



Children's choruses sing for the sake of other kids

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Brenda Morie holds an orphaned child at New Life Home in Nairobi, Kenya. The organization nurtures orphaned and abandoned babies in Kenya so they can be adopted. (photo courtesy of Brenda Morie)

The children's choir at Mount Zion Baptist Church usually sings at Sunday services. But last month, they left their church sanctuary for a studio - and became one of several youth choruses with a cause. They sang "The Presence of the Lord is Here," one of 16 tracks on a CD recorded at the Film Scoring Stage at the N.C. School of the Arts.

"That's one of our best selections," said Addie Jabbar, the group's director. "We wanted the children to know they weren't alone, that the presence of the Lord was with them."

The "children" are the hundreds of thousands of babies orphaned or abandoned by AIDS in Kenya. The CD, *Amani Means Peace*, is the latest effort of the Amani Children's Foundation of Winston-Salem to raise money for a Kenyan organization called New Life Home, which nurtures the babies back to health so that Kenyans and others can adopt them.

Amani takes its name from the Swahili word for peace. The CD includes a performance of one song by each of 15 children's choirs from as many area schools and churches. The CD's 16th track comes courtesy of three children singing "E Mungu Nguvu Yetu," the national anthem of Kenya. All told, about 800 choristers participated, most in the elementary and middle-school grades.

All proceeds from the recording's sales will go to New Life Home, which has homes in Nairobi and Kisumu but hopes to establish operations in all of Kenya's provinces, said Jane Stephens, one of the foundation's founders. So far, 5,000 copies of the CD have been made.

"I hope we sell all of them by Christmas," Stephens said, noting that \$1,000 is usually enough to take in an abandoned baby and care for him until he is adopted.

Several participants said that the children's involvement in *Amani Means Peace* both raised their awareness of the consequences of the AIDS epidemic in Africa and showed them that they could do something about it.

"If we don't get ... them to take care of the world around them, the world won't get fixed," said Diane Caruso, who directed a choir from Redeemer School in "African Noel."

A benefit CD featuring several children's choirs doesn't come along every day. *Amani Means Peace* owes its

creation to a little luck, a lot of vision and even more organization.

The luck part came in when Brenda Morie, a local recording artist, heard last summer that her friend Marcia Vaughn was traveling with other Amani supporters to Kenya. (The trip, which Morie would join, took place in October.) Morie, who had always wanted to travel to Africa, became intrigued, wanted to become more involved with Amani beyond the trip - but didn't know how. So she met Stephens for coffee and began discussing some possibilities.

"We came to this conclusion about how much I love kids, how much I love music and how much I love Africa," Morie said. "All of a sudden this project mushroomed."

The organizers reserved NCSA's Film Scoring Stage studio for two days in November. John Sisti, Morie's husband and an instructor at NCSA's film division, said that he would do the recording's editing, then mix and master the final product. Stephens still can't believe her good fortune, noting that many other organizations would love to have the chance to use NCSA's state-of-the-art facilities.

"They can't," she said. "It belongs to the School of the Arts. The fact that they shared it with 800 children from Winston-Salem is amazing."

The next - and more challenging - step was to round up the choirs and organize their participation in the recording. There wasn't much time to make the necessary arrangements: Prospective choir directors first heard of the project in September. Morie, Stephens and other organizers would be gone for much of October. Recording would come in the middle of November.

Moreover, choral directors would need permission from their principals to take students out of class. They would need extra rehearsals. Transportation would have to be lined up, parking spaces at NCSA found. The singers would have to be insured.

Morie, undaunted, said that she and others made a lot of phone calls. "It was whoever got wind of it in September was on board first," she said. The only requirement was that each group sing a different song about Africa, peace or children and that each track use light accompaniment, so that the children's voices would be highlighted.

"It wasn't about the wrong word or the wrong note," Morie said. "It was about singing out and reaching the little babies and the people out there."

"There's a lot of heart and a lot of feeling," Sisti said. "You listen to it and you're getting the emotion."

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