

# the AFRICAN REGGAE PHENOMENON

The African fascination with reggae began as soon as the first records from Jamaica's finest reached the Mother Continent in the early '70s. Local bands began to incorporate *Jah* music into their repertoires, covering hit songs by Bob Marley and Jimmy Cliff and adding their own indigenous musical flavorings. *Black Star Liner: Reggae From Africa* (Heartbeat, 1983), a various artists compilation of groups from Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia, was the first hint to American ears that African musicians were listening to and putting their own twist on reggae. Some artists, like Nigeria's Sonny Okosun, had hits that used the steady heartbeat riddim. But it was not until the advent of Alpha Blondy from the Ivory Coast that reggae, African style, went international. It was Blondy who once told me that "reggae music is another African music."

Reggae has become one of the dominant Pan-African forms. Toure Kunda from Senegal has experimented with a reggae crossover sound, while newcomer Adioa has released a slick, progressive album on Mango. In Nigeria, reggae is so big that some critics fear it may overwhelm the local styles. As Roger Steffens reported in Vol. 9 #2 of *The Beat*, the likes of Majek Fashek, the Mandators, Tera

Kota and Ras Kimono dominate the youth consciousness and the charts. Roger's conversation with the mysterious and charismatic Fashek the Rainmaker is one of the two features in this section.

Few recent concerts have captured my imagination and dancing feet as much as Lucky Dube's Los Angeles debut. Combining vocal chops rivaled by few and enough energy to power a medium-size city, Dube delivered across the board. The former South African *mbaqanga* singer has become the top pop star in his native land; his *Slave* album has sold more than any

release in South African pop history. Jim Gardner's insightful interview with Dube is the other half of this section, an honest and truth-seeking introduction to one of the contenders for the hearts and minds of the international reggae family.

African reggae has taken its place alongside its Jamaican and British brothers as one of the most potent forms of music on the planet. How many more young Blondys, Fasheks and Dubes are living and grooving in the great urban centers like Lagos, Abidjan, Soweto, Dakar and Nairobi or the villages not found on most maps? As Bob once said, only time will tell.

—Tom Cheyney



PHOTO BY JAN SULLZMAN/PHANTOM PHOTOS

**Senegalese artist Maxidlick Adioa is just one of the current crop of young African hopefuls using reggae's heartbeat rhythm to spread their messages.**