

Home music, Apala ri

By Benson Idonije

The fact is undisputable that Nigerian popular music idioms such as highlife, juju and Afrobeat have since found a permanent place in the entertainment culture of Europe and America Courtesy of Ambrose Campbell, Sunny Ade and Fela Anikulapo Kuti, in that order.

Afrobeat in particular has become profoundly popular on the dance floors of the West upon the demise of its originator (Fela), with a popularity rating that is higher there than at the home base, Nigeria.

But it is gratifying to know that the international acceptance of Apala, an indigenous form by Haruna Isola is presently taking root in the west, courtesy of impresario Andy Frankel.

With compilation produced by Andrew C. Frankel for Indige Disc, a division of PDSE Records Incorporated of New York, 13 evergreens have been mounted on a well finished and decorated CD entitled: Apala messenger, among them are Late Mathew Toyé, Oma tita ni koko, Kise tenu, Soyoyo Sisi, Kafowo komo niwe, Ewure ile komaniyi, Late omo nijari, Abanije koni gbayi, Lade Iwa Lewa and a medley of songs predicated on Egbe Gbobaniyi of Odogbolu, as main theme.

Originally recorded at Decca West Africa Studios, Abule-oja, Lagos, Nigeria at various dates between 1967 and 1971, and the songs were composed and arranged by Haruna Isola himself.

In his characteristic manner, Ishola has paraded praise songs which over the years have become the bane of Nigeria social music.

But he has also included social commentaries about situations, places and events. And predicated on philosophy, he employs proverbs and anecdote, as channels of communication in Ewure ile komaniyi for instance where he merely establishes the very well known adage that familiarity brings contempt.

But in literary terms the proverb says that the "goat in the house is not accorded any regard."

Like in highlife music and other more popular Nigerian music idioms, where the late Adeolu Akinsanya is known for correcting the excesses of the female folk in terms of fashion and behaviour, Ishola frowns at bleaching.

His lyrical approach to the song is different from that of Afrobeat icon, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti whose rendition is detailed, in terms of telling a story in Yellow fever. But the import of Haruna's message is nonetheless potent and aggressive in that his main focus is the woman's neck which says prematurely develops wrinkles as in result of bleaching.

Haruna Isola appreciates the importance of education even though he did not have the opportunity himself. In *Kafowo komo niwe*, he advises that instead of squandering money on unprofitable ventures, parents should endeavour to send their children to school and invest the money on them.

The kinetic energy of Isola's Apala is in the rhythmic thrust. Even though monotonous as a cohesive unit, the various percussion instruments articulate complex rhythms that resonate in intensity.

The legion of talking drums and other percussion provide a rich background for Haruna Isola's lead vocal, which establishes the call-and-response pattern with a well-articulated group vocal harmony session.

How one wishes Ayinla Omowura's version of Apala music which is on the fast up - tempo lane would also receive this kind of international exposure - for the sake of its complex rhythms and blues wailing voice.

Another highly rhythmic indigenous sound crying for international exposure is the music of Omokomoko from Delta State of Nigeria. His energetic sound of intricate rhythms matches his powerful voice - the combination of which has turned Omokomoko's music into a religion in Delta State.

But the second production on Andy Frankel's international stable is that of Stephen Osita Osadebe whose highlife recording of the 70s to the 80s have been dubbed into another CD.

These seven compilations which include *Makojo*, one of his greatest hits of the period in question are elongated and over stretched in order to provide an uninterrupted activity for a dance floor community.

The beauty of this new initiative lies in finesse arising from professional approach. Liner notes are detailed and include historical essays which vividly describe the musicians and their music.

Photographs which have been professionally treated are adequate and the well designed packaging is attractive and inviting.

In his words of welcome to the premier volumes of Indige Disc. Andy Frankel says: "We are delighted and proud to bring you some of the most remarkable music from Africa for our first two volumes. Indige Disc's goal is to bring you significant sounds from around. We are starting with West Africa where we have access to some incredible music and where we believe the recording industry has missed some truly important and remarkable artists. Important because to tens of millions of people, these artists are the best, and hence, we believe they deserve a listen and closer look in our shrinking world."

The first idiom to break through the international scene was highlife which through the likes of Ambrose Campbell was popularised in London. Campbell settled into a residency at the Club

Afrique and backed up his live work with regular highlife releases on melodics label.

Sunny Ade was the first African musician to be given a high profile launch by a western record label. When he secured a deal with Island Records in 1982, Ade became perhaps the biggest natural phenomenon on the Nigerian music scene.

With the release of the album, *Juju music*, Ade was launched onto the Western pop scene where the music was adequately promoted and popularised.

Afrobeat has since become a world phenomenon since the demise of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Adopted by numerous Western groups, Afrobeat is presently waxing stronger on the international scene than at home here in Nigeria.