

## An African visitor, a medical drama, and an act of kindness

By Brian Fitzgerald

What is there to say when your eyesight is deteriorating & and then, two operations later, your vision is restored? <sup>3</sup>It's just a miracle,<sup>2</sup> says Yazid Dogo, a renowned actor and educator from the African Republic of Niger. <sup>3</sup>I simply can't find the words to express my gratitude to Boston University.<sup>2</sup>

Sitting in the office of John Hutchison, a CAS associate professor of African languages and linguistics, Dogo recounts a drama that unfolded in July and August of 2004 during a visit to Massachusetts. It is a story of trepidation, confusion, and, ultimately, compassion.

Dogo, the head of a comedy theater troupe that performs in Niger's Hausa language, is in the United States as a guest of the West African Research Association (WARA), whose American office is housed at Boston University's African Studies Center. His trip is funded by the African Language Materials Archive (ALMA) project, which gathers the continent's literature in the African language it was written in and posts it on the WARA's ALMA Web site. He has been staying in Hutchison's home in West Newbury, Mass.

Dogo had been experiencing blurred vision, so on July 28 Hutchison took him to a nearby ophthalmologist, who agreed to examine him free of charge. The doctor discovered cataracts in both Dogo's eyes. For Dogo, the horror of the diagnosis was compounded by the fact that he had no health insurance, so surgery seemed out of the question. Dogo and Hutchison wondered what to do next.

Then Hutchison had an idea. Dogo teaches a course in the performing arts to BU students who participate in the University's Study Abroad Program in Niger, so Hutchison explained his friend's plight to Ben DeWinter, the associate provost for international programs. DeWinter contacted President Aram Chobanian. <sup>3</sup>In short order, Aram Chobanian, who is also a member of the faculty of the School of Medicine, intervened on behalf of Yazid Dogo,<sup>2</sup> says Hutchison. MED <sup>3</sup>donated to our visitor surgeries to remove cataracts in both eyes, and by the next morning, all the facility costs were contributed as well by Boston Medical Center, through its executive vice president, Paul Drew.<sup>2</sup> The pro bono cataract surgery on Dogo's left eye was performed August 16 and the operation on his right eye on August 30. Both procedures were successful.

<sup>3</sup>I will never forget the University's generosity,<sup>2</sup> says Dogo, who will return to Niger on September 19. <sup>3</sup>I cried tears of joy.<sup>2</sup> Hutchison, who is working on a documentary on Dogo's life, had filmed interviews with him last summer in Niger. But little did he know Dogo's story would take such a dramatic turn a year later in Boston. Indeed, an account of his friend's restored eyesight will be included in the documentary.

<sup>3</sup>We're so grateful,<sup>2</sup> says Hutchison. <sup>3</sup>It was an incredibly magnanimous gesture on the part of the University.<sup>2</sup>