BISADE OLOGUNDE:
I AM STILL TRYING TO HOLD ON TO WHAT MOVES PEOPLE ABOUT MUSIC

EDITOR 'S NOTE: *Lagbaja is not only the theme for the music album of Bisade Ologunde's team. It is a theme but more than a theme. It is a concept. A concept of a masked musician. An anonymous man, an unknown instrumentalist striking the keyboard notes or blasting away on the bass guitar. Bisade would not confirm this, but Lagbaja, that is the concept of an unknown man rings a strident bell with both a musical and political resonance. Can we expect not to recall that Fela Anikulapo-Kuti in the 70s released an album titled* ***Unknown Soldier*** *? Which itself echoed the summed up verdict of a judicial commission that investigated a raid of uniformed soldiers on his erstwhile residential compound in Lagos - the Kalakuta Republic. As Bisade confesses to us, influences fly from mind to mind purely at the stream of the subconscious: Nobody can hold on to it!*

QUESTION: Can you give us a brief introduction to your person?

ANSWER: Well, I call Bisade a musician. I'm also a producer. We have a band, we've been together now for about five or six years; sorry, this is the fifth year; in another one month, it will be five years we've been together. The band is called ***Colours.*** We play basically African music. It's like all my work is based around that band for now. Studio production for now are limited to experimental projects. That's the summary of what I'm all about.

Bisade Ologunde

QUESTION: Is there any relationship between Bisade Ologunde and the invisible man, the masquerade you called 'Lagbaja'?

ANSWER: Bisade is the producer for Lagbaja. I also conceived the idea. But there has been so much unnecessary focus on the person behind Lagbaja. The more important thing is the message of Lagbaja and the total concept. Anybody could be Lagbaja. It's just the significance of using a mask. And the main importance of that mask is that the mask is like a symbol of the facelessness of the so-called common man in Africa. So, we have different people perform the role of Lagbaja, being masked performers. But Bisade is Bisade. I'm not Lagbaja. If I wish too, I could wear the mask and perform Lagbaja also. But somehow, I think it's probably due to some press misconception that led people to thinking of Lagbaja as Bisade or whatever. We've had several people play the role of Lagbaja as a matter of fact.

QUESTION: Looking at the music trend in Nigeria, would you say there is anything called Nigerian jazz?

ANSWER: Em... Classification of music is basically for communication. If you wish to call something Nigerian jazz, that would be your classification. Generally, I understand jazz to be a universal style.

It's equally a universal tag. Music is a language that is universal. So, when we talk about jazz, it's got to be the same jazz all over the world. "Nigerian jazz" could only mean an English phrase to talk about the Nigerian scene.

QUESTION: Richard Smith was talking about this classification and how they relate to the Nigerian environment. Like reggae, that we have only one or two reggae musicians in Nigeria playing the kind of reggae that you find in the West Indies and all that - Can we have a general... apart from jazz, maybe reggae and calypso... Do you think it is

possible to have any of these forms...?

ANSWER: This is possible. But we have some problems, I will say, of knowledge, know-how. When you talk about jazz, basically, even in America where jazz is probably at its peak form, there are all kinds of controversies on what is jazz and what is not jazz. So, when you talk about jazz, basically people, purists think in terms of the original art form that was the popular music of the world at some point in time and that has styles like swing, bebop, blues. They tend to consider that more like jazz than what generally people call jazz here which is classified as fusion in their own terms. So when you talk about Nigerian jazz, it's like you are now beginning to add another dimension to the confusion of classification. Lots of what we might call Nigerian jazz might end up just being another type of fusion which is basically like taking instruments of standard jazz forms and having the instruments of African or Nigerian forms and adding those things. If you put percussion in jazz it's no news. It's been done even since the days of Coltrane - all kinds of amalgamation, mixtures of jazz and other forms. So, the sub-division can go on endlessly. I prefer to just keep to the international standard of what they believe is jazz and how they classify the other forms, the ones they call music of *avant-garde* or the ones they call fusion. Or indeed jazz of the more recent hip-hop adventures.

QUESTION: So, it's not possible to recognise any local trend that can really be...?

ANSWER: We can talk about the efforts of Nigerians and their ideas of jazz but they are not many, they are not sufficient to have a movement. When we talk about new ideas and movements, you must have an active scene. You must have musicians coming together in workshops, exchanging ideas; when these guys, the M-Base guys take up the saxophone, they just come together, Greg Osby, Steve Coleman, they come together, they play, they discuss, they rub minds together. And then ideas come out over a period of time. It's an active, dynamic thing. That's what I'm saying, that it's not a very active movement. One or two people. Really, they are just making individual efforts.

