

**HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MULTIFUNCTIONAL THEATRE
DESIGNS OF SELECTED UNIVERSITY-BASED THEATRE VENUES IN
NIGERIA**

By

**EDEM, Ekaette Brian
Department of Performing Arts
Akwa Ibom State University,
Nigeria**

ABSTRACT

The University-based theatres provide unique spaces that serve multiple functions simultaneously, blurring the boundaries between teaching, learning, and cultural exchange. By creating environments where students can explore, practice, and perform their craft, these theatres contribute to the development of future generations of Nigerian artists and scholars. At the same time, the presence of these venues within university communities helps to foster a vibrant cultural life on campus, encouraging a wider appreciation of the arts among students and staff from diverse fields of study. Regardless of their importance as cultural spaces, University-based theatres in Nigeria face varieties of challenges that impact their ability to thrive like; technical limitations, staffing challenges, financial support and many others. By highlighting the importance of University-based theatres as centers for learning and creativity, this study raises awareness of the value of arts education and encourages greater investment in training and professional development for young artists. The study recommends increase investment in University-based theatres through government funding, corporate sponsorships, and community donations to support infrastructural development, staff training, and production costs. In conclusion, the development of university-based theatres in Nigeria represents a significant investment in the future of the country's cultural landscape and the incorporation of multifunctional designs has been instrumental in ensuring their viability and relevance for years to come.

KEYWORDS: University-Based Theatre, Theatre Venues, Theatre Development, Multifunctional Theatre.

INTRODUCTION

The University-based theatres are performance venues that are integral to their parent educational institutions, functioning as both teaching and learning spaces for students and faculty, as well as cultural centers for the wider community. These theatres serve as unique platforms for the exploration, development, and dissemination of the performing arts, blending the academic pursuit of knowledge with the practical application of these skills in a professional context. From the nurturing of emerging talent to the fostering of interdisciplinary collaborations, the university-based theatre ecosystem offers a dynamic and dynamic environment for artistic growth and expression. The presence of these theatres on university campuses also facilitates the exchange of knowledge and ideas between different academic disciplines, promoting cross-pollination of ideas and innovative approaches to theatrical

performance. These venues often serve as important cultural touchstones within their communities, providing a common ground for the celebration of local traditions and the exploration of universal human experiences. By offering a range of performances, workshops, and events that engage a diverse array of audiences, university-based theatres not only contribute to the cultural vibrancy of their communities, but also create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and shared understanding across different backgrounds and perspectives. These venues can act as cultural bridges, connecting local and international communities through collaborative performances, exchange programs, and joint artistic ventures. By offering student performances, workshops, and community events, university-based theatres can inspire a lifelong love of the arts and help cultivate the next generation of theatre practitioners, patrons, and enthusiasts, contributing to the continued vitality and growth of the arts sector.

In a simple term, the University-based Theatre is a place where theatre practices are taught, learnt and carried out through practical performances, in order to examine and assess the students intellectually. It can also be called Educational Theatre. This theatre is concerned with the production of festivals and seasons of plays. Archer, Cynthia and Hood gave an insight into what could best be called an educational theatre. To Archer, Cynthia and Hood, it “refers to production programmes generated by universities, colleges, secondary schools and primary schools, often as a part of their curriculum” (57).

Indeed, Nigerian universities have served as hubs of theatrical activity for half a century, providing invaluable opportunities for the development and presentation of dramatic arts. From the premiere of Wole Soyinka's plays at the University of Ibadan in 1960, to the countless student productions that have graced stages across the country, university-based theatres have been crucial in promoting Nigerian theatre culture and nurturing the nation's emerging talent. In fact, many of Nigeria's most renowned artists have emerged from the rich creative cauldron of university-based theatres. The establishment of these educational theatres in Nigeria was heavily influenced by European traditions of theatrical education and production. During the colonial era, the British established universities and introduced their own curriculum, which included theatre as part of the arts and humanities. This led to the establishment of drama departments and theatre venues within Nigerian universities, with many early productions heavily influenced by European theatre styles, themes, and practices. As a result, the early years of university-based theatre in Nigeria were dominated by adaptations of classic European plays and experiments with modernist European forms like absurdism and expressionism. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Nigerian theatre began to forge its own distinct identity and embrace more indigenous themes and performance styles, under the leadership of visionary Nigerian playwrights and directors like Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi.

Sunday Ododo asserts that “before the independence in 1960, European theatre culture had gained enormous ground in the country. This manifested through recreational activities and our educational system. It was this European theatre culture that became the guiding standard through which the merging Nigerian Literary Theatre found its bearing” (74). Even after independence, most of the theatre playhouses in the country were also constructed to model the Proscenium Theatre Stage that was in vogue in Europe as at that time, in even the newly constructed ones at present followed same. Theatre has become a prominent discipline within the Nigerian educational system, with numerous institutions offering a wide range of courses and degrees related to the performing arts. As at 2020, there were over forty (40) Federal, State and Private Universities in the country offering either Theatre and Media Arts, Performing

Arts and Culture, Film Arts, Theatre and Film Studies, Theatre and Performing Arts, Theatre Arts, Performing Arts or Dramatic/Performing Arts. There are also several Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, offering Theatre Studies across the 36 States of the country and the FCT and almost all with well-constructed and designed theatre playhouses for their studies. The proliferation of universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education offering theatre-related programs underscores the importance of drama and theatre in Nigerian culture, as well as the ongoing efforts to cultivate homegrown talent and expertise. Moreover, the fact that these institutions have constructed well-designed theatre playhouses further highlights the value placed on practical learning and hands-on experience in theatre education in Nigeria.

