pipe on top, and mounted for raising and lowering movements as desired.

The counter-weight lines are estimated to carry about 695kg in a single purchase system. According to Wilson, "an Italian, Glacomo Torelli (1608-1678), devised the counterweight system in which weight hung on a series of robes and pulleys balanced the scenery, allowing heavy scenery to be moved easily by a few stagehands" (83). There are also about twenty–five single cleat spot lines distributed around the main stage area from the manila rope running down from the pulleys and operated from another gallery at stage right. Its estimated load capacity is 195kg per metersquare. The counter-weight system also supports the lighting bars and the cinema screen.

At the stage left above the flying gallery is the loading gallery. The proscenium wall is opened to accommodate two small door-ways extending access on the flying gallery into the cat-walk that links the first and second lighting bridges down to the projection room. On the roof of the stage tower and the roof above the auditorium are six giant electric powered air absorbing ducts fitted with a fanning machine that take out hot air from the heat dub lighting instruments into the atmosphere. There is provision for back stage area and the dressing room is located on both sides of the stage, measuring 110 and 80 square meters. The rooms have lockable dressing tables with mirrors. There are also toilets on the stage right for male and stage left for female.

Technical Installations: Scenery, Properties and Sightlines

Scenery is an element of theatrical production coordinated by the technical director. The coordination ranges from scenery of materials, the general handling, the construction in terms of space and equipment, their assembly, painting, rigging, shifting and running, the strike, disposition and storage machines. There is provision for construction of models, scenery and properties and a loading space for the storage of scene and property materials. There is provision for rigging, sinking, flying, rolling and trapping of scenery. The scenery and properties are painted in place on stage, readjusted, altered or accepted for the performance. At the end of the performance, the scene and properties are dismantled, a process which is technically called striking and disposed of or stored in the scene dock for re-use in future productions. The scene shop is positioned close tothe stage. Scenic units are built to the maximum sizes allowed by the size of the doors and passage ways. The painting is also done on stage in the absence of paint floor, paint shop or paint frame. The paint tools and materials are stored in the space located near the projection room. Properties (props) needed for productions are designed, built, brought, rented or borrowed. The stage has wing spaces at the left and right for the deployment of the stage properties.

Sound Devices

The Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre is located in a very busy and noisy part of the campus. The noise, most especially from the lecture rooms, the corridors and open spaces around the vicinity, flows into the auditorium through the doors. The doors and windows between the foyer and the auditorium are not sound proof. There are channels for noise flow into the theatre house. The ceiling of the Arts Theatre, the side walls and their structural layout are governed by sound distribution requirements which prevent reverberation or echo. The straight parallel and symmetrical side walls of the Arts Theatre are broken by niches to enhance acoustics and sound distribution. The sloping ceiling and several-sided walls in the auditorium help correct acoustic shortcomings. The floor is hard and gently raked; the seats are bare hard plastics, and the ceiling is flat while the walls are symmetrical and untreated with fabrics.

There are about sixteen loudspeaker socket outlets, distributed around the theatre connected to the console. There is a separate monitor

speaker with volume control provided in the control room. There are microphone sockets around the stage which are also wired back to a patch panel in the control room. There is a talk-back unit that links the control rooms. the projection room, the box office, to the two dressing rooms, the lighting bridges and the flying gallery. The central control of the talk-back unit is placed at the stage manager's control desk situated at the stage Mangers corner, stage left, at the foot corner of the tormentor. On the two sides of the Arts Theatre proscenium wall, are heavy-duty loudspeakers for speech effects and music reinforcement and for public address system. A speaker is placed on the acoustic board, centre of the stage and two other movable speakers on the stage floor.

LightingEquipment

According to Enendu, the Auditorium has three rows of fluorescent fittings with about four-feet tubes in a fitting covered with a prismatic diffuser to give general illumination of about 15 foot-candles good for lectures, conferences and reading of production programmes. There are also 150 watts, GLS parabolic sealed beam lights, mounted on the ceiling, used also to illuminate the house before, during and at the end of productions. There are two strand lighting, profile spot lights, Patt. 818, of 2000watts mounted on the second bridge located in ceiling slots overhead the front section of the auditorium above. Most lights used are Bifocal Spot Lights, the Rank Strand Patt. 808 that burns (2000watts), the T-84, 1000watts, the Rank Strand Patt. 828 (2000watts), Fresnel Spot Lights and other special lights like Parblaze Beam Light and the Strobe Light (Stobotron). A gas-filled tetrode twenty-four, 2000watts Profile Spot.

