



TONY ALLEN
Lagos No Shaking
HONEST JON'S RECORDS

- Tony Allen is the co-creator of Afrobeat, and one of the most distinctive and in-demand drummers on the planet. No one swings like this Nigerian rhythm man — with that amazing, loose-limbed, poly-rhythmic technique that has powered some of the funkier and most challenging dance music ever created. And Lagos No Shaking is his most powerful and personal album to date: a return to core values; a testament to the fact that afrobeat is best served straight — hot, hard and percussion-heavy.

Tony Allen grew up surrounded by rhythm: the local palm-wine and juju sounds loved by his motor mechanic father, and the pan-African, big-band highlife then sweeping the clubs of Africa — exemplified by the great Ghanaian bandleader E. T. Mensah. The young Tony developed an obsession with drums. But opportunities to get near a kit were few and far between in 1950s Lagos. He made his professional debut at the age of 18, while working as a radio technician, playing claves with Sir Victor Olaiya and his Cool Cats. When the regular drummer left, Tony was handed the sticks. He went on honing his technique with Negu Morris And The Heatwaves, the Nigerian Messengers and the Western Toppers Highlife Band. His role models were Art Blakey and the Ghanaian drummer Koffi Ghanaba, aka Guy Warren.

Then, in 1964, Tony was invited to audition for a band called Koola Lobitos, led by a young Nigerian — just returned from music studies in London — named Fela Kuti. Fela's influence on the young drummer was incalculable. But then so was Tony's on Fela. Here was exactly the musician Fela had been looking for: capable of fusing jazz and highlife sensibilities and sounding, as Kuti put it, 'like five drummers at once'. If Fela was afrobeat's mind and mouth, Tony Allen was its arms and legs, his webs of cascading off-beats endlessly powering the music forward.

Allen split with Fela in 1978 — citing the bandleader's lack of care for his musicians. He relocated to Paris in 1980, involving himself in an amazing diversity of collaborative projects over the succeeding decades.

Now, finally, Tony Allen himself is back. Recorded over ten all-night sessions in the Ikeja district, Lagos No Shaking is the first Lagos-recorded album on which Tony has had complete artistic freedom. But it is also a truly collaborative work, which draws on the city's diverse musical traditions and brings together several generations of Lagosian musical talent.

Key among the veterans is the extraordinary 76 year-old palm-wine singer Fatai Rolling Dollar, who adds his throatily commanding tones and throbbing agidigbo thumb piano to four tracks. From Fela's classic Afrika 70 and Egypt 80 line-ups, saxmen Baba Ani and Show Boy add that essential deep-blasting horn undertow. There are the r and b sensibilities of Yinka Davies and Omololu Ogunleye; and Muritala Adisa adds touches of ewe, a form of spoken praise-singing rooted in ancient Yoruba tradition.

But the key element is, of course, Tony Allen's powerful, yet magnificently relaxed drumming, which keeps everything in perpetual rocking motion, tempering the hard funk edges of classic afrobeat with earthier Lagosian flavours. Indeed, while the album's observations on Lagos life are aptly tough and sardonic, this is a warmer, more down-home, perhaps a more humane album than anything Fela ever produced.

Lagos No Shaking means Lagos is on form, Lagos is solid; and on Awa Na Re Fatai Rolling Dollar sings the praises of a city that has been much reviled — not least by its own inhabitants. 'Lagos is a fantastic place,' he sings over rolling traditional percussion. 'In Lagos you can get whatever you want.' Ise Nla maintains the mood with talk of a 'dream ticket, a fantastic job'. In Moyeye Lolu thanks his parents for good upbringing and the freedom he feels when he stays with them. Ole ('Lazy') and

Ogogoro — an ode to the local gin, complete with drunken marital discussion — warn of the dangers of hanging around in bars. Morose bemoans the grim expressions of the people of Lagos; and Losun alleges and lambasts the inexpressiveness of Nigerian men with true afrobeat frankness.

Lagos No Shaking is a spectacular homecoming for Tony Allen, an acerbic, unflinching love letter to the city that gave him life in rhythm.