

THE INTERVIEW OF RIED



My name is Ried Nwakari. I am not an English man. I am strictly a Nigerian, but my father's best friend was a white man. My father actually brought me up fortunately in one of the areas where the white people were occupying in Nigeria then. That was at Ikoyi. I had my primary schooling at Ikoyi, my secondary schooling at Ikoyi, which was Falomo High school at Ikoyi. From there, I, unfortunately I was a bit of a victim of JAMB disappointment then, I found myself in the University of Ekpoma where I had a professional degree in Philosophy. From there, I proceeded to lecturing, because I came out with a very good degree. I lectured in University of Calabar, part time, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), part-time. I lectured at UI, part-time. I am married, ten years now; my wife was a student in one of the universities where I lectured. The government could not pay me my salary regularly so I married one of my students (laugh). I have two kids, the first one is about ten years old, he is a boy and the second one is a girl about 4 years old. I left lecturing because of the influence of my wife whose father was actually the manager of Ogudikwe. She is also a singer. She's also into Show Business. You know I was singing at a time but I stopped singing. I went into management; I was the manager of King David Music in Port- Harcourt. I was also a presenter; presenting the most popular gospel musical programme on T.V. across the Niger. It's called *The Vibe* and I consulted for NTA Port-Harcourt. From there I consulted for Excel Music. After that, I started my own company where I managed Bright Chimezie at one time. I managed Asoki, a popular gospel musician and when I was managing Asoki, I got *Channel O Awards* (Back to Back). Then I worked with Rivers State Government. I don't want to say I was among those that stole government money, but I enjoy working there (laugh). Then I came back to Lagos. And I went into consultancy. I consulted for Sammy Okposo, his album "*No More Drama*", the latest album in the market, I am the consultant. I also consulted for Buchi – the album before now. I also consulted for Tee-Mac – the album launched at Muson Centre. I also consulted for PMAN briefly. Then I started running a management company, the company also consults and manages Soul-E, Buchi and Eddy Remedy – we are working on it (ongoing), though that label is Top Ten and Eddy is talking to me. And we are packaging something

with Mac D, I just talked with Mac D over the week and then I am also talking to Steve Ojo (of Galaxy TV). I also do concerts; my wife does concerts with churches. I am also into projects.

How long have you been in music?

I have been into the music for a long time because I was a drummer...that was a long time ago and my big brother is also a musician, my wife is a popular singer, she does jazz, she has done jazz with T-Mark and so many jazz musicians. Actually, management-wise, I have been into Show Business since 2002, that is about six years now.

Q: What does it take to be an artiste manager?

Ah, that's a big question because you have to look at professional definition of artiste management. We have to look at our own definition of artiste management. People that we have in Nigeria, I know a lot of artistes; I have done one or two things with D'Banj, I have done one or two things with many artistes. I found out that the problem we have in this country is that those that call themselves artiste managers are actually artiste messengers, because they do not have authority and the leverage to talk to the artiste and tell the artiste what they want as the managers. What they do is that they negotiate for shows, they collect money and that's just all. They can't even influence the career of the artiste positively. Do you understand? That is the problem that we have and the reason why it is so is because you find the situation where the artistes are richer than the manager. That is why it is in sport, when you have a coach that is poor and yet his followers are rich. At the end of the day the coach will become errand boy. So that's how it is in this country. Those people that call themselves managers are not really managers and the reason why I could manage the few artistes that I have to manage is because I put food on their tables too. Let me tell you the problem with artiste management in Nigeria and the average artiste. An average artiste in Nigeria, because of the economic hardship their own is to think about the money first before the career. When they are discussing with you, the first thing that comes to their mind is money. So if at the end of the day you are called the manager, the artiste manager, and you cannot bring out initiative that will bring money on their tables without somebody calling the D'Banj, because he want to talk to D'Banj and D'Banj did not say go and talk to my manager and connection is not coming through the manager, the connection is coming first through D'Banj and the problem will now be D'Banj will now see the manager...the artiste will now see the manager that I don't need you to survive. Do you understand? But where mine is different is that I get deal for these artistes. I don't get money from them, Okay? I know how much they paid Sammy Okposo for his album launch, which I got him sponsor for. Tee-Mark album that I got a sponsor, is it not about ten million naira? So, if I talk to Tee-Mark, he listens to me and that is how the industry will be big. The Eddy Remedy album project we've been having some series of dialogues, I have been talking to marketers to put down something with his current work, which is currently in my hand, he has a new work which I am talking to marketers on. I am walking on bringing money to his table. So the respect is mutual. It is synergic, mutuality and understanding. But where the manager runs errand for the artiste, at the end of the day he is not helping the artiste. The only way for you to be responsible as a manager is for you to also have some contracts; have initiative of bringing food to your table and also be independent or else, my brother, you are missing out.

