

EMPOWERING THE PERFORMER

Unanswered questions about a Unique Experiment
with the Performing Arts & Cultural Development



DANIEL LABONNE

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Daniel Labonne

INTRODUCING FACE

(Foundation for Arts Creativity & Exchange)

“The new Africa must use the traditions of Africa as well as the culture of the world to produce a unique and healthy vision of the future.”

FAYE CHUNG

Minister of Education and Culture, at the opening ceremony of ACTPA at Castle Arts,
November 1990. Bulawayo.

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INTRODUCTION

‘THE MAN WHO DOES NOT LICK HIS LIPS CANNOT BLAME THE HARMATTAN FOR DRYING THEM’
Professor Albert Mawere Opoku of Ghana, citing an African proverb.

I met Professor Opoku, the Founder of the National Dance Ensemble of Ghana, at the University of Legon, during the field work that provided the foundation to this vast experiment in the performing arts. What the professor means is this: when things go bad, do not blame nature or others; just do what you can. Most of the time the effort will pay off, at least it will pacify nature and ensure you do have a future.

Well, Professor, we have licked our lips and we have nobody to blame. As we write this book, we feel that the harmattan may finally be over and the skies are clearing up. We are much older now, so we know that life itself is the most worthwhile experiment, provided we remain alert and creative. The fact is we had a rather ungrateful and ambitious job to do in 1985, through uncharted waters. An original school for performing artists! A very vague and risky brief indeed... Worse, execution needed to be on behalf of performing artists of Africa. It has taken me personally 25 years to get to this point, when the reader may hold a book made simple that presents the facts, opens up the album of an extended-family from all over and gives a chance to the actors as well as witnesses to record their hopes and excitement... Everything being governed by time, it is also right that the unanswered questions are addressed in a frank and direct manner for the average reader of the 21st Century. But then, what’s the point of giving a voice to performers, organisations, sovereign countries and academics if it is not to point in one direction for the future? This time, I shall quote the Chinese wisdom which says that the dog may have four legs but it heads in one direction only.

One generation later, having explored extensively the multifaceted issues, I may confidently conclude with this book that the FACE – *The Foundation for African Centre of Exchange* is the best vehicle and the *African Centre of Exchange* (ACE) the final destination. Because, first, we need to feed the dog - and money has been the most damaging issue that requires drastic measures. The *Diamond Theory* can be trusted as a road map. The Castle Arts, in Bulawayo, will always remain a point of reference to establish that Utopia is only a steep mountain to conquer. Finally, the concept of *exchange* is not magic; but, it is a tool for cross-fertilisation and a method of giving value to disregarded arts forms while reaching out to larger audiences. Yes, the Harmattan is clearing up, Professor, and the future is finally looking brighter for Africa... Should the performers step in and begin the dance that empowers?

The book ends with a reminder of what the observers and partners had to say about this unique experiment in the field of the performing arts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Among them some, like Louis Akin, are dead; others have betrayed; many were sad to see those who dared to dream sink into oblivion... The bottom is this: Africa has been robbed of another 20 years of creativity and development through the arts. Do I have to mention that I have never been paid for the services delivered along the decades of what may still prove a determining experiment in the cultural development of a continent? But it was never a one-man band. It would be too long for me to thank here, all those who deserve a mention in this vast enterprise. It is however fair that an entire chapter of the book is devoted to listing down supporters, participants and enablers. Hopefully, the photo album will also set the records right.

To appreciate fully the achievements recorded in 1990 by the African Theatre Exchange (ATEX), the reader is invited to place this book within parameters set by both the South and the North in a rare consensus. In May, the AOU (now the African Union) acknowledges the urgency behind the need to train performing artists of Africa adequately. In Cameroon, Ministers of Culture of the continent *'URGES member states to participate in the training projects and to support the future establishment of a permanent centre after the trial period'* (see page 216). Later in the same year, one of the spectators of the dance drama FOOTPRINTS, conceived, created and performed at ACTPA at Castle Arts in an interafrican production, was Dr. Ray Orley. An American cultural attaché at the USIS, he decided to write to me directly as the artistic director with these words: *'This is a Phase 1 to be proud of, and one can only hope there are many, many phases to come.... The contribution which ACTPA can make to the culture of the continent as a whole promises to be very great indeed.'* (see page 217)

