

Cultural Daily

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Remembering Mandela, with Ladysmith Black Mambazo

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[Ladysmith Black Mambazo](#) rose to international fame when they collaborated with Paul Simon on the album *Graceland*, but the group originated twenty years earlier, in the middle 1960s. Their unique name comes from “Ladysmith,” the hometown of the group’s founder, Joseph Shabalala; the black ox, the ubiquitous farming animal in that district; and “mambazo,” the Zulu work for “axe” — South African singers are nothing if not competitive, and this group meant to chop down their rivals.

Ladysmith released this video last year; the song first appeared on their 2006 album *Long Walk to Freedom*. The video is deliberately strange, with its tribal rituals, desaturated colors and soft focus. As you watch, you’ll be captivated by the sweet blend of their voices, and then you’ll begin to recognize English words. Next you’ll see the television images of protest and Nelson Mandela. Soon you’ll realize they’re signing about the end of apartheid in South Africa and Mandela’s triumphant ascent to that nation’s presidency.

As world leaders gather to mourn the passing of Mandela, one of the world’s great leaders and peacemakers, this video and all its history is especially timely.

[embedvideo id=”bq_zSSOCEZA” website=”youtube”]



Ladysmith Black Mambazo in concert at Ravinia, photo by Stephen Neilson, via flickr, Creative Commons license

Top image: Nelson Mandela, 1918-2013. Photo via Flickr Creative Commons user Domenico

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