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# DRUM

by Jacob Roberts-Mensah

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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### **NOTE**

This edition reflects a rehearsal draft of the script and may differ from the final production.

*DRUM* was first produced by Our Day and Omnibus Theatre, and premiered at Omnibus Theatre in September 2022. The performance was directed by Sarah Amankwah, with scenic design by Constance Villemot, sound design by Peter Adjaye, lighting design by Marie Colahan, movement direction by Judith Palmer MBE, and dramaturgy by Sam Pout. The production stage manager was Tracy Benner. The cast was as follows:

**MIKE EGHAN** ..... Benjamin Sarpong-Broni  
**JAMES BARNOR** ..... Joshua Roberts-Mensah

*DRUM* was subsequently produced by Our Day and New Diorama Theatre, and opened at Underbelly at the Edinburgh Fringe on 1 August 2024. The performance was directed by Sarah Amankwah, with dramaturgy by Sam Pout. The stage manager was Laide Sonola and the associate producer was Esther-Rennae Walker. The cast was as follows:

**MIKE EGHAN** ..... King Boateng  
**JAMES BARNOR** ..... Joshua Roberts-Mensah

## CHARACTERS

2 men

**MIKE EGHAN** – 30, Ghanaian, BBC Radio Presenter

**JAMES BARNOR** – 38, Ghanaian, Photographer

## SETTING

BBC Studios

## TIME

1967

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

James Barnor is on assignment to photograph Mike Eghan for a feature in *DRUM* magazine.

As we enter the auditorium, it feels like a highlife music gig, with coloured spotlights swirling over the seats.

Mike Eghan is DJing classic highlife music for the audience.\*

Footage of era-specific London/Accra images are projected.

Chyron: BBC Studios. 1967.

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*To my parents.  
Inspired by my grandparents.*

*(MIKE is in the zone, finishing up the rehearsal for his radio programme. He sits at his desk like a king.)*

**MIKE.** That ends our broadcast of Music With An African Beat, right here from the BBC Studios in Bush House. I hope you enjoyed the broadcast today. Until next time, beeeeeee good!

*(Rehearsal has ended. Less sure of himself his countenance changes. He is less of a king, and more like a subject under scrutiny. MIKE tweaks his script.)*

*(Talking to his producer.)* How did I sound? Don't worry I'll continue to work on the script. And diction. Yes haha! Thanks, Tony. No-no, I'm happy if you're happy. Let's reconvene later. He'll be here any minute now. I've got to get ready for this thing I told you about. This is a big deal for me guys.

*(The producers leave. MIKE rushes to prepare for a photoshoot in the BBC recording studio. He is waiting for the photographer to arrive. He is excited and jittery, pacing around the studio.)*

*(MIKE rushes to place a massive BBC sign in his studio in anticipation of the photoshoot.)*

*(He stands in front of the sign testing out various poses. Analysing each pose, but not settling on one he likes.)*

*(He sits down, stands up, then begins shifting his weight from left to right.)*

*(He stretches his trousers and almost rips them.)*

**MIKE.** Woah!

*(Stunned at the state of his hair, he pats it down. He looks through his desk to find his comb and creates a nice parting in his hair.)*

Ooooo!

*(MIKE runs to his desk, to put on a record, "All For You" by ET Mensah.\* He sings along.)*

*(He keeps on trying out different poses, thinking about what will make him look epic. He dances in the mirror and finishes off with an "I feel good" spin. He is satisfied with the result.)*

*(MIKE continues posing and singing. Enter JAMES BARNOR. Initially, he's not sure if he's in the right place. JAMES recognises the music and dances in. He catches MIKE mid-pose. Secretly, MIKE is hoping he is caught listening to this. JAMES seems to have forgotten MIKE's name.)*

**JAMES.** Mike Eghan?

*(Beat.)*

Chale!

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\* A licence to produce *DRUM* does not include a performance licence for "All For You". The publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact PRS to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. If a licence or permission is unattainable for "All For You", the licensee may not use the song in *DRUM* but should create an original composition in a similar style or use a similar song in the public domain. For further information, please see the Music and Third-Party Materials Use Note on page iii.

