



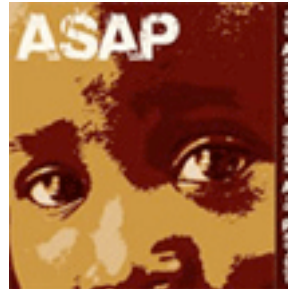
Album of the Week

Reviewed by Mario Quadracci

Various Artists

ASAP: Afrobeat Sudan Aid Project
[Modiba Productions, 2005]

Genre: Afro-beat



Nigeria, 1977 – A thousand soldiers storm a commune to bring a state criminal to justice. They brutalize and rape the compound’s residents and throw an 82-year-old woman through a second-story window. She succumbs to her injuries. The woman is the mother of the man they are after: outlaw Fela Anikulapo Kuti. Kuti’s crime: giving the have-nots of Nigeria a voice against their corrupt military government – Afro-beat.

Afro-beat is raunchy and hypnotic, a blend of traditional African rhythms, jazz, high-life and funk. Infused with political criticism, the music has been the cadence of African social movement for four decades. Silky threads of bass, guitar, percussion and electric piano weave polyrhythmic fabrics stronger than steel. Horn sections punctuate ideas of unity, force and voice. Lyrics are counterattacks and manifestos of progress.

Kuti was imprisoned and repeatedly beaten by the ruling powers of Nigeria but remained immovable in his mission and exact in his words to the end: “The truth should be said before death carries us.” He died in 1997 from complications from AIDS. In Afro-beat, he gave the world a weapon of peace. It is still being used effectively today.

ASAP: Afrobeat Sudan Aid Project was put together by Modiba Productions, an organization founded by two Wesleyan University students to aid in the social and economic empowerment of the African continent. The record is a compilation of tracks by Afro-beat artists and collectives from Europe, Africa and the United States.

One hundred percent of profits from the album’s sales go to organizations providing humanitarian relief to refugees of ethnic cleansing in the Sudan. The suffering of black Africans under the brutal hands of their totalitarian government and Arab militias is beyond tragic and going largely ignored as the Western world’s attention is drawn to more opportunistic problems. An estimated 300,000 people have been murdered, and 1.8 million have been forced from their homes since 2003.

Revolution is about movement, and ASAP’s 12 hard-grooving tracks certainly facilitate it. Two of Kuti’s former band members, Tony Allen and Dele Sosimi, contribute. Allen’s mid-’70s song, “Progress,” features the late high priest himself, Fela Kuti, on sax. The compilation also has contributions from three incendiary modern Afro-beat orchestras from New York – Antibalas, Kokolo and Akoya – as well as contributions from several other international artists.

Buying this album would be money well spent even if the proceeds ended up in pockets

rather than in the aid of suffering people. ASAP is a great introduction to the extensive catalog of Afro-beat (Fela Kuti alone released more than 50 records) and also to the next generation of musicians that have inherited a way to proffer the sacred and move minds, hearts and bodies like a riptide. Buy it for everyone you know.

The compilation is being sold as a download through iTunes or as a CD through True Majority's Web site, which can be accessed through www.modiba.net.