

## Week in Uganda was mind-broadening for HC profs

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The music Tony Brown and his accompanist Ken Rodgers heard while in northern Uganda in June reminded them of the spirituals Brown, a baritone, sang in that country and elsewhere.

Brown, Hesston College artist-in-residence, and Rodgers, a member of the college's music faculty, spent a week in war-torn areas of northern Uganda at the invitation of a local group, Friends of Orphans (FRO).

"We were the first people Friends of Orphans had taken to the war areas of the north," Brown said.

"The people responded well to our music and the spoken word," he added.

In a big park in Kitgum, an estimated 10,000 people from far and wide, some who walked long distances, attended a long afternoon program.

"Churches and groups performed and danced," Brown said. "It was a colorful, exciting time of celebration."

The people included those still living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps.

As the featured guest, Brown led the crowd in the singing of several spirituals. He also offered words of hope and encouragement, commenting on their struggles as victims of war.

"We are one humanity and your pain is our pain," he told the crowd. "We will take what we have learned back to the United States and tell your story."

In Pader, where FRO is based, Brown and Rodgers experienced a five-hour ceremony which included graduation for 21 child mothers (former abductees) who had been trained at the FRO's vocational training center for nine months in sewing and tailoring. Each received a sewing machine, supplies, and some start-up money.

Another activity was the laying of the cornerstone for the Anthony

Brown Baritone Comprehensive School. It will provide primary and secondary education for students who are former abductees or orphans.

“One thing I noted was that 300 to 400 years ago, my ancestors were stolen or sold from this continent,” he said. “In the U.S., they were pillaged, killed, raped and held captive to work against their will. Despite those experiences, we survived and overcame.

“I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me,” he added. “It is a special moment for me to be here, I told them, coming full circle to receive this great honor. We are one people.”

The audience then broke out in applause.

“All of the songs we heard,” Rodgers noted, “were about what is happening to them right now--about the 20 years of war, the child mothers, the Lord’s Resistance Army and its leader, Joseph Kony, who among other things abducted child soldiers in the north.

“It reminded me so much of the spirituals that we shared,” Rodgers said. “Here the music was also functional and wonderful.”

“The music came right out of the fabric of the people’s lives,” Brown added.

In the past 20 years, the LRA abducted an estimated 20,000 children to help their war effort in northern Uganda. Pader was their center of operation until February of this year.

At the height of the war, an estimated 1.6 million people lived in IDP camps, government-run camps to protect the people.

“The LRA and its estimated 3,000 fighters have been allowed free reign in the north for 20 years,” Brown said. “Part of our role was to say that it is our pain, too. We also tried to challenge people, especially Christians and those in the central and southern parts of Uganda, to have some compassion for the victims of the war in the north.”

Brown and Rodgers visited two IDP camps.

“The conditions were less than adequate—dense population, poor hygiene, malnutrition, cholera, and malaria. It wasn’t pretty,” Brown noted.

“The political history of ethnic differences in the country is part of the problem and is not unique to Uganda,” Brown said. “Much of Africa’s sub-Saharan region struggles with ethnic conflict.”

One of the local organizations helping the former child soldiers and orphans, including the child mothers mentioned earlier, is Friends of Orphans. Founded in 1999 by Anywar Ricky Richard, the scope of its

present ministries is incredible.

It pays school tuition fees, provides peace-building activities including training in conflict resolution, provides income-generating skills, provides mosquito nets and training in the identification and marking of land mines, and offers its vocational training center, which trains former child soldiers in carpentry and child mothers in tailoring.

The vocational training center is called “Atim Ki Koma,” which means, “Let Me Do It Myself.”

“FRO and others recognize that the 33 or so non-governmental organizations—like the U.N., UNICEF, World Bank, and so on—will eventually leave,” Rodgers said. “FRO is an organization of local people committed to a local cause which will continue.”

Before they left Uganda, Brown and Rodgers gave a concert in Kampala (in the south) on Saturday, June 24. Then Brown sang in two services at a church Sunday morning.

“One learning for me,” Brown said, “is how what we saw in Uganda is part of a larger phenomena in much of Africa which was colonized by the Europeans. The colonial empires were created when European leaders met in Europe and objectively drew country lines irrespective of where tribes were located.

“In many cases, they put tribes and groups together who hadn't lived together before. As long as the Europeans were in charge, there were no civil wars. But when they pulled out, what happens?

“Over the past 50 years, we have seen the fruits of the colonial era,” Brown said. “It’s a complicated state of affairs and the solutions to the ethnic and political struggles in Africa are not easily found.”

Brown and Rodgers were impressed with the extent to which the people in the war-torn regions of northern Uganda live in hope.

“We came to bring hope, but we left having been strengthened by the courage and commitment of the war victims,” Brown said. “We stand in solidarity with them in their efforts to regain their dignity and to resume their normal lives.”

**Courtesy of Phil Richard, Hesston College director of communications**

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