

This is what Kuti has always set out to do, from albums including 2011's Brian Eno-produced *From Africa With Fury: Rise* to his guest spots with Egypt 80 on Janelle Monáe's party-fied 2023 album *Age of Pleasure*. "I met Janelle at the Hollywood Bowl years ago, maybe 2016, and we stayed in touch. When she was making this record her people reached out to say that she would love to work on it with me."

The good times are there, too, on *Heavier Yet...*, notably on the aforementioned 'Love & Revolution' and the groove-laden closer, 'Move'. "I want people to know that liberation work is joyful work," says Kuti, who has a ten-year-old daughter Adara with his wife Yeide, a TV chef and former Egypt 80 dancer, and has another daughter, also ten (and allegedly estranged), who lives in Lagos with her mother.

"My daughter [Adara] is at the age where she just wants to be famous without doing all the work," he says with a grin. "I'm being forced right now to write her a song."

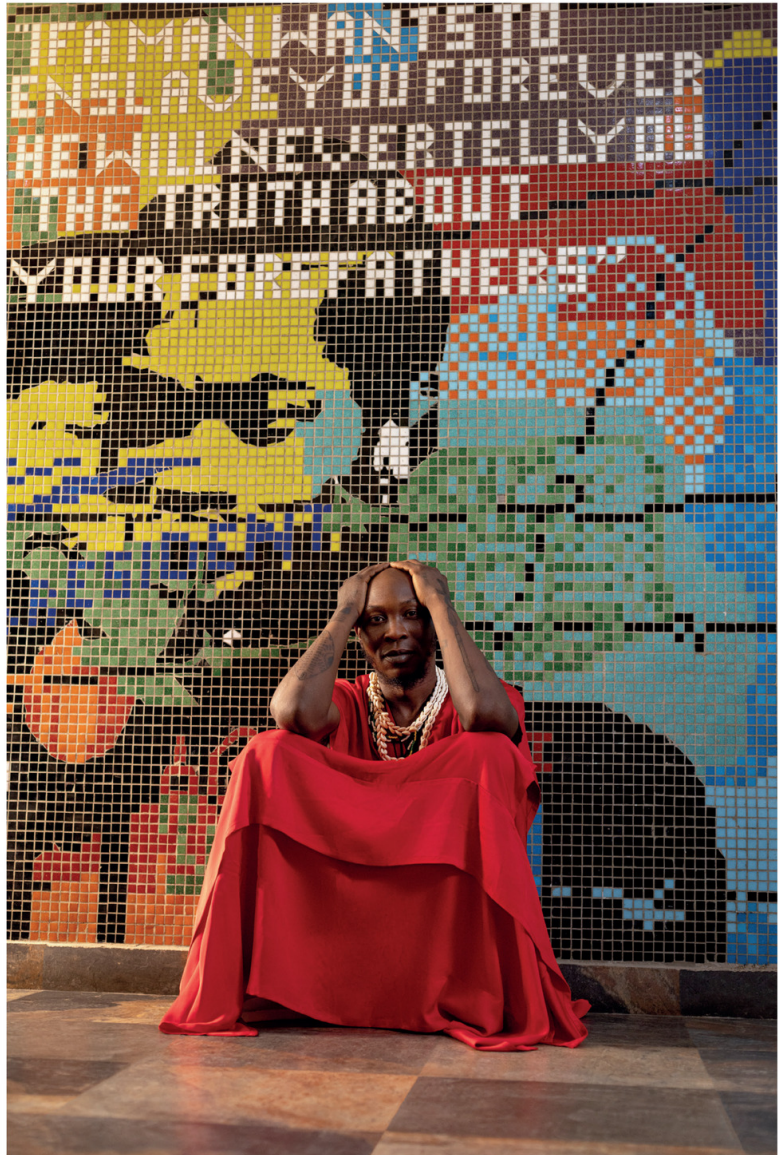
Unlike Fela, who was given to macho posturing – in 1976 he famously married all 27 of his backing dancers – Seun seems aware of issues around gender and feminism. Recently asked by a panel of female hosts on Nigerian TV whether he planned to continue the Kuti line by having a son, he clapped back, replying that the line was perfectly able to continue through his daughter. Of his relationship with Yeide, whom he married in 2020, he says, "She challenges me to be better. Love for me is a force that can change the world. It's not just about going on holidays and making babies and buying gifts in the way the capitalists want you to think. It is a decision more powerful than that."

The pair have plans to open another, larger Kuti's Bistro in Lagos after the pandemic sent their last restaurant venture under, and Kuti is to revive his rant-a-minute YouTube series *Birds Eye View* as a podcast later in the year.

Indeed, while considered a problematic rabble-rouser by those in power in Nigeria, Seun Kuti is beloved in turn by a huge army of Nigerian fans, a fact evidenced during his eight-day imprisonment in May 2023 after being charged with assaulting/slapping a police officer during a driving offence. "Crowds of people were outside all day and all night. It is not easy to be in jail; they knew my innocence and they supported me, screaming my name, giving me strength. It was like a carnival outside the police station sometimes."

"The Movement of the People is a necessary step for me to take in terms of organising, finding direct representation for the people politically," he says of MOP, which he revived following the Nigerian #EndSARS (a social movement against police brutality) protests of October 2020. "Our country's elites are not interested in development. There must be drastic change in the relationship between the elite of Africa, the resources of Africa and the African people. That is the message of the MOP."

Kola Oshaiye; Dianne Brooks



It's also the message of *Heavier Yet (Lays the Crownless Head)*, a masterwork that looks set to garner him the recognition within Nigeria, long overdue, purposefully withheld, that he deserves.

"What's incredible for me is that my Nigerian numbers are growing exponentially, so I must be speaking in a voice that my people are understanding. This is not easy in a country where everything is so privatised, where reaching the people without the mainstream is not easy. Even when I was nominated for a Grammy in 2018 not a single African ceremony gave us a nomination. Not one."

He shrugs and smiles again. "But things are changing in terms of my career at home," says Seun Kuti, "and that brings so much joy to my heart." ♦

+ *Heavier Yet (Lays the Crownless Head)* is a *Top of the World* this issue, p56. 'T.O.P.' is on this issue's compilation, track 1

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