QUESTION: Is it possible to make the same comment about reggae?

ANSWER: Now, reggae in a way, yes. But I'll say what really made reggae popular in Nigeria was the media and Bob Marley and all the Virgin Record guys - I-Roy and co. It took a long time before authentic Jamaica-like reggae came out. The youths that were listening then grew up until they were able to play. It was easier for them to tend to reggae because, one, the technical facilities they needed weren't that complicated. Most of reggae is based around the two, three chord progression. Much like you find in highlife, basic primary chords most of the time. A few adventurous pieces have more than three, four chords. But it's easier to learn some basic chords and play reggae. Also, there is a particular rhythm which you play when you play those forms. As opposed to jazz where a piece could have probably some nine, ten chords

with some different arrangements per section. But aside from blues that also uses basic primary chords and extensions of them like seventh, ninth, in reggae there are basically the primary chords, the one, four, five major and a few minors. So I think that is what aided the growth of reggae.

Also the general culture, again through the media, aided the growth of reggae. And I think it is through practice that a style develops. Eventually it got to the point where people were able to play in a style that could almost be called a Nigerian style of reggae. Also Nigerian could be a wide classification. If you play an instrumental piece of reggae, it would sound very much like an instrumental piece of reggae from Jamaica. But then, when you start singing, the accent will give you away and then you see a difference. But they got to the point of aping so much, talking the patois, "I 'n I" and "Gimme likkle sugar" and stuff like that.

QUESTION: Can we go back a bit? Give us a brief overview of your musical background?

ANSWER: Musically, I've been playing in bands from school. First of all, it was Government College, Ibadan. Later, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. I was lucky to have friends that were active in music too. So, together we kind of taught ourselves through reading books and discussing and arguing, sometimes ignorantly, until over time...our interests grew and our skills too on some instruments. There were many influences, Nigerian and foreign. I will say the very first artiste that I got into was Carlos Santana. And rock. But you see, there were some instrumental rock pieces like *Samba Patti*. And as a matter of fact, it was from that style, that instrumental rock thing, that I got to recognise that there were other pieces called jazz. So, it was from Carlos Santana I got into Bob James and Earl Klugh. And it was my surprise about a year later I found out that there were even more exciting forms - swing, big band, bebop.

QUESTION: You were reading most of the time?

ANSWER: It was more of listening then. More like you just get to a place by chance and you hear that someone has a record and he's playing it and something sounds interesting.

QUESTION: What about the Nigerian scene?

ANSWER: The Nigerian scene? It was mainly Fela.

QUESTION: What did you study?

ANSWER: I did first degree in Education Biology. Then I did an M.B.A.

QUESTION: About which time were you focussed on Fela?

ANSWER: Fela has been from secondary school. Well, not only Fela. There was Fela and Baba L'Egba - that's Yussuf Olatunji - and Haruna Ishola. It was much later, during my Masters years that I got into *fuji*, I was more excited about *apala* and *sakara*, especially Baba L'Egba.

QUESTION: What is it about Yussuf?

ANSWER: There is this smooth...oh not blues in the sense of American blues as such, but the feel; blues in the sense of the feel. In fact when he attempted to sing the fast songs in the fashion of that time, they were usually in this funny drawl that, if you aren't careful, listening to the music, you'll probably sleep off. But there are very exciting ways in which he would say things. Despite the fact that I am Yoruba, it took me a long time to even understand some Yoruba things he was saying because of the way in which they were said. Not following the usual phonetic patterns of Yoruba, *"do-re-mi-re-do"*; the basic things; turning things around. And also the poetry of his compositions. The way he would start in the middle, stop in the middle and repeat parts of it, then the guys in the band would probably just join like they had forgotten they were supposed to join and end the piece. But I found out it was actually a style - not that they forgot or anything, it was just the style.

Apala came into my consciousness more because somehow it was popular around with some DJs. So you got to hear them on the radio. But again it was the composition of Haruna Ishola. I remember clearly *"Ina ran, / O k'omo ti o t'owo b'eeru"*; "On my way to London *ko s'ewu rara*". Quite exciting pieces at that time. I think it was the sheer pleasure of listening to all those. During my Masters years, I had a friend who had discovered *fuji* before me. So, he just brought a couple of records and I got to hear them. Then it was Barrister...

QUESTION: What hit you about *fuji*? Was there also a feel?

ANSWER: I really can't place my finger. It was a gradual thing. I would say that as a matter of fact, I initially looked down on fuji. It didn't strike me as anything exciting. It sounded like they were even stealing pieces from apala and sakara. But gradually, I got to find that they had their original style. It took a long time to even differentiate between Barrister and Kollington. They even looked alike to me at that time, sounded alike and so on. So, it was after a while you find they had totally different styles. Then came Wasiu with his ***Talazo Disco***....