What you are telling us is that there is difference between manager and management

Of course, there is a big difference between the two.

What does it take as a manager to have an artiste under your management?

Simple! Every artiste wants to grow, you see you have to understand how it works in Nigeria. The way it works in Nigeria is not the way it works in other parts of the world. In other parts of the world

they have an organized system. The way it is in other part of the world is you have the label, what the label is supposed to do is; you have the recording company, what the recording company is supposed to do is if you have songs you've written down, you've done the demo you've not done the major work, but you've done the master discs; they take it up from there, record you and get the job done. The industries abroad are trying. They have so many people that are listening to music, you have a market system where you don't have to go to shop to buy a CD. Your CDs are selling through the net (Internet), you will sell million copies in a day. It is a different ball game here in Nigeria.

In Nigeria you have to do door to door marketing. In fact, these days, things are so bad that marketers have to carry their band to Ikeja bus-stop, carry their band to Orile bus-stop to sell their products because of the economic hardship. So, what I'm trying to make clear generally is that when you are talking about having an artiste, it is as simple as convincing the artiste that you can put food on their tables. That is the summary. But where the artiste has been living for himself and the artiste wants to be sentimental. Somebody like Tuface for instance, he's working with Joyce. Joyce is supposed to be the manager in a way because they have had a long term relationship. So the situation now for Tuface is like "oh! I have gotten to this point: I mean Joyce has been there with me. Why should I get somebody else when Joyce is there?" But Tuface honestly does not need Joyce to do whatever he'll do. Tuface on his own, independently, can role thing as he is. So, what I'm trying to make you understand ordinarily is, for you to be a manager, for you to get an artiste, it is as simple as being in the position. In fact, the managers don't get artistes, the artistes in Nigeria look for the managers. That is because of the pressure that we have in the industry due to the hardship as I said. People... artistes now see music as a shortcut to success, not because they have the talent to do so. Every house now has an artiste like having a graduate.

Those days, when we used to play Large House in the era of fifteen years ago, I remembered that many artistes were being hunted (discovered). Somebody like Blacky, Blacky was discovered by... Cool FM. Blacky was discovered at the *Broken Booker* at Marina; the place where reggae people go to play, many reggae artistes recorded at the *Booker*. In those days in Nigeria where you have few labels like Premier, Afro Beat Music, very few of them, okay, pass us records like Majek FASEK. At that point in time we have fewer artistes, and artiste was looked down as a hungry thing. So the producer was going out to look for the talent. But now, the artistes are looking for the producer. Because artistes are the ones who have the talent and these days, because of the fact that they are under the pressure and they can accept anything, just anything, industry is putting pressure on the artistes. And because of that, adequate talents have not been harnessed. It's unfortunate. So what we are looking forward to is to get to a point where the artistes need to make themselves to be recognized as having the talent: Talent can get you money but money cannot get you talent.

As a manager, who can come under your management, the upcoming or the established?

You see, like I said before, it brings down to the current situation in the country. I have been trying to float an outfit where I will discover new artistes. Of course, I've discovered some new artistes. I don't know if you have noticed them. One gospel artiste that sang gospel rock, "Ima ra n ma baba..." Ok, you don't know him? He is in South Africa now. I discovered him for Moren Records. Now, the reason why most people do not invest in upcoming artistes is because our industry is greatly unpredictable. There are lots of artistes that are good, that are not quack, and they are not selling. But the industry has gotten to a level where you need to package an artiste properly for the artiste to sell. At times, you have some surprises. You get the person you have in mind that would sell but won't sell. I could, but I don't want to call any artiste. There are lots of artistes that are quacks in this industry that honestly I won't advise you to buy their CDs. That is the truth of matter. But some of them are verse.

