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## Chapter X

### En'shrine'd: Ushering Fela Kuti into the Western 'Rock' Canon

Abigail Gardner

#### Introduction

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was a fearless maverick for whom music was a righteous and invincible weapon. His self-given second name, Anikulapo – which translates as ‘the one who carries death in his pouch’ – spoke of indestructibility and resistance. It was an apt choice for the creator of an amazingly timeless body of work that for decades has transcended barriers of class and nationality, gathering ever more strength and devotees with the passing decades. Fela was indeed a man who seems always to have been destined for the almost mythical status he has now claimed among music fans around the world (Busby, quoted in Moore 2010:9).

Writer, broadcaster and the UK's first Black female publisher, Margaret Busby's tribute to Kuti in the introduction to Carlos Moore's (2010) biography of Fela Kuti encapsulates the key themes with which this chapter engages: Kuti's threat, his defiance of death itself and his legacy. Kuti's iconographical status and political impact have largely been silenced in the processes of canonisation through exhibition, representation and memorialisation, and are overshadowed by representations of excess and sexuality that are commensurate with worn yet still dominant stereotypes of African men (Hall, 1997; Gilroy, 2004; Leonard, 2007), and mythologies of the rock star (Reynolds and Press, 1995; Rojek, 2001).

Kuti (1939-97) was a Nigerian musician and the lead exponent of Afrobeat, a term he coined to refer to a style of music that mixed Yoruba call-and-response style vocals, jazz, and funk. From 1969 to 1997, he produced nearly fifty albums and toured Europe and the United States, where his first album (*The '69 Los Angeles Sessions*) was recorded. He used

his music to critique the Nigerian authorities, for whom he was a formidable and outspoken opponent. He recorded and performed much of this music in a club called The Shrine, which was part of a self-declared 'republic' that he set up in Lagos in defiance of the Nigerian military regime of the late 1970s. He died in 1997 aged 58, precipitating many obituaries that dwelled on his political rebellion and musical legacy. In these accounts and in what I consider to be his memorialisation, or enshrinement, through exhibitions and musicals, there is an attempt to configure him as African icon and/or Western rock star. By keeping close to the concept of the 'shrine', a place of collective religious communion, I draw out the ways in which Kuti's posthumous legacy is predicated on two closely entwined discursive processes which I term containment and enshrinement.

This chapter is motivated by a desire to trace out such discursive strategies in order to address how they represent the posthumous Kuti. It engages with the erasing of threatening qualities in death through canonization processes that simplify complexities, and in this respect benefits from recent work on museology and popular music that are questioning the relationships between institutions and lived musical experience (Leonard, 2007, 2010, 2013). The following personal reflections indicate why such work might be needed. Kuti played at the Brixton Academy in 1988 when mounted police herded the audience (of which I was a member) into the venue and police dogs rounded them up afterwards. The following year he confused my peers at Glastonbury, who, though wanting to dance, were vehement that his sexual politics prevented them from doing so. From these two instances, it appears that he was, in the late 1980s, a threat to both white British authority and the white middle-class Left for whom 'World Music' was an emerging scene, and also a direct political threat to the Nigerian Government. I last saw him in 2004 as part of the Barbican's exhibition *Black President. The Art and Legacy of Fela Kuti*, where his legacy was encased and ensured. It is this journey from threat to accolade within Western Anglo-American discourse that I want to

travel, seeing in it a number of attempts to incorporate an unwieldy and problematic musical figure into conventional discursive parameters. In doing this, I sketch out two means by which Kuti's death has been discussed and what kinds of *presence* he has had since. To this end, the chapter is divided into two parts. The first considers Kuti's life in order to provide a context for understanding his politics and music. The second focuses on his posthumous presence by dealing with commemoration. It examines first obituaries in UK and US broadsheet papers and the rock press, all 'containing' Kuti within discourses that are reliant on the myth of the rock rebel. It then addresses three types of commemorative events across three continents: the UK exhibition *The Art and Legacy of Fela Kuti* at London's Barbican Centre (2004), the US musical *Fela!* (2008) and the Nigerian *Felabration* festival (1998 onwards). Through these examples this chapter demonstrates that Kuti has been contained and enshrined in ways that make him accessible to (and reduceable to a Western rock canon).