QUESTION: Barrister and Kollington are probably in the old school now with the Wasius coming out. What are the differences? It seems their works have not been able to go beyond Nigerian shores. Is there something about it that is unable to aspire to world standard?

ANSWER: I think it's difficult to find a

reason for its not going international. Of course they play abroad and stuff like that. But when it comes down to individual creativity, the personality of the man behind the music, Sunny Ade taking juju beyond these mighty boundaries has to do more with Sunny Ade as a person. Because music nowadays is seen from the perspective of the individual, of the solo act, and how he puts the package together; what he looks like, sounds like and everything. In spite of the language barrier, Sunny was able to do something. I think in fuji, there hasn't been a person with that personality yet; you know, who is dynamic enough to have the so-called star quality. It's not a thing you can hold on to, but he has them. Now, having said that I think, it's also still developing. I think it had a very big break about seven years ago. Then it actually almost took over all parties from juju. And I think it was basically because of the fact that it was easier to buy equipment to play fuji. So even today, you have thousands of fuji musicians around. At that time, it would cost you about N125.00 to buy the total fuji equipment. But because it was mainly sekere (maracas) and sakara. In fact, not even gangan (talking drum) that was so expensive. A single flat-faced sakara then was about N15.00; two sakaras, about four omele, then sekere, agogo (gong) and you are fine. And, of course, guys went there. As opposed to juju that you needed to buy a bass guitar and about four guitars and a synthesizer and a drum set - and these are foreign things. So it was quite expensive. Fuji even went so far as offering to play for free, hoping that they would be sprayed at the party.

QUESTION: You had a project. Can you talk about it - with one of the fuji artistes?

ANSWER: I found out then that fuji was a growing style, I was quite excited. It was an active...like an active Yoruba popular music. Or let's say metropolitan, urban - In Lagos, they had what you call jumps everyday of the week in different places. Again it came down to being able to afford the instruments to play with. Also, the instruments are there, being as a Yoruba thing. In addition, they already had people they could look up to, people who were technically versatile already. So, they had heroes to worship and learn from percussion wise. Therefore it was growing. This is very much unlike the saxophone. I mean, I had to learn the sax myself, more or less. Those I thought I could look up to were themselves not so good, just about average. You couldn't find people to tell you about tones, and to correct you. They would think that's good already when you know you are not even sounding like what you know you should sound like, they can't even tell the difference. Those you thought were the heroes, you get close to them and found they were out of tune. They could hardly play in more than one or two keys.

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But in fuji then, it's like you have these people who are entirely in the music business. It was possible to go ahead and learn from those - ask questions, watch them, so they were playing. I got excited about this, going round and watching them. Then I decided to invest in it and record an artiste. Although apart from creative reasons, I had commercial motives at that time too. You see I found out that it was actually the cheapest thing I could release.

Now, pop music, if you really want to sound good, you have to have the right equipment, and you have to have the know-how to operate the equipment well. Then, more of the time, you took many more sessions to have something done in the studio. Now, for fuji, the guys play together. This is more like the jazz of those days. You go to the studio, the guys come together and they just play. And they record about two or three tapes. That's the music. Not that you go to the studio, you record the drums, you record the bass guitar and the keyboard, you overdub this and that; it takes a long time. And then, it is not their own music. Really, people were still learning the technology involved. You sometimes had the synthesizer and you couldn't programme it, you use whatever thing is in the synthesizer, stuff like that. But in fuji, it is different, where the music is around you, and they could play together as s band. So, in three sessions, I could finish a programme. So, I decided to look all over town to find the kind of guy that I thought could do the kind of thing I wanted him to do. I had my ideas too like an A and R [artiste and repertoire] person. So I was looking for a young person who believed in himself, and who could compose. Because I found then that you heard the same songs everywhere. Obviously only a few people were really composing. Most of the others, even the established acts were like stealing or borrowing ideas and concepts from the others who hadn't the chance to record. So it's difficult to track down a person with these qualities. Especially one who was able to compose.

Also who looks good - had the so-called star quality you can really put your hands on. And of course who was sensible enough to want to work.

