

ANTIBALAS

THE AFROBEAT GOES ON

BY TOM ORR

PHOTOS BY
ROBERT SMITH



BAND ON THE ROOF: Some of the members of the Antibalas Afrobeat Orchestra at their home base in Brooklyn. In front, Luke O'Malley and Duke Amayo; second row, Frank Stribling, Victor Axelrod, Fernando Velez, Dylan Fusillo, Aaron Johnson, Nick Movshon, Phil Ballman, Stuart Bogie, Ernesto Abreu; at rear, Jordan McLean.

Every now and then, one comes across music touted as “not for the casual listener.” To me, the degree of casualness depends on the music itself and the spirit that led to its creation. There is a lot of music around nowadays that, if the unsparing blandness of it is any indication, ought to have the words “for casual listening only” indelibly stamped on it. With that in mind, let me say that it took about 10 seconds to come to the realization that the music of Brooklyn-based Afrobeat band Antibalas was to be a listening experience of a decidedly non-casual variety.

The Antibalas track included on Shanachie’s dead-on compilation *Afrobeat...No Go Die!* grabbed my ears with an opening sound not unlike a blast of thunder or artillery, followed by an organ swell punctuating a startling human outcry that could be one of suffering or celebration. Then the ticking intensity of the Fela Kuti-like groove began, and I was hooked. Once I got my hands on the band’s own *Liberation Afrobeat Vol.1* (which had gone from ep to full-length album to fuller-length album by the time it was released by the Ninja Tune label in 2001), I was beyond hooked. This was a band to truly love, to embrace, and to champion.

In the cd liner notes and accompanying promotional materials, I read of how Antibalas came to be, how vital the sound and spirit of Fela has been in their music and

outlook, the diverse backgrounds of the band’s dozen-plus members and their commitment to Afrobeat as both party music and a force with the power to change things for the better. Of course, none of it would mean a thing if the music didn’t measure up. Well, it more than measured up. It gave my whole being such a sonic surge that by the third track I was scrambling for pen and paper with which to write a rave review. While the extent of Fela’s influence was evident in the lengthy polyrhythmic structures, articulately rough solos and relentless intensity, the music of Antibalas seemed looser, less rigid, more the result of communal input rather than the focused cynicism of a single dominating personality.

Which is not to say that the music of Antibalas is kinder and gentler than Fela’s. Indeed, it would be difficult to find music less commercial. There are no hip-hop beats or guest rappers, no Top 40-friendly tracks, nothing likely to start (much less follow) any mass-market trends. There’s not even many lyrics. It’s music with a groove created by people, not machines. A groove with African origins heard in the tireless jamming of layered percussion, then brought to cathartic levels of

gritty sweetness with interlocked guitars and bass topped by nasty-cool horn and keyboard solos.

Antibalas, which means something along the lines of "bulletproof" in Spanish, is an odd sort of band in certain ways. They play music of a type originally bolstered by Black Power ideology, but they're mostly guys of visibly non-African heritage who look more likely to work at the local pizza parlor than play Afrobeat. On stage, the closest they come to having a front man is Duke Amayo, a dreadlocked fellow of Nigerian descent who does more percussion playing than singing. Their de facto leader plays baritone sax in the five-strong horn section and simply blends in most of the time. When he does step to the mike to address the audience during live gigs, he does so in the manner of a slightly nervous but articulate student who has no desire to take a mandatory speech class until he discovers he has a lot to say.

That leader is Martin Perna. It was Perna who started the band in the late '90s with members from other groove-oriented outfits (the Soul Providers, King Chango) with roots in the Brooklyn artistic community called Williamsburg, Perna whose opinions on the ineptitude of government and authoritarianism in general would make Fela grin approvingly, and Perna who turns out to be my main interview subject as I anticipate seeing Antibalas live for the first time. But the other guys in the band, who are 13 strong on this occasion, are plenty affable and interesting, too. As they begin to trickle into the backstage area of an L.A. club to prepare for their performance, they're chatting it up among themselves, talking of many things musical (later in the evening I would have an insightful off-mike chat about the current state of reggae with keyboardist Victor Axelrod, who does extensive instrumental and production work with the Easy Star label).

Knowing something of Antibalas' reputation as a hot live act despite the fact that they sometimes do without a player or two in such situations, I ask no one in particular if any personnel are missing tonight. When I respond with mock indignation upon learning that there will in fact be absenteeism in the percussion section, I am assured that all will be fine. Horns are lifted from cases, riffs are practiced, onstage plans of attack are decided upon, subjects both crucial and seemingly innocuous come and go, and eventually Martin Perna is able to take time from this preshow ritual to answer some questions.