*(MIKE responds to a rare but familiar call.)*

**MIKE.** Mr Barnor!

*(MIKE attempts to turn down the music.  
JAMES is keen to join in the fun.)*

*(They sing the first verse and dance.)*

*(JAMES and MIKE shake hands and snap  
their fingers, Ghana-style.)*

**JAMES.** Oh, I miss Ghana. Sweet Highlife music being played at the BBC? Wow! You have good taste.

**MIKE.** Thank you Mr Barnor. I hope you haven't come from far.

**JAMES.** Do you know Medway, Kent?

**MIKE.** Oh wow then, welcome welcome. Please let me take your coat, make yourself comfortable Mr Barnor.

**JAMES.** So this here is now my photography studio for the day.

**MIKE.** I guess so.

**JAMES.** So you are my sitter eh? Mike Eghan.

**MIKE.** Yes sir

**JAMES.** Oh, but you're a handsome boy oh.

**MIKE.** *(Bashful.)* Oh, I don't know about that – Mr Barnor.

**JAMES.** Please call me James.

*(Beat.)*

**MIKE.** I should even call you Uncle James from Jamestown  
Te oyɔɔ tɛŋŋ?

**JAMES.** Mi yɛ ojogbanŋ.

Ey onu o Ga.

**MIKE.** I don't speak Ga oh.

**JAMES.** Your Ga isn't bad at all.

**MIKE.** Oh thank you! O yi wala do. In fact...

*(MIKE rushes over to the record player and plays "Nkebo Baayaa" by ET Mensah.)*

*("Nkebo Baayaa" starts playing.)*

*(MIKE sings the first verse of the song.)*

*(JAMES joins in.)*

*(Beat.)*

**JAMES.** Ah but you, Eghan, where are you from?

**MIKE.** As for me, I'm a Western showboy! Fante man. Born, bred and baked in Sekondi, Takoradi. European Town.

**JAMES.** Then you are a privileged paa. Dada ba? Daddy's boy.

**MIKE.** *(Indignant.)* Not at all.

**JAMES.** But isn't that where all the dignitaries and foreigners live?

**MIKE.** Yes, there are some there but my father didn't raise me to be any privileged...dada ba.

**JAMES.** We will see about that.

*(Beat.)*

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(**JAMES** looks around the office. It's his first time in the iconic BBC.)

You know Kingsley from *DRUM* magazine eh?

**MIKE.** Oh yes, we go way back. I'm a big fan of *DRUM* magazine and particularly your photography, Mr Barnor.

This is a real honour for me, I've been looking forward to today. I really wish I could get more people from Ghana tuning in to my show. I'm hoping this feature will help with that.

(*Silence.*)

**JAMES.** So how does one even get a job here?

(*Slyly.*) Did your dada ba connections come in handy?

**MIKE.** (*Indignant.*) Handy? Oh you must have the wrong person? The only hand I needed was the hand of God to get a job here. Handy.

**JAMES.** I'm just asking questions Mike.

**MIKE.** (*Excited.*) You know – when I came to this country, I waited and waited in the lobby of this building until a producer saw me and decided to give me a chance! From *GBC* in Ghana to the *BBC* in Britain. I had made it, I had arrived!

**JAMES.** (*Subtly inquisitive.*) So, what is it that you do here exactly? You play music and things like that?

**MIKE.** Yes please, I present “Music With An African Beat” from here.

You've listened to the show right?

**JAMES.** (*Doubtfully.*) Oooooooooo.

**MIKE.** – You haven't? –

**JAMES.** – I haven't –

**MIKE.** (*Visibly disappointed.*) Oh

**JAMES.** DRUM just told me to come and photograph a Ghanaian man at the BBC who is doing great things. So here I am. I couldn't turn down the money. You know how tight things are in this country and besides anything about Ghana, I want to be involved. So here I am. I also just had physio on my knee, so I've been preoccupied with other pressing issues. I'm sure you understand.

**MIKE.** Oh of course, yes that's absolutely fine

**JAMES.** No offense

**MIKE.** None taken

(*Beat.*)

**JAMES.** What's your show about?

**MIKE.** Right now, I do a programme solely devoted to African music. They know a lot of our music has meaning. So the producers wanted someone to play the music and explain the lyrics. You name it. I play it. Kwela, Anglophone, Francophone. Ignace De Souza, CK Mann, Victor Uwaifo, Miriam Makeba, Fela. I could go on and on! As for Ghanaian Highlife, that's no problem, I'm an aficionado.

**JAMES.** When does it come on?

**MIKE.** Just twice a week! For the world service. Wednesday mornings and Saturday evenings.

**JAMES.** Oh I'm sure people listen.

(*Beat.*)

Okay, who is your favourite musician?

**MIKE.** What?

**JAMES.** Who is your favourite highlife musician?

**MIKE.** That's difficult for me, I play them all.

**JAMES.** You're afraid to say it eh? Trying to please everybody. You're afraid to say in case they don't come here for an interview, I understand. Don't worry this is off the record, I'm just here to take the pictures.