I almost gave up after about six months. Then, by chance, I saw a guy playing at Ketu [area of Lagos]. And his voice was good. He was sounding very good. But he looked very...he was very sheepish kind of in his performance - stand on one side, cork his head to one side. He didn't even have the aura that was captivating. But his voice was great. So, I spoke to his manager who then said I should come back the next day to watch somebody else perform at the same place. I saw that one perform. He was vibrant. But he didn't sound good, he didn't sound creative. So, I told the manager I couldn't work with that too - and that was the guy called Hajji Top. So, he said there was a third guy who was performing elsewhere - somewhere else in Ojota. That if I could fix a time with him over the weekend, we could go and watch that guy. That's how I got to see Sandoka. He kind of had much of what I wanted - you know, he was young, he was good looking and he had his own way of singing; slightly aggressive, but he was unique.

I also thought at that time that he was composing most of the pieces. That was more like '84, '84/'85. I found eventually that he too was actually borrowing from places I hadn't been. So, when I thought he was composing, he wasn't composing. And I found out that the best of the composers then was a guy called Shaura - that was his nickname. I've forgotten his real name now. His base was Idumota area of Lagos. And he was at constant loggerheads with Wasiu, the Talazo king of the time. So, many of these acts were actually stealing or borrowing or adapting. They go to watch themselves. Like when I'm not playing, I go to watch you play at a jump, I hear something, I pick it up. Because the jump is free - I mean no gate fee, just come in. But they expected you to spray and buy food and stuff like that. So, it's like they hang out together. In fact, when you see another star, you'll probably spend about ten minutes praising him and making him dance or whatever.

The only real culture then that was really out and developed from the roots. And that was also contemporary, you have moved a little away from apala to what was happening that was entirely ours. It was a real culture. And it was real, it was happening. As opposed to the so-called Nigerian jazz or even pop, it was really happening. One, you had so many people doing it so you could have others to learn from. Also it was from the roots of the Yorubas. It was easy to develop; it was growing.And also it was in a language that they could understand. It came to a time that it was like a colloquial - even mixing words of English into it just like in normal everyday life. So, it was more like the authentic contemporary urban style of the Yoruba at that point - even up to now.

QUESTION: Do you want to link it to ghetto rap or stuff like that?

ANSWER: Yeah. I think as a matter of fact it's like our own answer to that because that's their real music...

QUESTION: Were you looking at that as an artiste or...?

ANSWER: Just an independent thing.

QUESTION: When you look at the coming of people like Adewale Ayuba, Abass Akande Obesere and Sandoka who seem to have taken over from the older Kollington, Barrister era, would you say the jump culture has produced them? Again do you see any of these guys having the potential of achieving the kind of thing Bob Marley achieved for reggae and Sunny Ade achieved for juju music in future?

ANSWER: I think it's possible. Not immediately, but I think it will develop. There is no doubt it will get to that point. But unfortunately, because of our enslavement to foreign culture and the way people look at foreign things as better, they are already beginning to dilute or should we say commercialise from the point of what they think is commercial, by adding synthesizers. They are not even played properly. In a way, one could say that maybe even the way it is played is also real. It's not like they play in a particular way like when you have Baba L'Egba then playing his goje. Goje is like violin. But even the instrument itself, he knows about it. He knows about the tuning, he knows about the way it sounds, he knows about how it blends with his voice and style of playing. So, when you just carry a thing and you just start playing, sometimes the guy even sings on a different key from what the guy who is backing him is trying to do. If the guy who was backing him knew about his instrument, he could as well listen and learn from the lead vocalist's style of doing things. And after, decide to accompany him, learn a different style of accompanying. Not come and install a two, three chord pop style behind the guy who is changing keys....

QUESTION: Is it the norm now?

ANSWER: Yeah, that's what's happening now.

QUESTION: Is it going to obliterate the originality of the whole thing?

ANSWER: I think it would take a few, probably more serious people. Maybe somebody will come up with a style among them and develop something. But then it comes down to awareness. One, you have to believe in your own thing. Two, you have to respect yourself, know that you are a worthy human being. And that something that is yours coming from you is as authentic as of anywhere else.

QUESTION: How does the man on the street, who just wants to make a million dollars, how does he have that kind of orientation?

