

Benson Idonije

# Old or New

## Palm Wine is Truly

<GLENORA REVIEW><African Quarterly on the Atrs><Vol 5 @ No2>

# Sprawling

for many kilometers in different directions, Lagos is the most populated city on the West African coast. Even though it ceased to be the political capital of Nigeria in 1991, Lagos still remains the commercial heart-beat of the country with inhabitants drawn from various parts of Nigeria and other nations of the world. This cosmopolitan crowd generates a rather vibrant social activity whose history dates back to the pre-independence times of the colonial era. Generating social activity over the years have been social aggregations of all types, some of which are elitist, including clubs such as Ikoyi, Island, Yoruba Tennis and Eko among others. An aggregation like Island Club, for instance, was founded in October 1943 by a group of patriotic and eminent Nigerians led by Adeyemo Alakija who became the first chairman. Two major reasons were advanced for the founding of the club. The first was a desire to provide a congenial atmosphere where Nigerian elites of all ethnic shades could come together to discuss matters of interest in such areas as commerce, industry, trade and, above all, politics—areas that were then dominated by Europeans. The second was to provide a conducive environment where politicians—Nigerian and Europeans alike—could relax. This was in pointed contrast to the already existing Ikoyi Club, which was notorious at the time for its racially prejudiced admission policy. All the clubs

have their set objectives.

Various night clubs, including Chez Peters where Victor Olaiya

# Enchanting



performed in those days, Ambassador Hotel, Yaba, Cool Cats Inn, Apapa Road, provided venues for social activity.

And, of course, there were local ceremonies that ranged from child naming, house warming, and birthday celebrations, to funeral events and chieftaincy title awards, many of which often called for partying. However, these social structures and settings have been fueled, sustained and activated over the years with juju, a musical genre whose sociology is rooted deeply in the culture of Lagosians, as an entertainment vehicle. Fuji, a social music type with origin from the Muslim culture of South-Western Nigeria, has since become popular in Lagos, having acquired a hard electro-rock edge with its African content being deliberately subjected to Western influence. This is only a passing phase as it is a far cry from the original concept created in the seventies by

of Lagos, former nexus of British colonial power in Nigeria, home to a diverse population of indigenous and immigrant peoples. And, like port towns everywhere, Lagos was a fertile ground for the germination of hybrid musical forms. Although contemporary juju music is specifically identified with, and patronized by, the over fifteen million Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria, its complex history reflects the intermixture of various African, Afro-American, European and middle Eastern-derived materials. The period between World War I and World War II saw the parallel development of guitar-based popular music forms in Freetown, Monrovia, Accra, Lagos and other towns along the coasts of West Africa. This cluster of urban traditions can be divided into two broad categories, each derived from a traditional type of musical context. The first is the guitar-band highlife that involves adding one or more guitars to a traditional percussion ensemble. This type is

**THE origin of juju lies in the cosmopolitan economic center of Lagos, former nexus of British colonial power in Nigeria, home to a diverse population of indigenous and immigrant peoples. And, like port towns everywhere, Lagos was a fertile ground for the germination of hybrid musical forms**

*Singing To The Gods, © Tam Fiofori (photo on opening page)*

*Agidigbo Player, 1960 (right).*

*Apala Music pioneer and exponent, Haruna Ishola (Baba Ngani Agba) performing with his ensemble, 1975 (opposite page).*



two ex-servicemen-turned-musicians: Sikiru Ayinde Barrister and Kollington Ayinla. However, modern groups such as the Wura Fadakas composed of young Lagosians keep reminding Lagosians of the need to identify with the roots of juju music as exemplified by the pioneers. And this is why the hi-tech juju music of Yoruba superstars, King Sunny Ade and Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey, discovered and lauded by the American alternative popular music press in the early 1980s, is the product of some fifty years of continuous experimentation by African urban musicians.

The origin of juju lies in the cosmopolitan economic center

social dance music. The second is a more personal "listening" tradition, which is centered around a single performer accompanied by one or two of his listeners, playing on bottles, cigarette tins or palm-wine calabashes struck with a nail or knife blade.

