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HEADS UP DVD CAPTURES THE KINETIC ENERGY OF LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO

Features stellar performances and in-depth interviews

For more than three decades, the story of Ladysmith Black Mambazo has been just as much about physicality and choreography as it has been about brilliant vocal harmonies. For this GRAMMY-winning a cappella group that merges South African music and dance traditions with Christian messages of compassion, love and global harmony, the music alone is only half the story. Simply put, Ladysmith Black Mambazo has to be seen to be understood.

Heads Up International offers a visual glimpse of these icons of South African music and dance with a DVD, *Ladysmith Black Mambazo Live* (HUDV 7149), scheduled for worldwide release on January 27, 2009. Recorded in Akron, Ohio, in 2008, the set captures not only fourteen songs performed on the stage of EJ Thomas Hall at the University of Akron, but also forty minutes of in-depth interviews with founder, leader and musical director Joseph Shabalala and other members of the group.

Shabalala, a South African farmboy turned factory worker, first began gathering talented vocalists and arranging multi-layered and tightly woven harmonies in the early 1960s. After a series of records throughout the '70s and early '80s, the group rocketed to international fame in 1986 with their appearance on Paul Simon's landmark recording, *Graceland*.

The thematic elements in Mambazo's music that appeal to South Africans, says Shabalala, are the same elements that appeal to a universal audience in all parts of the globe. In that sense, the group has come to be recognized as South Africa's musical ambassadors to the world.

"People love our music because we have a story in this music," says Shabalala. "It's a very deep story about tradition, about taking care of yourself, about reminding people to get together

and work very hard for themselves. We are treated like kings because of this music. When the police and the politicians [in South Africa] listen to this sound, they love us. They say, ‘*This* is the African sound. Therefore, let these people go wherever they want to go and spread this music around the world.’”

Spanning more than ninety minutes, the performances within *Ladysmith Black Mambazo Live* are riveting – not just in their layered musicality but in their sheer kinetic energy. Beginning with their opening number, “Nomathemba,” and throughout the performance, the nine-man group is almost constantly in motion – sometimes as individuals, sometimes as a unit – with simple hand gestures, giant leaps and bounds across the stage or overhead kicks that seem to defy the most basic laws of anatomical flexibility.

Other highlights include the thoughtful “Ekulupekeni” and the stirring “Long Walk To Freedom,” the title track to their 2006 Heads Up recording that recognized twelve years of democracy in the Republic of South Africa. Further in, “Thulanhliziyiyo” features some light-hearted call-and-response with the audience, while the quiet and pensive “Rain Rain Beautiful Rain” celebrates the inherent beauty and spirituality of the natural world.

The set closes with two emotionally resonant encores: “Shosholoza” (also from *Long Walk To Freedom*) and a quiet, heartfelt medley of the two well known hymns, “Amazing Grace” and “Nearer My God To Thee.”

The disc also includes an extensive interview with Shabalala, who takes the viewer through the history of the group, beginning with his early days in the late 1950s as a South African factory worker with musical aspirations. Interviews with other members of the band highlight the generational cross-section that makes up the group by introducing the younger members who have joined the ranks in recent years.

“Ladysmith Black Mambazo will never end,” says longtime member Abednego Mazibuko, “especially because now we have a young generation that will follow us. We are very grateful for that.”

Young or old, in motion or at rest, regionally popular in the ‘60s or world renowned in the 21st century, Ladysmith Black Mambazo has spent the past thirty-plus years committed to a message that’s as simple as it is constant. “Only one thing,” says Shabalala. “Only one thing. Love.”

Catch *Ladysmith Black Mambazo Live* and tap into this basic but profound concept.

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