



LEAD CULTURE X CHOCOLATE CITY

POWERED BY LR106.3

THE SPECIAL
EDITION

THE CITY THAT
KEPT MOVING

*2026



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THE CITY THAT KEPT MOVING

By Victor Ogundeji

Chocolate City, different generations and the making of a Nigerian music institution

Some record labels release music. Others become part of the history of the music they release.

Chocolate City belongs to the second category.

Since its emergence in 2005, the label has moved through several generations of Nigerian music, adapting to changing sounds, changing audiences and an industry that today looks very different from the one it entered.

Its earliest identity was closely connected to the rise of Nigerian hip hop. M.I Abaga, Jesse Jagz and Ice Prince became central figures in the label's early story, helping create a period when Nigerian rap was becoming increasingly confident, commercially viable and culturally important.

M.I brought lyricism and storytelling into the mainstream. Jesse Jagz pushed experimentation and production. Ice Prince helped carry the sound into a wider pop audience. Together, they gave Chocolate City an identity.

But the label's story was never meant to end with one generation.

As Nigerian music expanded, Chocolate City expanded with it. The label's creative world grew beyond hip hop, embracing artists and sounds that reflected the changing character of Nigerian music.

That evolution became one of its defining qualities.

Chocolate City did not remain frozen in the sound that made it famous.

It moved.

The industry moved from physical music to downloads. Downloads gave way to streaming. Artists moved from relying entirely on traditional media to building direct relationships with audiences through social platforms.

And Chocolate City continued adapting.

The next generations brought different sounds and different ideas about what an African artist could be.

Today, Blaqbonez, Young Jonn, Candy Bleakz, Tar1q, Noon Dave and Major AJ represent the current Chocolate City roster. They do not sound identical, and that may be precisely the point.

Blaqbonez carries the label's rap tradition into a new era.

Young Jonn represents the journey from celebrated producer to recording artist.

Candy Bleakz brings street energy and female rap into the conversation.

Tar1q represents a younger, more introspective songwriting voice.

Noon Dave brings R&B and soulful textures.

Major AJ adds another perspective to the label's evolving pop identity.

Six artists.

Six identities.

One City.

That diversity reflects a music industry where genre boundaries have become increasingly fluid.

The Chocolate City of today does not have to sound like the Chocolate City of 2005.

It simply has to retain the ambition that made the name important.

That ambition is visible in the label's current creative direction, including Chocolate City: NXXT, a project that brings members of the present roster together and offers a glimpse into the chemistry and possibilities within this generation.

The EP is not necessarily a statement about everything Chocolate City is.

It is a snapshot of where the City is right now.

And perhaps that is what makes Chocolate City's longevity so interesting.

Its greatest achievement may not be a particular artist, album or era.

It may be the ability to move from one generation to another without becoming trapped by the success of the previous one.

The first generation built the foundation.

The next expanded the City.

The current generation has the opportunity to redefine it.

After two decades, Chocolate City is no longer simply a record label with a notable history.

It is a Nigerian music institution still trying to answer the same question every generation faces:

What comes next?

The answer will belong to the artists, executives and creatives building the next version of the City.

And for now, the City is still moving.

CEO

THE BUSINESS OF THE CITY

By Victor Ogundeji

Abuchi Peter Ugwu and the strategy behind Chocolate City's next chapter

The music business has changed.

Running a record label today requires much more than discovering an artist and releasing songs.

Streaming has transformed consumption. Social media has changed discovery. Global audiences are increasingly accessible. Publishing, distribution, brand partnerships, touring and intellectual property have become central to building sustainable music careers.

At the centre of Chocolate City's current chapter is Abuchi Peter Ugwu, the label's Chief Executive Officer.

Ugwu's background gives him an understanding of both the creative and commercial sides of the industry. Before becoming CEO, he worked across areas including production, sound engineering, artist management and business development.

That experience matters.

Because the job of a modern music executive is increasingly about understanding the entire ecosystem surrounding an artist.

A great song is only the beginning.

The real work is building a career around it.

For Chocolate City, that means developing artists who can operate in a Nigerian market while also competing for attention across Africa and the wider global music economy.

Ugwu's leadership comes at a particularly interesting time.

Chocolate City has inherited the weight of its history, but its current roster belongs to a generation that does not necessarily measure success in the same way previous generations did.

For today's artists, a career can be built through streaming numbers, social communities, international collaborations, live performances, publishing and brand partnerships.

The executive therefore becomes part strategist, part talent developer and part cultural translator.

The challenge is knowing when to protect an artist's individuality and when to push them into a bigger opportunity.

For Ugwu, leading Chocolate City is ultimately about managing that balance.

The label has already proven that it can survive different eras.

The next challenge is proving that it can continue building artists who matter in the era ahead.

That is the business of the City.

TAIWO TAIWO:

The Promotions Mind Behind the Hits

In Nigeria's ever evolving music industry, the success of a record is rarely determined by the artist alone. Behind every song that dominates the airwaves, climbs streaming charts and becomes part of everyday conversation is a team working tirelessly to create visibility and momentum. One of the young professionals making his mark in this space is Taiwo Taiwo, a Senior Promotions Manager whose career reflects growth, consistency and a strong understanding of what it takes to move music.

Taiwo began his professional journey in the music industry in 2022, joining Chocolate City as an intern. What started as an entry level opportunity has grown into more than three years of experience and a steady progression through the industry. Today, he serves as a Senior Promotions Manager, playing a key role in the promotion and positioning of music projects.

His work has been connected to records that have achieved impressive visibility across Nigeria's music landscape, including "Lalala" by CKay, "Elumelu" by young Jon and "Chanel" by Blaq bonez. These records have not only secured strong rotation on Nigerian radio but have also made their presence felt on streaming charts, demonstrating the growing importance of having a promotional strategy that works across both traditional and digital platforms.

Beyond these records, Taiwo has also worked on radio campaigns for a diverse range of international and African artists, including ThisizLondon, TxC, Young T & Bugsey, Gyakie and Maleek Berry. His experience across these campaigns reflects his ability to work with different sounds, artists and audiences while developing promotional strategies that help music connect with listeners.

