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African Children's Choir

Center for Performing Arts

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Governors State University
Opus 3 Artists And THE AFRICAN CHILDREN’S CHOIR
PRESENT
The African Children’s Choir in
JOURNEY OF HOPE

April 5, 2008
The Center for Performing Arts’ 2007-2008 Season is sponsored in part by a generous grant from The Illinois Arts Council, an agency of the state of Illinois.
Our Story

The first African Children’s Choir was made up of children who were born in Uganda during the final years of Idi Amin’s regime. In 1984, Uganda was embroiled in a Civil War that left hundreds of thousands of orphans in great need. The Choir traveled to the West to tell the story of these children in the hope that the rest of the world would come to their aid and help to relieve the widespread suffering.

Since then, the Choir has expanded its operations to serve children and families in Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria, the Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and South Africa. Our relief, education and music programs currently support almost 8000 underprivileged children, ranging from schools for the “Lost Boys” of Sudan, to teachers’ colleges, to literacy schools in the inner city, to support centers for AIDS orphans in South Africa, to university sponsorship programs for former choir members. These children could have lost all hope, but they have overcome their circumstances and are now making a positive impact on society by being a voice for millions of children suffering in Africa.

For twenty-three years, the African Children’s Choir has worked with Africa’s most vulnerable children, not only raising awareness of the plight of the orphaned and abandoned, but also showing the beauty, dignity and potential of the African child.

This is our first of many stories. Our Journey. Our hope. Our Africa.

Journey of Hope

ACT ONE
Acholi Dance ........................................ Acholi Tribe
Abataka .................................................. Baganda Tribe
Fishing Song ........................................ Baganda Tribe
Hunting Song ......................................... Baganda Tribe
Harvest Song .......................................... Basoga Tribe

Dance Tutorial:
Kiganda Dance ...................................... Baganda Tribe
Rwandan Dance .................................... Rwanda
Bandi Minya Soya Maci-Lingala ................ Congo
Ding Ding ............................................... Acholi Tribe
Ujesu Tiathoma ..................................... Tribe/South Africa
Shadowland .......................................... Composed by Hans Zimmer & Lebo Morake

Intermission

ACT TWO
Can Dance ........................................ South Africa
Homeland ............................................ Music by Dirke Brosse
Lyrics by Frank van Laecke
& Lorraine Feather
If We Ever ........................................ Traditional
Bethelehemu .......................................... Nigerian
Mwije Bantumwe ..................................... Runyankole Tribe
Natambe .............................................. Runyankole Tribe
Mother Africa ....................................... Tshoma Tribe/South Africa
Composed by Hans Zimmer & Lebo Morake

Runyege Dance .................................... Batoro Tribe
Nosi Sikele ............................................ South Africa
Arrangement by Dirke Brosse

Program Notes

Fishing Song A group of fishermen on Lake Victoria have a close encounter with a crocodile as they pull in their daily catch. The leader assures them that all is well and they sail ashore to safety.

Hunting Song A hunter returns to her village and declares to her skeptical neighbors that she has died during the hunt and was resurrected. She tells them that she had been told to sit alone and make sure that the antelope did not escape past him. But instead of waiting patiently, she bravely decided to stalk the prey herself. As she made her way towards the trap, she discovered to her shock and dismay that it was a leopard and not an antelope after all! She insists that it mauled and killed her - but since she is clearly still alive, she must have been resurrected. The hunters finally realize that she is bluffing, and make fun of her, telling her that she must have fainted from her fear.

Harvest Song This song was first sung in the Basoga Kingdom in Eastern Uganda. During the harvesting of maize, corn, mangoes, peanuts and sweet potatoes the workers sing while they work. When they are finished they bring their crops to the village and celebrate a successful harvest. They invite their village friends to the celebrations and together they sing, dance and make merry.
Homeland  An original piece from the musical "Prince of Africa," this song was created especially for the African Children's Choir.

