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Ladysmith Black Mambazo Returns to the Mondavi Center

Davis, Calif.—The musical ambassadors of **Ladysmith Black Mambazo** return to the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts**, UC Davis, **Monday, March 16**, at **8 p.m.** in **Jackson Hall**. One of the world's greatest and most popular **a cappella vocal ensembles**, the eight-member group has introduced the beauties of **Zulu harmony** to a wide international audience over the last four decades, recording more than 40 albums and collaborating with artists ranging from Paul Simon to the English Chamber Orchestra to Dolly Parton.

Says **Don Roth**, Mondavi Center executive director, "Ever since appearing on Paul Simon's 'Graceland' album, this energetic, enthusiastic and highly talented ensemble has become a staple favorite at performing arts venues everywhere."

Pricing is \$45/35/25 for regular tickets and \$22.50/17.50/12.50 for students and children. Purchase tickets online at MondaviArts.org, through the Mondavi Center box office at 530-754-2787 or 866-754-2787 (toll-free), or at the door. Accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. This event is presented as part of the Mondavi Center's **World Stage: Music** series, which concludes with **Lila Downs** on **April 3**.

The Mondavi Center Arts Education Program also presents **Ladysmith Black Mambazo** as part of the **2008–09 School Matinee Series** in **Jackson Hall** on **Tuesday, March 17**, at **11 a.m.** The School Matinee Series is made available for teachers and students, including homeschoolers. Performances in this series support the California Department of Education Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards. Educators interested in purchasing tickets should call 530-754-4689.

For more than 40 years, **Ladysmith Black Mambazo** has married the intricate rhythms and harmonies of their native South African musical traditions to the sounds and sentiments of Christian gospel music. The result is a musical and spiritual alchemy that has touched a worldwide audience representing every corner of the religious, cultural and ethnic landscape. Their musical efforts over the past four decades have garnered praise and accolades within the recording industry, but also solidified their identity as a cultural force to be reckoned with.

Assembled in the early 1960s in South Africa by Joseph Shabalala, then a young farm boy turned factory worker, the group took the name Ladysmith Black Mambazo—“Ladysmith” being the name of Shabalala’s rural hometown; “Black” being a reference to oxen, the strongest of all farm animals; and “Mambazo” being the Zulu word for “axe,” a symbol of the group’s vocal ability to “chop down” all things in their path. Their collective voices were so tight and their harmonies so polished that they were eventually banned from competitions, although they were welcome to participate strictly as entertainers.

Shabalala says his conversion to Christianity in the 60s helped define the group’s musical identity. He explains that the path that the axe was chopping suddenly had a direction: “to bring this gospel of loving one another all over the world.” He’s quick to point out, however, that the message is not specific to any one religious orientation. “Without hearing the lyrics, this music gets into the blood, because it comes from the blood ... It evokes enthusiasm and excitement, regardless of what you follow spiritually.”

A radio broadcast in 1970 opened the door to the group’s first record contract—the beginning of an ambitious discography that currently includes more than 40 recordings, garnering two GRAMMYS and 15 nominations, including one for the group’s most recent recording “Ilembe: Honoring Shaka Zulu.” The philosophy in the studio was and continues to be just as much about preservation of musical heritage as it is about entertainment. The group borrows heavily from a traditional music called “isicathamiya” (is-cot-a-ME-ya), which developed in the mines of South Africa, where black workers were taken by rail to work far away from their homes and their families. Poorly housed and paid worse, the mine workers would entertain themselves after a six-day week by singing songs into the wee hours on Sunday morning. When the miners returned to the homelands, this musical tradition returned with them.

In the mid-80s, Paul Simon visited South Africa and incorporated Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s rich tenor/alto/bass harmonies into his “Graceland” album, a landmark 1986 recording that won the GRAMMY for best album and is considered seminal in introducing world music to mainstream audiences. A performance with Simon on “Sesame Street” is legendary and is one of the television show’s top three requested segments. In addition to their work with Paul Simon, Ladysmith Black Mambazo have recorded with numerous artists from around the world, including Stevie Wonder, Josh Groban, Dolly Parton, Sarah McLaughlin, Emmylou Harris, Natalie Merchant, Mavis Staples, Ry Cooder and Ben Harper.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo has been invited to perform at many special events including events for the Queen of England, two Nobel Peace Prize Ceremonies, a concert for Pope John Paul II in Rome, the South African Presidential inaugurations and many other special events. Read more at mambazo.com.

- **Ladysmith Black Mambazo**
- **Mon., March 16, 8 p.m.**
- **Mondavi Center, Jackson Hall**
- **9399 Old Davis Road, Davis, CA 95616 (GPS)**
- **\$45/35/25 regular; \$22.50/17.50/12.50 students, children**
- **530-754-2787**
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