In today's music business, radio remains an important driver of discovery, but the journey does not end there. Streaming platforms have transformed how success is measured, with listeners increasingly determining the longevity and relevance of a record through their streams, playlists and digital engagement. For music promotion professionals like Taiwo, navigating both worlds requires an understanding of audiences, strong industry relationships, strategic timing and the ability to build sustained attention around a record.



TAIWO TAIWO:

His progression from an intern to a Senior Promotions Manager in just over three years is a testament to his growth within a highly competitive industry. It also reflects the changing face of Nigeria's music business, where promotions now extend far beyond traditional media and require a more holistic approach to audience engagement.

For Taiwo, much of the work happens behind the scenes, but its results are visible wherever Nigerian music is being consumed, from radio speakers to streaming platforms and digital charts. His journey so far represents the rise of a new generation of music executives who understand that a great record needs more than talent. It needs the right strategy, visibility and people pushing it forward.

As Nigerian music continues to expand globally, professionals like Taiwo are becoming increasingly important to the machinery behind its success. From his beginnings as a Chocolate City intern in 2022 to his current role as Senior Promotions Manager, Taiwo Taiwo's story is one of progression, experience and impact, proving that behind every record making noise is often a team making the right moves long before the numbers begin to show.

ROSTER

MEET THE **NEW CITY**

SIX ARTISTS SHAPING CHOCOLATE CITY'S PRESENT

BLAQBONEZ

The Rapper

Blaqbonez has become one of the most distinctive personalities in Nigerian rap.

His music combines lyricism with humour, personality and an instinct for understanding how culture moves online.

More importantly, he represents the continuation of Chocolate City's relationship with Nigerian hip hop while bringing a very different energy to the genre.

Blaqbonez is not simply carrying a tradition.

He is reshaping it.



CANDY BLEAKZ

The Street Voice

Candy Bleakz brings a different energy to the Chocolate City story.

Her music sits at the intersection of rap, street culture and contemporary Nigerian pop, while her journey represents the continuing growth of women in spaces that have historically been dominated by male voices.

She is part of a generation of artists redefining what a female Nigerian rapper can look and sound like.



NOON DAVE

The Soul

Noon Dave brings R&B, soul and Afropop influences into the Chocolate City conversation.

His sound adds another layer to a roster that increasingly refuses to be defined by a single genre.

In a label built across generations, Noon Dave represents the softer, more melodic possibilities of the new City.



ROSTER

MEET THE **NEW CITY**

SIX ARTISTS SHAPING CHOCOLATE CITY'S PRESENT

YOUNG JONN

The Hitmaker

Young Jonn's story is one of the most interesting transitions in contemporary Nigerian music.

Already respected as a producer behind some of the country's biggest records, he successfully stepped into the spotlight as an artist himself.

That experience gives Young Jonn a rare perspective.

He understands the record from behind the console and from behind the microphone.

Within Chocolate City, he represents the possibility of moving between roles without abandoning creative identity.



TARIQ

The Songwriter

Tar1q represents the more introspective side of the current Chocolate City roster.

His appeal lies in his songwriting, vulnerability and willingness to explore emotion without losing his connection to contemporary African pop.

He represents an important part of the new City.

The idea that an artist does not need to fit neatly into one box to build an identity.



MAJOR AJ

The New Pop Voice

Major AJ represents another side of Chocolate City's younger generation.

His presence adds another contemporary pop perspective to the roster and reinforces the label's interest in developing artists with individual identities.

The next chapter of Chocolate City will not be defined by one sound.

Major AJ is part of that evolution.



SOUND



WHAT DOES CHOCOLATE CITY SOUND LIKE NOW?

By Victor Ogundeji

Perhaps the most difficult question to answer about Chocolate City today is also the simplest.

What does the label sound like?

Twenty years ago, the answer would have been easier.

Hip hop was central to the label's identity.

Today, the answer is much more complicated.

Blaqbonez does not sound like Young Jonn.

Young Jonn does not sound like Candy Bleakz.

Candy Bleakz does not sound like Tar1q.

And Tar1q does not sound like Noon Dave or Major AJ.

That diversity is not a weakness.

It may actually be the new identity.

The Nigerian music industry has become increasingly fluid. Afrobeats overlaps with R&B. Hip hop borrows from street pop. Producers become artists. Artists move between genres without needing to choose one permanent identity.

Chocolate City exists inside that reality.

Its sound is becoming less about genre and more about individuality.

Perhaps the new Chocolate City sound is simply this:

Artists being allowed to sound like themselves.

EP NXXT

A glimpse into the next Chocolate City

The title says it all.

NXXT is about what comes after now.

The Chocolate City: NXXT EP offers a snapshot of the label's current generation, bringing its artists into a shared creative space.

Rather than treating the project as another collection of songs, it can be viewed as a small experiment in what happens when different voices from the same label occupy the same world.

The project gives listeners an opportunity to hear the chemistry between members of the current roster while offering another glimpse into Chocolate City's evolving musical identity.

It is not a conclusion.

It is a signpost.

A suggestion of where the label could go next.

And perhaps that is the most appropriate role for a project called NXXT.

To point forward.



HISTORY

THE CHOCOLATE CITY ARCHIVE The moments that built the City 2005

Chocolate City begins its journey and starts building what would become one of Nigeria's most recognisable independent music institutions

THE M.I ERA

M.I Abaga becomes one of the defining voices of Nigerian hip hop and establishes Chocolate City as a serious home for rap.

JESSE JAGZ

Experimental production and alternative hip hop expand the label's creative identity.

ICE PRINCE

Oleku becomes a cultural moment and helps push Chocolate City into a new level of mainstream visibility.

THE EXPANSION

The label's creative universe grows beyond its original hip hop identity, embracing different artists and genres.

THE NEXT GENERATION

New artists arrive and the label begins navigating an industry increasingly shaped by streaming and digital culture.

THE NEW CITY

Blaqbonez, Young Jonn, Candy Bleakz, Tar1q, Noon Dave and Major AJ represent the current chapter.

NXXT

The present generation comes together and offers a glimpse into where Chocolate City could go next.

The archive is not simply a collection of memories. It is a reminder that every era eventually becomes history.

The current generation is writing theirs now.



BUSINESS BEYOND THE RECORD



What does it take to build an African music company today?

The modern record label is no longer just a place where music is recorded and released.

It is an ecosystem.

