



Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: The Art of an Afrobeat Rebel

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Fela Anikulapo-Kuti

The Art of an Afrobeat Rebel

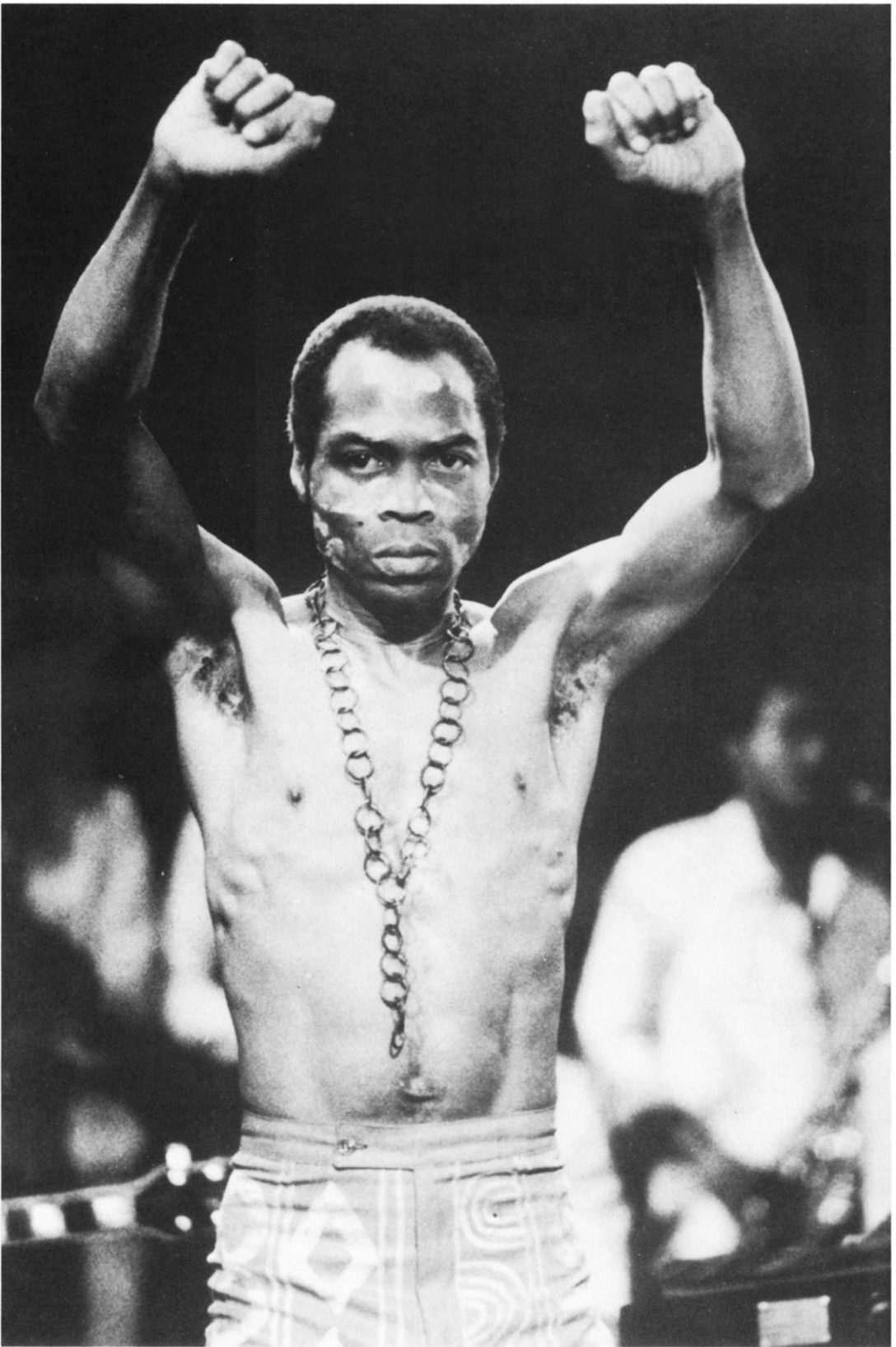
Randall F. Grass

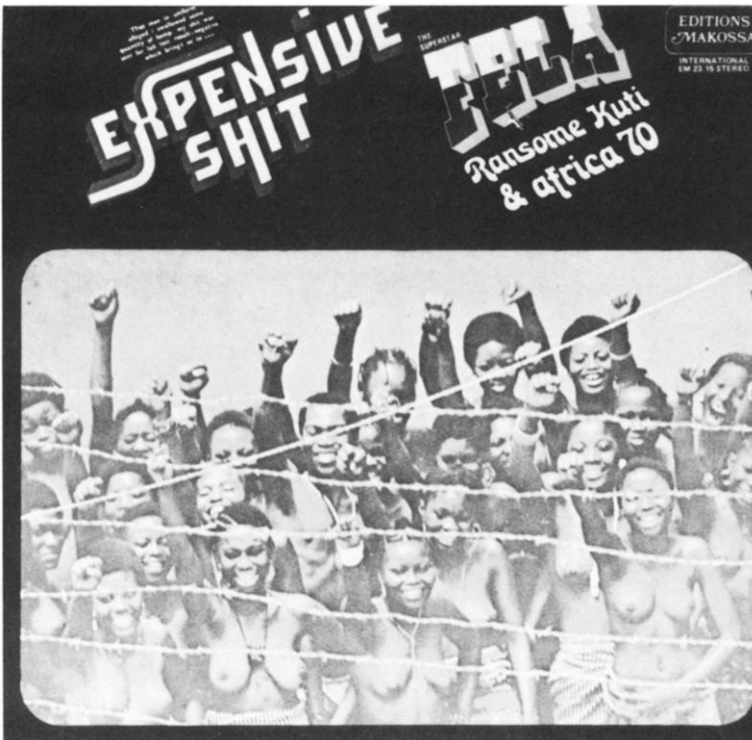
A photograph flashed around the world in October 1984. It captured Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Africa's most controversial musician, at a particularly dramatic moment in the long-running morality play he had been enacting with the Nigerian government. Flanked by soldiers, Fela raised his fist and grinned, a pose he has struck onstage and for album jackets. His arrest on the eve of what would have been a triumphant American tour was the logical consequence of confrontational art taken to its limit.

Fela has spent more than 15 years making an artistic statement by breaking down the barriers between his artistic performance and his private life. He has obliterated the notion of "performance" as something existing separate from life. He extends a traditional African concept of art—especially music—as being an integral component of both ordinary and extraordinary human activity. Typically, though, he turned such traditions upside down even as he affirmed them; this is one reason why Fela Anikulapo-Kuti remains Africa's most challenging and charismatic popular music performer.

In many traditional African cultures, including the Yorubà in which Fela was raised, music and dance are tied to every aspect of life. Every activity has a particular rhythm, a particular song, a particular dance. Musicians play a functional role within the society because many activities cannot properly be undertaken without them. Only certain people may become musicians, usually persons from a lineage of musicians or those who have passed through an approved apprenticeship. Music can be a bridge to the animating forces of nature or to the spirit-world of the ancestors and the unborn, as well as to deities who influence the material world. The highly sophisticated rhythms of African music evoke the manifold rhythms of creation; this complexity frequently demands a large group of musicians creating communally.

Born in 1938, Fela experienced traditional culture while growing up in colonial Nigeria during the 1940s and '50s. But he also was shaped by an emerging urban, bourgeois culture that was greatly influenced by Western values. Fela came of age during Nigeria's struggle with the twin specters of colonial suffocation and impossibly romantic notions of independence. Nigeria's fledgling steps as a newly independent nation in the '60s led it right into an explosion of development accelerated by sudden wealth from massive oil discoveries. The country's leaders—with only an alien colonial blueprint as a guide—already had their hands full dealing





(Opposite)

