

Ladysmith Black Mambazo

South Africa's Ladysmith Black Mambazo was founded in the early 1960s by Joseph Shabalala, then a teenage farm boy living on the lands just outside the small town of Ladysmith, in the province of kwaZulu Natal, half way between Johannesburg and Durban. Joseph used his hometown's name to honor his family's history. Joseph added to his group's name the word Black in reference to the black oxen, the strongest of all farm animals. Mambazo is the Zulu word for chopping axe, a symbol of the group's vocal ability to clear the path to success.

It took several years for Joseph to find the best singers to join his group. At one point he had a dream in which he heard the sound he wanted his group to emulate. Finally, in early 1969, with four brothers and three cousins, Joseph had the voices he long dreamed of his group having. At that point Ladysmith Black Mambazo began their true musical journey. Their early ability won so many awards, at the local South African competitions, that by the end of the 1969 the group was banned from competing. However they were always invited to attend as entertainers.

A radio broadcast in 1970 opened the door to their first record contract, the beginning of an ambitious recording career that currently includes more than seventy albums, earning nineteen GRAMMY Award nominations and five GRAMMY Award wins; *Shaka Zulu* (1988), *Raise Your Spirit Higher* (2004), *Ilembe* (2009), *Singing For Peace Around the World* (2013), and *Shaka Zulu Revisited* (2017).

Singing For Peace Around The World. Not just a CD title but a statement of the group's career mission. It was Nelson Mandela who designated Ladysmith Black Mambazo "South Africa's Cultural Ambassadors to the world." It is a moniker the group members hold close to their hearts. Nelson Mandela passed away in 2013 but the group has been celebrating Mandela's message of peace at every concert they perform.

In 2017 the group released two albums that both were nominated for GRAMMY Awards, a first for a World Music group. *Songs of PEACE & LOVE for Kids & Parents Around The World* was nominated for Best Children's Album. It is very important, to the group, that their message of peace and love be passed from generation to generation. By recording songs of peace that parents can teach their children, the group hopes to continue this message for decades to come. Their second album of 2017, *Shaka Zulu Revisited*, won Best World Music Album.

Apartheid, the South African social system forced upon the country's black majority to keep the white minority government in power, was a dividing force in many ways. The musicians and artists of South Africa took two paths of resistance. Some sang songs with powerful messages of revolution against the horrors of apartheid. Others, like Ladysmith Black Mambazo, followed a path of peaceful protest. Joseph, following the ways of Martin Luther King Jr and Mahatma Gandhi, wrote songs of hope and peace. When Nelson Mandela was released from prison, in 1990, he stated that Ladysmith Black Mambazo's music was a powerful message of peace that he listened to while in jail. When Mandela was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1993, he called on Ladysmith Black Mambazo to join him in Norway and have them entertain at the ceremony. Mandela eventually called the group South Africa's Cultural Ambassadors to the world.

The group sings from a traditional music called isicathamiya (is-cot-a-ME-Ya), which developed in the mines of South Africa. It was there that black workers were taken by rail to work far away from their homes and families. Poorly housed and paid worse, the mine workers would entertain themselves after a six-day week by singing songs into the wee hours on Sunday morning. When the miners returned to the homelands, this musical tradition returned with them.

During the 1970's Ladysmith Black Mambazo established themselves as the most successful singing group in South Africa. In the mid-1980s, American singer/songwriter Paul Simon visited South Africa and incorporated the group's rich harmonies into the famous *Graceland* album (1986) – a landmark recording that was considered seminal in introducing world music to mainstream audiences.

In addition to their work with Paul Simon, Ladysmith Black Mambazo has recorded with Stevie Wonder, Dolly Parton, Sarah McLachlan, Josh Groban, Emmylou Harris, Melissa Etheridge, and many others. They have provided music for many movies, have appeared on Broadway where they were nominated for a Tony Award and even had a documentary film, titled *On Tip Toe: Gentle Steps to Freedom, the Story of Ladysmith Black Mambazo*, nominated for an Academy Award.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo carries a message of Peace, Love and Harmony as they travel the world year after year. They bring this message, in song and dance, to every theater they perform in. We hope you will join them as they sing their message.

See more at www.mambazo.com