It is from the latter stream, often referred to as "palm-wine music" by older urban musicians, that juju emerged as a distinctively named style in about 1932. This was when Tunde King, widely recognized as the founder of juju music, formed his band with the release of his first recorded material, *Eko Akete*, on Parlophone record label in 1936. This first



appearance on disc bore the stylistic designation, juju, and introduced several innovations that defined the new genre. And from 1932 onwards, Tunde King's group consisted of four musicians. There was the leader on the six-stringed guitar banjo and vocals. Then there were a tambourine (juju) player, a sekere (traditional gourd rattle) player, and a second vocalist who occasionally doubled on western cymbals or triangle — a format copied by other groups in Lagos, particularly after the release of Tunde's 1936 record referred to as "faaji" which means "pleasure". Tunde's music was usually on the medium tempo. And listening to him was like giving attention to a preacher because his music had a strong moral content: exhortation, advice, and words of wisdom, from which people usually drew and learnt beneficial lessons.

The origin and history of the term juju as a musical style

onlookers, and not Tunde King himself, who gave the music its name, which has stuck till today. Another etymological explanation for the application of the term juju is tied to the concept of religion. It is suggested by older musicians that juju, a word used by disapproving Europeans and Westernized Africans to refer to indigenous religion, was satirically applied by the Yoruba to predominant Western features of the new style, such as the tambourine, cymbals, triangle and harmonic patterns derived from Christian hymns. However, the first explanation is a more logically acceptable probability. The formula for King's success and the ability to adapt to the new musical style lay in the diversity of juju's audience at the time. Performing at urban bars or hotels and new traditional ceremonies — (child naming ceremonies and wedding funerals among these)—juju groups had, at



are traceable to the tambourine as an instrument. Tunde King himself was quoted as saying that he bought a tambourine from the Salvation Army Stores and gave it to his "samba" drummer who developed a virtuoso technique which involved tossing the tambourine high into the air and catching it. Yoruba is rich in sound imagery and the motion of the tambourine was described by onlookers as "ju-ju" (low tone-high tone), a term subsequently extended to the style as a whole. The Yoruba word for "throw" is "ju." Duplicated with tonal accent, it became juju. Thus it was the

various times, to satisfy the demands of Yoruba clerical workers, librarians, Ghanaians, and West Indian sailors, rich Muslim Yoruba traders, and members of the Saro Westernized elite.

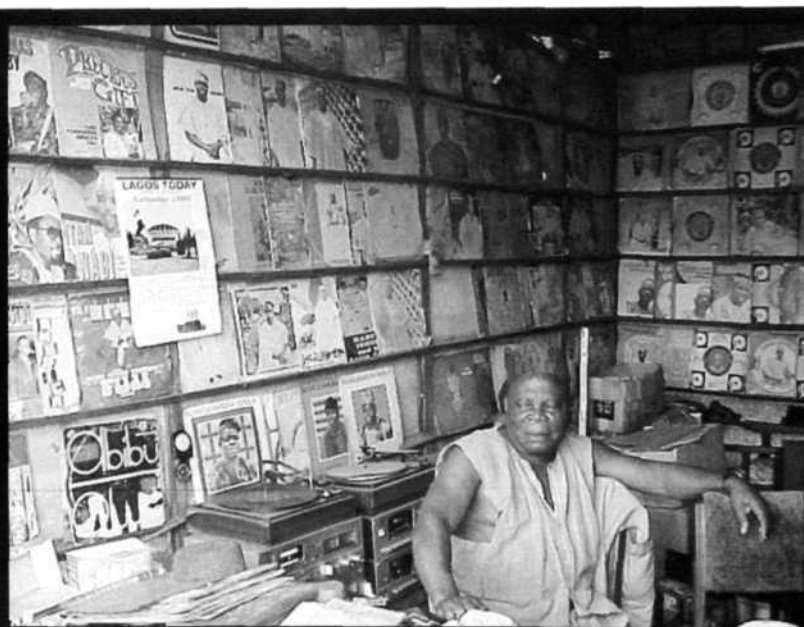
King's 1936 recorded works for instance included in their instrumentation, violin and dulcitone, strange instruments which he never used in live performances. The use of these instruments was obviously suggested by the German recording technicians who also played the role of producers. This clearly demonstrates the heterogeneity of King's audience.