Fela in concert, his fists raised in a gesture frequently repeated for newspapers and album jackets. (Photo courtesy of Celluloid)

Expensive Shit, Makossa, 1981. (Front photo by Peter Obe Photo Agency, graphics and art by Makossa Art/Remi Olowookere)



Fela in concert, Rome, 1984. (Photo courtesy of Celluloid)

with 700 million ethnically diverse Muslims, Christians, and animists speaking 200 different languages. Suddenly, they found themselves flooded by petro-dollars, foreign exports, and randomly imported technology. Politicians and civil servants, already steeped in certain African customs which cynics call corruption, could rarely resist filling their pockets.

Lagos is Nigeria's bizarre capital, a festering, topsy-turvy mutation of a colonial outpost, jerry-rigged over swampy lagoons to accommodate the plunderers' ships. It is a city of tall buildings, nightclubs, expressways, traffic jams, and mercantile hustle-bustle, much like New York or any other Western metropolis. But the telephones don't work, a simple drive across town might take hours, and everyone's hand is out. As a city it is virtually non-functional, but millions of Nigerians, seeing only a Hollywood vision of urban paradise, flocked there anyway.

Fela was one of them. He had grown up middle class in Abeokuta, a tranquil Yoruba town a couple of hours up the road, where life was still as it had always been. But both his parents had made important steps away from traditional culture. His father was a prominent minister and educator who ran his school with iron discipline. His mother was a fiery activist who fought the absurdities of colonialism. As founder of the Nigerian Women's Union she won her case against taxation by engineering the abdication of a local puppet-chief when she led thousands of women to a sit-in at his house. She was an emissary to the People's Republic of China and an intimate of Kwame Nkrumah, former president of Ghana.

Fela, who wanted to be a musician from an early age, had a new class of popular musicians as models: social orchestras, highlife bands, juju bands, marching bands, jazz groups, and others, many of whom were primarily entertainers at clubs, parties, and other social functions. In 1957 Fela went to study at the The London School of Music, where he played hookey from classes in music theory to jam with jazz musicians and others in the international music community. After returning to Lagos in 1963, he formed a band that played a jazz-highlife hybrid—highlife is a fusion of various West African traditional styles, brass-band music, Latin guitar styles and jazz. Fela's music was neither the pure entertainment of the popular dance bands nor was it connected with the socially meaningful traditional music. Consequently, Fela's performances in Lagos clubs during the '60s were not particularly popular, except with a small group of would-be hipsters.

