

# Sunny Adé a special event

By RICHARD UNDERHILL

The Toronto concert-going public was treated to a rare exhibition of natural talent fused with energetic showmanship as King Sunny Adé and his African Beats played to a capacity crowd at the Concert Hall Sunday night.

Adé, a Nigerian tribal prince, plays, as described by the title of his first album, *JuJu Music*, which is a commercial mixture of traditional African drumming, call and response vocalizing (in his native tongue), Afro-American musical idioms (funk, reggae, calypso), and Western instruments.

These divergent influences are bound together by Adé's slick arrangements and charismatic stage presence. The result is a spectacle that is both musically exciting and visually entertaining.

Originally scheduled to do two shows, Adé canceled his first, and instead delivered one 2½-hour non-stop performance. It began with the appearance of a solitary percussionist. As he set up a bouncy rhythmic ostinato, the rest of the band slowly drifted on stage, bringing with them a multitude of exotic instruments (talking drums, bongos, bells, guitars), adding to the density of the music and the visual spectacle on the stand.

By the time King Adé arrived—regally attired in crown and flowing golden robes and flanked by four traditionally clothed vocalists—the stage resembled an African tribal feast at a 104° pitch, complete with choreographed dancing and light show.

Sunny led his 18-piece African Beats through a variety of tunes, using a dense groundwork of polyrhythmic percussion as a vehicle for excursions into funk and calypso. Although heavily arranged, the songs retained vitality and energy. There was plenty of room for improvising within each piece. However, the

tunes were kept short enough to remain both novel and alluring.

Adé exerted a near-telepathic control over his musicians—a nod of his head or gesture with cape enough to cue the band into a new song or alternate rhythmic groove. Also Adé's rapport with the audience was excellent. He encouraged the willing crowd to keep time, sing, and of course, dance—demonstrating the holistic nature of performance in African society where there is little distinction between audience and performer. This energetic openness and enthusiasm, contradictory to the snide arrogance of many Western rock groups, transformed the concert into a special event.

Unfortunately, Sunday night's engagement was King Sunny Adé's last appearance of a North American tour that has seen him play Toronto three times. However, those interested in participating in an Afro-American experience of a similar sort should not miss Sun Ra and Ninth-Dimensional Arkestra tonight at Larry's Hideaway.

Like Adé, Sun Ra leads a large, devoted band (many members of the Arkestra live with Sun Ra in a Philadelphia commune) whose concerts are more like intergalactic religious experiences than mere entertainment.

Internationally acclaimed, Sun Ra's music is the vanguard of the avant-garde and ranges from free-jazz to blues, middle eastern music to bebop, with plenty of room for African and Asian influences as well. Guaranteed to be entertaining.



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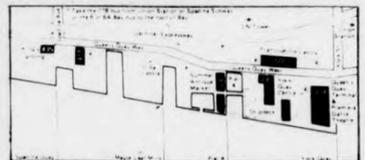
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Thurs. Sept. 15th - 2pm-9pm  
Fri. Sept. 16th - Noon-9pm  
Sat. Sept. 17th - 10am-6pm



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