

## **Aggressive Publicity, the Hub of Successful Theatre Production: A Study of “Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons.”**

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### ***Abstract***

*In every field of human endeavour, the need for recognition is always taken seriously. For one to be recognized, the person must make people know he exists. So, for anything or person to be known, there must be some level of awareness created. The theatre is not left out in this recognition matter, hence, this work discusses the role of publicity in the theatre, which is the creation of awareness in the theatre with a special attention to the theatrical production tagged “Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons” as a case study. The work reviews the entire spectrum of publicity with emphasis on the different methods of publicity. As nobody talks about publicity without referring to the publicity director, the work discusses the publicity director’s duties and qualities. The study also presents a brief history of Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons and its activities so far, as well as the functions of publicity therein. Though the programme is relatively new, it has really made some level of progress in making the members of the university community find*

*time for relaxation. This progress is due to the aggressive publicity done by the producer and her crew. However, some challenges are confronted and seriously taken care of. The programme has actually become the toast of all the members of the university community and beyond due to the wide and serious publicity given to it.*

**Key Words:** Aggressive publicity, Hub, Theatre and production.

### **Introduction**

It is one thing to produce or manufacture a quality product and it is another thing to sell it or make it get to the final consumers. No matter how good a product is, if it is not sold and used by those who need it, that product is looked at as good for nothing. So, when an organization produces a thing, it is necessary for the good to be brought into the market for the people to buy. But more importantly, there must be a serious awareness created for that particular good to be known and cherished by the people. This awareness is necessary because, it is not one organization that is involved in the manufacturing of that good. But when there is enough awareness on the product, the people will not only know that it is in stock, but also, that it is the one they must buy. This public awareness is known as publicity. Hence, this work discusses the role of publicity in the theatre, using the monthly celebration of birthdays tagged *Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons as a case study*. This monthly celebration which has seen several editions successfully is produced by Mrs. Grace John-Ogbonnaya under the umbrella of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt.

Therefore, publicity is just a necessary condition for any product good, bad or ugly to sell successfully in the market. Through this work, we shall be able to see what publicity has done in marketing theatrical products, especially the monthly *Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons* in the University of Port Harcourt.

From time immemorial, publicity has become known as one of the prerequisites for the actualization of the theatre manager's ultimate goal of full house, guaranteed satisfaction and profit maximization. Because of this, publicity has always had a big budget. Unfortunately, however, most productions have failed in terms of patronage because of poor publicity. The case of the *Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons* however different because the success recorded in this nascent production is spectacularly amazing. Moreso, this resounding success has been attributed to good publicity. This study appraises how the producer of this programme has been able to apply publicity in order to achieve the said resounding success. The reason for this study is to know how one can apply publicity to a theatrical product and achieve the theatre manager's ultimate goal of full house, satisfaction and maximized profit. This study will strengthen the minds of theatre practitioners who most often fret at what may be the outcome of their performances due to the fact that they are not certain if the performance will attract a reasonable quality of audience or not. This study will also reassure upcoming theatre practitioners and even students of the art that one can stand as a producer provided he or she has the wherewithal and also know the publicity strategies to use in order to arouse the people's interest to come to the theatre.

Some individuals and groups are always filled with doubts when they went to go into the production of any programme, especially, one that is relatively new. However, this study has come to abolish the fears completely, because it shows that with a good knowledge of all the methods of publicity and aggressive application of same, the production stands to be a huge success.

This work focuses on the achievements made through publicity in the marketing of theatrical products with a special attention to the monthly programme of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies; University of Port Harcourt, tagged *Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons*. It also discusses the general role of publicity in the theatre as well as the methods of publicity in the theatre. It identifies the problems encountered in the

employment of the publicity technique and recommends solutions to the identified problems.

This study used both the primary and secondary sources of research methodology. The primary sources include the interviews conducted on the producer of the programme and the researcher's personal experience as a student of theatre Arts who has been trained on publicity as an important aspect of theatre management. The secondary sources include materials from books, journals, magazines, newspapers and the internet.