In 1969, a financial angel sponsored a trip to the United States for Fela and his Koola Lobitos band. There they scuffled for gigs with limited success in Los Angeles clubs. Meeting Sandra Isidore, a young black nationalist activist who became his lover and cultural mentor, changed Fela's life. Against the background of the flashy, sophisticated technology of the American society that awed him, he saw people who were turning to Africa's cultural treasures for inspiration and wisdom. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in particular convinced Fela to claim and explore his African identity, both personally and with his music. Inspired by the expatriate African musician Ambrose Campbell, he immediately began composing music based on chants, call-and-response vocals, and complex, interacting rhythms. He dubbed the new sound "Afrobeat."

When Fela returned to Lagos in 1970, he was a man with a mission, having changed the band's name to Afrika 70 and evolved the Afrobeat style. Afrobeat amalgamated jazz, the funk of American soul singer/bandleader James Brown, highlife, traditional rhythms, and chanted declama-



Inner sleeve illustration of Black-President, Arista, 1981.

tory vocals. The jazz element surfaced in the solo and ensemble horn work, which was melodically and harmonically more sophisticated than most African traditional music. The choppy, angular guitar and electric bass figures of James Brown—whose communal, rhythmic orchestrations were, ironically, an Africanization of Afro-American rhythm and blues—were utilized by Fela in the far more sophisticated context of African rhythms. Afrika 70 quickly grew to a large ensemble, encompassing a brace of horn players, a chorus of singers, myriad percussionists, a couple of electric guitarists, an electric bassman and Fela himself on electric keyboards and saxophones. Each composition's rhythmic possibilities were fully explored with several extended solos which, added to Fela's vocal passages, meant that few recordings lasted less than ten minutes.

Fela's lyrics, in contrast to the humorous, light-hearted moralizing of many other popular musicians, send uncompromising messages of pointed social commentary, as reflected in such recordings as "Buy Africa," "Black Man's Cry," "Chop and Quench [Eat and Die]," "Fight to Finish," and others. Fela's lyrics retain the personal touch found in the lyrics of African traditional music but, unlike Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey, King Sunny Ade, and other popular Nigerian performers, Fela eschews praise songs. At the performances of top juju artists, for example, it is common for a singer to sing the praises of a great man—either a

Gentleman, EMI, 1973.
(Album design by Afrika
70, photos by Peter Obe
Photo Agency, graphics and
art direction by Remi
Olwookere)



chief, government official, or simply a respected member of the community. If the praised personage is in the audience, he usually responds by showering the performer with money.

Fela writes his lyrics in Yoruba and in pidgin English, the *lingua franca* of urban Nigerians. He is probably the only major African musical artist to almost always print lyrics on album sleeves. The impact of these recordings on post-colonial Nigeria, which was foundering in waves of corruption, sweeping social change, and war, was immediate and profound. Suddenly the urban masses—as well as progressive intellectuals and restive students—had a spokesperson, a catalyst for mounting challenges. Like traditional musicians, Fela was a lightning rod for the concerns of society, but unlike them he adopted a confrontational posture. Where traditional musicians might admonish a chief or clan member with oblique satire, Fela would make naked accusations and blunt calls to action. For instance, in “Confusion” (on *Confusion*, EMI, 1975), he describes the legacy of colonial economics in everyday terms:

them be three men wey sell for roadside o
them be three men wey speak different language o
them speak Lagos, Accra, and Conkary
one white man come pay them money o
he pay them for pound, dollars and French money
for the thing wey he go buy from them
he remain for them to share am o
me I say na confusion be that o

Still, in many early compositions, he adopts a more traditional, proverbial-

al style, as in “Trouble Sleep, Yanga Go Wake Am” (on *Rosoroso Fight*, EMI, 1972):

when trouble sleep, yanga [trouble-maker] go wake am
 wetin him de find? palaver him de find
 palaver him go get o, palava him go get
 when cat sleep, rat go bite him tail
 Mr. Tentant lost him job
 him sit down for house
 him think of chop [food]
 Mr. landlord come wake him up
 Mr., pay me your rent
 wetin he de find? palaver him de find . . .

