

The Sound And Spirit Of Perfect Timing.

Discussing a superb documentary on artist Abdullah Ibrahim

by **Michael F. Hopkins**

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One of the finest documentaries on African Music makes its way onto DVD, and it's a sure bet that *this* feature hits the ground swinging! ***A BROTHER WITH PERFECT TIMING*** is an exceptional look at **Abdullah Ibrahim**, the remarkable South African pianist-composer who's made his mark on Jazz and other musical fields for a good half-century now, and is still playing strong.

Wisely, the 1980s documentary -co-produced by **Chris Austin, Gill Bond, and Ibrahim** himself- centers upon the artist's own nitty-gritty eloquence in speaking on the basics of this music, and the culture it emanates from. Those used to the overly-academic, over-the-top fundamentalist mouthings of the **Marsalis** era will find this presentation from *Music Video Distributors* to be quite the eye-opener.

Both earthy and polished, the anecdotes which spin from **Ibrahim's** seasoned rap tingle with great wisdom, a touch of naughtiness to spice up the virtuous flavor, and an abundance of winning charm.

Ibrahim's academy is the education of struggle, honed in surmounting the gauntlets of sanctioned prejudice and societal apathy to shape his art. Delivering traditions that refuse to die, he is strengthened by the innovations of two continents which will not be silenced.

To hear **Ibrahim** talk on the healing power of Music is to hear a master scientist of sound sharing precious herbs with those who have been ill for too long. No New Age rejoinder, **Ibrahim's** is the authentic caliber of indigenous song which *New Ager*s have been superficially trying to cop for decades now. Listen to his talk on the roots of the classic ***Mannenburg***, or his thoughts on **Thelonious Monk**, and hear the bounty of his reflections upon the nature of his struggles to be heard, as he shares all he continues to learn.

Best of all, **Ibrahim** consistently puts his money where his mouth is. Spontaneous deliberations as a speaker are more than matched by his steady breaks upon himself to play exactly what he is talking about. Equally delightful are the documentary's frequent segments of his activities as a leader. Between his employment of African choral tradition, and his equally superb instrumental arrangements, you never lose sight of the aural richness at hand. Longtime lovers of **Great Black Music** will recognize baritone saxophonist **Charles Davis**, multi-reed threat **Rick Ford**, and tenor saxophonist **Basil Coetzee** (the last featured briefly as he plays part of his now-acclaimed solo from ***Mannenburg***).

While the DVD could probably use some digital remastering here and there, the play is clean enough, and its contents are crystal clear. Whatever your musical interests, ***A BROTHER WITH PERFECT TIMING*** is an impeccable testimony to the power of positive, uplifting song, delivered by one of the world's most unique messengers.

Heed his call.