



SONTA

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

SOCIETY OF NIGERIA THEATRE ARTISTS

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Guidelines for SONTA Creative Writing and Music Composition Competitions

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I. General Information

The Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) shall organise annual creative writing and composition competitions in playwriting, dance librettos and art music composition to reward the author of the best published play text, play manuscript, dance libretto and art music composition. The competitions are opened to published plays in the category of Master Playwright Prize and only unpublished works for the other categories.

The competitions bestow public recognition and a monetary award to each of their winners. Two other writers/composers whose works are adjudged to be of good quality shall also be cited for Honourable Mention in each category.

1. Goals of the SONTA Creative Writing/Composition Competitions

In addition to the immediate purpose of rewarding the authors of the best current creative piece, SONTA competitions have a number of other important goals. They are a means of making known to theatre practitioners/producers, readers, publishers, booksellers and distributors, literary critics and reviewers, the latest achievements of the best Nigerian playwright, emerging playwrights, dance librettists, and art music composers. The competitions contribute in a practical way to sustaining the tradition of excellence in Nigerian creative enterprise for the

stage, discovering new playwrights, dance librettists and composers, while keeping older ones in focus.

The competitions also serve to deepen awareness among dramatists, dance artists and musicologists of what creative excellence entails in these artistic domains, by offering models and sources of inspiration. In this regard, the publicised comments of the judges' report are a means of clarifying what qualities are to be sought in good creative works for the stage.

Publicity that comes with the awards is intended to have benefits beyond the immediate recognition of the winners. Specialists in the field of African drama, dance and music are alerted to the presence of new works and creative artist whose achievements are worthy of scholarly attention. Publishers would also have the opportunity to publish and promote emerging playwrights, dance librettists and music composers. Through channels of information distribution such as the Internet, those in the international community interested in contemporary drama, dance and music are also provided with an opportunity to learn about these achievements. It is expected that through the Internet in particular, SONTA will increasingly be able to serve as a liaison between its members and interested parties of all kinds. Increase in the sale of the published works is also an expected gain.

Finally, SONTA hopes to encourage publishers to be increasingly active on the theatre/drama, dance and art music arena, by bringing out, advertising and distributing more of the best current creative works for the stage, especially play texts and dance librettos.

Some of the judges' comments shall concern the important role of publishers in fostering good writing, and in particular, the importance of careful editing. In announcing the publishers of winning plays, SONTA wishes to recognize those who are doing the most for Nigerian drama.

It is in everyone's long-term interest to make good stage creative works known and more easily available, so that the local reading public grows and the market for these works in turn expands.

2. Submission Procedure

Seven copies of the creative texts/manuscripts being entered for the competitions are to be submitted either by authors or publishers, in accordance with specifications of the individual awards. Entries are welcome both from within Nigeria and abroad. There is an opening and closing date for the submission process, usually between March and June each year, as is officially announced and publicised by the SONTA national executive. The number of copies required (currently six) for the work to be considered is also announced at that time. Works not submitted to SONTA Secretariat by the deadline and according to specified conditions shall not be considered.

This being an annual competition, the copyright on published works submitted must not exceed two years to the competing year of entry. For example, published books competing for prizes in

2015 cannot be copyrighted earlier than 2013. Judges are instructed to ignore any entries which were mistakenly forwarded to them with earlier publication dates.

Complete contact information, including email and phone numbers, should accompany each submission.

3. Who is Eligible to participate in the Competitions?

All prizes are endowed to recognize Nigerian creative artistes (playwrights, dance librettists and art music composers). “Nigerian creative artists” is understood to include anyone qualified to claim Nigerian citizenship, even if born or living abroad, including those who have assumed a foreign nationality, and those born abroad who have lived long enough in Nigeria, with or without naturalizing, to be recognized as Nigerian in their orientation.

One need not be a member of SONTA to compete. In some cases the creative artist may have reason to employ a pseudonym. SONTA members currently on the National Executive and members of panel of judges are however **NOT** permitted to compete.

II. Guidelines on Assessment Criteria

1. General Qualities to be Considered

The judges will consider the following: correct grammar and careful editing, originality, avoidance of stereotypes, entertainment value, flexible style that avoids clichés and is appropriate for the subject and intended reader/audience, harmony of any symbols and metaphors, structure and unity of the work from the title and opening to conclusion (i.e. is every creative element purposeful and effective?), the scope, maturity and integrity of the writing/composition, coherence and depth of vision, awareness of and relationship to drama/dance/music tradition(s), and re-readability—that is, does the creative text give all it has to offer in the first reading, or is it rich enough to withstand close study? Does it challenge our beliefs, or teach us something new, whether about society or ourselves as human beings?

