Osibisa - Ojah Awake (1976)

A1 The Coffee Song 3:14 A2 The Warrior 3:43 A3 Flying Bird 'Anoma' 4:40 A4 Cherryfield 4:30 A5 Dance The Body Music 3:48 B1 Ojah Awake 4:52 B2 Keep On Trying 5:17 B3 Hamattan 6:04 B4 Sakabo 3:58 Bass – Mike Odumosu Congas, Percussion – Kofi Ayivor Drums, Bongos, Bells [Cowbells] – Sol "RhythmMan" Amafio Guitar – Jake Solo (tracks: A1, A2) Guitar, Vocals – Wendell Richardson Organ, Piano, Clavinet, Synthesizer [Moog], Vocals – Kiki Gyan Producer – Gerry Bron Saxophone [Tenor, Soprano], Flute, Drums [African], Vocals, Producer [Assistant] – Teddy Osei Trumpet, Flugelhorn, Cabasa, Bells, Rattle, Timbales – Mac Tontoh Violin – Graham Smith (tracks: A4)

Osibisa's eighth album in only five years, 1976's Ojah Awake was the Ghanaian Afro-poppers' commercial high point in their adopted home of Great Britain. Though the band had a strong cult following throughout their career, this big-selling album spawned two big hits: the Brazilian-flavored "The Coffee Song" (a '40s novelty song that had previously been recorded by the Andrews Sisters, Rosemary Clooney, and, improbably, Frank Sinatra) and the disco-tinged groover "Dance the Body Music." As might be imagined, then, this is Osibisa's most slickly commercial record, with Gerry Bron's glossy production smoothing out the free jazz influences that had peeked around the corners of earlier Osibisa gems like Woyaya. (It's telling that as "purer" West African highlife artists like King Sunny Ade started showing up on U.K./U.S. cultural radar, Osibisa's critical reputation plummeted.) That said, in no way does Ojah Awake feel like a sellout move; Teddy Osei and company keep the rock and funk influences as a flavoring, not a main dish, and the exciting, potent highlife of the title track or "The Warrior" is among the group's best work. This is an excellent album for newcomers to Afro-pop, though those already familiar with more challenging artists like Thomas Mapfumo or Fela Kuti might find it a little bland. The AIM CD adds two contemporary single tracks, "Living" and "That's Life," and an alternate take of "The Coffee Song." ---Stewart Mason, AllMusic Review

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