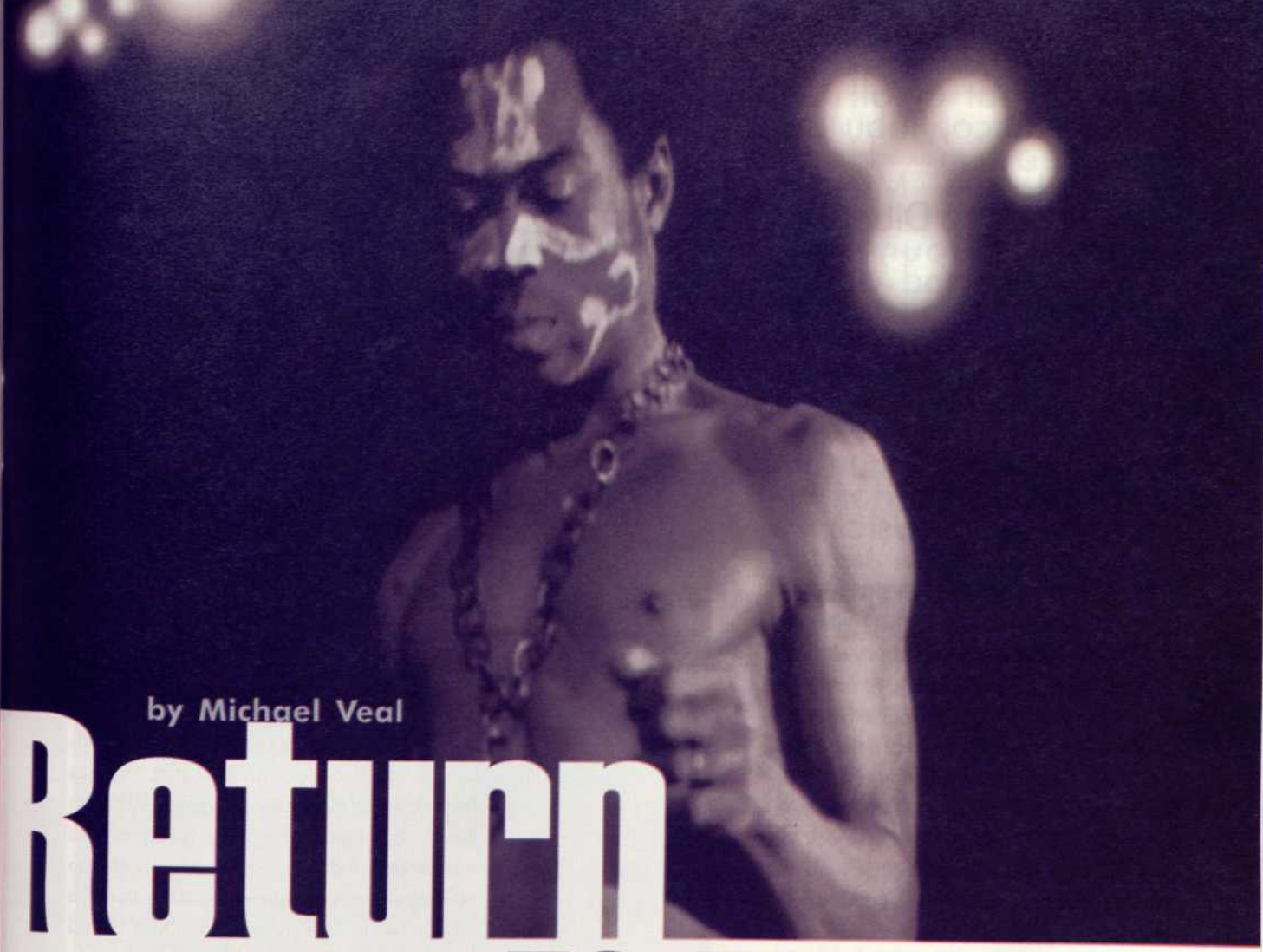

by Michael Veal

Return TO THE Shrine

Fela Kuti's Legacy Inspires an Afro-Funk Revival

AS THE SAYING GOES, DEATH IS A brilliant career move. Thus, the market for the Afrobeat music of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and all of its stylistic relatives and offshoots has become big business since his death in 1997. In Europe and the United States, Fela's back catalogue - most of which had been unavailable during the last years of his career - has been reissued, his music is being played in dance clubs, Afrobeat revival bands are forming, and compilations of Afrobeat-related music are being released at a seemingly monthly rate. Even though Fela is only one artist within a generation-bound constellation of great African musicians, his newfound popularity in the United States seems

to have momentarily eclipsed that of all the others. Franco, Tabu Ley Rochereau, Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, Manu Dibango, Youssou N'Dour, King Sunny Ade, and others are equally important in the history of post-World War II African popular music, yet they largely remain niche market names within the current American market for African popular music.

The reasons for this are clear. First, Afrobeat was a dynamic innovation whose appeal to Western audiences partially reflects its strong roots in the familiar Western styles of jazz and funk. Second, Fela's passing removed the most difficult element from the marketing equation - the man himself, who was patently distrustful of all record companies, and whose scabrous pronouncements on a wide range of issues were successfully calculated to shock, offend, and alienate audiences of all persuasions. Third, the mythology surrounding Fela is a built-in advertisement for his music; since the days of Bob Marley's international ascension, companies have known that a controversial black man who fulfills the familiar tropes of sex, drugs, and politics, always means guaranteed sales to white Western—especially American—audiences.

