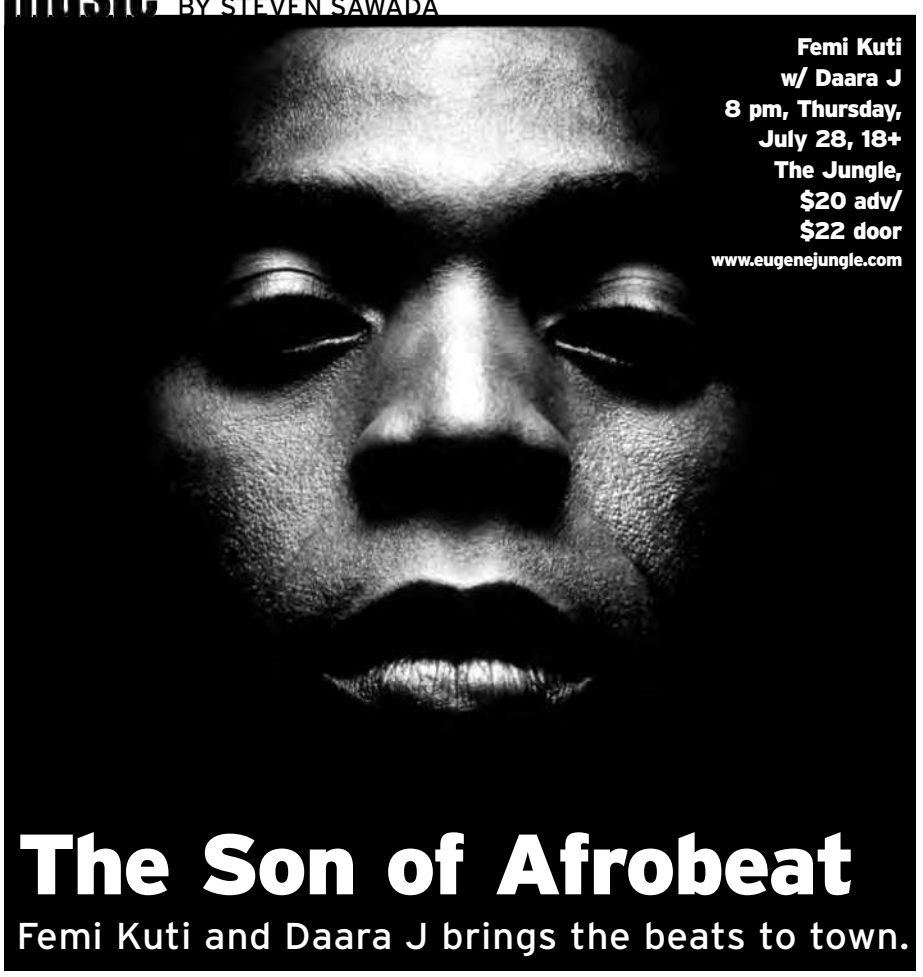
music BY STEVEN SAWADA



The Son of Afrobeat

Femi Kuti and Daara J brings the beats to town.

It is difficult for any man to live in the shadow of his father. But when your father is Fela Anikulapo Kuti, and when his legacy is the entire politico-music movement known as Afrobeat, fulfilling any filial expectations the world music community may have (not to mention the expectations of the Nigerian people) seems wholly impossible.

Some would say Femi Kuti, the eldest son of Fela, assumed this burden in 1997 upon his father's death from AIDS-related complications. However, Femi understood and accepted his father's legacy long before his death. Born in London but raised under the oppressive rule of Nigeria's corrupt government, Femi's induction into Afrobeat began at a very young age.

Femi witnessed his father's musical tirades against the Nigerian government first hand. Afrobeat's fusion of Western musical styles such as funk and jazz blended with traditional West African music provided an excellent base for Fela's political commentary. But his stance against the government had its price. Fela routinely faced false imprisonment, phony criminal charges and brutal violence. All of this, coupled with the impoverished conditions in Lagos, inspired Femi to drop out of school in 1978 and pick up the alto saxophone as a member of his father's band Egypt 80.

Then in 1985, as the audience at the Hollywood Bowl eagerly awaited the appearance of Fela and Egypt 80, Femi instead walked on stage to lead his father's band. Arrested at the Lagos airport on concocted fraud charges, Fela failed to board the U.S.-bound plane. In his father's absence, Femi stepped up and delivered a performance that brought the U.S. audience members to their feet. A year later, he split off from Egypt 80 and, with two of his sisters, formed his own band, Positive Force.

After his father's death, Femi continued to champion Afrobeat and landed a recording contract with MCA that resulted in two albums: *Shoki Shoki* and the critically acclaimed 2001 release *Fight to Win* (which also featured Common and Mos Def).

Femi makes his Eugene debut in support of a greatest hits release entitled *The Best of Femi Kuti*. He also just released the DVD *Live at the Shrine.* The disc features Femi and Positive Force live in Lagos at the Africa Shrine, an incarnation of the legendary Shrine nightclub, the music venue originally founded by Fela.

Senegalese hip hop group Daara J, fresh off a performance at Live 8, will open the show with their border smashing, politically conscious style of hip hop. The group adds a new dimension to the international hip hop community by melding English with French, Spanish and Wolof (a prominent Senegalese dialect). Following the lead of Senegalese rappers like Positive Black Soul and the Senegalese-born MC Solaar, Daara J's American debut album *Boomerang* conveys a fresh and all too rare international hip hop experience. **EW**