

“Homeless”: A Reflection

The South African male chorus Ladysmith Black Mambazo rose to international fame after performing the song “Homeless” with Paul Simon. The group utilizes the traditional Zulu styles of a capella music, isicathamiya and mbube. Isicathamiya (Zulu word that loosely translates to "walking softly") connotes more gentle, harmonious blends, while mbube (Zulu for lion) refers to power and intensity. Both of these styles are effortlessly blended in the song and hold fast to traditional musical style of the Zulu people.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo was frequently tied to the politics of South Africa in the late 20th century, especially the controversy surrounding apartheid. For example, when the apartheid government was abolished, the group published a celebratory album and even accompanied Nelson Mandela to perform at his Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. Throughout the entirety of their career, Ladysmith Black Mambazo has primarily attracted black South African fans.

The particular track "Homeless" was originally a collaborative effort between Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the American musician Paul Simon, introducing western audiences to the traditional Zulu isicathamiya style. The song describes the people yelling, "we are homeless, homeless" after "many [are] dead, tonight it could be you." The listener can interpret these exclamations to express the cries of the black South Africans about the grievances of apartheid, thus sending a political message of protest to the government. This song was included in the course because it highlights the use of music as a tool to gather the voices of the common people to revolt against decisions made by the government.

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