EMPOWERING THE PERFORMER also involves a fresh proposition for action which responds to the unattended 'urgency' signalled by the Africans and the frustrated 'expectation' of the American. The results expected are two-fold. First, enrich the skills, knowledge and aesthetics of the performing artist through the right training and exchange, so he may play a pro-active role in the development of his country and continent. Equally important, African Performing Arts must no longer remain homeless. The performer needs a home in the African city. The most suitable venue for the exchange to operate requires special, urgent coordination, so an increasing number of productions like FOOTPRINTS may cross borders and reach an ever-growing audience. There is no shortage of spectators in sub-Saharan Africa and performing arts have always been a familiar alphabet to the average African person. The ACTPA experiment is over; the research has structured the thinking into the DIAMOND THEORY; effective action now requires serious and reliable funding. FACE, the Foundation for African Centres of Exchange, addresses this hard reality of development.

Dr. Issa Asgarally has kindly accepted my challenging invitation to venture out of his area of expertise: to write a preface about performing arts and about the Africa region. I thank him for that. He and I do connect on the philosophical plan: interculturalism – his own expertise - should take many forms and wars must be avoided, not won. This book would never have come together without the indefectible support and love of my wife Sheila, who through thick and thin, always thought that nothing in our creative life together would ever match the ACTPA Project, in Zimbabwe and ATEX, in London. I must also thank my two sons, Pascal and Nicolas, who have undoubtedly suffered from the energies invested by their father into a collective dream, thus depriving them of the time and affection they deserved when they were younger.

Finally, just as Africa is a crying reality, the African performer is no abstraction. To make sure that this book does not sink into an ocean of assumptions, I have requested a man and a woman to watch over the reader from beginning to end. I am inviting Sotigui Kouyate and Myriam Makeba, two remarkable performers who lived and died as performing artists and dignified Africans, to inspire the work of FACE, as this book paves the way for a brighter future.

NOTE: The Harmattan is a dry and dusty trade wind that blows south from the Sahara towards the Gulf of Guinea. West Africa is affected by the Harmattan between November and March, when the temperature may drop to 3% Celsius.

PORTRAIT OF THE AFRICAN PERFORMER

Sotigui Kouyate

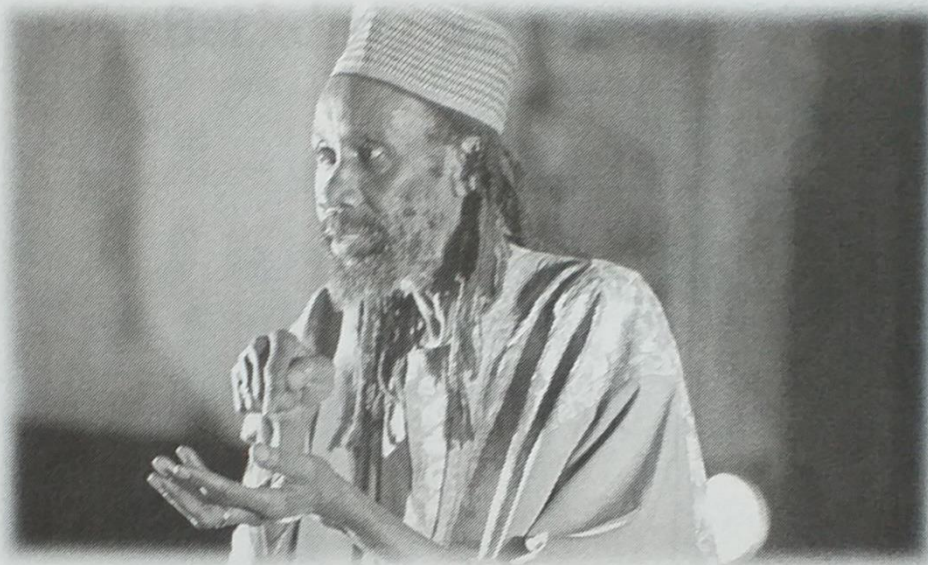


Photo by Esther Kouyate.