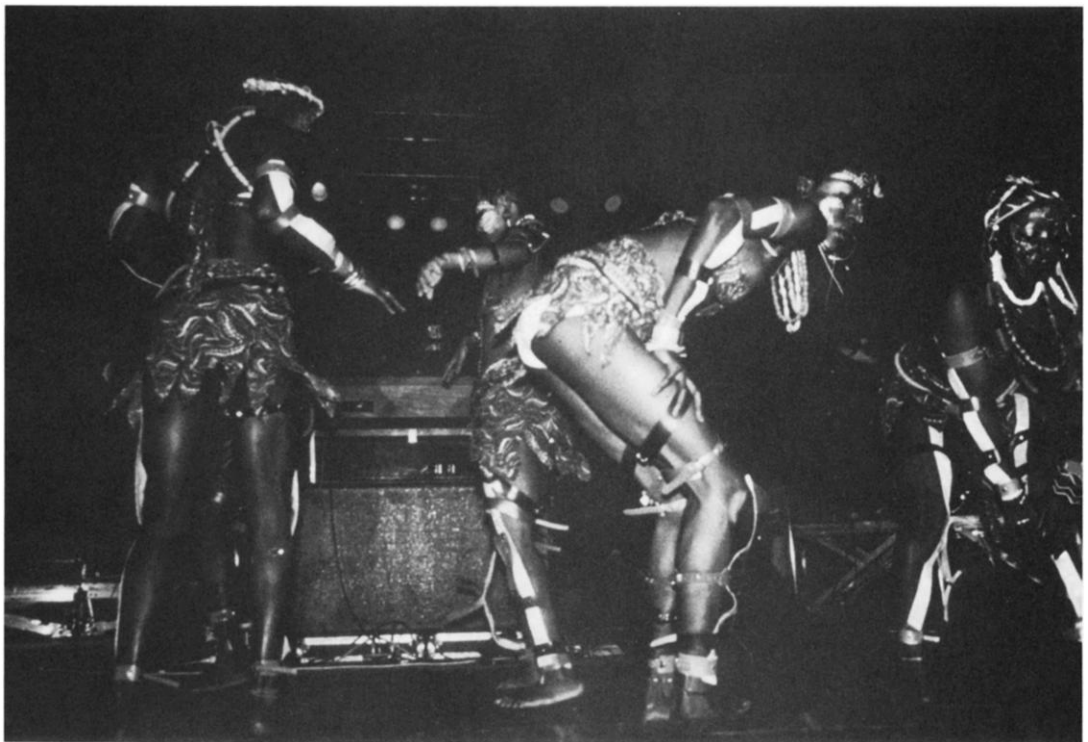
Much of Afrika 70's performances during the early '70s took place in Fela's own club, the Shrine, located in the Surulere section of Lagos. The name of the club reflected Fela's intention that it be more than a night-club; it was meant to be a place of communal celebration and worship, a rallying point of pan-African progressivism. Although many people attended to enjoy the music and the loose ecstasy of the rebellious hemp-smoking crowd, just as many were there to partake of Fela's vision of a new African society. Instead of ethnic or “tribal” communalism, as in traditional society, Fela's new society was pan-ethnic and pan-generational.

Afrika 70 performed on a stage at one end of a square, open-air courtyard edged with the flags of all African nations. A heaving mass of people crowded the dance floor. Performances began after 9:00 p.m., and, as with most African popular musical groups, lasted for many hours with few breaks. There weren't any formal introductions or other trappings of showmanship; the band simply began to play. The percussionists, conga drummers, Western trap drummer, sticks, maracas, and shekere players set up the oscillating Afrobeat pulse punctuated by deep, throbbing, intermittent electric bass figures. Electric guitarists played chopping rhythm figures and concise single-note lines. The horn players blew repeated figures *en ensemble*, a response to the soloist's lines. Fela, often wearing only trousers, would blow improvised solos on soprano and alto saxophones, occasionally putting down the horns and jumping behind an electric piano for a jagged, rhythmic solo. A trumpeter or another saxophonist might step up at a certain point for his solo. Fela would stalk the stage, pacing back and forth, preaching, declaiming, perhaps joking with the audience about the events of the day or anything else on his mind. At some point he would begin his sing-songy chant, answered by a chorus of female singers repeating a single phrase highlighting the theme of his lyrics:

<i>Fela</i>	<i>Chorus</i>
dem call us hooligans	(we no talk, we no answer)
dem call us ruffian	(we no talk, we no answer)
dem call us hemp-smokers	(we no talk, we no answer)
dem call us prostitutes	(we no talk, we no answer)
now we go talk o	
our big big people dey fight	(who a be, who are you?)
them VIP self dey fight	(who a be, who are you?)
our parliamentarian dey fight	(who a be, who are you?)



At Fela's concert in Rome, 1984, members of his Egypt 80 group dance and sing chorus. (Photos courtesy of Celluloid)



now we go talk o
 ariwo ariwo ariwo l'enu vendor (noise for vendor mouth)
 (from "Noise for Vendor Mouth," on *Noise for Vendor Mouth*,
 Afrobeat Abro, 1975)

At times, females trooped onstage to dance during instrumental passages. Fela himself frequently illustrated lyrics with spontaneous dancing while his percussionists, singers, and horn players transmitted the rhythm with steady-state undulations. Fela focused his lyrics on themes such as economic empowerment ("Buy Africa"), corruption ("I.T.T., International Thief Thief"), colonial mentality ("Yellow Fever," "Johnny Just Drop," "Gentleman"), urban chaos ("Go Slow," "Upsideown"), and police brutality ("Expensive Shit," "Trouble Sleep, Yanga Go Wake Am"). It was not uncommon for a performance to be stopped for a prayer or the pouring of libation to ancestral spirits, reflecting Fela's increasing involvement with the traditional Yoruba Orisha religion. Fela would cajole, exhort, joke with and jeer at his audience, who, though replicating the Afrobeat pulse in their dancing, hung on his every word. The Shrine encompassed a little community, temporary perhaps, but one that expressed Fela's concept of a liberated African society.

