

drums, percussion, guitars and horns. It's the instantly familiar sound that Fela pioneered and Antibalas passionately adheres to (right down to the wry vocal style of singer Abraham "Duke" Amayo), foreshadowing the eventual realization that this is the best hybrid of enlightened leader and inspired followers Antibalas has yet produced.

Substitute "Nigeria" for "America" in that first song's title and you have the basis for something Fela may well have recorded 30 years ago. But where Fela might have denounced colonialism trying to crush tribal tradition, Antibalas questions the immigration-versus-slavery equation in the building and diversifying of the U.S. and laments how and why true unity managed to go awry in today's media-saturated environment.

Next comes "Pay Back Africa," an instrumental seeming to do just that in terms of powerful musical respect, which may have to suffice in the absence of material compensation. "Indictment" follows, and though its rather disjointed arrangement and peevisish name-checking make it the least-satisfying track musically, it's an effective reminder that pleasantness must sometimes be sacrificed to make a point. "Big Man" is a burning look at how ruthlessly and amorally the rich and powerful can force the rest of us to take it on the chin with no recourse. It's a tune that recalls Fela's similarly sardonic "Shuffering and Smiling" though it's even more on target.

From there it's complete left-turn time with "Obanla'e," a brief percussion-heavy Afro-Cubano chant that goes straight to the roots of the Latin sounds hinted at on some previous Antibalas works. I'd have been perfectly content with another two or three minutes of such an interlude, but once a rising undercurrent of horns and organ dramatically signaled the onset of the next track, all cause for complaint vanished. Like the massive but majestic beast it's named after, "Elephant" struts lightly through an unhurried groove with hypnotic Yoruba call-and-response vocals (led by conguero Ernesto Abreau), carrying on the African vibe set by "Obanla'e." Evoking Obatala, orisha of peace

and light, "Elephant" is a parable/prayer that sweetly lays cynicism aside long enough to stir the spirits within.

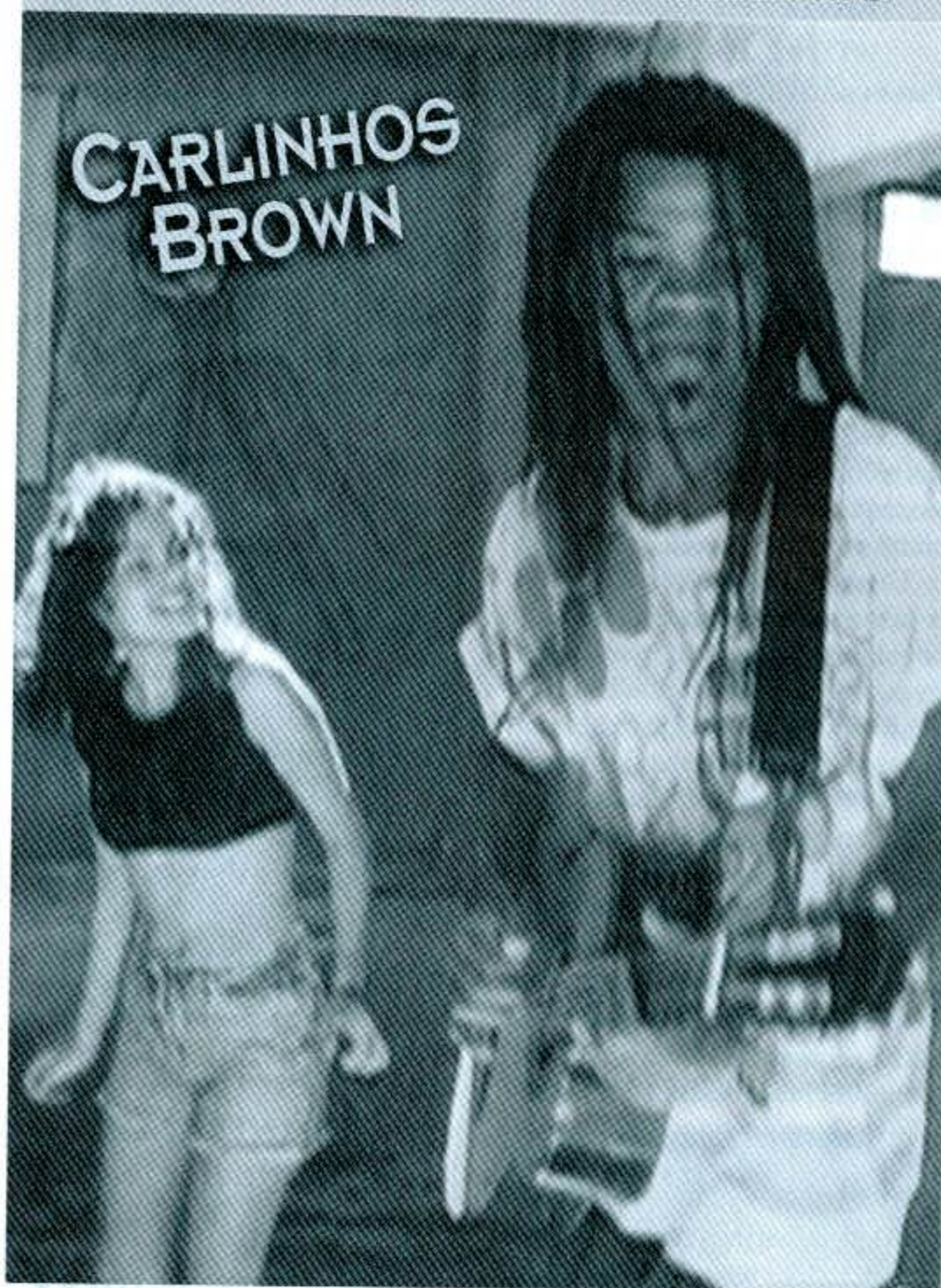
And then we get to the final track, where further striving for basic common-sense goodness takes place. "Sister," over 19 minutes in length, is a gruff but sincere big-up to women, apologetic in tone and even asserting without reservation that women are the equal of men. (Stick that in your spliff and smoke it, Fela.) The song's length allows plenty of space for the lyrical truths to unfold as well as offering ample time to savor the seamless layers of pulsating sound that have completely captivated from the beginning of the album to this extended winding-down.