An artist's career can involve distribution, publishing, management, marketing, brand partnerships, sync licensing, touring and international expansion.

That means the value of a label is increasingly measured by what happens around the music.

Can it identify talent early?

Can it develop that talent?

Can it protect creative ownership?

Can it create international opportunities?

Can it help an artist build a career that survives beyond one successful song?

These questions matter because African music is now operating at a global scale.

The opportunities are bigger.

So are the challenges.

Chocolate City's longevity offers an interesting case study.

The label has survived changes in technology, audience behaviour and musical taste.

The next phase requires another kind of evolution.

It is no longer enough to build successful Nigerian artists.

The ambition is to build African artists whose careers can travel.

That is what makes the business of Chocolate City worth watching.

PLAYLIST

THE CHOCOLATE CITY 15



15 records that tell the story of the City

For this special edition, the regular LR Airplay Chart gives way to a Chocolate City archive. Rather than ranking the songs only by numbers, this playlist should represent different moments in the label's evolution.

THE FOUNDATION

M.I Abaga — Safe
Ice Prince — Oleku
Jesse Jagz — Bad Girl
M.I Abaga — One Naira
Ice Prince — Aboki

THE EXPANSION

Brymo — Ara
Ice Prince — Superstar
M.I Abaga — Chairman
CKay — Love Nwantiti
Dice Ailes — Machinery

THE NEW CITY

Blaqbonez — Back In Uni
Young Jonn — Big Big Things
Candy Bleakz — Tikuku
Tar1q — Hurt
Chocolate City — NXXT

This playlist gives the reader something important: a musical journey through different versions of Chocolate City.

From hip hop to Afrobeats and from the foundation to the current generation, the playlist shows that the City's identity has never been completely fixed.

It has always been moving.

THE CITY IS STILL OPEN

Editorial

Every generation eventually asks the same question:

What happens next?

For Chocolate City, the question carries particular weight.

The label has already lived through several versions of Nigerian music.

It has seen hip hop move from the margins towards the mainstream.

It has watched Afrobeats become a global cultural force.

It has experienced the transition from physical music to digital platforms and streaming.

It has seen artists become brands and audiences become communities.

Through all of those changes, Chocolate City has remained.

But remaining is not the same thing as surviving.

To survive is to change.

And that may be Chocolate City's most important lesson.

The artists who built the original City were different from the artists who came after them.

And today's artists are different again.

That is not a problem.

That is the story.

Blaqbonez, Young Jonn, Candy Bleakz, Tar1q, Noon Dave and Major AJ do not need to recreate the Chocolate City of the past.

They need to create the Chocolate City of their generation.

That is where legacy becomes interesting.

Because a legacy should not become a museum. It should become a foundation.

The past gives the City its name.

The present gives it its energy.

The future will determine what the name ultimately means.

For Lead Culture, that is the story worth telling.

Not simply what Chocolate City has done.

But what Chocolate City is still capable of doing. The City has changed.

The music has changed.

The business has changed.

The audience has changed.

And after all these years, one thing remains clear:

The City is still open.

