

WHAT: LEAF INTERNATIONAL: RWANDA

WHEN: LEAF Crew Traveled to Rwanda for 2 weeks in December 2006

A LEAF Rwanda Night is happening Sunday February 18th at Black Mountain's Watershed Music Hall at 6pm for presentation, music, & cultural insights.

Contact: Jennifer Pickering, LEAF Executive Director

Jennifer@theleaf.com 828-68-MUSIC (686-8742)

Web: www.LakeEdenArtsFestival.org

LEAF Team in Rwanda Works Towards “Empowerment of Orphaned Youth through Music, Instruments & Mentors”.

A team of 4 from Lake Eden Arts Festival joined LEAF performer Jean Paul Samputu in his native country of Rwanda to work towards empowering and helping to create healthy futures for two groups of teen orphans: The Mizero Crew and The Nyanza Cultural Troupe. Most of these youth are ages 14-18, and were orphaned during the Genocide in 1994 when their entire families were murdered. Many of the orphans witnessed these horrific moments, and several have machete wounds. Several orphans are younger and are “Aids” orphans. In the beautiful small country of Rwanda there are 1 million orphans. Orphans will play a vital role in determining the future of the country. As the MIZERO Crew sings in a song they wrote with Jean Paul, “We are the future of humanity, we are the world in our community”.

During our short time to start and implement the LEAF Rwanda project, we had a dynamic agenda of actions and projects to quickly and effectively make an impact on these youths' lives. We were presented by many surprising issues; however, as a team we looked at the challenges of each day and kept in mind our mission (empowering through music) and our goals (provide instruments and mentors) and these INSPIRING and IMPRESSIVE KIDS!

TAKE ACTION! LEAF Team actions & program in Rwanda:

The MIZERO “HOPE” Crew is a group of 25 street orphans (we named them MIZERO which means, “hope” in Kinyarwanda). The Mizero Crew has raised themselves from the ages of 2-4 years old on the streets of Kigali. They are survivors and a “BAND OF BROTHERS”. They have an established order within: “Chief” David, “another Chief” Jean Paul, and Manual is the “translator for English”. These youth have experienced the worst of humanity; however, they have evolved into amazing beings. They are respectful, kind, punctual, clean, talented, bilingual, literate, basically physically healthy, comfortable with hugs and expressing emotions, and they have “MIZERO”. These are 25 beings that have hope for a positive future IF they have support for learning, housing, and guidance on how to support themselves positively.

- **Our “work” with The Mizero Crew**

- Matching the kids with guitars and Rwandan Drums & Sticks.
 - The large beautiful Drums were purchased locally and we brought the guitars from US.
- Hiring a Drum & Song Teacher, Leonard, to mentor the youth twice a week.
- Securing a safe place a local community center for the Drums & Guitars to be kept and for Mizero Crew to have regular mentoring lessons & workshops.
- National Health Cards were secured for all the Mizero Crew for one year.
- Interactive exchanges of break-dancing, hip hop, acro-yoga, photographing and video interviews to establish trust and relationships.

- Visiting the “safe” place they sleep, a dirt parking lot with no cover and worn out cardboard for mats.
- A formal banquet for ALL the kids with at a local restaurant.
- Presentation of song, dance and drums by the Mizero Crew that they had prepared for us. Their talent was outstanding and surprising.
- Mentoring with Jean Paul Samputu. Lots of group speeches.
- Presentation of Holiday Backpacks filled with supplies: flip-flops, t-shirt, hat, toothbrush & paste, Swiss army tools, notebooks & pens, pillow & blankets for some, snacks, and miscellaneous items.

The Nyanza Cultural Troupe, a group of TALENTED orphans, invited up to the rural highlands for a cultural dance and drum presentation. These orphans have “home family” matches, live in a supportive rural community, and have one teacher/mentor who works with them several times a week. Upon arrival to the dilapidated genocide appeal court, we were all a bit skeptical. To our surprise, 20-30 youth led by Francoise Uwimbabazi, put on a “world class presentation”. “If I had seen this 3 hour Rwandan cultural presentation at the Kennedy Center it would have been just as impressive”. The troupe is the perfect “Cultural Ambassador” for Rwanda and The Rwandese Orphans. Francoise later revealed that they had rented all the costumes and drums to create this day for us, and her biggest challenge is her solo effort and lack of supplies and funds. LEAF worked with Nyanza in these ways:

- Matching the troupe with Rwandan Drums & Sticks.
- Donating fund to purchase costumes.
- With instruments and costumes they will be able to do local weddings and more performances.

