

Paul Simon – Graceland (25th Anniversary Edition) [2012]

Written by bluesever

Friday, 13 July 2012 18:45 - Last Updated Monday, 22 May 2017 12:27

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01. *The Boy In The Bubble* 02. *Graceland* 03. *I Know What I Know* 04. *Gumboots* 05. *Diamonds On The Soles Of Her Shoes* 06. *You Can Call Me Al* 07. *Under African Skies* 08. *Homeless* 09. *Crazy Love, Vol. II* 10. *That Was Your Mother* 11. *All Around The World Or The Myth Of Fingerprints* 12. *Homeless (Demo)* 13. *Diamond On The Soles Of Her Shoes (Alternate Version)* 14. *All Around The World Or The Myth Of Fingerprints (Early Version)* 15. *You Can Call Me Al (Demo)* 16. *Crazy Love (Demo)* 17. *The Story Of "Graceland" (As Told By Paul Simon)*

It's been a quarter century since Graceland's release, and the world is a vastly different place. Apartheid is over. Nelson Mandela is free. Ladysmith Black Mambazo, formerly famous only in the black villages of South Africa, have become world-renowned, recognized as readily by the couch potatoes who've heard the group on TV commercials for 7 Up, Lifesavers and Heinz ketchup as traditional fans of world music. Some things never change, though, and Paul Simon's Graceland sounds as innovative today as it did in 1986.

To celebrate the album's 25th anniversary, Legacy Recordings is re-releasing Graceland in four different packages. The leanest version is a two-disc reissue, which bundles the original tracklist with five extra songs, an audio documentary and a DVD. Under African Skies, a new documentary covering the album's creation and legacy, is also included. A second version of the album adds an extra DVD to the mix, as well as an 80 page book and a replica of the yellow legal pad where Simon once jotted down his lyrics. The third incarnation of the Graceland reissue is a remastered 180-gram vinyl. Finally, for those fans who're wealthy enough to have diamonds on the soles of their shoes, the \$250 "Collector's Edition Box Set Bundle" offers everything listed above, as well as an autographed poster and a linen-wrapped slipcase to hold the whole thing together.

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The album itself is the star of all four versions, no easy feat when you're dealing with this much fan memorabilia, but kudos to Simon and his label for making sure the bonus additions – particularly Under African Skies and several live video clips – serve a crucial purpose, too. Together, they help illustrate the larger story behind the album. Graceland was never just a collection of songs, after all; it was a bridge between cultures, genres and continents, not to mention a global launching pad for the musicians whose popularity been suppressed under South Africa's white-run apartheid rule. Hearing Ladysmith Black Mambazo's thickly-stacked harmonies on "Homeless" is one thing; watching the guys perform alongside Simon at a 1987 concert in Zimbabwe (included in the second reissue's bonus DVD) is something entirely different, a vibrant, visual representation of Graceland's culture clash. Out in the audience, black and white South Africans enjoy the show in equal numbers, mirroring the diversity onstage. Since Simon's most famous video clip from the Graceland era was "You Can Call Me Al," an almost ludicrously Caucasian clip featuring Chevy Chase instead of Bakithi Kumalo, Morris Goldberg or any of the South Africans who actually played on the song, it's nice to see Graceland wearing its multi-cultural heritage so proudly. This reissue doesn't just cater to the audiophile who wants to hear the album in crisp, 21st century sound; it gives a broader view of Graceland as a whole, defining it not as an album but as a cultural experiment that changed the way the western world viewed South Africa. --- Andrew Leahey, americansongwriter.com

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