THIS WEEK IN MUSIC, FILM, FASHION, TECH AND CULTURE

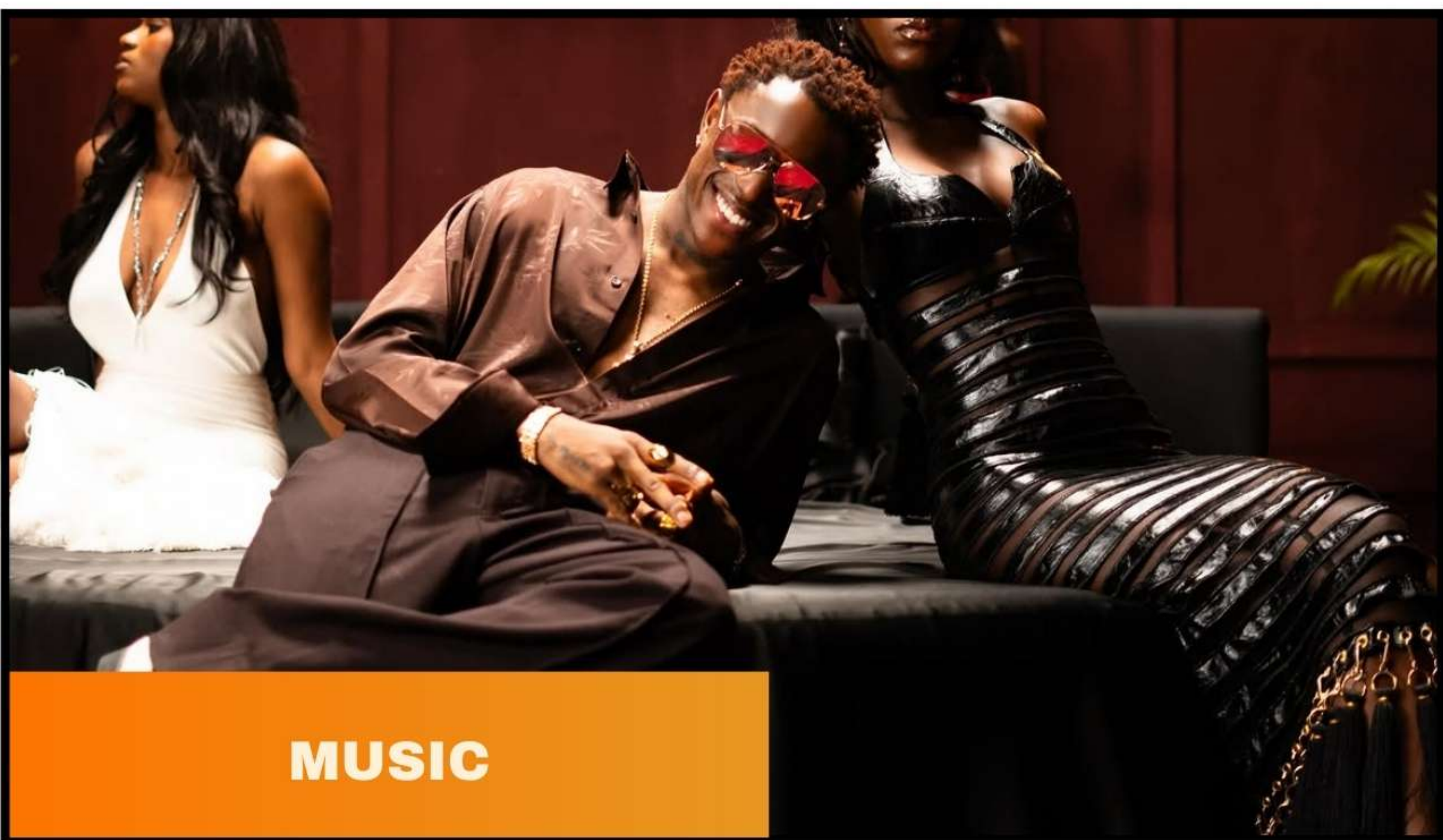
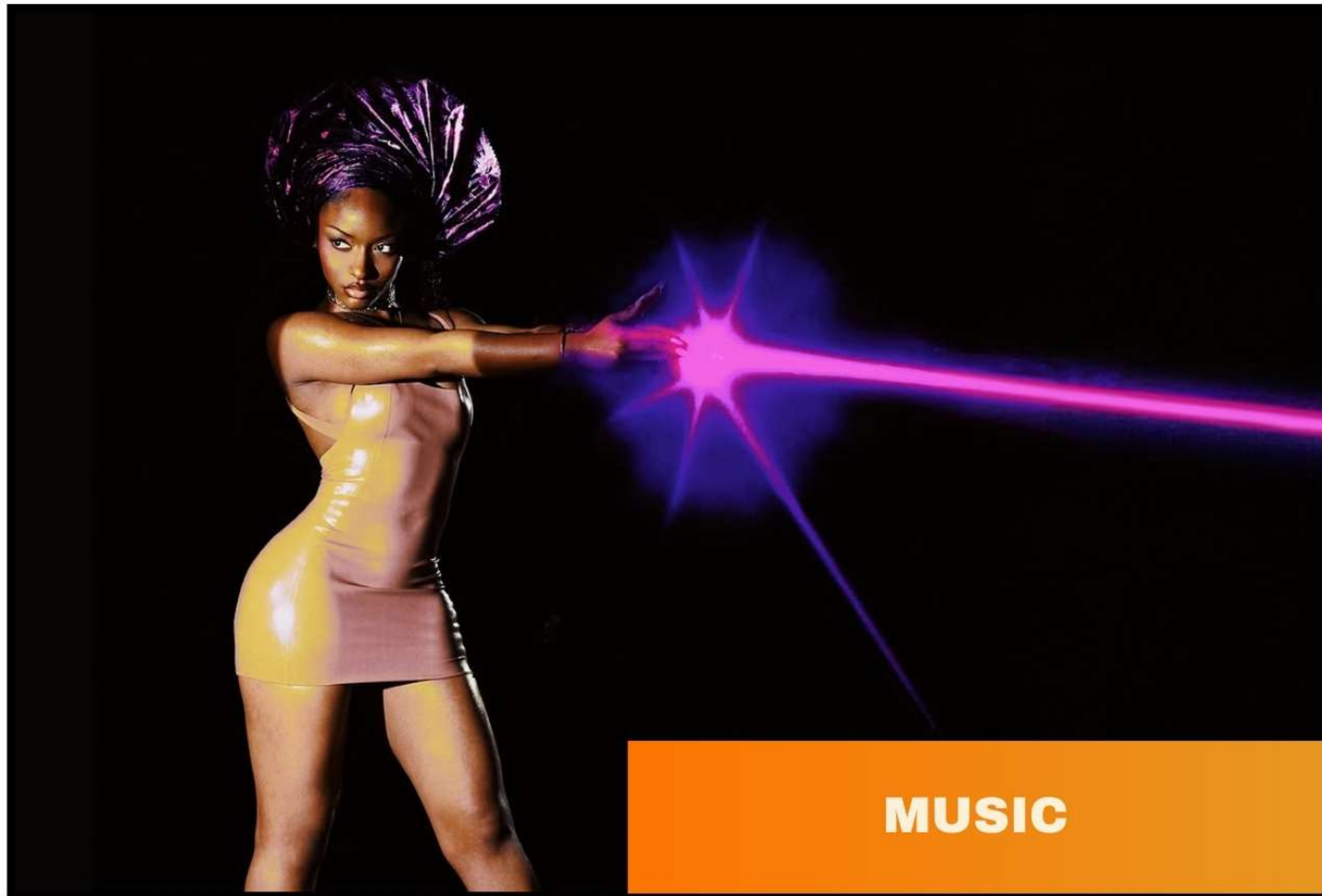


THE HEADIES REVEALS 2026 NOMINEES

The 2026 Headies nominations are out, with Wizkid, Davido, Burna Boy, Rema, Tems and Ayra Starr among the major names competing across the categories. The new list also highlights the continuing growth of younger voices alongside Nigeria's established stars.

AYRA STARR'S STARRGIRL ERA CONTINUES

Ayra Starr's third studio album Starrgirl is now out, bringing together an international cast that includes Wizkid, Rema, ZAYN, Leon Thomas, KWN, Danny Ocean and Theodora. The 16 track project represents another major step in Ayra Starr's increasingly global career.



VICTONY ENTERS HIS STARLIFE ERA

Victony has released his sophomore album Starlife, a 15 track project featuring artists including Bnxxn, Blaqbonez, YKB, Young Jonn and Fola. The project continues Victony's move towards a broader and more genre flexible sound.