In fact, the whole disc comes at you with an aggressive cohesiveness that gives it the feel of a true musical manifesto for our times. It's the kind of statement that this band has the guts and talent to put forth and anyone with ears to hear should listen to. Antibalas are still on the trail that Fela blazed, but their own alternate routes are taking them to places where mortal men can and must dare to tread.

—Tom Orr

[www.ropeadope.com ; www.antibalas.com]

WORLD MUSIC PORTRAITS



CARLINHOS BROWN

WORLD MUSIC PORTRAITS:

BAHIA BEAT

(Shanachie DVD 116, 2004. 52 mins.)

Carlinhos Brown—*Bahia Beat* is an engaging portrait of the Grammy-winning Brazilian artist whose spirit is as forceful as the sounds he creates.

The film gives insight into the development of Brown's aesthetic—as he strides the streets of Candeal, Salvador, Bahia, the artist uses a *tambo* to demonstrate exactly how his mentor, the legendary Pintado do Bongo, taught him that Brazilian drumming is built on a foundation of venerable Yoruban rhythmic patterns, then layered with the sounds of modern religious Candomble drumming. Brown's ability to expand upon the musical dialogue is vividly displayed in a major rock concert-style performance of his world music hit, "A Namorada." Scenes with local singers and percussionists as well as a practice session with his latest street music-oriented collective, Zarabe, illustrate Brown's deep commitment to the development of Brazilian youth.

SUN RA

THE CRY OF JAZZ

(Unheard Music Series/MVD DJ-865)

Filmed on location in Chicago in 1959 *The Cry of Jazz* is a fascinating oddity that deserves to be seen. Utilizing a hipsterish, interracial jazz-appreciation club as its backdrop, the 35-minute black-and-white film is an interestingly positioned polemic on the history of jazz served up *nouvelle vague* style. Members of the amazing Chicago-period Sun Ra Arkestra, including tenor saxophonist John Gilmore and Sun Ra himself, provide visual examples. The *Cry of Jazz* is a worthwhile addition to any musicologist's DVD library.

[www.musicvideodistributors.com]

—Rebecca Levine