In some ways, the 'Afro-funk' revival in the U.S. parallels the resurgence of roots reggae in England and in fact, the best of the retro-Afro compilations discussed here have been released by British companies. But the situation is a bit different in the U.S., where the African cultural presence is not nearly as integrated into urban American culture as the Jamaican is into urban British culture. Africans in the United States live mostly in enclaves, and their music stays largely within the community. There has been no tradition such as the infamous "blue beat" dances, which provided a forum for Britons and Anglo-Caribbeans to interact musically and socially in the 1960s. Thus, the current interest of American record companies in African pop smacks of a fad, an attempt to maximize short-term saturation of a particular niche market. After all, the U.S. market for "world beat" market is itself small, largely comprised of young, well-educated Euro-Americans in major cities. The interest in African popular music is a sub-market of this group, and the retro market in Afro-funk an even smaller sub-group.

The typical 20-year commercial cycle which governs the re-circulation of previously-popular styles would seem to indicate that this audience would gravitate towards the African-American funk music of the 1960s and 1970s. To an extent this has happened, such as in the chic popularity of Shuggie Otis's reissued *Information Inspiration* LP last year. But the reason that there retro-market for funk has not taken hold to a greater degree among young urban professionals is that through sampling, the hip-hoppers have controlled the resuscitation of 60s/70s soul and funk like James Brown and Parliament/Funkadelic. The music thus remains viscerally grounded in contemporary black culture and the yuppies must get their funk from an offshore source, in order to enjoy the cultural flavor of a black musical style that has been defanged of its political baggage. Although the music of Fela and many of his colleagues was created within a climate of pan-African political struggle and cultural revitalization, the new market in 'African funk' offers a re-routed funk in which the political codes of black America have been partially or completely erased, and replaced with (for Americans) alien codes which allow the music to be appreciated for its mere 'surface qualities.'

But what is Afrobeat? Is it a type of highlife? Of jazz? Of funk? Is it a studio-based or a live performance medium? Is it by definition a political genre? As lone exponent of the genre for most of his career, Fela himself often confronted these very questions, as his music was received by various audiences, in various places, with various agendas. Afrobeat as played by Fela was a political music obviously rooted in the highlife tradition, but stretched far beyond the parameters of that genre. It was jazzy but not virtuosic; it was funky, but not frivolous. With such a multifaceted pedigree, it is no surprise that the various contemporary exponents of the genre have taken the style in each of the directions suggested within Fela's prototype. What I would like to do in this article is to briefly survey several of these recordings - compilations of

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Fela tributes, Afrobeat revival bands, or works by older contemporaries of Fela.

Although there are several recordings available, the most convenient place to start is Shanachie's continuously-mixed *Afrobeat No Go Die*, which surveys the highest-profile bands working in the genre of neo-Afrobeat. The title makes an assertion that seems unnecessary, as there have never been as many exponents of afrobeat as in the present. The cover art presents what has become an iconic Fela image—a young, heavily-bejeweled, face-painted woman (ostensibly one of Fela's wives) holding a half-burnt stick of Indian hemp in front of a sheet of rusted corrugated steel. The photo, an obvious attempt to duplicate Adrian Boot's well-known series of photos taken at the Afrika Shrine in 1976, begs the question of whether Afrobeat can be reduced to a series of generic gestures, phrases, and images. The same question frames the music on this collection, which runs the gamut from the inspired to the formulaic.

The collection kicks off with former Afrika 70 drummer Tony Allen, leading an ensemble of Paris-based musicians through a programme of dub- and techno-influenced Afrobeat. Allen's drumming style remains unchanged from his days at the Afrika Shrine, but the setting around him has changed substantially. Although he still plays with the traditional rhythm section of guitar, bass, and keyboards, the rhythmic basis of the music has been redefined by the atmosphere of floating digital sounds. The front line horn themes of Afrika 70 have been replaced here by Allen's digitized vocalizing, as he scats and sings a lyrical theme drawn from his 1979 LP *No Discrimination*. The atmospheric production of these tracks does not necessarily do the most justice to Allen's polyrhythmic drumming, since his style is fundamentally based on a model of conversational interaction with the front line horns inspired by jazz drummers like Art Blakey. Allen has in fact recently collaborated with jazz players such as Jamaican guitar great Ernest Ranglin, but if he could feature on a full-fledged project of big-band Afrobeat, it would place his drumming in the most revealing setting, clarify the jazz roots of Afrobeat, and inspire more musicians to interpret Afrobeat from the jazz angle.

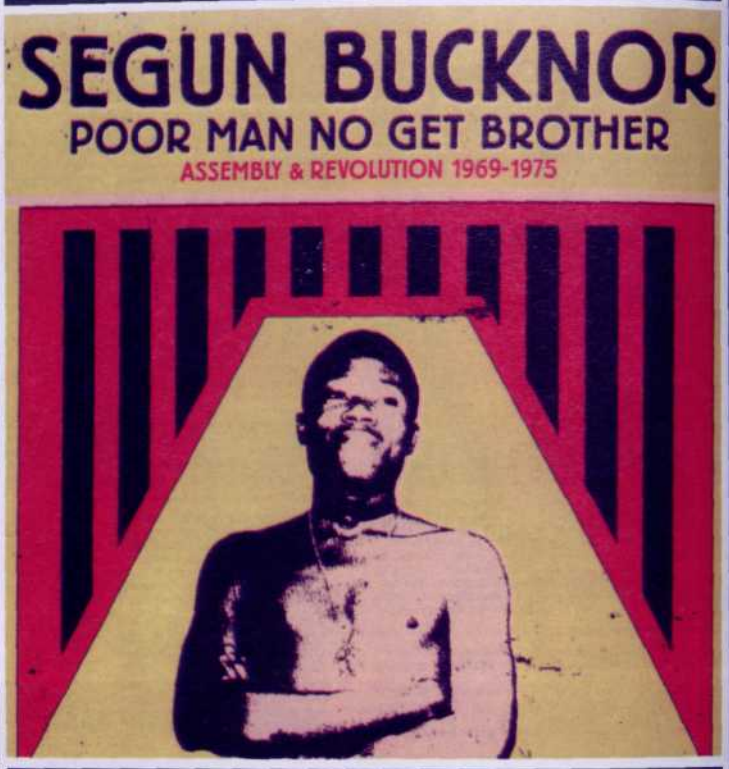
Next up is Afrobeat heir Femi Anikulapo-Kuti, who is attempting to make a Western market-friendly version of his father's music by cutting song lengths, lightening the subject matter, and updating the production style. The title of the included track 'Beng Beng Beng' (i.e. 'Bang Bang Bang') tells the listener much of what they need to know about Femi's approach in general. Essentially a contribution to Fela's sub-genre of sex manuals set to music (such as 'Na Poi'), Femi's depiction of the sex act leaves little to the imagination and the circular, polyrhtyhmic sensuality of Fela's music