Tom Orr: How was the band formed? Was it specifically with the intention of creating an Afrobeat band?

Martin Perna: Yeah. It started off small, four years ago, about six or seven members. As soon as the core got started, the nucleus, we started playing around. People got hip to the

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project and after about a year we had to start turning people away. It was getting too big. It took a while to get into it. Afrobeat, the very nature of it, you've got to have a certain kind of personality...being able to submit to the groove. If you're a guitarist who comes from a different background, jazz or something, it's a very different bag. Someone who came from reggae or funk could understand a whole lot better. It took some time to really assemble a group willing to play it for what it is. It's not like I went out and hand-picked everybody. It was pretty magical, the way we came together.

Q: Who do you cite as influences besides Fela?

A: What you hear coming out in the music is mostly Fela, Tony Allen, James Brown. Everybody in the group has their own influences which, when they compose a tune, reflects that. We're into liberation music, free jazz and more traditional African musics—*apala*, highlife, sacred drum rhythms, salsa, Guinean music. With 15 people in the group, you even have some coming from heavy classical backgrounds. Everybody in the group is also involved with other projects, so whatever creative anxieties you might have, there are outlets for it. If something doesn't fit in with Antibalas, they can grab a bunch of musicians from Antibalas and do it somewhere else.

Q: So in that sense it really is a collective, a community.

A: Yeah. There are musicians who didn't know each other before Antibalas who now go off and do all kinds of things together.

Q: Do you like the minimalist stuff that Tony Allen is doing now?

A: I do. It's hard to come to it and compare it to what he was doing with Fela. Totally different bag, but the beat's the same.

Q: When people use terms like "retro" or "old school" to describe your music, how valid is that? Do you mind use of those terms?

A: Yes and no. I think our culture in particular is obsessed with novelty. Rather than trying to become masters of some form, people are constantly trying to make something new without necessari-

ly putting quality into it. For us, it's not a question of trying to come up with something new just for the sake of something new.

Q: So in that respect, to what degree are you accused of being derivative?

A: People can accuse us all they want, but Afrobeat is such a rich music. For it to have died with Fela would be such a shame. Femi Kuti's doing Afrobeat in his own way, Tony Allen in his, a couple of other groups...we're doing it 'cause it needs to be done, but at the same time what made it so popular in Fela's heyday and again now is that it's relevant to what's going on. It's not just a cool dance music. People need to dance, but it's about community and getting people together. It's about struggle, and taking the struggle out of Afrobeat is like taking Jesus out of gospel music or Rastafarianism out of reggae. You can do it, but the themes are so interlinked with the essence of the music. It may not be relevant for us to talk about Africa, but at

Continued on page 38



"You've got to . . . submit to the groove."
Baritone player Martin Perna is a co-founder and the de facto bandleader.

ANTIBALAS · TALKATIF

ANTIBALAS

Continued from page 37

Music appreciation, or music addiction, or whatever sickness one deems it to be, is ultimately subjective. Then again there are albums that due to context, consistency and focus cross a threshold of undeniable excellence. From my admittedly biased perspective, *Talkatif* makes the grade as an exceptional recording on all fronts.

When *Talkatif*, Antibalas' second studio album, was released in March, the first question to be answered was whether the group's identity would develop from its Afrobeat revival debut, *Liberation Afrobeat*. The first album banked heavily on the Fela sound of the early/mid-'70s. The beauty of *Talkatif* is that while it is clearly made in the tradition of Afrika 70 in terms of instrumentation and rhythm, it doesn't necessarily remind the listener of any of the Black President's specific albums. That occurs to me as a major accomplishment.

Talkatif substantiates the argument that Antibalas can embrace Fela as a primary inspiration without pandering to nostalgia or being patently imitative. Yeah, there's a little harmless referencing of Fela here and there (e.g., the deliberately rough-edged squawks on the sax that Fela loved), but that adds a certain charm.

Talkatif ranges from the storming grooves of longer tracks like "Talkatif" and "Nyash" to more intricate and subtle statements in "Gabe's New Joint" or "N.E.S.T.A. 75." The longer, more intense tracks can hearken to Fela compositions like "Opposite People," but the band defines itself with its shorter numbers, some of which barely exceed three minutes. The whole album is trim at 41 minutes.

