

# Seun Kuti and Egypt 80: A Long Way to the Beginning

By [Rob Caldwell](#) 26 June 2014

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This is powerful, take-no-prisoners, socially conscious music.

It's also party music.

Because, while there's a lot of anger in a track like lead-off single "IMF", you can't help but start dancing in your seat while listening to it. It's got that driving beat, that groove, those horns (and, man, what horns!).

Seun Kuti and Egypt 80's latest release, *A Long Way to the Beginning*—their third together—finds the youngest son of African music legend Fela Kuti turning in a high-energy, danceable Afrobeat/jazz/funk fusion. Egypt 80 was his father's band, and he took up the mantle of vocalist and band leader in 1997 at the young age of 14.

Expectations will always be high for Seun Kuti, due to his heritage. Thus far, he's carried on his father's brand of music, as well as Fela's political and social views, with aplomb. This new release looks to cement his reputation.

The aforementioned "IMF" refers to the controversial International Monetary Fund—an organization set up to loan money to poor countries, but which has come under criticism as not having those country's best interests at heart. Kuti takes the acronym and gives it an angry twist to "International Motherf\*&\$%r". Back in 1985, singer/songwriter Bruce Cockburn expressed similar sentiments in a song called "Call it Democracy" ("IMF, dirty MF, takes away everything it can get... You don't really give a flying f\*&\$ about the people in misery"). It's sobering and sad to see that, almost 30 years later, the situation doesn't seem to have changed that much.

*A Long Way to the Beginning* was produced by Grammy winning R&B musician and jazz pianist Robert Glasper. Glasper guides a collection of tracks that is, in essence big band music—pan-African style. The 17-member group is very assured and precise, and it's so tight they can turn on a dime. It's complex music indeed, but it's also sweaty and hot. By the time you're catching your breath after the joyous dance explosion "Ohun Aiye", you find yourself embroiled in the heavy funk of "Kalakuta Boy".

Elsewhere, the political protest track "African Smoke" begins with an overlaid rap on top of an interlocking horn and percussion foundation. "Smoke from African fire / Make the black man suffer" go the lyrics, with African smoke symbolizing the injustices and oppression experienced by peoples throughout the continent. "The winds of change will blow the smoke away" is the optimistic rejoinder.

"Black Woman" slows things down and closes the album on a smooth, almost slinky groove. At close to nine minutes, the track is a tribute to the strength of African, and all, black women: "I don't talk about your hair or your shoes or the clothes that you wear / I talk about your mind / I talk about your courage / I talk about your strength and how you manage to achieve so much / When they give you so little / Caught in a vicious cycle / Victim of every battle."

Seun Kuti fills his role as well, or better than, many with twice as much experience as he. This is a well-oiled, veteran operation, with a fiery leader capable of carrying the torch of Afrobeat to far borders and bringing the music to new heights.