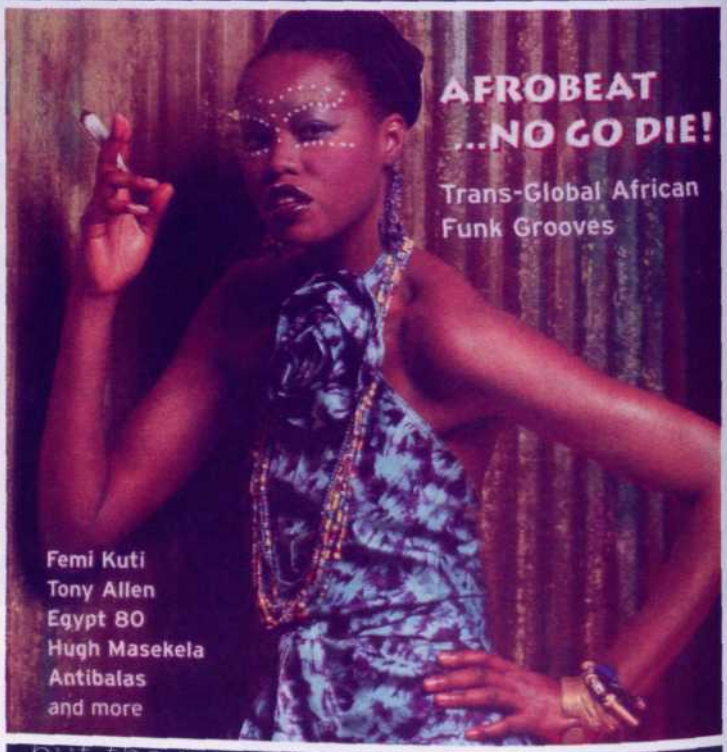
has been similarly reprocessed into a 'four-on-the-floor' house beat which has found favor with the house music crowds in Europe. Femi's live band is one of the most exciting African acts currently touring, but the irony here is that the very qualities which attracted Westerners to Fela's music are the qualities which Femi downplays - long-form grooves, and ample time to stretch out and create a 'vibe.' With hyperbolic reviews hailing him as the 'next Bob Marley,' Femi should be careful not to fall into the frequent trap that has snared many African musicians, of compromising the uniquely local qualities of their music in search of a mass Western audience that has not yet materialized for any African popular musician.

The New York-based band Antibalas works in an early 70s Fela style. The band's strong point is their rhythm section, whereas the horn arrangements tend towards the diffuse, lacking the fire and focus of Fela's writing. Their 'Dirt and Blood' track here is typical of the band's semi-instrumental workouts, although other tracks on their *Liberation Afrobeat* LP (from which this track is taken) feature the pidgin vocals of expatriate Nigerian Duke Amayo. Antibalas have recently released a second CD (*Talkatif*), a more concise set which finds them perfecting their take on Fela's early sound. Curiously, most of the tracks are again instrumentals, suggesting that like many other neo-Afrobeat artists, Antibalas have yet to decide exactly what and how to sing on top of Fela's assumedly-politically grooves. But like Femi, they put on a thoroughly-enjoyable live show.

The rest of the collection is rounded out by artists who take various approaches to the form. Antibalas' New York City compatriots the Daktaris weigh in with a garage-band version of Fela and Sandra Isadore's 'Upside Down,' and former Egypt 80 member Dele Sosimi takes the music into progressive jazz territory with his piano-led instrumental 'Gbedu 1.' Femi Kuti's home-front competitor Lagbaja offers 'Side by Side,' in which he uses Yoruba language and the lead talking drum to reposition Afrobeat closer to Yoruba neo-traditional genres, while the production style links it with contemporary African-American pop.

Tribute songs to Fela are offered by guitarist Kiala, and South African trumpet legend Hugh Masekela. The former is filtered through