ANSWER: Well... (Laughter). Well, we can only hope. By the way too, we are working on something similar. It's like...em...I've been fascinated by that kind of music from time. So, it's like we came up with this style of music that was highly percussive but not just percussive. We use the talking drum as an instrument of rhythm in backing. Not just talking, but singing. Normally when you get a talking drummer to play, he plays, he talks, not that he sings. Now you try to now understand his own way of thinking when it comes to melody. He doesn't have to play in what you consider to be the standard Western classification of notes into keys and notes. It's like 'play, play'. Get about seven guys to play, all different styles, and try to find what is the link between them, the way they think. I mean, like if you ask my talking drummer now to do for you the *tonic solfa*, I mean the guy, he would probably do about four, five out of seven notes. And that's how he understands that. But he has an authentic musical style in him. He is going to be a master for his drum. So, can I now learn from him? How is he thinking? What is he even thinking about? How can I use that for my own music in the so-called popular genre? And that's the thinking. So we kind of produce things that had the talking drum combined with drums to play rhythms. That gives us the beats. And the beats are not the standard four-four beats or the popular disco beats or the hip-hop beats. They are more like, well, they are slightly jerky, probably more related to where the guy was coming from - the drummer. His own personality, his own history of understanding, his own understanding of music, his own free thought. But again, he's also a product of several influences. He's also heard M. C. Hammer and Michael Jackson. So, in a way, he's been influenced too. But his own interpretation of those forms, of his own instrument is different from my own interpretation. Because I am thinking already in almost the Western key forms. He is still thinking in his own mode. And you can hear it, he is not thinking in terms of how I am thinking, so, he is authentic. And he moves people; and you don't really know what is moving them. You can't say...I mean like ask them 'What exactly is exciting about...?' They just tell you 'Men, I mean it's nice. It sounds good.' So, there is something about what he is doing that's authentic.

QUESTION: It's an evolution of this decadent style of music where someone like you that is sound and is out of the same urban crowd here but is taking a bunch of talking drummers that are ingrained in the background of the tradition and now is directing them. Is this what you are trying to do? You are taking your own culture among your own class of people and holding on to it too and then with different vibrations?

ANSWER: Yes, the only difference is that maybe now I am putting in editing language. Maybe now I'm doing a little of English. That's the only attempt to communicate to the wide population of English speakers.

QUESTION: Is that not modernising?

ANSWER: No. O. K., now, I won't call it modernising. It comes back again to being honest with myself. Now, initially, I looked down again upon foreign culture because I felt it's doing a bad thing for us here. But then I found that I had to find myself. The fact is that as a young African, I've passed through several experiences. I went to a primary school that was put on the form of the British education. Next, I went to a secondary school that was even one of the best in the country, a government school that had white teachers initially who established the school. And then I got to a point where you had to learn the proper way, the proper grammar for English. If you said something wrong, I mean grammatically, they say you misfired; I mean, they would make fun of you. So, you had to learn some things, some forms. And then it got to the point where you prefer to wear a shirt and a trousers

Sunny Ade

and you wouldn't want to wear your own thing. It took a long time before you got to where you are. So, as a person, I'm also a product of many influences. Some, traditional, some foreign. All of them affect the psyche. Even things that had nothing to do with music. The politics of the nation, the madness, the ignorance of the people at the top. They affect things that affect you ultimately: your growth is limited to their perception, their lack of vision. So, you are an individual that is a product of many influences. So, I found out that I had to discover myself first of all and be...I mean, I said 'You have to be yourself.' I am not really traditional. Even fuji music... If you really want to hear the authentic music of the Yorubas, you have to go to the villages and go to the festivals. The same talking drum I use in a different style. Our talking drummer is *ayan*, Ayangbola. He was born into the family of talking drummers. So, he grew up as he went with them from ceremony to ceremony and so on. But he came to Lagos to join juju bands

and stuff like that. So, he is a product of many influences. Juju bands were aspiring to add foreign things to their music. In fact, they even quarrelled on who first introduced the trap drum set, who first introduced the bass guitar, who first introduced something exciting. And again as a nation, even as a continent, we are under regular slavery economically, culturally. And the audience you are trying to talk to, people generally, they live under the same condition that you live in, even worse; the listeners. I am not excited about creating art for art's sake. As far as I am concerned, it's a communication thing. Also, I have a message. And I think it's a message I have need to carry across. I cannot sing fuji. As a matter of fact, it would be pretentious because it wouldn't really be real. I cannot play apala per se, that's not me. Now I cannot play jazz like Lee Morgan would, or like John Coltrane would. More or less, I am inspired more by the singing of Miles Davis. It's not a matter of selling out. I'll never buy ignorance. It's a dynamic thing. And it has to do with your culture at that point in time and the people. Miles was a part of jazz O. K., maybe they had a commercial interest too, to make money and stuff like that. But if you look at other great jazz artistes like Sonny Rollins, or like Pharaoh Sanders, you find them constantly learning, experimenting. It's a continuous process. And they keep learning and they keep imbibing all kinds of ideas into their stuff. It's not rigid. A style goes for a while. If you play all the time, you really get bored with something. Like Fela would never play live a song he's recorded. I think it has to do with some form of gaining style of his own. I mean, it would be tough for him to go on stage now and start playing ***Palaver*** and ***Lady***...He would be bored. And then it wouldn't be challenging to him creatively. I would want to create something new all the time, be on the edge of it. As a matter of fact, now we have a problem with Lagbaja because at this point in time I am almost tired of the music already. And it's not a year old in the market. It's more to do with being creative and having new ideas that makes those old things very outdated more or less. Not outdated per se but outdated somehow to me. People still want them. It's like OK., let's play it for them, they are asking for it. But there are new things....

