

Music review: d'bi young

Ron Sakolsky

2011

a review of
d'bi young. Wombanifesto.
www.dbiyoung.net

Invoking Elegua to open the musical floodgates, d'bi young wastes no time in unleashing bold soul sonic vibrations that ripple through the body and mind, swiftly but surely navigating the resulting rapids to carry us along on the raging (as in outrageous and outraged) river of her creativity.

Gathering together all the diasporic riches of dub poetry, reggae/dancehall, hip hop, jazz, and Cuban riddims, then rocking them all in the arms of Yemaya and Oshun and Jamaicanizing them as Yemojah ("yemojah moon phoenix"), d'bi mashes it up in a wombanifesto style. Deftly integrating the sacred bata drums, santeria chants, a capella beatboxing, and electronic beats (not to mention some hot Cuban fiddle/guitar licks), her musical scope and execution is simply staggering! This is music with no borders that ranges freely all over the map, but unlike the scattershot approach of so much multicultural music released these days, d'bi knows precisely how all the musical pieces of the African diasporic puzzle fit together, layering and juxtaposing them in a way that enhances their collective impact while retaining their individual cultural reference points. This is no watered-down-lowest-common-denominator music mosaic churned out by the record industry with only market share in mind, but a vibrant and succulent black bushwoman sound mix that is a joy for the ears to hear.

Her socially conscious lyrics are the icing on the cake. Neither pulling political punches nor fleeing from raw sensuality, her songs are nothing short of revelatory. They possess a pride in being "comfortable in me" ("gawdess in me") which is contagious and a get up/stand up quality that is inspiring rather than being merely didactic in the insipid way that the work of less talented purveyors of "message songs" can be. No topic is too controversial for her lyrical attack: from incest ("children of a lesser god") to Eurocentrism in the women's movement ("ain't I a oomaan"); from Orwellian echoes of genocide in Iraq to torture at Guantanamo prison ("animal farm"); from a nuff respect celebration of the resilience of the African woman in slavery days done in collaboration with former Black Liberation Army stalwart Nehanda Abiodun, who now has become the "godmother" of Cuban hip-hop during her years of exile there ("ase yemaya") to a deeply personal act of sabotage aimed directly at prying loose the deathgrip of gender rigidity ("gendah bendah"), which is livicated "to all those fucking with gender lines" today. Reversing the Rasta curse of "blood clot," d'bi refuses the shame associated with those words and rejoices in the strength which her monthly cycles represent by singing, "I bleed because I'm a warrior" ("blood").

Drawing on the words of ancestors gone, she quotes Bob Marley's "Johnny Was," and, more obliquely perhaps, dub poet Mikey Smith's "Mi CYaaN beLieve iT" for an overstanding of the trials and tribulations of a ghetto youth shot down by the police ("Sailor Johnny"). Then, by passing the mic to a living ancestor, former Black Panther Assata Shakur (now living in Cuban exile), d'bi posits a revolution of peace and love that is rooted in mind, heart and spirit but which still proclaims the need to fight against oppression when necessary ("revolution"). This is not a revolution based upon the "commercialization" and "trivialization" alluded to by the guest Cuban rappers anonimo consejo in relation to what history misrepresents as the American Revolution, the latter term being a misnomer that merely

masks the stark reality of the “ prison industrial shitstem” which “sucks my blood/my oil” and “rapes my trees” (“amerikkkan dreaming”). And coming full circle in her closing number (“satta”), she gives a fierce shout-out to her own bioartistic lineage in the person of anita stewart by passionately singing the words, “Like my mother before me, I will continue the fight to be free.”

Ase!

fifth Estate

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