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Soweto Marimba Youth League (SMYLE) Ready To Energize Audiences In Waterloo Region Cambridge Native, Michael Rea, Returns With The Kidz

By: Sue Fox

The Amazing Soweto Kidz?

In May 2006, a group of 26 talented, but apprehensive, teens from Soweto, South Africa began an unforgettable journey to Cambridge, Ontario A journey that made such an incredible impact on Cambridge that, literally, thousands of students in eleven high schools, will never forget the words..."Chicken, on your mark!"

The Soweto Marimba Youth League (SMYLE), an extension of the Soweto Marimba Kidz, is back to entertain and to raise awareness and money for victims of HIV/AIDS in Soweto, South Africa.

My husband and I have taught kids for 32 years, and we are truly humbled by the musical talent of SMYLE, who practice for hours daily, and still manage to keep up their school work in order to maintain their membership in the band. As the band members mature, they mentor kids from the Township of Soweto and pass on their skills to the next generation, so that the band is always evolving.

History of The Soweto Marimba Kidz and SMYLE



LIVE And In Person

Michael Rea, who is originally from Cambridge, was working in South Africa as a Corporate Social Responsibility Consultant, just happened to hear a marimba band playing in a marketplace in Johannesburg. Michael felt compelled to have them visit and entertain in Cambridge. In 2006, financial assistance to do this.

Johnny Hlaba (Coach) and Kgabo Setati (Director) of the Dr. Mary Malahlela Primary School, located in Dobsburg are the founders of The Soweto Marimba Kidz, of which SMYLE is an extension. Johnny is "a man who can play any musical instrument", started the group five years ago. He noticed kids hanging around the school with nothing to do. He asked Kgabo, "Can I teach them how to play the marimbas?" – And the rest is history! "The only real project is: Education First!"

As a result of Johnny's dedication, and many hours of practice, SMYLE'S repertoire is 500 songs. "They're always blowing, strumming, tapping, slapping and dancing with smiles on their faces that light up every stage they play

Music is only part of the "edutainment"

The concerts begin with the drummer, "Chicken", who waits for his cue, "Chicken, on your mark", to ignite the 22 musicians and four dancers. For a moment, the high school crowd is stunned, but only for a moment. The crowd is mesmerized by the Kidz playing the marimbas, steel drums, horns, and djembes! In fact, in 2006 some of the school kids became 'groupies' and followed the Kidz wherever they went, to Niagara Falls, St. Jacob's Market, African Lion Safari.

At the high schools, Michael Rea speaks about Aids and connects kids on both continents! I was there....I know I hear the proverbial 'pin drop' as he engages 1200 students, and you know that something amazing has happened

After the Kidz tour in 2006, Michael and his videographer, Kobus, returned in November of that same year to thank the community for their support, and to keep the Cambridge-Soweto memory alive. At that time, they presented a documentary where the Kidz reflected on their time in Cambridge, a community in which every kid has the opportunity to go to school, where family members don't die of AIDS, houses aren't surrounded by barbed-wire, and getting an education is as easy as turning on a tap, and, where most people are nice to you.

Since 2006 there are Cambridge students who still communicate with the Kidz. A few high schools have raised money for Cotlands orphanage, under the umbrella of the Stephen Lewis Foundation. One generous Cambridge businesswoman has agreed to pay for the university education of all 6 girls in the troupe just because she could.

One other interesting spin-off of the event, was the creation of a Cambridge Marimba band....a small group of school kids, who were keen to learn to play the wooden xylophones left behind by the Marimba Kidz. They formed a marimba band under the volunteer direction of a young, enthusiastic percussionist from Beyond the Clef music school.

Soweto Marimba Youth League (SMYLE) 2008 Season

Michael Rea has raised some of the money to bring the Kidz back to Cambridge, but your donations at the Fundraising events will be appreciated.

This time there will be 28 kids: 20 musicians and 8 dancers. Johnny, the dedicated music teacher, two chapeau department of Education representative and a Cotlands representative), and of course, Michael Rea. Assisting are many local volunteers, doing everything necessary to make the SMYLE 2008 Canada Tour a success.

Highlights of the 2008 SMYLE Tour will include visiting nine high schools, two primary schools, and five churches.

Friday May 30, 6:00 pm	Southwood Secondary School, Cambridge Relay For Life
Saturday May 31, 9:00 am	Busking at St. Jacob's Market
Saturday, May 31, 4:00 pm	Marimba Mingle at Dickie Settlement School Ticket holders only. Tickets \$15. Call Becky Barrie at 519-740-1230.

- Sunday, June 1, 9:00 am Forward Baptist Church, Myers Road
All welcome!
- Sunday, June 1, 1:00 pm Sheffield United Church
All welcome!
- Saturday June 7, 9:00 am to 11:00am Cambridge Farmer’s Market
- Saturday, June 7, 3:00pm - 5:00 pm RONA, Pinebush Rd.
- Saturday, June 7, 6:00 pm Open percussion jam session at
Mill Race Park Cambridge
All percussionists welcome to join in!
- Sunday June 8, 9:00 am – 6:00 pm Cedarcreek Baptist Church in Ayr.
All welcome!
- Sunday, June 8, 6:00 pm Salvation Army Church in Cambridge
All welcome!
- Monday June 9, 7:00 pm Hillside Lake Park Concert
Hwy. 24A to Paris
- Tuesday June 10, 7:00 pm Cambridge Air Cadets Armoury
Ainslie Street, Cambridge
- Friday, June 13, all day Port Dover Motorcycle Festival
- Saturday, June 14, 10:00 am Busking at St. Lawrence Market, Toronto
- Saturday, June 14, 2:00 pm Harbourfront Centre, Toronto
- Saturday, June 14, 6:00 pm Galt Collegiate Institute
Mercedes-Benz Classic Mile
- Sunday, June 15, 9:00 am – 10:45 am Cedarcreek Church, Hwy. 97 West

All welcome!

(Evening WrapUp event also!)

All performances are free, but when you see the ‘GUMBOOT’ make sure you make a donation. Also, look for / that are on sale, like handmade baskets, CDs, t-shirts and jewelry. All donations will help to raise funds for th Cotlands, and the South African community where it is located, assisting South African families affected by H

For more information check out SMYLE www.smyle.co.za

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