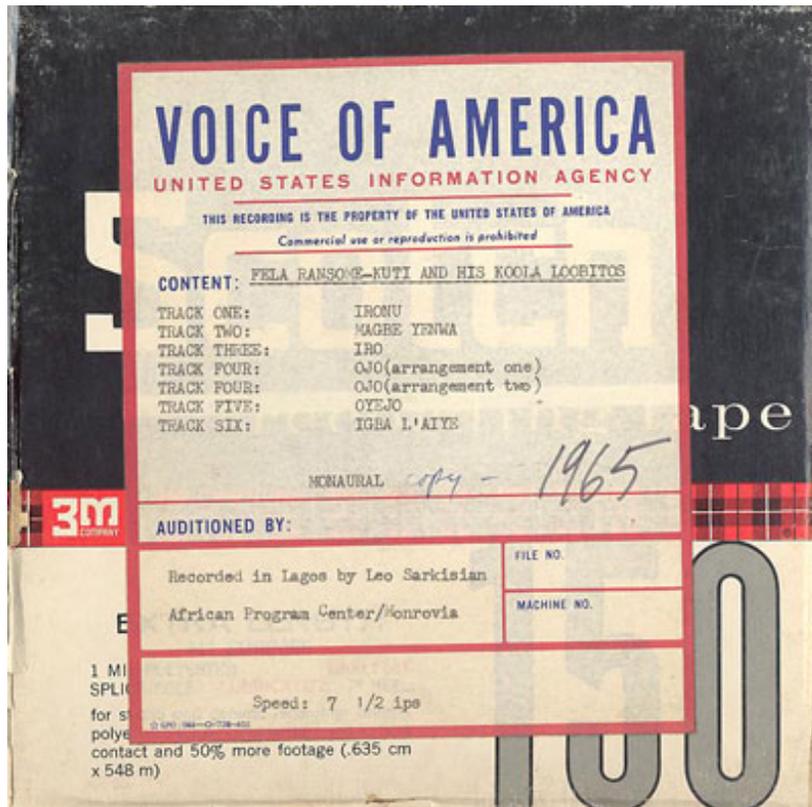


## Unreleased Fela and Koola Lobitos, 1965

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I have recently fallen into the end of the year holiday-induced doldrums, and have not had the time to finish the research on several posts I have been working on. Nonetheless, I wanted to end 2008 with some good music (recordings that don't need much commentary). I thought I would feature what is arguably the most 'famous' tape in our archive; Leo's never-released 1965 reel of Fela Ransome-Kuti and his Koola Lobitos that caught the Afrobeat pioneers at an interesting time in their careers. Fela had returned to Lagos two years earlier (after several years of musical study at Trinity College in London) and the Koola Lobitos were starting to get noticed in Nigeria. Leo's recording session with Fela and the Koola Lobitos came at the end of a six week trip to Nigeria that I have discussed in this previous [post](#).



Over the past several years, several different compilations have released Koola Lobitos tracks from the same era; these recordings however were made for Voice of America broadcasts, and I don't think any of them have been commercially released. However, given that none of the tracks are longer than 4 minutes, I suspect that Fela may have hoped to release these recordings. (According to Toshiya Endo's great Fela [discography](#) different versions of two of the songs Fela recorded for Leo were released, and four were never re-recorded, or at least no other versions are currently accounted for).

As you listen to the tracks you will hear Fela introducing each take. Unfortunately we do not have any of the false takes. Leo's best recollection is that these false starts and alternate takes were erased when he got back to the VOA African Program Center in Liberia; no sense in wasting valuable tape stock. These recordings, for reasons that no one can any longer remember, are also the only ones from Leo's 1965 Nigerian trip that he recorded in monaural.

- ↩ [Fela Ransome-Kuti & his Koola Lobitos 'Ironu'](#)
- ↩ [Fela Ransome-Kuti & his Koola Lobitos 'Magbe Yenwa'](#)
- ↩ [Fela Ransome-Kuti & his Koola Lobitos 'Iro'](#)
- ↩ [Fela Ransome-Kuti & his Koola Lobitos 'Ojo \(arrangement one\)'](#)
- ↩ [Fela Ransome-Kuti & his Koola Lobitos 'Ojo \(arrangement two\)'](#)
- ↩ [Fela Ransome-Kuti & his Koola Lobitos 'Oyejo'](#)
- ↩ [Fela Ransome-Kuti & his Koola Lobitos 'Igba L'Aiye'](#)

A couple of months ago, while looking for some Angolan radio tapes I found a few other items of Fela-bilia. The most interesting is a 1967 interview that Fela gave to Sean Kelly, then the VOA correspondent in Lagos. Fela's years as an international 'icon' were still ahead of him; Fela was still a Lagos bandleader trying to push the boundaries of Nigerian popular music. This nine-minute feature includes a live cut of the Koola Lobitos

performing 'Lai-se', and ends with Fela's assessment of the West African music scene.

↳ [VOA interview with Fela Ransome-Kuti, Lagos, November 9, 1967](#)

This final track does not feature Fela himself, but rather his paternal grandfather the Reverend Canon Josiah J. Ransome-Kuti, an Anglican pastor and composer of religious hymns. This recording is one of many from the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation archives that were given to the Voice of America by the great Nigerian composer Fela Sowande, who in the early 1950s had been the director of Music and Music Research at the N.B.C. This piece was composed by Reverend Ransome-Kuti but I am not sure if this recording also features his voice.

↳ [Reverend Canon Josiah J. Ransome-Kuti 'Kyrie'](#)

For a wonderfully detailed examination of Fela's life and career check out Michael Veal's biography 'Fela: The Life and Times of an African'. Best wishes to all for 2009!!