

SOWETO GOSPEL CHOIR

“(The choir) has a cornucopia of remarkable voices: sharp, sweet, kindly, raspy and incantatory leads above a magnificently velvety blend.....the music was both meticulous and unstoppable.....the songs were both spirited and spectacular”

Jon Pareles – The New York Times

When it comes to vocal talent, Africa, and more particularly South Africa, has spawned the most evocative sounds on earth and still produces the very best that the world has to offer in this art form. Soweto Gospel Choir *is* that very best.

“..songs calculated to go straight to the heart, sung with that joyous sense of celebration and exuberance that only black South African choirs seem capable of achieving.”

West Australian, Perth

Expect earthy rhythms, rich harmonies, acapella numbers as well as accompaniment by an exciting 4 piece band and percussion section. Add to this, energetic dancing and vibrant, colourful costumes, and the mix is awesome. This young dynamic choir performs both traditional and contemporary music, adding its own unique feel and interpretation to both. The choir performs in 6 of South Africa’s 11 official languages.

This magnificent 52 strong, choir, styled with a contemporary feel, leaves all who hear it stunned with emotion. It is small wonder that they are charting a meteoric rise to international fame. Those that saw the 46664 Concert in Cape Town 2003, under the auspices of former President Nelson Mandela, will have witnessed Soweto Gospel Choir in action alongside other musical greats like Bono; Queen; Anastacia; Peter Gabriel; Jimmy Cliff; and the Eurythmics.

“Everybody agrees the choir were absolutely stunning.....They are all true stars and were, for me, the best artists on the stage that night”

Spike Edney, International Musical Director, 46664 Concert

“Soweto Gospel Choir is wonderful!! You have never seen or heard such infectious joy – guaranteed”

Brian May of Queen

Formed only in November of 2002, by promoters/presenters Andrew Kay, David Vigo and Clifford Hocking, in association with Executive Producer/Director Beverly Bryer and Musical Director David Mulovhedzi, Soweto Gospel Choir’s five year existence has become an overnight, multi

award-winning sensation. In 2003 they won a Helpmann Award, Australia's prestigious Performing Arts Award for "Best Contemporary Music Concert". In May 2004 they won the 2003 American Gospel Music Award for "Best Choir", in October they won the 2004 Gospel Music Award (also US based) for "Best International Choir", and locally, their debut CD *Voices From Heaven* was nominated for a SAMA Award for "Best Traditional Gospel". This CD has also garnered rave reviews, having reached the Number 1 spot on Billboard's World Music Chart, within three weeks of its US release, debuting at Number 3. Their next CD *Blessed* was released in July 2004, followed by *African Spirit* in 2007, through Universal Music.

Wherever Soweto Gospel Choir has performed, be it Europe, Singapore, Australia, the UK or the US it has wowed audiences. At the Edinburgh Festival it was the top selling show, with a fully booked season and five star reviews. It was listed as the critics' choice in all major publications. In September 2004 Soweto Gospel Choir performed three concerts at the Royal Festival Hall in London, followed by a countrywide UK tour. In November/December of that year, the choir completed a sell-out tour of Spain, followed by performances in Berlin, Stuttgart and Hamburg. The choir completed a two-month, 39-city tour of the United States in April 2005, with the majority of concerts (many at over 2,000-seater venues) sold out. Soweto Gospel Choir returned to the US in 2006, 2007 and is already booked for 2008!

In June 2005 the choir performed in Athens and Spain, followed by a sell-out performance at St Paul's Cathedral, as part of the prestigious London Festival. In July they performed their "Voices From Heaven" show for the first time in South Africa, at the Nelson Mandela Theatre in Johannesburg, before returning to New Zealand and Australia in August where they toured their new show *Blessed* extensively around both countries, to exceptional reviews and audience reaction.

The next highlight of their short but amazing career was a guest appearance with Diana Ross, Deborah Cox and Danny K for the "Unite of the Stars" Gala Banquet in November last year, in aid of the charities Unite Against Hunger and the Nelson Mandela's Children's Fund. Soon afterwards they departed for performances in the Caribbean and Germany, returning home at the end of December. In January the choir left for Bermuda followed by a three month tour of the US where they performed for President Bill Clinton at a corporate function in Little Rock, Arkansas. They were invited guests on NBC's "Today Show" as well as "Late Night with Conan O'Brien", both a special honour for any artist. The choir returned to South Africa in April for ten performances of their "Blessed" show at the Johannesburg Civic Theatre, dazzling both reviewers and audiences. Soon after their local performances in April 2006, the choir departed for a 5-week tour of the UK, including two sold out concerts in London. They followed this with a tour of Spain and a month's season at the 2006 Edinburgh Festival where they were one of the top selling acts, earning 5 star reviews. The choir also joined Johnny Clegg as his special guests for his "One Life" show at the Johannesburg Civic Theatre in July, playing to full houses and reaching new audiences during its two week run.

