VERSION POSSE

jack barron looks to the bright continent

AFRICA

SEEMS THE right place to look into the jaws of '84 because there is enough fresh breath here for it to be the music of next year. Ah, but what does it all mean? Makossa, fuji, apala, highlife, soukous, waka, juju — hold it, this is a good place to start since everyone must have heard some Sunny Ade by now.

The King of juju might be synonymous because of the breaks in this business. But Ebenezer Obey's Hammersmith Palais concert last month was so EXTRA it should make one circumspect about hailing anyone from Africa as the best. . .

True, the King and the Chief Commander are at the moment undoubted rulers of Yoruban rhythms in Nigeria. But there's a whole generation of young, sharp exponents of juju making waves in Lagos presently which will be felt here in due course. And one name on everyone's lips is. . .

SEGUN ADEWALE AND HIS SUPERSTARS INTERNATIONAL 'Adewale Play for Me' (Sterns 1003)****½

IN THE October issue of *Africa Music*, Segun was quoted as wanting to prove to the rest of the world that the Sunny Ade myth is not a flash in the pan. And that *"there is definitely more and hotter stuff from home"*.

This elpee, the Crown Prince's eighth and his first official British release, goes part way to putting Segun's music where his mouth is. In sections, 'APFM' contains some of the steamiest and dreamiest juju I've tripped over all year. Especially those songs which embody the gent's vision of Yo-Pop.

As you might have guessed, Yo-Pop is short for Yoruban, erm, Pop. In reality it's half a new sub-genre and half a smart marketing ploy to distinguish Segun's offering from the synchro and miliki systems of Ade and Obey. Described as a fusion of African percussions, highlife and 'the real jazz' (whatever that is), this hybrid incorporates the usual juju instrumental army.

Talking drums chatter excitedly like gossips, guitars galofe spurt gleaming string stings while choral calls and responses rise and fall, implode, get twisted, and re-emerge in spectacular profusion.

On paper, this sounds like familiar brew, but in fact Segun's juju scampers a lot faster than the gentle recorded pace of either the King or Chief. The Superstars bring the swagger of impatient youth to the idiom. Sometimes it works wonderfully well.

If the talking drums of the African Beats and the Reformers, on disc anyway, are the Peggy Archers of juju, then the Superstars percussionists are more in the mould of Hilda Ogden. And you know how she yaks!

Sprinkled with English (inane) lyrics dovetailing effortlessly into Yoruban epithets, the songs are extended affairs which never run short of ideas. There's always something to take delight in; from glooping synth lines through the swish of shekeres to Segun's voice.

And what a voice! Rich and canyon resonant, Adewale appears to have a greater larynx range than Ade and Obey combined. It especially somersaults on 'Yo-Pop' which is rhythmically reminiscent of 'Synchro System' only done at twice the speed.

The track would be an astute choice for a single as it's extravagantly steeped in motion and hence could be the first juju song to infiltrate the nation's discos in a serious way.

Whether Segun is as staggering live as he is reputed to be we'll find out in January.

KATI ELICLEAN NAMANONO 'Amalabi' (Earthworks ELP 2003)****½

AS YOU might almost expect from a man whose name means Clean Cat, Kati is an arch exponent of the caged cajun-like jive of the Zulus.

He comes from the tribal state of Kwa Zulu, a territory set up by the apartheid regime of South Africa, and one which incidentally refuses politically to accept the sham designation of 'independent homeland'.

Like the other bogus states masterminded by the cretinous SA government, Kwa Zulu is mostly peopled by old men, women and children. Adult males, of course, are elsewhere slaving away in the gold mines which underwrite the apartheid atrocity. Pass laws dictate they can only see their families occasionally.

Kati grew up in such an environment where pubescent boys have to shoulder the burden of looking after mum, kids and ancient relatives, as well as herding cattle for food and milk.

Understandably, like many youths, Kati decided to use his prodigious skill in traditional guitar playing and his hurly-burly voice as a passport to stardom so as to avoid having to go underground to live.

