



Contact: Richard Kornberg / Billy Zavelson / Tommy Wesely (212) 944-9444
Richard@KornbergPR.com / Billy@KornbergPR.com / Tommy@KornbergPR.com
PHOTOS: <http://www.felaonbroadway.com/epk.html>

**SHAWN "JAY-Z" CARTER AND WILL & JADA PINKETT SMITH
PRESENT**

FELA!

**THE NEW BROADWAY MUSICAL BASED ON THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF ICONIC
AFRICAN COMPOSER & PERFORMER
FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI**

BOOK BY **JIM LEWIS & BILL T. JONES**
MUSIC & LYRICS BY **FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI**
DIRECTED & CHOREOGRAPHED BY **BILL T. JONES**

EUGENE O'NEILL THEATRE

OPENING NIGHT: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23

Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter and **Will & Jada Pinkett Smith** present *Fela!*, the new musical based on the life and music of groundbreaking African composer, performer and activist **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti**, currently in previews at the **Eugene O'Neill Theatre (230 West 49th Street)**. The official opening is set for **Monday, November 23**. This new musical is directed and choreographed by Tony[®] Award-winner **Bill T. Jones** (*Spring Awakening*), with a book by **Jim Lewis** and **Bill T. Jones**. **Sahr Ngaujah** and **Kevin Mambo** play the title character at alternate performances, while the world renowned **Antibalas** and other members of the NYC Afrobeat community, under the direction of **Aaron Johnson**, again perform Kuti's rousing music live onstage. Winner of this year's Lucille Lortel Award for Best Musical, *Fela!* was conceived by **Bill T. Jones, Jim Lewis** and **Stephen Hendel**. *Fela!* had its world premiere at Off-Broadway's 37 Arts in September 2008, where it enjoyed a sold-out limited run. [Tickets for Fela! on Broadway](http://www.Telecharge.com) are available through www.Telecharge.com, by calling (212) 239-6200 or in-person at The Eugene O'Neill Box Office, located at 230 West 49th Street.

Directed and choreographed by Tony[®] Award-winner **Bill T. Jones** with a book by **Jim Lewis**, *Fela!* welcomes its audience into the extravagant, decadent and rebellious world of Afrobeat legend **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti**. Using his pioneering music (a blend of jazz, funk and African rhythm and harmonies), *Fela!* explores Kuti's controversial life as artist, political activist and revolutionary musician. Featuring many of Fela Kuti's most captivating songs and Bill T. Jones's imaginative staging, *Fela!* is a provocative hybrid of concert, dance and musical theater.

Fela! features a multi-cultural cast led by **Sahr Ngaujah** (recipient of an Obie Award for his performance in the title role Off-Broadway) and **Kevin Mambo** (MTC's *Ruined*), alternating in the role of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Tony Award-winner **Lillias White** plays Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (Fela's mother) and **Saycon Sengbloh** (*Hair*) plays Sandra, Kuti's love interest. The company also includes **Corey Baker, Hettie Vyrine Barnhill, Lauren DeVeaux, Nicole Chantal DeWeever, Elasea Douglas, Rujeko Dumbutshena, Catherine Foster, Rasaan-Elijah "Talu" Green, Shaneeka Harrell, Chanon Judson, Abena Koomson, Ismael Kouyate, Gelan Lambert, Farai Malianga, Shakira Marshall, Afi McClendon, Adesola Osakalumi, Jeffrey Page, Daniel Soto, Jill M. Vallery, J.L. Williams, Iris Wilson, Aimee Graham Wodobode**. Scenic and costume design is by **Marina Draghici**, lighting design is by **Rob Wierzel**, sound design is by **Rob Kaplowitz** and projection design is by **Peter Nigrini**. Musical arrangements and additional music by **Aaron Johnson** and **Jordan McLean**, and **Jim Lewis** provided additional lyrics.

