



**TCR
Project 2**

Supported by the Commonwealth Foundation



CHORAL PROJECT

Project leader – Joy Hill

**The African Children's Choir
The Alpha and Omega School Choirs
The African Outreach Academy
The Kampala Music School
The CHOGM Festival Choir
Young singers from the UK's specialist
schools and junior conservatoires**

**Kampala, Uganda - November 2007
By Joy Hill**



Joy Hill with a young member of the African Children's Choir and with members of the international choral group after the CPF Closing Ceremony

Prior to my arrival in Kampala the information gathered by Alison Cox and Martin Wess on their recce trips enabled me to develop very good email relationships with the schools and their teachers, to outline some ideas of what we might do in the workshops and to send them some music and recordings that I intended to use.

However, I was not prepared for the high level of performance and musicality of these children and their teachers. Their hunger to learn and quick response to the presentation of every musical idea were both moving and humbling.



Pupils from the African Outreach Academy and the Alpha Omega School



My aim was that the UK music students from the Royal College of Music Junior Department in London, The Purcell School in Hertfordshire and Chethams School in Manchester (six students in all) would help to present the workshops by teaching the music alongside me and that we would also have the chance to hear the children from the choirs in Kampala singing some of their traditional songs. The UK students would therefore have close contact with the Ugandan students through the teaching of the music rather than merely be observers in the workshops.



Students and teachers from the UK working with Joy Hill and the Ugandan choirs



Joy and her students from 'The Commonwealth Resounds!' teaching the Ugandan choirs 'Roads' specially arranged for the CPF by Steve Dobrogosz

I realised that we might not have access to a piano, (although we did in fact at the first session and so had the privilege of also working with Nick Oliver, the accompanist from Chethams), and so was prepared to do everything unaccompanied. However, I also had the opportunity to work alongside Keith Waithe and so had a piece especially arranged which featured his flute accompaniment. Keith also worked with the young singers on his 'vocal gymnastics' and, between us all, we created interactive musical workshops where everyone was learning from each other. The sessions were fun and an enormous amount of musical learning was achieved in a very short time.



Joy Hill, Keith Waithe and all the young singers in a choral workshop (above)



UK students teaching children a song, assisted by a Ugandan teacher



Nicholas Oliver accompanying



Choosing music and suitable texts for such an occasion is challenging as it is easy to think that many pieces might be unsuitable: perhaps because of the style of singing required or because of the dominance of the cultural background within a text that may not readily transfer its meaning to a different cultural context. Above all, as the time we had together was limited, and the music needed to be learnt quickly.

Note from Alison Cox

Joy's precious rehearsal time with the Ugandan choirs was eroded further by the late start of the project which makes it all the more remarkable that they were able to create such an accomplished and memorable performance for the CPF Closing Ceremony. A.C.



Detail from the CPF Closing Ceremony performance

I also worked with The African Children's Choir on Bob Chilcott's piece 'Can You Hear Me?' which preceded the performance of the Mozart Requiem in Namirembe Cathedral. Bob Chilcott was delighted that his piece would be performed and sent his best wishes to the children and their teachers.



Performance of Mozart's Requiem at Namirembe Cathedral



The African Children's Choir singing in Namirembe Cathedral as part of the 'Thanksgiving for Peace'

Note from Alison Cox

Joy also provided some valuable coaching for the 100-voice adult choir, assembled from churches all over Kampala in a specially-named enterprise 'Churches Together for CHOGM'. Organisers in Uganda suggested that we call this choir 'The CHOGM Festival Chorus'. This name was unofficially adopted; however it was important also to acknowledge each of the individual choirs involved! A.C.

The song 'Roads' written by pianist-composer Steve Dobrogosz, is about the different roads we can choose to take in life: 'high, low, safe, dark, hard, good.' The children we were working with had limited choices in life due to extreme poverty and traumatic childhoods dominated by war and the effects of Aids, often leaving them and their siblings as orphans from an early age. The choir schools and the educational support programmes resulting through the network of the Commonwealth have now given the children some choices for their futures. We learnt that, as a result of gaining a place in the choirs, they would have financial support to ensure that they can study at University. This piece seemed ideal and so was especially arranged for me and generously given to the project by the composer.



Steve Dobrogosz



Bob Chilcott

In my experience of working closely with composers, it is this direct link with the performers and the composers that really enhances the creative act of performing music. Having a piece of music especially arranged for the children was special and exciting for everyone and, we discovered, a new experience for the young singers in Kampala

I would recommend that future musical projects always include a piece of music created especially for the occasion. It is not a difficult thing to arrange but if high profile composers are to be used, a longer time scale than the few months we had to prepare for Uganda is essential.

Note from Alison Cox

The young singers who volunteered to come to Uganda with Joy Hill spent a lot of time researching the choirs and their livelihoods before the project. They also organised special fundraising concerts and events in the UK. One enterprising young musician, Alexandra Welbourn raised almost £4,000 at one concert alone, supported by friends and colleagues at St Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School, and St Augustine's Church, Tunbridge Wells, and when in Uganda was able to donate money to the choirs to help them with their work. Since returning to the UK, the young people have been investigating ways to help generate ongoing support for the choirs. Our TCR team will follow their progress with great interest and report all relevant updates in our future documentation. A.C.