Some terms which are very vital to the understanding of this study are hereby carefully defined. They include: Aggressive, Hub, Publicity, Theatre and Production.

**Aggressive Publicity:** This is the creation of enough awareness of an event, thing, or a production which sustains the people's interest in it and provides enough motivation for the people to identify with it. It is a favourable or unfavourable presentation of news items in the medium which is not paid for by the organization affected. A publicity is said to be aggressive when one engages all energy, forces, efforts, resources and instruments within one's command in order to create a very satisfactory publicity. In other words, one is totally determined to succeed and so, leaves no stone unturned in one's plan to achieve the best.

**Hub:** This is a very important part of something. That is to say that the role aggressive publicity plays in the success of a production is key because it influences the production positively.

**Theatre:** The term theatre is used in this study to mean a building where dramatic presentations are made. It also stands for human experience gained from a presentation on the stage before an audience.

**Production:** This means the process of procuring; harmonizing and co-ordinating human and material resources of the theatre and the

final utilization of the resources to achieve a goal. The goal or final product can be in tangible form or of an abstract nature. This final product can be in form of goods or services.

### **Publicity as a concept**

According to the *Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary* – Publicity is the whole of the methods and materials used in making enterprises and products known to the public with a view to increasing business; the methods and materials used in making some non-commercial matter similarly known; the disseminating of advertising or informative matter; the condition of being exposed to the knowledge of the general public especially through newspaper reports (255).

Uche S. Okafor sees publicity as a favourable or unfavourable presentation of news worthy item in the media which is not paid for by the organization affected.

Sylva Kanu states that publicity is “non-personal stimulation of demand for a product, services, or idea by means of services, or idea by means of commercial significant news planted in the mass media and not paid for directly by a sponsor” (5).

Ohiri on the other hand sees publicity as any effort one makes so as to influence product, action or behaviour.

According to him:

Publicity includes any information relating to a producer or his product that appears in a medium on a non-paid basis. It could be either positive or negative. In the media, it is a form of free promotion which stimulates a favourable demand impression or action towards something. This could be done through newspaper, news presentation, interviews, talk previews of reviews (5).

### **Publicity through Newspaper**

According to Allensworth et al., “the local Newspaper is probably the most effective publicity medium in most communities”. The news columns, either on the amusement page or the women’s page are usually more effective than the advertising columns. In fact, newspaper advertising is generally a waste of money, unless a production is scheduled to run for two or three weeks and there is important information about curtain times and ticket prices that the public needs to know (331).

They further emphasize thus:

In preparing stories for the newspaper, try to make it as easy as possible for the paper to suit your story. That means you should get the material to the paper in plenty of time for the editor to cut it or reverse it. Do as much of the work as possible yourself”. (331).

Most newspaper are short of help; and the better your material has been written, the more chances it stands be used. Try to have a genuine news angler to every story you submit to the paper (331).

### **Publicity through Personal Contact**

Ogunbiyi explains the forms of publicity technique as techniques through contact and procession, through officers of the society (234). He observes that, for instance, a local judge playing a minor role in a domestic comedy would not be particularly newsworthy. But a local judge playing the role of a judge in a courtroom drama would be news worthy. He concludes that the same might be the case if a local banker were cast as a bank robber or the minister’s wife as a dance hall girl. He warns that one should not combine two stories into one news release. But should submit them separately and on separate days.

To this end, Allensworth et al, recommend that “you organise your publicity releases so that there is a steady build in interest right up the opening performance”. For example, the announcement of the play might come first; then the announcement of the leading players; then the announcement of the rest of the cast; then a profile of another leading

player; then a story on the rehearsals; then a story on the difficulties of fine suitable customer; then a story on the preparation of an unusual property; then a story on the tribulations of an actress learning to walk in a period costume; and finally a story on the first dress rehearsal. He concludes that if spaced properly, these stories could be expected to generate considerable interest in the production by the time of the opening performance. He advises that we should accompany our stories whenever possible with photographs and that Newspapers ordinarily prefer 8 by 10 inch glossies, and except portraits of individuals. He discloses that many newspapers refuse to run pictures taken by anyone other than their own staff photographers and that if a staff photographer has been assigned to photograph certain aspects of the production, it is good to make an outline of the activities you want to be covered and the people you want included. He speaks against leaving the photographer to use his own judgment and opines that it is better to make sure everyone is properly identified (234).

