



Soweto Gospel Choir

From Africa to America – and Back

Soweto Gospel Choir at the Hult Center

In this country, the term “world music” generally refers to musicians from Asia and Africa and their influence upon Western musicians from Lou Harrison to Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel. But it works the other way, too. Thanks primarily to missionaries, one of America’s great musical traditions, African-American gospel music, found its way back to the source of all African-American music: Africa itself. And the prime practitioners of — what shall we call it? African-African-American gospel? — make their Eugene debut (and only Oregon appearance) April 3 at the Hult Center.

Composed of some of the finest singers around Soweto and Johannesburg, the 26-member **Soweto Gospel Choir** often (but not always) mixes traditional and popular music from around Africa with exuberant American gospel styles and even pop music arrangements (including music by Jimmy Cliff, Otis Redding and Bob Marley). Although it only emerged five

years ago, the choir has already won a top gospel music award and a Grammy nomination, scored a world music chart-topping album, worked with Bono and members of Queen and performed for Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu and at many charity functions, particularly supporting orphans, hunger relief and AIDS research and prevention. The choir’s concerts present a striking visual as well as auditory experience, replete with multicolored traditional costumes, high-kicking synchronized dance moves and accompanying percussion such as the djembe drum. Even when the group sings in Xhosa and other languages, the ensemble supplies English explanations of the stories behind the songs. This multicultural mix of several of the world’s most ebullient musical styles should be one of the most exciting concerts of the year.

Missionaries also brought American church choral music to Hawaii, where it mingled with the guitar music of earlier col-

onizers from Portugal and Spain along with the music of native Hawaiians. More recently, the musicians of **Hapa** took those influences, added yet another mainland musical style — folk rock — and came up with another appealing cross-cultural fusion. The acoustic duo makes one of their regular journeys across the Pacific to perform at the Shedd on April 12. Still more global fusion happens at Cozmic Pizza on March 29 when Portland cellist extraordinaire **Adam Hurst** returns with his atmospheric blend of Indian, Middle Eastern and Gypsy musical influences in composed and improvised works for solo cello.

Three female singer-songwriters visiting Luna this month claim to have fused folk and jazz. The poppiest, the waifish **Jessica Parsons-Taylor**, celebrates her CD release on March 29. **Natalia Zukerman** (whose dad, Pinchas, is a pretty hot fiddler; mom Eugenia can toot the flute) leans more toward the country-blues side; she plays March 31. The most compelling, Austin’s **Datri Bean**, plays and sings “southern-fried vintage jazz” at the club April 11.

For straightahead instrumental jazz, try the retro sounds of **Hot Club Sandwich**, which plays Sam Bond’s on March 31. This sweet swinging ensemble of some of Seattle’s hottest young jazzers has now been joined by guitarist Ray Wood, who’s been lighting up Northwest stages for more than half a century, and he augments the violin, mandolin, upright bass and guitars to channel the irresistible, high-energy Gypsy swing music pioneered by Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli in 1930s Paris as well as original tunes and other music in that sturdy style. For a more recent vintage jazz, try Portland’s **Dusty York Trio** at Jo Federigo’s April 6. This dynamite young tenor saxman has clearly heard a lot

of mid-’60s Coltrane and Sonny Rollins (and fellow tenor master, papa Michael York), and he puts those influences to good use in his original pianoless post-bop compositions. He’s a rising young Northwest jazz star.

Another local jazz master, UO prof and saxist **Idit Shner**, plays postclassical music by Edison Denisov and Ida Gotkovsky with the **Oregon Percussion Ensemble** at Beall Concert Hall on April 10. And on April 9, one of the great classical flutists of our time, **William Bennett**, joins another Englishman, the young guitarist **Jonathan Leathwood**, at Beall to play contemporary American composer Robert Beaser’s delightful “Mountain Songs” (based on Appalachian folk tunes), nuevo tango master Astor Piazzolla’s sultry “Story of the Tango” and other contemporary and recent music.

Finally, for a look at the life and music of America’s most performed living post-classical music composer, head down to DIVA on April 1 for a free screening of the film *Hail Bob! A Portrait of John Adams* by Tony Palmer. From his breakthrough opera *Nixon in China* to his new opera *A Flowering Tree*, Adams has been one of the most admired and accessible voices in American music. This 1998 biopic will be followed by a discussion with a representative of the Eugene Symphony. **EW**



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