Fela! is produced by **Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter, Will & Jada Pinkett Smith**, Ruth & Stephen Hendel, Roy Gabay, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Edward Tyler Nahem, Slava Smolokowski, Chip Meyrelles/Ken Greiner, Douglas G. Smith, Steve Semnitz/Cathy Glazer, Daryl Roth/True Love Productions, Susan Dietz/Mort Swinsky and Knitting Factory Entertainment. In association with Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

BILL T. JONES (Conceiver / Director / Choreographer / Book Writer) is a 2007 Tony® Award winner and the recipient of the 2007 Obie Award and 2006 Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation CALLAWAY Award for his choreography for *Spring Awakening*, the recipient of the 2007 USA Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship, the 2006 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Choreography for *The Seven*, the 2005 Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement, the prestigious 2005 Wexner Prize, and the Aaron Davis Hall Harlem Renaissance Award. He is also a MacArthur "Genius" Award recipient in 1994, named one of America's Irreplaceable Dance Treasures by the Dance Heritage Coalition in 2000, and was awarded The 2003 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for which recipients are considered trailblazers who have redefined their art and reshaped the cultural landscape. He began his dance training at the State University of New York at Binghamton (SUNY), where he studied classical ballet and modern dance. After living in Amsterdam, Mr. Jones returned to SUNY, where he became co-founder of the American Dance Asylum in 1973. Before forming Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in 1982, Mr. Jones choreographed and performed nationally and internationally as a soloist and duet company with his late partner, Arnie Zane.

JIM LEWIS (Conceiver / Book Writer / Additional Lyrics) Broadway credits include *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (Tony®, Drama Desk Nominations), *Dangerous Games* (with Graciela Daniele), *Tango Apasionado*. Dance/Opera: Paul Dresher's *The Tyrant*; Ballet Hispanico's *Nightclub*; Philip Glass' *Les Enfants Terribles* (BAM); PastFORWARD (Mikhail Baryshnikov, BAM). Translations: Ionesco's *The Chairs*; Ibsen's *Lady From The Sea*. Dramaturge: *House Arrest* (Anna Deavere Smith); *Dream On Monkey Mountain* (Bill T. Jones); Art Spiegelman's *Drawn To Death*; *Dido And Aeneas* (Spoleto); Bill T. Jones 20th Anniversary *Still/Here* (BAM), *This Beautiful City* with The Civilians (Vineyard Theatre).

ANTIBALAS (Arrangements / Musicians) Credited with introducing Afrobeat to a new generation, this Brooklyn-based collective has released four critically-acclaimed albums since forming in 1998, and can be heard on numerous Afrobeat compilations. Antibalas has performed more than 700 concerts around the world including appearances at the Coachella, Newport and the Montreux Festivals.

SHAWN "JAY-Z" CARTER (Producer) Since 1995, multiple Grammy award winner, Shawn "JAY-Z" Carter has dominated the rap industry and set trends for a generation. Now in 2009, he personifies the "American Dream." Founder and chairman of Rocawear, he is also co-owner of the NJ Nets, 40/40 sports clubs, Translation Advertising and Carol's Daughter skin line, as well as a partnership with Iconix Brand Group. After three successful years as President and CEO of Def Jam Recordings, where he fostered the careers of international stars Rihanna, Ne-Yo and Kanye West, JAY-Z entered into a partnership with Live Nation to form Roc Nation. Through Roc Nation, JAY-Z released the Blueprint 3, his 11th #1 album, putting him ahead of Elvis for most #1 albums by a solo artist. He continues his philanthropic work through his Water For Life initiative and the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation.

WILL SMITH (Producer) Two-time Academy Award nominee Will Smith has enjoyed unprecedented success in a career encompassing films, television, and multi-platinum records. For his memorable portrayal of Muhammad Ali in Michael Mann's *Ali*, he received his first Academy Award nomination and that was followed by his second nomination for the true-life drama, *The Pursuit of Happyness*. Films in which Smith has acted include *I Am Legend*, *Hancock*, *I, Robot*, *Independence Day*, *Men in Black* and *Men in Black II*. Films in which Smith acted and also produced along with partner James Lassiter at Overbrook Entertainment include *Hitch*, *ATL*, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Seven Pounds* and *The Human Contract*.

JADA PINKETT SMITH (Producer) Currently stars as Christina Hawthorne in TNT's newest medical drama "HawthoRNe." The show, which Jada executive produces through her production company 100% Womom, garnered critical acclaim for its first season. The second season will air in the summer of 2010. Recent films in which Jada has acted include *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (as the voice of Gloria), *The Women*, *Reign Over Me*, *Matrix Reloaded* and *Matrix Revolutions*. Jada wrote and directed *The Human Contract* and served as executive producer of *The Secret Life of Bees*. Additionally, Jada's 2005 children's book "Girls Hold Up This World" was a *New York Times* bestseller.

Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter and **Will & Jada Pinkett Smith** present ***Fela!***, a new musical, based on the life of groundbreaking African composer, performer and activist **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti**, is now in previews at the **Eugene O'Neill Theatre** (230 West 49th Street, between Broadway and 8th Avenue). The official opening is set for Monday, November 23.