Undeniably, University-based theatres in Nigeria face a variety of challenges that impact their ability to thrive and fulfill their mission. Many of these theatres rely on limited funding from university budgets, staff and students which this can create instability and limit opportunities for expansion and improvement. Despite their importance as cultural spaces, University-based theatres lack advanced technical equipment or infrastructure, limiting the types of productions that can be staged and reducing their appeal to wider audiences. Ekaette Edem confirms that the shortage of this modern equipment in the long run affects the quality of production, as most of the available ones are technically limiting in terms of visual effect, despite the fact that on daily bases new technologies of stage lighting equipment are being introduced in advanced countries” (210). There is also problem of limited resources, making these theatres to struggle in attracting and retaining highly skilled staff, such as directors, designers, and technicians, who are essential for the quality and success of their productions in Nigerian universities.

Despite these challenges, these theatres offer a unique space for artistic exploration and community building, inspiring a sense of pride and purpose among Nigerian students, artists, and audiences alike. By studying these theatres and the experiences of those who use them, we can gain valuable insights into the power of art and performance to shape society and forge connections across boundaries of ethnicity, class, and ideology. According to Ekaette Edem; “the main goal of a theatre experience is to make an environment that will recede from the consciousness of everyone who uses it, to make a building that aspires to have the qualities of good directors, actors and technical designers, and a neutral surrounding that will disappear into the minds of the performers and audience” (544).

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN ARTS THEATRE

The University of Ibadan (UI) played a pivotal role in the development of modern theatre in Nigeria, with its English department spearheading the establishment of a Theatre Arts programme in the 1950s. Under the visionary leadership of Professors Molly Mahood, Geoffrey Axworthy, and Martin Banham, the UI Drama Department created a fertile environment for the study and practice of drama, introducing students to both European and indigenous forms of theatre, and laying the foundation for a unique brand of Nigerian theatre that would emerge in the coming decades.

In 1961, the University of Ibadan Dramatic Society launched the Travelling Theatre, a mobile theatre troupe that took performances to student’s audience in their halls of residence on a makeshift stage. The Travelling Theatre of the 1960s was not only innovative in its approach to theatre, but also significant in the broader context of Nigerian history. Moreover, the troupe's bold experimentation with different theatrical forms and styles, blending indigenous traditions with Western techniques, laid the groundwork for the development of a distinctively

Nigerian theatrical aesthetic that continues to shape the country's cultural landscape to this day. The University of Ibadan Dramatic Society also performed in open spaces in the towns and the stadiums and in community compounds. From Adelugba and Obafemi; "The School of Drama itself was founded in 1962 under the direction of Geoffrey Axworthy, assisted by Martin Banham, but already, as part of the English Department" (151).

The University of Ibadan Arts Theatre is notably the first of such modern University Educational Theatre building of that time. It was a milestone achievement in the history of Nigerian theatre, providing a state-of-the-art venue for the performance and study of drama at the university. It was designed by British architect as the first modern educational theatre building in the country, boasting a proscenium stage with a 300-seat auditorium. Beyond its architectural significance, the University of Ibadan Arts Theatre served as a symbol of Nigeria's cultural aspirations in the post-independence era. As a hub of artistic activity, the theatre became a magnet for talented actors, playwrights, directors and designers from across the country, helping to establish Ibadan as a center of theatrical innovation and creativity.

According to Adedeji "it was one of the building complexes of the then University College Ibadan, and was described as "the best theatre of its kind in Nigeria" (28). The building of the Arts Theatre was a product of an unusual foreign influence of Geoffrey Axworthy (its first Director of the Artistic Programmes of the Theatre in Nigeria). The theatre was originally conceived and designed as a lecture hall/cinema house for the Staff and Students to have their performances occasionally. Adedeji submits that "the Arts Theatre thereafter became the most active and influential living theatre in Nigeria" (8). By 1963, the Arts Theatre had developed to accommodate the activities of the School of Drama.