Update since Project Started in December:

- Both groups were part of the Christmas Eve Concert at Kigali Stadium for Orphans. The Nyanza Troupe was a featured performance group.
- Mizero crew has attended twice weekly drum and song mentor sessions with Leonard. He reports they are doing great and requests additional funding for dance workshops.
- The kids have regular access to their instruments and are using them!
- The Mizero Crew will give their 1st concert at Hotel Okapi this week for an international peace group that contacted us via the Black Mtn News Article.
- There are a few possibilities for housing. Securing housing does require raising more substantial funds for rent, mattresses, utilities, and a few other basics.
- There is now a formal contract with the community center and they are very pleased with the youth & the LEAF program.

Keep TAKING ACTION! Future Hopes for Mizero:

- Raise funds to continue the MUSIC MENTORING program that within a month has had huge success and impact.
- To secure housing and education for the Mizero Crew.
- To help arrange regular performances for the Mizero Crew at local restaurants and hotels which would provide regular sources of food, tips, and future jobs.
- Encouragement & Support
- Find and fund a guitar teacher.

Future Action for Nyanza:

- Bring the Nyanza Cultural Troupe on a tour in America that would serve as a Rwanda Cultural Ambassador and as a fundraiser for all the Rwandan orphans.
- Françoise has requested funding for English tutoring lessons.

FUNDING: LEAF International Rwanda was funded by Lake Eden Arts Festival and several individual donors and local businesses. This is a non-profit grassroots and collaborative efforts. Please note we each donated our time and paid for all our expenses. Sarah did receive a WNC Scholarship to participate. ALL \$3,100 FUNDS raised were 100% used for the youth.

Helping Create a positive future for these Rwandan Youth.

Send donations to: LEAF, 377 Lake Eden Rd, Black Mtn, NC 28711 att: Rwanda.

All donations are tax-deductible and will make such a significant difference now!

Interested in Starting a project anywhere to connect kids with instruments & mentors?

Contact us at info@theLEAF.com or 828/68-MUSIC.

RELECTIONS from the LEAF Rwanda Crew:

Sarah Hipp

- **The Mizero crew was amazing!** Despite their painful history and terrible living conditions they were still full of hope. They were respectful, honest, responsible and hardworking. They are survivors with smiling faces and loving hearts, ready to learn and make a difference in the world. Very inspiring!
- **The Nyanza group was very talented** with both dance and music. Their performance was an overwhelming experience. The dancing was amazing, the music and singing were powerful, and the emotion that filled the room from each dancer, singer and drummer created a moving atmosphere. World class
- I had a great time playing with all the **village children** at the community center. It was nice to be interacting despite the language barriers; children have a way of not getting frustrated and giving up but finding another way to interact. Pointing, acting out meanings, showing you how to do something and (most importantly) laughing and smiling.
- I was very impressed with **the people in Rwanda**. They were very curious, helpful, kind and caring. The people have learned to live together and make things work despite their difficult history. Rwandans are moving forward, learning from their history and making a difference for the future of their country.
- Hearing **Rwandan music** and seeing the children smile with joy every time they started drumming or singing was proof enough that music is healing, moving and life changing. Rwandan traditional music has a very complicated beat -- 16(?) count -- but it seemed to be a natural rhythm for these teens. Amazing!

Kate LeRoy

- **The Kids-** They were so eager and willing to learn. They showed each other and us the utmost respect and kindness.
- **Performance-** Both the Nyanza and Kigali kids showed us through performance that music and dance can make a difference in their lives. The times when they were performing the youth were excited and oozed self-confidence.

- **Humbling-** many of the kids could speak two if not three languages. They were talented in many ways and yet they were from the streets or lived in orphanages. They made do with what they had and when we visited them they took us in and made us feel just as welcome.
- **Progress-** in Rwanda the vision of progress was found throughout the city. People were proud of their country, their government and what changes were being made. From the clean streets to the well-maintained road system it was obvious that positive things were happening in the country since the genocide.
- **Opportunity-** Everyone that we worked with could see the opportunities that were in front of them. The Nyanza kids have the opportunity to become the ambassadors of Rwanda. The Kids in Kigali have the opportunity to make a change in their lives and in others lives through performance and the adults surrounding the youth have the opportunity to make a positive change in the kids and in their country.