Sotigui Kouyate (1936-2010) a monumental performer who always claimed to be African first, a traditional Griot next, then a stage and film actor. He insisted upon his plural identify as a Guinean, a Malian and a national of Burkina Faso. He graced the stage of the globe, in Paris with Peter Brook (*Mahabharata*), in the UK, across Europe, Asia and America. His films include *Little Senegal* and *London River*. When I performed as an actor with Sotigui Kouyate in Canada, under the French director Claude Regy, I used to call him 'La Tres Haute Volta' (The Very Tall Volta) to refer to the former name of his country, Upper Volta, so tall was his tree-like body and his uniquely chiselled face. But it was his big heart and remarkable modesty combined with exceptional talent that kept Sotigui Kouyate close to his roots while he gave a uniquely touching dimension to every character he played. He remains a living example of the humanity, the depth and fascination of African performing arts.

Preface

By Dr. Issa Asgarally

At a time when the third globalization is unfurling, channeled by an unprecedented media revolution, as we grow aware of the necessity to “empower” certain key players of the social life, it seems to me that the project of Daniel Labonne comes at the right moment.

Daniel Labonne has had a long and rich career first as comedian, then as director before becoming a playwright and, finally, an administrator of performing arts. On the basis of his strong and tremendous field experience coupled with years of study and reflection at the University of London, he set up ACTPA, an African center for the training of performing artists, stressing the multifold representativeness of performing arts that brings together “a performer, a performance and an audience”.

His *Diamond Theory* is fascinating and full of promise, because it places performing arts in the centre of four development plans: personal, social, national and economic. First of all, it is evident that a performer’s personal development is enriched by the learning of fundamentals such as dance, drama, stage management, techniques of production, acting and singing. As regards the social development, Daniel Labonne reminds with good reason that performing arts are an integral part of African societies as they inspire and support every aspect of social life. Besides, performing arts can form the core of a cultural industry in Africa, considering the fact that if culture is priceless, it does have a cost. Through training, performing artists are given a chance to become entrepreneurs, teachers, hence, active players in the economic development; and performing arts, a vehicle to foster the development of a cultural industry and support its expansion in the national industry. Finally, in the Diamond theory, it is a different type of gem, a non-mineral...

Also innovative is the neologism ‘Drumma’ created by Daniel Labonne, combining *Drum*, omnipresent in Africa, and *Drama*, western by origin but global in outreach, allowing the specific and the universal

to come to terms. As he justly points out: Drumma, in order to feel and hear the pulse of a continent reduced to silence. And here I quote Aimé Césaire: "Ma conception de l'universel est celle d'un universel riche de tout le particulier, riche de tous les particuliers..." [My concept of the universal embraces a term enriched with all its particularities and pluralities].

Being committed to cross-cultural exchange, I think that Daniel Labonne's project fits harmoniously therein. I shall echo the forceful assertion he made: "Underdevelopment is not only about underperforming economies, tyrannical leaders and ethnic warfare. It may be about the inability to listen to each other." To listen and speak to each other, is precisely one of the stakes in intercultural exchange. The absence of others deprives me of existence, wrote Hannah Arendt.

In show business, he says, Africa has a lot to give and to receive from Europe, from America, from Asia. However, before speaking to the world, it is essential for Africa to speak to herself first, making sure that the process of exchange start at home, among African countries. And already there, the work to be undertaken is huge! Because it implies the need to prevail over the lack of organisation, resistance to change and corruption -- the losing trifecta of a rich continent -- and, after the martyrdom of slave trade and colonialism, to put an end to the supplement of self-damnation known as negroology. But once the work being launched, the cultural meeting – which formerly failed – between Africa and Europe could eventually begin. Besides, given the African origin of a large number of the population in America, the relations between both continents would only be stronger and mutually beneficial. And obviously, it would be of sheer advantage to the millenary civilizations of China and India to establish cultural ties with the cradle of civilisation. In brief, if Africa makes strategic choices in line with requirements and gets really integrated in the current globalization process and if, in turn, the other continents change their stereotyped representations of Africa, the intercultural exchange between these four continents will be in a position to soar up. Indeed, as I mentioned in previous writings, the intercultural does not see the various cultures as competitors for the title of "the greatest" or "the most developed", but rather, forming a whole, as majestic and symphonic movements, the history of humanity with its variations and differences. In this particular perspective, Daniel Labonne's project is crucial.

