

Ladysmith: Hallelujah!

Ladysmith Black Mambazo
Jubilee Auditorium
Monday, October 10

review by Mike Spindloe

Something wonderful and unique happened Monday night. Ladysmith Black Mambazo gave a concert at the Jubilee Auditorium. That concert was so unlike anything I have seen or heard before as to almost defy description.

But I'll try.

The ten-man a capella group filed on-stage, grinning and waving, uniformly attired in off-white trousers and striped shirts. Throughout most of the concert they remained in a single line behind a battery of microphones, except for the leader, Joseph Shabala, who wore a wireless microphone and danced around in front of the group.

This overgrown-barbershop-quartet-run-amok appearance was complemented by the stage, empty except for a few tropical plants and sound monitors. A massive couple of quilt-like backdrops with intricate African motifs lowered into position behind the singers at times.

Apart from that, it was just Ladysmith singing their hearts out. Some of the words were in an African language and some were in English; it didn't really matter

because it was the *sound* of the words and the feelings which those sounds communicated which made this a memorable concert.

The singers shuffled through a well-choreographed variety of stationary dance routines, occasionally stepping out in small groups to "solo", all the while singing in perfect harmony or in a unison backdrop to a solo vocal.

Ladysmith looked perfectly relaxed and confident onstage, introducing songs with jokes in nearly-fluent English. The greatest surprise, in fact, was their relaxed demeanor. One might have expected much more overtly political content from a leading South African group (especially a black one — or are there any others?), but Ladysmith instead let the strength and joy they find in having the freedom to perform their music to be the main message.

They did perform "Homeless" from Paul Simon's *Graceland*, the album which brought them recognition around the world, and finished off their encore with the black African national anthem, but the majority of the songs seemed to be about the usual boy/girl stuff. Every song was done with a polite sincerity that emphasized the positive so that even a song about "the hope that our leaders will not lead us astray" seemed more spiritually than politically motivated.

There was one additional reference to Simon, in a song which asked and answered the musical question "where did you get the wings to fly abroad?" The answer, of course: That day in 1985 when I met Paul Simon. This is a true story.



Ladysmith Black Mambazo in a publicity photo: their joy in performing music transcended South African politics on Monday night at the Jubilee.

Ladysmith performed for 80 magical minutes. In one song introduction, they thanked the various media which have helped to popularize them outside of South Africa, and then added what seemed like a plea for more good press, saying "destroy not this beauty". They didn't really need to say it.

Opening the show was American singer/songwriter Eliza Gilkyson. With one album (*Pilgrims*) out on Gold Castle in the U.S., as well as some independent releases, Gilkyson provided a strong and unexpected contrast to Ladysmith, at least in some ways. As she said herself, we were surprised to see "this giant white woman" opening

the show, but her songs from the heart won warm applause from the audience.

Playing just acoustic guitar or piano to accompany her singing, the California native and Santa Fe, New Mexico resident took on the tough job of playing for a crowd which had never heard of her before and definitely won some new fans. Gilkyson has been touted as a new age singer, but her lyrics about self-discovery, love and ecological and political concerns belie that label, with their relatively wide-ranging content.

Gilkyson seemed slightly nervous at first, but gained confidence as her 35 minute set progressed.

Dusty Chaps and Vancouver's Mercury Festival, were entertaining enough for the twenty or so people who managed to listen to them, but as usual (and as proper?) they paled in comparison to the headlining act. Yet the rockabilly stylings of Dusty Chaps and the earthy beat of the "Red Rideresque" Mercury Festival did much to prepare the audience for the main band. And if the opening acts manage to get the

...they were also capable of slowing the place right down without losing the audience

audience pumped, they have done their job.

Weddings, Parties, Anything mixed it up enough to keep the show engaging throughout, and came back to play one two-song encore. After that, either because of the mad hopping of the crowd or the length of the concert itself, everyone was far too tired to demand more. It was uplifting to see another promising band play an inspired show. Everyone left Dinwoodie smiling. And any band capable of doing that for people couldn't have gone wrong.

Weddings offers Celtic flavour

Weddings, Parties, Anything
Dinwoodie Lounge
Friday, October 7

review by Ron Kuipers

Ahhh, that Celtic flavour. That's what the audience was savouring Friday night at Dinwoodie Lounge. Not to mention the fact that they got a bonny dose of folk, country, and good ol' rock'n roll too! Yes indeed, Australia's own Weddings, Parties, Anything were at their beer-drinkin', foot-stompin' best Friday night, cranking out an energetic, crowd-pleasing set.

The Aussie quintet transformed the sound of a good album into an even better live show. But perhaps this isn't surprising since many bands sound better live than they do on vinyl. Besides, what is a band if it isn't what they are right there on stage? And what was right there on stage was a near two-hour, non-stop set of powerful music.

Needless to say, the energy level of this concert was high. And although the band performed with considerable verve, they were also capable of slowing the place right down without losing the audience. One song that stood out in particular was a song called "Brunswick", a song "about any place that makes you feel good." During this song, all the members of the band left the stage save the lead vocalist, playing acoustic guitar, and the bass guitarist, who played the mandolin. These two proceeded to perform a stirring duet while simultaneously transforming Dinwoodie into "Brunswick" for many people in the audience.

Aside from moments like this, the rest of the concert was robust, pub-rockin' stuff. This band would not feel right in a venue of any considerable size. Wedding, Parties, Anything needed the intimacy that Dinwoodie provided, and the slightly frenzied crowd responded to and generally respected this intimacy.

The two opening bands, Edmonton's



Paul Menzies

Mick Thomas, lead singer and chief crowd pleaser of Weddings, Parties, and Anything, rocked up a storm at Dinwoodie Lounge last Friday night. The Australian group delivered a solid show of their best beer drinking music.

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