

FEMI KUTI

During the course of his career, the legendary creator of Afrobeat Fela Kuti used his music to lament social injustices and political corruption in his native Nigeria. His music, a compelling blend of American funk and West African highlife, often locked into spellbinding grooves that seemed to go on forever. Yet that was the point: to fall deep into the rhythm and dance away the hardship. While this impacted Nigeria and the entire world, it also affected Fela's son Femi and his son Made, both of whom carry his legacy as torchbearers for change.

On February 5th 2021, Partisan Records, home to Fela's catalog, will release two albums from Femi and Made — both very much in the tradition of Fela's music, but with different scopes. Femi's album, *Stop The Hate*, radiates the unique Afrobeat sound that he has forged throughout his long career, affirming with conviction what his father would've claimed in the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

Made's album, *For(e)ward*, is a modern and progressive freedom manifesto, pushing boundaries of the subgenre even further. Both will be packaged into a double album called *Legacy +* that, when taken as a whole, bolsters the rich musical heritage of the Kuti name. Yet this isn't just about honoring Fela, it's also personal for Femi and Made, a father and son with deep creative synergy. "This is probably the most important part of my life right now," Femi says of releasing new music with his son. "I'm happy because he's not copying me. He has found his voice." Made was planning to release his album in 2019, right when his father was planning his own album to be released this year. Femi asked Made — who plays bass, alto saxophone and percussion on his dad's album — if he'd want to release both records together in an unprecedented package. Made agreed, and the plan for *Legacy+* was born.

The lead singles — Femi's "Pà Pá Pà" and Made's "Free Your Mind" — are equally divergent: Femi's song implores Nigerians to rail against the dishonesty of local politicians. "Government must not waste our time," he declares. "When government waste our time, government waste our life." Conversely, "Free Your Mind" centers a spellbinding groove; the lyrics — "free your mind and set your soul free" — are mixed within a rhythm that grows more hypnotic the longer it plays. "I think freeing your mind is, in a way, the opposite of what the phrase actually sounds like," Made says. "Free your mind' almost sounds like decadence, like 'don't be constrained by anything, just take things as they are.' I think the true meaning of 'free your mind' is to be critical. It means use your mind to its full potential — to think, to try to find answers and ask the right questions."

Before Femi was his own bandleader, he started playing saxophone in his father's band, Egypt 80, in 1979, where he learned the ins and outs of performing with a legend. "My father was so huge," Femi says with a laugh. "I taught myself everything I knew, so I was learning on the job, and you are not allowed to make mistakes. Being in front of such an icon, it can be intimidating." In 1984, Femi had no choice but to fulfill his destiny after Fela was arrested at the Lagos airport just before the start of a U.S. tour and Femi was asked to be the

frontman of his father's band instead of cancelling the shows.

In 1986, Femi created his own band, called Positive Force, which quickly gained notoriety as a formidable group in Afrobeat music. Over the next 30 years, Femi would amass worldwide acclaim as an ambassador of this righteous music and many humanitarian organizations. Positive Force is still at the forefront of the Afrobeat movement, expanding the music's vocabulary by adding hints of punk and hip-hop to the sound, while maintaining its traditional roots and political message. Femi has performed on some of the world's most prestigious stages and festivals, and collaborated with iconic musicians across a wide array of genres, most recently Coldplay on their song "Arabesque," which is featured on their latest album *Everyday Life*.

Stop The Hate — Femi's eleventh studio album — arrives just when listeners need it most, as Black people throughout the world continue the fight for equal rights and the end of police brutality. Throughout his album, Femi criticizes the local government for causing chaos when it should be promoting peace. "From corruption him close eye take money," Femi sings on the exceptional "You Can't Fight Corruption With Corruption." In an interview, he delves better into the meaning: "I'm talking about the government in Nigeria. The president tried to win the election, and he surrounds himself with everybody who is corrupt. You can't take money from criminals and then fight criminals. If you are a good guy, you don't take money from bad guys to fight bad guys. You just have to find a better way to fight bad guys."

Such rebellion is also heard on Made Kuti's *For(e)ward*, on which he plays every instrument! He grew up in the legendary New Afrika Shrine in Lagos, and spent much of his childhood touring with his father, Femi, playing bass or saxophone in Positive Force. Unlike Femi, who didn't formally study music, Made went to the famed Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London (the same place his grandfather Fela studied, back when it was known simply as Trinity College), where he shared a musical environment with some of the most talented and disciplined musicians up-and-coming acts from the city's underground scene. On *For(e)ward*, Made unpacks the effect of political negligence, and how widespread corruption affects all aspects of everyday life. The song "Different Streets" delves into a simple trek down the road. "Right in front of my house, a 20-second journey by car will take you 10 minutes because the roads are not paved," Made says in an interview. "And it's not just there, it's rampant through the city. No matter where you live, nothing works the way that it should." Elsewhere, the track "Young Lady" was inspired by the BBC documentary *Sex For Grades*, which uncovered massive sexual harassment at the University of Lagos and the University of Ghana. Here, Made sings from the perspective of the tormented Nigerian women, who wanted to earn an education the right way, yet they can't rely on local government officials to get justice for them. In the country, Made says, "there is almost no hope for a young lady in that position."

PARTISAN ARTS



Produced by Sodi Marciszewer, who recorded, mixed or produced Fela's last six albums, *Stop The Hate* and *For(e)ward* presents very different perspectives from two different generations of Kuti. More importantly, the *Legacy +* project finds these men coming together in the name of family. "I don't think it's been done where a father and son have released on the same day, or have a joint album of this magnitude," Femi says. "It's been more joy in my life to see my son be able to express himself in this manner. What other joy could a father want than to experience this in his lifetime?"