

Great Highlife Party rises for a staunch patron

By Benson Idonije

Come Sunday, October 27 at 5.30pm, the monthly Elders' Forum otherwise called the Great Highlife Party will take on a completely different dimension. Known for celebrating life and living, this edition will go out of its way to pay tributes to the dead. The forum which holds every last Sunday of the month at O'jezz Club on Iwaya Road, Onike, Yaba is dedicated to remembering the late Segun Moyela, a great champion of highlife who slumped and died last week.

Under normal circumstances, this edition should be put off in his memory. The club would be closed. The day would be set aside as one of morning with flags flying at half mast. But in the words of Segun Moyela himself he was greatly committed to the cause of the project. "This highlife revival initiative is greater than any individual and all of us put together.

And as if he had the premonition that he was going to die soon after making this statement last month, he added. "Even after we all have passed away to the great beyond, this event will still continue. We must therefore ensure that we do the right things in terms of maintaining discipline and adhering strictly to the tenets of this musical culture. No individual should be allowed to use this project to nurture his own selfish ambition.

"The perpetuation of this project as a whole should take overriding pre-eminence over every other thing. I see this project as an enduring one which will overtake all of us." The show must therefore go on, even in the face of almost overwhelming odds like the one posed by Moyela's sudden and untimely death. The 'party' will hold in adherence to the ideology that Segun Moyela himself stood for.

Moyela had spoken his mind two months ago when two of the regular musicians refused to submit to the directives of the project co-ordinator. One artiste was in the habit of overstaying his time on stage, refusing to leave even when told to. Another one was fond of coming late and insisting on mounting the stage only when he knew that his fans who were likely to 'spray' him were present. The musicians concerned have since had a rethink.

The late Moyela's involvement in the on-going highlife revival initiative was that of a producer who helped with conceptualisation, planning and execution. A week before the event, he phoned to find out about featured artistes and their materials. In actual performance, he was on hand to allocate periods to every artiste. His approach was not that of making sure that each musician kept to a definitive time slot. But because of his ear for good music coupled with the good sense of judgement both of which are in fact some of the attributes of a good producer, he had a way of making some artistes stay longer than others.

He would rather allow a combo setting like Alaba Pedro's to perform for short period in a double appearance rather than a long stretch, to avoid boredom. He would advise that the show should always take off with Fatai Rolling Dollar, not because of his age or acknowledged accomplishment, but because as a project, the entire production technique should be able to tell a chronological story in the process of documenting history. And, this is true.

Fatai Rolling Dollar represents the foundation on which early highlife called 'palm wine' music is predicated. His style is the embodiment of all the efforts of Tunde King who first cut a record disc in 1932. Ayinde Bakare, Ambrose Campbell, Tunde Nightingale. J.O. Oyesiku of the Rainbow Quintet, Julius Araba among others.

As a production point, Moyela favoured the elongation of big band sounds which involved Akinibosun's classic band as session unit with some individual on vocals. This was because the music drew scores of people to the dance floor in an excitement that kept this community of people together for a long time.

He suggested the idea of World Boye, the young, energetic musician from Bayelsa who is following on the heels of Rex Jim Lawson, to be allowed to round up the session. His decision was informed by the rationale that the man is dynamic and has the tendency to elongate the show after hours, beyond the stipulated 11p.m into the early hours of the next day. And it has always worked. Unfortunately, this Great Highlife Party is holding this Sunday without the inimitable Segun Moyela himself.

There were times when it became the lot of Moyela to point out that a guitar or saxophone was out of tune-in the course of live performance, a lapse which should have been discovered by the musicians themselves. Sad to say that these fine production points will now cease to come from segun Moyela.

Actually, his interest in music and entertainment began from his youthful days at Ibadan Grammar School where, as a student, he was the lead guitarist for a formidable rock group called The Cyclops. Also featuring Akerele, who is now a doctor. Akingbehin, now a professor on bass: and Oke B. Naze on vocals, the band was one of the early progressive rock groups on the scene at the time such foreign outfits as The Beatles. The Who. The Rolling Stones. The Animals among others became sources of influence. This was from 1962 to 1964.

Moyela was one of the early notable impressarios in the country: And with a promotional outfit named "prestige", he pursued this career with a great commitment. Little wonder he became very effective as Artist and Repertoire Manager in 1980 with Phonodisk Records, the first notable Nigerian indigenous recording company, founded at the time by apala music exponent Haruna Isola who was a visionary artiste. Moyela attracted to the company such quality stars as Chris Okotie whose Just for you broke new grounds in the evolution of pop music in Nigeria. Others were Ammas, Eddy Okonta to mention just a few.

Until his demise last week, Moyela was a Media Consultant involved in, among other things effective public relations and the packaging of new breed politicians.

A befitting entertainment oriented programme has been put in place for Moyela's burial ceremonies which begin on Sunday October 27 at O'jezz Club. All his friends and well wishers will gather to pay tributes to him in a project he was greatly committed to. Wednesday, October 30 has been ear-marked for what is usually referred to as the "service of songs", but this will take a different dimension as "The service of life."

Instead of singing hymns and psalms and sometimes drifting into arias and recitatives, highlife music, most of which will be instrumental, will be performed live at Ellas Night Club, the venue where he slumped, listening to highlife, at 348 Borno Way, Ebute Metta. Wake

Keeping is on the night of October 31 at his residence while burial takes place on November 1, at Ikoyi Cemetery after a short service at the Christ Church Cathedral Lagos.

Segun Moyela is survived by an aged mother, six children among them Olumuyiwa Moyel, who is the Senior Economic and Business Correspondent for Africa Today magazine.