### **Containment and Enshrinement**

Containment is a commodifying technique that represents Kuti within discursive parameters particular to musical genre and race, generated within a Western regime of representation that has configured African male musicianship in specific ways (Grass, 1986; Olaniyan, 2001; Stanovsky, 1998). Kuti has been commodified, trafficked and depoliticised (Gilroy, 1993) to become representative of an African masculinity, which, allied to a hyper-sexuality, accords with conventions of the Western rock star and with colonial discourses of the Black masculine (Guilbault, 2006; Feld, 1996). These are traced out across rock press and broadsheet obituaries that prioritise Kuti's sexuality and excess as different or Other (Hall, 1997).

Enshrinement venerates by drawing on quasi-religious rhetoric. It refers to what I argue is the memorialising process of curating Kuti, both through exhibition and revival. It is sometimes an extension of containment or imbricated within it, since both are symptomatic of Western techniques of representation. Shrines are places of veneration, communion and devotion, of pilgrimage and sanctuary, lying outside the body politic. The Shrine in Lagos was such a place, a signifier of separateness (from the Nigerian State) and of devotion to, and communion with, Kuti. Understanding enshrinement also involves a discussion of how Kuti's music and his persona might be configured through the interplay between the human and the divine within Yoruba music and culture.

Yoruba culture is, like many other African cultures, one in which music has a primacy within both the spiritual and secular worlds, where 'music can be a bridge to the animating forces of nature or to the spirit world of the ancestors and the unborn, as well as to deities who influence the material world' (Grass, 1986 p. 131). Grass argues that Kuti's music was an extension of the African idea of music being related to 'both ordinary and extraordinary human activity'. Veal's ethnomusicological work notes this too, describing one of Kuti's night long performances at the Shrine as follows:

On stage Fela combines the autocratic band leading style of James Brown, the mystical inclinations of Sun Ra, the polemicism of Malcolm X and the harsh, insightful satire of Richard Prior. [He glides] gracefully around the stage in white face paint, which he says facilitates communication with the spirit world (Veal, 2000 p. 4).

The interplay between these two realms allows us to envisage how Kuti lends himself to being enshrined, but also illustrates how perceptions of threat and elation in his live performance find themselves transformed in death.

Containment and enshrinement operate as curtailing and erasing processes. In the first, Kuti is somehow restricted in order to fit into prescribed containers that are conversant

with Western readings of the rock rebel and the African icon. In the second, which is an extension of the first, his extraordinariness, excess and legendary status eclipse his voice. When an artist as musically influential as Kuti is circumscribed within these available models of mediation, this process suggests an on-going paucity in the possibilities available for representation, as the following sections demonstrate.

### **Fela Kuti during his Lifetime**

Kuti was born in 1939 into an elite Yoruba Nigerian family, the son of a Church of England minister, the Reverend Israel Ransome-Kuti, who was the first president of the Nigerian Union of Teachers, and of a mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who was a leading women's rights and anti-colonial activist. He was sent to England to study medicine but went instead to the Trinity School of Music where he specialised in piano and trumpet. He formed his first band in 1961 (Koola Lobitos), which fused jazz with Ghanaian highlife (a musical genre from Ghana popular across West Africa), and worked on a music that became known as Afrobeat. This was characterised by a large brass section, steady bass lines, sax and Fender Rhodes solos over the top, call-and-response lyrics in 'pidgin' English. It was a fusion of musics that had travelled to and fro across the Atlantic and was distinctly 'his'. It is audible in the album *The '69 Los Angeles Sessions* with his band, now called Nigeria '70 (Sterns Music, ) where jazz idioms and funk baselines are shot through with the concerns that Kuti voiced about colonialism, African esteem and identity (Stanovsky, 1998).

Kuti was in the United States in the late 1960s when the Black Panther movement was at the height of its influence. In San Francisco, he met and worked with Sandra Smith, who was active in the Black Panther party and introduced him to James Brown and the music of Nina Simone and Miles Davis (Stanovsky, 1998; Lipsitz, 1994). It was his relationship with Smith that exposed Kuti to 'ideas about Pan-Africanism that had been censored in

