

FEMI KUTI

Femi Kuti and Positive Force Present
One People, One World

On His Tenth Album, Femi Presents a Message
of Hope and Reconciliation, Without Abandoning the Music's
Relentless Pulse and Revolutionary Lyrics

One People, One World Will Be Released By
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Femi Kuti is the heart and soul of modern Afrobeat. Femi's father, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, created the style - a blend of traditional Nigerian drum patterns, the smooth groove of highlife and American soul, funk and R&B – and took it to the world, inspiring people with insistent dance beats and lyrics bristling with political statements. Afrobeat moved several generations of musicians, in Nigeria and around the world, to follow Fela's dictum and use music as a weapon to fight for justice and freedom. Femi and his band, Positive Force, are at the forefront of that movement, continually expanding the music's vocabulary, adding hints of punk and hip-hop to the sound, while maintaining its traditional roots and political message.

When he's home in Nigeria, Femi and his band play at The Shrine, the dancehall and concert space he built as a memorial to his father. The club is the eye of the global Afrobeat storm, a gathering place for fans old and new, a rallying spot for activists and dancers. As a spokesperson for UNICEF's crusade for the rights of children and an advocate for HIV/AIDS education and prevention, Femi is recognized as a community leader and an inspiration for African resistance to the remnants of colonial mentality and economic hardship.

The Shrine's Sunday Jumps draw more listeners than can possibly fit into the club. "When we built it, there was nothing around The Shrine," Femi says. "Over the years, a neighborhood of homes and businesses sprang up. The Shrine has become one of the most famous places in the country. We keep the price low, so everybody can afford the show." The Shrine allows Femi's music to develop organically, driven by his weekly interactions with the alternative cultural and political voices of his fans, feelings that are then amplified by the music.

One People, One World sees Femi returning to the music's African roots. Hints of reggae, highlife, soul, R&B and other African, Caribbean and African American flavors go swirling through the mix, adding depth and complexity to the arrangements, but the influences don't distract from Femi's signature sound. "When I was a boy, I listened to funk, highlife, jazz, folk songs, classical music and my father's compositions, so you will hear those things in the music, but everything on this record comes strictly from my heart and soul. Like Africa itself, Afrobeat has endless possibilities within its structure. As we play live at The Shrine, the songs evolve, absorbing the energy of the audience. It's like painting, with the changing hues and

tones of the dancers coloring the music. When we take it into the studio, you hear all of those influences moving together.”

One People, One World is pure Afrobeat, with the potent horn lines Femi created for the band punching up the tempo, driving everything forward at a frenetic pace. The new album is still political but, for the first time, there are love songs and celebrations of our common humanity. “Yes, the music is more uplifting, more optimistic,” Femi says. “I’m a father and I love my kids, so I want to give the younger generation a message of hope. Despite all our problems, we can create greatness in our lives.”

Femi recorded most of the album in chaotic Lagos, with musicians from Positive Force, and his son, Omorinmade Anikulapo – Kuti. “My son, Made, is studying music in England at Trinity College, the same place his grandfather Fela Kuti studied, and played piano and bass on many of the tracks,” Femi says. “His contribution brought an intimacy to the sessions. Having Made play with me, and give me advice on the arrangements, was lovely.”

“One People, One World” is a plea for global unity, with a sizzling call and response between the horn section and Femi’s sincere vocal. Awomolo Opeyemi’s rippling soukous guitar, Andrew Aghedo’s reggae-influenced bass line and Ayodele Alaba’s crackling drum kit take the song deeper. “This is a straight forward dance tune,” Femi says. “When you look at what’s going on in Africa, Europe and America, it’s important to keep the dream of unity alive.”

“Africa Will Be Great Again” has a profoundly African melody and a hint of the Caribbean in its syncopated arrangement. Multi-layered percussion, Femi’s soulful organ and the jubilant horns urge us to rise above corruption and dance into a new dawn. “The energy of the horns takes the music to a different level for me. I like short powerful phrases that will propel you to the dance floor.”

Other standouts include the Afrofunk of “Best To Live on the Good Side,” “Evil People,” with its hint of samba, and the secular gospel of “The Way Our Lives Go (Rise and Shine),” a gentle R&B ballad with a jubilant chorus answering Femi’s quiet prayer for peace. Femi’s sax toys with the melody to augment the swing of “Na Their Way Be That.” Then he dances around Opeyemi’s Congolese guitar work and the layers of Latin percussion, adding a buoyant feel to the track. “E Dey Their Body” rides a tidal wave of blazing horns, multi-layered percussion that hints at the second line strut of New Orleans, icy organ stabs and Femi pleading for a return to political sanity. “On this album, I kept to my roots and let the music flow through me, without diluting it. I didn’t think funk, or Afrobeat, or anything else. If you hear something in the melodies, it may be there, but as a composer, I surrendered to the higher forces that give me this gift to play music and let it flow out of me.”