QUESTION: Don't you think you need to give it time to evolve before you switch to another thing?

ANSWER: I think it's more because I have grown in awareness over the last eighteen months. And my growth had nothing to do with music. Again it came back to the political situation in Nigeria. The **June 12** madness. It's like I understood other things about life. And I got to a point where I found that I had to do other things apart from what I was doing. So, what we are doing now is nearer what I think we are going for. It's not a deliberate attempt to go one way or the other. But I'm just trying to follow my natural inclination; the thing I feel good doing, I enjoy doing and that's giving me some creative vibes. And that's why the new direction is coming up. So, I was saying that it's difficult to just hang on to one style if you don't think about the importance of course of being dynamic. And nothing is static. Things keep changing all the time. It should be same for art and for music. And there was no way that jazz itself could ever have been developed if people did not strive for something new. The Africans who were taken as slaves then could have been playing white music or playing their home stuff. Nothing new would have come out. Jazz would never have been developed. It's a matter of dynamism. I'm not an American anyway, I'm not a custodian of traditional jazz or whatever. I want to make music and communicate my art to the best of my ability and to keep learning from other forms. So, I came up with this new thing now. And I don't think that is the end point yet. I think I will have to see people's response to it. I try to ask questions from people that: 'What really moves you about music? Can you tell me what exactly excites you?' I read a couple of books, well, not really read, I kind of glanced through them trying to... they talk about the function of music or whatever. In fact, I wrote a thesis, my thesis for my M.B.A. was on marketing music in Nigeria. So, I had to go through some books; there was a book on functions of music. It gave me a little bit

Yoruba folk musician.

of an insight into what moves people about music. But I'm still not satisfied. People really can't hold on to what they think moves them. And it seems to be what, I mean, there must be a norm to determine what is good music or bad music. It's very very subjective from person to person. And so, it's like I keep wondering whether it's not like a spiritual thing. Something you really can't hold on to, that it's subconscious thing. That's why people have hits once in their lifetimes and never have another hit. They try their best to find what exactly moved people the first time around and they can't find it again. It's a subconscious mixture of so many things. From the timing of the release to the lyrics, to the beats, to the mood of the society. I mean, so many things at that point in time. So I find out that it was just good to be me with all my conflicting influences.

QUESTION: Before we talk about other types of music in Nigeria, this new thing, is it going to have 'Every man's' name like Lagbaja or what is the name? What are you calling it?

ANSWER: Well, Lagbaja again. The concept was developed with the idea of mass communication in mind. An image that could be powerful - a masked musician. Somebody you don't know who is behind the mask. At this point in time, I am actually considering whether or not to pack up totally the Lagbaja thing. We have a problem of communication with the people artistically. People want to see the face of the artiste, see your expressions when you are sad, when you are smiling, everything coming to the people. The mask kind of makes the image static; all they can see are the eyes. They can't see his cheeks or his mouth curl up or curl down. So, there is this static thing about it. We've tried to develop all kinds of masks and reduce this. I even saw some photographs in your shop [**Glendora Bookshop/ Jazz Hole**] of some women from is it Tunisia or from Djibouti, they had this *pudah* kind of mask which I would say are friendly masks. But still those things have a connotation of religion which I wanted to move away from. Also the mask connoted masquerades in Yoruba culture. Now, I am a Christian. And I really believe in what I believe in. And it's like I didn't feel happy with the mix-up; people take you at times to be a masquerade - Nothing to do with the *egungun*. This is more like contemporary music. And also communicating the essence of an image. Also we were trying to build an image that could be powerful in terms of recollection. It's difficult to see ten saxophonists play and not remember the guy who was masked. But then that took away from the music because what interests people was who was behind the mask. As opposed to the music itself. So, right now, as a matter of fact, we have serious arguments, discussions, the band, about what to do...Lagbaja has already built something. So, it's like how can you decide to just break it down and move on to something else? So, we can't make up our minds what to do.

The late Yussuf Olatunji.

