ROCHEREAU IN CONCERT

Review by Jiml Horl

Tabu Ley Rochereau, Mbilia Bel, L'Africa International and a troupe of lithe and sexy 17-year-old shake dancers presented a motor bootie affair at L.A.'s Country Club Feb. 22, the first ever major live Congolese music show in Southern California.

The lounges of Las Vegas seemed to be on many people's minds as they pondered the rich visuals of dancers and band who seemed to love theatricality and Show Biz. But L'Africa International, the crack back-up unit, rocked too hard to really fit into the cultural slackness and anomie embodied by that anti-oasis in the desert. With a sure sense of dynamics, the band would set up their rockers quietly and then take off with a roar, the drummer leaning into it and the horns shouting in unison, in classic Congolese two-part song construction style.

While the dancers, who had more moves than Magic Johnson going to the hoop, demonstrated an unstoppable exuberance, Rochereau himself was acting the 25-year showbiz vet, restrained in voice and dance, leaving the sweat to the youths.

Perhaps it was that restraint and the rigors of the road that, with a couple of exceptions, showed his highly-touted vocalizing unable to live up to its hype. His protege, Mbilia Bel, also seemed to be a little stiff, until she started dancing, revealing herself to have more joints than most (at least more than I). Her vocals, particularly on slower songs, seemed very Middle Eastern and moving.

As with Sunny Ade, the joy and rhythm overcame language barriers. The band was tremendous, showing itself capable of many moods, sounding at times like a highlife carnival band, other times near second-lining like Crescent City natives, other times almost rocksteady, and always, locking into a groove. The sense of celebration enraptured the crowd, which danced all night in the spirit of the music and in love with the spectacle.

The warmth of African music transcends cultural barriers, creating empathetic art, capable not just of entertaining, but of touching the soul. Rochereau has touched the souls of Africans for many years, and is now reaching out to America.

Photo courtesy of Shanachie Records
from Latin-influenced dance-hall rhythms and cha-chas to a more modern, popular sound with elements of showmanship in its presentation.

The album contains six tracks. The opener, "Gagner Gagner," (Winning, Winning) is a full-tilt boogie, with a bouncy rhythm and call-and-response chorus. There are two tracks from previous releases on Genidia import, "En Amour Ya Pas De Calcul" (In Love There is no Calculation) and "Es Yo Wapi" (Where Are You?), both largely unavailable in the U.S., and both very good. The latter, and "Loyenge," feature the celestial M'Bilia Bel, Rochereau's angel-faced protege and rising female African vocalist. Her vocal style is modeled closely on that of Tabu Ley, always light but strong at the same time. The remaining tracks, "Ibeba" and "King Sa" feature Tabu Ley with his uncredited, but excellent, backup singers providing the harmonies and responses.

Shanachie Records is to be congratulated (and supported) for taking a chance on releasing what is a virtually unknown quantity in the U.S., despite Rochereau's immense popularity in Africa and Europe. Rochereau has released over forty albums in Africa, but just try to find one in the U.S. (Actually, Makossa/African Record Centre has released a few here, but promotion and distribution efforts are minimal at best.) This music should appeal not only to the African and reggae music audience, but also to soca, salsa and other Caribbean music fans as well. And to have it available on a domestic label, with clean production and pressing, is a delight. —CG Smith

**ALBUM REVIEW**

**PERAMBULATOR: FELA KUTI & EGYPT 80**

(THR Records, Nigeria, 1983)

The Black President and Chief Priest Fela Anikulapo Kuti with the 23-piece Egypt 80 band and guest artist Lester Bowie in tow, comes screaming out of Lagos with a new Nigerian release. Corruption in high places has always been Fela's primary target, and this lp is no exception. Recorded just before the military takeover in Nigeria on Jan. 1, 1984, the title track condemns wealthy Nigerians for draining the country's resources by going in and out (perambulating) of the country, spending Nigeria's currency, and ignoring traditional medicine in favor of European doctors. Fela's rant is punctuated by the chorus singing "No solution," and propelled by a driving uptempo rhythm. The flipside, "Frustration," is an instrumental in a slower, funkier groove, an almost Bo Diddley, "Who Do You Love" type rhythm, featuring a tortured trumpet solo from Bowie, of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, who has appeared on at least four other Fela releases to date. No American distribution has been spotted yet—my copy was sent from Nigeria by a friend of a friend—but if you see it, grab it. —CG Smith

**RECENT AFRICAN RELEASES**

Briefly noted... The Flamingos of Ghana, It's Time for Highlife (Makossa): Formerly the Super Sweet Talk, this extremely accomplished and versatile band was recorded live on their recent U.S. tour. This is the real thing—contemporary Ghanaian highlife as it is played in Africa. In concert, no song was less than 30 minutes long, presented in an energy-conserving style developed for all-night gigs. This band is about as tight as they come, playing as a single instrument... Toure Kunda, Amadou-Tilo (Celluloid): Self-conscious fusion, sounding sometimes like Sun Ra, sometimes Oriental, and once like the Ventures, but never settling into a solid, identifiable African sound... Mohammed Malcolm Ben, African Feeling (Sterns): Speedy Ghanaian highlife; political lyrics in English are a little obvious... Diana & Les Bobongo Stars, Marguerida [Angola] (Safari Ambiance): Diana ap-

**MAKOSA RECORDS: Where African Music is Supreme**

**Makossa Records**

**Distributed Exclusively by African Record Centre Distributors Ltd.**

1194 Notstrand Ave., Bklyn, N.Y. 11225 • Tel.: 212-493-4500

**Check Out These Other Classic**

- Fela Ransome-Kuti and the Africa '70 with Ginger Baker Live (M2700)
- Franco et Le TP OK Jazz a Paris (M2377)
- Tabu Ley et L'Afrisa International Vol. 5 (M6005)
- Sam Mangwana-Wakawaka (M6000)
- Fela Ransome-Kuti - London Scene (M2399)
- Zaire Various Artist Vol. 3 (M2709)
- Zaire Vol. 2 with Dr. Nico (M2707)
- Kinshasa Superstars Various Artists (M2705)

Big 16 Page Catalog Available. Send $2.00

**All Makossa Record & Group Labels Are Available At Better Stores Or The African Record Centre Stores**