

fROOTS

FROOTS : WOMEX AWARD WINNER 2010

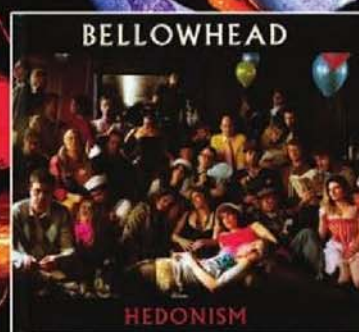
Local Music From Out There

WIN!

our top 90 CDs!

FREE!

FAF tracks CD inside!



the best of 2010

the albums of the year • folk awards nominees

Calypso Rose

She's had to fight all the way for acceptance as a woman in her musical field, hears **Elisavet Sotiriadou**.



cal aspirations that her music was not unsuitable or against God. She started singing and composing songs at a very young age and her father, a spiritual Baptist, had a lot of objections to her music. He would tell her "You cannot please God and the Devil at the same time".

To sing calypso music, which had a beat originating from West Africa, the slaves who had been brought to the Caribbean would have to hide away and meet in the bushes at night to play their drums and music. So Rose's father believed that the beat from that music belonged to the Devil, because it was performed underground and in secrecy. "But I'd tell him, 'Dad? If Calypso had belonged to the Devil, how come the good Lord gave me the inspiration to write it, create it and sing it? It's nothing bad.'"

The change came when Hurricane Flora hit Tobago in 1963. She wrote a song about the hurricane which had killed eight people, one of them her cousin. The song's spiritual message, with her singing "Abide with me" in every verse, made people realise that Rose and the calypso were a long way from being just party music.

"The rhythm and the beat is the calypso music, but the lyrics could do a lot – the lyrics, the lyrics, the lyrics!" Rose says. She's also written two gospel albums in calypso style and as we are sitting at the picnic tables backstage, she starts singing one of those songs, overshadowing all the music that leaks in from the surrounding stages at Womad with her overwhelming voice.

"Some of my calypso, I got them in my dreams, in my vision, some of them is my imagined thought, some of them I just pick up... I've never been to school to study musical, or learn music, but I used to watch my great uncle play the *cuatro* and I used to watch all the fingers move and then I would pick up the *cuatro* and just *tun tun tun* and the song in my ear it sound good and that's how I started playing in my guitar." When Rose took her songs to an arranger, all he had to do was to write the notes on the page, the rest had already been done.

During our conversation Rose sings songs for me and has me practise to understand her language. She wants to sing one more for me before we part. "And now they address me as her majesty, they say me music's sweet, it make for the pants to beat, take off your shoes and jump on carnival day... they call me Queeeeeeeeeen, Queen of the road."

For details of her tours and albums see www.calypsorosediva.com

Photo: Judith Burrows

Calypso Rose is not only a prolific songwriter with at least 800 songs to her name; she is a vibrant, feisty and sexy woman both on and off stage, who makes you smile, laugh and feel good no matter how serious the topic of conversation.

With her pidgin English and her dance moves she gets the audience to gently move their hips. Dancing early on in the day might not be what they had in mind, but there is no stopping Calypso Rose as she tries to infuse the less than flexible audience with her party spirit.

She started her live performance at last summer's Womad festival shoeless: "Just like Miriam Makeba," I tell her when I meet her backstage. She is beyond ecstatic with this comparison, and tells me how proud she is of her African ancestors. "You know I'm an African descendant. My great-grandmother came from Guinea, Africa: my great-great-grandfather was the slave Sandy. If you go to the history of Tobago and you go to the library and read the his-

tory of Tobago, the slave that led the revolution to burn down the Governor General's house... was the slave Sandy."

So there's no mystery over where she gets her power, fighting spirit and energy from – it is definitely in the genes. But her path to stardom and a career in singing has not been easy, she's had a lot of hurdles to clear along the way. Not only did she have to convince her own family that singing was not demeaning for a woman, she also had to fight for women to be allowed to sing calypso songs and win calypso competitions across the Caribbean. Having won the Trinidad Road March competition five years in a row – a competition for the most-played, newly-composed calypso song during the carnival – Rose, being a woman, was not allowed to receive a prize even though her songs kept winning.

In a society where "everything black was bad", Calypso Rose not only managed to continue with her singing, but to persuade those who were critical of her musi-