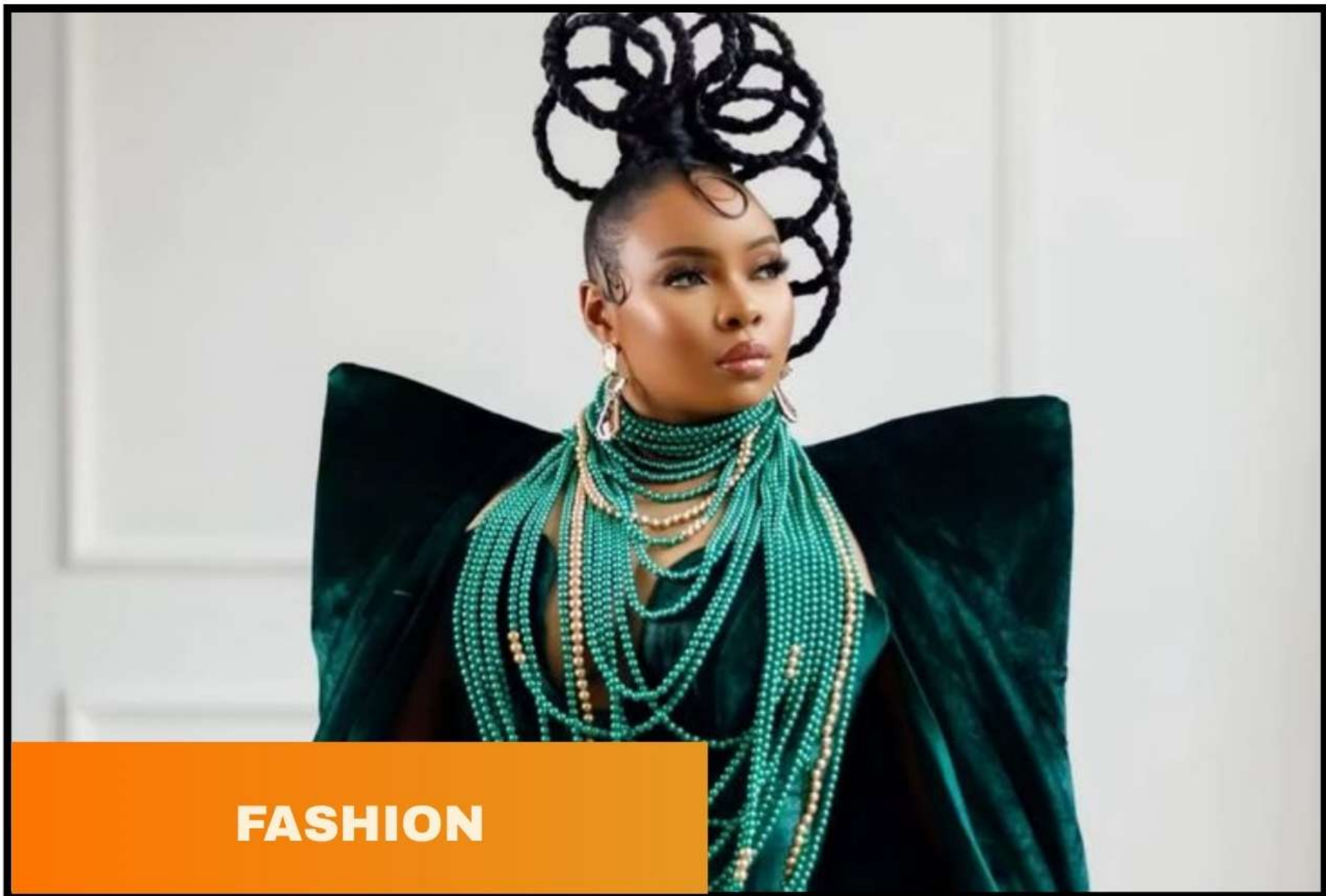
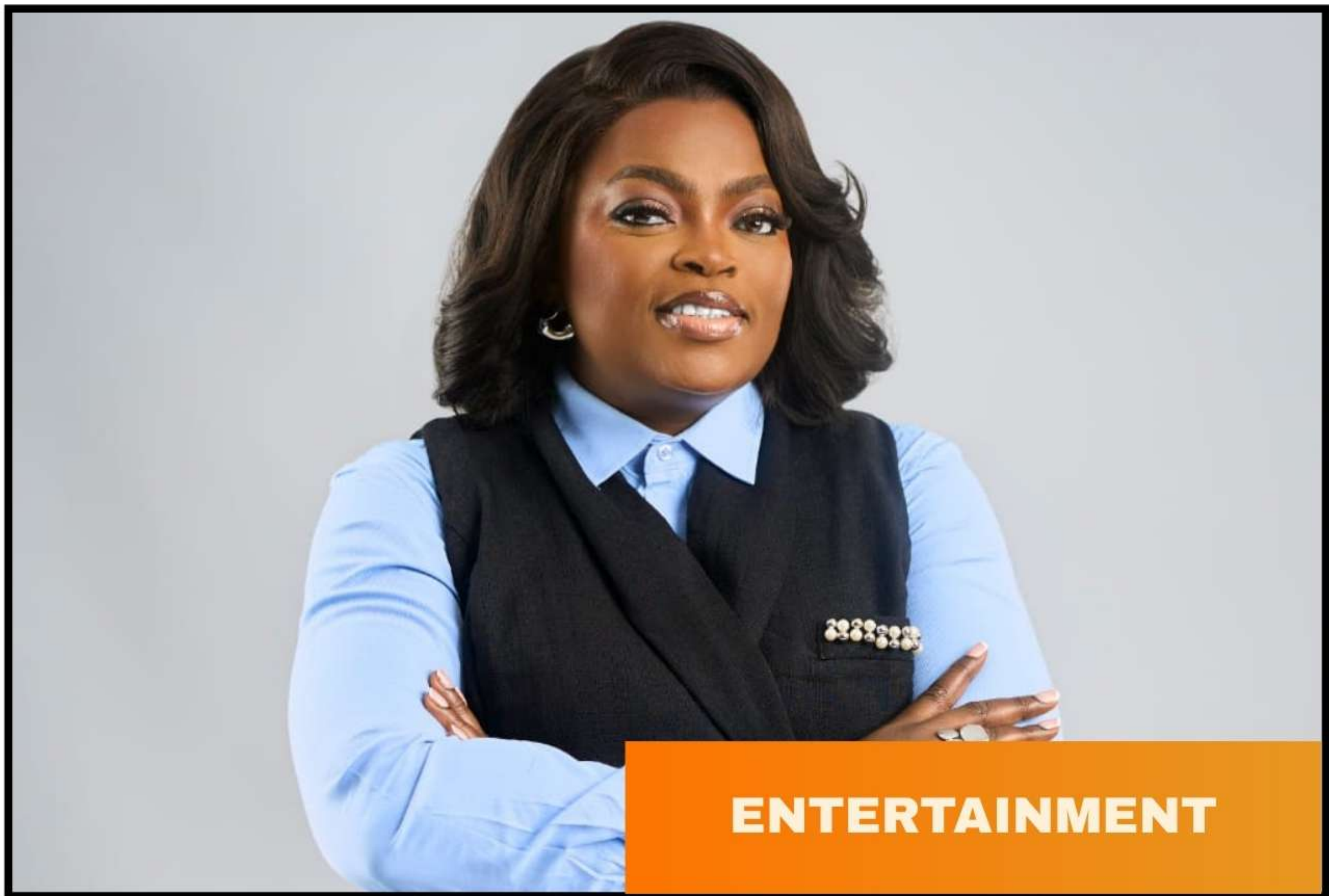


NOLLYWOOD MOURNS OGOGO

Nollywood is mourning veteran Yoruba actor Taiwo Hassan, popularly known as Ogogo, who died on August 23 at 66. His career spanned acting, screenwriting, production and directing, making him one of the recognisable figures in Yoruba cinema.

