The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:
http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/

Available through a partnership with

Scroll down to read the article.
IX hours of flight aboard a Lufthansa craft began at 11.55pm on Saturday October 12. The twelve versatile Nigerian performing artistes were full of trepidation about the prospect of their current performance tour of Germany but fortunately the three-man directorial team had past experiences to draw on - performances in Italy (1987 and 1992) on the platform of the Kakaaki Arts company. Richard Lang, the chief strategist of the entire AFRIKA PROJEKT '96 and architect of the present grand cultural exchange with Germany was restless too. He reviewed action plans regularly with the directors.

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

Personally, I remembered Cora's words: 'if you don't take warm clothes with you, thick socks and strong tennis shoes, you will die of cold, I tell you Jahman.' Yet, the Frankfort cold was more than we bargained for. The five ladies in the team cut a pitiable sight. Dancer Christie Okougbo, who against all warnings wore a nylon blouse was...
freezing while our song-bird Stella Ayanlade already appeared set to take ill.

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

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

Unfirm Steps

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

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

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

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

‘Yes, I think so’, said Ben Tomoloju the project consultant.

‘But, where is Saidit?’ became the chorus of virtually every other member of the team. ‘Could one of us have disappeared so soon?’ Our eyes travelled around the flamboyant environs of the airport, deepening burrows creasing our foreheads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Ah, ah... look our boxes,’ announced Richard. Behind us a big wooden box bearing drums and other materials for the stage set had come up through the lift — it was too big for the belt— and was being trolleyed down the hallway by a huge-chested guy who must have been cursing in his mind the owners of the monstrous, heavy box that indeed looked out of place amidst the flurry of cute leather bags littering the sides of the conveyor belt.

Richard met the big guy and announced that the guy had said he was charging us 10dm (N500.00) for every 1.5 minutes the box rested on the trolley. We were all alarmed. So much money for an ordinary trolley that you get for the whole day just with a bribe of N20.00 in Nigeria, I remembered another of Cora’s words: ‘Germany is very expensive. You pay for everything, including water.’

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

‘You get to that office (pointing behind us) and wait, they will attend to you. The rest, let’s go.’ Ben strolled off eastward, with a confidence that marvellled me. The rest of us passed through a gate, which indeed should be aptly tagged, Gate of No Return—actually it is marked ‘No Entry’ on the other side, which means once you pass through it, you can’t go back into the luggage hall.

In fact, there were these two stern-faced security men in muti who eyed everyone entering.

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

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

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

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.

The Konrads stayed with us in the lobby of the airport for almost 30 minutes as we expected the arrival of our huge wooden box. The problematic box kept Richard Lang running helter skelter, making enquiries, trying to ensure that the box arrived on time. Within that interval, the Mayor and his wife got to know more about the group of Nigerians. He had enthusiastically awaited this day. Now we were here. The Konrads modestly dressed were full of life in spite of their age, stepping gingerly into the bubbly youthful rhythms of the Africans as they embraced them. In their smattering English, the Mayor and his wife gave a very quick and short history of Haag and the Bavarian people.
The peace of the environment was affective. Trees were robed in the colourful garb of autumn in transition. Now we came into a more colourful scape with the leaves wearing orange and rose drapes. Living quarters sprouted like dots in the vast land mass.

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

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

Haag

... flows in solemnly through the fluid melody of Aja Kubo. Time was 11.20 a.m., a sign indicates that Freising is 12 kilometres behind us. Haag was sleepy, desolate, but so beautiful. Houses, trees, flowers, gardens. But where were the people?

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

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

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

SONG flowed after song as the bus, driven by a young lady, Monica snaked its way through the impressive road network, heading toward the outskirts of town enroute Haag. Ben broke into Benin royal songs lifted from Aratasin, a dance drama he had packaged for the Atlanta '96 outing by Nigeria.
The white house has an attic room panelled with well polished white wood. The Germans it seemed have perfected the use of wood in the shelter provision.

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

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

We went into the St. Johanness kirche, an old church with a very interesting story. Inside, it bears 15th century Gothic architecture and had only recently being renovated. The legend of the father of Protestant Christianity Martin Luther bestrode the church, as Richard was to reate the history of the Germanic tribe and their relationship with the former colonisers, the Roman Empire, detailing how in the 1750s, a German, Caesar was the king of the Roman Empire and he ended up regaining for his people part of what they had earlier lost to the Romans.

Outside, is a tall blue and white pole that is only a bit more shapely than a broadcasting antennae. ‘What is this?’ I ask, continuing ‘I have seen it in almost all the villages we passed through. ‘It is called malbaum. You find it in every village and all these pictures you see on it are sculptural motifs representing all the trades and vocations you will find in the village. So that by seeing it you know quickly what kind of trade the people in that village engage in. Let’s say you need a mechanic for your car, you will know whether you can get one here.’

I was amazed. ‘So its that functional.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then the band of five youngmen in tee shirts and denim jeans trouses strike out again performing ‘Where is my Way’. There was no mistaking the Aerosmithian kind of charge up rhythms and rumbling guitar works laced with explosive drumming. The music is exquisitely loud and moving that I personally restrain myself from dashing out to the explosive drumming. The music is exquisitely loud and moving that I personally restrain myself from dashing out to the newspaper.”

A huge banner with very bold and assertive letterings welcome our entourage to the Hebbel Theatre, which from outside has a rustic bearing. It is said to be over 100 years old. ‘It is the dream of many European actors to perform on the Hebbel stage,’ disclosed Matthias our guide who has worked long in the theatre. Calmly he noted: ‘so we are lucky to be here. This is Berlin’s most important and oldest theatre, with a lot of history behind it. All the important critics and media men come here and they can be very harsh in their comments.’ My heart jumped again. Well, we disembarked at the back of the theatre building and noticed that Norbert Young kept starring at Inse. On the next day when we got to the theatre he wanted to learn the German words with which to enquire after Inse.

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

**EBBEL is an intriguing theatre. A massive auditorium with two upper sitting areas. The stage has depth, so much depth that we had to divide it into three parts for our performance. It sits about 600 in its cosy bowl which in spite of age still looks regal. But for an African performance with loud drumming and singing, it could be dysfunctional.**
Lagos. Running the play holds no fascination for the director. We were hardly two minutes into the first scene when, he stopped us. That henceforth was the mode of the rehearsals. No problems though. We knew our director's style.

Hebbel is an intriguing theatre. A massive auditorium with two upper sitting areas. The stage has depth, so much depth that we had to divide it into three parts for our performance. It sits about 600 in its cozy bowl which in spite of age still looks regal. But for an African performance with loud drumming and singing, it could be dysfunctional. Its acoustic is boxed up, so that the sound keeps circulating within a restrained orbit. Our singers and drummers had problems coping because the sound travels into the box almost 60 feet above, gets trapped in there releasing a late feed back.

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

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

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

Matthias seems more relaxed this Monday morning. The cast members are expecting the opening night. The rehearsal is more relaxed and enjoyable. 'Wow, they have destroyed our stage.' lamented the dancer Christie, when she saw what he had been done to the gate that cost us so much money and energy to build in Lagos.

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

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

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

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

And PRONTO!

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

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

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

And so to Chemnitz we proceeded. Matthias was too overwhelmed by his success (the press actually swarmed around praising him) to drive, although he claimed that he was too tired and so would want to sleep through the journey. Long took the wheel.

Freezing on the Mountain

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

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

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

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

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

To situate the floor plan for a performance of the play Amona on this small stage space was trying. Just making that decision alone took almost one
hour of debates, trials and mock settings before we arrived at a manageable design.

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

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

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

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

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

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