

ITI-Nigeria Report: Theatre Activities in Nigeria (2023-2024)

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Overview

Between the last World Congress to date, several issues have significantly impacted the Nigerian theatre scene. These factors that have collectively shaped the dynamics of Nigerian theatre in the past two years, influencing both the production and reception of theatrical works include:

One of the most notable developments is the grand reopening of the National Theatre in Lagos. The Bankers' Committee, with government approval, undertook extensive renovations starting in 2021, which were completed in 2024. This renovation aimed to modernize the facilities to world-class standards, including new HVAC systems, upgraded fire safety, and enhanced power, water, and sewage systems. The restoration also covered the 4,000-seater main bowl, banquet halls, exhibition halls, cinemas, VIP spaces, and more, making it a central hub for the creative sector in Nigeria.



Rising inflation and the devaluation of the Naira have strained the financial stability of theatre productions. Increased costs for materials and utilities, coupled with higher interest rates, have made it difficult for many theatre companies to sustain their operations.

The ongoing insecurity in some parts of Nigeria has affected theatre attendance and the feasibility of hosting late-evening theatre events. The uncertainties created by the security situation which is worsened by exaggerated media reports discourage both local and international audiences, as well as potential sponsors and partners. However, the artists are resilient as there has been a significant push towards integrating digital technology within the theatre space. This shift has facilitated greater accessibility and engagement despite the security challenges.

While there have been some efforts to support the arts, inconsistent government policies and insufficient funding remain critical issues. The removal of fuel subsidies, for instance, led to higher operational costs, impacting the affordability and accessibility of theatre for the general public.



The continuation and growth of cultural festivals have also played a crucial role. Events like the Lagos Theatre Festival, Abuja Festival, Nzeh Mada Festival in Akwanga and other regional festivals have seen increased participation and visibility, showcasing local talent and fostering community engagement



There has been a significant push towards producing content that reflects Nigerian cultural narratives and addresses contemporary social issues. However, balancing traditional themes with modern storytelling techniques remains a challenge for many theatre practitioners who are constrained to work with dwindling budgets.

Key activities in the Nigerian Scene (2023-2024)

Despite the challenges enumerated above, for the period under review, Nigerian theatre has seen a vibrant mix of activities, reflecting its cultural richness and creativity.

2023

In 2023, the Lagos Theatre Festival, held in February, showcased innovative productions under the theme "Evolve." This festival, initiated by the British Council in 2013, serves as a platform for collaboration between Nigerian and British artists, encouraging innovative theatre productions that extend beyond traditional spaces.

Another significant production was "Loud Whispers," a satirical stage play adapted from a book by Joseph Edgar. Directed by William Benson. The play featured Nigeria's ace comedian Ali Baba and a 20-member cast and was performed at the Muson Centre in Lagos.



Similarly, the 2023 Abuja International Theatre Festival included plays like "The Torn Petal," which highlighted diverse narratives from Nigerian playwrights. These events underscore the dynamic and evolving landscape of Nigerian theatre, which continues to blend traditional and contemporary storytelling methods



The National Theatre in Lagos hosted the 4th Edition of the National Theatre Festival of Unity in December 2023, themed "Boundless Possibilities." This event showcased a variety of performances, reflecting the ongoing efforts to revitalize and promote theatre culture in Nigeria

4th NATIONAL THEATRE Festival of Unity
THEME: BOUNDLESS POSSIBILITIES
 NATIONAL THEATRE, ICANMU

15 DEC

OPENING CEREMONY
 10:00am-1:00pm

- NATFU Lecture by Professor Duro Oni: "Boundless Possibilities of Arts: The National Theatre and New Paradigms of Development".
- Cultural Performances

CLOSING CEREMONY
 3:00pm-7:00pm

- Film Screening: Fagunwa: Literature, Language and Literalism by Zuri 24 Media
- Choral, Dance and music performances
- Command Performance: "To Return from the Void" by Professor Sunnie Ododo, to be performed by Crown Troupe of Africa
- Awards

Additionally, ITI Nigeria members have expanded theatre activities to include discussions on climate change and community engagement. The *Nna Enin 2023 Community Theatre project* in Akwa Ibom State focused on using theatre to address environmental issues and foster community dialogue

2024

In 2024, several notable plays were staged in Nigeria, showcasing the country's vibrant theatrical scene. Some of the key productions included:



DiS Loyal Judas - An Easter opera performed in collaboration with the Crown Troupe of Africa at the National Theatre in Lagos. It was presented on March 31st and April 1st



Common Wealth - Presented by the National Theatre Student Internship Program on February 14th at the National Theatre in Lagos

On the 13th of July 2024, Africa's first Nobel Laureate in literature, Professor Wole Soyinka turned 90 years. This motivated a series of live performances across Nigerian cities in honour of the laureate and former President of ITI Worldwide.

For instance, *Isara*- This stage adaptation of Wole Soyinka's "Isara: A Voyage Around Essay" was directed and written by Femi Osofisan. It was hosted by the Institute for Information, Arts and Culture Development (IACD) in Nigeria at the Wole Soyinka Theatre, University of Ibadan, on July 27th and 28th 2024



It is also gratifying to note that, the newly renovated National Theatre, Lagos was renamed Wole Soyinka Centre for Culture and Creative Arts by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.



Overall, owing to the growing network of ITI-Nigeria partner institutions and members across the 36 states of the federation and the federal capital territory, the Nigerian theatre scene has remained dynamic, with festivals and projects that not only entertain but also address social issues and foster international collaboration.

Some useful weblinks

<https://newtelegraphng.com/issues-in-nigerias-political-landscape-in-2023/>

<https://indypressui.org/2024/07/26/isara-iacd-nigeria-to-host-stage-play/>.

<https://nationaltheatre.gov.ng/booking-events/>.

<https://thenigerialawyer.com/from-festac-77-to-2024-national-theatre-set-for-grand-reopening/>

<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ntj/issue/current>.

[NatTheatreNG](#)

[Naija Theatre - Shows and Reviews.](#)