The history of the development of Nigerian theatre cannot be complete without recognizing the effort of Dexter Lindersay (Molinta Enendu: 110). Dexter Lindersay, an American architect and theatre designer made significant contributions to the development of Nigerian theatre in the 1960s. Lindersay was a product of Yale University, where he earned his Master's degree in Architecture in the late 1950s before moving to Nigeria to work with the University of Ibadan's Department of Architecture and Quantity Surveying. While at Ibadan, Lindersay became involved in theatre design, collaborating with local artists and engineers to develop new lighting and sound systems for the university's Arts Theatre. Dexter Lindersay's contributions to Nigerian theatre design and technology were truly pioneering. He was named the founding father of Nigerian theatre design and technology. Enendu further mentioned that the School of Drama contributed to facilitating the architectural and physical structures of the theatre and enhancing the scope of its technical facilities and services. A basement, an attic, a design room, a lighting booth with lighting facilities, a scene dock, costume and dressing rooms, and a scene shop with a hand and power tools for building of scenery were added to the theatre with rewards on the quality and tangible returns in the standard of productions presented. The Arts Theatre became the center and hub for producing the first and the second generations of technical theatre personnel in the country. "It was in this theatre that this technical personnel and practitioners; Sumbo Marinno, Duro Oni, Agbo Folarin, Domba Asomba, Taiwo Adeyemi, Molinta Enendu, Jasper Okwesha, as students were trained by Dexter Lyndersay" (Enendu; 200).

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR CHINUA ACHEBE ARTS THEATRE

From an interview with Enendu in 2011 and 2022, "before the formal commissioning of the University of Calabar Theatre as a theatre-house, 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”. Prior to the construction of the Arts Theatre, theatrical performances at the University took place on improvised or makeshift stages. These temporary spaces were often located in the halls of residence or outdoor venues, making it difficult for the department to produce high-quality, technically complex productions. Despite these limitations, the passion and dedication of lecturers and students alike ensured that theatre remained a vibrant part of university life, and the makeshift stages served as incubators for some of the earliest experiments in Nigerian theatre, paving the way for the establishment of more permanent venues and institutions.

The University of Calabar Arts Theatre was conceived and designed as a lecture hall in 1976. From to Enendu, “the design was done by Arch-Design Associated Architects and Housing Consultants (ADAHC) and the building was then named the *New Arts Theatre* (NAT)”. 1996/97 changed the name NAT (New Arts Theatre) and was named after Africa’s foremost novelist, Chinua Achebe.

Dexter Lindersay's advocacy for the construction of the New Arts Theatre was indeed instrumental in bringing the project to fruition in support of the then Vice Chancellor E. A. Ayandele. In recognition of his efforts, the university decided to rename the theatre in 1977 in honor of renowned Nigerian writer and scholar Chinua Achebe from NAT (New Arts Theatre) to Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre. The choice to name the theatre after Achebe was a tribute to his literary contributions in Nigeria. The Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre building, University of Calabar, has a simple architectural form.

The theatre has a good provision and accommodation for flying system which aid frequent, fast and smooth movement of scenic structures during performances. Oren Parker and Harvey Smith support that, “a good stage house that is designed to handle scenery in the air will have adequate flying system and generous amount of hanging space, which means a high and wide loft” (15). The flying is a key component of modern theatre design and stagecraft. Often referred to as a “fly system” or “flying rig”, this system enables stagehands to raise and lower scenery, lighting, and other equipment above the stage, allowing for quick and seamless transitions between scenes. The inclusion of a flying system in the design of the Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre represented a major upgrade in the technical capabilities of the venue, enabling more elaborate and dynamic staging for theatrical productions.

OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY IFE ODUDUWA HALL

The Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in Ife played a significant role in the development of university- based theatre in Nigeria with the construction of the “Open Air Theatre Quadrangle” and the “Oduduwa Hall”. The Open Air Theatre Quadrangle was a unique performance space designed to host outdoor performances, lectures, and other events. The circular structure featured terraced seating that could accommodate thousands of spectators, creating a communal atmosphere for performances. The Open Air Theatre Quadrangle became a prominent venue for events at OAU, hosting numerous plays, dance performances, and traditional festivities that brought together the university community and the local populace.

The Oduduwa Hall, situated at the center of the quadrangle, was a more formal performance space with a traditional proscenium stage and seating for up to 500 people. Named after the legendary founder of the ancient Yoruba city of Ife, the hall served as a symbol of the university's commitment to preserving and celebrating Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. The theatre is designed to meet the most modern trends, with modern scenery and stage lighting

technology. In the words of Enendu, “the Oduduwa Hall, structured after the traditional proscenium stage, was one of the first Nigerian University theatres to be fully equipped with desired level of light energy from different light sources to cater for different productions both in single and multiple setting situations” (118). The backstage facility of the Obafemi Awolowo University was designed to provide ample space and resources for the technical aspects of theatrical production. The backstage area featured a spacious stage for the performers, as well as dedicated areas for scenery construction and storage, costume design and storage, property management, and makeup and dressing rooms. These spaces were critical in ensuring that productions could be staged with high production values and efficiency, allowing performers and technical crew to work together seamlessly to bring the story to life for the audience.

In existence was also the Ife Pit Theatre that was constructed for multi-purpose staging of plays. It was an inheritance by the Department of Theatre Arts from the Institute of African Studies in 1977. The Pit Theatre located at the African Studies Complex was constructed in form of an arena theatre with a half feet deep rectangular pit used as an auditorium and also a playing area. Sunday Ododo asserts that, “the northern end of the top of the pit serves as a proscenium staging area while the remaining three sides are for sitting arrangement. When the pit is in use for an entire performance, the proscenium of the pit top becomes a sitting area too. Perhaps this is one of the few experiments that best captures African performance reality” (76).