Talkatif showcases several outstanding soloists, particularly keyboardist Victor Axelrod, who has a noticeably Fela-influenced style on the ivories, but also a gifted melodic sense. There are also notable solos on the album by trumpeter Jordan McClean, trombonist Aaron Johnson, and group co-founder and baritone sax player Martin Perna.

Percussionist Phil Ballman, who plays trap drums behind six of the album's seven cuts, has in many ways the biggest shoes to fill for an ostensibly Afrobeat ensemble. Tony Allen not only defined the territory in Fela's Afrika 70, he co-created the Afrobeat itself. Ballman and percussionist Dylan Fusillo (who plays trap drums on the title cut only) rise to the challenge in every aspect throughout this release. The percussive backbone of Fusillo and Ballman fits perfectly with Del Stribling's octave-hopping bass lines, which are simultaneously percussive and beautifully melodic compared to any of Fela's bass players.

The contributions of vocalist/percussionist Duke Amayo are also worth mentioning. Amayo's Femicentric voice is only heard on two of the album's seven tracks ("Talkatif" and "Nyash"), but his Nigerian heritage is essential to the group's legitimacy and the overall feel of the album.

In general, *Talkatif* is a giant step forward from *Liberation Afrobeat* in terms of concept and content—logical track sequencing to a great album package. Ghariokwu Lemi's cover art—Lemi did most of Fela's album covers—expressively depicts the album's contents, and Pat Hamou's design embraces the group's strong connection to Brooklyn.

When considered as a complete artistic statement, *Talkatif* actually speeds past a sizable portion of Fela's work. One must keep in mind that Fela wasn't an album-maker in the traditional sense—his releases often featured only one or two songs, and that's almost a different paradigm of music presentation. With *Talkatif*, Antibalas has put forth a work that, alongside Femi Kuti's *Shoki Shoki* and Tony Allen's *Black Voices*, is a benchmark not only for the modern revival of the genre but the whole history of Afrobeat. Regardless of its commercial success, *Talkatif* will certainly be considered Antibalas' breakthrough album when the history of the group is written.

[www.ninjatune.net]

—Carter Van Pelt

the same time there are many things that Fela sang about—"I.T.T.," "Zombie," "Vagabonds in Power"—that are relevant to the United States. And relevant to the individual backgrounds we come from as well.

Q: Were you prepared for the degree of critical acclaim you've received?

A: I don't know if you can ever really be prepared. There's really no harsher critics than who's in the band. We'll have a show that's completely sold out, everybody clapping, everybody sweaty, and then after some of us are calling each other out. With love, but it's "we messed up here," "you missed a cue," "your speech wasn't as on point as it should be."

Q: Speaking of frankness, there's a kind of manifesto/mission statement in the liner notes of *Liberation Afrobeat* that calls tv, fashion and professional sports "excrement." Who wrote that?

A: I did.

Q: You ever take any heat for your opinions?

A: Yeah, from the band [Laughter].

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yeah, the band has grown a lot, but a lot of the initial efforts came from me because in any project there's a catalyst, a core. Everybody in the group is pretty much on the same wavelength, but there's definitely differences of opinion as far as methodology...

Q: Ideology?

A: Yeah.

Q: What do you want the listener to get out of the music of Antibalas?

A: First of all, just the joy of being alive. We hope that's transmitted, and a true respect for life that's missing in the world. There's a lot of musicians involved in music just for the whole vanity aspect of it. The music is a vehicle for their ego. I hope that when people hear our music, they'll know we're just normal, down-to-earth human beings just trying to build this thing together. And at the same time trying to inspire and motivate. I feel like there's so many factors in life, especially in America, things are institutionalized to the point where people become apathetic. People become indifferent. We try to shatter that in some way. Hopefully we inspire people like "hey, I may not be a musician but I like the way they got together. So many different-looking people onstage, people of different backgrounds." And that's the main thing. There's so many different ways to live, whether it's alternatives in music,

(N I N J A T U N E Z E N C D 6 6 , 2 0 0 2)





Antibalas Afrobeat Orchestra in high gear at S.O.B.'s, New York City, on Nov. 1. The band wore Halloween costumes in the spirit of the season. At left, horn section members Aaron Johnson, Jordan McLean and Martin Perna; at right, Gabe Roth, guitar, Frank Stribling, bass, Amayo plays congas, Dylan Fusillo on percussion.