Alexandra Welbourn donating £1,000 to the Alpha Omega Choir from her fundraising efforts

We were all extremely impressed by the calibre and outstanding professionalism of the teachers in the schools, many of whom had grown up within the African Children's Choir. They were eager to extend their knowledge of music and choral singing, especially the Western tradition, of which they had had no experience.

Teaching the *Lacrimosa* from the Mozart Requiem to the African Children's Choir, which they subsequently sang at the cathedral, was their first experience of singing Western repertoire beyond Western pop music. The teachers were very apprehensive at first but seemed to be thrilled that we considered them capable of it.



Group showing young singers from the Alpha Omega School, The African Outreach Academy and The Commonwealth Resounds with Joy Hill, Keith Waithe, Nicholas Oliver and Ugandan teachers from the schools



Firm friendships were formed between members of the different choirs

Note from Alison Cox

Speaking to the young UK-based singers after this wonderful project, all emphasised how much they had learned from the Ugandan children and their teachers. This kind of mutual respect and empathy between young people from different cultural traditions might well be an excellent basis for sustainable partnerships in the future. A.C.

THE COMMONWEALTH PEOPLE'S FORUM CLOSING CEREMONY

Thursday 22nd November
The Nile Hall, Africana Hotel, Kampala

The choirs all performed together during this ceremony, directed by Joy Hill in the presence of Dr. Mark Collins, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, Warren Nyamugasira, Chairperson of the Commonwealth People's Forum Steering Committee and the High Commissioner of Trinidad and Tobago

The African Children's Choir, African Outreach Academy and the Alpha Omega School Choir all performed individually during the ceremony



The African Outreach Academy (above) and the Alpha Omega School (below)





The African Children's Choir



A distinguished international audience at the CPF Closing Ceremony loved all the young choirs and gave them a standing ovation at the end



The grand finale, where all the choirs came back on stage together with the young international singers performing 'Roads' by Steve Dobrogosz, accompanied by Keith Waithe (flute), Daniel Smith (djembe) and conducted by Joy Hill was absolutely spectacular!



The audience stood and applauded loudly!



*An award was presented to the choirs
by Her Excellency the High Commissioner*

After Kampala – Joy Hill writes

I am now trying to create an opportunity for the teachers of the young choirs in Kampala to apply for choral conducting scholarships through the International Federation of Choral Music, of which I am a member, to enable them to attend courses on choral conducting outside Uganda. This, in turn, would have an obvious positive impact on their work with their young students in Kampala.

Since our return from Uganda, contact with the choirs in Kampala and with the students from the UK is still strong. My students from RCMJD are now setting up their own choirs in their schools in the UK with the aim of doing concerts to raise money for the young choirs in Kampala. Money raised by the students in the UK has already been given to help to buy choir costumes for the Ugandan choirs and, we hope in the future, a keyboard will be bought for the schools.

We worked with highly talented Ugandan musicians who have the desire to learn about music beyond their own culture and, we learnt, through the African Children's Choir particularly, are given the chance to travel and meet 'the world'. However, having international musicians visiting them in their own work places, as a result of CHOGM, was something that they cherished and were very grateful for.

The UK students had direct experience of working with the young singers and have been inspired to work with choirs in this way in the future and the young Ugandan singers seemed to love having the opportunity to interact with so many new people.

My student from RCMJD, Dan Smith, said that:

"I was touched by the loving hospitality of the Ugandan people and learned a lot from their approach to music as a communal activity which brings people together. I especially enjoyed singing with the African Children's Choir and accompanying them at Namirembe Cathedral."



Dan Smith with some of the young choir members

"I loved Uganda. I met so many wonderful musicians, and was astounded by the children we worked with. Their ability is outstanding and they are extremely talented. I feel privileged to have worked with African Children's Choir, and very much hope to see them again in the future. The most striking thing about Uganda is the people there and their willingness to learn; you cannot help but want to learn too. The whole experience is one I'll never forget: from visiting an Infectious Diseases Institute to dancing under the stars to an African band. I am so grateful to Joy Hill for enabling me to experience such an amazing opportunity". (Charlotte Walters)



Charlotte Walters (centre) and friends listening to the young Ugandan choirs

I have been deeply touched by the experience of working with the children from the schools in Kampala, along with the music students from the UK and my special colleagues who came together through 'The Commonwealth Resounds' and would like to extend my thanks to Alison Cox and Martin Wess for inviting me to take part and to the Commonwealth People's Forum for supporting the project. I would also like to acknowledge the particular support of Marianne Welbourne, a parent from RCMJD, Margaret Moore, from the Purcell School and Peter Harvey, my colleague from RCMJD. Without them, I would not have been able to take the students from the UK to work alongside the children in the Ugandan choirs.

I consider that the project was highly successful and that the cross-cultural exchange and musical learning that took place will result in long-term artistic growth for all who were involved.



Joy Hill
Choral Director and Group Leader
THE COMMONWEALTH RESOUNDS!

Documentation by Joy Hill and Alison Cox
Photographs by Martin Wess, Margaret Moore and Nicholas Oliver



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