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA PAUL ROBESON DRAMA BUILDING

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) was established in 1960, becoming the first indigenous university in Nigeria, following the country's independence from British colonial rule. The university was founded by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a prominent statesman and nationalist who served as Nigeria's first President and Chancellor of UNN. The establishment of UNN was seen as a pivotal moment in Nigeria's post-colonial history, representing a major step towards the nation's self-determination and the assertion of its cultural identity. Nsukka soon became a hub of intellectual and artistic activity, attracting some of the brightest minds in the country and providing a platform for the development of indigenous cultural expressions, including theatre.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, in his role as UNN's founding Chancellor, placed great emphasis on honoring the rich cultural heritage and history of Africa through the university's architecture and naming conventions. Many of the academic blocks and hostels on campus were named after prominent figures in African history. Azikiwe's vision for UNN went beyond simply naming buildings after important figures. He sought to imbue the campus with a spirit of pan-Africanism, creating a physical environment that celebrated the shared history and cultural heritage of the continent. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) boasts a rich history in theatre, starting with the establishment of the Department of Theatre Arts in 1965. The University of Nigeria's Theatre complex was named after Paul Robeson, a groundbreaking African-American artist and activist whose work inspired generations of black performers and artists worldwide. Robeson was a highly accomplished individual, excelling in numerous fields, including football, law, singing, acting, and activism. He was a vocal advocate for civil rights and social justice, using his platform as an artist to challenge racism, colonialism, and inequality. He was known for his political radicalism and activism as a Civil Movement Campaigner. He was the first black actor of the 20th century to take part in a production with an all-white cast playing to a largely white audience. His father, William Drew I is a descendant of the Igbo tribe of Nigeria and as a slave, had ran away during the American civil war. By naming the theatre complex after Robeson, the University of

Nigeria sought to pay tribute to his legacy and contribution to African American culture and the struggle for equality.

The Paul Robeson Drama Building has a simple architectural form with a proscenium stage. From the researchers visit to the theatre in 2011, she gathered that the Paul Robeson Drama Building was inadequate for mounting production of any meaningful dimension. With this, the theatre users started thinking of alternative venues, therefore, the Arts Theatre emerged. The Paul Robeson Drama Building piloted the preparation of performances which at the end is transferred to the Arts Theatre due to the high population of the viewers and the inadequacy of the Auditorium. The Paul Robeson Drama Building with its foreground provide parking space for lecturers coming to their offices, theatre patrons coming for performances and for visitors coming to the building. Opposite the Theatre is a storey building belonging to the Faculty of Arts, and on the right side is the drive way and a lavatory belonging to the Faculty of Arts still on the right side from the main entrance.

There is a Drama Pavilion right behind the lavatory but directly attached to the Theatre on the right; a well created foot path by the side of the building leading to the Paul Robeson Auditorium. This foot path also leads to the Drama Pavilion. The Pavilion seats about 100 spectators with a flexible staging method. The Paul Robeson Drama Building which has a simple architectural form was formally occupied by two Departments; the Sub-Department of English and Department of Mass Communication. The building at present houses lecturers' offices on the second floor, while on the first floor is Arts Library, Store, Editing Suite, Lecture Room and the Head of Department's Office (Ekaette; 134). The Arts Theatre has a raked auditorium with the seating capacity of about 500 people, arranged on two sides of the auditorium to have a central aisle. The stage occupies about 19 feet high, 23.6 feet opening and 24 feet deep with no orchestra pit. The stage is designed after the proscenium stage type and pushed inward in a square-like form, going deep inside. The apron is attached directly to the audience due to the problem of poor sightline, according to Enendu; "it was conceived more as a lecture or seminar hall than a theatre building. The building was lost to fire in 1995 by unknown perpetrators" (119), although as at the researcher's visit in 2011, the Arts Theatre has been renovated and in use to date.

THE UNIVERSITY OF JOS OPEN AIR THEATRE

The University of Jos Theatre Arts Department has its roots in the vision of Sonny Oti, a formidable figure in the Nigerian theatre scene. Oti, who served as the first head of department in 1973, was an accomplished performer and educator with a passion for nurturing young talent and promoting indigenous Nigerian art forms. Under his leadership, the University of Jos became a hub for theatrical experimentation, with a focus on developing an authentic Nigerian theatrical language that blended traditional storytelling techniques with contemporary dramatic forms. Sonny Oti's tenure at the University of Jos coincided with a wider cultural shift towards a greater appreciation of African arts and culture. During this period, there was a surge of interest in indigenous Nigerian drama and performance, leading to the establishment of various theatre groups.

