

THE CONGOS

Swinging Bridge Tour 2006



A duo comprised of Cedric Myton and Roy Johnson, the Congos are primarily known for one record, Heart of the Congos, released in 1977. Reggae historian Steve Barrow, one of the people behind the exquisite reissue of this long-thought-lost record, considers it as good as seminal reggae recordings such as Bob Marley and the Wailers' Natty Dread, Burning Spear's Marcus Garvey, and the Mighty Diamonds' Right Time. This is not an exaggeration.

Myton and Johnson, working with Lee Perry at his Black Ark Studios in Kingston created a masterpiece, one of (if not the) finest production job of Perry's long and prolific career. Cedric Myton grew up in St. Catherine, Jamaica and began his singing career as a member of the Tartans in the late '60s. Singing in a tuneful rocksteady style, the Tartans scored hits with songs like "Dance All Night" and "Far Beyond the Sun," the latter recorded for Duke Reid's Treasure Isle label. Roy Johnson, a native of Hanover, Jamaica, grew up singing spirituals at home and cut his teeth as a member of Ras Michael and the Sons of Negus. More importantly, Johnson attended school with Lee Perry, the start of a relationship that would lead to Perry working with him and Myton years later. A chance meeting led to Myton and Johnson working under the name the Congos and hooking up with such major musical talents as Sly Dunbar, Ernest Ranglin, and "Sticky" Thompson. And while the music that backed the Congos was undeniably great, their most distinctive feature was their vocals: Johnson's strong, clear tenor and Myton's breathtaking falsetto, which sounded a bit, like that of the great Russell Tompkins of the Stylistics.

What Lee Perry brought to this mix was his usual anarchic presence, but also his technique of using primitive (even for its time) four-track recording technology that emphasized a cluttered, dense, but hot live sound. With Perry at the controls, the Congos had a man uniquely qualified to capture the roots vibe they wanted to record, perhaps the only producer in Jamaica capable of doing so. Great as it was, Heart of the Congos sold only reasonably well in Jamaica, and became a hotly sought-after collectible in America and Britain by a cult of reggae aficionados. The original release dropped out of sight, and crappy reissues were all that was available until very recently. Not long after the record was released, Myton and Johnson went their separate ways but continued to use the name the Congos or Congo as a means of identification. Myton continued to record with other singers as the Congos, and Johnson now identifies himself as Congo Ashanti Roy, working as a solo act and as a member of some of Adrian Sherwood's experimental dub/funk aggregations. As solo artists, they've never again captured the magic of Heart of the Congos, but 25 years after, The Congos are back together with a brand new album which could be its deserving successor: "Swinging Bridge".

We can find the same spiritual message sang by the original band with magic tracks such as "Black Market Baby" "Lost Sheep" or "Revolution".

After their come back on stage this summer in the biggest Festivals (such as Summerjam, Uppsala, Dour, Jahsound and many others) they are coming back on tour throughout Europe in October in order to spread their message.