### **Publicity through letter writing**

This is a medium of disseminating information through the means of writing. With the invention of western education, information are passed down from one person to another through the medium of writing. When information on a particular festival or theatre production is disseminated to people living in the village, they send the information across to their relations living in the cities through the medium of writing (Akomolafe, 10).

### **Publicity through Telephone Medium**

Telephone as one of the electronic media of communication is another technique through which information is disseminated from one person to another. This medium makes communication easier and faster. People send information to friends and relations on matters relating to the festival in question. They could either call or send as text message via phone to inform people on the fixed time

and date for the festival as well as persuade them to come home (Akomolafe, 10).

### **Publicity through personal invitation**

Another means of publicity is through individual invitation. A typical example is "Ikeji festival of Arondizuogu in Imo State. Awareness of this festival is also consciously or unconsciously done through individual invitation, and persuasion to participate in the festival. Some Arondizuogu indigenes that reside in the cities give information and invitation to their friends and persuade them to participate in "Ikeji" festivals (Arondizuogu Patriotic Union 8).

Another famous method through which "Ikeji" festival of Arondizuogu is brought to the knowledge of the general public is through music maestro (Egwu Mmonwu) by Pericoma Okoye, through his music, created a wider awareness on "Ikeji" festival to the general public. His type of music and lyrics surrounds around "Ikeji" festival which made him the chief publicist (Arondizuogu Patriotic Union 8). A lot of folks got to know about this festival and Arondizuogu through the music maestro by Pericoma Okoye. He became popular through his kind of music in the early 80's till date. Pericoma Okoye is seen as the chief publicist as far as "Ikeji" festival is concerned. (Arondizuogu Patriotic Union, 8).

**Publicity through the officers of the Society:** In "Egungun" masquerade, performances sponsored by "Alagba" sent "Ope"(caller) to invite the leader of the troupe to negotiate a performance proposal with him, the date, time and venue of the performance were placed in the hands of the officers. The officers of the society are responsible for the dissemination of information on the performance to the public (228).

**Publicity through Contact and Procession:** The publicity arrangement is varied in respect of each term of promotion. In this method, the group leader of a troupe and his members lured the various towns and villages to

the venue of performance. There was no formal notice; the troupe announced their shows to the public through contacts and procession.

According to Ogunbiyi, during the period of interior professionalism, the above mentioned techniques were used in two different African festivals like the “Egungun” cult activities and performances promoted by the court of Old Oyo Kingdom (225).

Nzeribe identifies a town crier as a pivotal means of publicity in “Ogene” festival of “Oguta”. The town crier plays a role in disseminating information on this festival. The aim of every town crier is to make his information clear and understandable to his audience or community members. This means that information dissemination process should be void of noise. The town crier in his effort to overcome this should choose a suitable time to make his announcement, often, in the early hours of the day preferable, 6am. Sometimes he chooses to do his publicity late in the evening when the villagers must have returned from the farm and the market. The manner of speech used by a town crier determines the audience’s attention to him. With this in mind, the town crier employs diplomacy in his speech in relation to his information. He makes use of choice language to enable his audience and not to misunderstand him. In order not to waste his time so as to effectively communicate, as well as conserve his energy, he chooses places like village and market square. The town crier is the basic medium of information dissemination in “Ogene” festival of Oguta (28).

**Publicity through the Use of Gun Shot:** Gun shot is another publicity technique used in the traditional African society. For instance, during the Ikeji festival, this technique is used on the day of “Oye Egbugbu (second day), the day in which livestock are slaughtered and sacrificed to family deities. It is expected that every “Okpara” must shoot a gun to send a signal across the community that a particular family has appeased their family ancestor or deity, as such, ready for the festival (Nwaizuzu, 9).

