

Sing the real old song again

By Benson Idonije

First of October used to be celebrated with all pomp and pageantry on the air. The occasion was adequately reflected with programmes in all the formats; talk, interview, discussion, magazine, drama, features and documentaries, variety and light entertainment and music.

In recent years, celebrations have been restricted to music alone, as a line of least resistance, obviously because things are no more what they used to be. But music, if creatively used could be very effective because by itself, it is a loud expression of culture; and in fact, all that broadcasting is trying to achieve in this regard is to capture the experience of old times, stimulate memories of the sixties, bring back echoes of independence, and generally evoke the nostalgia of our cultural past.

Two stations made commendable efforts to achieve these goals last week when Nigeria turned 36. NTA 10 and RayPower 100 FM rose above the others even though production procedures suffered defective handling in place.

NTA 10 aired *Top Celebrities*, an old programme featuring Maliki Showman who is more of a new breed musician even though he is product of the sixties. Apart from compere Rosemary Anieze Adams whose personality epitomises pre-independence times, and the band's treatment of "Corner Corner Love," a Godwin was popular till 1960, the choice of Maliki was not appropriate. A brilliant musician, Maliki made a great impact on the highlife scene in the early eighties when he introduced 'joge' rhythms from Etsako, Edo State, in bid to revive the music.

In the sixties, Maliki was in his formative years, playing with the Harbours Band, having evolved from the fifties, la saxophone styling in the Baby Face Paul mould.

An old programme of Stephen Osadebe was also aired to capture the mood of the sixties. Osadebe's popularity did not start until he actually had the desired certification with 1960, an era which found him singing as a sideman with the likes of trumpet player and bandleader Eric Onugha at the Central Hotel, Yaba. He also recorded a hit single with trumpeter Zeal IOnyia, but it was his solo effort at 'One pound, no balance' around 1964 that eventually made him, and encouraged him to go his separate way.

For the purpose of achieving the aim of the programme, Victor Olaiya should have been given special showcase and focus because he has all the qualifications that a producer would require in the choice of a musician for the programme.

By Nigeria's independence in 1960, Victor Olaiya's All Stars was the top band around, and so he performed at the independence anniversary ball on special invitation. In fact, he has a number of interesting antecedents. On graduation from the Bobby Benson Band, he formed his Cool Cats in 1954; and before independence, he played in 1955 at the state ball organised

in honour of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1957, Victor Olaiya performed at the gala for Miss Nigeria competition. All things being equal, since Victor is still around, practising this same art with his All Stars, the ideal thing to do was to take a fresh proview to recall memories of pre and post-independence times.

RayPower 100 FM, on the other hand, had a bold and enterprising outing that featured Fela Anikulapo Kuti and his son, Femi, in an adequately promoted show at the famous 'Water Parks,' Ikaja. Tagged 'Independence Anniversary Jam 96, the event was grand and well attended judging from the frenzied emotions that were exhibited by 'commentators.' The impact of the mammoth crowd was not felt because proper attention was not paid to production in terms of microphone placing. As a result, crowd effects were not captured for the listener.

The beauty and flow of the show on air was unnecessarily interrupted again and again by a group of overzealous commentators who are always in the habit of reducing situations like this to variety shows, where all of them try to outplay one another with over-dramatised emotions and excitement. All they needed on this occasion was a 'compere' to introduce the band and their music in 'concert', in an orderly manner, givisng the listener relevant information that would around and sustain his interest.

Femi's music is that of the nineties and so did not relive any memory of the sixties, but it provided enough fun and excitement on the spot, for the dance floor community, even though it did not come across to the listener faithfully due to poor balancing and sound mixing. The saxophone and his voice were prominent, but all the other instruments, especiallyh the drums and bass guitar were suppressed and drowned. It was not surprising therefore that Fela's contribution was not broadcast, Femi is still in his formative l;years, struggling for all the publicity that he can get, but it matters a great deal to a lsuperstar of Fela's stature, the quality of the music he sends out to a mass of people. Besides, broadcast fees payable to musicians of Fela's calibre in these circumstances are enormous, a huge amount of money which is not negotiable.

However, every disappointment they say is a blessing. From the studio, the listener was thoroughly entertained and treated to Fela's music from the original Koola Lobitos days in London around 1961, free wheeling highlife music totally devoid of fusions and jazz progressions, highlife in the Victor Olaiya tradition-quite reminiscent of independence.

If Fela's live lmusic was broadcast, it would have provided great entertainment but it would not have achieved its independence anniversary value. Renting the air would have been Fela of more recent times, the current phase of his music loaded with a lot of message in terms of vocalsisation, complex in arrangement, but African in execution, without being overtly commercial.

However, the whole night made exciting radio listening to a splendid show of ceremonial grandness, a celebration of Nigeria's 36th Independence anniversary, courtesyd Ray Power 100 FM.