I'm eager as a bird to fly to journey through the bright blue sky
Back to the house I knew only there's no one there
Wherever I was meant to be it really isn't clear to me
Could I grow wise and strong where I was wanted where I belong

Homeland, homeland, deep in my soul I need a homeland
Somewhere I always will be welcome safe on the shore
Sadness, danger, why must I always be a stranger
Finding my way without the ones that I loved, those who loved me
Lonely and lost on both sides of the sea

Homeland, homeland, deep in my soul I need a homeland
When I'm away I hear it calling, softly
Somewhere I know I will be safe on the shore
A part of me forevermore

A bird can't be afraid to fly so try your wings and take the sky
Though I can tell you feel you are in no man's land
However many roads unwind whatever in the world you find
There will be just one place that seems to hold you in its embrace

Homeland, homeland, all people hunger for a homeland
Somewhere we know we will be welcome safe on the shore
Teardrops, laughter, may we be happy ever after
Joining together as we lift up our dreams, braver as one
Praying tomorrow will shine like the sun

Homeland, homeland, all people hunger for a homeland
Its lovely colors and its music will always fill us with joy
Homeland, homeland, we are a family in our homeland
There is no blessing like our own true homeland, homeland, homeland
Somewhere we know we will be safe on the shore
A part of us forevermore...

Mwije Bantume/Natamba  Both of these from the Runyankole Tribe are sung at times of high festival and celebration.

Runyege Dance  This dance originates from the western part of Uganda, created by the Batoro tribe from Toro Kingdom. It is performed mainly during the Courtship season at a time when parents try to find wives for their sons. The young men must put on an energetic and impressive dance display in front of potential suitors to prove that they are capable of making good husbands. Anyone judged to be putting on a lackluster performance jeopardizes his chance of attracting a wife!

Nkosi Sikele  South Africa's National Anthem bestows a blessing on the entire continent.

Raymond Barnett (Executive Producer)  As founder and director of the African Children’s Choir, Ray Barnett serves as the leader for the nonprofit organization. He has worked to develop the Choir into an internationally acclaimed performing group, while raising funds to help thousands of destitute children receive an education and hope. Under his leadership, the Choir has gained international recognition, performing at Live8, appearing before the British House of Commons and the Pentagon, and singing in some of the world's most prestigious halls, including The London Palladium, The International Club of Berlin and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

Through his work with the Choir, Ray has been able to raise millions of dollars to establish numerous schools throughout Africa that serve children who would otherwise have no chance at an education. He has also been able to raise significant money for emergency relief and development programs in Sudan and Rwanda and is currently working to help orphaned children in South Africa who are battling starvation and disease.

An ordained Irish minister who resides in White Rock, British Columbia, Ray has been the subject of two television documentaries and has received numerous awards and honors for his work. These include the prestigious Cross of Nails, awarded by the Coventry Cathedral in England, to recognize his widespread efforts to promote peace throughout the world, and the Heart of Gold Award bestowed by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC).

Since its inception in 1984, the African Children’s Choir has helped to establish numerous schools throughout Uganda and other countries in Africa and has been instrumental in financing tuition for thousands of children who would otherwise have no access to an education. “We recognized early on that education is the key to long-term change and advancement in Africa,” said Barnett. “It's the children who will become the leaders of tomorrow and can make the difference. By helping one child at a time, we can move mountains.”

In addition to education efforts, the Choir, through ongoing support from generous donors, finances numerous relief and development projects throughout Africa, carrying out our mission:

“Help Africa’s Most Vulnerable Children Today,
So They Can Help Africa Tomorrow.”

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Julia Barnett Tracy (Artistic Director & Writer) Began her work with the African Children's Choir in after receiving her Music degree from Anderson University. Her eight month volunteer service turned into joining the Music For Life family. Her first job with the choir was based in Kenya training new choirs. She lived in East Africa for many years also working with MFL's relief efforts in Rwanda and The Sudan, where she faced off military men, ate grasshoppers and washed her hair in a bucket for months on end. She then went on to travel around with the world with the choir. She is now based in NYC as the Director of International Choir Operations. Julia is also an accomplished actress (Law&Order, SVU, Trial by Jury, One life to Live, Letterman Show) and playwright. Her play 'Modern Missionary', based on her experiences in Africa was awarded "Outstanding play" at the 2006 NY International Fringe Festival. Her greatest achievement to date is the birth of her first son, Zander. They live together with her husband, Van Tracy, a lawyer and accomplished theater actor in Jersey City, NJ. She sends thanks to her husband and mom for support during long production hours.