If you checked Earthworks' 'Zulu Jive' collection, you'll know just how addictive this music is: pumping bass, guitars like mandolins, vituperative vocals and, in this case, squall sax all hooked into a country beat of Big proportions.

Most of Kati's songs are inspired by the natural obsessions which haunt migrant workers when they are forced away from home. Their existence being devoid of wives and children, the workers take solace in their usual vices — prostitution, drink, gambling and sudden violence.

With VD, cirrhosis of the liver, empty pockets and possibly a slashed body available as fun, it's little wonder that the workers dream about the good life back on the krall and the tribal women in abundance.

Hence, for example, 'Inyanga' is a tale about how Kati would like to find a witch doctor so he can get a lucky charm to help him woo the lady he loves. Makes sense, a little magic can go a long way when your environment is gloomy.

Mind you, not all the songs are romantic or nostalgic. On 'Amagwala', which means 'Cowards', Kati asks why it is that as soon as a police van appears everybody runs. While 'Amalabi' exhorts to stop talking and forget about having a nice time because the people are at war.

If you liked the cajun of the film *Southern Comfort*, you'll love this. Even more wild than the American variety, 'Amalabi' makes Talcy Malcy look like the clutz cultural imperialist he undoubtedly is.

HI-LIFE INTERNATIONAL 'Hi-Life International' (Sterns 1002)***½

SUBTITLED IN the press release 'Music To Wake The Dead', this record embodies all the necessary Z's to unpeel the eyes of the most diseased zombie on its prime cuts: zap, zip and, er, well you get the picture.

Funnily enough, apart from being a particularly gormless Haitian desperate to snuff it in order to get onto the George A Romero artistic ambulance of film, a zombie is also a snake god in West Africa.

Stranger still, the leader of International comes from West Africa, Ghana to be precise. However he looks less like a serpentine omniscient on the cover and more like a dapper off-duty NHS doctor.

And if there's one vital organ in this body of work, it's definitely a strong but clinical pulse. Like many brands of Soca, International's blend of trumpet and sax charged highlife and soukous is a difficult vinyl pet to pamper.

Stick it on the record player and you immediately want to get up and do something — anything. The music irritates the feet and thoughts, it makes you want to socialise.

Although there are some instrumental benedictions which bless the record with grace like the clean breeze tenor of Frank Williams, what this outing seems to lack is a sense of light and shade.

Even the lachrymose lyrical story of 'For Better For Worse' comes across like a riot in a carnival to my ears; there's no corresponding melodic catharsis of the blue emotions the song is trying to exorcise.

Anyhow, let me mention this in passing . . . I first saw Hi-Life International at the Africa Sounds event at Ally Pally in honour of ANC leader Nelson Mandella during the summer.

Apart from the political import, the festival showcased just how many excellent Bright Continent bands live in Britain yet remain relatively unsung. Particularly Dudu Pukwana's Zila and Julian Bahula's Jazz Afrika.

In the context of that gig, International were hugely enjoyable. Likewise this record is best kept for those times when you want to liven up a party of a few thousand people.

TOURE KUNDA 'Amadou Tilo' (Celluloid French Imp CEL 6646)****¾

I KNOW virtually nothing about Toure Kunda except they come from Senegal, are based around (I think) a trio of singers, and that this is their third elpee to come out of France.

Nonetheless, the striking aspect about this pristine platter is the dazzling diversity of styles it features. One minute you're listening to an intricate concoction of vibes, voices and massed drums, the next you're off on a funked-up, brass blistered, elephant cakewalk kind of experience.

Altogether different from the other albums reviewed here, like Pierre Akendengue's 'Mando' the sound is one of immense sophistication — glassy smooth and voluptuously varied.

French and Senegalese translations are included but since I'm proficient in neither language, the meanings of the songs will forever remain a mystery to me. In a major sense, though, that doesn't really matter since this is one of those rare records which musically kisses the sublime.

Apparently, Kunda's debut record was exclusively a reggae outing. I'm glad that they haven't repeated that experiment here in view of the batch of strong material currently pumping out of Jamaica. These slates will be dissected in the near future. . .