Just as Fela attempted to create a new society with his performances at the Shrine, he also established his domestic life as a liberated zone within Nigerian society. His communal household, dubbed Kalakuta Republic, encompassed much of his Africa 70 organization, which included not only his wife and children but also musicians, DJs, artists, equipment managers, and other workers, many of whom were young people who had run away from home or school. Kalakuta was often a refuge for dropouts—at the very least a teenager would be given some pocket money. Some would become members of the household and get allowances and jobs. Fela's lifestyle was relatively simple: it encompassed eating, sleeping, rehearsing, performing, hemp-smoking, and love-making. The Nigerian press blossomed with photos of Fela standing in his underwear, blowing his saxophone in his yard; of bare-breasted young women lounging about; of insolent teenagers blowing clouds of hemp smoke. It's difficult to overstate the impact of such unabashed flouting of convention in a decorum-conscious African society. The government regarded Kalakuta as an affront, a first step toward incipient, secessionist anarchy, no joke in a country racked by civil wars. In reality, Fela established a kind of traditional village in the middle of the city, with himself as chief, head of a polygamous household. He exercised discipline in the authoritarian but benevolent manner of traditional rulers. Pilgrims, whether curious passersby, worshipful teenagers, or emissaries from progressive political movements, came for audiences.

Though Fela's lifestyle intentionally harkened back to tradition, his flouting of convention was at odds with tradition. He openly disrespected the powers-that-be. This generated harassment by the police and military which escalated into violent clashes between arrogant squads of "Fela's boys" and the authorities. Fela's open hemp smoking gave a ready excuse for arrests, though his mother's political influence helped him avoid convictions. The clashes grew more violent until finally, in 1977, Kalakuta was burned to the ground in a full-scale attack by the military. One of Fela's boys clashed with soldiers and fled to the Kalakuta compound. Soldiers surrounded the house, demanding that Fela hand over the man. When he refused, the soldiers charged, and Fela charged the electrified



In 1977, Kalakuta—the residence of Fela's communal household—was burned to the ground by the military after a confrontation between soldiers and one of "Fela's boys." (Photo courtesy of Celluloid)

fence encircling the compound. But the power supply was cut off, and soldiers poured onto the grounds. Fela and his extended family were beaten; many of the women were raped. Musical equipment, master tapes, and films were destroyed; finally, the house was set afire, and Fela was temporarily imprisoned.

In the melee, Fela's mother was thrown out a window. Her broken hip marked the beginning of her physical decline, leading to her death several months later. When she died, Fela took her body to the barracks quarters of Head of State Olusegun Obasanjo. The procession was depicted on the jacket of *Coffin for Head of State* (Kalakuta, 1981), an album that vilified Obasanjo.

When Fela was released from jail with all charges against him dropped, he sued the government. An inquiry blamed an "unknown soldier" for the Kalakuta destruction. Fela went into self-imposed exile in Ghana.

By this time, Fela's recordings had become overtly critical of specific government policies and personages. Album jackets often featured damning headlines and articles from newspapers or garish illustrations depicting government violence. "Unknown soldier," "Kalakuta Show," "Sorrows, Tears and Blood," and "Coffin For Head of State" discussed in detail government harassment and attacks. He focused other compositions on corruption, mentioning culprits by name. As the proposed beginning of civilian government approached, Fela associated himself with the Young African Pioneers, a political group linked to vaguely socialist would-be politicians. He began to style himself as "The Black President," mentioning aspirations toward political office to friends. All of this reflected Fela's feeling that art should have political purposes. In a television



Confusion, EMI, 1975.
(Design by Maxoh-Max-Alax, graphics by Remi Olowookere)



Black-President, Arista, 1981. (Front cover photo by Jean Jacques-Mandel)

documentary, *Music Is a Weapon*, produced in 1981 by Stefan Tchalgalchieff, Fela delivered his artistic credo:

Yes, if you're in England, you sing of enjoyment. You sing of love or . . . who you're going to bed with *next!* But my society is underdeveloped because of an alien system imposed on my people. So there's no music for enjoyment, for love, when there's such a struggle for people's existence. So, as an artist, politically, artistically, my whole idea about my environment must be represented in the music, in the arts. So art is what's happening in a particular time of people's development or underdevelopment. Music must awaken people to do their duty as citizens and act.