Aaron Worrell

- **THE PEOPLE.** The grace, honesty, pride and hospitality of the people of Rwanda is profound and amazing. That a people could move forward together from one of the most horrific episodes in human history is awe-inspiring. Everyone we encountered from people on the street to cab drivers to the staff at the genocide memorial were open, honest and wanted to tell the story of Rwanda without mincing words, while also emphasizing the future and the hope they all feel. I for one believe that they have so much to be proud of and want to do what so many people asked and "tell the story" of Rwanda then and now. It is a country of great culture and beauty and we cannot let the dark part of the history (which we all ignored at the time) be all that the outside world knows about this amazing place.
- **THE KIDS.** These kids, some of whom are young men, have more to be proud of than most adults I know. The resilience they showed in the face of such true horror is humbling. Hearing the stories of these children and how they stuck together and raised each other over the last 12 years, knowing that they are just a few of a million whose parents, brothers and sisters were murdered is so humbling. The smiles, the wonder at merely being acknowledged, the young man who reached out and held my hand and told me about his life as we walked down the road; these are friends I will not forget and who I feel my life is tied to from now on.
- **Beauty.** Rwanda is stunningly beautiful. Kigali is clean, safe, open and hospitable in a way that rivals most western cities, let alone a "third world" country. The culture, from the music and food to the art and language is rich, deep and amazing. The Rwandan countryside is lush and green with rolling hills as far as the eye can see. The famed Hotel Milles Collines (Hotel Rwanda) takes it's name from the French phrase for "thousand hills", a slogan for Rwanda. I was reminded of a sort of tropical Appalachians. The small towns throughout the countryside are clean and bustling with activity. Small agricultural plots checker the hillside like a quilt, while well-built homes lay nestled under the shade of banana groves. Steers and goats graze by the side of the road, watched over by young boys. Women and children in bright clothing (western suits for the men), walk in groups, laughing and talking as they go about the business of the day. Simply a gorgeous country.

- **Hope and change.** I find myself thinking a lot about the hope that has been inspired in me by this trip. Hope for healing in Rwanda, our own country, and the rest of the world. It is amazing what four people with some determination, an idea, and a few thousand dollars (thank you donors!) managed to accomplish by ourselves. EVERYONE can make a change, one person at a time. It means so much and is easier than one might think. The world is global and all people everywhere are our family.
- **5-Music!** Music is the main love of all of us at LEAF. We witnessed the healing power and the ability to communicate across borders that the language of music provides. Hearing the kids drum and sing for the first time was so powerful. Listening, surrounded by orphans as they sang "we are the future of humanity" moved us all to tears. I knew then we were doing something good and they were right; they truly are the future. Music is everywhere in Rwanda. The beauty of spending a sunny African Sunday morning in church, surrounded by the swelling voices of thousands as they sing the most joyful music I have ever heard is a experience all people should be lucky enough to have.

Jennifer

- **SLEEP.** A little MIZERO kid " Rasta" (he loves Rasta music) took us to see where they sleep- it is so much more desperate than we imagined.... in the back of an open red dirt parking lot with surly guards with stick & guns they sleep on worn out cardboard the guards lock the gate at night so they feel "safe".
- **FOOD.** EVERY kid had a place at the banquet table..it is important they feel respected and worthy. They were awesome! I cannot imagine a group of American teens that had been orphaned for 10 years being so organized and respectful. Fantas and HUGE heaps of food were brought and the kids ATE ATE ATE and of course wanted their photos taken. It is only one meal but it was such a moving meal and building of trust and respect. Help to create a "stable" food source is one of our goals.
- **NYANZA CONCERT.** The floor was bare concrete. The genocide tribunal courtroom was about to be used for one of the most magnificent performances we have ever been privileged to experience. The drums began. The children in Rwandan costumes came out and the dance and performances began.... 20+ children with only ONE leader Francoise created a world-class event in the midst of this tiny village. At the finale we ALL danced together and learned their moves and followed. It was a very happy time.
- **MUSIC HEALING.** Each time we gathered for music, these "street boys" came into their own power as they choreographed the complicated rhythms, a chorus group sang proudly, and the others danced without any boundaries or fears. They were so happy and so free in these moments. I do hope that through our website and our story we can raise some funds to continue to help them to HELP THEMSELVES. They are so close to being "OK"- they need our continued support, encouragement and some luck.
- **BOOKS & MOMS.** They are so eager TO LEARN! Manual, who speaks English and acted as our translator, gifted Kate with their ONLY book (of geography)- she told him to use it to teach the others. Then Manual, Chief David, & the kids sat down and wrote me a letter in English blessing us and stating, "they all understood I must go home to see my

mom". Coming from a group of 25 youth who last saw their mom 12 years ago under tragic conditions.... makes me cry as I write.

A few Travel Rules

- #2 If you are having any self-esteem issues- start a small program in Africa where they write songs using your name often.
- #5 act like the GOAT skewers taste really good.
- #76...do not adopt 25 orphan elephants.

Mizero Crew Photo Gallery Link

<http://www.kodakgallery.com/l.jsp?c=rfnngi2t.8siavi6l&x=0&y=-m107zy>

Nyanza Cultural Troupe Photo Gallery Link

<http://www.kodakgallery.com/l.jsp?c=rfnngi2t.67vpipbh&x=0&y=mx2u47>

PRESS:

Black Mountain News and also printed in Asheville Citizen Times

LEAF brings musical healing efforts to Rwanda

by Andy Gabel, Staff writer published January 17, 2007

<http://www.citizen-times.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070117/BLACKMOUNTAINNEWS0103/70116033/1117/blackmountainnews>

Sylva Herald

http://www.thesylvaherald.com/html/local_volunteer_helps_bring_mu.html