

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

LONDON WIDE BLACK ARTS PROGRAMME

FROM FEBRUARY 21ST - MARCH 28TH 1986

1 Introduction

This report outlines a proposal for a London wide Black Arts Programme reflecting the historical and contemporary Black Experience. The Black Experience which is the broad title for the programme will have a major impact on London's cultural and artistic life and help develop an understanding of the past, present and future of the Black presence in Britain. Through a variety of art forms, both traditional and contemporary, and subjects both historical and present day, the programme will highlight the political, social, cultural and economic contribution of black people to this country. The programme is planned to take place for 6 weeks from February 21st to March 28th, 1986 in a variety of venues ranging for Mainstream, Community Arts and Black Arts Institutions.

1.2. Background

Before proceeding to outline the objectives, structure and cost implications of this programme, it is important to clarify the history of the project. This is best summarised as follows:-

- (a) The People's Gallery submitted a proposal in January 1984 for a major visual arts exhibition depicting on canvass the History of Black People in Britian. The proposal was presenteed as part of GLC Anti Racist Year at an estimated cost of £101,000.
- (b) The Ethnic Arts Advisors while supporting the application felt further detailed information was required before they were able to make a decision. It was agreed that the People's Gallery should undertake a feasibility study and report back to the Committee with full details of the budget, artists to be commissioned, administrative structure and the time scale envisaged for completion of the project.
- (c) From the feasibility study, it became clear that the project was very large and required extensive administrative back-up and resources. It was also important for the completed works to have a permanent home. On 18.12.84 the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee agreed that the Roundhouse Black Arts Centre be invited to take over the Black Experience Arts Project and appoint full-time staff to co-ordinate this project. The Committee further agreed that £80,000 of its grants budget be earmarted for the staging of special events under the banner of the Black Experience to coincide with the projected opening of the Roundhouse Black Arts Centre.

- 1.3 1986 will be a significant year for Black Arts for a number of reasons. It will be 10 years since the publication of Naseem Khans report "The Arts Antains Ignores" which first drew the attention of Local Authorities, ACGB, and Regional Arts Associations to the presence of Black Arts in Britain. The research which was published by the Commission for Facial Equality since its publication and widely distributed, provided descriptive accounts of the range of arts and cultural activities taking place in the country, often with no financial support, access to venues or resources. The report made a series of recommendations to the funding bodies for the promotion and development of Black Arts and it will be interesting to assess what real advances have been made by Black Arts and Artists.
- 1.4 Next year will also see the opening of Europe's first major Black Arts Centre. This is a very significant development for Black Arts which will have a venue of equal calibre and facilities to some of the best known art venues of Europe.
- 1.5 The effects of the proposals by Central Government to rate cap and abolish the GLC, if successful, will also be felt in 1986. While the emphasis of the London wide Arts Programme will rightly be on the celebration of the historical and contemporary presence of Black People in Britain and the significant contribution to the development of this country, the devastating effects of Central Government policies on the future development of Black Arts, cannot be underestimated. Thus the planned programme of activities will be used as a campaign for continued support to Black Arts through ACGB, GLAA, Local Boroughs and Mainstream Arts Institutions.
- 1.6 Objectives of the Black Experience
- (a) To give expression to the experience of black people in this country through the work of contemporary artists.
 - (b) To highlight throught the different art forms the significant recent developments of Black Arts in Greater London area.
 - (c) To present the best of Black Arts in a co-ordinated programme across different venues.
 - (d) To illustrate the wide range of mediums that are being employed by black artists including dance, theatre, music, visual arts, literature, film and video.
 - (e) To assess the role of public patronage and the development of Black Arts.
 - (f) To make the black communities themselves aware of their heritage, contributions and current arts practice.
 - (g) To make the Mainstream British media aware of the high quality of Black Arts now.

