

Jazz in the megacity of Lagos



• Biodun Batik and his band



• Skata Vibrations playing on stage during the festival.

PHOTOS: EDOZIEUDEZE

BEYOND making April 30 an international Jazz day by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Jazz itself is a form of musical rendition that has permeated most societies of the world. For three days last week in Lagos, Jazz musicians and Jazz lovers and picnickers from far and near gathered at the Freedom Park to celebrate not only world Jazz day, but also what the organizers of the event tagged *Lagos International Jazz Festival 2015*. This is a celebration that began three years ago, meant to gather lovers of this genre of music with jazz musicians themselves from all over the world playing and generally having fun.

With this year's theme as *Jazz in The Mega-city*, Ayoola Sadare the festival director explained that it was time to consolidate on past gains and experiences and to also showcase what he termed jazz in Naija and other climes. This

Jazz music is obviously gaining grounds in Nigeria as Edozie Udeze shows in this report concerning the just-concluded Lagos International Jazz Festival

was why he invited Rashid Lombard of South Africa as the special guest of honour for this year's show.

Lombard is the founder of Cape Town International Jazz Festival, which has been in charge of all jazz jams in that country since 2000. He is not just an internationally-acclaimed entertainer, promoter and director, he is also a former political and war photojournalist. His primary responsibility includes his foremost strategy in conceptualizing and marketing jazz festivals all over the world. This was partly why in 2014 the South African government conferred on him the *Presidential Order of Ikhamanga*. It is the highest South African honour granted by the president of the country for

outstanding achievements in arts, culture, literature, music, journalism, sports and photography.

Lombard's presence indeed helped to encourage artistes to play to their hearts' content. As these jams happened simultaneously in different locations inside the Freedom Park, guests strolled round from place to place to savour the different renditions. Musicians in other genres were equally invited to play. It was totally a jamboree of musical entertainment, created to douse tension in the hearts of many.

The atmosphere was conducive as musicians played the best they could to hold the people together. Sadare explained that this Lagos outing is modeled after the famous Cape Town

International Jazz Festival in order to give it the desired effect and clout. He said, "this festival is designed to offer visitors and residents in Lagos world class entertainment. The theme of this year is *Jazz in the Megacity* and our intention is to celebrate Nigerian Jazz and Jazz-related musicians who play the genre of music in various fusions and with an indigenous flavor."

For this purpose, artistes for this year's outing were mainly the accomplished ones among them. A few of them were up-coming singers who equally showed that they were ever ready to prove their mettle. With the five different stages tagged after Nigeria's foremost jazzists and high life impresarios like Osita Osadebe, Steve Rhodes, Fela Kuti, Fatai Rolling Dollar and

Bala Milla, the stage was set to thrill and enthrall the audience.

One of Nigeria's foremost jazz exponents Biodun Batik described the show as a big event to bring jazz musicians together and create a beautiful scenario to make people happy and be more appreciative of the jazz music." Some of the performers included Biodun Batik, Ugo, Oyin, Seun Sticks, Dr. Blaze and Alex Osho. Their performances made people asking for more. The mix of acoustic and big saxophones and other familiar jazz instruments added huge vibes to the accompaniments.

The rendition by Skata Vibrations on the last day sent the crowd reeling with joy as they shuffled their legs and twisted their waists. Skata Vibration made use of loops. With heavy reliance on guitars and bass and trumpets to stir the crowd, it was more of a spiritual production, with heavy instruments that often

sounded like those of the rock musicians. At a stage, it even seemed as if the defunct Police Band, known for its heavy percussion was on stage. But the leader of the band, Jad, an American could not hold back his joy when they were through and he enthused, "Oh, we just play music. We jam to the mood of the moment, right from our inner souls."

With over 200 live performances within three days, it is yet to be seen any other jazz festival that can match what the organizers put together. Yet it is not time for celebration. Nigerians are yet to be fully in love with jazz. Even though it is a music for the elite, jazz soothes the soul; it is so edifying that the combination of lyre, cymbal and tambourine can match what King David did in the Bible to honour God. Jazz is soul-searching; it is conducive to douse worries and render hearts free from acrimony, headaches and pains.