FUNKE AKINDELE TURNS 49

Funke Akindele marked her 49th birthday on August 24. From acting to producing and directing, Akindele remains one of the most commercially significant figures in contemporary Nollywood.



AFRICAN FASHION CONTINUES ITS GLOBAL PUSH

Yemi Alade recently joined Africa Fashion Week London 2026 through her beauty brand YEM Beauty, as the event continues to position African fashion and creative businesses on an international platform.



NIGERIA FASHION WEEK LOOKS TOWARDS OCTOBER

Nigeria Fashion Week 2026 is scheduled for October 2 to 4 in Abuja, with organisers positioning the event around African creativity, modern craftsmanship, innovation and sustainability.

NIGERIA'S TECH ECOSYSTEM LOOKS TOWARDS GITEX

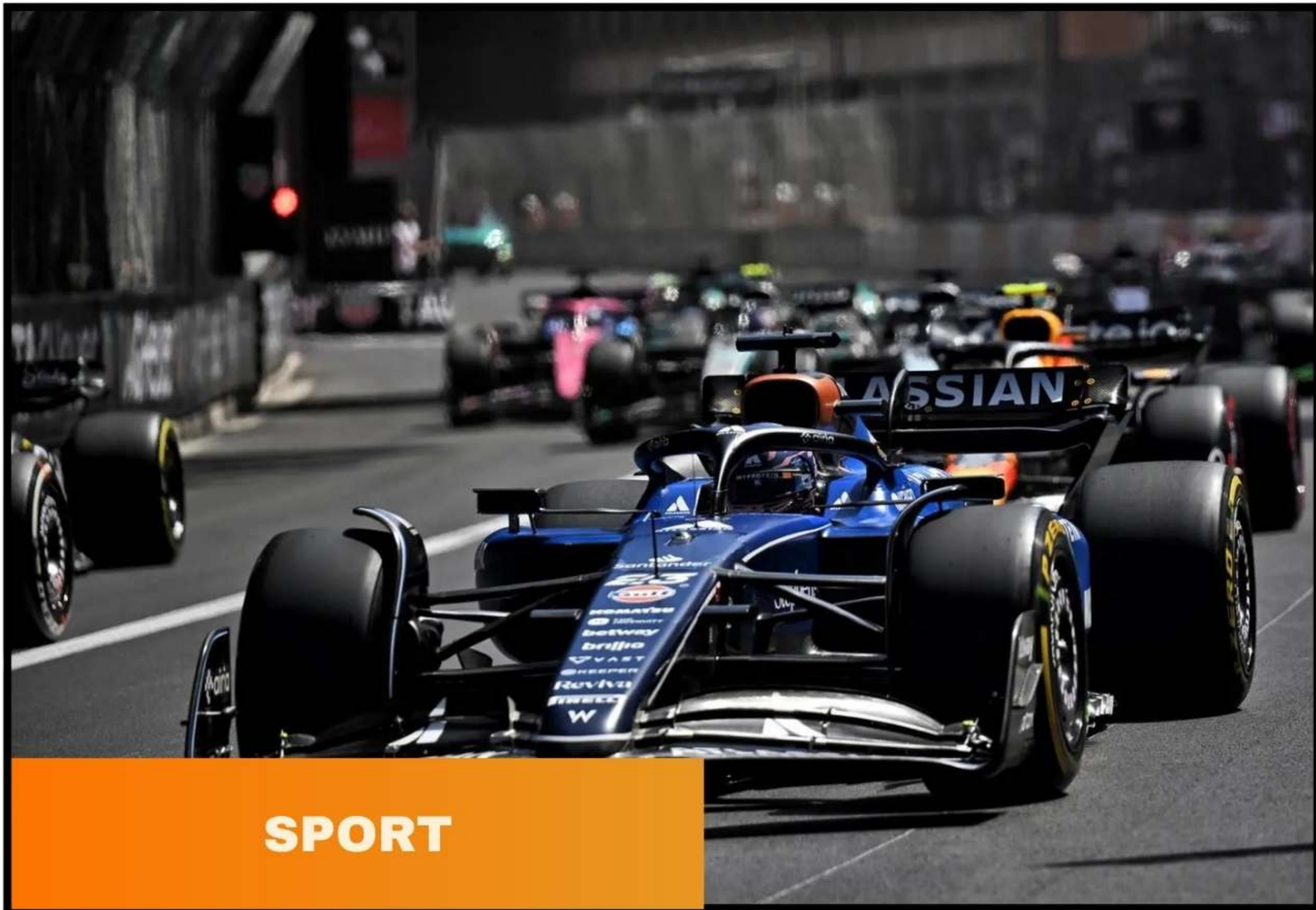
GITEX Nigeria is set for August 31 to September 3, with Abuja hosting a dedicated day focused on digital public infrastructure and AI before the event moves to Lagos. The event is expected to bring together startups, investors, policymakers and technology companies.



NITDA TARGETS 339 INNOVATION HUBS

Nigeria's technology ecosystem is receiving another push as NITDA works on strengthening 339 innovation hubs across the country. The initiative is aimed at creating stronger support structures for startups and technology businesses nationwide.





F1'S AFRICAN FUTURE REMAINS A TALKING POINT

Nigeria's reported interest in hosting a Formula 1 Grand Prix in Abuja continues to generate conversation around motorsport, tourism and the possibility of bringing major international sporting events to the country. For Nigeria's growing F1 audience, the bigger story is the possibility of turning fandom into a wider motorsport culture.