1.7 Thematic Structure

The Black Experience will consist of a programme of events each of which will form part of one of the themes of the Black Experience. The themes of the programme are:-

- (a) Figures and forces of Black History
- (b) Resistance and Rebellion
- (c) Impace and Influences
- (d) Race and Labour

1.8 Figures and Forces on Black History

The focus of this theme is on individual who have influenced the development of the black communities in politics, science, education, health, art, sports and media. These people include Claudia Jones, the founder of first black newspaper in Britain and a committed political activist all her life; Paul Robeson, Mary Seacote, black nurse who nursed lives of soldiers in Crimeon War but never given the recognition; C.L.R. James the Black Historian; Maurice Bishop who studied in London and returned to Grenada to lead a revolution; Vinakyak Damodar Savarkar patriot and freedom fighter to name but a few.

1.9 Through production of plays, exhibitions, poetry, readings and screening of films the programme will highlight the very significant contributions made by these individuals. Programme ideass include:

- (i) A Focus in C.L.R. James: Producton of his play "The Black Jacobins Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution, the first Colonial Revolution; exhibition of his books and journals and screening of films made with C.L.R. James.
- (ii) A production of play on the life of Claudia Jones.
- (iii) A photographic exhibition of the many black Figures and forces in Black History.
- (iv) A production of play set in India House at the hight of Nationalist fervour and political agitation which led to the independence of India (set in the 40's)

(b) Resistance and Rebellian

Black people have played their political roles in this country both through the main stream political machinery and their own independent organisations. Nowhere is the struggle of the Afro, Caribbean and Asian community which moved from Resistance to open Rebellion more clearly analysed than in A. Sivanandan's book "A Different Hunger" writtings on Black Resistance. Again through use of Exhibitions, film programmes, seminars and performances the comtemporary artists will present the struggles of the black communities. Programme ideas include:

- (i) Film programme: Struggle for Black Community: Who Killed Colin Roach; Riots and Rumours of Riots; Hole in Babylon; Pressure, Terrotons etc.
- (ii) Photographic exhibits of the Uprisings.
- (iii) A series of seminars on the analysis of the past struggles as the basis for a way forward to be presented by leading political figures in the black community.

(c) Impact and Influences

The presence of black people have enriched and continues to enrich the cultural and artistic life of this country. Black People's music , dance, life styles, Theatrical traditions, visual arts, literature, fashion and food have all impacted in European culture.

The art and cultures of the Black and Third World have been appreciated over the ages and have been presented back to black people as something other than their own. Similarly many black artists who influenced the development of European cultures have been denied recognition and the objective of the programme is to focus on their work. Programme ideas include:

- (i) Tribute to neglected Black Artists such as Ira Aldridge; Coldridge Taylor; Paul Robson through a programme of concerts and poetry recitals.
- (ii) Fashion shows which trace the influences on fashion today from Africa, India and the Caribbean.
- (iii) Dance in an area where black people have made a significant contribution but one which has been very largely neglected. It is proposed to organise a dance programme which will focus on both contemporary Black British Dance Companies and the context in which their work is being developed both in relation to contemporary Black American dance and its roots outside of Europe. A similar programme of Indian dance will also be presented.
- (v) The monopoly on Cinema held by the Europeans is being broken down with the emergence of Cinemas of the Third World, particularly from India, Latin America, Black America, Africa and Black British. Screening of some of these films will be presented as part of the programme.

(d) Race and Labour

The contribution of black people to the political and economic development of this country cannot be under estimated. Black people, many of whom had never seen England fought and gave their lives for the so called " Mother Country". This is never acknowledged in history books or the hundreds of films made about the wars. This is continued even today where many soldiers are sent to Northern Ireland to uphold British rule.

Black people arrived in this country at the invitation of white industrialists and the Government to help build the economy of this Country. That they worked in the worst jobs; lived in the most appalling housing conditions and were denied access and facilities because of the colour of their skins led to the formation of some of the most milliant organisations fighting against racism. It was the black workers who lead the Imperial Type Writers and Grunwick strikes.