**Publicity through Drum beats signal:** This publicity technique usually was used for a particular class of individuals, mostly, the chiefs and kings. This drumbeat is popularly known as “Ekwe Izuogu”. It is used in conveying information to the council of “Ndi Eze and chiefs”. They use it two times, before, and after the festival. It is used before the festival to summon the various persons and authorities responsible for negotiation of “Ikeji” plate. The second sound of “Egwu izuogu suggests the commencement of the festival. Other publicity techniques adopted in “Ikeji” festival includes; letter writing, telephone method, internet, guerrilla, radio jingles and announcement as well as publicity through video cassette and video CD. Through individual invitation and handbills (Ohia, 10).

### **The Publicity Director; his Duties and Qualities**

According to Ohiri Innocent, the publicity director traditionally belongs to the commercial side of the theatre business. His role is administrative though he supervises some artistic activities like the production of the publicity materials. He contributes so much to the management of the production by controlling the staff under him and working cooperatively with other staff of the theatre. His contributions include the creation of a good image for his theatre. His interaction with the theatre community, the press, the patrons and the theatre wider audience enhances the smooth running of both the theatre and the productions. His main job of creating enough awareness of the theatre and the theatre productions brings him face to face with a lot of managerial tasks which include the supervision of the preparation of his publicity materials, the negotiations for a good commercial rate, the interaction with patrons, sponsors, the press as well as the documentation and preservation of the publicity material of the theatre (Ohiri, 94).

### **Advantages of Publicity**

The advantages of publicity in the theatre cannot be undermined. Through publicity all the theatrical productions are made known to the general public. Ohiri enumerates the advantages of publicity as follows:

- (a) Publicity creates an awareness of the event or thing publicized. It erases doubts and persuades.
- (b) It secures attention and patronage and therefore maximizes profit.
- (c) It enhances the good image of the sponsor, the performing troupe or the theatre.
- (d) It serves as reminder. Continuous publicity helps to refresh people's memory of the event.
- (e) It boosts the moral of the performers and gives them a sense of belonging and responsibility. An artiste whose name is mentioned in a jingle for a production uses a greater sense of responsibility and importance than one not mentioned at all. He feels challenged and encouraged.
- (f) It creates job opportunities for many e.g. radio, television publicity experts, designers, writers, etc.
- (g) It increases human skill. Such publicity methods like press interviews or press conferences can aid the development of the participants' communication skill. Publicity can promote arts and culture (23).

### **Publicity in Ancient Greece**

Publicity in ancient Greece took a different form; a typical example was the lighting of Mount Olympus with burning torch during the sports activities in ancient Greece. In theatre production, according to Brockett, the citizens of Athens made processions through the street of Athens before the actual Dionysian festival. The management of the Greek theatre was a state affair. In other words, the government controlled theatre growing and theatre management. The state appointed a manager who was charged with theatre management functions. This official was called the CHOREGUS (choragi).

He co-ordinates the elements of production; for example: idea, artist and production process. He also co-ordinated the place of presentation. "THE ACROPOLIS" and audience attendance during presentation. All his functions were in accord with state objectives and he appointed an official to take charge of daily activities of the theatre management, which covers publicity of invited dramatist. Setting up with his committee, wealthy citizens who finance production took charge of the financial part of performance. He negotiated with play wrights e.g Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, who provided the idea, developed it, recruited and rehearsed with the actors.

The financial management aspect was not restricted to the state alone, wealthy citizens were appointed to pay expenses of particular performances as a civic responsibility. Publicity was no problem, because it was a state affair and attendance was compulsory for both officials and citizens.

According to Awodiya, productions that received state financial support were free of charge later productions charged for two (2) OBOL. Successful theatre performance was recognized by the government and special prizes given to play wrights and sponsoring wealthy citizens (52).

### **Publicity in Ancient Rome**

Theatre management in Rome borrowed from Greeks structure, it was progressive and of standard having high and professionally competent personnel. According to Nwabuzor;

They appointed an administrative head 'MAGISTRATE' who represents the state in all performance, in charge of financial grant, in charge of managing festivals, he selects the plays to be performed, consoling productions of low quality, issuing posters for advert and publicity (5)

Publicity is done orally especially in the market place and sometimes in the Ludo of gladiatorial contest. The magistrate appointed a "DOMINI" who

was in charge of acting troop developing and providing the idea, an actor and manager who selected plays and presented it to the magistrate, contrasting for a particular production with the magistrate (7).