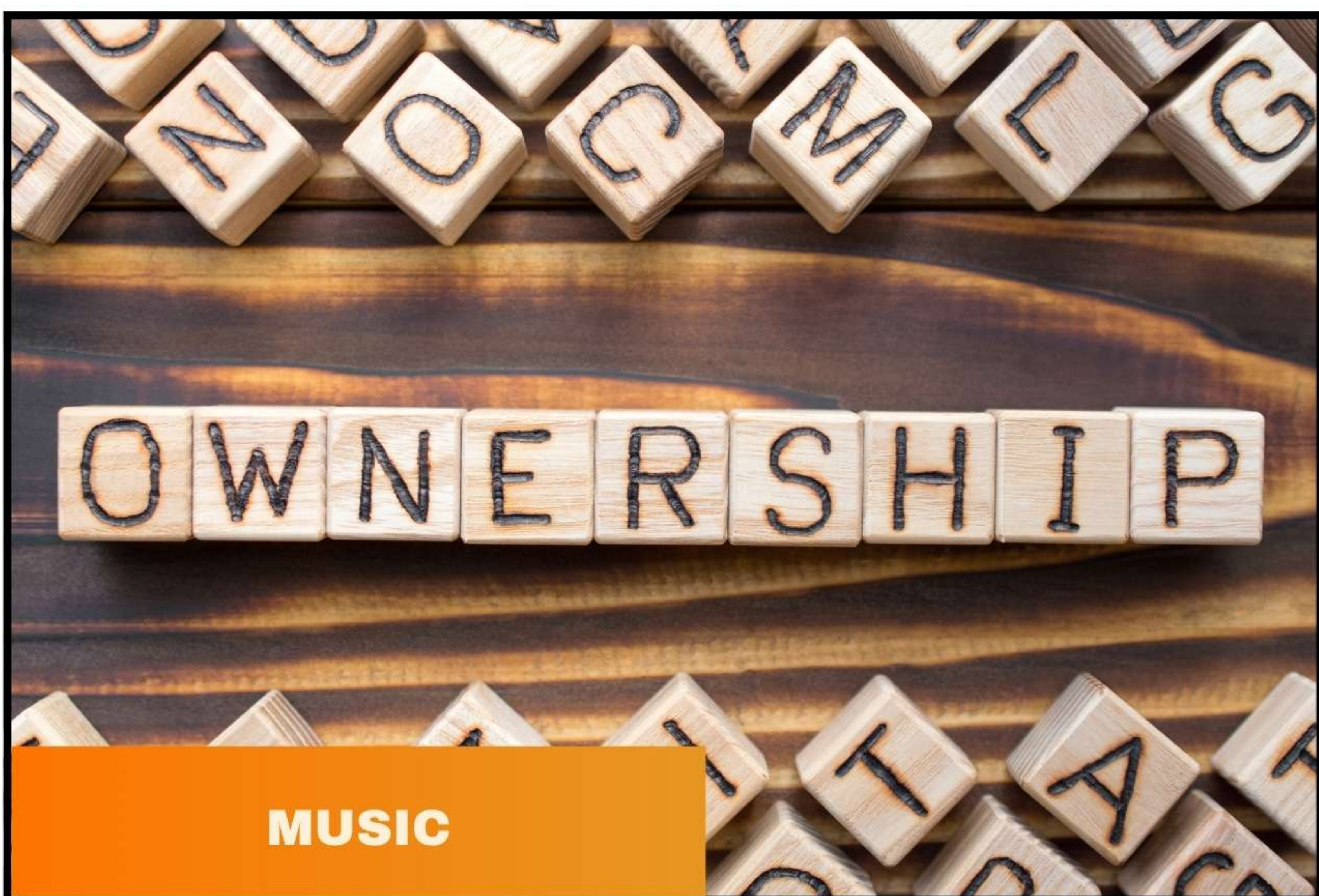
THE CREATOR ECONOMY KEEPS EXPANDING

Reality television and social media are increasingly functioning as talent development pipelines, with personalities building audiences that extend far beyond traditional television. The shift shows how Nigerian entertainment is moving towards an economy where community, personality and digital influence can be as important as the original platform.



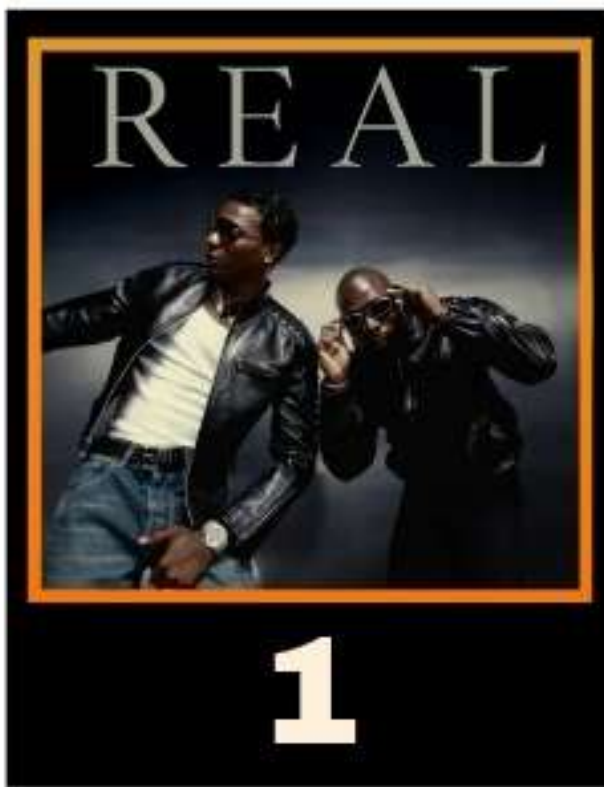
THE BUSINESS OF MUSIC IS MOVING TOWARDS OWNERSHIP

A recent music industry workshop in Lagos brought renewed attention to intellectual property, publishing and royalties as Nigeria's music industry continues to grow globally. The conversation is increasingly shifting from simply making Afrobeats successful to ensuring creators properly benefit from the value their work generates.



