

## The Congos - Heart Of The Congos (1977)

Written by bluelover

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01 - Fisherman 02 - Congoman 03 - Open up the Gate 04 - Children Crying [play](#) 05 - La Bam Bam 06 - Can't Come In 07 - Sodom and Gomorrow 08 - The Wrong Thing [play](#)  
09 - Ark of the Covenant 10 - Solid Foundation

Watty Burnett - Vocals (Background) Robert Johnson - Guitar (Rhythm) Winston Wright - Organ Boris Gardiner - Bass Geoffrey Chung – Bass Keith Stewart – Piano Mikey "Boo" Richards - Drums Noel "Scully" Simms - Percussion Uziah "Sticky" Thompson – Percussion Barry Llewellyn - Vocals (Background) Candy McKenzie - Vocals (Background) + Sly Dunbar - Drums Gregory Isaacs - Vocals (Background) The Meditations - Vocals (Background) Lee "Scratch" Perry - Percussion, Producer Ernest Ranglin - Guitar

On Heart of the Congos Lee Perry created a masterpiece of music. Many critics consider this 1977 album one of the best roots records of all time, and at the very least, it was Perry's apex – only Junior Byles' Beat Down Babylon is an equal contender. Which is why it's all the more shocking that the record was turned down by Island, and even back in Jamaica it received only a limited release. It took nearly two decades for Heart of the Congos to reappear, finally reissued with a clutch of period bonus tracks by Blood and Fire. This here is an rip of the original vinyl from 1977.

The Congos themselves seem the least-likely contenders to record an exceptional album with Perry. The duo of Cedric Myton and Roy "Ashanti" Johnson had a unique sound, revolving around the former man's crystalline falsetto, which was set off by the latter's rich tenor. The pair composed deeply cultural songs, but both men's vocals had a gentle quality that would wither under a typical deep roots arrangement. In fact, if anything, the producer was even more sympathetic to the Congos' styling and exhibited a musical self-restraint that astonished even his hardcore fans. Every track on the original album is worthy of classic status, and all presented the group and their songs in the best possible light. To this end, Perry was aided by a phenomenal group of sessionmen and guest backing vocalists which included Gregory Isaacs,

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a pair of Heptones, and the mighty Meditations. But beyond the Congos' superb songs and performance, the superb musicianship, and the exceptional vocal talents, it's Perry's arrangements that brought these numbers to life.

Each one was carefully tailored, taking into consideration the mood of the piece and the vocalist. The tribal beats of "Congoman," for example, are just the song's launch pad; its the way the vocals and harmonies weave in and out that makes the piece extraordinary. "Ark of the Covenant" is stuffed to the brim with instrumentation, with the vocals soaring overhead, and brings the album to a religious fervor. In contrast, "Solid Foundation" is stripped back, a showpiece for Myton's marvelous falsetto. There's the stirring roots of "Open the Gates" and "Sodom & Gomorrow," while rocksteady echoes across the deeply affecting "Children Crying" and "La La Bam Bam." Every track offers something new: a unique sound, an unforgettable melody and rhythm, an unexpected arrangement. --- Jo-Ann Greene - allmusic.com

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