ABBREVIATIONS

FACE	Foundation for Arts, Creativity and Exchange
ACE	African Centre of Exchange
ACTPA	African Centre for the Training of Performing Artists
ATEX	African Theatre Exchange
UAPA	Union of African Performing Artists
ISC	International Scientific Council set up to advise the coordinator in London
CASTLE ARTS	Venue for ACTPA made available by the Government of Zimbabwe in 1990
AFSYMWORK	African Symposium Workshop organised in Mauritius in 1988 as a mini ACTPA in operation
ATEX Round Table	International Meeting in February 1998 in Paris with major partners from Europe, Africa and America
FOOTPRINTS	Title of the first production Made in Castle Arts – a dance-drama with an inter-African cast. 1990.
LUCY & ME	Title of course 2 at Castle Arts, devised by ATEX on the theme of Anthropology and Performing Arts. Title of the play at the end of the same course. 1991.
OAU	Organisation of African Unity. Now African Union grouping most countries of the African continent.
UNESCO	United Nations Education Science and Culture Organisation
ACI/ICA	African Cultural Institute formerly based in Dakar, Senegal and now out of operation. ACI had member states mainly from French speaking Africa.

EXCHANGE An old word used in this research as a new concept applied to the creative process in training performers of Africa. A pragmatic approach to end the isolation of African performing arts and the limited market of their products by expanding the distribution prospects; potentially, an original form of live performance Made-in-Africa, depending upon further research.

DIAMOND THEORY Theory developed by Daniel Labonne applied to the cultural development of Africa. The theory is based upon practical work, including the work done with ACTPA and ATEX in 1990s. The theory encapsulates one clear result from an original experiment inserted in the World Decade for Cultural Development.

DRUMMA Term coined by Daniel Labonne during his research to describe dramatic arts preceding Ancient Greek Drama, namely live arts across Africa. Name to be eventually given to new theatre buildings in the African city of tomorrow.

DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CREATIVITY Title of the MPhil Thesis of Daniel Labonne at University of London.

LET THE AFRICAN PHOENIX RISE

Too many people have been involved
Too much effort and too many resources invested
Too much hope has been raised
Too many nations would eventually benefit
Too many artists have placed their faith in it
Too many sacrifices have been accepted
Too many lies have been told
Too many talents yet long to blossom
This report is but a testimony of time
Supported with authentic photographs taken along years of sheer hard work
But duty ends when a task is fully done
We remain confident that, in the end, truth will overcome
That deep seated belief and decades of labour will bear fruits
To benefit the young and free the thespian's song
There was a need to draw a line over the past and clear the way for the future
If it still matters to say thank you, more importantly
It is about shaking off the ashes so the phoenix may rise
Fly south of the Sahara to lay her eggs
Sparkling diamonds full of magic

D.L.

To all the individuals whose photographs appear in this book, we express gratitude for their kind collaboration. We do hope that the book is fair to them.