The place of performance was the state's responsibility hence it built and maintained halls, galleries, stadia (stadium) and later Amphi Theatre model after the Greek styles. The state also took care of publicity of dramatic activities. For the ladies, attendance for ladies was free of charge and special seats were reserved for the officials and senators (10).

### **Publicity during the Renaissance period**

According to Brocket, publicity during the renaissance period was with posters in towns and city gates followed with procession by actors in their costumes with trumpets on performance day. Special envoys were sent on heroes backs in some cities to publicity and advertise the dramatic performance of the troupes (98). For instance, in Elizabethan England, the "public" and "private" theatres were managed by the acting troupes of the kings men and quality queen men, who were under the patronage of the royal family (royal patronage). Also acting companies relied primarily upon the sharing system as a means of raising capital, rewarding valued members and for the management of the company itself. The management team, who were shareholders, formed a self-governing democratic body that selected and produced plays, co-ordinating the theatre affairs, having responsibility within the company to supervise publicity, costumes, props, acting and other theatre business (Awodiya, 54).

In France, all seventeenth century French acting troupes were based on the sharing plan which all regular members participated in artistic publicity, and other commercial management function of the organisation as well as sharing financial risks and profit among members according to their classification in the company (54).

### **Publicity during the Contemporary Era**

During the contemporary era, from about 1850 to 1950, theatres were being managed by untrained business men who aimed at profit making at the expense of artistic quality. However, they have since been replaced with theatre managers about 1950 to fit into Langley's description of a manager, thus:

A person who is knowledgeable in the art with which he is concerned, an impresario, labour negotiator, diplomat, educator, publicity, and public relation expert, politician, skilled business man, social sophisticate, a servant of the community, a tireless leader – becoming humble before authority – a teacher; a tyrant and a continuing student of arts (Ohiri, 8).

However, in contemporary era the advancement of science and technology has aided in publicity dissemination. Hence Ohiri posits.

There are various methods of publicity at the disposal of the publicity director who is directly responsible for this aspect of the theatre business. The various methods include the use of radio, television, newspaper, posters, banners, bill board, hand bills, novelty and Guerilla stunts" (6).

Thus, going by what Ohiri said, we can see that publicity in contemporary time is better organized and has a wider range of coverage within a stipulated short interval.

### **Publicity in Nigeria Theatre Experience**

Concerning publicity in Nigeria theatre experience, it is imperative that the activities of Alarinjo travelling theatre in ancient Yoruba Kingdom be mentioned here as the fore-runner of theatrical experience in Nigeria. According to Ogunbinyi, the Alarinjo theatre management (derived from the Egungun) team comprises the Obas, the political head, the Alagbaa as the cultic head, troupe leader and manager operated within the guild system. They adopted a virile structure that positioned and focused the

troupe for effective rendition of excellence and qualitative entertainment services to the audience. This virile structure involves the publicity crew of the Alagbaa, the repertory system, the chorus, the orchestra and performance etc (225). Ogunbinyi explained the forms of publicity techniques as techniques through contact and procession, through officers of the society and publicity through the "bara" chants (228).

Publicity Through the Use of "Bara" Chants: on the day of performance the actors were accompanied by "Bara" around the community; the "bara" disseminated the information about the performance through his chants.

### **Brief History of the Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons**

As earlier indicated in this work, "Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons" is a production of the department of Theatre and Film Studies; Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt. However, it is the brain child of Mrs. Grace John-Ogbonnaya, a production staff in the same Department of Theatre and Film Studies. According to the producer, "Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons" is an offshoot of her myriads of thoughts on what she can contribute to the University and the society at large as a trained artist who has been privileged to become an employee of the same Department, nay, University that trained her. So, she was inspired to think of what she can do to be useful to both the theatre industry and the university because having been employed as a producer, she must really engage herself in the full time business of production in the theatre. More importantly she, as a theatre artist, knows and believes that the theatre as an entity exists to teach, correct, inform, heal and entertain the society. Therefore, in order to make impact in the society, she must produce a theatrical piece that can affect the society positively.