However, this is not to say that music began as an entertainment vehicle for Lagosians only in the 1930s with the advent of Tunde King's juju. The process of this musical culture dates back to the previous century and was influenced by the specific cultural backgrounds of the various immigrant settlers and their various locations. Indigenous Yoruba communities in the crowded Isale Eko area of Lagos Island, as well as groups of Yoruba settlers from Ijebu Ode and Ibadan patronized a wide range of musical types. These included performances by street musicians and the complex percussion ensemble music attracted to naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and religious festivals. Two groups of repatriated Yoruba who had settled in Lagos in the nineteenth century also contributed to the city's diverse musical culture. The Aguda or Amaro community—emancipated slaves of Yoruba descent from Brazil and Cuba—introduced traditions

Nigerian nationalists, supported the legal rights of traditional drummers, and introduced elements of Sierra Leonean Creole syncretic music to the Lagos scene. A more amorphous group that was crucial in the process of cultural cross-fertilization between Lagos and other port towns in Africa, Europe and the Americas, was the transient population of African and West Indian wage laborers employed by shipping lines and the rail road system. These cosmopolitan individuals were frequent patrons of the night spots along the Lagos Marina. There, they introduced variety and expanded the scope of the music. Songs in various languages such as Kru, Akan, Fanti, Ga, Igbo, Efik and Ijaw were added, just as were such Afro-American popular musical styles: ragtime, calypso and rumba. European-derived sea shanties and drinking songs, as well as guitar techniques were also added to the repertoire.

The proselytizing efforts of two world religions, Islam and

**THE arrival of Bobby Benson and the introduction of modern highlife to Lagos by Ghana's Emmanuel Tetteh Mensah changed the direction of music on the Lagos scene when highlife began to dominate with such names as Victor Olaiya, Bobby Benson, Eddy Okonta, and Chief Chi Bill Friday among others.**



A dealer in 'old' vintage music, Mushin, Lagos. © Jide Bello

developed in the New World including the "careta" or "fancy" dance, carnival masquerades which made use of the square "samba" frame drum in their musical and instrumental setting.

The Saro community of Olowogbowo quarter consisted of Yoruba repatriates rescued from the slave trade by the British squadron and dropped off in Sierra Leone, from where they migrated to Lagos and became a sort of social buffer between the indigenes and the colonial government.

Referred to derisively by indigenous Lagosians in those days as "Oyinbo dudu" (black Europeans), their cultural ambivalence had musical correlation, the Sierra Leonian repatriates emulated British values and behavior, including popular ballroom dances such as waltz, fox trot and swing. On the other hand, the Saro community produced the first

Christianity, also had an effect on Yoruba music in general and, in particular, the music of Lagos. From Islam came the nasalized style employed in Koranic recitation and the instruments introduced from northern Nigeria. Christianity, including both the institutionalized Anglican Church and the syncretic Aladura churches which began to spring up in the inter-war period, incorporated Yoruba instruments, rhythms, texts and melodies into their services. This is one aspect of the influence. The other influence, strong but often ignored, is the secularised ritual music of the traveling masquerade performers, the Egungun.

Nigeria, with Lagos as its capital city, was dependent on Western economy, a situation that brought about two technological factors that were crucial in the emergence and promotion of juju music. There was the importation of

relatively cheap Western instruments and facilities for the reproduction of sound. By the 1920s, guitar and other string instruments were kept in stock by the large trading firms like UTC (United Trading Company) and shops run by local Saro merchants. Innovative Lagos musicians were quick to take advantage of this development.