Each of the lanterns in the Arts Theatre is linked to the dimmer rack and the lighting console through a network of electrical wiring using a 2.5mm cable. There are also twelve lighting boxes with 15amps mating plugs, as major high-ways that supply the total electric energy. The control equipment uses the standard range of Rank Strand Electric Thyristor Dimmers to form an Advanced Manual Control (AMC) system. It has a total of sixty channels of 2.5kilowatts per channel. The switch systems for the house lights, the control panel for the colour changing wheel and the control system mounted on the wall of the control room are used mostly for special effects. According to Enendu, "the greatness of the Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre of the University of Calabar largely

depends on the number, type and special characteristics of the stage lighting instruments and the control equipment available for use in productions" (oral interview).

Security Installations

Above the stage, there are towers and within the auditorium roof, there are six smoke vents or air ducts which are operated from the prompt corner in the control room, used to draw smoke and fumes out from the theatre. Also, as part of safety procedure, the spacing of counterweight lines is a minimum of 15 centimeters. This ensures that the objects suspended and flown do not fold one another. There are several exit doors in case of emergency. The fore-stage has crash-doors which comprise double-swing units which also help in loading the stage scenery and provide for fast flow and movement of people at times of panic and emergency. There are "Exit" signs on both side doors of the auditorium connected to auxiliary power accumulator source in the control room, set to ring when a particular area has unusual rise in temperature and heat. This is to aid immediate exit at emergency and the accumulator charger systems are always sure to be in a functional state.

Also in the *Arts Theatre* are permanent fire-fighting devices since the major source of hazard in the theatre is said to be fire. Thus, devices are in the auditorium, control room, projection booth and the back stage area. Hand fire extinguishers are also available, hung on the walls different strategic positions.

Workshop and Storage Space

The storage room is located beside the projection room on the decked floor. The store provides lockable storage place and mostly unused lanterns, detached seats and valuable stored items. There is also a loading space for the storage of scenic and property materials at the foyer and a separate storage space within the academic block complex of the department. There is no architectural space or provision for the processes of designing, drafting, delivery of materials, construction and the painting of scenery, although there is an alternative arrangement of a scene-shop, scene-dock, property room in a separate building within the academic block complex of the department. This is due to the architectural limitations and inadequacies of the Arts Theatre space.

Enendu describes it as "a non-self-contained theatre ". It should be however noted that some of the above described equipment and facilities are presently non-functional following poor maintenance culture.

The Crab Theatre, University of Port Harcourt

The University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre, popularly known as the "*Crab Theatre*, is located at the Delta Park campus of the university and was founded by the Late Professor Ola Rotimi in 1979. Ola Rotimi designed a structure, a house that looked like the Crab, a semi aquatic crustacean creature. The crab is a cherished delicacy of the coastal people of the Niger Delta. The Theatre itself is surrounded with green vegetation giving the impression of a marine environment. The CRAB as identified by the founder is an acronym for Creative Review of Arts and Books. It was built mainly for entertainment functions. *The educational role of it has overridden it.* The *Crab Theatre*, according to the theatre manager, Gyapong, was designed by the then Director and Founder, Ola Rotimi, to serve seven different purposes thus: to project the image of the University artistically, enhance communal and intellectual life, workshop for the Department of Creative Arts (now Theatre Arts) in the area of theatre practice, serve as venue for public lectures, public concerts and symposia/conferences, serve as venue for the Certificate in Theatre Arts Programme, thus relieving the Department of Theatre Arts of her problem of lecture space and serve as workshop for Department of Theatre Arts in terms of theatre practice. In all, it was to assist the University to reduce the cost of jobs that demand artistic skills; the personnel of this theatre were to work in pilot roles as technical acting instructors, under whom the certificate and degree students should learn the rudiments of the theatre and undergo apprenticeship in the technical and histrionic aspects of theatre. Since theinception of the theatre, eminent theatre practitioners have piloted the affairs of the *Crab* as a Theatre House and as a Department (Oral Interview).

Architectural Design

The external structure of this Arts Theatre is in the form of the

Crab. It has the Crab surrounded with trees and green vegetation to show the habitat of the Crab. There is a big parking lot with a canteen at the right hand corner of the park although not attached to the theatre itself. The canteen also serves as the theatre secretariat for users and visitors to send and receive information concerning performances in the theatre. The *Crab Theatre* is a story building. The entrance leads from two wooden doors painted in blue. From the entrance is the box office constructed with light plywood and painted blue. The painting is to avoid termite penetration and destruction of the wood. The box office is accessible from the main door of the Theatre.

The control room is accessed through a flight of steps from the entrance behind the auditorium. In the stair case by the left is a small storage room used for the storage of instruments. By the left is the door to the control room. In the control room, are the Theatre Manager's and the Technical Designer's desks. The room also serves as an administrative unit and the Stage Manager's Office for findings, enquiries and information concerning the *Crab Theatre*. There is sound console, sharing space with the lighting console. There is an observation window for the console operator which gives an unobstructed view of the stage. In the control room is the master switching system of the electrical units and the lighting control box. The control room's inner door leads to the editing suit which is a practical room for film studies. In the suit are the facilities used in film editing like the monitor/video machine, central processing unit (CPU), keyboard, uninterrupted power supply system (UPS) and printer.