During an interview session with the researcher, the producer Mrs. Grace John Ogbonnaya remarked that it was the need to reduce stress, worries and the like from people's life, especially after the normal hustling and challenging daily activities, that she decided to initiate this programmed.

She is optimistic that with such a programme which not only puts smile on the faces of the individuals, but also gives them the opportunity to relax after a hard days job, there would be a drastic reduction at the rate of some stress related health challenges, such as High Blood Pressure, in our society. Hence, "Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons" is a celebration in honour of very important dignitary within the University community who have really excelled in their various professions or fields of life's endeavour. These very important dignitaries comprise both the academic and administrative staff of the University like professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, registrars, deans, head of departments, provost etc. other members of the University Community who are not yet among the gurus are also celebrated since, it is universally believed and known that the young shall always grow.

Another concept that motivated Mrs. Ogbonnaya to start this programme is to bring to limelight some upcoming artiste in the various areas of specialization, be it comedy, acting, dance, broadcasting, writing, singing, directing, ushering etc. this is so because, as a beneficiary of the artistic excellence of the University of Port Harcourt, she has observed young artistes that only need some encouragement and guidance for them to become full blown artistes who will be making waves in the arts industry both locally and internationally. In her own words, "I am using the "Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons" as a means of catching them young for the entertainment industry"- (Ogbonnaya; interview).

So, through this production, the celebration of birthdays has gotten a new meaning and an elevated value for the members of the University of Port Harcourt. Hence, every member of the University Community now looks forward to celebrating and being celebrated. After giving the concept serious thought, she now sought the approval of the Department of Theatre and Film studies through the then Head of Department, Professor Femi O. Shaka. She got an express approval because the Department encourages its

staff both teaching and non-teaching, to develop themselves and grow in their chosen careers.

She thought about the funding and believed she could fund it from her little resources and support which could come from some generous individuals, lovers of arts, the university management and even the government. However, her husband, Mr. John Ogbonnaya, who is also a staff of the University of Port Harcourt, remains a very strong pillar of support in the actualization of this dream. Having considered all that would be involved, she now decided to set aside the last Friday of every month as the most suitable day for this Harvest of Laughter which has successfully completed several editions, the first edition having taken place in November, 2014.

### **The Activities of the Harvest of Laughter**

The programme aims at celebrating people's very important moments in life and as human beings, our birth days are very important days that we like to celebrate. Since it is a celebration that calls for relaxation, laughter and happiness, there are series of activities that make it worth the while.

The activities include the following:

1. Introduction and recognition of dignitaries by the master of ceremonies.
2. Musical rendition by the Theatre Band
3. Welcome speech or address by the Head of Department who is always referred to as the host.
4. Drama sketches/play lates
5. Comic show in both English and native languages
6. Cultural dance display
7. Variety shows of various types
8. Unveiling of the icons and beading the citations on the individuals, nay, dignitaries that are being celebrated for the month.
9. Cutting of the birthday cake by all the celebrants
10. Dance by the celebrants, families and friends

### 11. Response by the Icons

### 12. Closing remarks.

At the beginning of the celebration, the Master of Ceremonies (M. C) recognizes and welcomes all the dignitaries, their family members and friends who must have already been seated in the auditorium. Afterwards, the Head of the Department of Theatre and Film studies, gives the welcome remarks. During this time, the HOD as the host of the theatre audience welcomes the visitors, the icon and their loved ones officially to the theatre, he gives a brief introduction of the programme. He assures all present of their safety and comfort in the theatre, encouraging them to relax and enjoy themselves

Since it is all about laughter, relaxation and happiness, the HOD's welcome address is always followed by comic scene. So far, the comedians who have featured and still feature include; Ala Owerri, Kaduna 1<sup>st</sup> Son, Michael Jackson, Uniport Newscaster etc. this comic session is packaged in such a way that one cannot but laugh and forget one's sorrows, and challenges.

