



# Ladysmith Black Mambazo's music, choreography provides intoxicating mix at DeVos Performance Hall

Posted by Jeffrey Kaczmarzyk | The Grand Rapids Press March 01, 2009 02:53AM

Joseph Shabalala rose above the hardships of life in South Africa under apartheid in the 1960s to create music of unmistakable joy with his musical group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The vocal ensemble was in DeVos Performance Hall on Saturday for the Grand Rapids Symphony's annual "Symphony with Soul" concert.

Created in 2002 to build bridges and forge connections between the orchestra and the wider community, its success is undeniable. With 2,050 in the hall for the first half, it was the Grand Rapids Symphony's biggest audience of the season in DeVos Performance Hall.

3.5 OUT OF 4 STARS

**What:** "Symphony with Soul"

**Guest Artist:** Ladysmith Black Mambazo

**Conductors:** David Lockington and Duane Davis

**Time on stage:** 125 minute, not counting intermission

Plenty more came in after intermission to see Ladysmith Black Mambazo, which won its fourth Grammy Award earlier in February.

The group's soft, repetitively mesmerizing singing style was introduced to American audiences by singer/songwriter Paul Simon and his 1985 album, "Graceland."

It's intoxicating to listen to the supple, fluid way they swoop in and out of phrases on songs such as "Long Walk to Freedom." Others, such as "Homeless," from "Graceland," was richly layered with ambient sounds of nature accompanying the music, all created by the voices of the eight-man ensemble.

But Ladysmith Black Mambazo is far more entertaining when you can see them in action. Though they sing primarily in Zulu, the choreography usually makes it clear whether they're singing about hardship or courtship.

With "Vela Nsizwa," which translates as "Show Yourself, Young Man," a song about a man proving his worth to a woman, most took a solo turn to show off his high-kicking moves.

Several members of the Grand Rapids Community Gospel Chorus came on stage to try some moves along with Ladysmith Black Mambazo. As an encore, the entire chorus joined the group for a captivating version of "Amazing Grace."