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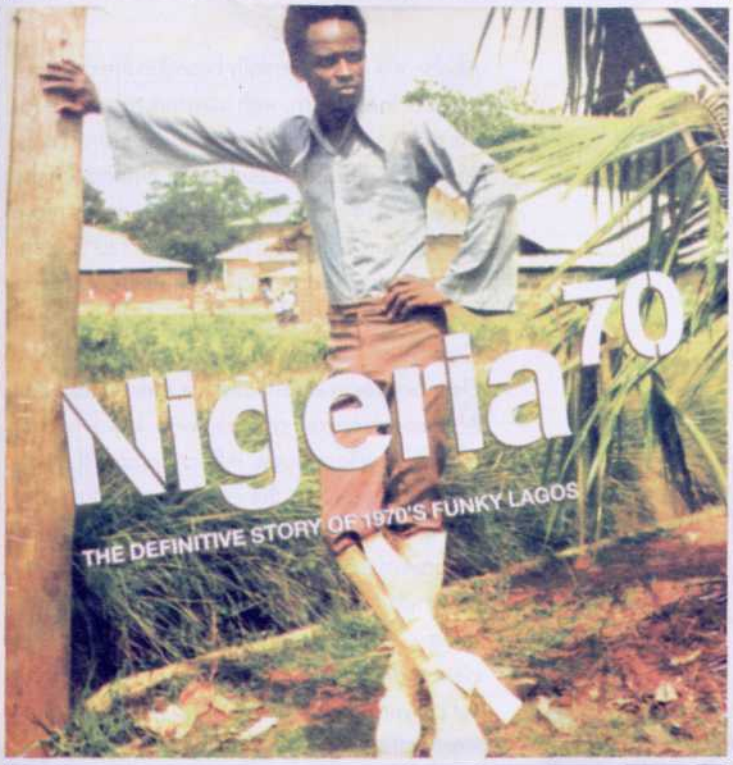
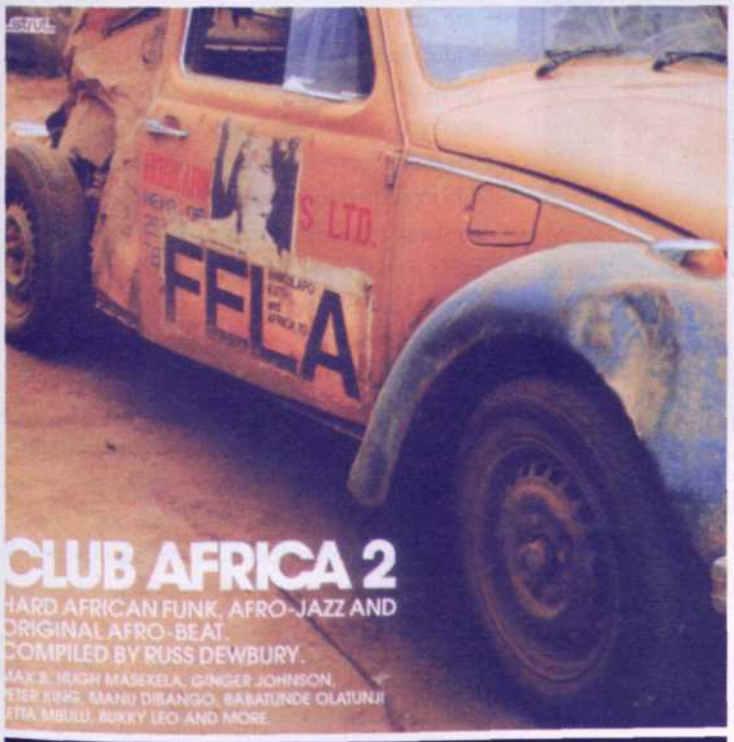




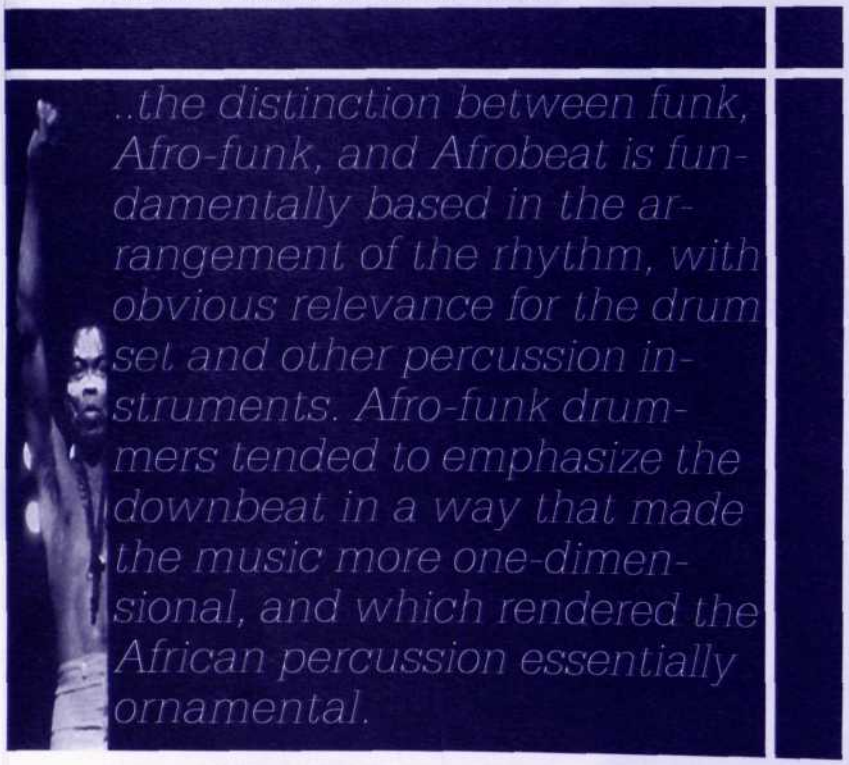
the aesthetics of the Afro-Parisian studio scene, while Masekela's poignant track manages to evoke both Fela's Afrika 70 sound (such as "Trouble Sleep," on which Masekela undoubtedly played during his period at the Shrine in 1973/4) and the more reflective sound of Egypt 80. Groove Collective's instrumental "Crisis" is the surprise standout on the collection, certainly the most rhythmically-advanced track here. Working off of a cyclical timeline pattern typical of Afro-Latin music, the simple horn theme tugs against the rhythm in a way that recalls both Afrobeat and Cuban music, while the ensemble interplay is at once subtle and intricate. In style and mood, the track resonates with Herbie Hancock's *Headhunters* sessions, as well as Tony Allen's classic *N.E.P.A.* Sessions.