Nigeria' (Lipsitz, 1994 p. 39), arguably radicalising his politics and informing his musical direction. On his return to Lagos, he and his mother changed their middle name from 'Ransome' to the Yoruba 'Anikulapo' (which translates alternately as 'he who carries death in a bag/his pouch'). All accounts suggest that this move indicated a rejection of imposed slavery and colonialism from the Anglicised 'Ransome' to a Yoruba-identified Afrocentrism. The choice of 'Anikulapo' could be read as a statement of intent towards the overthrow of colonial legacy, and an indication of Kuti's politicisation and potential threat. He also established the 'Kalakuta Republic', a large compound in the outer suburbs of Lagos, which included the club where he performed regularly, The Shrine. Kuti declared its independence from the rest of Nigeria in 1970. Around this time, his music started to reflect his growing dissatisfaction with the Nigerian political regime, setting the pattern for the remainder of his life; he was constantly in battle with the Nigerian authorities whom he saw as corrupt and elitist. Singing in 'pidgin', a mix of English and creole, enabled his work to travel out of Nigeria across Africa and beyond, widening his potential impact. In 1977, after many arrests and beatings from the Nigerian authorities, the Kalakuta Republic was burned down in a violent attack that saw his elderly mother being thrown out of a window, dying later of her injuries. Kuti took her coffin to General Olesugun Obasanjo's barracks, an event he described in the song 'Coffin for Head of State' (1980). He later wrote 'Unknown Soldier' (1981) in reference to the official enquiry that blamed an unknown soldier for the destruction of the compound.

Throughout his life, Kuti performed and was perceived as a sexual and political rebel. His personal life was political and his politics infused his music; in 1978, to mark the Kalakuta anniversary, he married 27 women at once, which Stanovsky (1998) claims was an affirmation of 'tribal culture'. He also released *Zombie*, an album that critiqued the Nigerian military rulers. Whilst performing this album in Accra, Ghana, a riot broke out which resulted

in him being banned from entering the country for life. In the same year he established his own political party called ‘Movement for the People’, and in 1979 put himself forward as a presidential candidate only to have his candidature rejected. Five years later, in 1984, he was jailed for 20 months on trumped up charges of currency smuggling, an incident that saw Amnesty International designating him a ‘prisoner of conscience’. Despite international musical collaborations (with Ginger Baker, Gilberto Gil and Paul McCartney among others) he remained, for the Nigerian authorities, an outsider. After dying of an HIV-related illness at the age of 58 in 1997, one million people were estimated to have attended his funeral, this in defiance of the Nigerian regime for whom he was, even in his coffin, a threat.

His role as rebel is marked, too, in the handful of YouTube clips of him, most poorly recorded (only one is professional, of the Berlin Jazz festival in 1978). He is dressed (in earlier performances from the 1970s) either in an all-in-one trouser suit, ‘match-down’ style, where the outfit is carefully co-ordinated, patterned or white; or (in later performances) in underpants, chains and white face paint. We might read him in the first as a *Shaft*-like, Blaxploitation figure that draws on ‘standard currenc[ies] of black popular culture’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2013 p. 82; Railton and Watson, 2011). This is similar to how some rap stars became cemented within Anglo-American popular culture, as inheritors of highly complex legacies linked to the street, crime and sex: the figures of the pimp, the hustler, the ‘badman’ (Quinn, 2005, cited in Hesmondhalgh, 2013 p. 82). In the second, where Kuti performs bare-chested and in slave chains, he is part of an on-going discursive regime that fetishizes race (Railton and Watson, 2011 p. 128).<sup>1</sup> Here, in a mimetic move, he appropriates the ‘super masculine menial’ (Cleaver, 1992 pp. 172–3), sending back the fetishizing of the ‘colonial fantasy’ (Mercer, 1994 in Railton and Watson, 2011 p. 127) into an Anglo-American popular culture whose negotiations over colonialism, post-colonialism and

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<sup>1</sup> See also Gina Arnold’s discussion of Tupac Shakur’s hologram at the Coachella festival, this volume (Editors’ note).



diversity are ongoing (Gilroy, 2011). Kuti himself essentialised his blackness vocally, for instance by claiming on stage (Berlin Festival 1978) to be ‘an African’ presenting ‘African music’ to stupid Europeans. How he in turn has been presented after his death raises issues of representational strategies that are complex and, at times, conflicting.

### **Fela Kuti since his Death**

This section discusses posthumous representations of Kuti. It begins with obituaries, which are inevitably the first to map out a posthumous identity and serve to benchmark subsequent representations. Stanovsky (1998) in particular notes that his sexual behaviour, perceived misogyny and polygamy have preoccupied mainstream US and UK newspaper obituaries.

Obituaries appeared in specialist US rock magazines (*Rolling Stone*) and UK and US broadsheet newspapers (*The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, *The New York Times*) addressed to a knowledgeable and niche audience. They prioritised, as do many online entries on Kuti, his excess and anarchy, both politically and personally:

Fela (pronounced FAY-la) was a showy, insolent, marijuana-smoking icon, who often made appearances wearing only bikini underwear. In more than 30 years as a dissident songwriter and saxophonist, he was arrested and imprisoned at least a dozen times, most recently in 1993 (Herszenhorn 1997).