Sonny Oti is a pioneer theatre practitioner, singer, musician, director and actor. He mentioned in one of his publications that; "the emergence of a serious production team and the flowering of a vibrant theatre was seen as an innovative scheme in the functioning of the campus itself" (29). The early years of the Jos Theatre Arts Department were marked by a spirit of ingenuity and resourcefulness. Without access to a dedicated performance space, staff and students had

to improvise, using any available space they could find like warehouses and classrooms for rehearsals and performances. These “dark holes” and makeshift stages, as Oti described them, became a symbol of the department's commitment to their art and their determination to create something meaningful in the face of limited resources. Despite the challenges they faced, the artists and students of the Jos Theatre Arts Department continued to produce groundbreaking work, often inspired by the unique conditions of their makeshift spaces. For instance, the Jos Repertory Theatre Company's 1974 production of "The Marriage of Anansewa," directed by Oti, was a critical and commercial success, drawing upon Ghanaian folklore to tell a poignant story of love and redemption. The production, which was staged in a converted classroom, used minimal sets and costumes, relying instead on the power of the actors' performances and the evocative storytelling to transport audiences to another world.

The current Jos Theatre is a testament to the department's perseverance and ambition. The Open Air Theatre, which was inaugurated in 2010, is a stunning outdoor performance space that blends seamlessly with the natural environment. The theatre's design takes full advantage of its beautiful surroundings, with tiered seating carved into the landscape and trees and rocks incorporated into the stage design. The Open Air Theatre hosts a range of events throughout the year, from theatrical productions to music concerts and cultural festivals, creating a vibrant and dynamic atmosphere for the university community and visitors. The Open Air Theatre is not only a beautiful venue for performances, but also a symbol of the university's commitment to sustainability and ecological stewardship. By creating a space that harmonizes with its natural surroundings, the University of Jos Theatre Arts Department has demonstrated a forward-thinking approach to the arts, prioritizing both aesthetic beauty and ecological sustainability. Sunday Ododo affirms that the “Jos Open Air Theatre is another variety in the Nigerian theatre architecture and stage. Its own uniqueness derives from the natural atmosphere it evokes, trees and rocks in a natural arrangement that presents an amphitheatre that is reminiscent of the Greek theatre” (76). As Ekaette Edem said, “the audience, by this arrangement was therefore placed quite close to the action, which such closeness provokes a feeling of intimacy and involvement” (94).

The Jos Open Air Theatre is a fascinating blend of tradition and innovation, drawing inspiration from ancient Greek amphitheatres while also forging its own path in the realm of contemporary Nigerian theatre. Like the ancient theatres of Greece, the Jos Open Air Theatre uses the surrounding landscape as an integral part of its design, creating a sense of harmony between the built environment and nature. The use of trees and rocks as part of the stage and seating design not only creates a visually stunning backdrop for performances but also amplifies the acoustic properties of the space, making it an ideal venue for music and spoken word performances. The Theatre is an informal theatre with no lighting positions and installations, lack of fixed stage background, wings, and back stage spaces. Close by are houses used as dressing rooms. Indeed, the seating arrangements at the Jos Open Air Theatre strike a balance between practicality and comfort, using natural materials and modern amenities to cater to the needs of audiences. The use of foam padding on the rock seats provides a soft and comfortable seating surface while still retaining the rustic charm of the theatre's natural setting. Additionally, the inclusion of movable plastic seats allows for flexibility and customization, allowing the venue to adjust its seating arrangements based on the requirements of different performances.

According to Ododo; “in January 1982 when the theatre was lunched with a pace-oriented play by Sonny Oti titled *Return Home* and *Roost Awhile*, the Nigerian audience was

once again introduced to another theatre possibility” (76). The premiere of Sonny Oti's play, “*Return Home and Roost Awhile*”, marked a milestone in the history of the Jos Open Air Theatre, as it showcased the venue's potential as a unique and innovative performance space. The play's premiere was a grand affair, attended by a large audience of local dignitaries, artists, and the University community, all eager to experience the magic of this new theatre venue. The production of “*Return Home and Roost Awhile*” at the Jos Open Air Theatre not only introduced audiences to a new style of performance space, but also served as a catalyst for future productions that harnessed the theatre's unique characteristics. The success of Oti's play paved the way for a flourishing of outdoor theatre in Nigeria, inspiring other university-based theatres to experiment with natural settings and unconventional staging techniques. Thereafter, quite a number of African and Euro-American scripts have been performed on this unique theatre stage”.

UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT THE CRAB THEATRE

The University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre, also known as “The Crab”, located at the Delta Park Campus, is a historic and beloved institution in the world of Nigerian theatre. Founded by the visionary dramatist and academic, Professor Ola Rotimi, the theatre was established in 1979 as part of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Port Harcourt. The name “Crab” was chosen by Rotimi, who saw it as a symbol of adaptability and resilience; qualities that he felt were essential for the development of Nigerian theatre. Under Rotimi's leadership, the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre became a hotbed of theatrical innovation and experimentation. The theatre's vibrant and diverse student body, drawn from all corners of Nigeria, created a dynamic environment where new ideas could flourish and flourish quickly. The Crab quickly gained a reputation as a home for socially conscious and politically engaged theatre, with productions that tackled issues such as corruption, human rights abuses, and the struggles of marginalized communities. Many of the actors, playwrights, and directors who emerged from the Crab went on to become leading figures in Nigerian theatre and the broader cultural landscape.