The Theatre Space in the *Crab Theatre*

The auditorium is accessed through a double door made from cedar. The auditorium door is made to carry some symbolic designs on it, ranging from traditional African instruments/drums, dancers, masquerade /mask, performers, ancient costumes worn by performers, representing the theatre as a performing and entertainment platform. The Crab Theatre houses about 250 audience members. It has a low raked seating arrangement making use of four rows of movable plastic seats. The fourth and the highest row of seats is constructed in a balcony separated from those on the third level with short pillars and wood raised to about waist level and leading through a six stairway. There are two

large windows and a single door on the left and right side of the auditorium. There are Exit signs on the doors, lit after shows for easy exit. The window has a thick, deep red house curtain to darken the auditorium andenhance good lighting effect in cases of day performance.

The Stage and Staging Equipment

The Crab Theatre has a stage structure of the thrust, designed and considered more to be like the action-space of Traditional African Theatre with its pit-like stage to facilitate a good audience-actor relationship. There are two doors from the back stage area into the auditorium. There is a back stage space for the actors directly behind the stage which serves as a costume and makeup room. In the back stage also are two toilets and a bathroom. The stage has no staging equipment and installations to facilitate the use and operations of stage scenery.

Technical Installations: Scenery, Properties and Sightlines

In the *Crab Theatre*, the stage is bare but it permits any construction during performances. Most scenic constructions are done either inside or outside the theatre auditorium. According to Boyle Adikiba, the theatre technical director, there are two dimensional flats, one riser, a carved head, tree trunk (three dimensional set unit), tap head, tree holders, metal base and a few other stage properties and scenery in the theatre. The scenery and properties are painted and constructed on stage. There is a minimum scene shop located behind the back stage in a detachable building from the theatre building. The properties needed for productions in the theatre are designed, built, bought, and some borrowed.

Sound Devices

Patrick Acha, the theatre sound and lighting designer mentioned several devices available in the theatre to include: microphones, speakers, amplifier, DVD/CD Dec which enhance sound production. There is also a set of musical instruments and a Television set, Recorder and a Monitor incase of recording in the theatre. There are 2 super speed rewind and long play devices, old digital camera for recording, and desktop system unit. Also available is the editing system/machine.

Lighting Equipment

According to the manager, the most used lights in the theatre are the Par cans since they are said to be accessible, easy to maintain with cheap and affordable parts. There are Paro 64, 1000ww, 6 channel Racks with good capacity, Dimmer Rack/Mixer, Amord Cabbles of 1000mm, 6 Ch DMX and Analog Dimmer Pack System connection, a T Spot Light almost like a Follow spot, 6x2 CH 2000 watt Dimmer Pack. The rigging positions are not permanent. They vary from one production to another depending on the needs of the technical designer. Each of the lanterns in the *Crab Theatre* is linked to the dimmer rack in the control room of the theatre.

Security Installations

The theatre is located in the most secure part of the campus close to the University security post at the Delta Park entrance. It is said by the theatre users that this part of the campus is more secure than the other entrances. There is provision for fire extinguisher positioned at the entrance to the control room in case of fire outbreak from the control room.

Workshop and Storage Space

In the Crab Theatre, the control room is also used for the storage of lighting equipment, properties, costumes and sound facilities. From the structure of the theatre, there is no special space for construction and storage of theatre facilities, although a room has been later attached to the *Crab Theatre* from the back stage area to enable the construction and storage of scenic units. However, the space is not secure since it is an open space with half walls.

Summary of Findings

From the findings, there is progressive decay in architectural structures and production infrastructure which is due to poor management, insufficient funding and poor maintenance culture. Theatre roofs, ceiling, walls, stage floors, auditorium, furniture and other architectural features and installations such as lighting instruments, sound and acoustic systems, scenic devices, costume and make-up are in

a state of disrepair. One may generalise that many theatre playhouses in Nigeria, as represented by these two playhouses in focus, lack secure parking spaces for their visitors. Some of the auditoria are defective with inadequate and badly functional facilities. There are no functional technical facilities necessary for staging elaborate shows. Spectators endure hard and badly-shaped seats, inadequate and bad ventilation,uneven temperature and other discomforts. At times, rows of seats are so close together that a long-legged person is uncomfortable with poor *sightlines*. The stages are narrow with tight back stages. The back stage spaces are either non-existent or too insufficient for free movement of cast, crew and production equipment. The performer's area which is the stage and backstage spaces, which is the engine room that propels the functioning of theatre presentations,unfortunately, appears to be the most neglected by architects in the design of the theatre houses.