On 7 October, the choir performed as invited guests for Archbishop Desmond Tutu's 75th Birthday Celebrations, in front of an illustrious audience which included former President Nelson Mandela, Mrs Zanele Mbeki, Tokyo Sexwale, Samuel L Jackson, Alfre Woodard and Carlos Santana.

Another exciting and memorable occasion for the choir, was at Sun City on New Year's Eve, where they performed for Oprah Winfrey and 200 of her V.I.P. guests, including Mariah Carey, Mary J Blige, Tina Turner, Patti Labelle, Sydney Poitier and Quincy Jones.

26 members of the choir left for a three month tour of the US and Canada in January 2007, having begun this tour with a guest appearance on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno", the highest rating late night talk show in America, so an immense privilege for the choir. While in New Orleans, they recorded a track with rock legend Robert Plant, to be included on a tribute album of Fats Domino songs, with proceeds going to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

"Mesmerizing, beautiful and phenomenally resonant. Working with the Choir with their energy and positivity has been one of the major events of my recent years".

Robert Plant, March 2008

The remaining 26 members performed at the CAF Awards in Ghana on 1 March, followed by sold-out concerts at the Adelaide Festival, the Hong Kong Festival and in Korea in mid March. They then travelled to Mauritius to sing at Sol Kerzner's daughter's wedding, alongside top US gospel star Bebe Waymans. In March they performed in Adelaide, Hong Kong and Korea and in July they sang for former President Nelson Mandela and Kofi Anan at the 4th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture in Johannesburg

In June this year, Soweto Gospel Choir was one of the supporting acts for the Red Hot Chilli Peppers at their concerts in Germany, followed by a featured appearance at the London Festival and performances throughout the UK, as well as in Sweden. They then returned home for their first national tour in September, premiering their third show "African Spirit" to enthusiastic audiences in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth.

On 1 December, World Aids Day, the choir joined a host of top national and international musicians for the third 46664 concert held in South Africa, this time in Johannesburg. They performed with music greats Peter Gabriel, Corinne Bailey Rae, Angeliqwe Kidjo, Johnny Clegg and Danny K amongst others, as Ambassadors for this worthy Aids initiative. They then performed at Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday celebrations in London in June this year, alongside, amongst others, Amy Winehouse, Josh Groban, Simple Minds, Eddy Grant, Loyiso and Vusi Mahlasela.

The choir recently collaborated with Peter Gabriel on the song "Down To Earth" for Disney's blockbuster animated movie "Wall-E", and their 46664

London performance of "Weeping", with Josh Groban and Vusi Mahlasela, is featured on Josh's latest album "Collection".

The choir has also had the honour of performing with Gospel legends Bebe Winans and Kirk Franklin.

"Having the opportunity to sing with Soweto Gospel Choir during my recent visit to South Africa was a wonderful experience for me. They have such beautifully soulful voices, and gorgeous harmonies...and they sing with such a natural rhythm. I can't wait to work with them again!"

Celine Dion, February 2009

They started 2008 with a six week tour of the UK, debuting their new show "African Spirit" at London's Royal Festival Hall. 26 members remained in South Africa where they performed alongside Celine Dion at a charity banquet on 14 February, as part of her 2008 World Tour. From April, the choir spent three months touring Australia, Fiji and New Zealand, followed by performances at the famous Spoleto Festival in Italy and a return season at the Edinburgh Festival. In October, 26 members toured Europe for three months, with the remaining 26 members touring the US and Canada, also for three months.

Soweto Gospel Choir has garnered numerous prestigious awards during its five year existence. More recently, on 11 February 2007, the choir received probably its greatest accolade, a Grammy Award for the cd "Blessed", in the category "Best Traditional World Music". They were also nominated for the 26th International Reggae and World Music Awards, held at the Apollo Theatre, Harlem, on 5 May, in the category "Contribution to World Music" alongside Jimmy Cliff, Salif Keita, Youssou N'Dour and Ziggy Marley. In April this year, the choir won a 2006 SAMA in the Category "Best Live Performance dvd" and in November they added to their string of awards by winning the 2007 Metro FM Award for Best Gospel Album for their latest album "African Spirit".

In 2008 they were again nominated for a Metro FM Award, in the same category, this time for their album "Live at the Nelson Mandela Theatre". The choir was also nominated for a One Gospel Award in the Best Choir category, and a Kora (all Africa) Award in the category Best Gospel Artist.

In February 2008, the choir was honoured with the PanSALB Award for the Multilingualism and Nation Building "Album of the Decade".

On 10 February 2008, the choir received a second Grammy Award in the Best Traditional World Music Album, this time for the cd "African Spirit" - a major accomplishment for any artist, receiving two Grammy awards within two years!

Incredibly, Soweto Gospel Choir received its third Grammy nomination in December 2008, this time in the category Best Contemporary World Music, for their album, "Live at the Nelson Mandela Theatre". The song "Down To Earth" from the blockbuster Wall-E movie, their collaboration with Peter Gabriel, won a Grammy in the Best Movie Song category.