Somebody like Ramsey. Ramsey is a very good artiste. Very good artiste. Technically, he is very good but, *ehh*, unfortunately because, either to say he is too advanced for the systems or people do not appreciate his kind of songs, people do not patronize his songs. And of course, the marketing industry is not also encouraging the mainstream industry because most of the marketers are illiterate. That's most of the problems that we really have here, because the labels themselves are greedy. All the labels. And they know what to do. And because they have not done what they should do. It has also affected the industry negatively. So generally I work with every artiste, but unfortunately I'm a Nigerian too. What that translates to mean is that of course, like I have Buchi's job at hand I have agent in Alaba talking to me on Buchi's job. The money they would pay Buchi is not the money they would pay the new artiste. And the new artiste, I need to invest so much money before he gets that kind (of) money back. And at time when you invest that kind of money, because of the fact that the marketing system is filled with gross illiterates that don't understand the technicalities and the rudiments of music, and how to develop music industry in Nigeria. They are traders. All they think is how much would they sell, how much would they make. It becomes a problem for us to even invest in young artistes, because if I invest in the artiste and I am not getting what I put in the investment. It is a problem. You understand what I'm trying to say. Basically speaking as it is, of course I encourage one or two new artistes I'm working on. There is a new artiste, a Yoruba artiste okay. Some other artistes were here, talking to me, Stella Damascus, sometimes ago. But what I'm trying to make you understand is that I'm also a businessman. I'm also a Nigerian. When you find yourself in a system, even if you want to make a change, you still need time to make this change. But basically as it is, you have to learn how to survive first before you effect the change. Because if you don't survive, you cannot be alive to make a change. Survival now also means that I have to key into the existing system to survive. And that also means primarily, my major interest is on the established artistes. If they are paying me six to seven millions naira on Buchi's job, they cannot pay a starting artiste one million naira. And that's where the money is. (Directs to the reporter) If you are doing this and the paper is not selling, you will be too restive, may be resign and join another paper, we have cases like that. So my business is not different from yours.

Under your management, how many artistes do you have?

Three. Three big ones

They are?

Bunchi. You know Bunchi, Soul-E and Eddy.

The music industry as it is now, what can you say about it?

It is rubbish!

Why did you say that?

It is rubbish. The only thing that is making it interesting is because companies are indicating interest in it. You see. Unfortunately, people that had the opportunity to change the face of the industry did not do so. What they only did was not entertainment. What they did was Show Business. And they are two things. Like you said, entertainment is all compassing but if you are in the business, it is musical entertainment. Ok? It is a difference ball game from Show Business. I could hire a limousine even if I don't have but I want to make them understand that I have it for me to sell my name. That's Show Business, "showing in the business". But in entertainment, I don't hire a limousine. No, I buy a limousine not to hire because I really do have it. So what we have in America, yes, a little of show business but not much of it. Americans are real. You can't see 50 Cent walking on the road without a flashy car. He is rich. There is no two ways about it. I don't know if you understand. D'banj cruises along, you see D'banj in helicopter in his video, you see D'banj in limousine in his video, he doesn't

have those things. Do you understand what I am saying? So, what I'm saying is that these are things that the people had opportunity to have changed. Despite the fact that they actually lead a legacy of brother and sister of TV companies. These are things that Kenny actually could have done to change. As a businessman in music, you have to first see music like school business. If you run a school, don't think of today when you run a school. It falls. That's how entertainment is. Entertainment is futuristic. You see today I'm planning, next year, next two years, and next three years. All the bunch of artiste that we have in Kenny's music, many, many of them, talented ones, Azadus is there, many of them, Sound Sultan, they never actually reached or achieved the peak of their career. So there is this selective method. The artiste that is selling is pushed forward and the rest are forgotten. Do you understand what I'm saying? This is not supposed to be so. Dr Dre has a lot of artistes, he gives them equal opportunity, equal promotion. That is why many of the artistes are known. Do you understand what I'm saying? Many of them are known and they are making that much impact. Eminem is making impact in one side, 50 Cent is making impact in other side. They all making different impacts. So what I'm trying to make you understand is that ordinarily to be very sincere with you, Show Business have failed but the only thing is, the only fortunate thing which is still unfortunate is, company capitalizing on the situation to also sell their products and services which is not bad because the only thing that is flamboyant in Show Business that we have in Nigeria today is that Nestle, Nigerian Brewery, all these companies are putting down money to organize concerts. They pay artiste to brand for them, to do this, to do that, so artistes are beginning to live a better life. You do concert that is more colorful, you go to an event and enjoy a little bit, okay? So, what I'm now trying to say is the industry itself, not the industry in relation to the corporate bodies should stand, it should have its own spectrum through which it should stand. It should be rooted on its own, but we don't have good management companies. Management companies are only interested in big artistes. One, two, you find a situation where the artiste is his own manager even if he has a manager, you see he will do this and that and even think of recording, he feels in some cases that if the problem is not solved what is producer gonna do, in that kind of situation, the best cannot be brought out of the artiste. That is why you see some artistes don't last for long, only few of them do last for long like I said. In advance countries, you find a situation where Lionel Richie will do his song, that song will still be ever green in ten, twenty years, If I play "All Night Long" today you'll enjoy it. If I ever play Lake Side "Feel The Rock", I play Cool And The Gang "Ladies Night", you will enjoy those songs. That's the truth! Honesty, you can't play Nigerian songs now, that was played ten years ago and enjoy them except highlife, few that are original. We still have the same few because they took time. It was not cut and nail because the studio stuff was not digitalized, it was analogue. It's either you play it well or you don't play it at all. Now computers have refined voices, they have tempo voices, even when the artistes go, they record. At the end of days because computer has refined and repackaged them, when they come to real light of music, they are dull! They don't know anything. In advance country you have artisan stage managers, artiste manager: people that manage the artiste, as an artiste, how they do stage performance, do choreography, are anchored by different managers. Femi was once doing it at one point in time but he could not afford it. All the white managers have left him, he's now alone. The only person that is packaging himself to a level now is Lagbaja. He just left the country to America. He is on concert in the U.S.