More Albums

SEX SEX SEX 'Sex Sex Sex' (New Rose NR 220 French Import)****

THERE ONCE was a fellow, name of Eric Debris, who sang and composed for three of the best French groups ever, namely Metal Urbain, Dr Mix And The Remix and, uh, Sex Sex Sex.

Unfortunately Sex Sex Sex [illegible] usual when dealing with daredevil Debris, the wait has been worth it.

[illegible] tradition of their spiritual ancestors, identified above, crawling out from under rock'n'roll as we know it to [illegible] garage pop idiom that espouses repetition as Godhead and pulp-porno-a-go-go conceptual modes as king.

It's weird stuff, granted, and a whole lot of fun into the bargain. Strolling in with 'Sexa Nova', something of a theme song, Sex Sex Sex lay down their merrily gamboling and surreptitiously infectious beat immediately, this time taking on a latino pseudo-disco disguise that is so ludicrous it works. Right down to a terribly corny Spanish guitar break, everything is perfect and eminently danceable.

'Motorway's Way' follows, built on a tenuously escalating guitar strum that is calm, controlled and [illegible] relishes so much.

It's a trance of cheesy guitar and random vocals [illegible] Alan Vega, Sex Sex Sex are not afraid to mess with success or their influences and with this crew all that's [illegible] barbed wire fence, and *that's* down.

Sex Sex Sex invite one to place one's head into their cement mixer of noise and do the twist. They're cheap wallpaper in the Habitat of pop, a fly in the ointment and a joy to behold. Damp and curled at the edges, Sex Sex Sex are simply a piece of sexploitation of the worst kind and loving it.

RALPH TRAITOR

THE BOLLOCK BROTHERS 'Live Performances' (Charly BOLL 102)*

THEIR NAME may be [illegible] McLaren, Jock McDonald might think he's the swindler of the post-punk, pre-Batcave [illegible] McLaren got away with it because he made A MILLION POUNDS out of the business. Which is about [illegible] more than Jock's pathetically transparent schemes ever have.

Example: Jock signing up the wretched (and sick) Palace intruder Michael Fagin. Side four of this 'official bootleg' purports to be a live recording of Fagin's Batcave gig (although I doubt if any of this was actually recorded live at all).

Malcolm got away with Sid singing, but Jock and Fagin? Forget it! Fagin's vocals are so indescribably awful that he almost makes Jock 'flatter-than-Twiggy' himself sound talented. Almost. His tuneless version of Don McLean's 'Vincent' would seem truly appalling even on a Kenny Everett 'Worst Records Of All Time' compilation.

[illegible] versions of Sex Pistols songs while, on the other two, the Bollock Brothers supply [illegible] but as worthwhile as a bike with no brakes.

File under JUNK!

JERRY HARRIS

VARIOUS ARTISTS 'Floorshakers' (Kent Records KENT 007)*****

FOR A musical genre that has been so mercilessly plundered, and hardly ever praised, Northern Soul will probably remain a mystery to most people. Thankfully, through a series of intelligently compiled records, Kent are attempting to open a few people's eyes (and ears) to something a bit more authentic.

The cheek of Paul Weller, who blatantly stole the structure and chorus of the [illegible] goes to show how fruitful this area has been for latter day pop 'stars'. Marilyn, Boy [illegible] guilty of plagiarising the sound.

But, finally, to this [illegible] time, is the *ultimate* in uptempo Northern fodder that's graced dancefloors from Hinckley to Wigan and Cleethorpes. The names and titles may mean nothing to you but I strongly suggest you buy this LP and enjoy an absolute wealth of music.

Willie Hutch's 'The Duck', Earl Jackson's 'Soul Self Satisfaction', Earl Grant's 'Hide Nor Hair' — they've all been sought after delights for some time, but the classic amongst classics has just got to be Jackie Lee's 'Darkest Days'. It's an eery and beautifully arranged opus which perfectly captures the [illegible] of this style of music on a superb performance.

For all Motown's 25 years [illegible] representation of Sixties soul, easily avoiding [illegible] parody of itself in later years [illegible] cabaret here, it's straight from the heart to your feet.

DAVE HENDERSON

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