The producer also provides a birthday cake which all the icons for the month join hands to cut. This is actually the climax of the celebration, because as the icons jointly cut the cake, the happy birthday song is rendered and the cake is distributed to all the icons and others in the auditorium.

Having been thrilled by this production the icons usually respond and show some appreciation at the end of the show. This appreciation or support is either in cash or kind or even words of encouragement. At the maiden edition in November, 2014, Professor Bran Brifa spoke on behalf of all the icons. December edition was appreciated by the university bursar Mr. V. O. Aliezi. January closing remarks were given by the then Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor Joseph Ajenka who is one of the January Icons and also the Chief Host of the celebration. The harvest of laughter of February 2015 was appreciated by the then DVC (Admin) Prof. Nduka.

## **Harvest of Laughter and the Publicity**

According to Mrs. Grace John Ogbonnaya, publicity plays a key role in the celebration of the Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons. First of all, the publicity starts with reaching out to getting contacts of *icons or celebrants* for the various months. In other words, researching for the birthday dates of these notable individuals so as to be sure that there are people to celebrate within a particular month and nobody is left out.

The following publicity methods have so far been adopted: Invitation Cards, Invitation Letters; Posters, Banners; Handbills; Text Messages; Phone Calls and One on One Contact

### **An Analysis of the Publicity Methods / Techniques Adopted In the Production of *Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons***

1. **Use of Invitation Cards:** During the first week of every month, invitation cards are printed and sent to all the icons of the month who have been identified. The cards are also sent to all the members of the university community as individuals and as groups. Invitation cards are sent to the Deans of the Faculties, Provosts of Colleges, Directors of Institutes, Head of Departments etc. the producer also goes to the extent of dropping the invitation cards at the residence of all the staff, so if you forget the invitation given to you as an individual, you may not forget the ones dropped at your office or home.
2. **Use of invitation letters:** Since the Icons to be celebrated do not ever know about the celebration until they are contacted, it is not enough to just send an invitation card to them. An invitation letter is also sent to them to inform them formally of the celebration. To prove the official nature of the production/celebration, the letter is strictly issued from the office of Head of the Department of Theatre and Film

Studies and dully signed by him, this invitation letter is strictly sent to the icons of the month only. Many members of the University Community hardly remember it even when they have been given the invitation card and letter. But with constant reminder through phone calls, text messages and the banners displayed everywhere within the University, the celebration is now something that people are becoming gradually aware of it. In fact, the researcher can even testify that some members of the university community at times call him on phone asking for any information on the production date and time. This is so because through serious publicity, they really have come to see it as part of the activities that take place in the university every month.

According to the producer, the first and second editions of the Harvest of Laughter had enormous audience which really surprised her because she felt people might not really turn up en masse since the production was relatively new. But due to the serious and aggressive publicity given to it, the theatre was filled to the brim that some people had to remain outside and be peeping from there to catch the glimpses of what was happening inside the theatre auditorium.

As a matter of fact, the first edition in November was so publicized that Professor Bran Brifa who was then the current Director for National Council for Arts and Culture, Abuja had to defile his tight schedule at Abuja just to witness the celebration. According to the producer, after the invitation card and letters are sent, she still follows up with constant phone calls and text messages. In fact, she disclosed that even as at the time when the programme kicks off, she still calls some of the icons who are not yet there. This is really an aggressive publicity to say the least.

## Challenges

The methods or modes of publicity used by the producer of the Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons are really creating enough awareness as well as arousing the interest of the members of the University Community to attend the show. However, some challenging situations also exist, thus; lack of reading culture and information dissemination among our people pose some challenges to this publicity network. It has been observed that most people hardly read things like invitation cards and short notices especially when at first sight, they do not seem to understand from where it is coming. For instance, there is this culture amongst our people that you come and deliver an invitation card to them, the person has it with him/her and he or she still throws questions like “where is it taking place? And when”? Instead of reading the document in his or her hand and get all the required information. It is also observed here that some staff of the university do not often go to clear their mail boxes (Pigeon Holes). So, any message or circular dropped in there may not be seen by a such staff until after the ceremony has come and gone. This is the reason why the producer always follow up with phone calls and text messages which always cost some extra expenses.

