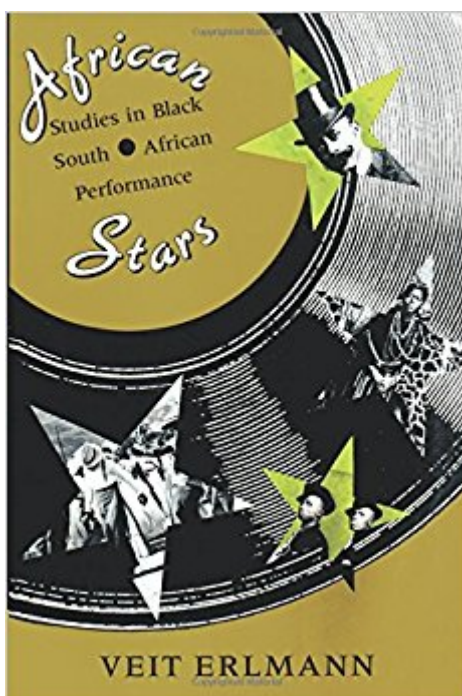


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African Stars: Studies In Black South African Performance (Chicago Studies In Ethnomusicology)



Synopsis

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 their 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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Customer Reviews

Erlmann (anthropology, Freie Universitat, Berlin) writes with sympathetic authority on the South African musicians, composers, and dancers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who paved the way for such contemporary figures as Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Unlike David Coplan's *In Township Tonight!* (Longman, 1986), which attempts to provide a comprehensive history of modern black South African performing arts, this study features concentrated, scholarly essays on several significant individuals. Quietly challenging those who view the evolution of the performance styles in terms of sociopolitical mass movements, Erlmann gives credit where it's due to such influential creative talents as African American choral singer Orpheus McAdoo and South African composer Reuben Caluza. For African studies and performing arts collections with an interest in world music and dance.- Anne Sharp, Ypsilanti District Lib., Mich. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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.

Written in the twilight years of apartheid, this book conveys some of the spirit of black South Africans as they struggled against a cruel dictatorship. Erlmann surveys the field from 1890 to 1990. In going through his descriptions of the people, one has to wonder. In a different and better period, some of the musicians and actors might have become world famous. The comparison to African-American singers is inevitable. Yet for most of the performers that Erlmann mentions, only fragments of memory and aging photos and LPs remain.

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