By "politics" Fela did not necessarily mean merely a struggle for political office; after all, he held governmental agencies in contempt. For Fela, politics meant a struggle for empowerment of the masses so that they could gain access to the necessities of life. Because he was not content to merely sing about political change, he became a threat to the established authorities.

In spite of Fela's rebellious nature and battles against authoritarian government, he tended to be authoritarian in his stewardship of the Afrika 70 organization. Members of the household were punished with fines or mild physical chastisement for transgressions. Fela relentlessly and meticulously rehearsed the Afrika 70 band. Yet, in day-to-day life, he was generally accessible and approachable. Like a traditional chief, he would

Fela surrounded by members of his group after a 1981 concert in Paris. (Photo by Bernard Matussiere)





*Fela performing at his Lagos club, the Shrine, in 1984.
(Photo courtesy of Celluloid)*

hear and adjudicate all disputes, requests, and discussions. One wonders, though, what sort of government he would set up and what style of governing would evolve. He has not been publicly specific about this.

Fela's notion of African traditionalism also bears examination. He has chosen to live in an urban center; he has shown no inclination to move to a rural area nor urged devotion to agriculture, as Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey has done. Obey, whose songs praise community chiefs and prominent politicians or express his Christian faith, is the darling of the Yoruba elite. In many ways Obey is more of a traditionalist than Fela, operating a farm in a rural area. Fela has not offered many specifics about how a return to African traditionalism would be squared with modern technology, which he distrusts. Though he has availed himself of Western technology in his music-making, he has balked at the use of synthesizers (some synthesizer parts were overdubbed by producer Bill Laswell on *Army Arrangement*, Celluloid, 1985).

For Fela, the paramount struggle for Africans is the battle against Western cultural imperialism. He wants Africans to reclaim an African identity by re-discovering their traditional religions (he has frequently reviled both Christianity and Islam), traditional methods of healing, and indigenous lifestyles. In some realms, this is a simple matter. It is easy to prefer an *agbada* to a three-piece suit or pounded yam to french fries. But if one accepts television, telephones, automobiles, and other Western technology, there are social consequences.

Fela's desire for African empowerment is also at odds with a return to traditionalism. If Africans are to evolve from dependent consumer-nations, they must be able to produce the necessary goods and services themselves. This requires technological mastery. Beyond hinting at some vast hidden treasure trove of African knowledge, Fela has offered no concrete plans suggesting a solution to this problem.

The 1977 attack on Kalakuta seriously damaged Fela's psyche and nearly destroyed his organization. The government had closed the Shrine, cutting Fela off from his prime vehicle for artistic expression. An injury suffered at the hands of police made it impossible for him to play his alto

saxophone—he was forced to rely on soprano saxophone and keyboards. After two years in Ghana, Fela returned to Lagos. He opened a new Shrine in the outlying, rough-and-tumble Ikeja district on the outskirts of the city. In a one-day ceremony that provoked more headlines, Fela married 27 of his female Afrika 70 members. The government applied pressure, stating that anyone who went to the Shrine went at their own risk.

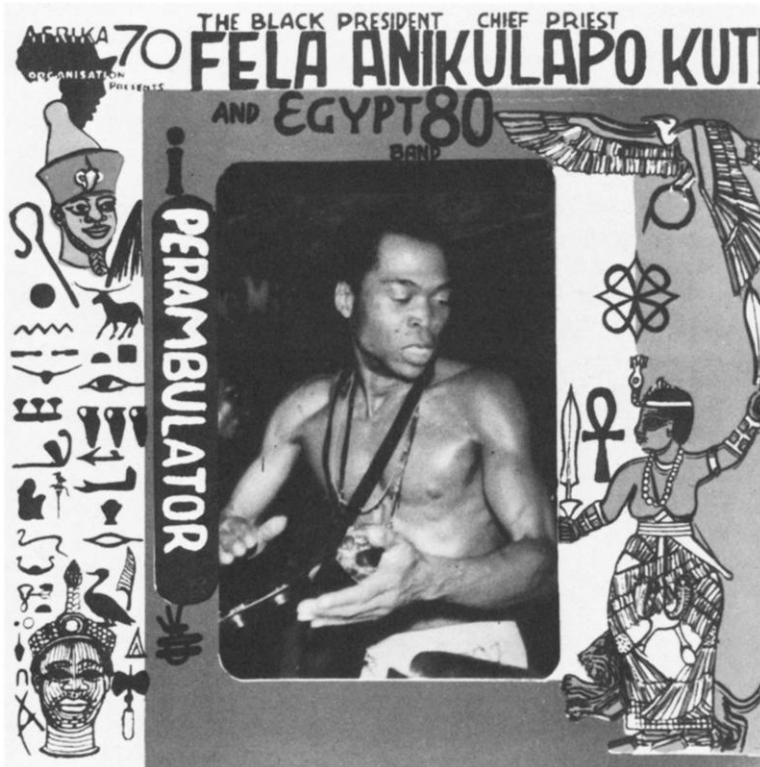
Fela slowly began to pick up the pieces of his life, doing a little recording and making a couple of European tours in the early '80s. He finally seemed vital again when the most recent arrest occurred.

