

E go betta... new music on the shelf

By Benson Idonije

Going by the quality and professional accomplishment of their new release, Jazz Hole Records seem to be saying that it is not how often but how well, Crafted in Pidgin English and titled *Ego betta*, the CD is coming after a period of four years - since the release of Laitan (Heavy Wind) Adeniji's *IBADAN*.

Ego betta is a package of five songs in a colourful compilation that is rooted in the typical music of urban Lagos. The situations are not exactly the same, but within the limits of available possibilities, it would appear as if Jazz Hole, a new wave recording stable is fulfilling the same role that America's Blue Note Records, performed from the modern jazz days of the fifties through the intervening years of the artform. The approach is not exactly the same, but they both have the same attitude to the recording process in terms of determination to achieve excellence.

An obvious similarity is the fact that recordings take long periods to accomplish - a fact that is born out of painstakingness. The search for the right artists to provide sessions and the ideal studio facilities to interpret production ideas pose obvious challenges.

And of course, the production approach, which attempts to break new grounds in the process of experimenting with new ideas, has put Jazz Hole on a slow but steady path to success in terms of offering something new with products that illuminate the imagination.

Perhaps the finest keyboards player on the Nigerian scene today is Durotimi Ikujenyo, an esoteric jazz musician whom the stable has been able to hold down for many years as one of its recording stars. A great asset to the stable, he has provided the right backing in terms of appropriate choral progressions to almost all the songs including his own individual contributions such as *Oriki Olorun* which also features veteran actor, musician, Jimi Solanke who happened to be in the recording studio when the session was on - to shower praises on the almighty God from point of view of Yoruba cosmology, using oral poetry and incantations as the language of communication.

His choice of chorus, and sense of rhythm have helped to enhance the beauty of the performance, transforming an otherwise static monologue to an unchained melody.

Kunle Adeniran's contribution, first on *Ole nsalo* and then *Afro blue*, reflects some of the inhibiting professional traits associated with musicologists. And it is not surprising to know that "he is presently about to graduate from Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Department of Music, Ile-Ife; and that he is a singer-multi-instrumentalist and leader of the Garetta Blues/Afara Oyin School of Sound".

While he sounded rather restrained on the free wheeling, medium tempo Afrobeat, *Ole nsalo*, he was in his fine elements, sounding rather expressive and involved in the ballad - oriented Afro-blue where two Yoruba folksongs, *Odun yi* and *Ise Oluwa* dovetailed into each other in the same progression. And, of particular attraction is his involvement with the delectable female singer, Queen Temi Oyedele in a counterpointal duet that repeats itself in the two songs.

Two urban city sounds representative of the social life of Lagos have been included to give the compilation a big boost. Perhaps the most remarkable performance in terms of originality and rendition is *Beleke*, a simple melody based on simple structure. For reason of the fact that Fatai Rolling Dollar has been kicking around for years as a palm wine stylist whose accomplishment dates back to the roots of highlife exemplified by Ambrose Campbell and Julius Araba - a basic experience of which he is the only custodian today, he sees himself as being 'miles ahead' and totally different from the others.

Popularly referred to as *Ti baba yato* - which literally means Baba's own is different - a nickname he earned in the seventies with the arrival on the juju music scene of a trend that was characterised by heavy equipment and high voltage amplification. He refused to join the bandwagon but stuck to the conventional setting where his music continued to be heard in its natural form.

Beleke is another self-identification kind of song which finds him reasserting his individuality, originality and class. And of course, with a lot of help from Duro Ikujenyo, the rhythmic concept introduces the element of funk and turns this fusion of *Apala* with *Ashiko* into a modern beat.

In a tribute to the legendary *Apala* exponent Haruna Isola, featuring Baba Teacher, with wailing saxophone sounds by ShowBoy, a remix of the original version of this same song has been done as an extract from *Ede gidi*, Jazz Hole's first recording effort in 1997.

The lyrics, which are original have been written by Abayomi Okushipe who also goes by the name, Baba Teacher, but this message is anchored on the melody of *Inaran*, one of Haruna Isola's greatest hits.

Ego betta is the first instalment of a new set of monthly mini - compilation CDs showcasing various artists with production efforts given a post Fela's Afrobeat dimension.

Produced by Gboyega Oyedele, and Kunle Tejuoso as executive producer, *Ego betta* is preceded by Laitan Adeniji's *Ibadan*, Kayode Olajide's *Once upon a time* and *Ede gidi* on the same label.

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