PART ONE
BACKDROP TO A DREAM

THE ACTPA PROJECT IN BRIEF

Title of Project:	African Centre for the Training of Performing Artists - ACTPA
Objects:	To train performing artists and trainers from all over the African continent according to needs using an innovative process of Exchange. To give substance and meaning to cultural development in the Africa region.
Purpose of ACTPA:	Centre for research, Education and Exchange devoted to the study and practice of all aspects of African Performing Arts. Data Bank on African Performers and Live Arts Headquarters of the Inter-African Theatre Company Activity Centre for Union of African Performing Artists - UAPA
Founder:	Daniel Labonne, researcher and theatre practitioner from Mauritius, Resident first in the Ivory Coast, since 1985 a UK resident Founding member, Vice president and Treasurer of the UAPA Cultural entrepreneur and director of ATEX Project co-ordinator on a voluntary basis from 1986 Artistic Director of the Pilot Project from 1988-1991 <i>Evaluator of the project from 1996 to 2001 with the University of London</i> <i>Author of the 'Diamond Theory' and promoter of the FACE in 2011</i>
Origin of Project:	The Union of African Performing Artists (UAPA) set up in Zimbabwe in 1984 by individual performing artists from 17 African countries who 'through their voluntary commitment accept to unite in a concerted effort to work for the promotion of African Performing Arts'... The UAPA ceased all activities in the early 1990s.
Project management:	From 1987 to 1992: ATEX – The African Theatre Exchange, a company limited by guarantee registered in Britain.
Project conception:	A school project was made official in the course of a colloquium on African theatre organised in Stockholm in April 1985. ACTPA was first given its name by Daniel Labonne in a brochure produced for the UAPA, published in Denmark in 1986.
Host country (pilot)	Zimbabwe
Opening of ACTPA:	September 1990 ACTPA at Castle Arts Bulawayo.
Training on Offer:	ACTPA Diploma Course, a one-year course ending with an inter-African theatre production Short Courses bearing on <ul style="list-style-type: none">- A specific skill useful to the performing artist- The role of the performer in Africa I (Theatre for Development)- National or Regional Needs (Courses on request)- Specialist training (Theatre Directors) Roots Diaspora Course for artists of the African Diaspora wishing to reconnect with their Roots

Diaspora Course for non-Africans wishing to learn from Africans in Africa

Target Intakes: African performing artists, directors, technicians, trainers
Languages used: English, French and African Languages
ACTPA PILOT: AFSYMWORk in Mauritius (1988) ACTPA at Castle arts (1990-1991)

PARTICIPANTS TO THE AFRICAN SYMPOSIUM WORKSHOP (AFSYMWORk)
CAME TO MAURITIUS FROM THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES

AFRICA

NIGERIA
TANZANIA
SIERRA LEONE
MADAGASCAR
IVORY COAST
MOZAMBIQUE
BURKINA FASO
SENEGAL
GHANA
ZAIRE
ZIMBABWE
CENTRAL AFRICA
SOUTH AFRICA
MAURITIUS

REST OF THE WORLD

UK
FRANCE
BELGIUM

FINLAND
SWEDEN
USA
DENMARK

PERFORMING ARTS FORMS TREATED AT THE AFRICAN SYMPOSIUM WORKSHOP
(AFSYMWORk) IN MAURITIUS.

KOTEBA
AFRICAN RITUALS
THEATRE IN EDUCATION
THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY
AFRICAN BALLET
GRIOT ART
STAGE DIRECTING

DRUMMING
WRITTEN AFRICAN DRAMA
THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED
THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT
DANCE DRAMA
MUSICALS
RITUAL THEATRE

PILOT PROJECT - ACTPA AT CASTLE ARTS, BULAWAYO

**Course 1: September 1999: DIRECTING A DANCE DRAMA IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA
(9 weeks)**

**Course 2: April 1991: LUCY & ME – Anthropology and Performing arts
(13 weeks)**

The 3-year pilot project was interrupted without any formal explanation in 1991.

THANK YOU

On behalf of the ACTPA Project, on behalf of the many performers who have benefited, I extend my sincere and total gratitude to those individuals and organisations that have financially contributed to this meaningful project between 1985 and 1991: the African Centre for the Training of Performing Artists.

The African Centre For the Training of Performring Artists - ACTPA PROJECT (1985-1991)

SPONSORED BY: SIDA – The Swedish International Development Authority
The Ministry of Education and Culture of Zimbabwe
UNESCO
World Decade for Cultural Development (UN)
The Government of Mauritius
The Government of Zimbabwe
DANIDA – The Danish International Development Authority
The Commonwealth Foundation
The Rockefeller Foundation
DSE, Bonn
FINNIDA – The Finnish International Development Authority
NORAD – The Norwegian International Development Authority
Sydney Black Foundation – UK
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Holland

And
The Labonne Family

Thank you to the other organisations which have brought other forms of support, directly or indirectly. I extend my thanks, on behalf of artists, on behalf of Africa in search of a sustainable development.

