

Released in 1986, Paul Simon's *Graceland* is considered by many critics and fans to be the renowned singer-songwriter's crowning achievement. Simon himself has even called the album the most significant achievement of his entire career in the 2012 documentary *Under African Skies*. The album was recorded with a group of South African session musicians who played a style of South African pop music called *mbaqanga*, which resulted in a drastically different sound when compared to Simon's previous work. The unique collaboration between Simon and these musicians proved to be a successful experiment, as the album brought the songwriter back into mainstream relevancy at a time when many thought he would never release another successful hit, resulting in one of pop music's greatest comeback stories.

Among these session musicians was a bassist named Bakithi Kumalo whose unique style helped define *Graceland's* sound and bring elements of traditional South African music into Simon's compositions. Kumalo grew up in the Soweto township of Johannesburg during apartheid and by the late 1970s was known around the country as one of the area's most talented bass players. Among his musical influences in early life were traditional South African acapella groups as well as American jazz and R&B, both styles that would be influences on the way he approached his bass lines.

Kumalo's unique sound on *Graceland* is partially due to the use of a Washburn B-20 fretless bass that has a distinct "growly" tone reminiscent of fretless bass virtuoso Jaco Pastorius, who was another influence on Kumalo's playing. Because of the vocal-like quality of the fretless bass, Kumalo developed a style of playing that incorporated elements from traditional South African vocal music and allowed his bass lines to assume a more prominent, melodic role than typical bass lines in Western popular music. These lines became one of the defining features of the album's sound and would even influence the way Simon approached his own songwriting on its tracks.

This lecture recital will present six tracks from *Graceland*, recreated as close to the album's arrangements as possible, that showcase ways in which Kumalo's playing incorporates elements of traditional South African music into Simon's pop songwriting. Topics covered will include an overview of the writing and recording of the album, the musical background of Bakithi Kumalo and his distinct style of playing, specific elements of traditional South African music present within Kumalo's lines, and ways in which bass lines of *Graceland* continued to influence Simon's instrumental arrangements both in the studio and live as he continued to work with Kumalo up until his retirement in 2018.