The collection closes with none other than Egypt 80 bandleader/baritone saxophonist Baba Ani (Lekan Animashaun), playing his "Serere" ("Act Right"), which Shrine fans will remember as Egypt 80's set opener for well over a decade. Those same fans await the release of Baba Ani's "Low Profile (Just for the Blacks)" recorded at the same time as "Serere" and still unavailable. "Serere" captures the Egypt 80 band during the late 1980s, and features a guest appearance by Fela on electric piano.

Afrobeat is currently enjoying its Western vogue, but few people are actually aware of the roots of the music. How did this music develop in the first place? Where did it come from? Did Fela accomplish the creation of Afrobeat singlehandedly? The truth is that when Fela synthesized the style in 1970, he pulled ahead of a pack of African musicians who were also working their way through similar fusions of highlife, jazz, rock, and rhythm & blues. The best-known of these musicians include second-generation highlife groups and 'copyright' groups such as Jerry Hansen's Ramblers and Stan Plange's Uhuru Dance Band from Ghana, Geraldo Pino's Heartbeats and O.J. Ekemode's Modern Aces from Nigeria, and Ignace DeSouza's Black Santiagos from Togo. There have been a trickle of releases over the last few years documenting this activity, beginning with Original Music's *Money No Be Sand*

in 1995, and culminating in a flurry of current releases such as Kona's *Afro-Rock*, Ocho's *The Shrine: Afrobeat*, Afrodisiac's *Booniayl*, Strut's *Nigeria 70*, and two volumes each of Strut's *Club Africa*, and Harmless's *Africa Funk*.

The most consistent of these is Strut's *Nigeria 70* compilation, which offers a variety of top-drawer odds and ends from the Nigerian pop music scene of the late 1960s through early 1980s, spanning the years when rock, rhythm & blues, soul, funk, and disco were the most influential foreign styles in West Africa. Besides being a fascinating (if partial) showcase of the Nigerian music scene of that time, the CD is illuminating since it samples music from all regions of Nigeria. This allows the listener to hear the interaction of a fairly common pop music model with various regional Nigerian styles, resulting in some fascinating fusions.



..the distinction between funk, Afro-funk, and Afrobeat is fundamentally based in the arrangement of the rhythm, with obvious relevance for the drum set and other percussion instruments. Afro-funk drummers tended to emphasize the downbeat in a way that made the music more one-dimensional, and which rendered the African percussion essentially ornamental.

In all honesty, the best of this collection could have probably been compiled onto a single CD. The inclusion of two Fela tracks, for example, is curious since his entire back catalogue is now available and easily-accessible. On the other hand, their inclusion is understandable since Fela's spirit hovers over the entire collection, right down to its name ('Nigeria 70' being the name of his band during 1970/1). What this compilation makes clear is that the distinction between funk, Afro-funk, and Afrobeat is fundamentally based in the arrangement of the rhythm, with obvious relevance for the drum set and other percussion instruments. Afro-funk drummers tended to emphasize the downbeat in a way that made the music more one-dimensional, and which rendered the African percussion essentially ornamental. Tracks such as Shina Williams' 'Agboju Logun', Tunde Oyelani's 'Ifa', and the Lijadu Sisters' 'Orere Elejigbo' seem essentially like African takes on African-American genres, with local flavour provided by language, inflection, and theme.

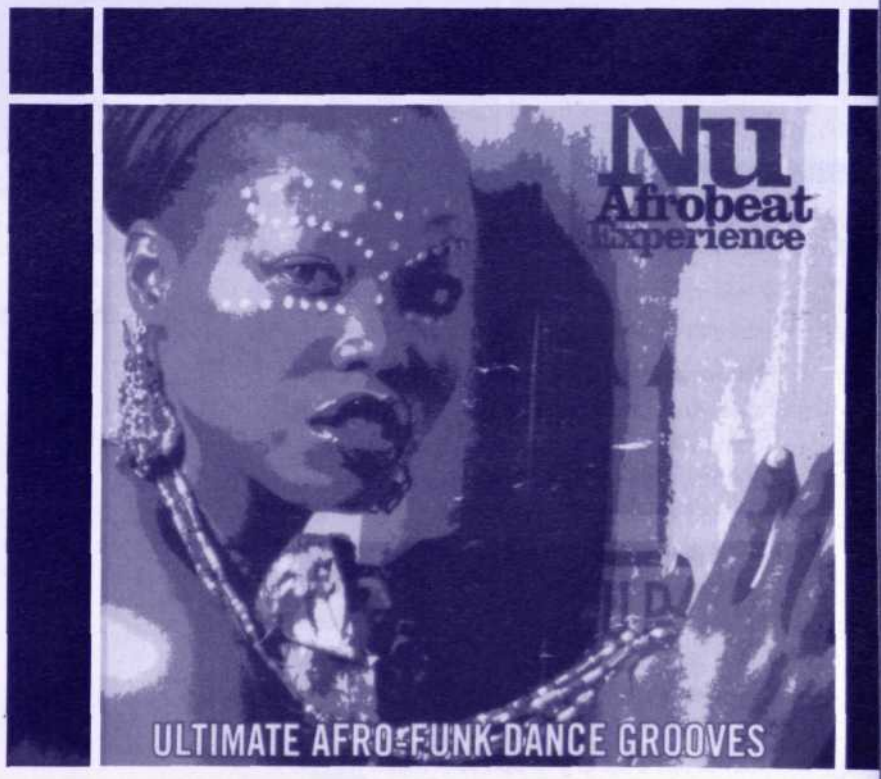
Afrobeat, on the other hand, stands as an African *reinterpretation* of funk, a filtering of some of the former's structure through a more polyrhythmic sensibility. In particular, the drumming on the Nigeria 70 compilation makes clear that the older generation of African drum set players (such as Allen and Moses Akanbi) were schooled in the jazz-inflected rhythms of highlife, had mastered independent coordination, and were thus able to play with a open-ended feeling that kept the music bouyant and polyrhythmic. On some of these performances such as, in fact, the drum set is on more-or-less equal footing with the auxiliary percussion. Into this category would fall tracks such as The Funkees' 'Dancing Time', Afro Cult Foundation's 'The Quest', and Sahara All-Stars Band's 'Enjoy Yourself', eight minutes of a surprisingly effective Fela knockoff, complete with a hedonistic "enjoy today, for tomorrow we may die" theme.