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alternatives in food... we’re being squeezed in general. By corporations, by the government. Sort of being put in boxes, and it’s a very dangerous thing. A lot of it is about looking for alternatives that make sense instead of just what’s put in front of you. If we wanted to make money, we’d just have a bunch of samplers and there’d be three of us on the stage, but that’s not the way we’re doing it. To make music the way we see it should be done rather than the most efficient or cost-effective way, I think that’s the sort of thing everybody needs to do whether they’re cooks or teachers or artists or whatever. Stop looking at the bottom line and start looking at the integrity of the project, whatever it is.

Q: So is the ideology of Antibalas political, or is it just common sense?

A: Well, it’s a little of both. Common sense *is* political. There’s no common sense in war, but people assume because that’s the way we’ve been doing it, that’s the way it needs to be done. We’re musicians, and I don’t think any of one of us wants to be any kind of ideological leader, but at the same time it’s cool when people get the message and are inspired by it. Our goal is to inspire people. Not like to say “do this and do that because we say it,” but do something. You

hear people talk about how in an ideal society, things should be like this and this. And you know in their hearts they have a sense of justice and equality, but through one reason or another they might feel it’s OK to compromise that.

Q: Has there been any pressure to commercialize your music, make it more contemporary-sounding?

A: No, not really. Ninja Tune has been really supportive of us just doing our own thing. They were the ones who came to us in the beginning. We never tried to sell our music to anybody. The minute someone comes to us and says “OK, you have to cut this down to three and a half minutes,” there’ll be 15 middle fingers up in the air [much laughter]. The whole thing with Afrobeat is that it’s not in a hurry. That paralyzed Fela a little bit, especially in the United States in terms of radio play. But this music, we’re not gonna dumb it down. There are solos every night that are longer than the average pop song, and that might just be one person’s solo. But if it takes them that long to say what they’ve got to say, then that’s what they get.

Q: Sharpen people’s attention spans a little bit.

A: Exactly! A lot of it is about pushing the bounds of what the listener is used to. We have this capacity to process a lot of information, but it’s atrophied. The shorter the tunes are, the shorter people’s attention spans are.

Q: When there are lyrics in the songs, do they come about before or after the music is written?

A: It all depends on the tune. There are a lot of tunes written by one person then brought to the group, where there’s maybe a melody and a bass line and a general arrangement. But the lyrics, so far, have been the hardest thing to flesh out because that’s the thing that’s most up for interpretation or misinterpretation. But as time goes on the lyrics in a tune get more clearly defined. So far, most of the lyrics have been written by Amayo. But sometimes I’ll write the tune and give it a title. Like the tune “Dirt and Blood” was an in-

Continued on page 40

ANTIBALAS

Continued from page 39

strumental for two years, then Amayo wrote some lyrics that fit.

Q: Some of the lyrics seem almost extemporaneous, like they're meant to fit in with the music in a way only spontaneity can achieve.

A: Yeah, but now the process is more integrated. At the beginning we didn't have anyone who was an out-and-out vocalist. Before Amayo started singing he was playing conga. So that's been the hardest part of the music. It's still got some catching up to do.

Q: Even though the music is largely instrumental, I think it speaks volumes. Does the new album (the not-released-at-the-time *Talkatif*) follow that path also?

A: There's more vocals on it. Plus the production, it's not slick in a Hollywood way, but the arrangements are tighter. More written out, more set out, making more sense moving from part to part.

Q: How many in the group have spouses, kids?

A: Just two people in the group have children. There's a lot of different ages in the group. But as we get older, more of us are starting to think in that direction. It's like, "Wow, how we gonna do that? We gotta start putting some money away." [Laughter]

Q: That's all the questions I have. Anything you want to add?

A: Well, it's really exciting that people are paying attention to Afrobeat. Even if people didn't interview us and just wrote about Fela, that'd make a lot of us just as happy.

With the business of the interview concluded, I move on to the pleasure of Antibalas playing live. Their percussion foundation is indeed perfectly solid, with Phil Ballman and Dylan Fusillo expertly tag-teaming drumset and *chekere* duties, Ernesto Abreau tearing it up on congas and Amayo providing high end on bells and blocks in between his commanding vocal turns. The horn section—saxophonists Perna and Stuart Bogie, trumpeters Jordan McLean and Todd Simon and trombonist Aaron Johnson—excel both as a unit and as soloists, unleashing blasts of sound that could topple the walls of Jericho in an instant. The place is packed and hardly anyone is sitting still. In every corner of the club the sound permeates, making bodies move, yes, but no doubt also opening minds, stirring souls and rousing restless spirits. ★

ANTIBALAS MANIFESTO

No amount of money, violence,
or good intention can make
the world a better place.

