

Why Hay Festival Of UK Wants To Partner LABAF

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Maggie Robertson and Penny Compton... at the LABAF ground

THE 13th Lagos Book and Art Festival, LABAF held for four days at the Freedom Park, Lagos last weekend with participation by visitors from UK, Germany, France and others...

ORGANISERS of the Hay Festival of Literature and Arts, an annual event held for 10 days between end of May and beginning of June in Hay-on-Wye, Pow, Wales have declared their intention to partner the yearly Lagos Book and Art Festival, LABAF. The disclosure was made by two representatives of the UK festival, who were observer-participants at the 13th edition of the LABAF held November 18-20 at the Freedom Park, (Old Colonial Prison Site located on Broad Street Lagos Island).

The participation of the Hay Festival officials in the Lagos event was via representation by its Development Officer, Maggie Robertson and the Programme Officer, Penny Compton through

facilitation of the British Council in Nigeria. The officials said they specifically came around to seek collaboration between Hay and the LABAF, through its organisers, the 20-year old Committee for Relevant Art, CORA.

The three-day events in Lagos, which included book and art exhibitions, discussions, musical and dance performances, readings, film shows as well as a segment devoted to children programmes otherwise known as The Green Festival, is gradually becoming an international event with participants drawn from among scholars, writers, artists, journalists, school children and people from around the world. Between 2005 (when the festival first attracted its first gush of international guests) and this latest edition, it has hosted about 20 such participants in critical segments of its programmes. The coming of the Hay Festival officers and their expressed willingness to partner it, seems, however, a major haul in its 13 years history.

THE 27-year old Hay Festival, which has the same basic activities of bringing artists, writers, comedians and politicians together, had earlier facilitated the birth of a literary festival in Kenya about three years ago.

In Nigeria last week for the first time, the visiting officers said they had learned a lot and looking forward to the collaboration. "However, it is not only to bring Hay and all we know to Lagos and take Lagos to Hay but there are simple things we observed like the kids' dance choreography and creativity workshop that never happen back home because the kids are very reserve and there are no incredible creative instruction as the children are witnessing here," said Penny Compton; hinting that the collaboration will be in the form of bringing creative writers from Lagos to UK and perhaps bringing international writers to Lagos too.

"It is sort of drawing and pulling knowledge and in a way help to improve their skills and increase their perspectives."

She continued, "It (current visitation) is just to come and look at what is going on in Nigeria and where we can start and have fresh perspectives; we don't know which direction or on how it is going to go, we are at an early stages of the discussion"

Asked in what ways she thought organisers of the LABAF, the Committee for Relevant Art, CORA, could improve on the festival's activities; she said it is possibly in the area of growth; but comparatively she thinks it is not about size; and in fact LABAF should not be compared to Hay festival, which is bigger in terms of scope. She is, however, fascinated by what she had seen at the Lagos event. She disclosed that the two events have quite similar activities, especially giving writers platforms to have freedom of expression. She said she also noticed in the various discussions at the festival that the participants had divergent views and opinions, which is quite healthy for the growth of literature. Such also happens at the Hay festival in Wales.

There is always the lack of fund to run such magnitude of events in the dimension dreamed by the LABAF, how can they improve? Penny offered: "From what I can gathered, there is a problem of poor level of art patronage in the country; it is a direct reflection of the bad economy. Moreover, funding is a not typical Nigerian problem, it is all over the world; but it (festival) is in an early day yet. There are ways that it can be commercialised by bringing some commercial partners who will be here acting on it. As it is now, art patronage is not on top of the A-list of priority for lots of people. There are a lot of other things that are taking over the mind of people

left and right; and I have heard that there are a lot of hungry artists here and they have to keep doing what they are doing; you know, trying to live because if there is a will there is a way”

Devised by Norman and Peter Florence in 1988, the Hay festival was described by Bill Clinton in 2001 as “The Woodstock of the Mind”

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