These struggles were not only waged on the factory floors but carried through into the Trade Union Movements and the Labour Party. Between 1924 - 1929 Britian for instance, had a Black MP named Shaperji Saklatvala in Battersea.

The role of black people in the Labour Movement is historical and one which must be understood in order to develop a strategy for a way forward. Programme ideas included:

- (i) commissioning a research for the purpose of feature film on Race and Labour History.
- (ii) A series of seminars on the Race and Labour Movement led by black and white Labour historians.
- (iii) A exhibition of photographs, newspaper cuttings, publications which trace the role of black people in the British Fones to present day.

1.9 Artists

The increased funding and support from the GLC has enabled the development and consolidation of Black Arts in London. A large number of new groups and organisations have emerged and a number of Black Arts Institutions established. It is these group organisations and individual artists who will be commissioned to produce and present the ideas outlined in the report as the Black Experience.

2.0 Tara Arts

Black Theatre co-operate
Dance Company No. 7
Rare Earth
Academy of India Dance
Association of Black Film and Video Workshops
Black Arts Gallery
Westbourne Art Gallery
Peoples Gallery
Temba
Carib Theatre
MAAS
Black Music Productions
Dacoits
Creation for Liberation
Triveni

South London Cultural Society
Umoja Theatre Company
David Baily
Gavin Janjtis
Union Dance Company

2.1 Administration

The Black Experience project will be managed and organised by the Race Equality Unit. To assist the Head of Race Equality Unit in the formation of the artistic programme it is proposed to set up a small Advisory Committee made up of Advisors from the Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee and representative for the Ethnic Arts Officers Forum. The role of the Advisory Committee would be to advise in the artistic programme and publicity for the 6 weeks event.

- 2.2 To assist in the day to day co-ordination of the project, it is proposed to engage a consultant with the responsibility for the administration of the project. This will include liaison with artists, booking of venues, production and distribution of publicity material and financial management of the project. Due to the massive scale of the project, large numbers of artists and venues unvalued, it is vital that the consultant is engaged as soon as possible to work on the co-ordination of the project. The consultant will be working for the offices of the Race Equality Unit and will be responsible to the Head of the Unit.
- 2.3 The production and distribution of publicity is important if the objectives of the Black Experience are to be realised. The Race Equality Unit will shortly be bringing a report to this Committee for the establishing of a black Marketing and Publicity Agency. It is proposed that the production and distribution of all publicity material is assigned to this agency. Publicity strategy for the Black Experience will include the production of posters, leaflets, programme booklets and catalogues. Advertisements will be placed in the black and ethnic press, Time Out, City Limits, Music Magazines and (National Papers where possible).

Venues

This list is by no means complete -

Black Arts Institutions

Tara Arts Centre
Black Art Gallery
Westbourn Art Gallery
Theatre Technis
Indian Arts Council (U.K)
Art Gallery
Ceddo Film and Video Workshop
Black Audio Film Collective

Community Arts Centres

Battersea Arts Centre
Albany Empire
New Shaw Theatre
Jackson Lane
Chats Palace
Waterman Arts Centre, Hounslow
Havalock Centre, Southall
Plus - Local Community Centres and Town Halls

Main stream Art Institutions

South Bank Concert Halls
National Theatre
National Film Theatre
Saddlers Wells
Music Venues

2.6 Finance

The Ethnic Arts Sub-Committee (E/AR 363) on 18.12.84 agreed to commit up to £80,000 of 85/86 Ethnic Arts budget for the Black Experience. The total estimated cost for monitoring the London Wide Arts Programme for 6 weeks is _____ leaving a shortfall of _____ still to be found. There is no financial provision within the existing Arts and Recreation budget. Committee is minded to support this particular initiative finances will have to be procured. I estimate that an additional sum of _____ will be required to carry out the artistic programme outlined in the report.