The design of the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre was a remarkable example of Rotimi's artistic vision and innovative approach to theatre architecture. The building's exterior was modeled after a crab, featuring a distinctive ten-legged design that created a series of interconnecting “pods” or stages that could be configured in various ways, depending on the needs of each production. The crab-like shape of the theatre created an immersive experience for audiences, drawing them into the dramatic world of the play and creating a sense of intimacy and immediacy that was unique to the Crab. The physical structure of the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre was just one aspect of Rotimi's vision for a new style of Nigerian theatre.

The symbolism of the crab is indeed a powerful and resonant metaphor for Rotimi's artistic philosophy and the ethos of the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre. The crab's amphibious nature, its ability to thrive in both land and water, reflects the theatre's commitment to bridging cultural and geographical divides, bringing together different communities and artistic traditions. The crab's status as a prized culinary delicacy in the Niger Delta region adds another layer of meaning to the theatre's name, emphasizing the importance of locally-rooted traditions and cultural specificity in shaping a uniquely Nigerian theatrical aesthetic. Rotimi's vision for the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre was deeply rooted in his understanding of African history and cultural traditions, which he believed held the keys to creating a new, distinctive style of theatre.

The University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre was not only a striking architectural landmark, but also a beautiful and harmonious part of the broader university landscape. The theatre's location within the lush green vegetation of the university campus created a sense of being in a kind of enchanted forest or serene marine environment, transporting audiences away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and into a world of imagination and wonder. Ola Rotimi's vision for the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre was not just about creating a beautiful space for theatrical performances, but also about transforming the theatre into a living embodiment of Nigerian cultural values and artistic expression. The theatre's natural surroundings, combined with its bold architectural design, helped to foster a sense of pride and belonging among the students, faculty, and local community members who used and enjoyed the space.

The CRAB as identified by the founder is an acronym for Creative Review of Arts and Books. Rotimi intended the acronym to reflect his belief in the power of the arts, not just as a means of entertainment or self-expression, but as a tool for critical reflection, dialogue, and social change. By naming the theatre the "Creative Review of Arts and Books", he signaled his intention to use the space as a platform for artistic engagement and discussion, where students and artists could come together to explore the ideas and issues that mattered most to them. The theatre was built mainly for entertainment functions although the educational role of it has overridden it.

Since its inception, eminent theatre practitioners have piloted the affairs of the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (Crab) as a Theatre House and also as a Department. The University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (CRAB) is an indoor space that offers shelter from the elements, creating a comfortable and controlled environment for performances and rehearsals. The one-storey design of the building creates an intimate atmosphere, bringing the audience close to the action on stage and fostering a sense of connection between the performers and their viewers.

The University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre not only served as a venue for theatrical performances, but also as a hub for intellectual exchange and academic discourse within the broader university community. The auditorium in the theatre building provides a perfect space for the staff and students to gather for lectures, discussions, and other forms of intellectual engagement, fostering a vibrant and dynamic cultural life on campus. This multifunctional use of the space is a testament to Rotimi's vision for the theatre as a central part of the university's cultural and educational mission, providing a platform for artistic expression and intellectual exploration.

The simplicity of the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre's architecture belies its technical sophistication and thoughtful design. The theatre houses a thrust stage, which is an innovative and versatile feature that allows for a wide range of dramatic possibilities. In contrast to the traditional proscenium stage, which separates the audience from the action behind a curtain or wall, the thrust stage extends into the audience, creating a more immersive and dynamic experience for viewers. The thrust stage at the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre enables directors to experiment with different spatial configurations and staging techniques, exploring the boundaries between performer and spectator in new and exciting ways. This flexibility also encouraged greater collaboration between actors, directors, and technical crews, as they worked together to create dynamic and innovative productions that made full use of the theatre's unique features. The facility provides for audience-actor intimacy as the preferred choice to further

achieves closeness as a feature of a traditional African theatre performance space.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS ARTS THEATRE

The impact of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) on Nigerian theatre was indeed profound, with its legacy continuing to reverberate through institutions like the University of Lagos. The festival's organizers identified a need for world-class performance spaces in Nigeria, leading to the construction of two state-of-the-art proscenium theatres at the University of Lagos. These theatres were designed to accommodate large-scale productions and provide a platform for the country's rich cultural traditions to be showcased on a global stage. The construction of the proscenium theatres at the University of Lagos marked a new era in Nigerian theatre, offering opportunities for larger, more complex productions that demanded advanced technical capabilities and sophisticated design. These theatres not only enhanced the university's reputation as a premier institution for the study and practice of drama and theatre arts, but also helped to attract international attention and support for Nigerian theatre, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the country's artistic and cultural traditions.

In preparations for the festival, the two theatres were fully equipped with technical facilities to serve partly the needs of the Festival and the theatre company. The installation of a revolve stage in the larger of the two proscenium theatres at the University of Lagos was a groundbreaking development in Nigerian theatre. A revolve stage, or turntable stage, is a circular platform that can be rotated to reveal different sets and scenery, allowing for seamless transitions between scenes and providing a more dynamic and flexible performance space. By introducing this cutting-edge technology to a Nigerian university theatre, the University of Lagos helped to raise the bar for technical innovation and production values, inspiring other institutions to explore new possibilities in theatrical design and presentation. Molinta Enendu confirms that; “the two theatres fully equipped with lighting facilities and scenic devices were completed and commissioned in 1977... the bigger of the two theatres, was the first Nigerian University Theatre to have a revolve stage and only next to the National Theatre in terms of technical theatre equipment and mechanical devices for stage use” (123).