On 4 September 1984, Fela and 40 members of his troupe arrived at Murtala Muhammad Airport for the night flight to New York. They had gigs booked in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, marking Fela's first visit to the U.S. in 15 years. All was proceeding smoothly when Fela, the last to check in, was accosted by a customs agent who, Fela said, asked him for a "tip" of 20 Naira (about \$20). Fela was unable to pay because all his Nigerian money was at home. Through customs and immigration checkpoints, Fela was again approached by the same official, who summarily searched him and demanded to know if Fela had declared the £1,600 sterling he found. Fela stated that he had, but the official took him to an office for questioning anyway. In the confused events that followed, Fela's currency declaration form disappeared. He was detained, and the flight left with his band. Fela intended to catch the next flight.

Instead, Fela was charged with two counts of illegal currency exportation and imprisoned for two days before being released on bail. On 8 September, Fela called a press conference at his home to argue that he should be allowed to leave the country for his tour and stand trial on his return. Police broke up the conference and arrested Fela—this time without bail.

The trial began on 20 September. Fela's lawyer submitted a "no case to answer" motion, stating that the prosecution had not followed proper procedures and had produced no documentary evidence, specifically Fela's currency form. But the court ruled that there was a case to answer. Fela's defense rested on several key points: 1) evidence that the money had been withdrawn from Fela's bank in London four days before his arrest; 2) evidence that it was impossible for anyone to pass the first customs checkpoint without filling out a currency form, even if he had nothing to declare; and 3) the failure of the government to produce Fela's currency form, which would indicate if he had declared the money. On 8 October, three weeks after the trial started, Fela was found guilty on both counts and sentenced to five years imprisonment on each, to run concurrently. He was also fined 2000 Naira and forced to forfeit the seized £1,600.

Fela's later recordings are interesting in that they reveal an evolution in his art. All the elements of his '70s Afrobeat performances are present but they are shaped by a different spirit. His band, virtually all new recruits, is now called Egypt 80, reflecting both a new era and Fela's belief in Egypt as a fundamental source of human knowledge. His recordings since 1979 present a moodier sound. Though he has often used minor keys in the past, some of his newer solos verge on a modal sound. The rhythms are not fundamentally different, but the manner in which they are played gives them a murky, swirling feeling. Whether this is intentional or stems from the lower standard of musicianship of the new recruits is difficult to determine. The loss of original Afrika 70 drummer



Perambulator, Skylark, 1983. (Cover photos by Afrika 70 Photo Agency and Femi Bankole Osunla, graphics by Ajao Bello)

"Gentleman," on Gentleman, EMI, 1973

I no be gentleman at all
I no be gentleman at all
I no be gentleman at all (repeat)

Chorus: I no be gentleman at all o
I no be gentleman at all at all
I be africa man original
I no be gentleman at all o
(repeat)

Them call you; Make you come Chop
You Chop small; You say you belefull
You say you be gentleman; You go hungary
You go suffer; You go quench
Me I no be gentleman like that

Chorus: I no be gentleman at all o
(etc.)

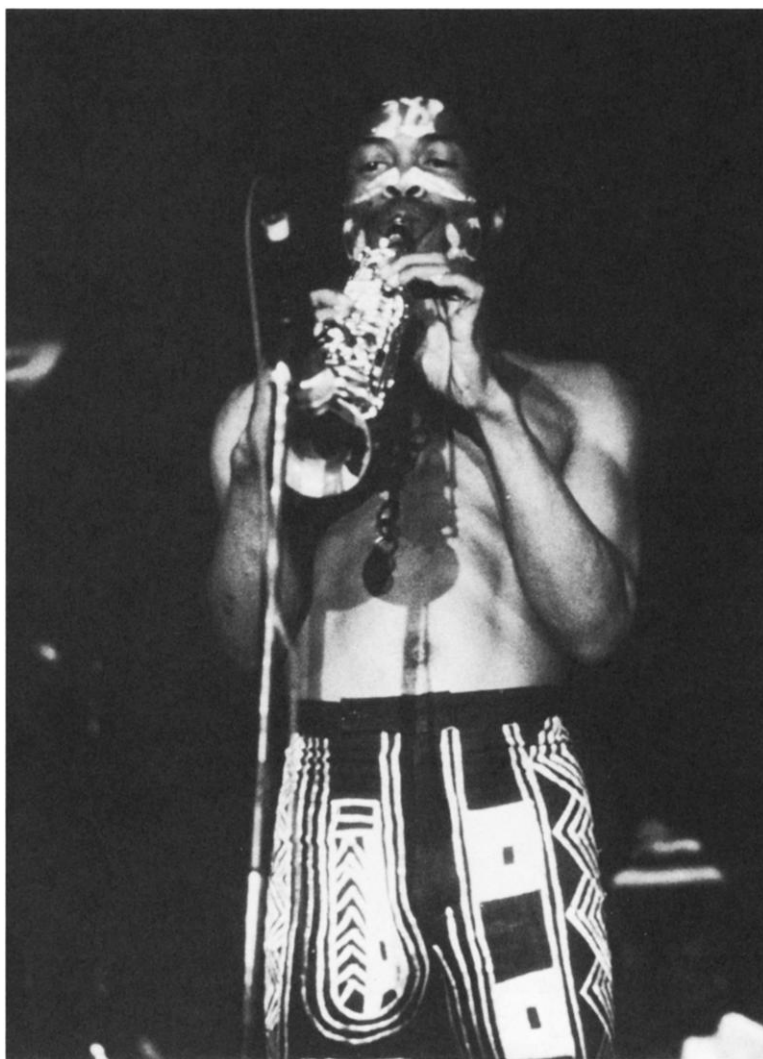
Africa hot, I like am so
I know what to wear; But my friend don't know
Him put him socks; Him put him shoe
Him put him pant; Him put him singlet
Him put him trouser; Him put him shirt
Him put him Tie; Him put him Coat

