

Thursday, March 30, 2006, 8pm  
Zellerbach Hall

# Ladysmith Black Mambazo



Joseph Shabalala  
Msizi Shabalala  
Russel Mthembu  
Albert Mazibuko  
Thulani Shabalala  
Thamsanqa Shabalala  
Sibongiseni Shabalala  
Abednego Mazibuko

*Cal Performance dedicates this concert to the memory of Jockey Shabalala.*

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## LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO

Mention African song and most people think of South African practitioners of the vocal arts—Solomon Linda, Miriam Makeba and, perhaps more than anyone else in recent memory, Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Ladysmith Black Mambazo has come to represent the traditional culture of South Africa. They are regarded as South Africa's cultural emissaries at home and around the world. In 1993, at Nelson Mandela's request, Black Mambazo accompanied the future President to the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo, Norway. Mambazo sang again at President Mandela's inauguration in May 1994. They are a national treasure of the new South Africa, in part because they embody the traditions suppressed in the old South Africa.

It has been nearly 20 years since Paul Simon made his initial trip to South Africa and met Joseph Shabalala and the other members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo in a recording studio in Johannesburg. Having listened to a cassette of their music sent by a D.J. based in Los Angeles, Simon was captivated by the stirring sound of bass, alto and tenor harmonies. Simon incorporated the traditional sounds of black South Africa into the *Graceland* album, a project regarded by many as seminal to today's explosive interest in World Music.

The traditional music sung by Ladysmith Black Mambazo is called *isicathamiya* (meaning "on tip-toe") and was born in the mines of South Africa. Black workers were taken by rail to work far away from their homes and their families. Poorly housed and paid worse, they would entertain themselves after a six-day week by singing songs into the wee hours every Sunday morning. *Cothoza Mfana* they called themselves, "tip-toe guys," referring to the dance steps choreographed so as to not disturb the camp security guards. When miners returned to the homelands, the tradition returned with them. There began a fierce but social competition held regularly and a highlight of everyone's social calendar. The winners were awarded a goat for their efforts and, of course, the adoration of their fans. These competitions are held even today in YMCA assembly halls and church basements throughout "Zululand."

In the mid-1950s, Joseph Shabalala took advantage of his proximity to the urban sprawl of the

city of Durban, which provided him the opportunity to seek work in a factory. Leaving the family farm was not easy, but it was during this time that Joseph first showed a talent for singing. After singing with several groups in Durban, he returned to his hometown of Ladysmith and began to put together groups of his own.

He was rarely satisfied with the results. "I felt there was something missing... I tried to teach the music that I felt, but I failed until 1964, when a harmonious dream came to me. I always heard the harmony from that dream and I said "This is the sound that I want and I can teach it to my guys."

In the early years, Joseph recruited members of his family, and friends—brothers Headman and Jockey, cousins Albert and Abednego Mazibuko and others. Joseph taught the group the harmonies from his dreams. With time and patience, Joseph's work began to gel into a special sound.

The name Ladysmith Black Mambazo came about as a result of winning every singing competition in which the group entered. "Ladysmith" is the hometown of the Shabalala family; "Black" makes reference to black oxen, considered to be the strongest on the farm. The Zulu word "Mambazo" refers to an ax—symbolic of the group's ability to "chop down" the competition. So good were they, that after a time they were forbidden to enter the competitions but welcomed, of course, to entertain at them.

A radio broadcast in 1970 brought about their first recording contract. Since then, the group has recorded more than 40 albums, selling over six million records at home and abroad and establishing themselves as the number-one selling musical group from Africa. Their work with Paul Simon attracted a world of fans that never knew that the sounds of Zulu harmony could be so captivating.

Their first album released in the United States, *Shaka Zulu*, was produced by Simon and won the Grammy Award in 1987 for Best Traditional Folk Recording. Since then, they have been nominated for a Grammy Award eight additional times. In 2005, they were awarded their second Grammy Award for Best Traditional World Music Recording for the release *Raise Your Spirit Higher*.

*On Tip Toe: Gentle Steps to Freedom*, a documentary film which is the story of Joseph Shabalala and Ladysmith Black Mambazo, was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Short Document-

tary Film in 2001 and an Emmy Award in 2002 for Best Cultural Documentary on American television.

The group has also recorded with numerous artists from around the world besides Paul Simon. Some of these include Stevie Wonder, Dolly Parton, Ben Harper, The Wynans and George Clinton. Their film work includes a featured appearance in Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* and Spike Lee's *Do It A Cappella*. Mambazo has provided soundtrack material for Disney's *The Lion King II*, Eddie Murphy's *Coming to America*, Marlon Brando's *A Dry White Season*, James Earl Jones's *Cry the Beloved Country* and Sean Connery's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

Their list of advertisements include award-winning commercials for 7-Up and Life Savers Candy, as well as an "on camera" appearance for an IBM television campaign, "Solutions for a Small Planet." In 1999, Heinz Beans UK used a Mambazo song for a television advertisement that was so popular, it helped the group's CD at that time sell over one million copies.