The new thing might still be Lagbaja in the very end. But the image of Lagbaja might be different. Now, also Lagbaja

had a political connotation which was deliberate. And which is like the most powerful part of the whole image. 'Lagbaja' in Yoruba means 'So-And-So', 'Somebody', the anonymous person; it's like Tom of Tom, Dick and Harry. So, Lagbaja was chosen as a word to stand for the faceless common man. What really happens when something affects, I mean, like in this country [Nigeria], it happens to a so-called big man, then things move fast. Like when they shot one [army] colonel at the check-point, they threw out police check-points immediately. I tell you there are hundreds of Lagosians who've been shot before and even since then at check-points and nothing ever came out of it. So, it's like they are faceless. They are not known. Except you are in a powerful position or like the son of somebody powerful, you are nobody. So you are faceless. How do we now build an icon, a symbol that would represent the facelessness of the so-called common man - me too I hate that word 'common man'. How do you now represent them? So, we chose to use a mask to represent that. Two, they are supposed to be common. A connotation which ultimately comes down to cheap, of little substance. So it was like, o.k., let's use the word 'Lagbaja' to represent that and then try and build the image as a voice of the so-called common people. So that was why we came up with, 'Let him be faceless.'

There is a third reason why we came up with the masked face. It has to do with wanting to be private. Because initially I was going to perform as Lagbaja myself before I came up with the idea of steering my original band, **Colours** as a party band and have somebody perform Lagbaja as a different person. So, I wanted to be a private person. I wanted to be successful at my work and yet be devoid of the so-called glamour attached to show business. Like on Sunday I just walk from my house, I stroll to the **Shrine** to go and watch Femi [Anikulapo-Kuti] or I walk down Allen [Avenue in Ikeja area of Lagos], nobody knows me. Last week, I was at Tejuoso Market to buy some things. Last Saturday I was at Wasiu Ayinde's show at Yaba Tech. Things like that you couldn't do if your face were known all over by everybody. They would harass you, I mean, in a friendly manner. But you don't have the freedom. So, it was a reason why that image came up.

QUESTION: What do you think of other music forms in Nigeria like our own pop and reggae, highlife and also the folk music forms of people like Dan Maraya Jos, Mamman Shata?

ANSWER: Again, I believe that, like I said, we are unique as Nigerians with so many influences. Some years ago, I believed that it was impossible to play pop music like the originators of pop music. 'Pop' itself came from 'popular music' anyway. But I mean the popular African-American style. I was also amazed at why Nigerians were so excited about soul music. Why they looked down on Nigerian music. Why it was foreigners that would come here and show us how to appreciate our own music forms. And then I found that really, it is a complex issue. Like I was telling you last time, I think there is what I call **'it's a Black thing happening'.** Basically if you look at what people love, Nigerians, it is mainly African-American culture, African-American music. People don't know about AC/DC or U2, or know about Bruce Springsteen here or Mick Jagger or Pete Townsend. Who knows them here? Nobody, more or less. But even the rap guy who is a small success in his state is known here. There is something about the rhythm, there is something about the music, there is something about African-American culture. To me, I think it's a Black thing. So we find that it comes down to the essence of the music. And the same thing applies, I think, to reggae. Because it's a Black thing from Jamaica, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and the younger ones that came after them, Shaba Ranks and so on. It is the Black thing.

QUESTION: Is it really conscious?

ANSWER: I am even saying it is subconscious. It is not conscious. It is not like they are going out to listen for who is Black. They just love a piece of music and I am saying ninety percent of it is a Black thing.

QUESTION: Do you think it is the rhythm?