For true change to happen,
the hearts of each and every
human being must evolve.

Respect and understanding must
replace greed and egotism as the
fundamentals by which we live.

Talkatif is dedicated
to people all over the earth
who create positive change
by changing themselves.

(From *Talkatif* liner notes)

Antibalas Side Projects By Carter Van Pelt

Part of the fun of exploring the work of Antibalas is the healthy dose of side projects associated with the group. This extends into the Desco back catalog of soul/funk revival and the current Dap Kings project, which includes Antibalas co-founder/guitarist/producer Gabe Roth, bassist Del Stribling and keyboardist Victor "Ticklah" Axelrod.

Several Antibalas players have strong interests in reggae—notably Axelrod—whose outstanding *Roots Combination* album was one of the better reggae releases of 2001. Ticklah's *Dub Side of the Moon* album is due shortly and is highly anticipated. A 7" single on Brooklyn's Redbud hip-hop label features two Axelrod productions, "Iso Strikky Vikkly" and "Rude Meat." This is the kind of deephead dub that can be played optionally at 33 or 45 rpm or with your choice of pitch control. (If you think I should lay off the red buds while I'm writing reviews, please contact my editor.)

Antibalas' guitarist Dave Hahn is the force behind *Dub Is A Weapon*, another Brooklyn-based reggae project with a beautifully packaged DIY ep to its name. The four-song disc features a West London-influenced steppers sound,

but it utilizes live musicians and includes a horn section. The production incorporates the musicianship of Victor Rice, Larry McDonald, Eddie Ocampo and Antibalas members Victor Axelrod and Aaron Johnson. Hahn recently produced tracks with Rob Simeon and Congo Ashanti Roy included on a similar ep [www.dubisaweapon.com; (646) 234-4896]

Antibalas' lead vocalist Duke Amayo also heads his own Afrobeat group called the Fu-arkist-ra. Last year, he released a set of live "sketches" to preview a forthcoming studio release. The first fully produced track to emerge is "Fist of Flower." The song emotes a beautiful kind of melancholy that differentiates the singer's work from that with Antibalas. The vibe seems to draw influence from the more meditative and philosophical side of Afrobeat—more in the vein of Fela's Egypt 80-era work. [www.fuarkistra.com; (212) 802-7920/(718) 486-9660]

[If you contact any Antibalas member about a side project, tell them you read about it in *The Beat*.]



Drummer Tony Allen, who put the beat in Afrobeat, continues to push the envelope.

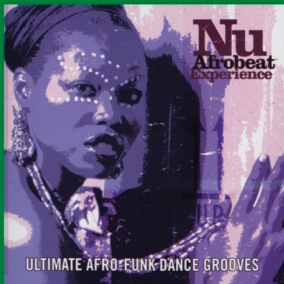
THE AFROBEAT EXPLOSION CONTINUES

BY CARTER VAN PELT

PHOTO BY BERNARD BENANT

Three very significant Afrobeat releases hit stores in September and October and are all worth investigating.

Tony Allen's *Home Cooking* (Comet-France) is a hard Afrobeat statement from the music's rightful co-founder. Allen's relationship with producer/turntablist Doctor L continues, but production credits are also shared with Unsung Heroes. For the most part, Allen seems to regard Afrika 70-style Afrobeat as big-band excess, but the addition of horns on several tracks is a welcome throwback. By stripping the music down to its minimal component—Allen's signature call and response between bass and snare—Afrobeat takes on its most progressive form as a dance-floor catalyst. Delicious rap vocals by Ty and soul references on several tracks even manage to give the album hip-hop credibility. Use of acoustic bass, vibraphone and horns elsewhere gives it a jazz flavor. The addition of talking drum on some tracks—something entirely absent from Fela's original Afrobeat—is also a fascinating development. On the whole, this is Maestro Allen's best work, post-Fela.



In a similarly progressive vein is Shanachie's *Nu Afrobeat Experience*, a 13-song set of contemporary grooves by artists including Tony Allen, Dele Sosimi, Duro Ikujenyo, as well as a host of others previously unknown to this writer. Some of the tracks on this set steer into the Afrohouse territory, which is probably fine unless you want to split hairs on definitions of Afrobeat, but the rest are solid, contemporary Afrobeat. Of note, the last track features Olufunmi, a female Nigerian artist with a great track called "Allelujah Amen." This is a good set, every bit as good as the first disc in this series.