IN CO-OPERATION WITH: The African Cultural Institute (ACI)
The Organisation of African Unity (OAU)
The International Amateur Theatre Association (IATA)
The Union of African Performing Artists (UAPA)
The City University – London
ACCT – L'Agence de Co-operation Culturelle et Technique (France)
The British Theatre Association – BTA
Arts Council of Zimbabwe
British American Arts Association
DATS – Denmark
Swedish Dramatic Institute
British Council (Mauritius Office)
Air Mauritius
Air Zimbabwe
Bulawayo Chamber of Commerce

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: ATEX – African Theatre Exchange (UK)

THE ACTPA PROJECT IN PHASES

- ACTPA Build-up:**
- Phase 1 lasted from May 85 to December 86 – 19 months for a pre-study which included various missions to Zimbabwe, to Canada, to Cameroon, to Ethiopia and Tanzania... Daniel Labonne moves from the Ivory Coast to take employment in the UK. ATEX is set up to provide a structure to the co-ordination, to raise funds and to protect the fledgling project.
- Phase 2 started in January 1987 namely with the writing and circulation of the ACTPA Guidelines in which Daniel Labonne defines the parameters, rationale and scope of the project. ATEX takes charge of the general co-ordination of the project. An agreement is reached with Zimbabwe whereby the newly independent African country will host the centre.
- Phase 3 provided a working structure for the project while widespread support was sought and obtained worldwide, namely in a ground-breaking Round Table meeting in Paris in 1988. More field study in Senegal, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia...
- Phase 4 brought together training specialists from all over Africa and the world in a comparative study to test the feasibility of the ACTPA Project in Mauritius. The exercise established the management skills of ATEX.
- ACTPA Pilot Project:**
- Phase 5 came about with the Castle Arms, when the Zimbabwe government entered in an agreement with ATEX and offered facilities to accommodate the training centre in Bulawayo. The Castle Arms is renamed Castle Arts. It is furnished and equipped by ATEX. Selection of resource persons and hiring of staff before the candidates are transported, accommodated and trained in ACTPA at Castle Arts.
- Phase 6: the Pilot Project lasted from 1990 to 1991, when the centre became operational and delivered successfully 2 training programmes.
- The ACTPA project stops all operations and Castle Arts is deserted when funders cut off the supply of funds in 1991. The interrupted programme leaves the coordination in debts...
- Phase 7: The host country, Zimbabwe, issues a statement of appeal for ACTPA at Castle Arts to continue.
- Post ACTPA:**
- 1 year producing reports and setting the accounts right, organising the archives of the project, steering the project clear of controversy. One last visit to Stockholm by Daniel Labonne proves unproductive. Self-financed work.

Daniel Labonne lobbies old and new partners to repair the damage done to a promising project and the loss for Africa. Self-financed work.

1992. ATEX tries to diversify its activities by providing services with ATEX Consultants. ATEX sets up the *World Africa Foundation (WAF)* which is never launched. Daniel Labonne conceives *The London Africa Show* to salvage the Castle Arts and the experiment. To no avail.

1993. 'The Other Side of the Dream' a book written and illustrated by Daniel Labonne fails to find a publisher. The ACTPA Project is formally dead.

1994. The UAPA has ceased to exist and has fallen into oblivion while Zimbabwe slowly falls from grace with the international community.

In 1995, a first evaluation is conducted as Daniel Labonne collects feed-back from the African artists from across Africa who took part in the ACTPA Pilot. Self-financed work.

From 1996-2001, Daniel Labonne undertakes an academic evaluation of the project with the University of London, as a private post-graduate student. Self-financed work.

In 1992, Daniel Labonne is granted an MPhil degree for his research. The study is entitled *Development Through Creativity (An Experiment with African Performing Arts)*. The University declares the project may then qualify for a new beginning and a viable future.

10 years later, Daniel Labonne writes the book EMPOWERING THE PERFORMER to pave the way for a new departure, based upon a body of research dating back 25 years and personal continued investment.

ACTPA Revival: (2011) FACE - Foundation for African Centres of Exchange