

Performing Notes for “Somlandela”

Musical and Textual Origins

This transcription of “Somlandela” is from the Soweto Gospel Choir’s 2007 album, *African Spirit*. Listening to and imitating the Soweto Gospel Choir recordings of this piece and others is one way to uncover a rewarding and authentic performance. The piece is unusual in the Soweto Gospel Choir catalogue since it is entirely acappella, without djembe. As such, the Soweto Gospel Choir typically stands still while singing this piece. (In most of their pieces, there would be movement associated with the performance.)

There is no official, single arranger of this piece; the group came to this interpretation together.

The soloist on “Somlandela” can be either a high tenor or a low alto. The solo part (beginning at bar 9) is entirely improvisatory. Though it is written out for reference, soloists should not feel limited to what is written. Whatever is sung, the soloist should fill the rests between the choral sections.

Text and Translation

“Somandela” is sung in Zulu, one of South Africa’s 11 official languages. The text and its translation are as follows:

Somlandela
 We will follow
Somlande’lu Jesu
 We will follow Jesus
Yonke indawo
 We will follow Him
Lapho eyakhon’ somlandela
 Where He leads us we will follow

Pronunciation

Somlandela
 Sohm-lahn-deh-lah
 [sɔmlandɛla]

Somlande’lu Jeso
 Sohm-lahn-deh-loo Jeh-soh
 [sɔmlandɛlu dʒɛsɔ]
 *Soloist sings “Je-su,” pronounced “Jeh-soo,” IPA [dʒɛsu]

Yonke indawo
 Yawn-keh een-dah-woh
 [jankɛ indawɔ]

Lapho eyakhon' somlandela

Lah-foh eh-yah-kohn sohm-lahn-deh-lah

[lafə ɛjakən səmlandɛla]

Editorial Note

To add some variety between the opening and middle/closing sections of this arrangement, the final syllable, “-la” of “Somlandela” was added to bars 1 and 3. It’s (barely) audible on the recording in bar 5.

Soweto Gospel Choir

In 2002, Soweto Gospel Choir was formed in Soweto, South Africa, by two choir directors, David Mulovhedzi and Beverly Bryer. The group’s first album, *Voices of Heaven*, was released in 2005, and reached the No. 1 spot on Billboard’s World Music Chart three weeks after its release in the United States. The group tours worldwide and has appeared in nearly all of the world’s most prestigious venues and festivals, including Carnegie Hall, the Sydney Opera House, the Nelson Mandela Theatre, the Montreal Jazz Festival, and the Royal Festival Hall in London. SGC has performed for such world dignitaries as President Bill Clinton, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Nelson Mandela. They have shared the stage with such diverse artists and groups as the Black-Eyed Peas, Johnny Clegg, Celine Dion, Kirk Franklin, Josh Groban, the Harlem Gospel Choir, Herbie Hancock, Mark Knopfler, John Legend, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Ozzy Osborne, Andre Rieu, Diana Ross, Shakira, U2, Bebe Winans, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and the South African sensation, Zahara.

Soweto Gospel Choir has won nearly every award available in the gospel and world music categories, including three Grammy Awards: for their 2007 *Blessed* album, their 2008 album *African Spirit*, and their 2018 album *Freedom*. They won a Sports Emmy in 2010 for their collaboration with U2 for ESPN’s promotional campaign for the 2010 World Cup. They have also received three “associated” Grammy Awards, three SAMAs (South African Music Awards), and an Oscar nomination.

In March 2013, the choir’s fifth album, *Soweto Gospel Choir and Friends—Divine Decade*, was released as a celebration of the choir’s 10th Anniversary. In December 2013, Soweto Gospel Choir teamed with Woolworths for a YouTube video tribute to Nelson Mandela, as part of a flash mob event, with the song “Asimbonanga”. The clip went viral and received over 3 million hits in its first week of release.

The choir’s newest album is its 2018 *Freedom*, which won the “Best World Music Album” Grammy in February of 2019.

Soweto Gospel Choir has founded its own AIDS orphans foundation, Nkosi’s Haven Vukani, to assist organizations that receive little or no funding. In South Africa, the choir performs for a variety of charitable organizations.

For more and current information on Soweto Gospel Choir, including updated touring information, please visit their website at <http://www.sowetogospelchoir.com>

The choir's Twitter feed is @sowetogospel and their Facebook page can be found by searching for "Official Soweto Gospel Choir." Recordings of the group can be viewed on YouTube and purchased at all the major online music retailers.

Transcriber / Arranger Dr. Kurt Runestad

American choral conductor Kurt Runestad has been privileged to teach at Doane University (Crete, Nebraska) since the fall of 2004. In the summer of 2010, Runestad transcribed Soweto Gospel Choir's "Khumbaya" for use with his choirs at Doane the following academic year. This first partnership with the Soweto Gospel Choir has led to several additional collaborations; he has attended several concerts, transcribed additional pieces, and in May 2018 had the great pleasure of bringing a group of Doane singers to Johannesburg, South Africa, where the Doane singers and the SGC spent a couple of hours together in a rehearsal and clinic. At Doane, Runestad conducts several of the college's choirs, including the acclaimed Doane Choir, which under his direction has performed in fourteen countries on four continents, and throughout the United States. Runestad graduated from St. Olaf College (Northfield, Minnesota) with a B.A. in music education, taught 10 years in the public schools of Iowa and Minnesota, and earned two graduate degrees in choral conducting from the University of Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa). He is a frequent clinician, arranger, and adjudicator for choirs throughout the Midwest. He and his wife, Carly Woythaler-Runestad, have two children, daughter Avery and son Owen.

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