

Thursday, April 19, 2012, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Seun Kuti & Egypt 80



Seun Anikulapo Kuti	<i>lead vocals</i>
Ajayi Raimi Adebisi	<i>drums</i>
Abidemi Adebisi Adekunle	<i>baritone saxophone</i>
Yetunde Sophia George Ademiluyi	<i>vocals, dancing</i>
Iyabo Folashade Adeniran	<i>vocals, dancing</i>
Oyinade Adeniran	<i>tenor saxophone</i>
Oluwagbemiga Alade	<i>guitar</i>
Tajudeen Olalekan Animasahun	<i>musical director, keyboards</i>
Okon Iyamba	<i>percussion</i>
Kunle Justice	<i>bass guitar</i>
Olumuyiwa Emmanuel Kunnuji	<i>trumpet</i>
David Obanyedo	<i>guitar</i>
Olugbade Peter Okunade	<i>trumpet</i>
Kola Onasanya	<i>congas</i>
Olawale Toriola	<i>percussion</i>

Tonight's program will be announced from the stage.

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Kelechi Amadiobi

BORN IN 1983, Seun Anikulapo Kuti first began performing with Egypt 80 at the age of nine, warming up audiences with renditions of songs by his father, Fela Kuti. After Fela's death in 1997, Mr. Kuti stepped up to the front of the band, leading the celebrated combo as both lead vocalist and saxophonist. While his father's influence cannot be understated, Mr. Kuti was determined to cut his own distinctive musical path, incorporating contemporary influences into the traditional Afrobeat approach.

"What inspires me is the time that I live in," Mr. Kuti says. "What is happening today in Africa are the same things that were happening 40 years ago, when my father was songwriting, but they're happening in different ways. So when I write my music, it's from the perspective of a 29-year-old man living in 2012, instead of a 30-year-old man living in the 1970s."

Sadly, Mr. Kuti finds himself challenging many of the same injustices his father fought in his heyday, from corporate greed to militarism to the ever-futile war on drugs. But where Fela's work often featured an explicit call to revolution, Mr. Kuti's goal is subtler. He sees his role as that of an educator, speaking truth to power in order to provoke awareness and debate throughout his beloved homeland.

"In Africa today, most people are struggling in silence," Mr. Kuti says. "The systematic oppression of the people has made them blinded to their reality. Everybody's just thinking about survival. Nobody wants to stand up for anything; everybody just wants to toe the line. So I'm trying to make people think about the

things that they are forgetting. I want to inspire people to want things to change."

Mr. Kuti is determined to speak to the new generation of young Africans born after his father's glory days. If he learned but one lesson from Fela, it is that no one has greater impact on hearts and mind than the true artist. Mr. Kuti's powerhouse protest music found serves as a kind of musical antidote to the corporate pop that he feels is polluting Africa's airwaves, distracting its citizens from the things that truly matter.

"Music has great impact on people's feelings," Mr. Kuti says. "That's what music should be. Pop music today is all about 'me, me, me.' Nobody is singing about 'we.' But nothing can change if we don't look out for our brothers and sisters."

On his mighty new CD, *From Africa with Fury: Rise*, Mr. Kuti heads up Egypt 80, the extraordinary combo first fronted by his renowned father. The album follows Mr. Kuti's critically praised debut, 2008's *Many Things*, which was unanimously praised for continuing Fela's musical legacy. *From Africa with Fury: Rise* sees Mr. Kuti finding his own idiosyncratic voice as songwriter, singer and bandleader, its songs and sonic approach marked by provocative edge and mature self-assurance.

Produced by Brian Eno, John Reynolds, and Mr. Kuti, the album captures Mr. Kuti and Egypt 80's extraordinary power, fraught with the scorching rhythms and kinetic funk energy that has earned the band—as ever, under the leadership of musical director and keyboardist Lekan Animashaun—worldwide acclaim as one of today's most incendiary live acts. With Mr. Kuti's booming vocal stylings at the forefront, songs like "African Soldiers" and "Mr. Big Thief" are fueled by call-and-response hooks, breakneck tempos and combative, topical lyricism, which firmly set the classic Egypt 80 sound in the modern era.

"I wanted to do something completely different," Mr. Kuti says. "Not different by trying to be American or European with my sound, just trying to make a very different album from my last album. My last album, it was my first

time in control, I was not as confident as in saying what I wanted. This time, I said, 'Okay, I can be more confident in how I express myself, I can say what I want, be as complex as I want.'"

The album's basic tracks were recorded at Rio de Janeiro's Companhia dos Técnicos Studios. In fall 2010, Mr. Kuti made two visits to London, where he mixed the record alongside Mr. Eno and Mr. Reynolds. Mr. Eno—an avowed fan who had previously invited Mr. Kuti and his band to perform at Sydney's Luminous Festival 2009 and the United Kingdom's Brighton Festival 2010—has nothing but the highest praise for Mr. Kuti and his band, hailing them for "making some of the biggest, wildest, livest music on the planet."

Mr. Kuti is equally effusive about his coproducers. "Brian Eno is 'Brian Eno' for a reason. He has a great mind when it comes to music. He adds new dimensions to the sound. He showed me new ways of opening up the sound I'd never have thought of on my own. I'm really glad I had him and John Reynolds work on the album."

While Mr. Kuti has nothing but the highest praise for his collaborators, he is quick to note that the songs of *From Africa with Fury: Rise* had been written more than a year prior to recording and had long been featured in the band's live performances. Despite the studio craftsmanship, Mr. Kuti sees the recording process as merely a means to an end, a way of capturing his music's magic for posterity.

"Afrobeat has to go from stage to studio, not studio to stage," he says. "I don't believe in going into the studio to write songs. You create music in the world, outside, with nature, in the environment."

"When people listen to the album, they will see that the album is talking about what's going on in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya—right now in Africa. It is telling the people that we have to take it ourselves. This is Africa for Africa."