

Throwback: Fela: Pansa Pansa



Fela's "Pansa Pansa" was the b-side of his 1992 release, *Underground System*. "Pansa" is a Yoruban term that means "inconvenient truth," and for Fela that meant his ongoing critique of his native Nigerian government and political corruption in the world. "Pansa Pansa" had been on Fela's live setlist since 1976. The Underground System title referred to what he called a group of secretive military and political elites focused on silencing anyone who challenged the status quo. The Afrobeat pioneer made his reputation calling out the corrupt Nigerian political system since 1969 when he discovered the Black Power movement during a 10-month stay in Los Angeles. "Pansa Pansa" had the usual traits of the genre he pioneered: jazzy baritone and tenor saxophones, hot rhythms, tinkly electric piano, and his incendiary lyrics. Fela had proven the power of songs as resistance when his "Zombie"

upset the Nigerian government and military. They infamously raided his Kalakuta Republic compound, burning it down and throwing his feminist mother, who was the first woman in Nigeria to drive a car, out of a window, causing her death. The government attacks or the death of his mother stopped Fela from singing about his politics and “Pansa Pansa” was his last release before his passing in 1997.

Fela’s influence is still felt in popular culture and several biographies, the stage play *Fela Son of Kuti: The Fall of Kalakuta*, the musical *Fela!* and the documentary *Finding Fela* have all examined his life. Yeni Kuti, one of his daughters, started the Felabration Festival in 1998 at the New Africa Shrine in Nigeria, which replaces the one Fela founded, to remember him every year. In 2022, Fela was inducted into the Black Music & Entertainment Hall of Fame. In 2025, the European Union made a commitment to Nigeria and other African nations to support their creative work to foster cultural understanding and humanity. The announcement was made at the Afrobeat Rebellion Exhibition in Lagos to celebrate Fela’s birthday.