

Fela Kuti

Afrobeat ambassador

Nicknamed 'The Black President', Nigerian Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was a tireless campaigner for the poor, his incendiary anti-establishment music and politics earning him the respect of millions.

Fela blended African-American jazz, soul and funk with traditional Nigerian and West African rhythms, often singing in the pidgin English spoken by the Nigerian poor. The Shrine nightclub he created became an important social and political institution, attached to his home compound, which he declared a sovereign zone – the Kalakuta Republic.

Fela was harassed and vilified by the ruling élite, spending most of the 1980s in prison. His song 'ITT (International Thief Thief)' – a scathing attack on the corporate looting by Western transnationals such as International Telecoms and Telegraph – earned him the wrath of the Nigerian military regime. Over 1,000 soldiers attacked and burned down his house, throwing the musician's mother and brother out of a window. When his mother died from her injuries, Fela, in an act of grief-stricken protest, placed her casket at the doorstep of the junta's headquarters.

A believer in African cultural heritage, he often took his cues from 'tradition' and held reactionary views about the status of women – he had 28 wives. However, in his later years he divorced all his wives saying: 'No man has the right to own a vagina.'

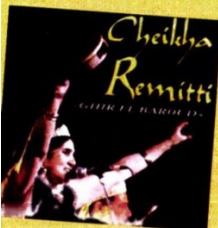
He died of AIDS in August 1997, aged 58.



CAROLINE COON / CAMERA PRESS

Remitti

Rai's hard-drinking diva



In Algeria during the 1920s, working-class Muslim women in the town of Oran rejected the prevailing values of men in power and combined street slang, French language, and populist poetry known as *chir al-milhūn*, to form a musical movement which came to be known as *rai*. It wasn't long before disapproving sheikhs took note, as did fundamentalist *mujahedin* independence fighters and the so-called 'liberal' French authorities.

A *rai* artist by the name of Remitti drew most scorn for her outlandish behaviour, lewd lyrics about sex – and her legendary drinking abilities. Despite the rumblings from above, peasants and workers came in droves to see Remitti and her friends perform.

In the mid-1950s when the country was steeped in anti-colonial insurrection, Remitti and the *rai* revolutionaries added to their repertoire songs of armed struggle. 'Cheikha Kheira Guendil [a *rai* singer] was the first... to brave the colonial police and sing about a free Algeria in public,' she later said. But even the post-independence socialist government reacted to *rai* by rounding up its musicians. Alcohol was banned, as were large *rai* concerts.

A decade later, new musicians like Cheb Khaled took up the mantle again. With lyrics that speak of injustice, poverty and corruption, modern *rai* is as relevant as it was in the 1920s and presents the single strongest cultural challenge to the fundamentalist Front Islamique du Salut.

Miriam Makeba

Mama Afrika

Miriam Makeba began her lifelong struggle at the age of two weeks when she served a six-month jail term with her mother. As a girl in South Africa, she worked as a domestic servant for white families. By her teens she had got involved in the progressive jazz scene and was pursuing a singing career.

In 1960, while on tour in the US, Makeba was denied a visa to return home for her mother's funeral. The white South African Government then cancelled her citizenship to punish her for speaking out against apartheid at the United Nations. A defiant Makeba was thrust into the position of being black South Africa's *de facto* ambassador to the Western world, where she earned the moniker 'Mama Africa'. Her call for an end to apartheid became increasingly powerful, particularly after the Sharpeville massacres, and her recordings were banned in South Africa.

Her marriage to Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure) caused a storm of controversy in the US. The couple was harassed by FBI and CIA officials, Makeba's concerts were cancelled by tour promoters, and ultimately forced into exile. They settled in Guinea where they have lived for 15 years.



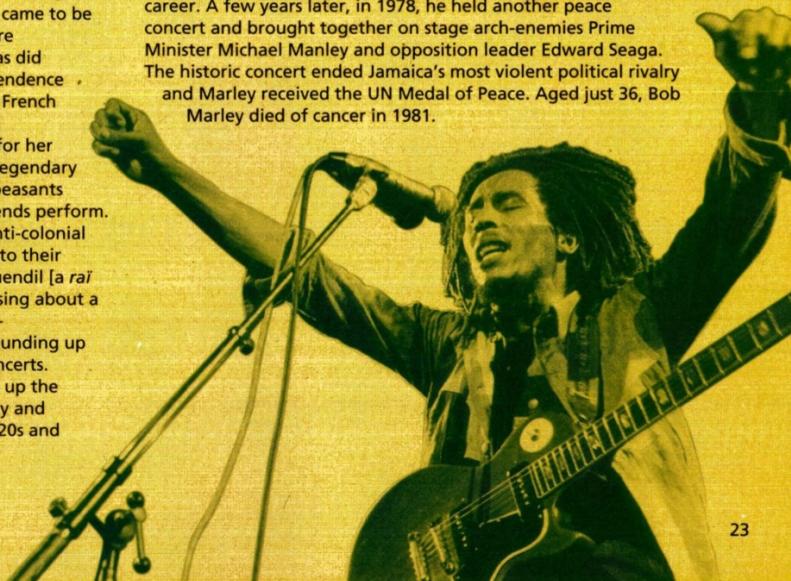
DENNIS MORRIS / CAMERA PRESS

Bob Marley

One world, one love

While many are familiar with his posthumously over-commercialized pop hits, Bob Marley's political works remain as fresh and relevant today as they did 30 years ago. Back then songs like 'Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)', 'Slave Driver', and 'War' defined his unique brand of 'rebel music' and fuelled the political aspirations of millions in Africa and the Americas. A religious Rastafarian, Marley infused his songs with a 'positive vibration' and evoked a utopian 'one world, one love'. As the Majority World was shaking off the yoke of colonialism, such hopeful yet steadfast songs energized many.

