

# GALA FOR GHANA

AN EVENING OF DANCE  
FEATURING MEMBERS OF  
THE ROYAL BALLET

SUNDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2014  
AT 7PM

BRITTEN THEATRE,  
ROYAL COLLEGE  
OF MUSIC  
SW7 2BS

IN AID OF ASHANTI DEVELOPMENT  
[www.ashanti-development.org](http://www.ashanti-development.org)

BOX OFFICE 020 7591 4314

[www.boxoffice.rcm.ac.uk](http://www.boxoffice.rcm.ac.uk)

Photograph of Royal Ballet Principal dancers Lauren Cuthbertson and Edward Watson by Rick Guest

Over fifteen members of The Royal Ballet, including Principals Edward Watson, Lauren Cuthbertson, Sarah Lamb and Rupert Pennefather, will be performing at Ashanti Development's gala evening on Sunday 2 February, 2014 at 7pm. The programme will include highlights from both classical and modern ballets, and will feature two world premieres, created especially for the evening.

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Ticket prices: £35, £28, £25

**Angela Cobbinah of the Camden New Journal hears how Bloomsbury childminder Martha Boadu has transformed the lives of people in Ghana (First published in the CNJ on 27 June 2013).**

As villages in this part of Ghana go, Gyetiase seems fairly typical as you arrive via its red dust road, with its modest dwellings, lush vegetation and wandering goats and chickens.

But for a place that until recently was struggling due to the demise of local cocoa production some 20 years ago, its smart new health clinic, piped water system and general air of purposefulness mark it out.

That it is now on the road to recovery and more is due in no small part to Bloomsbury childminder Martha Boadu, who grew up in Gyetiase and was determined to make a difference to the lives of the people she left behind.



The vehicle of change has been Ashanti Development, the charity she helped set up almost a decade ago from the front room of her flat in Marchmont Street with her neighbour, Penny David.

In a country where the state is small and not always efficient, the charity has now become a major institution in this remote part of Ashanti Region in its provision of better health and education facilities, basic amenities and small business support, not only for Gyetiase and its 2,000 or so residents but surrounding villages as well.

And Martha was commissioning yet another new project during one of her twice yearly visits to Ghana. Armed with a pick axe and battling the 35 degree heat she gamely broke the turf in a sod-turning ceremony for a community museum amid clapping.

A museum may not fit everyone's view of what constitutes development, but as Martha explained to the assembled villagers, it would go a long way to enhancing people's pride in their history and culture.

"We don't value what we once had," she said. "But it is important that we don't forget our culture and it is important that our children know of it. It's a part of our education as well and education is a key to progress."

Indeed, much of the day-long celebration was a rolling showcase of local customs like the "outdooing" or baby-naming ceremony, the adowa dance and traditional hunting methods.

Days earlier the mother of six, addressed here as "Maame Martha," also opened the latest stage in Gyetiase's piped water provision, representing a marked improvement in the supply.

In January, during a previous visit, Martha was featured in Ghana's national newspaper, The Daily Graphic, donating £23,000 of specialist eye surgery equipment to "development partner" Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital in the regional capital Kumasi. It had been given to Ashanti Development by German firm Heidelberg Engineering.

Little wonder that Martha is regarded as a visiting dignitary and that “medawase papaapa” - that’s “thank you so much” - are the words one most frequently hears in her presence.

Although Ghana is now among Africa’s fastest-growing economies thanks in part to the discovery of oil in 2007, rural areas like Gyetiase have little to show for it, as good an indication as any that wealth doesn’t necessarily trickle down.

But even in the good old days of bumper cocoa and coffee harvests, Martha remembers life being hard. One of the biggest problems was that water had to be collected each day from a stream about 2km away, a five-hour round trip.

“As children we had to help the women fetch water and the journey left everyone exhausted for the rest of the day as it was very hilly. We used this water for everything and people often fell sick because it wasn’t clean.”

When Martha returned to Gyetiase in 2000 for the first time since leaving for England in 1984, she was shocked at how impoverished it had become. “I knew I had to do something to help. I’d be watching Blue Peter with my children and see the sort of development projects they were supporting overseas and this gave me an idea of what I could do.”

Her collaboration with co-directors Penny David, a retired management consultant, and David Williamson, a water engineer, led to Ashanti Development’s pioneer project connecting the village to the mains water supply following a fund raising appeal.

Since then, with the help of volunteers and the villagers themselves, the charity has built a health clinic, installed a toilet in every home and helped expand the government school. It has also introduced a small loans scheme, giving people the chance to generate income through shops, small-holdings and cottage manufacturing.

Such interventions are simple but transformative. “Before we started people just sat there and went blind because of cataracts. Now these can be easily removed for free at the clinic,” she says.



Now back in the UK and pushing one of her charges to a playgroup, Martha enthuses once again about the museum and type of displays she wants on show, including the creation of a traditional Ashanti house. Money for the project, which has already received preliminary advice from the British Museum's Africa section, has yet to be raised.

However, given Ashanti Development's track record, that should only be a matter of time.

**Pam Smith, who visited Ghana for the first time last November, writes about her experience.**

Penny, Tricia and I have just returned from a wonderful two week stay in Gyetiase. For Tricia and me, it was our first trip to Ghana and we were overwhelmed by the colour, noise and general exuberance of life there. We received a warm welcome from the staff of the Ashanti Development, the chief and elders of the village to whom we were introduced on our arrival and all the Ghanaians we met during our stay.

On our first day we were shown round the village by Kwako Safo, one of the elders, who spoke excellent English. He proudly pointed out some of the recent developments. We saw the new water pump, now the focus of village life, which has made a huge difference in terms of time saved and, more importantly, health. We were also interested to see the small market set up by some of the women who were selling produce made with the help of microcredit loans.



As a librarian, I was keen to visit the library in the primary school compound. It has a stock of c2,000 books serving the children and teachers of the school and is particularly popular with the children as Alex, the librarian pointed out when he showed me the record of loans. Tricia and I went to the library before and after school each day to hear the children read. They were keen to practise their English and read well but we became aware of the bias of most of the books towards white European children, which had little relevance to life in a Ghanaian village. One simple solution was for the volunteers to write short stories with Ghanaian themes. These proved popular with the children.

While we were in Gyetiase we were joined by Paul and his brother Steve, who had been born and gone to school in Ghana. A highlight for all of us was the durbar given by the village of Anwya to honour Paul, who had raised a considerable sum of money through crowd funding to build household latrines for the village. Paul had been greatly helped by Tricia, who had made a very generous contribution, and by a Christadelphian church who had made up the sum. Paul was made a chief of the village with all the honours that confers, Tricia was thanked very warmly and we were all treated like VIPs and enjoyed the music and dancing in this very special ceremony. Afterwards we were given a tour of the latrines and told of the huge difference they had made to the life of the villagers.

During our time in Ghana, we spent one weekend on the shores of the beautifully serene Lake Bosumtwi and visited Kumasi, where we were fortunate enough to witness the amazing Akwasidae festival when the King of the Ashanti receives tribute from local chiefs. The traditional dress, music and dancing made this an unforgettable experience. Tricia and I managed to fit in a relaxing two days on the coast at Elmina and we all spent the last day in Accra visiting the University of Ghana, the botanical gardens and a local coffin shop.

My overwhelming impression of the trip was the beauty of the countryside, which was very green in November, and the warmth and kindness of all the people we met. I was struck by the difference a little help has made to the lives of villagers. A little goes a long way in Ghana.