

Crompton Hospital in Pinetown where she was declared dead on arrival.

As a pastor herself, Mrs Shabalala would minister to the church while her husband, who is also a pastor and university lecturer would tour the world



The late Nellie Shabalala

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leading Ladysmith, a group renowned for bringing to the world the sounds of Zulu rhythms. Nellie's own singing group, Women of Mambazo, started as a choir several years ago before turning professional. The group, directed by Nellie's husband, were finalising recordings of their debut album. The group toured England with Ladysmith Black Mambazo last October, and a tour of the United States in 2003 was in the pipeline.

This is the second gun tragedy to hit the Shabalala family, in 1991, Joseph's younger brother Headman was killed in Pinetown, outside Durban. Speaking to the press shortly after his wife's murder he said: 'What are we coming to when a beautiful person like Nellie is gunned down?' A spokesperson of the group's music label Gallo Music said: "Nellie's life was devoted to her children, grandchildren and the less fortunate families she knew in the townships of South Africa. She and Joseph were involved in with many charitable organisations who would ship clothing



Joseph Shabalala

to their church to distribute to the poor. Nellie Shabalala's family, her church, her charitable work and joy of singing will be a lasting legacy to all who knew her and were touched by her."

Following the attack Joseph Shabalala pursued the fleeing attacker but was unable to catch him. The SA Communist Party (SACP) has since called for the immediate arrest of the perpetrators and appealed to the Claremont community to assist the police with their investigations. The motive for the attack is unknown. A R50,000 reward is being offered for information leading to the arrest of the killer and a special task team had been formed to investigate the murder. SACP provincial spokesman Sicelo Mdletshe said Mrs Shabalala had been a pillar of the success of the group through her work behind the scenes and that "without her, South Africa and the world would not have reaped the magical music that overwhelms".

## Black ivory

*With the release of her current album Black Ivory Soul, Beninese songstress Angélique Kidjo took time out from her UK performances to talk about her work with Sylvia Arthur*

**T**he power of a good song can be measured by its ability to transcend boundaries. Whether linguistic or rhythmic, there's something about the medium of music that translates foreign lyrics and alien rhythms into universal thoughts and emotions. The songs on *Black Ivory Soul* have such an

intensity. The album takes the listener on a spiritual journey from the West African streets of Ouidah in Benin, to Bahia in Brazil, following the transatlantic passage travelled by slaves all those years ago. Inspired by the belief that the music of Africa survived the cruelty of slavery, the album reaffirms the melodic relationship between the continent and the Diaspora.

So what was it about Bahia that made a Beninese feel so at home? "If you ever go to Bahia you won't have to ask me that question. Never again," insists Angélique Kidjo, her intonation characterised by hushed tones and animated expressions. "As somebody who comes from West Africa, just live there and we can talk."

Angélique Kidjo demands attention. Be it her cropped blonde hair or her infectious live performance, she exudes a confidence and energy that could only have been developed by the freedom of the streets of Africa. The Paris and Brooklyn based singer-songwriter has received international acclaim for a body of work that stretches back over 15 years.

The idea to record an album in



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collaboration with Brazilian artists had long existed, ever since her childhood days in Benin when she learned about the slave trade, and since she witnessed the horrors of apartheid in South Africa. "Bahia is the only city outside of Africa where the population is 85 per cent black and music plays the same role as it does in our country. You see people that are drunk and playing music, they want to sing but they are completely out of tune, making up their own words. It's wonderful. That's how we do in Africa. And I never ever have heard that in America."

*Black Ivory Soul* is the second in a trilogy of albums that combine diverse musical forms while exploring convergent cultural experiences. Born into what she describes as a non-traditional African family, Kidjo says she and her brothers were given equal education and reared in a household where no subject was taboo.

Nurtured by this openness, she found it difficult to reconcile her inherent free-spiritedness with Benin's political regime and left the country in 1983 to pursue her music. She says: "I moved from Benin because of the communist regime. In a communist regime, you don't think for yourself. They think for you and they tell you what to do. So, if I lose my freedom as a writer, as a performer, as a singer, I'm leaving. That's why I left." However, she regularly returns to her native country and retains strong links with the continent. "My music is still really popular there. Every time I go to Benin with people they're like, 'Man, this isn't Benin. This is Kidjo land.'"

The tracks on *Black Ivory Soul* are sung with such gusto and conviction that up-tempo percussive numbers, like the explosive opener *Tumba* and the sentimental *Africa*, sit comfortably alongside the mellower, moodier sounds of *Iemanja* and *Ominira*. The album's constant shift in mood and tempo make it difficult to accurately classify and that's just how Kidjo likes it. It's not so much

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that her music defies definition but that she is averse to the apparent obsession with categorising it. But, then, what do you call music that's sung in English, French, Yoruba and Fon and boasts an unlikely but heady concoction of jazz, funk, salsa and traditional African and Caribbean rhythms? "Music, period. It's simply music," she asserts. "Why should we categorise it? It's like trying to take a human being and put him in a hole and say, 'OK, today you're gonna look red, tomorrow you're gonna dress blue.' No! I just don't like to put music in a pigeon hole. Just let it be." She subscribes to the philosophy of her South African counterpart,

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Miriam Makeba, that the "world music" tag is simply a euphemism for a category of music associated with the developing world. "Somebody wanted to call it 'third world music' but he swallowed the 'third' word to be politically correct. That is his problem, I don't care."

To see Kidjo perform live is to understand why she feels so restricted by the studio environment. She's famous for her powerhouse vocals and energetic stage shows where she challenges her diminutive physique and 42 years. "Being inside a studio was like being in jail. It's too technical and too cold. It's not my culture. Music is a live thing in Africa and I started my music on stage and in the street. If I take a drum and start playing in Africa I won't look like a mad girl, it's a normal thing. If I do that in Europe..."

Yet, despite the obvious contrasts between her African ancestry and her adopted European culture, the fact remains that her music has been able to transcend the differences and attract a universal audience on both sides of the Atlantic: a sure sign of longevity, not to mention the power of good music. She says: "What I want my music to tell people in all my work is that life is about many different things. Nobody knows how a day will go when you wake up in the morning. It might go smoothly, it might go roughly, it might not go at all. And that's what I feel like. But always, on every album the main drive behind it is the care and urge of sharing my gift with other people in a really large way." ■