LEAD RADIO AIRPLAY CHART

TOP 10 MOST PLAYED SONGS OF THE WEEK
ON LEAD RADIO 106.3



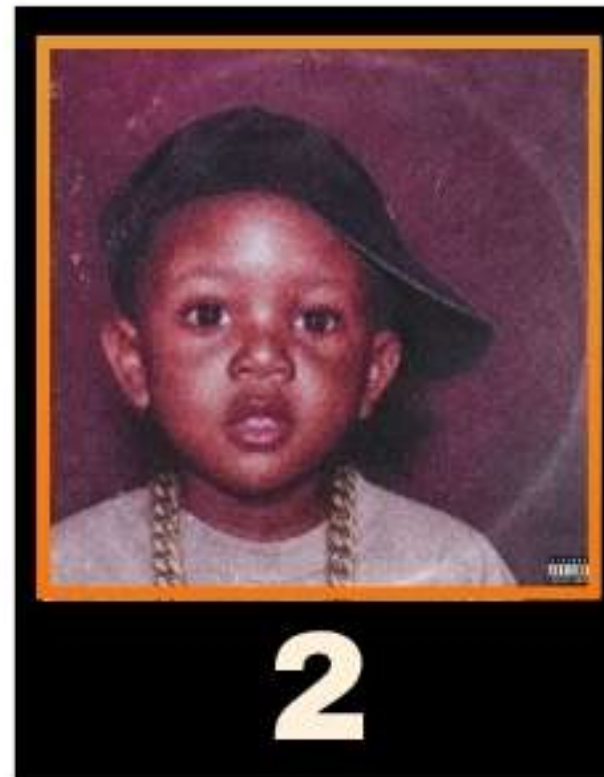
JOGODO
Asake & Wizkid

1



BIG BIG THINGS
Young Jonn ft. Kizz Daniel & Seyi Vibe

6



2FRESH
Victory

2



PAPARAZZI
Shoday ft. FOLA

7



STARR
Ayra Starr

3



MESSY
Lola Young

8



B4 B4
Davido, Mayorkun & FOLA

4



CHANEL
Blaqbonez ft. Asake

9



ORDINARY
Alex Warren

5



APT
ROSÉ & Bruno Mars

10

VICTONY ENTERS HIS STARLIFE ERA

Victony is stepping into a more confident and carefree chapter with STARLIFE, his 15 track sophomore album released on August 21. Unlike the heavier introspection of his earlier work, the new project leans into Afrobeats, R&B and hip hop while giving Victony more room to explore his personality and simply enjoy being a star.

With appearances from BNXN, Blaqbonez, YKB, Babyboy AV, Young Jonn and FOLA, STARLIFE feels like Victony embracing the freedom to experiment rather than trying to fit into one sound. It is less about proving himself and more about showing listeners where he is now.

STARLIFE is Victony choosing to enjoy the view.



VICTONY

THE SOUND THAT NEVER LEFT

HOW FUJI MOVED FROM IBADAN'S STREETS INTO THE GLOBAL SOUND OF AFROBEATS

By Victor Ogundeji



How Fuji moved from Ibadan's streets into the global sound of Afrobeats

Before Afrobeats became one of Africa's biggest cultural exports, Nigerian music was already full of sounds that carried the country's identity.

Among the most influential was Fuji.

Born from Yoruba Muslim musical traditions and shaped by performers who transformed it from a largely seasonal form into a commercial genre, Fuji developed around powerful percussion, call and response, improvisation and the expressive possibilities of Yoruba language. By the 1980s, it had become one of the dominant sounds in Nigeria.

And Ibadan has always had a special relationship with that sound.

The city has been an important home for Fuji culture, from legendary performers to the everyday audiences that have kept the music alive at parties, celebrations and social gatherings. Even today, Fuji remains part of Ibadan's musical environment, from established performers to younger musicians finding new ways to carry the tradition forward.

But perhaps the most interesting part of Fuji's story is what happened when younger generations began taking pieces of it somewhere else.

They did not necessarily stop listening to Fuji.

They started borrowing from it.

The percussion became part of contemporary production. The call and response found new forms. Yoruba chants, vocal cadences, street expressions and the rhythmic intensity of Fuji began appearing in hip hop, Afropop and eventually the wider Afrobeats movement.

This is one reason contemporary Nigerian music can sound modern while still feeling unmistakably Nigerian.

Fuji is part of that DNA.

Artists such as Olamide, Asake, Seyi Vibe, Portable and others have demonstrated different versions of this fusion, taking elements associated with Fuji and placing them inside contemporary production. The result has included sounds often described as Afro Fuji, Neo Fuji or Fuji fusion.

THE SOUND THAT NEVER LEFT

The influence is not always obvious.
Sometimes it is in the drums.

Sometimes it is in the way a singer stretches a Yoruba phrase.
Sometimes it is in the chanting between verses or the way a record builds around percussion.
Sometimes it is simply the feeling.

That is what makes cultural influence interesting. It does not always arrive with a credit line.

It can live inside a rhythm.

And Fuji's influence has travelled far beyond traditional Fuji audiences. Contemporary Afrobeats has become a global sound partly because Nigerian artists have consistently shown an ability to take different musical traditions and reshape them for new audiences. Fuji is one of those traditions, alongside Highlife, Juju, Apala, Afrobeat, hip hop and other influences.

The irony is that as Afrobeats has become increasingly global, some of the indigenous sounds that helped shape it have become easier to overlook.

Someone dancing to an Afrobeats record in London, New York or Lagos may not immediately recognise the Fuji influence underneath the production.

But it is there.

And that is perhaps the most powerful part of the story.

Fuji did not need to become Afrobeats to remain relevant.

It simply became part of it.

Ibadan's connection to the genre makes that story even more meaningful. The city has long been one of the places where Yoruba musical traditions meet modern urban culture. Its streets, parties and creative communities have provided a space where older sounds can exist alongside newer ones.



That is the real movement.

From Fuji to hip hop.

From Fuji to Afropop.

From Fuji into the contemporary Afrobeats sound.

And now, from Nigeria to the world.

The next time a global audience hears the heavy percussion, Yoruba chant or unmistakable rhythmic energy in a Nigerian hit, there is a chance they are hearing an echo of something much older.

Something that has been moving for generations.

Something that never really left.

LEAD CULTURE MAGAZINE



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