



Review of

Mr. Fuji: Barry Wonder The First Episode of the Fuji Documentary



By

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This engaging and richly informative documentary explores fùjì, one of Nigeria's most popular music genres, through the life and work of its founder Alhaji Sikiru Ayinde Barrister. Combining archival photos and film clips, contemporary performances, and interviews with a wide range of the musician's associates – band members, sound engineers, actors and actresses, family members, friends, fùjì artists, media scholars, fan club organisers—its expert editing moves us swiftly and satisfyingly through a multitude of facets of the art of “Barry Wonder”.

These include the historical context of the Nigerian civil war followed by the oil boom; Barrister's biography, from a disadvantaged childhood to extraordinary fame, wealth and social prominence achieved through the sheer genius of his musical creativity; the history of the fùjì musical genre itself; the internal dynamics of the band and Barrister's relations with patrons, politicians and the press; Barrister as husband and father; his last years, illness and death in 2010; and the impressive efforts made by his legions of fans to come together to create lasting memorials.

The director and producer of the film,

Professor Saheed Aderintō, is a leading cultural historian and authority on Nigerian popular music. His immersive, participatory research method has yielded remarkable results in this project. Participants are clearly at ease in the interview situation and are given space to elaborate commentaries that are both thoughtful and candid. Each recorded interview is divided into sections and distributed throughout the film, so that by the end you feel you are getting to know the participants as distinctive, often eloquent individuals.

There are also many beautiful performances by fùjì artistes in Barrister's honour sprinkled throughout the film. Though factually detailed and sophisticated in approach, the dominant note is one of respectful admiration for a unique cultural figure. How he envisaged his own legacy, how people remember him, and how his influence lives on, are key themes throughout the documentary. Aderintō himself not only speaks movingly to the camera on the impact of Barrister's art but closes the documentary with a performance of a fùjì praise-poem of his own. The film is beautifully put together and entirely captivating -- a landmark in popular music documentation.