THE DRAMA STUDIO AT AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

The Drama Studio at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Zaria is a fascinating example of architectural fusion, combining traditional Hausa design elements with modern construction techniques. The studio's mud walls and arches, combined with its distinctive mud domes, reflect the region's rich cultural heritage and traditional architectural styles, making it a visually striking and culturally significant structure. The choice to incorporate these features into the design of a modern theatre space is a testament to the importance of indigenous African forms and materials in shaping the aesthetic and philosophical foundations of Nigerian theatre. According to Michael Etherton “The Drama Studio at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in the Northern part of Nigeria, was built of mud-mud walls, mud arches and mud domes, in the style of a traditional Hausa Public building” (73). The domes of the ABU Drama Studio are indeed made of a traditional construction technique known as "cantilevered planks," where long, thin planks of wood are layered over each other in a rib-like pattern, creating a lattice-like structure that is then covered in mud. This technique, which has been used in Hausa architecture for centuries, offers a number of advantages for buildings in hot, dry climates like Zaria's. The use of thatched roofing in the construction of the ABU Drama Studio's stage houses is another ingenious example of traditional Hausa building techniques adapted for modern purposes. The palm-leaf

fronds used in the roof's framework are indeed remarkably strong. Layered over a wooden frame and covered with thatch, the roof creates a natural cooling system that helps to regulate the temperature inside the building, reducing the need for artificial air conditioning and contributing to the sustainability and energy efficiency of the structure.

The emergence of this theatre as said by Etherton with local style in the architecture and local identification with the place of performance was a determination to provide beautiful theatre for experimentation in the development of new theatre forms within an existing cultural framework. Ododo in his contributions to the development of this theatre playhouse said that “the ABU Studio Theatre which was designed by a young American architect, Steve Erlich, with the outstanding involvement of Micheal Etherton offers a new staging condition as different from the prevailing European oriented proscenium theatre house/halls. The involvement of Etherton and Erlich in this theatre design concept is also indicative of the contributions of foreigners in the search for African theatre idiom” (75). Enendu in his Ph.D. Thesis mentioned that the architectural characteristics of ABU Studio Theatre shows four circular stage houses of eight metres in diameter roofed with thatch and set out on four long sides of a rectangular space. With two other huts of six metres, set on two opposite angles of rectangular space, all oriented, and arranged to face a lower centred circular space that is the stage. The four other huts are part of the auditorium, which seats about 400 people, while the two latter ones are the foyer and scene shop cum storehouse respectively. The arrangement of the huts around a central stage space creates a unique sense of intimacy and community, where audience members can feel closely connected to the performance and each other. The use of traditional hut-style architecture for the auditorium and foyer also contributes to the building's distinctive aesthetic, evoking the ambience of a village gathering or marketplace, where stories and songs have been shared since time immemorial. This synthesis of old and new not only creates a distinctive and beautiful architectural space, but also reflects the broader philosophy of African theatre, which seeks to integrate traditional forms and stories with contemporary artistic practices and social concerns.

EKITI STATE UNIVERSITY ADETUTU THEATRE

The Theatre and Media Arts Department, Ekiti state University, Ado Ekiti commenced in the year 2014. The idea for the establishment of the Department was first mooted by Dr. Modupe Olaniyan at the University's Council meeting in 2009 while she was then a member of the Council. The Theatre and Media Arts Department was founded during a time of financial difficulty by the university. During this period, the department had to improvise most of their rehearsal spaces by using an open spaces or any available hall within the campus. Faced with a lack of dedicated rehearsal spaces, the Ekiti State University Theatre and Media Arts Department rose to the challenge by embracing a spirit of ingenuity and resourcefulness. Their ability to adapt to their surroundings and improvise with whatever spaces were available turned necessity into opportunity, fostering a unique creative environment that emphasized flexibility, innovation, and experimentation. In this sense, the temporary nature of their rehearsal spaces served as a catalyst for artistic growth and exploration, pushing students and faculty to think outside the box and develop new approaches to theatre that might have otherwise remained unexplored.

The University took a decision to allocate the Adetutu Theatre Hall to the Theatre and Media Arts Department, marked a significant turning point in the department's development, providing them with a stable home base for their artistic endeavours. The Hall, was formerly

named LT 3, built in 1992. The original name, LT 3, suggests that the hall was intended primarily as a Lecture Theatre, rather than a dedicated performance space. This gives a sense of how the department was able to adapt the hall to their needs, transforming a utilitarian space into a venue for theatrical creativity and expression. The fact that the hall was not initially designed for theatrical use also presents some intriguing possibilities for how the department might have adapted its layout, technical capabilities, and overall aesthetic to suit their needs and the types of performances they wanted to stage.