In February 2009, the choir became the first South African artists to perform at the Academy Awards, when they sang "Down To Earth", Gabriel/Newman's Oscar nominated song, with John Legend,

In March, Soweto Gospel Choir was nominated for three SAMAs (South African Music Awards), for their latest cd and dvd, "Live At the Nelson Mandela Theatre". The Awards take place in May.

But no amount of glittering international recognition and praise has diverted Soweto Gospel Choir from the mission it holds close at heart. In 2003 the choir founded its own aids orphans foundation, Nkosi's Haven Vukani. With the plight of South Africa's sick and impoverished top of mind, their foundation supports families and organisations that receive little or no government support. These destitute families and children rely on Soweto Gospel Choir to sing all over the world for very much more than their supper. To date, the choir has collected over R4million for their foundation. Whenever they are in South Africa, the choir performs for a variety of charitable organisations, is involved in many fundraisers, and visits with old age pensioners, aid orphans and many others less privileged than themselves, but who can be uplifted by the choir's inspirational music and spirit.

Soweto Gospel Choir is honoured to have as its patron, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT THE SOWETO GOSPEL CHOIR

"It is rare to go to a concert knowing nothing about the artists or their music and come away feeling overwhelmed by the performance"

Christchurch Press, New Zealand (Feb 2003)

"There's simply no flaw here"

Evening News, Scotland (Aug 2003)

"You don't have to be a believer to be inspired by the Soweto Gospel Choir: an appreciation of superb singing is all that's required"

Sunday Herald, Scotland (Aug 2003)

“The Soweto Gospel Choir is truly inspirational, but that’s not the reason they deserve five stars. Those are simply for a flawless performance”

The Scotsman (Aug 2003)

“Occasionally, a diamond of such brilliance is unearthed that you find yourself compelled to develop a near-fanatical enthusiasm for it”

Manchester News (Sept 2004)

“The Soweto Gospel Choir’s performance has made me a true believer. I guess you could say I’ve been baptized by the power of perfect pitch, superior intonation and harmony clearly not of this world”.

Times Dispatch, Richmond Virginia (Feb 2005)

“Soweto Gospel Choir gave a dazzling performance to mark their debut public appearance for South African audiences”

The Star, Johannesburg (July 2005)

“When they open their mouths, the sense of texture is flawless.....here is energy and passion in song”

Business Day, Johannesburg (July 2005)

“The public will be blown away”

Daily Sun, Johannesburg (July 2005)

“The Soweto Gospel Choir is a shout of joy, a towering onslaught of exuberance. The singers have a razor-sharp attack, phenomenal unity and a blazing, voluptuous sound”

Brisbane Courier Mail (Aug 2005)

“A singularly joyful sound”

“O Magazine”, USA (January 2006)

“These absolutely thrilling singers need nothing but their voices to make dazzling music”

“Billboard cd review (January 2006)

“Simply the best!”

The Star Tonight (April 2006)

“Gospel sensation”

Daily Sun (April 2006)

“Simply glorious, passionate singing....the audience clamoured for more”

******* *Evening News, Edinburgh (Aug 2006)***

“From the moment the Soweto Gospel Choir bursts into song, the audience is transported to a sunnier place.....the sheer joy of singing”

****** *The Scotsman, Edinburgh (Aug 2006)***

“When the choir appeared on stage, what came out of their mouths was something that left everyone mesmerised”

Swazi News, Swaziland (November 2006)

“...the voices were definitely something out of this world”

Times of Swaziland (November 2006)

“The crowd was held in sway, not only through an intellectual appreciation of the program, but by the sheen and spectacle of a masterful performance”

Seattle News, (March 2007)

“This is inspired and inspiring music”

Adelaide Advertiser (March 2007)

“Just can’t sing their praises enough”

Saturday Star/Daily News, Durban (September 2007)

“The show was inspirational, creative and innovative”

Herald, Port Elizabeth (Sept 2007)

“As their voices are raised and goose bumps start chasing up your arms, it’s not difficult to see why Soweto Gospel Choir won the Grammy for their CD Blessed in the category Best Traditional World Music”

The Citizen (September 2007)

“These people are striking singers with a range of vocal colours that blend and move perfectly together. Brilliant musicianship aside, easily the most fun I’ve had at a choral concert”

Herald Sun, Melbourne (May 2008)

“This is a tour de musical force....Soweto Gospel Choir is a slice of musical heaven”

Australian Stage, Melbourne (May 2008)

“If you attend only one music theatre event in Perth this year, let it be Soweto Gospel Choir’s African Spirit performance”.

West Australian, Perth (June 2008)

“They are still the highest energy production I have probably ever seen on stage. They are a meticulously well put together ensemble that delivers a strikingly uplifting performance”

******* Chloe Edworthy, Edinburgh Festivals Magazine (Aug 2008)**

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