Of course, the best tracks resist categorization. Orlando Julius' 'Alo Mi Alo' follows a very similar format to Fela's work with Koola Lobitos, but is more laid-back, taking more time to simmer and boil than Fela allowed in his own music of the time (see below). Ofo & the Black Company's 'Alla Wakbarr' and BLO's 'Chant to Mother Earth' both seem African takes on American psychedelia, though radically recontextualized. The former track drops the listener in on what seems like a possession ritual in progress (check the hyperventilating vocals which introduce the track), while the second track takes a droning, devotional-sounding chant and a warbling lead guitar reminiscent of Jorma Kaukonen, and places it over a traditional African 12/8 meter. Segun Bucknor's 'La La La La' is probably the compilation's most popular track, another standout blend of Afri-

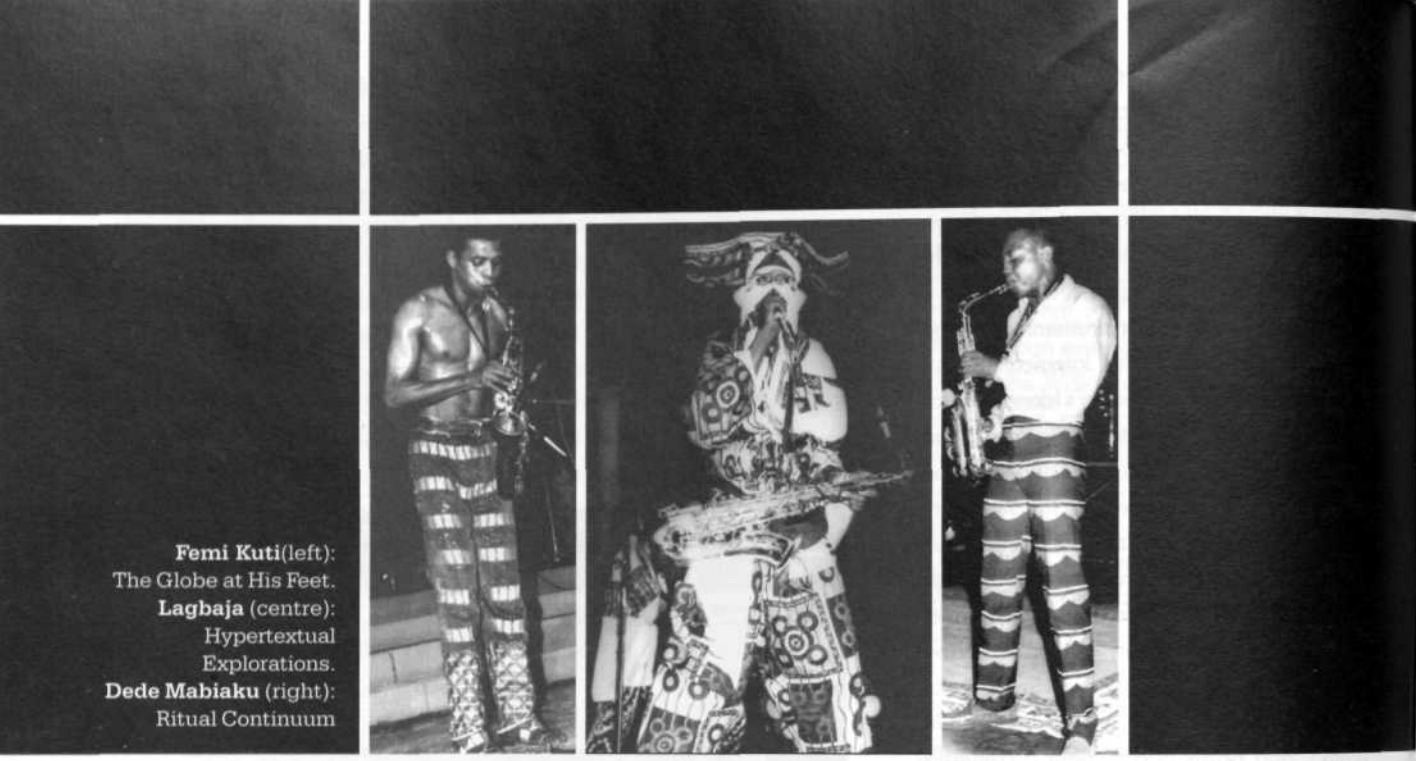
can music and American funk-rock (see below). King Sunny Ade successfully incorporated elements of Afrobeat into his juju to good fortune in the 1980s, and developed a reputation during the same period for the technical innovations he introduced into the style. Here, his classic song 'Ja Funmi' follows that pattern of innovation, given a new instrumental arrangement, and filtered through a Jamaican dub mix under the auspices of Jamaica's Island Records, to whom Ade was contracted at the time. Nearly two decades before Tony Allen stripped down his band and began purveying his own brand of dub-Afrobeat, Ade was already successfully experimenting in this vein. Scattered throughout the collection are several songs separated into two parts, a similarity with James Brown which recall a historical moment in black music when the 12" single had not yet been invented, and artists had to fight a culturally- and politically-inflected battle to break out of the standard 3-minute format. The compilation is rounded out by contributions from Peter King, Victor Uwiafo, William Onyeabor, Bongos Ikwue, Shina Williams, Gaspar Lawal, Monomono, Bala Miller, and Joni Haastrup.