The long-awaited Fela tribute compilation, *Red Hot + Riot*, arrived in stores right after Fela's birthday in October. The collection is produced by Andres Levin, John Carlin and Paul Heck as a part of the Red Hot AIDS fundraising/public awareness series. The all-star cast includes a who's who of pop, r&b and hip-hop—from D'Angelo, Macy Gray and Sade to international figures like Jorge Ben and Baaba Maal. These contributions are augmented by the presence of Afrobeat artists Femi Kuti, Tony Allen and Antibalas, as well as major African figures like Cheikh Lo and Ray Lema.

Though not all of the music is Afrobeat by any stretch of the imagination, Afrobeat purists will appreciate tracks like Femi Kuti's hoppin' remake of his father's masterpiece "Water No Get Enemy;" Cheikh Lo's mothergrooving medley of "Shakara" and "Lady;" Femi, Nile Rodgers, Roy Hargrove and Money Mark's take on "Zombie;" and the stunning rendition of "Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Am" by Baaba Maal, Taj Majal, Kaouding Cissoko and Antibalas. Of the same category of production, Res, Ray Lema, Baaba Maal, Positive Black Soul and Archie Shepp join the great Tony Allen for a remake of "No Agreement."

While these tracks are intriguing in and of themselves, a key aspect of *Red Hot + Riot* is that straight Afrobeat cuts are presented in conjunction with several street-level hip-hop adaptations. Several involve full frontal sampling of Fela's (or more accurately Tony Allen's) original beats.

The efforts of artists like ?uestlove, D'Angelo, Dead Prez, Mixmaster Mike and Money Mark, among others, make a move towards closing the Felawareness credibility gap in the hip-hop community. Afrobeat is one of the most infectious dance rhythms ever devised, and it begs the question why Fela hasn't been more widely sampled. For the good of humankind, let's hope the floodgate is now opened.

Red Hot + Riot is sequenced to give it a front-end load of hip-hop vibes, with "Colonial Mentality" and "Kalakuta Show" offering their potential as rhythmic building blocks. Several cuts listed on the album as covers are virtually unrecognizable compared to the Fela originals. "Gentleman" by Meshell Ndegeocello and Djelimity Tounkara is indecipherable with the exception of some chorus vocals. Yerba Buena! and Lemine do a version of "Colonial Mentality" that is rhythmically removed from the original in a similar manner. And while it might seem like a shame to lose Tony Allen's drumbeats on any adaptation of an Afrika 70 track, each interpretation ultimately finds legitimacy through passionate delivery.

The rappers draw inspiration from Fela's lyrics to devise their own, as illustrated by the brilliant adaptation of "Shuffling and Shmiling" performed by Dead Prez with Jorge Ben, Talib Kweli, Bilal and Positive Force. The backing track is built by Roy Hargrove, Money Mark and a cast of Cuban players with Femi's horn section. Stic from Dead Prez hits the microphone with the memorable line "religion is like prison, keep the people locked up in different divisions, some of them promise you heaven, but I see a whole lot of bullshitism-schism."

The album's most stunning track and its final statement is delivered by Baaba Maal, Taj Majal, Kaouding Cissoko and Antibalas via a remake of "Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Am." This is the first time I've heard a Fela composition significantly improved from the original, and the original in this case was deeply inspired. The addition of Cissoko's mesmerizing kora to the production is beyond my ability to describe. Having these particular artists in collaboration is the perfect metaphor for Afrobeat's journey "there and back again" and its establishment as an international music. This cut brings beautiful closure to a very important album.

Red Hot + Riot has great potential to draw the interest of new (younger) listeners, regardless of whether it alienates the purists from time to time. *Red Hot + Riot* seems to prove that Afrobeat, or the fundamental rhythmic elements that help define Afrobeat, can operate in many different contexts, with the common denominators of ass-shaking and fist-raising ever present. Only through this type of crossover effort will Afrobeat really make the impact it has long seemed destined to make, and that's something to celebrate.

A final note on the political tip: The money raised via an organization like Red Hot to fight AIDS is only a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of money that governments can and should leverage towards the battle—in Africa and around the world. "Feel-good" projects by recording artists are only symbolic unless those artists urge people (citizens) to push for real policy change in their government(s).



RED HOT + RIOT SEEMS TO PROVE THAT AFROBEAT CAN OPERATE IN MANY DIFFERENT CONTEXTS, WITH THE COMMON DENOMINATORS OF ASS-SHAKING AND FIST-RAISING EVER PRESENT.