Fela, 58, Dissident Nigerian Musician, Dies ... the earliest and wildest of Africa's handful of world-famous popular singers (Sweeney, 1997).

Sweeney's obituary from *The Independent* stays within a narrative that underlines Kuti's distinction, his ability to ‘transfix’, but also mentions Kuti's audience, whose diversity cut across race and genre, made up as it was of Black British and Nigerian fans, not just white ‘World Music enthusiasts’.

‘World Music’ is a shifting category, into which some writers and broadcasters

corral Kuti and which others do not. The term was established in Britain in 1987 by a group of music promoters and DJs who saw its potential as a genre offering a flight from ‘manufactured’ 1980s pop for those who sought ‘authenticity’ (Taylor, 1997). The *New Musical Express (NME)* offered a free *The World at One* tape in its October 1987 edition and this, along with the first World of Music, Arts and Dance (WOMAD) festival, organised by Peter Gabriel at Shepton Mallet in 1984, led to music from Africa and Asia beginning to have a small but noted presence. World Music was a convenient marketing term (Pacini, 1993) for anything outside the conventional Western pop or rock format, including musicians who had been recording for years prior to its launch (such as Ravi Shankar). But in the 1980s, Kuti didn’t quite fit the ‘World Music’ slot: his use of jazz and funk was complex and indicated that his ‘musicking’ (Small, 1998) illustrated the hybridity of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993; Stanovsky, 1998; Grass, 1986) which was at odds with the fetishisation of ‘authenticity’ that prevailed within the World Music scene at the time. A 2013 BBC programme, *How to be a World Music Star*, part of a series dedicated to World Music, discussed the careers of the Bhundu Boys, Baaba Maal and Salif Keita, and how Anglo-American labels formatted and marketed them to a Western audience. Kuti did not figure in this history and his inclusion in some broadcasters’ and critics’ reading of ‘World Music’, but not in others, illustrates both the slipperiness of the taxonomy and Kuti’s own complexity.

### **Kuti as a *Rolling Stone* Rebel**

Kuti has, however, been accepted into a predominantly white male rock canon, and this is exemplified by his inclusion in the *Rolling Stone*’s list ‘15 Rock & Roll Rebels’ (Anon, 2013). *Rolling Stone* was established in 1967, a vehicle for the ‘gonzo’ journalism of Hunter S. Thompson, and although its lineage is counter-cultural, it is now arguably part of the (predominantly) white US rock establishment. The magazine’s short biography on Kuti

prioritizes his politics both as a Black Panther and as an opponent of the Nigerian state, interweaving this with comments on Afrobeat and the story behind 'Coffin for Head of State' (1980). In this selection of fifteen 'rebels', Kuti appears alongside Johnny Cash, Public Enemy and Marilyn Manson as the rebellious outsider. *Rolling Stone's* collection elides the differences and contexts of the individuals, relying instead on the generic description of rock 'n' roll rebel, a stereotype within Western popular culture whose 'extrasonic or extramusical reputation dominated and still dominates' (Olaniyan, 2001 p. 1). Online, the catalogue of rebels exists as a series of image tabs that you can browse through. If you click to the right of Kuti, there is Elvis Costello (an 'angry young man') and to the left, Plastic People of The Universe, a Czech band who were arrested as dissidents before the Velvet Revolution in 1989. *Rolling Stone* refers to the chosen fifteen as outsiders and revolutionaries. Three out of these are Black: Kuti, Peter Tosh (chosen over Bob Marley as the 'real rebel') and Public Enemy. Including Kuti in this group corrals his music into a recognisable format where the common denominator is one of revolutionary marginality. Kuti's claim to outsider status is, like Tosh's and Public Enemy's, behavioural and raced, while Kuti is the only African, which compounds his Otherness and adds to his allure. Gilroy has eloquently illustrated the links between commodification and Blackness (1993; 2004; 2011) and notes how the use of Blackness within popular culture works to 'bleed risk, pleasure and excitement into each other as part of selling things and accumulating capital' (Gilroy, 2004 p. 61). This is arguably what Kuti adds to the roster of rebels in *Rolling Stone*. Notwithstanding Gilroy's work on the history of Blackness as a commodity in and of itself, his argument foregrounds the historical complexities and contemporary shifts in how Blackness is deployed and represented, some of which are visible in how Kuti was 'exhibited' in London in 2004.