The Adetutu Theatre Hall was handed over to the department in 2017 during accreditation visit to the university. The auditorium covers a total space area of about 537.4 square meters and has a capacity for about 400 to 500 spectators. From the information gathered, within its short interval of existence, the department boasts of some colourfully managed productions successfully added to its repertoire. The department has made significant strides in a relatively short amount of time. This quick success speaks to the department's commitment to artistic excellence and the talents of its students, faculty, and administrators.

AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY PINNACLE THEATRE

As mentioned by Ekaette Edem; “from an interaction with Okon Udofot Jacob as the Pioneer Head of the Department, the Department of Performing Arts is one of the Six (6) Departments established under the Faculty of Arts during the 2012/2013 Academic Session in Obio Akpa Campus” (547). In March 2013, the Department of Performing Arts at Akwa Ibom State University began its academic journey with limited resources. Despite lacking a dedicated venue for rehearsals and productions, the university provided lecture rooms in the Old Faculty of Arts Block, shared among all departments within the faculty. This arrangement required the department to adapt and innovate, developing creative solutions for preparing and staging productions without a designated performance space. As a full-fledged department with ambitious goals, the Performing Arts staff and students rose to the challenge, leveraging their ingenuity and enthusiasm to make the most of their limited facilities and bring their artistic vision to life.

Without a dedicated rehearsal space, the staff, students, and directors in the Department of Performing Arts demonstrated remarkable adaptability, utilizing whatever locations they could find for rehearsals. Open fields and shady trees may not have offered the convenience of a traditional rehearsal studio, but they provided an opportunity for the department to embrace nature and improvisation as part of their creative process. Despite the limitations in terms of rehearsal spaces, the Department persevered and managed stage productions in the university's Assembly Hall and TETFUND Hall from 2013 to 2016. The availability of these venues, though not specifically designed for theatrical performances, provided a much-needed platform for the department to showcase their talents and ideas, allowing them to engage with audiences and expand their reach beyond the confines of the classroom. “The plan for the construction of The Pinnacle Theatre began in August 2016 in preparations for the accreditation team who visited the University in November that same year: (547).

The hilly topography of the Akwa Ibom State University created a unique opportunity for the design of the Pinnacle Theatre, enabling it to take advantage of the natural slope to create a tiered seating arrangement without incurring excessive costs or labor. This integration of the theatre with the local geography not only adds an element of beauty and harmony to the campus, but also underscores the importance of respecting and working with the natural environment

in architectural design. The Vice Chancellor at the time, Prof. Eno Ibanga, played a crucial role in the planning and development of the theatre at the University of Akwa Ibom State. The selection of the plot location by Prof. Ibanga was influenced by the proposed design of the architect, suggesting that there was a strong collaborative effort between the university leadership and the architectural team in bringing the project to fruition.

With a capacity of approximately 274 audience members, the auditorium of the Pinnacle Theatre slightly smaller than originally intended 300 audience members, still offers a significant platform for performances and events. The seating capacity strikes a balance between intimacy and spaciousness, allowing for a close connection between performers and audience members while still accommodating a sizable group. The theatre features a modern theatre proscenium stage, backstage area, offices, stance studio and storage rooms. The design of the auditorium incorporates elements of Euro-American theatre tradition, particularly in its use of a proscenium stage. This design choice suggests a desire to create a familiar and accessible performance space for students, faculty, and audiences, while also acknowledging the influence of Western theatre on Nigerian theatre history. The fusion of this Euro-American style also with local building materials, such as the use of the natural slope to create raked seating, reflects a commitment to incorporating local cultural elements and environmental considerations into the design.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, many Nigerian universities have been investing in the construction and renovation of their on-campus theatre venues, with a growing emphasis on flexible and multifunctional designs. These modernized spaces are not only aesthetically pleasing but also offer a wealth of opportunities for the universities and their communities. By incorporating various features such as adjustable seating, movable staging, and multi-purpose event spaces, these venues have become more than just performance halls; they have evolved into creative hubs that support a wide range of artistic endeavors and serve as centers of cultural enrichment for the entire community. Furthermore, the increasing focus on multi-functionality has also led to more sustainable approaches to theatre design and management. Overall, the development of university-based theatres in Nigeria represents a significant investment in the future of the country's cultural landscape, and the incorporation of multifunctional designs has been instrumental in ensuring their viability and relevance for years to come. This topic examines the positive impact that multifunctional designs have had on the development of university-based theatres in Nigeria, specifically in terms of improving the theatre's utility, versatility, and overall impact on the university's cultural landscape. By creating spaces that can adapt to different forms of performance, from concerts to experimental theatre to film screenings, these venues are fostering a more diverse and vibrant cultural scene, and promoting a deeper engagement with the arts on campus.

The study recommends increase investment in University-based theatres through government funding, corporate sponsorships, and community donations to support infrastructural development, staff training, and production costs. Collaboration with local artists, cultural organizations, and community leaders can also create programming that celebrates and promotes Nigerian cultural traditions while also engaging with contemporary social issues and global trends.

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