JVC Victor in Japan will certainly drop a gem on the market for Fela collectibles in summer 2002 with their 3-CD, 40-song collection of Fela's work with his Koola Lobitos highlife band: *Fela Ransome-Kuti and his Koola Lobitos: Highlife Jazz and Afro-Soul: 1963 - 1969*. Although he began with the conventional approach of older highlife musicians such as E.T. Mensah, Bobby Benson, and Victor Olaiya (on tracks such as 'Bonfo' and 'Fere'), Fela set out from the very beginning to transform the style. In his hands, highlife developed into a uniquely energetic style, despite his relative lack of commercial success. Typical highlife chord progressions are enlivened here with syncopated rhythm & blues bass lines, while the percussive horn charts recall Motown, James Brown and Stax/Volt as much as they do Victor Olaiya, Roy Chicago and Cardinal Rex Lawson.

These tracks also demonstrate what might have detracted from Fela's success with Lagos audiences - essentially, the busy sound of the music. While the collection clearly demonstrates Fela's early mastery of arranging, he rarely lets the music *breathe* here - the songs are overflowing with catchy horn riffs which are often wasted as they clash rhythmically with Fela's lead vocals, or with horn solos that lack the space to fully develop. Although much of this is probably a reflection of the time restrictions of the 45 rpm format, the result is often a fairly cluttered sound. These arrangements show that although the dominant elements of Fela's language were in place in the 1960s, his conception matured in the Afrobeat years when he began to let his dynamic horn writing stand on its own, he developed the horn arrangements to their conclusion, he opened up a freer space for instrumental solos, and *then* began to sing.



That aside, the collection is full of wonderful and surprising music. We hear Fela working through a fairly traditional highlife model on tracks such as 'Bonfo' and 'Fere', which stick close to the traditional sound of dance-band highlife. There are strongly Cuban-inflected tracks such as 'Ajo' (a.k.a. 'Iya Mi O Se O'), 'Oritshe', and 'Abiara', and the transplanted soul stylings of 'Wa Dele', 'Omuti Ti Se', and 'Laise'. Fela's unique approach to highlife is heard to strong effect on tracks like 'Eke', 'Araba's Delight', and the uncharacteristically laid-back 'Lagos Baby'. We also get to



Femi Kuti(left): The Globe at His Feet. **Lagbaja** (centre): Hypertextual Explorations. **Dede Mabiaku** (right): Ritual Continuum

hear some music that is essentially Afrobeat in style, despite the fact that Fela hadn't actually coined the term at this point. It's hard to imagine how certain tracks here - like the smoking 'Omo Ejo' and 'Obinrin Le' - would fail to impress audiences. With their funky bass riffs, clashing horn rhythms, and stretched-out, dance floor-friendly song forms, they would have been right at home among Fela's Nigeria 70 releases from the 1970-1972 period.

The collection includes a couple of Fela's humorous attempts to ape soul music trends, such as 'My Baby Don't Love Me', presented here in both live and studio incarnations. We get several songs that were later re-recorded during Koola Lobitos' U.S. trip, such as 'Ololufe', 'Mi O Mo', and 'Ako'. Also included is a six-track, live EP of a Koola Lobitos session from Fela's famed Afro-Spot club in 1969, which shows the Lobitos in full swing. Alto saxophonist Isaac Olasugba is given ample solo space throughout, clearly as important to Fela's highlife music as Igo Chico and Tunde Williams would be to Afrobeat.

The biggest surprise of this collection is the opportunity to hear the future 'Chief Priest of Shrine' blowing his way through traditional jazz changes on the trumpet. Fela didn't begin to play saxophone until 1973, and while he was occasionally capable of inspired playing on the instrument, he never studied it with the same amount of discipline that he studied the trumpet during his student years in England, and thus never gained the same amount of technical control. This collection offers a clearer impression of Fela's jazz roots, as well as the jazz roots of Afrobeat. Most interesting in this regard is the inclusion of two tracks recorded with the original Fela Ransome-Kuti Quartet during Fela's years at the Nigerian Broadcasting Company, when he hoped to make a career of playing straight-ahead jazz in Nigeria. Throughout, Fela's playing comes across as fairly conventional and 'inside' - he quotes "When the Saints Go Marching In" on 'Omuti Ti Se', for example, and generally builds his phrases around continuous streams of eighth notes. Overall, he plays in a style reminiscent of players such as Dizzy Gillespie and Kenny Dorham, with occasional hints of younger players such as Lee Morgan and Clifford Brown. At some points, his phrasing is fairly stiff and regular, implying that he had not yet digested the new approaches to phrasing developed by Brown, Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, and other younger players. But these recordings clearly demonstrate that Fela could have pursued a career as a African jazz trumpeter in a manner similar to Hugh Masekela, had he wished to continue in that direction.

Listeners interested in Fela's highlife music will also surely enjoy Strut's new Orlando Julius compilation, *Super Afro-Soul*. Out-of-print since the 1960s, Julius' music is another strong example of the fusion of soul and highlife. Since his relocation to the U.S. in the mid-1970s, Julius (now known by his surname, Ekemode) has generated controversy by claiming that Fela actually patterned his Afrobeat after the sound of the Soul Aces. A causal link between Ekemode's 1960s work and Fela's 1970s Afrobeat seems unlikely to my ears, since Fela's 1970s work sounds very different from Ekemode's 1960s work, and particularly since a good portion of Ekemode's 1980s work (found on albums such as Shanachie's *Dance Afro-Beat*) seems directly derivative of Fela's Afrobeat, as well as Sunny Ade's modernized form of juju (Ade's talking drummers are featured on the LP).

