

Ladysmith Black Mambazo
& Vusi Mahlasela
Long Walk to Freedom

Thursday, February 3, 2005, 8 pm
Zellerbach Hall

Ladysmith Black Mambazo

Joseph Shabalala

Thulani Shabalala

Msizi Shabalala

Thamsanqa Shabalala

Russel Mthembu

Sibongiseni Shabalala

Albert Mazibuko

Jockey Shabalala

Jabulani Dubazana

Abednego Mazibuko

Vusi Mahlasela

Tonight's program will be announced from the stage. Ladysmith Black Mambazo's set will be approximately 60 minutes in length. Vusi Mahlasela's set will be approximately 30 minutes in length. There will be one intermission.

This performance has been made possible, in part, by the Friends of Cal Performances.

Cal Performances thanks the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, and the Zellerbach Family Foundation for their generous support.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Ladysmith Black Mambazo has come to represent the traditional culture of South Africa in many people's minds, and they are regarded as cultural emissaries around the world. In 1993, at Nelson Mandela's request, Mambazo accompanied the future president, and then South African President F.W. de Klerk, to the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo, Norway. Mambazo sang again at President Mandela's inauguration in May of 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's been more than 15 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 DJ 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.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The traditional music sung by Ladysmith Black Mambazo is called *Isicathamiya* (Is-Cot-A-Me-Ya). It 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, 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 not to 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 that became the 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.

In the mid-50s Joseph Shabalala took advantage of his proximity to the urban sprawl of the city of Durban, allowing 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 a few 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 dream came to me. I always hear the harmony from that dream, and I said “This is the harmony that I want, and I can teach it to my guys.” Joseph recruited members of his immediate family - brothers Headman and Jockey, cousins Albert and Abednego Mazibuko and other close friends to join. Joseph taught the group the harmonies from his dreams. With time and patience, Joseph’s work began to reveal the colors of these dreams.

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 the strongest on the farm. The Zulu word “Mambazo” refers to an ax – symbolic of the group’s ability to “chop down” the competition.

A radio broadcast in 1970 brought about their first record contract. Since then the group has

recorded more than 40 albums, selling more than six million records at home and abroad.

Their first album release in the United States, *Shaka Zulu*, was produced by Simon and won the Grammy Award in 1987 for Best Traditional Folk Album. Since then they have been nominated for a Grammy Award six additional times, including a nomination in 2001 for the album *Live From Royal Albert Hall*. A documentary film titled *On Tip Toe: Gentle Steps To Freedom*, which is the story of Joseph Shabalala and Ladysmith Black Mambazo, was nominated for an Academy Award as Best Short Documentary Film in 2001. In addition *On Tip Toe: Gentle Steps to Freedom* was nominated for American television’s Emmy Award in 2002 for Best Cultural Documentary.

The group has recorded with numerous artists from around the world besides Simon. These include Stevie Wonder, Dolly Parton, The Wynans, Julia Fordham, George Clinton, Russell Watson, Ben Harper, Des’Re and others. Mambazo provided soundtrack material for Disney’s *The Lion King Part II* as well as Eddie Murphy’s *Coming To America*, Marlon Brando’s *A Dry White Season*, and James Earl Jones’ *Cry The Beloved Country*. Their performance with Paul Simon on *Sesame Street* is legendary – their appearance is one of the top-three requested *Sesame Street* segments in history.

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 teaching. 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.

The group has devoted itself to raising the consciousness of South African culture, as well as Joseph’s intention to fund the Music Academy during their U.S. tours. Joseph has also been appointed an associate professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Natal, as well as a recent teaching position at UCLA in California. “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,” says Joseph.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Vusi Sidney Mahlasela Ka Zwane was born in 1965 in Lady Selbourne, near Pretoria, and grew up in Mamelodi township, where he still resides. Vusi never knew his father, lost his mother at a young age, and was raised by his maternal grandmother. Growing up in Mamelodi, a cradle of creativity that has produced a number of noted poets, writers, artists and musicians, the young Vusi began to teach himself to play on a homemade guitar, a remarkable instrument made of tin cans and fishing line. Vusi can't remember a time when he wasn't singing — "I'm sure I learned to sing before I could talk" — and was a seasoned performer by the age of 17. He soon discovered that he had a flair for composition and began to write his own music and lyrics.

From the outset, Vusi's songs addressed themes of political and social significance, and so he found himself in demand at political rallies and cultural events. His message of peace also drew him into close contact with poetry groups, especially the Ancestors of Africa, a rousing group of poets, musicians and actors, formed in 1981. He recalls, "We were picked up and harassed in all types of situations, going to church every Sunday and being forced to sign a piece of paper at the police station first. If I was going out of town for a wedding, it had to be reported to the police first. They kept on harassing me with the things I was doing. But I stuck to it."

After joining the Congress of South African Writers in 1988, Vusi developed a new level of confidence as a poet and a writer. He struck up a creative friendship with South African poet Lesego Rampolokeng at the same time he was falling under the spell of artists like Miriam Makeba and Phillip Tabane. He was also exposed to the work of Victor Jara, whom Vusi acknowledges as a central influence on his own music and lyrics.

His first record, *When You Come Back*, was recorded and released by Shifty/BMG in 1991 and produced by Lloyd Ross. The album is widely acknowledged as a South African classic. Then, in 1994, Vusi was asked to perform arguably the most important gig of his life: the inauguration of South Africa's new president, Nelson Mandela. That same year, with South Africa undergoing massive transition, Vusi released his second album,

Wisdom of Forgiveness. The album saw Vusi receive a finalist nomination for Best Male Vocalist at the FNB SAMA (South African Music Award). Vusi has released three albums since *Wisdom*, including the gold-certified and double-SAMA-winning *Silang Mabele* (1997), *Miyela Afrika* (2000), and his most recent, *Jungle Of Questions* (2002), which Vusi produced and recorded alongside his Proud People's Band.

Vusi is featured in *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*, the celebrated film about the importance of music and song in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. After garnering two awards at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival, *Amandla!* was released to theaters across North America in February 2003 and earned tremendous critical acclaim and more awards. The *Amandla!* companion album, which spans 40 years of South African music, was released on ATO Records and features four songs by Vusi, in addition to Hugh Masekela, Abdullah Ibrahim and others.

An accomplished guitarist, percussionist, composer, arranger, band leader and performer, Vusi now enjoys an ever-growing and worldwide following. Among his most ardent supporters is Dave Matthews, who is a native of South Africa and has long aimed to make Vusi's music known in the US. In fact, when Matthews founded ATO Records several years ago, one of his foremost goals was to sign Vusi to the label. In 2000 he invited Vusi to contribute guest vocals on the title track of the Dave Matthews Band's multi-platinum album *Everyday*. In 2002 ATO was approached by the producers of *Amandla!* and enthusiastically secured rights to release the soundtrack. Matthews further realized his goal earlier this year, signing Vusi to ATO. And so Mahlasela makes his North American debut with *The Voice*, a definitive collection handpicked by Vusi which spans his recordings over the last 11 years.

For Ladysmith Black Mambazo:

Adam Hunt, Jon Picciano and Mitch Goldstein, *crew*

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