David Travis (Director) As Associate Director and Co-Founder of the OBIE Award-winning Off-Broadway company Synapse Productions, Animal Farm (the Puppet Musical) (Drama Desk nomination and National Tour), world premieres of Barbara Hammond's Norman & Beatrice and Michael Aronov's Manigma, and the American premieres of Richard Bean's The God Botherers and Wabenzi, Caryl Churchill's A物体, Doc and Clarisse and Larmon featuring Kathleen Chalfant) at the IGNITE Festival. Also in New York, The Chicago Conspiracy Trial, Travis' own multi-media re-translation of Euripides' The Phoenician Women, The Elephant Man, Bloody Poetry, No Exit (Jean Cocteau Rep), Beyond the Horizon, The Woods, Grimm Tales. Additional credits include Willamstown Theatre Festival and in Great Britain the Scottish premiere of Lanford Wilson's The Rimers of Eldritch (Edinburgh Fringe). As a recipient of a Sheldon Fellowship, David worked with the touring company of Trevor Nunn's production of Tom Stoppard's Arcadia, and the British Premiere of August Wilson's Two Trains Running. David has also sung with the Tanglewood Festival Choir and he teaches in the New York Public Schools. Teaching highlights include The Crucible with 45 seventh graders and Romeo & Juliet with 45 eighth graders. Education: Harvard University.

Margaret Perez (African Choreographer) My name is Margaret Nakibogo Perez. My father died when I was five years old, and my mother could not look after all seven of us so she gave us to different relatives that were kind enough to take us in. I was brought to the African Children's Choir by my great Aunt because she wanted me to come to my full potential as a human being. She did this because she thought that I would never make it as one of twenty-two orphaned grandchildren that my grandmother was single-handedly struggling to look after. In her words, "I was too bright to waste". She brought me to an African Children's Choir audition, and the rest is history. I started giving back to the African children's choir while in college, and have not stopped ever since. As a dance major I applied August Wilson's (page 6 now I have two beautiful children and a loving husband. I still take time out though to put back into the family that took such great care of me. I teach dance, and do choreography for the choir. I do this for the man I call my father, Daddy Ray, as we all so fondly refer to one of the busiest men, yet one who so readily finds time to get involved in each of our lives like there is nothing else going on in his. The man who had the vision and accepted God's calling to save thousands of innocent lives. Literally the man who saved my life. I give back with gratitude to an organization that has nurtured and believed in me. I give back because of the many people that gave to me. I give back, because I can.

Prossy Nakiyemba (African Choreographer/Performer) Prossy was born in 1983 in Uganda. She toured with the 13th African Children's Choir from 1995-1997. Afterwards, she returned home for her studies. Prossy graduated last year with a certificate in journalism and creative writing. She began touring with this choir in March of 2007 as the choir conductor.


Emily Decola (Puppet Design) Emily is thrilled that puppetry is finally hip. Based in New York, she works with puppets and masks as a designer, performer and director. Her work has been featured in Peter & Wendy and Prelude to Death in Venice (Mabou Mines), Serendib (Ensemble Studio Theater), Pericles and Revengers Tragedy (Red Bull Theater) CARRIE (PS 122, co-design with Basil Twist and Eric Wright) and Luces de Bohemia (Repertorio Espanol) and regionally in The Tempest, A Christmas Carol and 1001 Nights (McCarter Theater) HATS! The Musical (Harras Theater, Royal George Theater) and Animal Farm (Synapse Productions). Ms. Decola's puppets and performance can been seen onscreen in LazyTown (Nickelodeon), Johnny and the Sprites (Disney), Moonfishing (David Michael Friend), and Katalog (Cipher Productions).

Jessica Paz (Sound Design) Jessica is proud to be a member of the production team for "The African Children's Choir." Her work was most recently heard in the third workshop of the "Fela Kuti Project" (Sound Engineer) with Bill T. Jones alongside Designer Rob Kaplowitz; "The Power of Darkness" (Asst. Sound Design) at the Mint Theater Company; and "Minor Gods" (Sound Design) at the Summer Play Festival. Jessica is the resident Sound Designer for the NJ Repertory Company where she has designed original works such as "BookEnds" Directed by Ken Jenkins; "Place Setting" Directed by Evan Bergman; and Upcoming "Minstrel Show" Directed by Rob Urbinati. She is also Resident Sound Designer at The Smithtown Center for Performing Arts where she has designed such Musicals as "Sunday in the Park with George; "Sweeney Todd"; "Joseph... Dreamcoat," and "Fiddler on the Roof." In addition to her many Sound Design Credits she also holds the position of Adjunct Sound Technician for the Lynbrook Union Free School District where she works with students throughout the districts many theater education programs. A big thank you to Dave for bringing her on board, and to her many friends and family members who support her in her art.