There are inadequate fire-fighting facilities and unavailability of trained personnel to fight fire out breaks in the theatre in the event of one. The audience, theatre personnel and properties are therefore always at great risk. Some fundamental architectural spaces are glaringly absent. These include spaces related to audience comfort (located in front of the playhouse), spaces needed for production preparation, production facilitation and storage of production equipment and workshop, car parks, loading and off loading curbs, lobby, check room, a lounge, and an auditorium balcony for audience. There is the absence of formal orchestra pit, stage traps and dips, basement, rehearsal space, backstage space for handling of scenery, properties, costumes and lights. Many of the theatre houses within the study even lack scene docks, loading bays, scene shop, or work space, for constructions and paintings of scenery and properties. There is also no formal space for the assembling, flying and sinking of scenery and rigging of lights. They also lack functional and decent lavatories, with poor provision of water supply and electricity.

Conclusion

The architectural design, atmosphere and environment of the theatre space, together with the size, location and the character of a theatre building, influence the quality of performances. Although from the theatre history it is glaring that there has been no such thing as an ideal theatre which means that there is no perfect theatre because each type of theatre and stage configuration presents different experience and challenges to stage lighting, technical directing, performance organisation and safety standards due to the architectural layouts. The quality of theatre experience can also be influenced by the nature and characteristics of the physical structure of a given theatre.

Therefore, educational theatre houses should be adequately planned, structured and constructed with safety standards. After all, a good theatre, according to Arthur Penn, "emits an atmosphere of mysterious anticipation into which it draws audience and then disappears into itself, allowing collective imagination to become the structure..., it should offer itself with tenderness" (30). In all, the theatre style, décor and shape can please, offend and even distract from the functioning in the theatre.

Recommendations

It is recommended that facilities for preparing for production as well as performance should include all of the following, among others:

1) scene shop for the construction, painting, and assembling of scenery as well as storage of equipment, materials and finished scenery;
2) property room for the storage of furniture and bulky properties, and for the construction, modification or repair of stage properties;
3) costume room for the construction and alteration of costumes as well as facilities for their laundry, dyeing, cleaning, and pressing;
4) costume storage room for the storage of costumes or costume pieces for re-use,
5) light shop as a work space for the lighting personnel;

6) lighting storage room for lighting accessories, spare parts, equipment and instrument,

7) control booth(s) for lighting and sound control board operators and at times the light and sound console in separate rooms but linked by a large sound-proof window where signals could be exchanged between the operators directly;

8) rehearsal room or rooms with space approximating that of each stage space the theatre operates, which is essential for allowing sets of performers to prepare while another is on stage;

9) dressing rooms comforting and close to the stage, appropriately lighted and well equipped with showers, private rest rooms facilities, mirrors for the application of makeup, restrooms, and showers for the performers and crew;

10) greenroom space for the performers to relax before or between scenes. It is also a place where performers and crew members assemble to receive instructions or notes. The green room space as well as the dressing room should have heating and air-conditioning systems that will not damage the actor's vocal cords;

11) business offices should be provided with space for box office, facilities for taking and dispensing tickets and securing of funds, work space for personnel like Theatre Managers and artistic directors;

12) Canteen space should be provided which permits eating and drinking while waiting for the performance to commence.

Theatre should be constructed to allow for a variety of performance types and encourage the people watching as well as exteriors that are inviting and auditoria that draw audience and artistes together. The stage or portion of the stage should be on a lift to allow presentation on more than one level at a time. Adequate wing and fly spaces are essential allowing for large-scale work and multiple set pieces. Ideally, the theatre should be sound-proofed against the outside noise, and extraneous sounds within the structure itself which includes the dressing rooms, the shop, rehearsal areas, the remote-control switches, dimmers, passage outside, the foyers

and lobbies. The materials used to finish the walls, ceiling and floor of the auditorium have a great impact on the reflection of the sound. The ceiling generally slopes towards the rear of the house, the floor raked, or inclined from the stage to the rear of the house.

Fire extinguishers should be located in easily accessible and clearly identified locations in all shops, on the stage and in the control room. Fire-fighting facilities should be installed in all the theatres. Authorities concerned should check and enforce safety regulations in the construction of theatre houses. Theatre designers should update their knowledge by reading current books. They should also be sponsored for further trainings, workshops, conferences and seminars regularly. Government and non-governmental organisations should help in funding these educational theatre houses in collaboration with the theatre technologists in the building, renovation and installation of the theatre with newly invented technologies. Good ventilation and cooling units contribute to the comfort of the audience, and this should also be considered during installation exercises.

Endnotes

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