### ***Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Kuti***

The Barbican is an exhibition space established in 1982 in London. Positioned between the City of London and its East End, it has a reputation for staging cutting-edge exhibitions and shows. Its own mission statement introduces itself in the following way:

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the Barbican pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. The Barbican exists to serve its wide and diverse audiences – engaging with arts lovers through our unique and inspiring artistic events at the Centre and using our Creative learning programme and free events to introduce new audiences to great arts experiences (Barbican official website, 2013).

In 2004, it staged the multimedia exhibition *Black President: the Art and Legacy of Fela Kuti*, which consisted of artworks by thirty-four artists inspired by Kuti, album covers, photographs, and of screenings of the Kuti documentary *Music is the Weapon* (dir. Flori and Tchalgadjief, 1982). The exhibition was synced to BBC Radio 3, with DJs from London's Cargo club where 'Shrine nights' had been hosted during the 1990s. It was indeed commensurate with the Barbican's aim to 'push the boundaries' in its multimedia approach to the exhibition and despite some reviews calling it a 'festival' or a 'celebration' (Longley, 2004). The exhibition was then transferred to New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art. It would be banal to suggest that the curation of Kuti, by incorporating him as museum exhibit, emasculates him and his politics, but the move from performance to exhibit requires some conceptualising since Kuti's appearance as the focus of this exhibition involved a subtle shift of position, from subject to object and from authorial politicised voice to represented figurative type. Recent publications on how music is curated in museums suggest that canonisation is afforded through rendering music and musicians as artefacts in line with the museums' 'institutional logic', which can replicate 'dominant hegemonic versions of history'

(Leonard, 2007:147). Such debates are apparent in contemporary reviews of the exhibition.

Despite the re-use of Kuti's album's title, *Black President*, carrying a very real and symbolic strength marking Kuti as a figure of Black authority, reviews of the exhibition suggest that his radical legacy and iconographic status were downplayed to concentrate on his sartorial style and sexuality, thereby rendering him as a sexual radical more in keeping with an established Western concept of the rebellious rock star (Reynolds and Press, 1995). The reviewers noted Kuti's political activism and his charisma, and claimed him as 'Africa's most influential composer', with Longley (2004) in the UK broadsheet, *The Independent*, declaring how he, 'alongside Ravi Shankar, brought "world music" to the rock-fed masses across Europe and the US'. Kuti's music was slotted into the convenient and unwieldy 'world music' pigeonhole and, with this, lost all sense of distinct musical hybridity and original creativity. Writing in *The Socialist Review*, Johnson (2004) notes that whilst Kuti's influence and iconographic status were a given in the exhibition, the thirty-four artists' work featured concentrated on his sexuality. Photographs of Kuti with his 'Queens' (as his wives were called) backstage and in hotel rooms (by Bernard Matussière) foregrounded his sexual prowess. Johnson acknowledges that this was 'because he had 28 wives and many mistresses, a tantalizing thought in many heads but, in the context of his torture by the government because of his uncompromising rally to the masses to revolt ... misses the point', suggesting that this 'emphasis on sex by some of the artists at the exhibition seems like thinly veiled jealous racism' (2004).

At The Barbican, Kuti was an exhibit, canonised and displayed in line with dominant hegemonic constructs (Hall, 1997: Leonard, 2007) and the elation and communion that Veal and Busby refer to are muffled. In contrast, reviews for a successful US musical foreground not only his life but the affect of hearing him; his music.

### ***Fela! and Felabration***

*Fela!* (dir. Lewis and Jones, 2008) is a stage musical based on Kuti's life. It showed off-Broadway in 2008 before successfully transferring to Broadway and London in 2010, before touring across the United States in 2013. It was nominated for eleven Tony awards, winning three for best choreography, best costume design and best sound design. Reviews described Kuti as an 'icon', 'extraordinary', a 'national hero', and 'legendary'. Publicity for the show refers to Kuti as a 'firebrand, iconoclast, rabble-rouser and composer of genius', and his music as 'sensual' (felaonbroadway.com). Its staging aimed to reproduce the décor of The Shrine in Lagos and audience members reflected on how 'this was music that entered your bloodstream' (Ozekhome, 2010). Ozekhome indicates that the experience of *Fela!* was somehow representative of the 'mysticism' and 'voodoo' of Kuti's music and so provided a musical bridge back to the Yoruba aspects of Afrobeat.