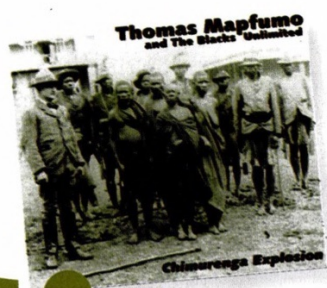
In the violent run-up to the Jamaican elections, Marley organized the 'One Love Peace Concert'. Days before the show, six assailants tried to kill the reggae artist, his wife and his managers. Marley took the stage, arm in a sling, to play one of the most emotionally charged shows of his career. A few years later, in 1978, he held another peace concert and brought together on stage arch-enemies Prime Minister Michael Manley and opposition leader Edward Seaga. The historic concert ended Jamaica's most violent political rivalry and Marley received the UN Medal of Peace. Aged just 36, Bob Marley died of cancer in 1981.



Culture bandit



The traditional *mbira* long devalued by the white colonizers, became a key symbol in the Zimbabwean struggle for freedom.



Adam Ma'anit meets up with the banned Zimbabwean music legend Thomas Mapfumo in the most unlikely of places.

IF Swedish furniture-chain IKEA made a city, it would probably look something like Milton Keynes. This bizarre British 'garden city', conjured up by warped government officials and overpaid urban-planning hacks in the early 1970s, is a surreal setting for a performance by Zimbabwe's most popular political musician. Yet it is here in Britain's consumer capital – Milton Keynes is infamous for its gargantuan US-style shopping malls – where I meet up with Thomas Mapfumo and his band The Blacks Unlimited. For one night this cultural desert blooms as hundreds of Zimbabweans come from all over Britain to see one of their most adored music legends.

Thomas Mapfumo, according to many who have turned up here tonight, is a cultural ambassador of Zimbabwe. 'He is Zimbabwe,' says Joyce, an IT student from Harare, currently studying in London. 'I've

... we are singing about the youth who are being used by those at the top to kill people...

listened to his music since I was a child, and now here I am still listening to it all the time. He is one of a kind.'

Affectionately called the 'Lion of Zimbabwe' by fans, it is not just his music, but the politics of his music which makes him truly unique.

It was in 1970s Rhodesia, after years of playing covers of Elvis and Beatles songs, that he began to search for an indigenous musical identity. In a country where local culture was viewed as primitive and worthless by the white minority and often violently repressed, Mapfumo found strength and inspiration from the folk music of his youth.

The traditional *mbira* – or thumb piano – became the primary weapon in a culture war against the white colonial Government of Rhodesia. The majority Shona people began to take a renewed pride in their culture and traditions. Influenced by the Afrobeat sounds of Fela Kuti, Franco's fast-paced guitar rhythms, Miriam Makeba's freedom songs, and Bob Marley and the Wailers' 'rebel music', Mapfumo plugged the *mbira* into a guitar amp and let rip. He added a full horn section, guitars, bass, drums and backing vocals, and set songs ablaze with a music all his own. Most important of all, he sang in the Shona language rather than English.

This marked the birth of the unique musical style and ethos which Mapfumo dubbed *chimurenga* after the Shona and Ndebele uprisings of 1893 and 1896-97. His music was often played at *pungwes* – all-night meetings of villagers with liberation fighters. The trance-like repetition of Mapfumo's *mbira* rhythms provided an opportunity for community dance and celebration, bringing people together in a society wounded by decades of repression, violence and ridicule. Chimurenga music was an oral newspaper, passing on subversive information coded in the deep metaphor of Shona proverbs.

'Oh grandmothers,
Oh mothers, oh boys,
There's a snake in the forest,
Mothers take hoes,
Grandmothers take hoes,
Boys take axes.'

The early chimurenga music was a spark in dry brush. 'Mapfumo's music provided the fuel and

yearning for liberation,' says Tafazuwa, a student who fled Zimbabwe four years ago and now lives in Britain. 'He is a true culture bandit.' The Rhodesian Government thought so too, and duly imprisoned him. Recognizing the influence he had on people, the white Government tried to manipulate Mapfumo into speaking in their favour. He resisted and white rule was eventually overthrown in 1980. Mapfumo was honoured by the newly elected president Robert Mugabe on stage with Bob Marley, who made a special visit to perform his song 'Zimbabwe' for the occasion. Mapfumo and his band The Blacks Unlimited headlined the show. Mapfumo recalls: 'Well, we all felt great... because everyone was celebrating a new era. Everyone was very happy. It was a day to remember.'

Déjà vu

His next few albums would reflect the early optimism of black Zimbabweans jubilant in their new-found freedom. 'He used to sing praises to Mugabe,' says Brian, an exchange student studying in Britain and attending all of Mapfumo's British shows on this tour. 'It was that sort of time. We all felt that way. Hope. Why wouldn't he be singing about those things then? None of us could have