

Sound In Nigeria

Dynamic duo takes path to quality operation

By Bernd Noack

Dayo Benjamins-Laniyi, a proud mother of three boys and honors graduate of the University of Ibadan, is the first female entrepreneur in professional sound reinforcement in the West African nation of Nigeria.

Three years ago, she resigned a plum public relations job at the Nicon Hilton Hotel in Abuja, Nigeria, and with husband Olatunde, founded DOXA DIGITAL, also located in Abuja. The fledgling enterprise has already emerged as one of the top performance audio companies in the country, serving prestigious international and ceremonial events such as the inauguration din-

ner and cultural festival heralding Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's return to office.

Dayo, with firm backing from Olatunde, decided to pursue the venture – focusing on premium quality – following recurring challenges experienced during both her work in events coordination as well as her own musical performances.

“My work in public relations led to a lot of work with children at ceremonies and holiday celebrations, and I would sing with them,” Dayo explains. “A lot of the parents were diplomats, and they started inviting me to handle events for the anniversaries of their high commissions. The demand for equipment started growing so that I could be heard as I sang national anthems and other musical presentations.”

“The turning point came about three years ago for a performance at the Royal Netherlands embassy, where I had hired equipment,” she continues. “When I picked up the microphone to do their anthem, it was dead. The cable or something, and it was so embarrassing.”

The equipment and support, unfortunately, were indicative of the state of the marketplace at the time. Encouraged by her husband, Dayo decided to fix the situation. The two identified a



Above: Nigerian audio entrepreneurs Dayo and Olatunde. Right: The mobile stage he devised.

World Stage



DOXA's full concert rig shown at top, and the company provides a wide range of equipment and services to an equally wide range of events.

potential investor in Germany, Hans Thomann, head of a successful enterprise, and at eight months pregnant, she boarded a plane to talk with Thomann in person.

Thomann was impressed with Dayo's plan and passion, noting that it reminded him of his first attempts to start his own business. With the necessary backing now in place, DOXA DIGITAL officially opened, with Dayo serving as managing director and Olatunde, a pharmacist by training and profession, taking the role of chief executive officer (as well as chief technician, engineer and road manager).

"We didn't fully understand what we had until we got the equipment, and then all of a sudden, we realized we had the best in the country," she says. "People were making demands and it was no longer the 'sideline thing' – now it's a business."

One unique facet the company offers is a mobile stage that quickly opens and can be configured for large productions. Olatunde served as its designer and chief builder. "He went away for some time with a trailer and returned with a new business opportunity," she explains. "The stage is rented out for a lot of political rallies and church events, where something like it is really needed."

Most of DOXA's sound engineers are employed on a free-lance basis. The labor pool with respect to this specialized skill-set isn't all that deep in Nigeria at this point in time. And

the few who are highly qualified, of course, are in heavy demand.

"It's hard finding people who have the heart to actually work with you for an extended period, and to be committed in fulfilling the regular requirements of managing this level of equipment," Dayo says. "There are those who like the 'hype' of working with stuff like this, but getting them to stay with the company has been a huge challenge. We think we have found several who are beginning to assert that level of loyalty and commitment."

"We've studied other companies in this business that have not sustained success," she adds. "And we found that one of the greatest obstacles is finding people who are loyal and who will not steal or ruin your equipment deliberately because they believe that they're not getting as much as they could get out of the job."

DOXA continues to grow, diversifying into lighting and events packaging, and over the past year, investing in a virtual arsenal of backline gear. This meets demands to satisfy top performing artists.

"I want to go back into music again, I have songs to perform, I want to sing," Dayo concludes. "But at the moment, I'm doing business and the voice needs to rest. I want to combine both in the future." ■

Based in Europe, long-time Live Sound contributor Bernd Noack conducted this interview while in Nigeria, and we thank him for the excellent account.