One such musician who was very popular was Irewole Denge, a palm-wine guitarist who had migrated from Ijebu Ode to settle in Lagos. Up till the fifties, Denge was seen walking the streets of Lagos, especially at night, playing his guitar and singing in an idiosyncratic vocal style that ranged from the conventional vocalization of melodies and acclamation to the spontaneous creation of onomatopoeia. His recorded career spanned a period of nearly forty years, beginning with the first series of commercial recordings of Yoruba urban popular music recorded by Odeon Records in 1929. Some of his early recordings included such hits as *Orin Asape Eko*, *Fija f' Olorun Ja* and *Otutu Ki Meja*: songs of exhortation and wisdom. [Some of these songs are currently being packaged in compact discs, notably the anthology titled "Juju Roots" introduced by Christopher Waterman. Denge was an itinerant musician like Pa Aderohunmu (Kokoro) the blind minstrel who is still around. But in the case of Denge, he regularly traversed Bamgbose, Kakawa and Campbell Streets in the heart of Lagos Island where he made money by singing the praise of rich elites and esteemed personalities like Candido Da Rocha, Saka Tinubu, Ladipo Anjou, Joseph Saveyan Branco among others. The concept of Denge's music was that of 'palm-wine' in a solo setting. Perhaps the pioneering ensemble sound of palm-wine began with the Jolly Boys Orchestra, which was led by Harbour Grant but included Ambrose Campbell who later led the West African Rhythm Brothers in London at the end of the second World War in 1945.

The Jolly Brothers' greatest hit at the time was called *Atari Ajanaku*, a praise song. The music was labeled "palm-wine" because its type was largely played in palm-wine bars along Marina area where it was enjoyed by sailors and crew men. Instrumentation took on three guitars, one mandoline, one samba drum, one triangle and a penny whistle. The early recordings of Ayinde Bakare, born of Yoruba parents in the Lagos neighborhood of Lafaji, is perhaps a better reflector of the spirit of juju. Bakare's band was unique and typical, consisting of such instruments as ukelele, banjo, juju, sekere, and supporting vocalists among other rhythm instruments. "Ojo Davies", a praise song, was one of his early hits in the 1930s. But he later became famous for such hits as "Adura Fun Awon Aboyun" where he prayed for pregnant women; "Iwa Lewa" in which he admired the beauty of the women, and "Ojowu Obirin", an exhortation against jealous wives. A highly original musician, he was well respected in Lagos and was nicknamed "Mr. Juju" because of his great talent and commitment to the music. Bakare ruled the Juju music scene until the fifties, providing entertainment at most parties.

Juju style remained relatively stable until the late 1940s, when the convergence of a number of social and

technological factors created the conditions for a major transformation. Interestingly, the specific catalyst for what might be called the indigenization of juju was the arrival in West Africa of an element of Western technology: electronic amplification. Portable public address systems and the electric guitar allowed juju musicians to use a wider range of traditional Yoruba drums, drumming techniques, and rhythmic patterns without hampering the musical progression of the ensemble sound now established by the combination of guitar, vocal and percussion. This proved a revolutionary change: it led to the incorporation of the "gangan" or "adamo" talking drum, a powerful, rhythmic symbol of Yoruba identity and a medium for the communication of verbal lores. Tempos were now more on the slow side and the percussion section of the standard juju group was enlarged to accommodate a variety of Afro-Cuban-derived instruments, including conga drums, bongos and claves, all of which were later adopted for highlife music in the fifties. The vocal component of the juju band became expanded from just the leader to a group vocal format that established a call-and-response pattern. These changes revolutionized the form, making it at once modern and African.

At this period, Tunde Nightingale and Julius Araba, two highly outstanding musicians, emerged on the scene. With a popularity that began in the early fifties, Tunde Nightingale whose real name was Ernest Olatunde Thomas created a brand of juju music called "Owambe." (It's there). He had a versatile repertoire in which he employed rhythm borrowed from calypso, rumba, swing and the various types of music that people were now exposed to through radio (which broadcast the Latin beat from Congo Brazaville) and other foreign stations. Besides, he had a good mastery of the guitar with an accompaniment that was amplified by modern electronic devices. It was the long-winding palm wine-oriented guitar solos, a style that kept the dance floor busy for hours on end, earning his brand of juju the alias, "Owambe."

