

FEMI KUTI

Throughout his prolific career, Femi Kuti has stood as a powerful voice for justice, carrying forward the revolutionary Afrobeat legacy pioneered by his father, Fela Kuti. Known for his unflinching critiques of political corruption and social inequality, Femi's heady mix of funk, jazz and highlife has always been a tool for resistance and change.

But on *Journey Through Life*, his new album out in 2025 via Partisan Records, Femi turns inwards, balancing the political themes that have defined his career with deeply personal reflections on family, life, and inner growth: "I wanted to talk more about me, about my thoughts and the goals and values that have guided me all these years and led me to where I am now. I've never done that on an album before" says Femi.

Femi began his career as a member of Fela's legendary band, Egypt '80, and briefly stepped into the role of frontman when his father was imprisoned on fabricated charges in 1984. In 1986 he left to create his own band Positive Force, and has been forging his own style of Afrobeat ever since, adding doses of R&B, rock, and hip hop to the traditional Yoruba rhythms and jazzy horns. Lyrically, however, his focus has remained firmly on issues of power, oppression, and social injustice, and his activism has extended beyond music through collaborations with organizations like Global Citizen and his role as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador.

"I've always been so political, and I will continue to be, but when I look back, my life has not only been about this. Yes, I get very depressed about my immediate environment and when I travel and I see sadness, but I also see how my music brings joy to people who come to my concert. I am a very homely person, I love my children very much, and I thought it was important for people to see that" says Femi.

The title track encapsulates Femi's introspective journey, with his soaring sax solo mirroring the song's uplifting message. Against a backdrop of sturdy, syncopated rhythms, he encourages listeners to "enjoy and learn from experience/Make the best of your journey through life," all while reflecting on its ephemeral nature.

Despite his more contemplative focus, Femi hasn't turned his back to the wider world, and the politically charged energy that has long been a hallmark of his music is still strong across the album. On "Politics Don Expose Them" he refers back to one of his most famous tracks, 1998's "Sorry Sorry", which — in turn echoing the fierce message of Fela's "Zombie" — claimed there was no difference between the outgoing military regime and the politicians who were about to take power. "So this is just to say, I told you so. Politics has exposed the true character of our politicians, they are just as corrupt and have put us in a very bad predicament" says Femi. In true Kuti style, the biting lyrics are woven into melodious sax lines, impossibly catchy horn riffs, and squelchy synths — truly embodying the spirit of Femi's signature "sweet music with a bitter message."

“After 24 Years”, which has been recorded for the first time with new lyrics after decades of being a fan favorite in Lagos’ New Africa Shrine, echoes similar sentiments, with the chorus powerfully declaring: “after 24 years/with confidence we fit say/These politicians failed the nation” over triumphant horn riffs and a buoyant key motif.

The *New African Shrine*, which Femi runs with his sister Yeni, was established in 2000 to honor Fela’s legacy, and it continues to serve as a place of resistance and proud cultural expression. Femi’s Sunday night performances with his band The Positive Force have become iconic, and every year the Felabration festival celebrates Afrobeat’s impact on post-colonial Africa.

As Femi reflects on his journey so far, he revisits several other old tracks, including three — “Last Mugu,” “Oga Doctor,” and “Think My People Think” — dating back to the early '90s, not only in an effort to preserve his legacy but to reshape it in a way that mirrors the person he has become, both spiritually and musically. “Corruption Na Stealing” for example, initially recorded in 2018 for *One People One World*, re-emerges with a bolder, funkier sound that amplifies its message: “I never liked the mood really, I didn’t like the feeling it left me with. But when we played it live at The Shrine, it was one of the best, so I wanted to capture that feeling for this album” he explains. Similarly, “Shotan”, originally recorded live in 2004, takes on new life in this album with a fresh studio version infused with a raw, punk energy.

While he has always composed all of his own music, this marks the first time he has also been in charge of every aspect of production: “It was very important for me to do it this time, and probably for my future work. I am at a stage where I want to emphasize my creativity, expressing how I truly feel from deep within. I want to delve deeper—spiritually, socially, and politically as well.”

This is particularly clear on “Work on Myself”, where Femi candidly reflects on his feelings of helplessness in the face of global turmoil and his commitment to personal growth as a way to navigate it. “There is so much chaos around me, and sometimes I feel like I have no power to change anything. I feel so helpless, and I know a lot of people around the world feel the same. My way is to keep working on myself, to always become a better person and better musician” says Femi, adding that the moments of self reflection while working on this particular track have helped shape his “mind and soul”: “don’t forget, I am just a medium, I don’t know where the inspiration comes from, the more humble I am the more this ideas will come and and guide my life and prepare me for the future.”

This album is deeply personal for Femi in another way, as it was written while his daughter was going through some serious health issues: “It just made me reflect on a lot of things, and on my journey as a father.” It also follows *Legacy+*, the double album he worked on with his son Made: “Making music with my son reshaped the way I approach everything,” he says. “Each album feeds into the next, and without that experience, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Journey Through Life represents both a continuation and a departure for Femi Kuti. While he remains committed to using his music as a vehicle for political and social change, this album marks a new chapter, one where his inner reflections take center stage. “I think I will keep going in this direction,” he says of his future work. “This album has helped me learn more about myself, and I hope it can inspire others to do the same.”

At 62, Femi stands at a creative crossroads, poised to explore new depths while staying true to the roots that have shaped him. *Journey Through Life* offers a profound and personal reflection on the values, struggles, and triumphs that have defined Femi’s life, both on stage and off.