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## Soweto Gospel Choir performs at Annenberg Center

By A.D. Amorosi  
For The Inquirer

They've sung with rock giants, won Grammys for their ebullient recordings, and been Oscar nominated for best song (*Wall-E*).

That acclaim could give even the most spiritually minded artists big heads.

Yet at Saturday's sold-out show of the Soweto Gospel Choir of South Africa at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, the only thing more dynamic than its rich choral interplay was the outfit's humility. It was a reserved and cool passion that guided the 27-member choir-and-instrumentalist through a mix of indigenous vocal traditions, their nation's divinity songs, and their take on Western devotional classics.

Added to an ability to uplift an audience was their sense of invention. A group that can make an adventure of shopworn songs like Bob Marley's "One Love" - paired with the African traditional "Avulekile Amasango" in a medley with a Creole feel - wins every time.

As vocalists and dancers, the costumed ensemble exuded energy throughout the program.

Their percussive routine "In the Canteen" - members clinked glasses, cups and plates with a team of male vocalists - was a delight.

No sooner had a SGC member high-kicked, spun, and belly-flopped, than they would hit the high notes of "Masigiye'bo" with clarion might.

While the women of SGC took on the a cappella of "Ngahlulele" with a sonorous sweetness reminiscent of Phil Spector's girl groups, the men hit bass notes on "Mangisondele Nkosi Yam" - accompanied only by their foot-stomping rhythm - with the rumble of [Paul Robeson](#) inspiration. Though the vocalists sounded like an orchestra without accompaniment, a tight band pushed SGC into a flavorful African high-life sound on "Mbube."

For all its mighty execution of African spirituals, it was the effervescent fashion in which SGC tackled American gospel songs ("Oh It Is Jesus" and "Oh Happy Day") and spiritually-minded pop songs such as "Bridge Over Troubled Water" that was truly inspirational. Cleverly, SGC did the Paul Simon-penned "Bridge" in the manner of Aretha Franklin's 1971 cover version, its background vocals lifting the phrase "still waters run deep" to a heavenly high. To say Soweto Gospel Choir was as smart as it was moving doesn't say enough.



LORENZO DI NOZZI

With a mastery of African spirituals, Soweto Gospel Choir's way with American music was even more inspirational Saturday.

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