Two older musicians, close friends, and both of whom worked for the Nigerian Railways, were responsible for the 1950s revival of elements of juju music. Julius Araba who was based in Lagos, and the Ibadan-based J. O. Oyesiku, developed a style called "toy motion juju." Characterized by a return to the small group ensemble, Toy motion juju adopted the use of European parade drum rather than the Yoruba talking drum, in addition to thought-provoking lyrics in Yoruba and Pidgin, and sophisticated Latin-influenced guitar and mandoline patterns. Julius Araba's Afro Skiffle Group included Fatai Rolling Dollar, an individualist who struck out on his own in 1959 to form a band that nurtured, as a sideman, Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey who would later become one of the juju giants of post-independence Nigeria. One of the Araba's greatest hits, *Iyawo ma Pami*, (Wife, Don't Kill Me), was recorded in 1957 while hits such as *Mo Kago* and *Otilekun Momo Onile* (S/he Shut the Door in the Face of the Landlord's Child) were recorded much earlier. As with Nightingale, it was the era of great exposure to foreign musical styles which naturally influenced musicians





Remains of Bobby Benson's Caban Bamboo on Ikorodu road, Lagos invoke memories of the halcyon days of highlife. © Glendora Review, 2001.

of this period. Little wonder that a song like *Iyawo ma Pami* was based on the melodic structure of "Constable Joe," a calypso made popular at the time by calypso exponent, Hord Kitcheners. Like Araba who worked with Nigeria Railway Corporation, Fatai Rolling Dollar and the other members of Araba Skiffle group worked in various establishments. And according to Fatai Rolling Dollar, they did not accept money for playing at parties in the early fifties. They relied on being compensated with drinks and food.

Another juju music exponent who made considerable impact on Lagosians in the forties was Theophilus Iwalokun who was noted for being the first exponent to sing juju in his native dialect of Ibereke, Okitipupa, in Ondo State of Nigeria. He died early in 2000 and was given a befitting burial by Lagosians who still remembered the musician's high sense of lyricism and his variant of Lagosian juju, with roots in Isale Eko. Alongside juju music in the early fifties was a musical genre called Agidigbo, which was named after the major instrument of the music. Popular in Lagos, especially at grassroots level, agidigbo was played by Adeolu Akinsanya from Abeokuta. He was popular for his voice, his critical social commentaries that were directed at contemporary Lagos women. The agidigbo is a rectangular box with a round, guitar-like hole that is located on its top, flat face. Over the hole lies a band of five or six flat, steel pegs, their free ends plucked with the thumb and other fingers to create musical notes. The first group broke up and later came up with the Rio Orchestra which also featured Akinsanya on agidigbo

and vocals, with other sidemen playing a wide range of percussion instruments that included bongos, maracas, claves and conga drums. A chorus of singers completed the ensemble.

The arrival of Bobby Benson and the introduction of modern highlife to Lagos by Ghana's Emmanuel Tetteh Mensah changed the direction of music on the Lagos scene when highlife began to dominate with such names as Victor Olaiya, Bobby Benson, Eddy Okonta, and Chief Bill Friday among others. Night spots such as Caban Bamboo, Liddo Bar, Empire Hotel, Club Arcade and many others emerged as a result of highlife which was a nightclub genre. However, juju music bounced back in 1960 when, apparently influenced by the highlife of that period, I.K. Dairo (deceased) brought back the dominant large ensemble juju style that was gradually on its way out by even increasing personnel and extending the instrumental configuration. As an innovation, Dairo introduced the accordion to the juju style of his 10-man Blue Spots Band. However, juju experienced further development from the 60s through the 80s as it was transformed from a neo-traditional form to urban music. And those who effected this transformation included Commander Ebenezer Obey, King Sunny Ade, and Dele Abiodun. The whole throng. GR