FELA! Performance Schedule

October 26 – November 22: Monday – Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 2pm & 8pm.

November 23 – 29: Monday at 6pm (opening night), Tues & Wed at 8pm, Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 2pm & 8pm, Sunday at 2pm & 7pm. NO performance Thursday, November 26.

Beginning November 31 the performance schedule will be as follows:

Tuesday at 7pm, Wednesday – Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 2pm & 8pm, Sunday at 2pm and 7pm.

Tickets range from \$27 – \$99 for previews (October 19 – November 21) and \$27 - \$122 post-opening (prices include a \$2 Jujamcyn Theatre facility fee). Tickets can be purchased online at www.Telecharge.com, by phone (212) 239-6200 or in-person at The Eugene O'Neill Box Office, located at 230 West 49th Street. For more information about ***Fela!*** please visit www.FelaOnBroadway.com.

#

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti

Fela Ransome Kuti was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria, north of Lagos in 1938. His father was a Christian schoolmaster, minister and master pianist and his mother was a world-recognized feminist leader, who was very active in the anti-colonial Nigerian women's movement during the struggle for independence.

Fela was educated in Nigeria amongst the indigenous elite. Ironically, many of his classmates in his Nigerian school would become the very military leaders he so vociferously opposed.

With medical aspirations for their offspring (Fela's older brother, Koye, was to become a Deputy Director of the World Health Organization and his younger brother, Beko, President of the Nigerian Medical Association) in 1958 Fela's parents sent him to London for a medical education. Instead, he registered at Trinity College's school of music where he studied composition and chose the trumpet as his instrument. Quickly tiring of European composers, Fela, struck by Miles Davis and Frank Sinatra, formed the Koola Lobitos in 1961, and his band became a fixture in London's club scene. Two years later, Fela returned to Nigeria, restarted the Koola Lobitos, and became influenced by James Brown. Trying to find an authentic musical voice, he added elements of traditional Yoruba, high life and jazz, and "Afrobeat" was born. In 1969, Fela's Koola Lobitos traveled to Los Angeles to tour and record. During his eight months in the US, with LA as a home base, Fela befriended Sandra Isidore, who introduced him to the writings and politics of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver and other proponents of Black nationalism and Afrocentrism.

With this new politically explicit and critical worldview, Fela reformed the Koola Lobitos as Nigeria 70 and returned to Lagos. He founded a commune/recording studio called the Kalakuta Republic, complete with his own private nightclub, The Shrine, and Fela dropped his given middle name "Ransome," and replaced it with a Yoruba name "Anikulapo" (meaning "he who carries death in his pouch"). Playing constantly and recording at a ferocious pace, Fela and band (who were now called Africa 70) became huge stars in West Africa and beyond. His music served as a rallying cry for the disenfranchised, critiquing the military government, and made Fela not only a pop star but thrust him into political life. People took to the streets singing his songs and the military responded by viciously harassing Fela, jailing him and nearly killing him on several occasions.

In 1977, during a government-sanctioned attack on his Kalakuta Republic commune, Fela and other members of his commune were arrested; Fela himself suffered a fractured skull as well as other broken bones; a number of women living at Kalakuta were beaten and raped; and his 82-year old mother was thrown from an upstairs window, inflicting injuries that would later prove fatal. The soldiers set fire to the compound and prevented fire fighters from reaching the area. Fela's recording studio, all his master tapes and musical instruments and the only known copy of his self-financed film *Black President* were destroyed.

After the Kalakuta tragedy, Fela briefly lived in exile in Ghana, returning to Nigeria in 1978. A year later, he formed his own political party, MOP (Movement of the People) and ran for president in two elections, although his campaigning was consistently blocked by the military. As the '80s ended, Fela recorded blistering attacks against Nigeria's corrupt military government.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was arrested more than two hundred times in his life, and charged with almost every conceivable crime, although only serving one eighteen month sentence in jail for a currency violation. Despite this constant harassment he continued to live in Nigeria even though, as an icon in the international world of rock and roll, soul, jazz and hip-hop, he could have at any point abandoned Nigeria and led the life of an international music superstar. His death on August 3, 1997 of complications from AIDS deeply affected musicians and fans internationally, as a unique and ineffable musical and sociopolitical voice was lost. In Nigeria one million people attended his funeral. His incredible body of work, almost 70 albums, is now available, through public demand, all over the world.