

**SOCIETY OF YOUNG NIGERIAN WRITERS**

**ARTICLES, ESSAYS AND E-BOOKS ON DANIEL  
OLORUNFEMI FAGUNWA**



## FOREST OF A THOUSAND DAEMONS

The expectation was already high long before Adventures into the Forest of a Thousand Daemons opened to audiences for two days last week in the commodious Shell Hall of Muson Centre in Lagos.

A preview at Ibadan weeks before had writer and journalist, Maxim Uzor Uzoatu, gushing over with praises, declaring the performance as “a rousing advertisement of total theatre.”

Since then, the cast and crew have been beavering away, fine-tuning Professor Femi Osofisan’s adaptation of Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa’s Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole, helpfully translated into English for non-Yoruba readers as The Forest of a Thousand Daemons by Profesor Wole Soyinka.

And when the English version of the play finally opened on Saturday, September 13, the effort of the production crew was not in vain. Neither was the audience disappointed. And for the sponsors, Chams plc, an acronym for Computer Hardware and Management Services, an information and communications technology company known for its card-based services, e-commerce and mobile payment schemes, it was an unparalleled success.

Guests arriving at Shell Hall that evening were treated to something refreshingly different from the usual fare of concerts and wedding receptions at Muson. Instead of the usual red carpet, there were rolls and rolls of mats, yes mats, leading to the foyer where leafy trees and palms lined the way to the auditorium. Standing close by the trees were painted dwarves along the aisles, and barefooted maidens in green outfits with plaited hair ushering guests to their seats. Strewn here and there were clay pots containing cowries and shells. And on the stage itself were hefty trees forming the backdrop for a play whose action takes place mostly in a forest.

In the opening scene, we see Akaraogun, an intrepid hunter whose motto can be likened to that of the British SAS (“Who dares wins,”) recounting his exploits to and from the forest of demons, the dangers encountered. Played with gusto by Toyin Oshinaike, he returns to a hero’s welcome by the villagers who are eager to hear his exploits.

Afterwards, there is merriment. While this lasts, the Oba, already chaffing presumably because of Akaraogun's overwhelming fame, dares him with another challenge – a journey to the summit of Mount Langbodo. Since he is the bravest man in the village, why not take on this new adventure to Mount Langbodo?

A man ever in quest of the unknown, Akaraogun accepts but agrees to ascend the mountain along with five other notable and equally fearless hunters in the community, Olohun Iyo (Taiwo Ibikunle) Kako (Martins Iwuagwu) Efo Iye (Simileoluwa Hassan) Imodoye (Edward Afolabi Dipeolu) and Elegbede Ode (Ombo Gogo Ombo).

Adventures into the Forest is not just a play about an individual with cojones. It is about other human traits of compassion, gratitude, wisdom and, above all, team work. Where the hunters battle Agbako (Martins Iwuagwu) individually and fail, they overwhelm him as a team, thanks to the sagely counsel of Iranlowo.

All the actors acquit themselves creditably, with outstanding performances by some. Ify Agwu is one of them. Reminiscent of a Joke Silva on stage, she gave a virtuoso performance in her role as the guardian spirit behind the adventurous hunters such that the audience gave her a spontaneous applause when she curtsied at the end of the play.

Interpersed with song and dance, poetry and proverbs, Adventures into the Forest is a masterful production that professional Thespians like Prof. Osofisan are known for, despite working with a cast of nearly 30. With productions like this, Chams is already living up to their boast of reviving Nigerian's interest in the stage.

A delightfully long production, the producers/ sponsors were gracious enough to show a documentary on Chams, thus allowing the audience time to reflect on the first part of the performance – as in classical Greek drama – as well as get informed about the ICT company now deeply involved in the arts. A worthy effort by Chams, no doubt, the production was marred by the choice of Shell Hall. Without the raked seats as you have in the nearby Agip Recital Hall, some of us had to crane our necks to follow the transaction on stage, coupled with ushers who partially blocked the actors from view.

On hand to watch the production were over a hundred members of staff of Chams Plc, distinguished from others in their green outfit and led by the MD/ CEO, Demola Aladekomo and his wife. Mr Tayo Aderinokun, MD of Guaranty Trust Bank, turned up with his wife. There were many more bankers, captains of industry and guests from the academia, as well as Dr. Ahmed Yerima, GM of the National Theatre and laureate of>NNLG prize for drama.

As a production, Adventures into the Forest was a success through and through. Endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, this is one stage production that is sure to revive interest not only in the theatre but also encourage cultural continuity.

For as Awosunmi writes in his directorial note, “only the ghosts of the likes of Fagunwa and Tutuola can help resurrect our collective sense of responsibility and restore our national right to cultural continuity.” For Osofisan, also, staging Adventures into the Forest would not have been possible without Chams. “Chams is rendering an immeasurable service to the preservation of our culture, at a time when our country like others in the so-called Third World are faced with the menace of globalisation. It is such projects as this that will help the process of our cultural rebirth. Fagunwa has shown us that we have our own folklore and fables, our stories and sagas and heroes as authentically rich, and enriching, as any other in the world.”

In the coming months, Chams will take Adventures into the Forest to Abuja, Ibadan and Ife. Based on what transpired on the Muson stage last week, this is one production audiences in those cities should be reasonably anxious to watch.