Him come cover all with him hat
Him be gentle man
Him go sweat all over
Him go gaint right down
Him go smell like shit, Peace means Urinate
Him go peace for body, him no go know
Me I no be gentleman like that

Chorus: I no be gentleman at all o
I no be gentleman at all at all
I be africa man original
I no be gentleman at all o

Tony Allen, who was an important catalyst in the Afrobeat sound, has never been recouped. In any case, such later recordings as “Coffin For Head of State,” “Power Show,” “Perambulator,” and “Cross Examination” proffer subdued, melancholic sarcasm in contrast to the aggressive, triumphant mockery of his classic period. Even so, Fela’s trademark humor still occasionally shines through, as on “Perambulator,” a hilarious satire of aimless, ineffectual bureaucrats.

Fela’s early-’80s performances in Europe generated some controversy due to their religious content and unconventional nature. Since his mother’s death, Fela had become intensely involved with traditional Yoruba Orisha religion, having experienced visitations of spirits as described by Carlos Moore in his biography, *Fela, Fela, This Bitch Of A Life* (1981, London: Allison & Busby). As a result of this new spiritual life, Fela began performing with white spiritual powder on his face, an aid to communication with spirits. Performances at his new Shrine stopped for ritual interludes in front of an altar bearing the portrait of Malcolm X, Fela’s mother, and totems of various deities. Professor Hindu, an adept from Ghana who claimed the power to “kill and wake,” became a regular feature of Fela’s performances as well as Fela’s spiritual guide. In Europe, Professor Hindu’s often gruesome performances disturbed many in the audience. The Professor reportedly lopped off human limbs on stage in



In a 1984 concert in Rome, Fela wore the white spiritual powder that he has been using since the early '80s. (Photo courtesy of Celluloid)



Fela in concert, London, 1984. (Photo courtesy of Celluloid)

order to demonstrate his restorative powers. These performances would end with a ceremonial flourish from the band as Fela, with his singers and dancers, faced left, right, then center, clenched fists in the air.

Some people were disappointed that Fela chose to perform mostly new material rather than familiar classics, while others were put off by the disjointed progression of the performance. The music was often halted by Fela so that he could harangue musicians or technicians when he was displeased with the sound or the playing. He also indulged in rambling monologs.

Many of those disappointed by Fela's performances had probably never seen him perform before. Possibly they had expected an entertainment in the Western sense. But Fela has not been interested in putting on a "show" since 1970. His European performances were a presentation of those things he considered relevant—the spiritual inspiration of Professor Hindu, his own didactic preaching, and, of course, his new music. The audiences were treated to Fela in a presentation of his faith, his anguish, and his anger.

As of this writing, Fela's early release from prison is imminent. A change in leadership of the military government, effected by the August 1985 coup, has resulted in less austere governmental policies. A number of persons detained by the previous government have been released, and press curbs have been lifted. Fela's brother, Beko, briefly jailed himself, was released and made Minister of Health. Fela's manager, Pascal Imbert, a French national, was also freed. For Fela, the projected 1 October 1985 release date passed without action, but optimistic predictions now set the date of his release for January 1986.

When Fela returns to the music scene, he will still be the only credible purveyor of Afrobeat. Other musicians, especially in West Africa, have attempted the style, usually with unmemorable results. Only Sonny Okosun, a Nigerian musician inspired by Fela, and Tony Allen, Fela's former drummer, have made music within the style. But neither has matched Fela's penetrating political commentary or the charismatic power of his performances. In any case, Afrobeat is only one element of Oko-

sun's music, which encompasses reggae, Western pop, Caribbean sounds, highlife, and hybrid sounds including both romantic and political material. In Africa, there are hundreds of popular performers playing the lilting Congolese styles, hundreds of juju bands, dozens of highlife ensembles, and multitudes of ersatz Western pop groups. But Fela stands alone as the originator and master of Afrobeat.

Ed. Note: As of 1 Feb. 1986, Fela had not yet been released.