Mambazo has worked in the theater as well. In 1992, the Steppenwolf Theater Company of Chicago used the group's singing and acting abilities in a play written about the apartheid era. After first premiering in Chicago, *The Song of Jacob Zulu* opened on Broadway in New York in the spring of 1993 and was nominated for six Tony Awards, including Best Music for a Play. Joseph and the group also were honored with the prestigious Drama Desk Award for Best Original Score.

In 1995, Ladysmith Black Mambazo collaborated in the staging of *Nomathemba*, a musical based on the first song ever written by Joseph Shabalala. *Nomathemba* was performed in Chicago, where it was awarded Best Original Musical Score, and at Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center and Boston's Shubert Theatre.

The group has been invited to perform at many special occasions. One event, at the special invitation of President Mandela, was to perform for the Queen of England and the Royal Family at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Meeting the Queen, as well as other members of the Royal Family, was a stirring moment for the group. As Joseph later said, "To think of all the people we have met over the years. People from North America, Europe, Asia, Australia. Presidents, dignitaries, movie stars,

and now the Queen of England. It is quite a dream for a Zulu South African to dream."

The group has also performed at two Nobel Peace Prize Ceremonies, a performance Pope John Paul II in Rome, South African Presidential inaugurations, the 1996 Summer Olympics, a Muhammad Ali television special, music award shows from around the world, and many other special events.

In summer 2002, Mambazo was again asked to represent their nation in London for a celebration for Queen Elizabeth II's 50th anniversary as monarch, dubbed "The Party at the Palace." Ladysmith Black Mambazo joined with Eric Clapton, Rod Stewart, Phil Collins and Sir Paul McCartney on the Beatles songs "Hey Jude" and "All You Need Is Love." After the concert members of the group joined a private party in Buckingham Palace, where they engaged in private conversations with Prince Charles, his sons, Princes William and Harry, and Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Time does not seem to be slowing down the group as they continue to travel the world, meeting new friends and reaching new audiences. This allows Joseph to continue to spread his message of "Peace, Love, and Harmony."

Meanwhile, traditional life in South Africa continues to change. Cable television, MTV and other international influences are taking its toll on tradition, and Joseph sees the wonder and the peril in this progress. Always a man to find faith in his dreams, Joseph's life ambition now is to establish the first Academy for the teaching and preservation of indigenous South African music and culture in South Africa.

Aside from singing and writing, Joseph continues the teaching of young children the traditions his elders taught him. In fact, over the past several years, with the retirement of several members of the group, Joseph has enlisted the talents of four sons...the next Mambazo generation. While bringing a youthful energy to the group, it shows the world, and Joseph, that his teachings and the traditions of his people will not disappear.

The group has devoted itself to the consciousness raising of South African culture, as well as Joseph's intention to fund the Music Academy during their U.S. tours. Attracting the financial and moral support of many, including Danny Glover and Whoopi Goldberg, was just the beginning. Ladysmith Black Mambazo's current and future tours

continue to spread the word of Joseph's dream of preservation through education while encouraging all those who can, to give their support.

Joseph's appointment as an associate professor of ethno musicology at the University of Natal as well as a recent teaching position with UCLA in California, has given him a taste of the life of a scholar. "It's just like performing," says Joseph. "You work all day, correcting the mistakes, encouraging the young ones to be confident in their action. And if they do not succeed I always criticize myself. I am their teacher. They are willing to learn. But it is up to me to see they learn correctly."

Ladysmith Black Mambazo's new album, *Long Walk to Freedom*, was released in January 2006. The album is a collection of 12 new recordings of classic Mambazo songs, featuring guest vocal performances by some of the most progressive voices of the contemporary pop music scene, including Melissa Etheridge, Emmylou Harris, Taj Mahal, Joe McBride, Sarah McLachlan, Natalie Merchant and Zap Mama. Also appearing on the guest ro-

ster are a virtual who's who of South African artists, such as Lucky Dube, Bhekumunzi Luthuli, Vusi Mahlasela, Hugh Masekela, Nokukhanya, Phuzekhemisi and Thandiswa.

The track sequence follows the chronology of their extensive history of recording, beginning with "Nomathemba," the hit song originally released in 1973 on the group's *Amabutho* album. The album closes with "Thula Thula," a new composition not previously heard on any Mambazo album. This simple song features the lone voice of Mambazo leader and founder Joseph Shabalala, who displays the broad dynamic range and emotional depth that has served as the driving force behind his history-making *a cappella* group for more than 40 years.

The story of Ladysmith Black Mambazo is about more than just music. It is about the historic struggle of a great nation. Much of that rich and bittersweet history is captured on this new recording. Ladysmith Black Mambazo invites the audience to join them and their cadre of stellar guests on the *Long Walk to Freedom*.