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CULTURE

Uganda's Sosolya Undugu Dance Academy delights German audiences

A group of young students from a dance academy in the Ugandan capital Kampala have been holding fans spellbound with spectacular performances on their German tour.



Accompanied by a variety of drums the young students gyrate with vigor, much to the admiration of the audience.

The academy was founded in 1993 by Br. Mark L. Mugwanya in 1993. His aim was to support socially disadvantaged and vulnerable children, as well as the youth from Kampala's sprawling slums.

The group's leader and trainer, Ssenuga Devis Edgar told DW, that their aim is to help needy children by providing education and material support.

"We help them (children) go to school, provide them with food and for those who stay at the center we also provide them with medication; we make sure that through their talent they can live a life of their dreams," said Edgar.

Through their well choreographed dancing and drumming skills the group has audiences in the German cities of Darmstadt and Wolfsburg. The message in their music is one of hope; it emphasizes the resilience and beauty of their culture. They hope that well-wishers will not only enjoy the music but also gain some insight into the difficulties they face in their lives.

As well as dance performances, the group also stages workshops while on tour.

Their trip to Germany was made possible by 16-year-old Lena Glemser, a tenth grader, who lives in Darmstadt. She watched the group while she was visiting an orphanage in Uganda accompanied by her

mother three years ago. At the time, she was only thirteen years old.

Lena opened a website and with publicity from newspapers, radio and TV was able to raise donations with which the group was partly able to travel to Germany. But much of the support that enabled the group to travel to Germany came from *kinderkulturkarawane*, a local NGO in Hamburg. It invites youth groups especially the disadvantaged from all over the world, to come and show as well as share their talents here in Europe.

For Lena, meeting the group was evidently a momentous occasion.

"Since three years I have a social project for kids in Uganda. I have been to Uganda with my mother and we met Sosolya," said Lena.

"We were so impressed. They are just wonderful and I loved the music and the drums. We decided to help them and bring them to Germany. So we collect money through events like this."



With earnings from the Germany tour the academy will be able to pay school fees for the young boys and girls

'Sosolya Undugu'

Sosolya is a name of a graceful and beautiful bird found in Uganda, while Undugu is a Swahili word for brotherhood. The group's name is a combination of these two words. And through their graceful dance performances on stage, coupled with the brotherhood at the academy, the young students have found a sense of belonging as well as a place they can call home.

One of those enjoying the benefits of the Sosolya Undugu Dance Academy is 14-year-old lead singer and dancer Sulaybah Namagambe. She lost her father at a tender age.

But after being taken in by the academy she is now in her tenth grade at a boarding school. It's rare opportunity for a needy child in Uganda .

"I feel happy because we live as one family. Like brothers and sisters. That is what Undugu means to me. I lost my father but they gave me that love so I feel comfortable and I feel again like am with my parents," she said.

Hope restored

The group's leader Senoga Davis said the Sosolya Undugu Dance Academy welcomes needy children and does not segregate them. "We work with all sorts of children-- the needy and orphans. Most of

them stay at the center while others live in slums around Kampala," he said.

Senoga added that the group wants to raise funds by touring to ensure that the children at the academy receive a good education.



"Our struggle is to make this project (dance academy) move on. This is our first international tour we have had and it is an achievement in itself. Another great achievement is that those who went through the academy are now giving back as leaders and trainers; we are always happy to see that someone like Sulaybah is now leading others," said Senoga.

Audiences were left yearning for more. At the end of one performance, Angelika Renk, a resident of Darmstadt, was full of praise.

"I am very impressed. I think they are really professional. They are young but well trained and really good at their traditional dance and music," she told DW.

From Germany the group travels to Austria for more performances and workshops.

Intensive rehearsals are essential to carry out such dancing routines

Lena hopes that through her project called --Making a Difference, many teenagers in Germany will feel inspired and help their peers from developing countries to achieve their dreams.

For support to the academy visit their website sosolya.com or Lena's webpage: lenagoesafrica.de

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