



African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance (Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology)

Veit Erlmann

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In recent years black South African music and dance have become ever more popular in the West, where they are now widely celebrated as expressions of opposition to discrimination and repression. Less well known is the rich history of these arts, which were shaped by several generations of black artists and performers whose struggles, visions, and aspirations did not differ fundamentally from those of their present-day counterparts.

In five detailed case studies Veit Erlmann digs deep to expose the roots of the most important of these performance traditions. He relates the early history of *isicathamiya*, the a cappella vocal style made famous by Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

In two chapters on Durban between the World Wars he charts the evolution of Zulu music and dance, studying in depth the transformation of *ingoma*, a dance form popular among migrant workers since the 1930s. He goes on to record the colorful life and influential work of Reuben T. Caluza, South Africa's first black ragtime composer. And Erlmann's reconstruction of the 1890s concert tours of an Afro-American vocal group, Orpheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee Singers, documents the earliest link between the African and American performance traditions.

Numerous eyewitness reports, musicians' personal testimonies, and song texts enrich Erlmann's narratives and demonstrate that black performance evolved in response to the growing economic and racial segmentation of South African society. Early ragtime, *ingoma*, and *isicathamiya* enabled the black urban population to comment on their precarious social position and to symbolically construct a secure space within a rapidly changing political world.

Today, South African workers, artists, and youth continue to build upon this performance tradition in their struggle for freedom and democracy. The early performers portrayed by Erlmann were guiding lights—African stars—by which the present and future course of South Africa is being determined.

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