However, what this compilation *does* reveal in no uncertain terms is a number of striking and curious similarities between Ekemode's work with the Soul Aces and Fela's highlife work with Koola Lobitos. The conception of the music is fairly identical in terms of both form and structure, and Ekemode and Fela also have a very similar way of singing over the rhythm & blues horn riffs. Most significantly, the way these rhythm & blues elements are integrated onto the highlife format is the same. This last element is important, because it is ostensibly the r&b influence that would have governed the terrain of innovation and competition between the two bands (and others).

Further similarities lie in the trumpet improvising of the Soul Aces' Eddy Fayehun, which sounds very similar to Fela's trumpet style with Koola Lobitos, and the alto saxophone style of Ekemode and the Lobitos' Isaac Olasugba, which is also strikingly similar. The most explicit link is the Soul Aces' instrumental 'Solo Hit', which uses the same I-VI-II-V chord progression and horn theme as the Lobitos' 'Eke'. It should also be mentioned that the two bands shared some personnel; both bassist Franco Aboddy and trumpeter Eddy Ifayehun were later members of Fela's bands (Ifayehun appears on Fela's records as 'Otenioro-Olu Ifayehun'), and drummer Akanbi Moses later brought the crucial element of Afrobeat drumming into Sunny Ade's African Beats in the 1980s.

Ekemode's highlife tracks here are strong and convincing, while his handling of the famous "boogaloo" beat popular in the 1960s strikes me as more convincing than Fela's. This is especially true on tracks like 'Ise Owo', which covers the terrain of the Bar-Kays famous 'Soul Finger' very profitably, and seems a more organic fusion than Fela's 'My Baby Don't Love Me', which is similarly based on a boogaloo beat. On a side note, I should also mention that although the Soul Aces' handling of the Temptations' 'My Girl' is not particularly noteworthy on its own terms, it bears strong comparison with (Ghana's) Ramblers International's cover of Eddie Floyd's 'Knock on Wood'. Both bands use the same format of playing the song straight, before switching to a highlife arrangement for the song's tag/fade. Clearly then, bands across West Africa were devising similar solutions to the fusion of soul and highlife. In the specific case of Fela and Ekemode, I can't claim to know the truth of this clear cross-influence. But it is certainly intriguing, and in any case it goes some way towards clarifying Ekemode's contribution to Nigerian music which, on the basis of these recordings, is certainly significant and deserves further attention.

The wild card of the Afro-funk revival is undoubtedly Segun Bucknor's *Poor Man No Get Brother* compilation on Strut (2002). An alleged early compatriot and competitor of Fela (in fact, Bucknor's older brother Wole had played with the first edition of Fela's Koola Lobitos in London), Bucknor's set was recorded between 1969 and 1975, and blazes a very similar trail to early 70s Afrika 70 workouts like *He Miss Road*. Bucknor's music with his Assembly band is similarly built from dominant 7th chord vamps, and jazzy drum set patterns. Like Fela, Bucknor is concerned with social issues, and these songs address topics like the Biafran War, social inequality, and the roots of African culture. But as Bucknor freely admits, he wasn't seeking a Fela-esque career of con-

frontation and tribulation. Where Fela breathes fire, Bucknor's social commentary is cloaked in a shroud of bluesy smoke that also includes songs of lost love, loneliness, and heartbreak. Bucknor's aggressive singing suggests the influence of Stax/Volt, while the instrumental sound suggests the more groove-oriented side of Blue Note, and the single B-sides that James Brown was using to let his band stretch out. The overall ambience is most similar to Charles Wright's work with the 103rd Street Rhythm Band in Los Angeles; the music has a communal, backroom feeling in which grooving together is emphasized over the dramatic and declamatory stance of the heroic dissident. So the irony is that while the hard urban funk of 'La La La La La' seems perfectly suited for a revolutionary lyric of social justice, it actually supports a theme of personal heartbreak.

To my ears, one of the album's true highlights is the instrumental 'Smoke', eight minutes of jazzy, mid-tempo Afro-funk. The track seems to sum up everything cutting-edge about the Lagos music scene in the 1970s - the loose-limbed fusion of African pride and a transplanted black hippie ethos which reigned among younger, comsopolitan Lagos audiences before rampant crime, military curfews, and discotheques killed off much of the live music scene. Why it took over two decades for this work to be reissued is a mystery to me, but Strut deserves praise and credit for getting this great music back into circulation (their next project is rumored to be a reissue of Afrika 70 trumpeter Tunde Williams' *Mr. Big Mouth* LP from 1977).

The music contained on these releases is undoubtedly a mere tip of the proverbial iceberg, but it is enough to allow a glimpse of the the circumstances which gave birth to the sound of Fela and his contemporaries. That world has long since given way to a new cultural and political order, but there is clearly still inspiration to be gained from a dramatic period in black music history when popular music was written in the broad and optimistic strokes of nationalism, cultural nationalism, pan-Africanism, and other mythic tropes of black unity and progress, and when the black body was charged with a particular sonic and sexual significance as it moved through cultural and political time and space. Whether the so-called Afro-funk revival turns out to be a short-term fad or an enduring field of interest, it has at least enabled the wider world access to an urgent body of work that deserves greater attention. And the international circulation of this music may yet signal the dawn of a newly-charged period of cross-cultural borrowing between artists of Africa and the diaspora. **GR**