

## Waka and Apala from Nigeria

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In 1965, Leo Sarkisian launched the Voice of America radio program 'Music Time in Africa', a show that featured traditional and contemporary music from throughout Africa. Today, 43 years later, Music Time is still on the air, presenting, every Saturday and Sunday, music from throughout the continent, to listeners across Africa. It was also in 1965 that Leo made some of his best recordings; the tapes I treasure most in our collection.

In 1965, Leo was living in Monrovia, Liberia, where he was working for the Voice of America's African program center. One of his primary responsibilities was to record and collect music for the VOA's Africa service. In the spring of that year, Lillard Hill, who at the time was the VOA representative in Lagos, Nigeria, called Leo to tell him about a young Nigerian bandleader he should consider recording; his name was Fela Ransome Kuti.

In August of 1965, Leo, accompanied by his wife Mary, flew from Monrovia to Lagos. Several days after their arrival in Lagos, they went to the port, to pick up their 1964 Willys Jeep, which had been shipped from Monrovia. Inside the Jeep was Leo's recording equipment; three two-track tape machines (including Leo's favorite Nagra), two MX-777 Sony six-input mixers, twelve microphones, a generator, customized frequency meters, and a crate full of cables and microphone stands. Leo and Mary spent the next six weeks traveling around Western Nigeria, recording some of the region's most appreciated musicians. (Before hitting the road, however, Leo did record Fela and his Koola Lobitos- you can see a picture of the reel in our picture gallery- and Cardinal Rex Lawson. I will feature both of these unreleased recordings in the future.)

One of the first people Leo and Mary met in Lagos was Mr. Tunde Sowande; a specialist in Yoruba music and the nephew of Fela Sowande-the pioneer of modern Nigerian 'Art music'. Tunde Sowande traveled with Leo and Mary, suggesting which musicians to record, facilitating introductions, and helping to organize the recording sessions. Over the course of their six-week trip Leo made over a dozen recordings, all of them are fantastic. Here are my three favorites.

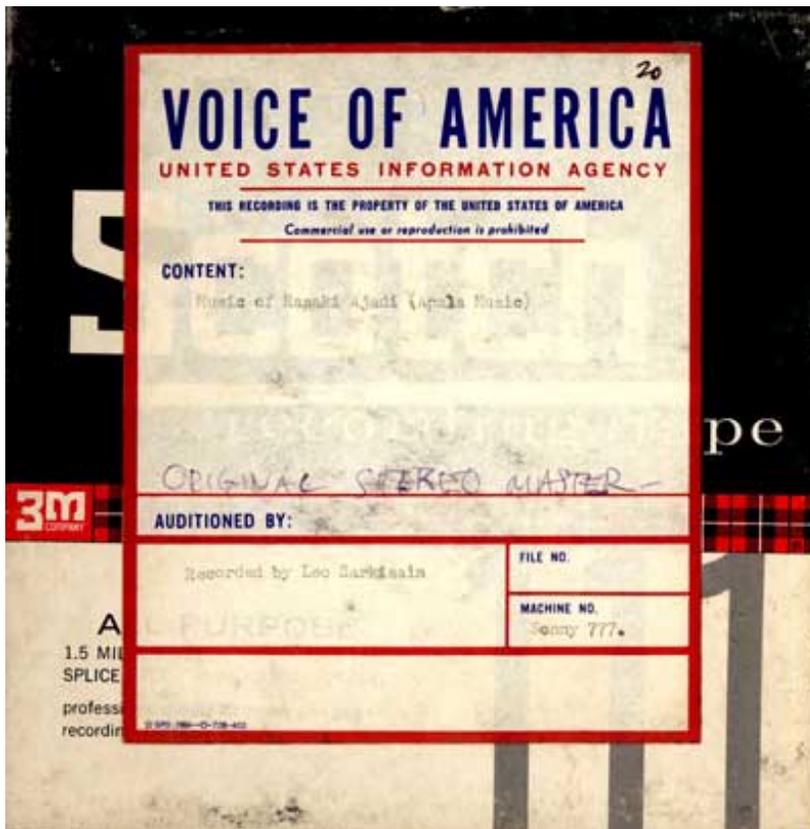


Waka music is genre of popular Yoruba Muslim song, performed exclusively by women, that was developed in the 1950s-it predates juju and fuji musics. One of the pioneers of the genre was Alhaja Batile Alake from Ijebu province, in Western Nigeria. This recording features one of Alhaja Alake's contemporaries, Nosimotu Alimi from the village of Ago Iwoye, also in Ijebu province. At the time of this recording, Mrs. Alimi, who had already been performing for fifteen years, led a group of 8 young men and women. She starts this piece with an exhortation to cleanliness, goes on to praise municipal health inspectors, and continues with fulsome praise and prayers for the teachers who shape Nigeria's future generations.

↳ [Nosimotu Alimi & her Waka Group](#)

Apala music is one of my favorite genres of Yoruba music. This style has roots in the songs and rhythms that were used to wake worshippers after fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Apala music, which

is one of the roots of juju and fuji, was always an urban music; open to new influences and 'foreign' rhythms.



At the time of this recording session, Rasaki Ajadi and his Apala group were based in Ibadan, also in Western Nigeria. The group consisted of three gangans (talking drums), one agidigbo (a large, three-key, box thump-piano), the maracas, one akuba (a small conga-shaped drum) and the konnongo (is this a small frame drum?). Rasaki starts the song by calling on the Yoruba God 'Oranmiyan' to 'protect us from death and unforeseen circumstances.' He sings, 'be careful, life is unpredictable; it is impossible to know the future. Death is inevitable, neither the rich nor the poor can escape.' He goes on to exhort the rich to help the poor.

↳ [Rasaki Ajadi & his Apala Group 'track one'](#)

Rasaki start's this next piece with a few verses of praise for his music and orchestra before launching into a series of Yoruba proverbs. He sings, 'Life keeps going on without stopping, and the maker of time keeps counting the days. You people that are unhappy with our work, with our music, it is because you don't know what the future holds.'

↳ [Rasaki Ajadi & his Apala Group 'track two'](#)

This final recording is the best of the bunch. This is Timiaju Abiodun, who was twenty-five years old in 1965, a rising Apala star. He led a group of ten musicians that performed frequently throughout Western Nigeria. He introduces this next piece by telling his listeners; 'I am here with my musicians for your pleasure. Those that are standing keep standing firm. Those who are sitting keep sitting still. And if you don't want to do anything, go home now. If we call your name three times, put your hand in your pocket and bring out some money. The amount of money you can put down will determine the potency of the dose.'

↳ [Tiamiju Abiodun & his Apala Group](#)

I hope you have enjoyed this first batch of Nigerian recordings from Leo's 1965 trip through Western Nigeria!

THESE ARE **STEREO** RECORDINGS AND I STRONGLY ADVISE THAT YOU LISTEN TO THEM ON A PAIR OF EXTERNAL SPEAKERS!!