



RIZE UP

Nattali Rize is a tender-spoken reggae artist who packs a political punch. Rize puts themes of love and hope front and center in her songs with her soulful vocals. By tying together her multicultural identity with her global travels, Rize has carved out her own mantra of putting humanity first and politics second.

"The illusion of what divides us is what makes people impressionable to fight against their fellow human," Rize says. "The reality is that we are one family, we are all connected and have the potential to be so much more than what current and past world systems have ever told us we could be."

She released *New Era Frequency*, a collaborative EP featuring fellow reggae artists Notis, in 2015, and she plans to release her first full-length album in March. Rize says her mother raised her on goddesses like Aretha Franklin and Judy Mowatt — influential artists that Rize ties in with her Samoan and indigenous American roots to create a rich perspective on achieving political change through music.

"I don't like politics," she says. "It's a sick system that keeps the collective mindset trapped in a very narrow paradigm of thought." She adds that by creating and sharing music from a multitude of backgrounds, change can better grow in an otherwise hopeless system — one that is programmed to keep you down.

"[Society] told you the sky is the limit," Rize says. "The truth is it's just the beginning. You've just got to fully wake and realize it, reclaim your power."

Catch Nattali Rize with fellow reggae groups **Tribal Seed** and **Raging Fyah** 9 pm Tuesday, Jan. 31, at WOW Hall; \$13 adv., \$15 door. — *Kelsey Anne Rankin*

LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO RETURNS

Any scholar of South African music can tell you **Ladysmith Black Mambazo** — who perform at the WOW Hall Thursday, Jan. 26 — are a force to be reckoned with.

When Mambazo formed in the early '60s, they were so good that they were banned from entering singing competitions. Their obscure-sounding name is actually a bit of eloquent braggadocio: "Ladysmith" is founder Joseph Shabalala's hometown, and "mambazo" means "axe" (they chop down the competition, you see).

It's hard to imagine *isicathamiya* — a quiet, understated vocal music of Zulu origin — spreading far beyond Africa without Mambazo.

But most of the world knows Mambazo's music secondhand. Their shoutout in *Mean Girls* brought a publicity boost that's emphasized in their online bio. They're in-demand international collaborators who've worked with everyone from David Guetta to Dolly Parton.

They're perhaps best known for their role at the center of Paul Simon's 1986 record *Graceland*, recorded with South African musicians at the height of a cultural boycott against the nation and its apartheid laws.

Albert Mazibuko, who joined Mambazo in 1969, insists the group was not exploited.

"On whether Paul Simon was wrong in breaking the boycott to work with South African musicians, people have different opinions on that," Mazibuko says. "All the musicians who worked with Paul feel it was a good thing. It put a face and a sound on the struggles South Africans were enduring."

Isicathamiya itself comes from that struggle. In the 1940s and 1950s, around the beginning of apartheid, disenfranchised Zulu workers migrated to mines across the country to find work. They would sing to keep themselves entertained — and when guards told them to stop, they'd just quiet down. Thus, the soft sound of *isicathamiya*.

"Our mission is to keep this style alive so the public remembers what sacrifices our people made," Mazibuko says.

Nonetheless, he and the group have no qualms about complimenting other artists' visions. Mazibuko is as happy to promote their new album, September's tellingly-titled *Walking In The Footsteps Of Our Fathers*, as "an American gospel CD with a famous guest singer as well as a Woody Guthrie children's album with another well known artist."

"It's one big beautiful piece of art we have been working on these past decades," he says. "Sometimes you hear our singing alone and sometimes you hear it blended with other styles. That's the beauty of music. So flexible!"

Ladysmith Black Mambazo perform 9:30 pm Thursday, Jan. 26, at the WOW Hall. \$21 general admission, \$33 seated. All ages. — *Daniel Bromfield*



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