

## ‘NOTHING IN THE LARDER’ by Black Roots

The music, in this new album by Black Roots, is punctuated by powerful horns rising up from the under belly of the bass and drums. The keyboards and rhythm guitar float just above this pulsating heartbeat. It is steady and regular, given depth and roundness by that pumping organ, guitar riffs creating accents and by horn, keyboard and guitar solos that give the music a jazzy feel. Then you add those distinctive vocals and harmonies, and the end result is another classic foundation roots reggae album from the band.

There is something here for the new fans to drill into. Black Roots have crafted another original set of songs and, using top musicians based in the United Kingdom from the genre, have recorded them delivering freshness even within the tight parameters that is foundation roots reggae. It will not disappoint.

The message remains strong and consistent but relevant. The world is in the grip of a pandemic, deepening inequality and growing racism and discrimination. There is much uncertainty driven by politicians around the world whose aim is to roll back personal freedoms and subjugate populations to their will, even in countries that trade on their democratic credentials. Divide, rule and conquer seems to be the new mantra. There is much to fear from this new world order. But unlike the past there is a growing lobby that is pushing back against this tide, against the senseless killing of Black people by the Police and is winning hearts and minds. These movements challenging these threats are a cause to be optimistic about the future, but we cannot be complacent ‘la lotta continua’ until equality and justice prevail.

So, ‘Nothing in the Larder’, is a timely reminder that we must continue to promote equality, justice and enlightenment. ‘Wisdom and knowledge are the food for life’. It advocates the message that even in the depths of despair there is always hope for a better world to come, if not for us then for the youths. People power counts.

The band sing of ‘Free up the weed and let it inspire the youth of today, crack is not what you feed the youth consciousness’... advocating young people to ‘seek enlightenment, meditation with spirituality from the breath of Jah’, and not to be suppressed by the evil of ‘crack cocaine’ that will lead to addiction and corruption of the mind.

There is a stark reminder of how families are caught in a cycle of poverty and hunger, and struggle to put food on the table. ‘Wake up in the morning, nothing in the larder for the children today, say a hard-times, times hard...’ Solutions are difficult, but it is time to shine the light on the children. They are the future.

The cry for ‘equal rights and justice’ is a theme that runs throughout the album. The way for nations to heal is through equality but is this what our leaders want? Satan represents colonial power and corruption and the Vatican is a symbol of the evil of Babylon. Zion awaits and is the part in our hearts that guarantees equal rights and justice. It is the place in our consciousness where we will find peace and reconciliation.

There are pleas to end the structural discrimination in education and in society that persists through ignorance and wilfulness, leads to discrimination and the limiting of choice for people of colour and particularly those of African descent.

The pointless killing that is driven by a greed that remains engrained must end. It is destructive and promoted by this ‘system’ to control, divide and rule. For Black people there is a direct call to stop the senseless killing of one another and to re-focus their anger and frustration. It touches on slavery and the 150,000,000 that were torn from their homes, shackled in chains, transported like cargo across the Atlantic and put to work on the plantations far from home. It is this act of inhumanity that is blamed for much of the woes faced by the African diaspora and that each must purge from within themselves.

And as each of these themes is touched upon the message is clear 'you have to know where you are from to know your way home'. For some this is a call to return to Africa, to go back home to renew oneself and rebuild. But there is a recognition that going back to Africa is not a return to a mythical land. It is a coming back to a continent that has also suffered and is still suffering from the legacy of colonialism and imperialism.

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