In short, the submissions are evaluated as theatrical texts and their performative values. On the whole, a work that challenges the reader/audience and takes risks is considered to take higher leap than the one that does not. A larger work with layers of meaning, to the extent that it is not mundane, repetitive or diffuse, may outweigh a shorter one. Simplicity of language is encouraged but not the ultimate virtue. On the other hand, impenetrability is not being sought. Difficulty is only acceptable in a text if the ideas or experiences being explored justify the increased demands made on the reader. Unwarranted, pretentious obscurity is a worse weakness than superficiality.

Should there be a submission that mixes genres, it will be evaluated primarily according to the criteria of the category in which it is competing, but also by the other genre(s) employed. Such works are discouraged, and judges will strongly interrogate whether the mixture of genres is justified by the intentions and achievements of the questionable creative text.

To a limited extent, evaluation will include the production quality and attractiveness of published texts. The works would do better without pretentious or irrelevant introductions. Authors shall also take responsibility for the sometimes inane or ungrammatical writing that appears on the back covers of their texts.

2. Criteria for Specific Competitions

a) The SONTA-OLU OBAFEMI PRIZE for Playwriting (endowed by Prof Olu Obafemi) – Prize Worth: N100,000.00 only

This prize is for the best submitted unpublished play. Unpublished plays must be submitted individually, not presented in a manuscript that includes more than one work. In addition to the general qualities of a drama script (see II.1 above), plays will be evaluated for their potential as theatre. In other words: Does the author show knowledge of what works with an audience as well as what is stageable? How do any divisions or breaks in the play contribute to the experience of the audience? How effective is the characterisation? Is the style appropriate to the play's overall intentions; does it help to distinguish one character from another? If stylised or poetic, will the language cause difficulties for either actors or audience?

b) SONTA-CHRIS IYIMOGA MASTER PLAYWRIGHT PRIZE (endowed by Dr Chris Iyimoga) – Prize Worth: N300,000.00 only

This prize is for the best submitted published play. Published plays must be submitted individually, not presented in a manuscript that includes more than one work. In addition to the general qualities of a drama script (see II.1 above), plays will be evaluated for their potential as theatre. In other words: Does the author show knowledge of what works with an audience as well as what is stageable? How do any divisions or breaks in the play contribute to the experience of the audience? How effective is the characterisation? Is the style appropriate to the play's overall intentions; does it help to distinguish one character from another? If stylised or poetic, will the language cause difficulties for either actors or audience?

An author may submit a play published in a collection that includes works by more than one author. But in that case s/he must indicate clearly, both in the submission letter and in each copy of the book provided, that only that play is being offered for consideration. Otherwise, the book will be eliminated from competition and will never reach the judges. It is advisable in most cases for the author to publish and submit his or her best plays individually.

Please note that only playwrights who have previously **published not less than five plays** are eligible to compete for this prize. You are to provide evidence in your submissions please.

c) SONTA-CHRIS IYIMOGA DANCE LIBRETTO PRIZE (endowed by Dr Chris Iyimoga) – Prize Worth: N200,000.00 only

This prize is for the best submitted unpublished dance libretto. Unpublished dance librettos must be submitted individually, not presented in a manuscript that includes more than one work. In addition to the general qualities of creative script (see II.1 above), dance librettos will be evaluated for their potential as dance theatre. In other words: Does the author show knowledge of what works with an audience as well as what is stageable in terms of choreographic possibilities? How do any divisions or breaks in the dance contribute to the experience of the audience? How effective is the characterisation? Is the style appropriate to the dance's overall intentions; does it help to distinguish one character from another? Other points to note are originality of ideas/concepts, engaging themes and sub-themes, innovative use of stylistic devices, deployment of theatrical elements, language and the overall aesthetics of the libretto. Dynamic use of dance elements is scripting is highly encouraged.

d) SONTA-CHRIS IYIMOGA ART MUSIC PRIZE (endowed by Dr Chris Iyimoga) – Prize Worth: N200,000.00 only

Entries are welcomed from Nigerian Theatre Arts scholars/practitioners, Musicologists and students to compete for SONTA-CHRIS IYIMOGA ART MUSIC PRIZE. This prize is for the best submitted unpublished art music composition. Unpublished art music composition must be submitted individually; there is no co-authorship and an author is entitled to maximum of two entries. Works for entry could be vocal (solo and chorus or its variant) accompanied by instruments or purely instrumental, sacred or secular. It must be indigenous in orientation with themes and motifs generated from the Nigerian/African environment. Before submission, entries must be authenticated as being the bonafide and original work of the author by a Professor or Head of Department or any other senior music lecturer with his/her phone numbers and email addresses. Music composed will be evaluated for their potential as art music for the theatre (or a musical or a scene in an opera, a stage play or film track). The expected duration is 3 minutes (minimum) and 5minutes (maximum). The music manuscript (typed with music software) must be accompanied with the recorded version on compact disc (CD) and clearly labeled. Experimental pieces in language, form and arrangement are encouraged.

