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Graceland
Paul Simon

Let's get one thing straight: I'm not some sort of Paul Simon fanatic who goes nuts every time he releases an album. Mind you, I've

always admired his work; I own Simon and Garfunkel's *Greatest Hits*, I've heard several of his solo albums and I always intended to delve into his catalog.

So, you can believe me when I say I approached his latest collection of songs, *Graceland*, with a fair amount of impartiality. But, having heard the album, I can't possibly remain impartial.

This year already has seen excellent releases from some of my favorite artists, but I have no doubt that *Graceland* will be widely considered the best album of the year.

In 1984, Paul Simon heard a cassette of music that entranced

him. It was an invigorating blend of Motown rhythms and '80s polish, with a dash of Zydeco thrown in for good measure. He quickly learned its origins: The music was called "township jive," the street music of Soweto, South Africa.

Simon immediately (and wisely) decided to travel to South Africa and hook up with the bands he'd heard. The entire collaboration was handled with the utmost integrity, for he paid the musicians double the standard New York studio rate and gave songwriting credit wherever possible. It has been successful in every sense of the word.

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Graceland is uniquely accessible, as only the best albums can be. I've yet to see anyone listen to it without tapping their toes, snapping their fingers or singing along. Its exciting, rhythmically complex tracks are unquestionably a major accomplishment in and of themselves, as well as an excellent introduction to a style of music that has received no exposure in the United States.

However, they're matched on every level by Simon's engaging and pithy lyrics. On the introspective "Graceland," which uses Elvis Presley's home as a symbol of

paradise, he writes, "And I see losing love/Is like a window in your heart/Everybody sees you're blown apart."

The exotic vocal support woven throughout *Graceland* is another important element adding to its depth and complexity. The high-spirited scat singing of the Gaza Sisters spices up "I Know What I Know," while Ladysmith Black Mambazo adds soul to "Diamonds On The Soles Of Her Shoes."

The backup singers are best highlighted on "Homeless," the album's emotional high point. "Homeless" is an exquisite a cappella tune that makes use of Zulu, an infectious call-and-reponse

bridge, and the haunting refrain, "Homeless, homeless/Moonlight sleeping on a midnight lake."

In a perfect world, these songs would be all over the radio and, given their high quality and the stature of Paul Simon, there is a slim hope that *Graceland* will break commercially.

Still, I doubt it. It's far more likely that the only place you'll be able to hear this music is with your own copy on your own stereo. Please buy *Graceland*. It is a perfect album. The only possible way to make it better is with commercial success, something Paul Simon richly deserves.

by Michael Giltz