**MIKE.** It's difficult for me to choose one so allow me to select three.

**JAMES.** Go on.

**MIKE.** CK Mann, Eddie Quansah and...Pat Thomas.

**JAMES.** (*Shocked.*) No ET Mensah? The King of Highlife himself.

**MIKE.** Don't start an argument! What about you?

**JAMES.** I won't tell you.

**MIKE.** He was crowned King of Highlife outside of Ghana even before Ghanaians knew what to do with him.

**JAMES.** As it is, a prophet isn't valued in their hometown.

**MIKE.** The young ones don't even know how great he is.

**JAMES.** But you, what do you know about highlife?

**MIKE.** As in the genre highlife? How much time do we have? It's too big. Too complex.

**JAMES.** Do you know the history?

**MIKE.** Oh Mr Barnor.

**JAMES.** Osibi?

**MIKE.** Oh yes.

**JAMES.** Adaha?

**MIKE.** Oh yes.

**JAMES.** What else? What else?

**MIKE.** Dagomba, Palm Wine Music, Guitar Band, Dance Band. Influences from Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Fisherfolk, Upper class and on and on. Come on Mr Barnor. You do the photography, I do the music.

**JAMES.** You know music is a big part of my life. I always had music playing at my studio in Ghana. I knew all the musicians. ET Mensah, Tempos. I was taking their pictures. These are people who represented Ghana so well. Some of them used to travel with Nkrumah. Whom I also photographed.

*(Silence.)*

**MIKE.** You did?

**JAMES.** Osagyefo and I were very close. If I didn't leave I could have been his number one photographer! Two hours with him and you'll understand what he was doing for the country and even the continent.

**MIKE.** I've met him too.

**JAMES.** Good, so you know.

**MIKE.** Now, I'm not a politics man and I don't really understand everything happening right now but... people are saying he's a bit of a dictator.

**JAMES.** *(Covers his ears, he doesn't like what MIKE is saying.)* Ah - Ah - Ah. Mr BBC please stop right there. This is a big debate, if we start now we won't take any pictures today. All I'll say is that you of all people have no excuse not to educate yourself. Don't just repeat what you hear everywhere. Unless you believe it.

*(Beat.)*

*(JAMES claps his hands together, back to business.)*

Well, we need to do this right! So before I put my name on this, I want it to be perfect. We will take a few pictures for this feature and select the best one. The one that shows you at your best. When I'm taking pictures, I don't like it to be just a plain portrait. We

should be able to tell where you are. I try to see what the subject is wearing as that needs to be pronounced or projected. In my experience, the men usually don't bother too much, it is usually the women that have more exciting things.

**MIKE.** Oh I've got something just for you.

*(MIKE runs to get his coat.)*

What do you think of this um...

**JAMES.** What is it?

**MIKE.** Some new coat that I bought.

*(MIKE puts on his faux mink coat.)*

What do you think of it? Groovy? Or not so much?

**JAMES.** Groovy? Why when you were in Takoradi, did you know "groovy"?

**MIKE.** Just answer me Mr Barnor! I bought the jacket just for this photoshoot. I just want to look good for the cover.

**JAMES.** Why? Am I your wife? The coat is not nice and this really isn't the cover.

*(MIKE is disappointed.)*

*(Beat.)*

I'm lying, I'm lying, the coat is nice but this really isn't the cover.

**MIKE.** You see, I was practicing some poses but couldn't quite get the perfect shot and was wondering if you would help.

**JAMES.** These are the things you like! Posing in your flashy clothes.

**MIKE.** Oh I just like to look distinct. I always wonder what impression I'm making on the populace back home. Nothing wrong with looking nice if you're being photographed by James Barnor himself.

*(MIKE is excited and strikes a pose.)*

**JAMES.** I think it's best if you let me direct you okay?

**MIKE.** Sure, sure. You're the artist! I trust the vision!

**JAMES.** I don't know if I'd describe myself as an artist. I'm more of a technician.

**MIKE.** So how do you know when you've got the right shot?

**JAMES.** I will make sure we get something that's usable.

**MIKE.** And I know it's just the recording studio but this is my life. We can make it a little kingdom, that chair is my little throne.

**JAMES.** People are more important than places.

*(Beat.)*

Before we even start taking pictures. Our relationship has to be organic. I've got to be flowing with the model in order to get the best of the model. This helps me to think of the whole concept. I never see myself as separate from my subjects, I want to be part of them, and I want them to be part of me. Does it make sense?

**MIKE.** I think so.

**JAMES.** This is how I will get the best.

*(Beat.)*

Is this the only room we have available?

**MIKE.** I'm afraid so, why?

**JAMES.** It's a bit...tight. Don't worry, we will make it work

*(Beat.)*