

Mp3 Charleston Okafor - Asante Groove



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World Fusion-Sade meets Steely Dan in a Majek Fashek world groove dance party, while invoking Marley-like rootsy vibes. 11 MP3 Songs WORLD: World Fusion, JAZZ: Jazz Fusion Details: URBAN DIALECT THE ASANTE GROOVE: CHARLESTON OKAFOR'S ELECTRONIC WORLD BEAT by Jimi Izael Published February 13 - 19, 2002 In 1985, Charleston Okafor came to America from a small village in eastern Nigeria called Ogidi. A blood relative of the world-renowned Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (Things Fall Apart, 1958), Okafor moved here with the intention of becoming a medical doctor. Instead, he says, "I discovered MTV." Eleven years after moving to the United States, Okafor set his medical books to the side to become the force behind the Asante Groove project, an amalgam of Cleveland-based jazz and reggae musicians who create a sound that runs the gamut from dancehall reggae to smooth jazz. Originally released in 1996, the group's album features artists from saxophonist Russell Thompson to West African percussionist David "Baba" Coleman. In December, Okafor released a remix album to the original self-titled Asante Groove project, titled Asante Groove: The Remixes (Power of Peace Syndicate). The new disc is an electronic reworking of the original 11 tracks, geared for the soundbwoys that crave a little more roots and raddics in their riddims. The remix EP contains reworkings by the likes of drum and bass warrior DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, and Victor Axelrod aka Ticklah, who has lent his roots-inspired styling to artists as diverse as Mary J. Blige, Les Nubians and George Michael. Some artists are leery about letting anyone tamper with their masterworks, but Okafor was excited about the prospect of a remix release. "I was looking forward to other people presenting their own interpretations of my songs," he says. "It's all part of the process - presenting [the music] from all different views. That's what music is all about." Some classify Okafor's project as world music, which is OK with him, because there seems to be a burgeoning underground world music scene here. "People in Cleveland that get into

world music have traveled quite a bit outside of the city," he says. "They have lived in diverse communities like New York City, San Francisco or what have you. This is where they acquired a taste for the music - from hearing it on the streets all around them. They get the music by living around it." For his own exposure to music, Okafor credits his mother, Christina Akuadi Okafor, with passing down her musical talent to him. A former musical director of the women's a cappella church group in Ogidi, Christina Okafor performed in the church naming and death ceremonies that are social and religious rites of passage in traditional Ibo culture (one of Nigeria's three tribes). "As was the case in those days, and still is with the youths in my village today, young boys like me longed for the days when we could participate in our own masquerade or nkpokiti dance groups," he says. By the age of 10, Okafor became a musical director, and he brings that tradition of music "I-rector" to Asante Groove's floating membership. He also has one of the longest-running college radio shows in the city, "African Abstract," which has run Sunday afternoons from 4-6 pm on WCSB 89.3 FM since 1992. Asante Groove has opened for many of the national acts he spins on the radio - groups like the Meditations, Chaka Demus Pliers and reggae superstar Michael Rose of Black Uhuru. Although they haven't played out much since the release of the full-length CD (an independent that sold out with little formal promotion), the band is well received whenever they perform. Still, Okafor remains busy preparing the next phase of the project, and he's anxious to get it started. "We do shows occasionally, but I'm more into the studio work I've been doing, making demos and what have you," he says. "I have a lot of music, but not a lot of finished songs, so I am trying to get that together. All of my music is sketched out on tapes here and there, just waiting to be properly produced." Okafor has just secured a management deal with a company in Los Angeles, and is looking forward to getting people outside of Cleveland to feel the Groove. "I'm trying to spread the music and the message as far as it will go around the globe." Back to top of page ****This article was published in the Free Times Magazine, Cleveland, in the volume that ran February 13-19, 2002. It is currently housed on geocities.com/rastaman_vibration_music/asantegroove_bio.html freetimes.com

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