

The Heroes Children Made: Childhood, Art, and Fuji Stardom (Posted on Facebook on 10/11/2020)

Children are unsung heroes of local cultural production. They would show up for uninvited private and public events and shower love on artists, even when their performance is mediocre. They were the first to admire and boost the morale of artists, even when adults talked down to them. They would celebrate turning points in the life of performers, even when adults think they don't deserve progress. Before the advent of social media, performance art relied on physical crowd of human bodies, dominated by children--not on the number of digital humans following an artist on Instagram or Twitter. This does not mean that children are politically indifferent or lack a deep sense of artistic judgement. Rather, they privilege the joy and spectacle of "looking" over whether a performance is spectacular or not. When it comes to art appreciation, the notion that children are innocent is incorrect.

This was the mood when Rasheed Ayinde (Merenge) received a gift of a brand new Datsun Cherry from his promoter in 1991. A crowd of school children besieged his home and turned his new car into a spectacle of wonder. His new machine was "a groaning iron... moving on the road," to borrow literary giant Tanure Ojaide's childhood memory of sighting a car for the first time in the 1950s. Merenge's Datsun Cherry, like Merenge himself, became an instant legend. Like his predecessors, he composed new songs to praise his car-- a true validation of his profound artistry.

Artistic stardom and fandom entail performance of progress. And conspicuous demonstration of real and imagined success is intricately connected with perception of accomplishment and circulation of narratives needed to accumulate a fan base. No Fuji artist would hide an observable progress, partly because evidence of success was required for climbing the next step in life. Cars and hajj were the most important gifts that artists received from their promoters. Yet, the political economy of these gifts went beyond mobility, comfort, and religious piety. Many artists lived their aspirational or imagined life ahead of time because their promoters, who did not give them luxury for free, knew that material possession as evidence of progress determined their fame and honor.

For the first time, I am writing an academic book about events of the past that I witnessed, about my childhood heroes and heroines, and about narratives that formed the basis of my own socialization. Because the child of yesterday is the adult of today, writing the history of performance art can be an exercise in auto/biographical narrative. When historians acquire primary data about a period they lived, they are reintroduced to their past in new ways. Yet, these poses unique epistemological questions. The fact that I witnessed some of the events I now write about does not mean I would produce an "incontestable" account. Occasionally, it takes some detachment (in time and space) from a narrative that one is familiar with to make uncommon sense of what "actually" transpired.

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

Car gift for 'Serubawon'

A DATSUN Cherry car has been presented to Rasheed Ayinde Serubawon by Mr. Lati Alagbada, the distributor of his latest album "Serubawon". The car according to Alagbada is a gift to a well behaved artist who has contributed his quota to fuji music.

The gift, 'tagged' "Surprise gift '91", was presented to him in Lagos late last year. The Talazo Jackson musician who is the rave in Ibadan revealed to *Entertainment Tribune* that he was quite surprise about the gift.

The musician who has waxed up to five records to date, told *Entertainment Tribune* that *Serubawon* record is the greatest hit he has ever released.

Rasheed who started music in 1983 said that this is his first time of owing a car. He said he will always be grateful to Alagbada for his kind gesture adding that, he has really

encouraged him.

The fuji Jackson told *Tribune* that, he will be coming out later in the year with another chart buster album.



Alagbada & Rasheed Ayinde (Serubawon)