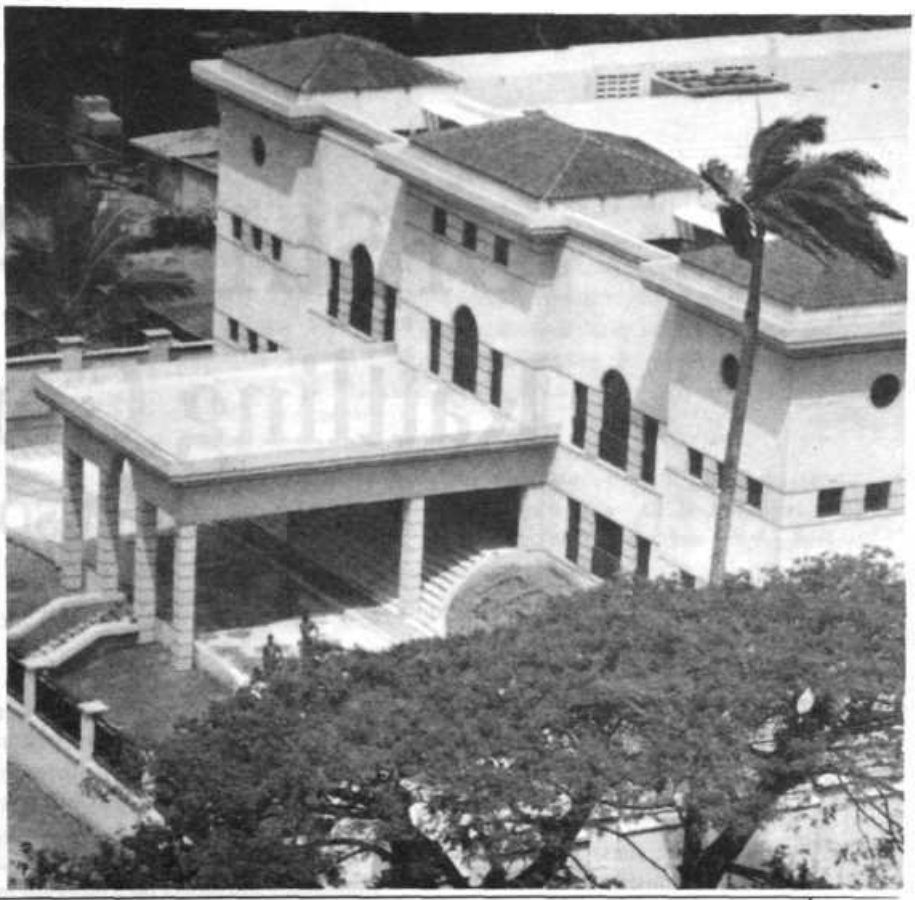
ANSWER: I think it's not just the rhythm. It is a total culture. The hipness of being Black. Look at movies, people like Black movies like nothing else. People love Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey on television. I am talking of things that I believe. They love them as much as they love white movies. Then you see our young people trying to ape the Blacks they saw in the movies, they don't try to sound like the white they saw there; the way they talk, the way they walk, they

It's difficult to see ten saxophonists play and not remember the guy who was masked. But then that took away from the music because what interests people was who was behind the mask. As opposed to the music itself.

can relate to that. The same thing with sports. Like Mike Jordan, Carl Lewis, they are popular among the youths here, they love them. Tyson, when Tyson came out, everybody wore his hairstyle.

And, see, the DJs are playing for the people what they perceive that people love. So, I found that this Black thing, there is no point throwing it overboard because in a way it is positive. It's not like they are just crazy for anything foreign. I was also happy that they are not as popular as just anything white. I mean, country music is not as popular as Black music in this country. You still find them in the east[eastern part of Nigeria], especially Don Williams and Kenny Rogers and so on, but just a few of them. Most of the time it is the Black thing that is really hot and really happening, even those Black artistes who are not national successes in the US., they are big here. When Lakeside came to Nigeria then, Lakeside, Shalamar and so on, they weren't as big as many of the white pop and rock musicians. But here, they were mighty heroes. So, there is a Black thing happening. So, I think that, one day you will find a Nigerian who will come up with a concoction, out of Nigeria, not that he would go out and borrow something from abroad o. Something Nigerian. Some Nigerian that would really hit...and I mean, hit it. GR

*** *Interview recorded by* GR at 59 Oregun Road, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria on Friday, 24th February, 1995.**



MUSON
CELEBRATES IN LAGOS

Friday 24th February, 1995 marked the first anniversary of the Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) Centre, Nigeria's new centre of excellence for classical music. Built at a cost of over N200 million, the Centre is an important landmark in the skyline of Lagos. The Musical Society of Nigeria has been highly commended for its monumental vision and achievement. MUSON Centre constitutes a rallying point for international and indigenous music in the category of classical idiom.

Activities lined up for the celebration included a piano concerto by the well-known British pianist, Gordon Fergus-Thompson under the sponsorship of the British Council. Mr Thompson also organised music workshops in Enugu, Nsukka, Abuja and Ibadan. On Friday February 24, two celebrated artistes, Herbert Druml, Austrian tenor living in Vienna and Kristin Okerlund, an American pianist also performed at the Centre. Their programme included the works of Schubert, Brahms, Fanre and Britten. They ended with a vocal workshop on Saturday March 4, 1995. Also on Saturday 25th February, 1995, Marianne Thorsen (violin) and Julian Milford (piano) thrilled the Centre's audience. The programme, sponsored by BP and StaOil Alliance, featured selections from the works of Beethoven, Kreisler and Wienniawski. Other activities were a special concert featuring renditions of Telemann, Gluck, Mozart, Chopin and Faure on Friday 10th and Saturday 11th March.

Friday 24th and Saturday 25 March, 1995 saw Nigeria's Zeal Onyia entertain alongside MUSON resident artistes.

But how did the MUSON dream come about? GR