Furthermore, some people within the University Community seem to have a habit of tearing posters and banners irrespective of what events they are announcing. This contributes to extra cost incurred by the producer because she always makes sure, she replaces such torn or completely removed banners and posters. Another challenge is that meanwhile, the producer is combining many job; she is the manager, the director, the publicity director etc. so, the weight of the job is really much on her unlike in a situation where there is a publicity director who is completely in charge of publicity as an entity in the production.

In all these challenges, finance remain a major issue, for any publicity to really be satisfactory, you have to spend money fixing the materials for publicity. Since this is still an individually sponsored programme, raising

money for some of these publicity methods is always a very difficult task for the producer.

### **Prospects**

These few methods of publicity are employed because the celebration, in the meantime is for members of the university community only. However, it is hoped that from celebrating the Icons within our University, we may someday celebrate the Icons nationally and internationally. In this case, the modes of publicity will definitely include other methods like the radio, television, newspapers and magazines which we know have wider coverage than the posters, banners and invitation cards.

### **Summary of Findings**

From this research, it is obvious that the place of good publicity in theatrical productions cannot be over emphasized. Nobody will ever know you exist if you do not bring yourself to light. This production in the Uniport's Arts Theatre, the Crab being relatively new ought not get the fame and popularity it has gotten but publicity has made it so.

The truth of the matter is that our people here lack the relaxation culture; hence, the theatre going culture is also not part of their ordinary schedule. But if one wishes to instill the need for relaxation in them, the person must go extra mile to drum it into their ears. The person must use all the methods available to make them understand why they must not claim being busy all the time. All these awareness and education are done through proper and serious publicity and that is what Mrs. Grace Ogbonnaya has done with all the methods of publicity she has so far employed in her monthly production of Harvest of Laughter for monthly icons.

It is obvious, she really means business in the areas of publicity because some may just be okay with the distribution of invitation cards and letters only and forget about any other methods. But she still makes sure that she keeps constant contact with all the Icons and other friends or lovers of the

theatre within the University Community. She has really left no stone unturned in the area of publicity. Hence, one would not be surprised at the resounding success of the production.

### **Recommendations**

Theatre is widely acclaimed as a collaborative business in the sense that each professional or expert comes to contribute his or her own quota to make a complete whole. So this must not be neglected by the producer of the Harvest of Laughter for Monthly Icons. Of course, it is obvious that she is aware of the fact, hence she shares roles for those who make presentations during the performance. Some present as comedians, some as dancers, both cultural and contemporary dancers, while others present as orators and newscasters. However, the issue of publicity should be given prominence by appointing or recruiting a publicity director who will be in charge of packaging all the publicity materials for each month's celebration of Harvest of Laughter. This among other things will reduce the work load that the producer currently bears. As the producer/manager, the brain work she does is enough to give one stress and hectic day. More importantly, it will not be nice if by trying to cure others of stress, she now unloads the stress on her own being.

Furthermore, sponsorship is always important in every theatrical production, the producer being a staff of the university is placed on limited salary like other staffers of the institute; so there is an extent her financial strength can carry even in matters relating to publicity. If this production is sponsored by the University, the government or well to do generous citizen, she will certainly go places with this innovation. Even as it is still for the University Community only, it can metamorphose into a state or national affair through a wide range publicity and strategic planning. In fact, if assisted through sponsorship, this programme will enjoy a wider coverage that one will someday look back and say, it really pays to laugh and to make others laugh.

## Conclusions

During the interview with Mrs. Grace John Ogonnaya, she really confessed that she likes seeing people being happy. She also remarked that she enjoys making people find time to relax and laugh. From the progress so far made there is no gain saying that she has really succeeded in making people, especially the high profiled personalities of the University Community laugh. This she has done through constant and aggressive publicity garnished with reasonable and genuine manner of approach. Otherwise, how on earth would she have been able to attract the presence of such eminent personalities live in the theatre. It is still obvious, that with more efforts in the production generally and publicity in particular, the programme will really go places.

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