

South Africa: Lorraine Klaasen

About the Artists

Lorraine Klaasen is the daughter of a legendary South African jazz singer and one of the few South African artists who preserve the classic sound of Township Music, which continues to be the most distinctive sound to come out of South Africa.

Lorraine was born and raised in Soweto, a township of the city of Johannesburg in South Africa. Townships were living areas that arose during apartheid, a harsh system of racial segregation that was violently enforced by the government of South Africa from 1948 to 1994. During this time, black people were evicted from properties that became designated as “white only” and forced to move into segregated townships. Townships were typically very poor and were built at the edges of cities. Soweto is particularly well-known as a vibrant cultural hub and home to many activists who struggled against apartheid. For example, two South African leaders who lived in Soweto include Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu—both Nobel Peace Prize winners.

Township Music grew out of this time of segregation and struggle against apartheid. As the townships brought together a variety of black people with different ethnic origins, the music they created also combined a variety of traditions including African rhythms, languages, and singing styles plus jazz. Instruments often included saxophone, trumpet, piano, guitar, bass, drum kit, and penny whistle. Township Music itself evolved over the years into three distinct genres: marabi, kwela, and mbaqanga. Much of the music included singing, and the lyrics were often an expression of political protest—even if sometimes a subtle protest that only people from the townships could understand.

Because the music originated in townships and was considered rebellious, the South African government restricted performances and recordings. In the 1960s and 1970s, the government forced many musicians to leave South Africa, and many of these musicians spent years in exile. However, from these difficult circumstances, Township Music became a vibrant style that celebrates the power of music to overcome obstacles.

Lorraine Klaasen was influenced by the South African musical giants of the 1950s and 1960s who frequented her mother’s home, and she works to keep this unique musical style thriving. Lorraine has performed and electrified audiences all around the world.

Resources

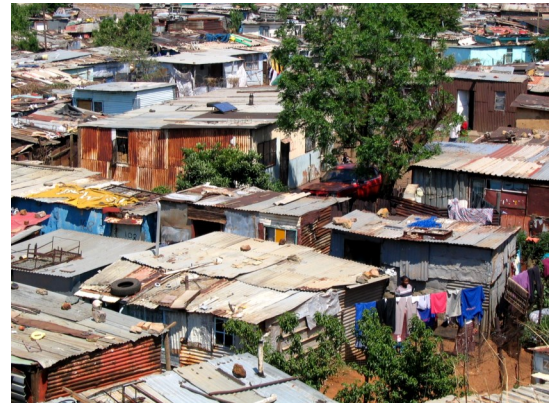
Encyclopaedia Britannica: South Africa Cultural Life
www.britannica.com/place/South-Africa/Cultural-life

Smithsonian Folkways: South Africa Choral Lesson
www.folkways.si.edu/south-africa-free-last-songs-civil-rights-movement-america/music/tools-for-teaching/smithsonian

South African Music Archive Project
<http://samap.ukzn.ac.za>

Musicians

Lorraine Klaasen	Vocals
Mongezi Ntaka	Guitar & musical director
Andre Whiteman	Bass & sound technician
Noel Mpiaza	Drums & percussion



A shanty town in Soweto, South Africa.
 Photo by Matt-80 (CC BY 2.0) via Wikimedia Commons



Renowned performer Lorraine Klaasen.
 Photo by Pierre Arseneault

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Dear Friends,

I'm very excited and honored to bring my music to your beautiful community and consider myself very fortunate to visit a part of the United States many international artists don't get to experience.

My performance will take you through a journey of South African Township Music, a mixture of indigenous music of Southern Africa. Miriam Makeba, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Mahlathini & Mahotella Queens, and Hugh Masekela are some of the South African artists who helped bring Township Music to international audiences. You might also remember that American folk singer Paul Simon recorded an album called *Graceland* featuring music from South Africa.

This music is in my soul. I hope you enjoy it while discovering the arts & culture of South Africa.

Ngiyabonga (Thank you),

Lorraine Klaasen



Photo by Pierre Arsenault

Did you know?

Lorraine Klaasen is a household name in Canada. She is a regular performer at the famous Montreal International Jazz Festival and even won a Juno Award—the Canadian version of a Grammy Award. Lorraine has also received the Martin Luther King Award, a prestigious award given to people who have contributed to the awareness of their culture by sharing their heritage.

Language in Song

There are eleven official languages in South Africa, and Lorraine Klaasen sings in many of them including Tsonga, Sotho, isiZulu, and Xhosa.

Language is particularly significant in Township Music since the genre is a mixture of traditions and a celebration of the struggle against apartheid. As South African activist and leader Nelson Mandela observed: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”