III. The Adjudication Process

1. Constitution of the Panel of Judges

A panel of not less than three or more than five judges shall be appointed by the SONTA executive to assess all the submitted works according to their category. They shall be respected performing arts critics, dance, music and theatre practitioners/scholars, and

dramatists/playwrights/musicologists/dance librettists, known for their objectivity, broad knowledge of the mechanics of drama, theatre, music and dance, and catholic taste. They should be experienced in evaluating new creative performative works and unlikely to be influenced by the reputation, position or previous achievements of some of the competing authors.

There should be continuity in the constitution of the panels, each ideally having at least one member who served in a previous SONTA competition adjudication panel. This is so that any work submitted for previous competitions may be identified, and also so that tradition may be referred to when necessary as panel members work toward their joint decision.

In February or well in advance of the annual SONTA international conference, which traditionally takes place in June, the judges are given personal copies of all the play texts submitted for each of the competitions, along with the lists by category of the entries. SONTA shall provide them accommodation at the conference and they are to be given an honorarium after the completion of their work.

2. Responsibilities of the Judges

The entries are assessed by a panel of three to five judges comprising distinguished performing arts critics, practitioners, scholars and writers. Membership of the panel is reviewed periodically by the executive committee of SONTA to reflect national geographic and gender sensitivity.

Before the Panel is Convened

Judges are to be familiar with the criteria of each prize category (see Section II above), in order to be able to disregard any work erroneously forwarded to them. Each is expected to check that the play texts/manuscripts, dance librettos and music manuscripts s/he has been given are complete, according to the lists by category of entries, and that no published works are dated earlier than two years. Dates are to be determined by the dates of first publication and NOT date of reprints.

They will individually draw up a short-list of what they consider the three best plays in each category, with brief comments as to their reasons for selecting each of these works, prior to coming together as a panel.

Panel Deliberations

The panel is convened for two days NOT less than one month to the annual convention by the SONTA General Secretary at a specified venue. Here the judges shall deliberate thoroughly the relative merits of the best entries and, when necessary, to re-examine those over which there is disagreement. The discussion begins with identifying where their individual shortlists are in accord, and progresses to consensus in the ranking of the best three submissions in each category. If consensus cannot be achieved, decisions are made according to the majority opinion.

When a decision must be made between two works of equal quality, one by an established author and the other by one less known, the work of the newer writer, who has more need for

recognition, is to be preferred. In the case of an unbreakable deadlock, an award may be shared between two writers, but this should be an exceptional outcome rather than a norm. At the end of their deliberations, the panel submits to SONTA secretariat a juggled shortlist of the best three entries in each category. The General Secretary shall within 24 hours of receiving the list, release it to the public through the Internet, Press (journalists) and other public information dissemination media. This is intended to generate public interest around the prizes and build up momentum towards the final announcement of winners. If the costs of prizes administration can be parts of the endowments and if absorbable, all the shortlisted works and their authors should be lavishly exposed to the public through book exhibitions, press interviews and reading tours with full audio visual coverage.

The Judges' Report

Panel decisions for each category will be announced as one prize-winner and two runners-up/recipients of Honourable Mention, their ranks not further distinguished to the public. Names of publishers will be included along with the titles and authors of the three works. Panellists will jointly prepare a written report that includes paragraphs explaining what they found most commendable in each prize-winning work. They are also encouraged to include general observations on submissions made by competitors to individual categories and anything else that may be helpful in promoting playwriting, dance scripting, art music composition and publishing excellence.

The panel's decisions will be handed over to the SONTA President in neat hard and electronic copies before the award ceremony begins. The report must be written and edited with care, as copies will be given to the press, and it will also be posted on the Internet.

IV. Awarding of Prizes

If submissions for any category are substandard, judges may shortlist fewer works than the normal three; and if many works are of high quality, the shortlist could be increased to not more than five. If it should happen that no work is of acceptable quality in a category, **SONTA is not bound to award the prize that year**. It is preferable not to award a prize rather than to have the standard of a prize lowered by giving it to an unworthy entry, for readers will only see the work being honoured and not the worse entries it competed against.

The winners are announced by the judges at a ceremony or dinner, open to writers, conference participants, and invited guests, as the climax of the annual SONTA convention. The judges' comments on the winners will be read at that time, in an abbreviated form if time makes this necessary, and their report subsequently made available to the press and other media.

Winning authors who are unable to be present for the convention may authorise someone else to collect the awards on their behalf.

If an established prize fails to be funded by the body or person that originally endowed it, SONTA executive committee may decide not to advertise that competition, and the category will be temporarily or permanently withdrawn from the list of SONTA competitions.

A winner of SONTA creative prize shall be entitled to the following: The monetary value of the prize category won, a Certificate and a Plaque. Every Theatre and Performing Arts Departments in Nigerian Institutions of higher learning are encouraged teach and produce SONTA's award winning creative works as they emerge.