



Brothers - and sisters - in arms for Mandela's freedom on June 11

Rocking The Racists

Pop and politics are usually uncomfortable bedfellows. But the issue of South Africa is alive and kicking in the music world. **Stan Rijven** looks at the issues involved, and **Denis Campbell** picks out the best of the political concerts in June

April 1984: *Nelson Mandela* by Special AKA hit the British Top 10. For the first time a broad rock audience was confronted with the issue of apartheid and informed about the symbol of South Africa's resistance through a catchy videoclip, sharp lyrics and a highly danceable song.

On June 11 a wide range of the international rock elite will gather in the Wembley Stadium at a marathon gala to honour Nelson Mandela and plead for his freedom at 70. Through broadcasting Wembley becomes again a global jukebox, this time not as a famine fundraiser but as a starting signal for anti-apartheid rallies all over the world.

The event marks some interesting developments within the international rock community in recent years. The mid-80s has seen a shift in consciousness among rock artists towards social and political issues.

Special AKA had nothing to do with Band Aid which is nowadays part of rock culture. At that time Bob Geldof was not even thinking of Xmas. The song was an isolated political statement from Jerry Dammers, his band and producer Elvis Costello, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Mandela's imprisonment. Looking back, their effort can be seen as a one-off rather than as a result of a widespread engagement among rock musi-

cians. How is it possible that today mainstream musicians publicly make a political statement against apartheid by performing at Wembley, not so long ago a Utopian dream for anti-apartheid activists?

Of course earlier examples of rock celebrities supporting a non-artistic cause do exist. In 1971 George Harrison organised the Concert for Bangladesh, in 1979 Bruce Springsteen made a stand with the No Nukes festival. The Concert For The People Of Kampuchea in 1981 and the annual Secret Policeman's Ball for Amnesty International are more recent initiatives. In all these cases, though, the politics were incidental. The events lacked media exposure and, besides the Secret Policeman's Ball, were aimed at *social* topics.

In 1985 something structural happened. Bob Geldof's Band Aid became the model for a whole series of 'swing low sweet charity' projects organised to raise money for Ethiopia, culminating in the mega-media event, Live Aid. Since then the Band Aid phe-

nomenon has become familiar. Musicians are eager to support all types of causes. But raising your voice against apartheid is somehow qualitatively different from either Band Aid, Kids Aid, Sport Aid, Ferry Aid or Farm Aid. As long as outspoken political choices had not been made, outspoken musicians didn't have to put their politics on the line.

The change came during the same year. Before, many megastars like Rod Stewart, Frank Sinatra, Julio Iglesias and Elton John played Sun City and nobody cared. Yet the 1981 UN cultural boycott remained in force. Even in September 1984 Freddy - *I Want To Break Free* - Mercury and Queen could tour South Africa without any international indignation.

The American Athletes & Artists Against Apartheid (AAAA), chaired by Harry Belafonte, started to focus on the UN blacklist. As a result, Paul Anka, George Benson and The Temptations among others decided never to visit South Africa again. The 'sleeping' AAAA saw membership in one year jump from 65 to 500. Stevie Wonder propelled the public opinion by dedicating his Grammy award to Nelson Mandela, and on American campuses apartheid became a hot issue. Then at the end of '85 Little Stevie Van Zandt got his Sun City crew together for a hard-edged song of the same name. Thanks to the Band Aid model but without the ambiguity of many charity projects Sun City caused a challenging change, a pressure from which nobody could escape anymore.

Even a so-called naive Paul Simon, who landed in February 1985 at Jan Smuts airport in Johannesburg, could not fail to be aware of the AAAA activities. At that time he could not foresee which shifts in public opinion would take place in the near future. However, when *Graceland* was released he participated in many debates to make it absolutely clear he was there just for the music. As if music, and especially South African music can be sepa-

rated from its context. His *Graceland* album became the 80s metaphor for discussions on the politics of pop. Nevertheless, one of the unpredicted side effects was the growing acceptance of South African local music like the mbaganga style or the mbube singing of Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Another effect of Van Zandt's Sun City is the expanding anti-apartheid music catalogue. Youssou N'Dour recorded *Nelson Mandela*, Alpha Blondy sang *Apartheid is Nazism*, Stetsonic contributed *AFRICA*. Eddy Grant's *Gimme Hope Joanna* is the latest example of how the anti-apartheid issue now has almost turned into a commodity.

All these developments slowly altered the consciousness among rock stars and prepared them to participate in events like the 'Nelson Mandela: Freedom at 70 Campaign'. Although Live Aid, this month's Mandela marathon and 'Conspiracy Of Hope' tour for Amnesty differ in their objectives, style and politics they nevertheless have a lot in common. It is pop stars lending their name to a public issue on a scale and with a media coverage that has never been shown before. Pop can serve as a vehicle to intervene in the process of opinion-making on social and political issues. That has occurred before but never with such frequency, potency and with so many participants.

Their influence may be small but the role and effects of rock stars as an identification to a wide and differentiated audience can't be neglected. On June 11 it is George Michael who will tickle our fancy with his mix of marketing and morality but Michael's media power cannot be ignored, nor can the effects of his presence at Wembley. When even George is against apartheid something is wrong - or maybe very right. At the end of the 1980s categories of street credibility and sincerity are being surpassed by new approaches to rock and politics. The Wembley concert is the latest test. •

Agitpop

June 11 sees the biggest array of pop stars since Live Aid, gathered together to celebrate Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday in an all-day concert at Wembley Stadium. The show, organised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement and Artists Against Apartheid, boasts an impressive line-up including many of pop's biggest names.

Already confirmed are Dire Straits, Whitney Houston, Simple Minds, Eurythmics, George Michael, Sade, The Bee Gees, UB40, Chrissie Hynde, Sly 'n' Robbie, Hugh Masakela, Miriam Makeba, Maxi Priest, Jessye Norman, a supergroup featuring Midge Ure and Phil Collins, a rap ensemble including Derek B, Salt V Pepa, The Fat Boys and Chubby Checker, and a celebrity soul band featuring Roberta Flack and Natalie Cole. Comperes for the day are Harry Belafonte, Whoopi Goldberg and Billy Connolly.

Any remaining tickets priced £25 can be had from the Wembley Box Office on 019021234 or 017481414 (credit cards) or by post from Nelson Mandela Box Office, Freedom Productions Ltd, PO 1426, London W6 0EX. Cheques and POs should be made payable to Freedom Productions Ltd, and enclose a Sup booking fee for each ticket and an SAE.

The following weekend sees Amnesty International's biggest ever fund-raiser, their two-day Festival Of Youth at Milton Keynes Bowl on June 18 and 19. The festival is the first of a series of events to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, and it will also launch Amnesty's youth network.

Acts confirmed include Aswad, Joe Strummer, Big Country, The Stranglers, Aztec Camera, Motorhead, The Bhundu Boys, Go West, The Damned, Spear of Destiny, Martin Stephenson and the Daintees, New Model Army, The Icicle Works, Rhythm Sisters, The Men They Couldn't Hang, Transvision Vamp, So, World Domination Enterprises and Run Rig.

Tickets are £15 for one day, £25 for the weekend, available by post from PO Box 77, London SW4 9LH. Enclose a 50p booking fee per ticket and SAE, and make cheques/POs payable to Amnesty International. There's also a Pledgeline for anyone wanting to donate money. It's 0898 400500.