EVENTS 2011: Some Stars Dazzled the World, Others Dimmed Prematurely

Contributed by Modupe Ogunbayo-Tona
Sunday, 15 January 2012

As reports of instability and chaos rocked the nation’s socio-political front, the entertainment sector, especially the music industry, gave many Nigerians reason to smile or laugh through it all.

Entertainment was the soothing balm for Nigerians in 2011. As reports of instability and chaos rocked the nation’s socio-political front, the entertainment sector, especially the music industry, gave many Nigerians reason to smile or laugh through it all. In March, President Goodluck Jonathan gave the Nigerian Motion Picture Industry popularly called Nollywood, reasons to hope for greater things when he promised the industry a $200 million intervention fund. “There is a lot to gain if government supports this sector. It employs a lot of people and can also earn foreign exchange…it is a key sector and every president of Nigeria needs to know what is happening there,” he said. In the same month, Dapo Oyebanjo, popularly called D’banj, and Innocent Idibia also known as Tu-face, were nominated in the African Best Category of the prestigious Black Entertainment Television, BET, Awards in the United States. In June, the two Nigerian nominees jointly won the prize at the star-studded finale in the United States. The BET awards seek to honour African-American and African entertainers and its significance is underlined by its frequent reference as the “Black Grammys.” The two singers were not the only Nigerian artistes that put smiles on the faces of Nigerian music lovers. Ayo Balogun, who is better known by his appellation of Wizkid, won the UK-based Music of Black Origin, MOBO, award for Best African Act in 2011. Abolore Akande, also called 9ice, had earlier won the 2009 edition. The winning streak for Nigerian singers extended to the annual Channel O Awards held in South Africa. At the awards, Darey Art Alade won in the Most Gifted Dance video category for Ba Ni Ki Di while D’banj won special recognition award and a second award for Most Gifted Male Video Artiste for Mr. Endowed, his collaboration with Snoop Dogg, American artiste. O le Ku, Ice Prince’s hit song in which he featured BrymO, also won for him the Most Gifted Newcomer Video Artiste while Naeto C won in the Most Gifted (Male) West African video category for 10 over 10. Banky W, who also doubles as one of the comperes at the event, won the Most Gifted Rhythms and Blues Video award for Feeling It, his collaboration with M.I. The award brought Nigeria musicians into international arena and many international record labels looked the way of several Nigerian musicians recently. Top on the list of Nigerian singers boasting of signing international record deals in 2011 includes Asa, D’banj, Nneka, Tu-face, Darey, Tiwa Savage and Cobhams, foremost music producer and occasional singer. Asa, Tuface and Nneka were listed among the most powerful Nigerian acts by CNN in its 2011 list of most influential Africans. They are also ranked among other Africans in Forbes’ list of most influential Africans alongside Chinua Achebe, the globally-acclaimed author, and Genevieve Nnaji, Nollywood actress. But, by far, the most influential amongst the country’s music greats revealed itself in Femi Kuti, the Afrobeat singer. Shortly before the end of 2011, Kuti earned his third Grammy Award nomination for Africa for Africa, his 2011 international musical album. In the nail-biting weeks before the final announcement of the winner is made in US this January, many Nigerian hope Kuti will go home with the trophy this time. Also in 2011, Karen Igho, Nigeria’s contestant in last year’s edition of the Big Brother Africa, BBA, reality television show, emerged the joint winner of the competition. With that feat, she took home $200,000. Her emergence marked the third consecutive time that a Nigerian won in the continental reality television show after Kevin Pam and Uti Nwachukwu won the 2009 and 2010 editions respectively. Though somewhat overshadowed by the Nigerian music industry in the year gone by, Nollywood still thrived among the entertainment sectors that soothed Nigerians’ nerves during 2011. Blockbusters like Damage, Tango With Me, Aramotu, Mirror Boy, Two Brides and a Baby, Anchor Baby, Return of Jenifa among others were released locally and internationally to rave reviews and the delight of movie lovers. However, movie lovers were denied the joy of watching the hotly-anticipated cinematic release of Black Gold: The Story of the Niger Delta Struggle by Jeta Amata. The multi-million Naira movie which featured foreign and local cast was already shot and ready for release when its release was stopped abruptly following the threat to the lives of Amata, his wife and especially, their child by Niger Delta militants. They were chagrined at the revelations made in the movie and they do not want that shown to the world. When they wrote Amata of their intention to kidnap his daughter from her school in Abuja, the cinematographer was forced to flee from Nigeria to the United States with his family. This development affected Nigeria’s chances in international festivals in 2011. Amata’s movie was seen as potential nominee for the African category of the Academy Awards, also known as Oscars because of its topical theme and relevance to the international audience. These were the chords which resonated with the Oscar award judges when Hotel Rwanda, a movie on the 1994 Rwandan genocide, won the prestigious award a few years ago. But, Nigeria missed out on that. At the African Movie Academy Awards, AMAA, Nigerian movie practitioners failed to dazzle. Many of the top prizes were won by movie practitioners from other parts of Africa with Via Riva from Congo, winning the biggest prize at the 2011 edition. That did not, however, dim the shine of Nollywood stars last year. Several movie stars were included among the 2011 Nigerian National Awards honourees. These included Kanayo O. Kanayo, Osita Iheme, Stephanie Okereke, Amaka Igwe, Olu Jacobs and Genevieve Nnaji. They all got the Member of the Federal Republic, MFR, national award. The industry also recorded deaths in the year. MC Loph, the singer behind the popular remix of Osondu Owendi, a song which was the most played single in the Eastern part of Nigeria in 2009 according to entertainment magazines, died alongside another co-traveller in a fatal car crash. He was on his way to perform his traditional marriage ceremony. His pregnant fiancée, who was also in the vehicle, was injured, but she survived. Not long after, Christy Essien-Igbokwe, also known as Lady of Songs, passed away after a short illness. Also, Ishola Durojaiye, known as Alasari in the Yoruba movie genre, John Chidioke also called CD John, Chidinma Mbalaso, UK-based Yemisi Akande popularly called Eleto, Ashley Nwosu and Sam Loco-Efe were among notable music and Nollywood stars who passed on

in 2011.