

South African singer and anti-apartheid activist Johnny Clegg dies at 66



Johannesburg, July 17 (RHC)-- South African singer Johnny Clegg, one of the very few white musicians who confronted the apartheid regime in the 1970s and 1980s has died from pancreatic cancer at the age of 66, his manager reported on Tuesday.

“Clegg has made an indelible mark on the music industry and the hearts of the people,” said the South African government in a tribute paid to the singer on Twitter, adding that his music had the power to unite people across race and to bring them together as a community.

Clegg's relation to music dates back to the time he began, as a teenager, to take lessons in the streets of Johannesburg with Zulu migrant workers playing street guitar. Since then he dedicated his life to his art and the fight against the apartheid government.

Johnny Clegg -- one of South Africa's most celebrated sons. He was a singer, a songwriter, a dancer, anthropologist whose infectious crossover music exploded onto the international scene and contributed towards social cohesion #RIPJohnnyClegg

Those learning years as a musician with street artists were an introduction to the Zulu language, culture, and music for the one who has sometimes been called the “White Zulu.”

“I felt like an immigrant,” he had told the New York Times in 1990, adding that “the migrant workers were themselves immigrants [they had left their homes and went to the city to find work], so we had a similar feeling of marginality in the city ... That was emotionally something I could relate to.”

In 1969 he formed a mixed-raced band with the Black guitarist, Sipho Mchunu. The group mainly performed in Europe as they were subject to harassment from the authorities in their country and were arrested many times. Clegg was thus the first white singer to challenge the laws that prohibited mixed-race performances at that time. “We had to find our way around a myriad of laws that prevented us from mixing across racial lines,” he told AFP news agency in 2017. Much of Johnny Clegg's music was prohibited in South Africa until the end of the apartheid in 1994.

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