

Ladysmith Black Mambazo won't have to worry about belated recognition. That group, led by Joseph Shabalala, has an international following and enough fans among musicians to fill its latest album, "Long Walk to Freedom" (Hears Up), with guests. The Carnegie Hall concert featured fellow South Africans — the songwriter Vusi Mahlasela and the vocal trio the Mahotella Queens — along with North Americans who appear on the album, Sarah McLachlan and Natalie Merchant.

The guests provided some of the concert's peaks. Mr. Mahlasela, a political voice during apartheid who now counsels forgiveness, played solo, picking an acoustic guitar. His voice leaped up to a falsetto croon, turned into a rasp or accelerated toward quickly articulated syllables that created spectacular momentum with minimal means. The Mahotella Queens' sassy voices harmonized as brightly as trumpets, and they had some bump-and-grind dance moves. Ms. Merchant sang Mr. Shabalala's "Rain Rain Beautiful Rain" and her own "Kind and Generous" with her voice poised above Ladysmith's harmonies. And Ms. McLachlan joined the South Africans for "Homeless," written by Mr. Simon and Mr. Shabalala, with her voice bringing out the melancholy of lines like, "Somebody cry, why why why?"

Yet for all the years that Ladysmith Black Mambazo has performed alongside pop songwriters, Mr. Shabalala's own songs are still resolutely South African. Ladysmith's unaccompanied vocal style, *isicathamiya*, has been translated as "on tiptoes" or "stalking" because it originated in mineworkers' dormitories with dance steps done lightly enough not to alarm security guards. At Carnegie Hall, the songs were built on dignified call-and-response leading into rolling, repeating three-chord vamps rather than the hooks and contrasts of Western pop.

The vamps were carried by Ladysmith's seven bass singers, whose voices blended like organ pipes for deep harmonies. Eventually, as the harmonies continued, the songs led into dance routines with synchronized moves as well as head-high kicks that are a Zulu tradition; the singers wore white shoes to show them off.

Mr. Shabalala, singing above the basses, has a sweet, hushed tenor that whispers and swoops and quivers, gentle yet fervent. In the formality of Carnegie Hall, the songs came across not as jovial workers' entertainment, but as something more somber: music that had survived sorrows to find benedictions in the aftermath.

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