

## NOTES AND NEWS

### Lesotho Academy of Arts

Practically, Lesotho Academy of Arts follows on the footsteps of the late Rev. Brother Dr. Basil, SHO. Dr. Basil pioneered the teaching of music in Lesotho. He headed the Roma College, many of whose students were introduced to staff notation and brass band music. He was the principal musical observer-cum-reporter on Lesotho for the *Journal of African Music*, the organ of the African Music Society founded by Dr. Hugh Tracey, early in post-World War II period.

As assertive heirs to Dr. Basil's role, the Lesotho Academy of Arts is a voluntary, non-profit making, self-fending, non-sectarian educational institution. Perceptually, it is the brainchild of the narrator of its tale, and was founded in 1990 by Dr. 'M'asechele N. Khaketla, Mr. B. Moeketsi, Rev. Fr. C. Sutha OMI, Mr. Thabo Merekimane, Mr. Tsokolo 'Muso, Mr. G.T. Mohlapiso, Ms. Mary Agnes 'M'anonyane Nonyane-Pakela, Mr. M.T. Mabote, Miss. Tsili A. Morolong and Mr. Motsamai Motsamai.

LAA's honorary patrons, from its birth, are the Hon. Chief Justice of the High Court of Lesotho, Mr. Justice Peter Brendan Cullinan; Rev. Pastor Leteka Gilbert Sibolla, then Head of the Lesotho Evangelical Church (initiated by French missionaries of the mainstream Lutheran movement); Mr. Tsitso Mohapi, a talented but unskilled clay-modeller (whose needs for basic life-supports have driven him into motor-mechanics as a trade), and Dr. T.C. Maitin, a medical practitioner.

LAA's aim is to liberate the God-given creative talents which lie idle or dormant in the head, heart and hands of a Mosotho toddler, child, teenager, youth and adult. To a schooled artist, Lesotho is a fertile virgin patiently waiting to attract the eye of a suitable musician, poet, actor, choreographer or painter! To date, many a prospective investor in local art gets arrested at exhibitions of art and presentations of performing arts in South Africa's long-established markets and arenas of performing arts. Or else, gifted young Basotho artists leave their country to go and eke a living in South Africa, which geographically encircles Lesotho and, economically, dwarfs any local efforts.

Of the 1,600,000 Basotho in 30,000 square kilometres of land — 75% of which is mountainous and inhabited by only 25% of the total population, 40% of the able-bodied males are migrant labourers who man the South African mineral mines and contribute 52% of Lesotho's GNP in remittances. 70% of Basothos live in Lowlands, lying up to 1,985 metres above sea level — at a density of 600 people per square kilometre. 60% of the population live below the Poverty Datum Line, with 48% who are direct beneficiaries of food-aid from international donors. 20% of the rural population is landless; 43% of the labour force is unemployed; 52% of eligible children are not attending primary school. Lesotho is one the 28 poorest countries in the Third World, and among the ten poorest in Africa. The unplanned-for urbanization in Lesotho is spear-headed by the fast increasing numbers of "Street Children"!

LAA exists in order to address the question of untapped CREATIVE FORCES with which Lesotho's Mosotho is definitely endowed by the CREATOR! LAA has set for itself the task of mounting, organizing and launching educational schemes with a sole view of equipping the prospective artists with usable skills in music, dance, drama, literary and visual art. The newly unanimously elected democratic Government of Lesotho, through its Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Lesao Archibald Lehohla, has donated 15,000 square metres of prime land in the heartland of Maseru on which are to be built schools of music, drama, dance, literary and visual art.

LAA was no sooner legalized in terms of Lesotho's laws for the regulation of voluntary social organizations in 1991, than the Ministry of Education which, inter alia, controls and administers CULTURAK concerns, meted LAA with moral support and official recognition. From thence on, the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Television flung open its doors, enabling LAA to disseminate information to the overall population in, and in the neighbourhood, of Lesotho. The author of this story runs weekly columns on "ART, DANCE AND MUSIC" in Lesotho Today, a Government weekly. News and views on matters relating to art are televised and radioed frequently each month.

In 1993 LAA established a complimentary organization whose aim is to locate, identify and assemble Basotho prospective and skilled artists. This is the LESOTHO COUNCIL OF ARTISTS which is headed by Dr. L.B.B.J. Machobane, former Minister of Education, during whose reign LAA was established. Dr. Machobane is also a former Acting Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Lesotho. LCA now boasts of over 400 members, 150 of whom are active.

In collaboration with LCA, LAA runs a programme of public lectures, workshops, art exhibitions and educational visits to cultural centres in and out of Lesotho. A close working relationship has been established with the Performing Arts Council of Orange Free State that is directed by Mr. Fred Sharp, Mr. Ron Rau of the Faculty of Art in the Orange Free State Technikon, Professors Bennie Britz (Dept. of Architecture), Dr. D.P. Lamprecht (Dept. of Music), J. Moll (Faculty of Arts), Mr. Nico Luwes (Dept. of Drama) and Mr. Jan Schutte (Dept. of Fine Art) — all of the University of Orange Free State. LAA has also struck links with Mr. Steffan Hundt of the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Mr. Kobus Dreyer of the National Museum and Mr. Chris Olivier of the SABC.

Since 1992, LAA's President is Prof. Adamu David Baikie, a graduate in sculpture, and current Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Lesotho. The Chairman is Dr. Paulus Mokete Mohome, Dean of Post-Graduate Studies in NUL.

LAA lives from hand to mouth. It is at the mercy of occasional GOOD SAMARITANS, and survives from contributions made by its members and lovers of art. The Executive Director and his volunteer secretary receive no salary. They depend on their wits for their daily bread and office rental. LAA's basic are three, acronymized "MMM", meaning: MEN, MONEY, MATERIALS. MEN stands for all forms of HUMAN resources. MONEY is for capital costs, recurrent expenditure and costs of power and water and access road construction, including building up administrative structures, schools of arts and living quarters for guest teachers, artists

and students. By MATERIAL resources is meant teaching-aids from text-books to dancing shoes, cameras and tape recorders to an artist's brush. There are, of course, long-term and short-term NEEDS, some of which are needed urgently. True, Rome was gradually built and, certainly not instantly. LAA urgently needs VOLUNTEERS to come and assist in keeping afloat the IDEA of LAA and IDEAL for which its founders were prompted into action.

LAA, for an idea, offers a unique opportunity for students of art who wish to carry out researches, experimentations and artistic schemes for the love of art, or for commercial ends. Early birds catch worms a-plenty.

Tsokolo 'Muso,  
Executive Director, LAA, P. B. A280, Maseru 100, Lesotho