With Jay-Z, Will Smith and Jada-Pinckett Smith now executive producers, this musical might be configured as a positive representational process, led as it is by African-American music and media stars and committed to reviving the experience of being at The ('legendary') Shrine, where Kuti was supposed to have often played all night (due to curfews). The emphasis of the musical was also on Kuti 'presented not in the usual militant stereotype, but as a compromised, flawed, even unbalanced soul' (Spencer, 2010). Spencer's review for *The Observer*, a liberal UK broadsheet, offers a counterpoint to the musical's own publicity, indicating perhaps the complexity of reviving such a figure. Thirteen years after Kuti's death, this review is more nuanced than the obituaries of 1997 in similar liberal broadsheets, both UK and US, a position perhaps enabled by the reflection and critical appreciation that has garnered pace since his death.

*Fela!* returned Kuti to the United States, where he had recorded his first album in Los Angeles in 1969. He did not have any success there during his lifetime, but this show

opened up the Stateside market, and Wrasse records synchronised the release of re-issues to coincide with the musical. Such a synergistic response illustrates the ongoing commodification processes that Kuti is prey to, travelling after death across The Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993 and 2011). This more recent commodification rests on his reputation as a transcendental musical presence, whose stage shows at The Shrine (replicated on Broadway) offered elation and communion and whose legacy is ensured through celebrations like the annual *Felabration* festival, held in Nigeria.

Staged over a week in October (Kuti's birthday), *Felabration* was started in 1998 by Kuti's daughter and includes performances and debates on all things 'Fela'. The event is subtitled 'Forever Lives Afrobeat' and offers a space where successive generations encounter Kuti's music and discuss his ideas. The potential for such occasions to offer affective communal experiences is also borne out by reactions to fundraising concerts. In the summer of 2013, there were *Red Hot and Fela Live Aids* Charity performances at New York's Lincoln Centre in the United States where audiences could experience 'The defiant spirit and groove heavy music of Nigerian firebrand Fela Anikulapo Kuti' ([www.lcouofdoors.org](http://www.lcouofdoors.org)), and raise money for the fight against Aids in the process. However, this also exemplifies how Kuti is allied to an illness with latent connotations of sexual excess and promiscuity that feed into racist and rockist stereotypes, whose simplistic veneers mask complex undercurrents, as exemplified by the following comment.

## **Conclusion**

'I'm not dancing to him. He's sexist'. So said one of the people I had gone to Glastonbury Festival with in 1989 when Kuti was playing the main stage. As my friend, a white World Music fan like myself, walked away in disgust, Kuti, resplendent in a white trouser suit, sang, orchestrated his band, played a Fender Rhodes and sang about corruption in Nigeria. What

seemed to have upset my friend was that his band consisted of six or seven of Kuti's wives, all painted, many in bra tops and short skirts, dancing languorously and sensually. Kuti's perceived chauvinism seemed to eclipse all else for this friend who walked away. This machismo, I would argue, along with his radical resistance to the Nigerian government, has enabled Kuti to be posthumously corralled into the western rock canon. As the BBC review of a recent compilation album of his argues, 'his vivid life story ... fodder for the massively successful stage musical – often threatens to overshadow his music' (Chick, 2013). It is easy to see why.

This chapter has argued that the posthumous Fela Kuti is located within discursive parameters that both contain and enshrine him through commodification and memorialisation. Kuti was a complex, paradoxical character. He reframed and added to his own musical heritage, carving out a new sound in Afrobeat, which he used to articulate his dissident political views. This sound was a fusion of Black Atlantic sounds and its message was pan-Africanist. He was a counter-cultural figure within the context of Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s, refusing to be imprisoned within colonial matrices whose legacy he sought to subvert, whilst at the same time essentialising his Blackness and announcing his sexual prowess. It seems fair to say that the political intentions of his music might be less apparent to a Western audience and this point might be borne out with a final personal reflection. When Kuti played the Brixton Academy in 1988, a large proportion of the audience were Nigerian and they sang along; every lyric, every satirical jibe at the Nigerian authorities was joyfully vocalised. All I could do was listen and watch. And dance. His music affected me viscerally and the memory of being rounded up by mounted police afterwards has remained with me ever since, pointing to the element that is missing from the *Art and Legacy of Fela Kuti*, *Fela!* and *Rolling Stone*. Kuti was dangerous. His music's message was politically and sexually radical, shot through with complexities. These have, to a large extent, been



overwritten with comprehensible stories of personal excess. They have ensured that Kuti is tamed and fits in after his death where he never did whilst alive; canonised and taxonomised as rock star rebel and icon.

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