



The New York Times/John Darnton

African dancers in costumes reminiscent of Spanish colonizers performing at arts festival in Lagos, Nigeria

## African Festival Ends, a Decided Success

By JOHN DARNTON

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LAGOS, Nigeria, Feb. 12—Before 60,000 spectators in the National Stadium, the flag of some 50 nations were shot into the air, and the performers from around the world broke into one last, exuberant dance. The final speeches were made, the last anthems sung and the flame that had been burning for 29 days—a gift from the Yoruba god Sango—was extinguished.

And so ended the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture—called the most important convocation of its kind in Africa in over a decade. It was, everyone agreed, a success.

For Nigeria, a country whose awesome power is sometimes matched by a flair for disorganization, staging the month-long cultural showcase was in itself a major feat and perhaps a milestone as it presses for continental hegemony.

"And what a brilliant spectacle it turned out to be," said a front-page editorial in the Government-owned Daily Times. "Nigeria is justified in feeling a sense of achievement, it has done what many, even amongst citizens, at first thought impossible."

### A Time for Solidarity

For black Africa, it was an occasion to celebrate political solidarity at a time when many of its children are feuding and there is apprehension over the growing confrontation with the white minority regimes in the south.

And for many individuals in the "black diaspora," from Papua New Guinea to Watts, Calif., it was a chance to search for roots, the intense and complex experience of returning to the motherland as a total stranger.

"I had a bad case of culture shock," said Warren McIntosh, a tall, soft-spoken member of an actors' workshop from Chicago's South Side. "But I got over it. Now, all I can say is I've got a lot of memories to take back, a lot of memories."

Altogether, according to the Government, about 17,000 artists, dancers, and intellectuals participated in the festival, called Festac, at a dozen locations. They put on everything from dance, drama and cinema to back-street art exhibits and fashion shows displaying elaborately pleated African hairstyles.

### Impressive Nigerian Shows

Nigeria mounted two of the most impressive shows, symbolic of her cultural extremes. One was a three-day regatta in the river in the south, featuring 200 double-decker canoes carrying drummers, dancers, paddlers and warriors. The other was a two-day "durbar" in the desert north in which 4,000 horsemen and camel riders paid homage to the religious authority of the local emirs and the Sultan of Sokoto.

Beset by organization problems and confusion, the festival did not get off to a good start. Even the opening stadium ceremony, in which the performers assembled for a two-hour parade, was marred by violence. At least a dozen spectators were pulled out of their

seats and tossed hand-over-hand by a frenzied crowd to crash upon the concrete stands below. Several died.

After a week in which the shows were sparsely attended, the Government stepped in to lower ticket prices and by the third week, the National Theater drew a standing-room crowd for a performance by the calypso singer called the Mighty Sparrow.

Last night, the nonstop jamboree reached its climax at a performance by Miriam Makeba, the South-African-born singer who sang the songs of freedom when the African nations gained independence in the 1960's and who now carries passports from five African countries. "I hope to get an O.A.U. [Organization of African Unity] passport," she said, "because I love Mother Africa. I belong to all of her." The response was adulation.

She was followed by Stevie Wonder, the only internationally known American performer to appear of dozens who were rumored to be coming. His singing, of hit songs like "Cheri Amour" with a back-up group that he pieced together in a single day, did much to salvage American honor.

Many African participants have been dismayed by the caliber of the American performers. "I think the blacks in the U.S., torn apart by their own Festac politics, underestimated what the rest of the black and African world would come up with," wrote one columnist. "Thus far, they have made little or no impact."

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The American organizers, embroiled in squabbles with the United States Government over funding, selection of performers, and review rights for a United States Information Service film, struck a tone of militancy that sometimes seemed out of keeping with the Africans. In one instance, a 26-year-old white dancer from [redacted] company was barred from performing [redacted] by ostracized. Both [redacted] included white performers [redacted] companies.

The sense of black pride engendered by Festac reached a peak when Comdr. O.P. Fingsi, the head of the festival, declared: "We are no longer the third world. We are the first world."

The real accomplishment of the festival was not the scholarly or the artistic. It was, as one Nigerian musician, put it, in the simple fact of coming together.

"For the first time," said the musician, Bayo Martins, "it dawned on me that all black people have one thing in common, a culture and a heritage. I believe in the spirit of Festac, the need for black people to get together and rekindle their consciousness and confidence."