What I'm trying to say is that the industry could have done better because we have the population. In music, you have to think of population because if the population were not as large as it supposed to be, there would be low patronage. It is the population that also patronized the product of these artistes. The CDs, the VCDs, the video and all that, and that is why Nigeria is doing well in the music

industry than other parts of African because we have the population. We have to look into the industry for the industry to do well; the government has to also get everything right! For instance light, if I don't have light in one month, so what am I buying the CD for? And not only that, again the transportation system also affects the industry. If I carry a product from here and it takes a whole day before I could get to V.I. then what is the essence, so instead I will stay in ikeja and sell, I will not need to carry my product to V.I. because by the time I will get back from V.I to Alaba market, Alaba people would have closed. Do you understand what I'm saying? Then not only that, the technological system that we have is also affecting and that is the advantage that foreign countries have, especially America has over Nigeria. In America, you don't go and advertise your product somewhere else. In my house, I will download through credit card. I pay the bank, then the artiste is making his money. I could just release an album in one hour and sell a hundred thousand copies, because as I am selling, I'm advertising on the net and everybody is downloading, they are buying on the net. So I don't have to go out and buy. But in Nigeria I will need to go Council bus stop to buy a Rugged Man CD as much as I want to hear it or else I will be forced not to buy a CD. Not only that, the level of intellectual understanding, intellectual system; level of education also affects marketing, as a whole goes to Show Business because if show business is not doing well, people will not come into it. The reason why people are coming to it as a matter of fact they believe that when you run a Show Business, it will automatically expose you, like that of Kennis...

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Everybody wants to be an artiste not because they have the talent but because they want to *hammer* and buy a car. They want to live like Tuface. They want to live like ... but entertainment is different. What am I trying to say? Where you have a country where people are like illiterates. So what are they buying the CDs for? In American system, the average young man can operate system, they are on the Internet but our economic system does not allow this. I have not fed very well, my son has a computer, he will say, "Daddy, I want to connect to Internet." My friend, I have to feed well before I can get you Internet. But in advanced countries, children even below age five can operate computer. They could download CDs. They know what is happening. In Nigeria, we don't know what is happening and because of hardship, we don't even enjoy ourselves very well. People that do enjoy themselves, we look at them as being wayward. But that is how life is supposed to be. Say, you club, you go to party, you're ... wayward people. It is wrong! That is the level of hardship that the psychological aspect of hardship has beaten us. All these actually compound in one bond to frustrate the industry. So people have turned beggar but unfortunately because the key players have refused to do what they have to do, the labels, because the label is turning now to a marketer. Let me tell you, the marketer pays you money. How many copies would you sell for three years? They will sell your copies. *Inna, carry your wahala and go*. I don't do what you are doing. You are the one that has to survive on your own. That is why at the end of the day when the marketer is selling... Let me tell you something. Prince Nico Mbarga was one of the poorest musicians in Nigeria, he was the one that released one of the highest selling albums in this country, "*Sweet mother*" (sings) *Sweet mother, I no go forget you...* He died on *okada* because he sold his copyright to Roger in Enugu. What exactly am I trying to say? What I am trying to say now is, now there is glamour because companies are pumping money into it but unfortunately, the right structure is not in place. People that are investing into Show Business apart from these companies are businessmen but they love

music, they just gave somebody money to ... They don't even know what is happening, they don't understand it, they don't even know it.

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How does management runs?

