

The Idea of a Total Artist: Shooting the Fuji Documentary with Adebayo Ishola Barryreborn
(Posted on Facebook on September 24, 2022)

I have always doubted the idea of a total artist. I just couldn't imagine how a single artist would dance, sing, play instruments, act in stage plays, and create physical artwork—all with impeccable perfection. I thought it's impossible for a young Fujician to recreate complex wordsmithing and maneuver intricate lyrical contours of orthodox Fuji of the 1970s. It's unrealistic, I thought, for anyone to be an academic and a 21st century reincarnation of Barrister—the Fuji Prophet who gave millions of people a frame through which to see their world and its corresponding contradictions.

All these changed in June 2020, when Dr. Soji Cole introduced me to BarryReborn. What started as a simple text message would lead to a strong collaboration. BarryReborn, who studied Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan and Olabisi Onabanjo University is currently a lecturer at the Lagos State University of Education. When he's not teaching, he's performing at a cultural festival or making drums or recreating diverse sub-genre of Fuji in his studio. He has been Sango, Ogun, Oduduwa, Obatala, among other Yoruba male gods and deities in live stage plays. The Fuji documentary is semi-scripted. My subjects are actors who are expected to "perform or act or give life to their own stories" -- while taking lines from me, occasionally. In many ways, their story itself is a script—an archive of memory. So, the Fuji project is more than story telling—the narratives must be rendered in a manner that empower the past with engrossing visual aesthetics.

This approach is not extraordinary, for life itself is performance—there is a performative dimension to human existence. Working with BarryReborn made performing stories for the Fuji documentary easy. Knowing what to say, when to sing or chant with the right intonation, while releasing appropriate gesticulations, are far beyond what a filmmaker can achieve without the independent impulse and creativity of a professional actor like BarryReborn.

Appreciation

Sitting majestically on top of Mokola Hill in Ibadan is the Cultural Center, one of the ruins of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77). After several months of correspondence, I received approval to shoot in its breathtaking gallery, free-of-charge. I thank the administrators of the Cultural Center for their help. I'm also grateful for the support of the management of Cocoa Bean Café, where I shot BarryReborn's live performance on May 28. My camera crew comprised of some highly-motivated mentees— Samuel Yusuf, Tolani Onike, Bunmi Shorunke, Busuyi Adeleye, and Akintunde Boboye. BarryReborn is available for booking: +234 8058121923.

Yours Sincerely in Fuji,
Emperor Saedo Okola and His International Fuji Lions