Leah Gelpe (Video Design) Leah Gelpe designs video, film and sound for live performance. Projection designs include Walmartopia (Minnetta Lane Theatre), Britannicus and Island of Slaves (American Repertory Theatre), Indian Blood (Primary Stages), Spalding Gray; Stories Left to Tell (Minetta Lane) and This Place Is a Desert (ICA Boston). Sound designs include God's Ear (New Georges) and Saved (Theatre for a New Audience). Outside of the U.S., she has worked in Berlin, Budapest, Paris, Vienna and Salzburg. Upcoming projects include New Ballet with choreographer Alison Chase and The Ohio State Murders for Theatre for a New Audience. She is a recipient of the NEA/TCG Career Development Program.
Our Vision: The African Children's Choir Academy

“Only the educated are free.” Epictetus

Education is truly the force which breaks the chains of poverty. Without education, there is simply no hope for African youth to lead productive lives.

Our vision and objective is to break the chains of poverty and provide African youth with a bright future by creating the African Children's Choir (ACC) Academy. Our goal is to raise $1.1 million by the first quarter of 2008.

The Academy will provide Choir children returning from tour with an outstanding residential and educational facility. The Children's Choir academy will provide students with an environment in which they will be stimulated to continue building on the academic and musical excellence they have achieved during their time as members of a Choir tour.

The ACC Academy will serve 400 children and will include school rooms, dormitories, dining hall, staff housing, guest housing and musical training facilities. It will also include a nursery school, athletic fields, an assembly hall, amphitheatre and gardens.

In order to ensure educational quality, class sizes will be kept to a minimum. Highly trained and dedicated teachers will offer the core curriculum which includes computer studies, art and languages.

The Academy will also serve as a training center for the Choir's faculty and staff. The facility will sit on 15 acres of land located off the shores of Lake Victoria, 40 minutes from the city center, and will create an environment that is nurturing, safe and educational, while also providing recreational and reflective spaces to allow holistic development in the children.

After completing their studies in this facility, Choir children will be well-equipped to enter into secondary education and continue their journey to becoming influential leaders able to affect positive change in their continent.

The Academy carries the potential to drastically alter the future of hundreds of children each year. The Choir has already educated thousands of children who previously had little chance of receiving education and a hopeful future.

“Help Africa’s Most Vulnerable Children Today, So They Can Help Africa Tomorrow.”

(page 8)

(page 9)
The Need for Accessible Quality Education

The African Children's Choir understands the importance that education plays with the life of each African child. Quality education is rare within Uganda and can only be accessed by students who achieve high entrance test marks and can afford the exorbitant fees demanded by reputable high schools. The barriers to accessing quality education exclude thousands of worthy and potential students.

Unlike in North America where high school education is a right, competition for high schools in Uganda is very strong. Music for Life schools prepare children to take the national exam to enter high school. Attendance at a reputable high school is essential for a student to access good programs in universities.

Our Need

Our organization has been providing education in inner-city Kampala in a five-story building designed as a hostel, sitting on only a half acre. The Kampala Academy is addressing the need for education within this community, but faces many operational challenges. Originally purchased to serve 50 children, the residence now houses 100 children and is struggling to meet the growing demand.

The school sits landlocked on a city street in one of Kampala's poorest neighborhoods amidst a busy, overcrowded environment. Without playgrounds or fields, the children are confined to the school grounds during the week. In addition, many hundreds more cannot be served due to space constraints.

Other basic amenities needed for a quality school, such as a library, computer lab, science lab and open space for recreation and quiet times are unavailable at the Kampala facility. Further, the Uganda Department of Education is now demanding that new schools (especially foreign sponsored schools) develop to its standards, which include sports fields, certain acreage, and separated buildings for boys and girls. Our present school does not meet these specifications, which requires us to relocate the academy.

Our Commitment

The African Children's Choir has committed to funding the post-secondary education of former choir members and continues to prepare students to achieve good grades on high school entrance exams. Upon completion of secondary school, many of these young adults continue in college and university programs, where they train to become doctors, engineers, social workers or other professional leaders in Africa - bringing the vision full circle.

Children selected into the African Children's Choir come from some of the continent's poorest homes. The ACC commits that each child who serves in the Choir will receive holistic care into early adulthood, including shelter, love, education and a future.

We are committed to relocating our Academy to our property off the shores of Lake Victoria. The new ACC academy will be situated and designed to provide a beautiful learning environment for students and will overcome the spacing and regulation challenges being experienced at our Kampala location.

We need your assistance. Together we can realize the dream of helping Africa's most vulnerable children today, so they can help Africa tomorrow!