2.6 Budget

Estimated expenditure is set out below and notes explaining each item then follows:

1. Publicity

		£
Poster design and production	(10,000)	
Leaflet design and production	(30,000)	10,000
Programme booklets	(15,000)	

2.

3. Venue Hire

30 venues at average £500	15,000
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4. Arts Programme

..... Productions

£

(a)	The Black Jacobins	70,000
(b)	Claudia Jones	25,000
(c)	Play set in 40's India House (The Fire Abroad)	25,000

Film Programme

Hire Films for U.K. and Abroad Approximately 20 features, 40 shorts.	6,000
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Film Transport

Shipping and Insurance Film transport between venues (4 weeks).	2,000
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Music Concerts

10 Music Concerts Inclusive of artists fees, publishing, hire of equipment and security.	20,000
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Exhibitions

- (a) Possible suggestions and
photographic exhibits of the
figures and fones in black
history.
- (b) Exhibits of the
and Black Resistance
- (c) Exhibits of books, publications
and journals of any by C.L.R. Jones
- (d) Race and Labour Movement:

Estimated 5 exhibits
inclusive of research,
....., hire of exhibit
furniture.

50,000

	<u>Dance Programme</u>	£
	Commissioning of new pieces of work.	50,000
	<u>Seminars, Lectures, Symposiums</u>	
	Presented by Black Historians and Black Artists.	10,000
	<u>Publication/Distribution</u>	
	Symposium, lectures, seminars 4 publications	10,000
5	<u>Black Experience Publicity Van</u>	
	Hire of van, driver for 6 weeks.	3,000
6	<u>Assistance During the Programme</u>	
		2,500
7	<u>Hospitality</u>	
	Receptions for key events	3,500
8	<u>Consultancy</u>	
	1st August - 31st March 1986 8 months full-time.	8,000
9	<u>Contingency</u>	
10	<u>Advertising</u>	
	Black and Ethnic Artists Time Out City Limits Selected National Press T.N. Advertisements Radio Adverts	12,000

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE ARTS PROGRAMME

PROGRESS REPORT

As at 31/10/1985

PROGRAMMING

We have been meeting with a number of groups to discuss the possibility of them being commissioned to organize the projects in the above programme. The following is the state of development of that process.

1) FOCUS ON CLR JAMES

The focus in one major project on the life and work of CLR James with two components which will be linked in terms of the venue, publicity and all other possible areas of overlap.

a) The Black Jacobins Play

This is the most developed of the projects to date. Talawa Theatre Company has been commissioned to stage the play "The Black Jacobins" written by CLR James. Concerning "The Contemporary Significance of the Black Jacobins" Talawa have written...."Because it is so often the case with black dramatic productions in this country that the material they use is untried and new, the black theatrical community has to prove itself on too many fronts simultaneously. This is undoubtedly a good thing as it requires fierce determination and we learn as we go...however, when a play of such historical authority, proven distinction, a play of elegance and vision exists, then it is right that not only the black community but the general theatre-going public should have an opportunity of seeing it produced.

THE BLACK JACOBINS has been performed in England before, in the year it was first written, 1940, when it was presented by the London Stage Society with Paul Robeson in the lead, but never since. This is explained away by the large budget necessary to mount it. The play has, nevertheless, been regularly produced in Africa, the West Indies and the United States of America. This play, a classic of black theatrical tradition which so eloquently portrays the only truly successful slave revolt in history, has much to say to the embattled black community of this country, portraying as it does the historical and political events of the late eighteenth century which still influence today's attitudes."

The play like the exhibition will be staged at Riverside Studios from 17th February to 16th March 1986. Talawa, on agreement with Riverside Studios will be responsible for the administrative arrangements and the staging of the play, together with publicity and general P.R. around the play and the exhibition.

a) Exhibition on CLR James

Creation for Liberation is about to be commissioned to undertake the staging of this exhibition which is also to take place at the Riverside Studios.