Let me tell you how a management company should run. You should have your Legal Department, very important. First before anything, you have PR Department, which is not Media but will liaise with the media, you understand, because the job is not just media. It's beyond media. We have PR in corporate bodies, PR in government, and PR within the industries. Is it not so? Then you should have an Account Department, Financial Secretariat. Four basically. Then if you are running a label, there should be extra one. It is called A & R Department. What A & R Department does is to articulate royalty, but because of hardship like I said, those things don't happen. Even in Nigeria Music Award, it is done haphazardly. What Tony Okoroji did was to go round, gather some media persons. That is just it. That is what people do this day. They will go and pay some editors, like I have a good friend Dada Eriye. He is the editor of *News of the People*. I will just say Dada come. I speak to Kehinde, Kehinde come. Okay. I will say trustee, trustee, trustee... at the end of the day, they just report to me. But it is supposed to go beyond that. You have to have a PR department inside. Because of the hardship, people cannot afford to pay. So you now really liaise with media outside and this is exactly what is happening in our industry currently.

What can you say about piracy?

Uhm! Let me tell you something on piracy. I am a marketing consultant. I am very sensitive to Alaba boys. We can't stop piracy, listen to me, we can't stop piracy. We can only reduce piracy. And with the kind of structure we have now, it is not too good to reduce piracy. Listen to me now. People don't get these things. I am talking professionally. I am telling you what these artistes don't know. Buchi was here some days. I educated Buchi on these things. Because, you see, most artistes don't understand the market technically. I will tell you why you can't reduce, reducing piracy is like saying... you can't just stop piracy. Stopping piracy is like when you say you want to stop stealing (laughs). You can't stop it. You can't stop crime. In fact, if you stop crime, it is a problem. In fact, if you have a crime-free society, it is a problem. Philosophically, it is a problem. If we are living a crime-free society, I will be bored. Somebody must steal. Somebody must do something wrong for it to be better. If I stay in my house, if my wife doesn't offend me, I may not feel comfortable. I am telling you. Yes! So you cannot stop it, you can only reduce it. It would have been good (to reduce it) but Nigeria industry as it is now is bad. Yes, I will tell you why and I will start from A and come down to B. Now, some years ago, the label owners were the ones to market the products of the artistes and they were far from the central market, and distribution market. I will tell you what Central and Distribution Markets are. The central market is Alaba International and distribution markets are Onitsha and Aba. Port Harcourt was sitting here and there, just developing. And when these label owners were marketing, the Alaba boys would buy in time because they were not interested... the only thing they did then was at times, they had a contract with the label owner, distribute. They were distributors. They were not printing. So when they printed, it was totally piracy. So, they were not involved in full time marketing. But now, Show Business is attractive; people are now buying unlike before. Youths are now going into music. We have graduates. So people patronize music. They patronize these products because they don't look at it as industry for failures anymore. A master

degree holder now is an active chap. Rich people are also getting money. There are lots of them that are the pirates and are the ones that pay artistes to sell their products. Even Kennis is dead. Died before long. The last coffin that Kennis Music had been buried was Tuface. Now listen, the market is shifted from labels to central market, Alaba. The same thing happened to the film market. Zeb Ejiro and Amaka Igwe, Charles Ovia, they are not in existence. Initially they would produce, Alaba boys would sell. That was at their established market at Adeniran Ogunsanya. They will say, "We sell here, Alaba come and buy." The Alaba would say, "*no problem, Infinity Merchant o ya, director* I will pay you money, *nwei ego*. Call Genevieve, call... I will shoot it myself." So everything went to Alaba. Are you following what is happening? It takes risk in business. If you don't take risk, you are not a businessman. That is the advantage that they have. The *Ibo boys* risk. They sign any artiste. It was Kenny and Obaino that started this ball game. Obaino sued Kenny on label right. Now let me educate you on the rights.

We have different kinds of right. We have copyrights. Copy rights, in all albums you see "copyright reserved". You go to Nigerian Copyright Commission, you register. The copyright is a right that you have as the owner of that work because you own the work. It's yours. You can decide to sell if you are desperate. That means you don't have anything to do with that album anymore. Don't ever think that you own or you write the album. There is one we call label right. Label right was the transaction that Obaino had with Kenny. Let me tell you how that happens. I will pay you a particular amount of money, that the value for the royalty of each of the label of each of the album. If I sell a CD one hundred naira, you say your own cut is twenty naira. I will pay you twenty naira on each album. That is a label right. There is another one called MMD. That one, the marketer will sell for two years, don't disturb me, I'm going to market for two years ...we have what we called distribution right. After the distribution I will bring in the artiste in to the marketer, they will now distribute to the market at the end of the day. There is another one called Marketing Right, this is not exclusive, but MMD which is Manufacturing, Marketing and Distributions.