

Press Release

PROMOTING RECONCILIATION IN RWANDA THROUGH THEATER

YOUTH BRIDGE GLOBAL WORKS WITH KIGALI ARTS CENTER TO STAGE “ROMEO & JULIET” WITH LOCAL ACTORS

(Kigali, July 11, 2013) The international team of Youth Bridge Global comprising Rwandans, Americans, Canadians and Britons are spending eight weeks working with Kigali’s Ishyo Arts Centre and Rwandan youth on a production of Shakespeare’s timeless classic *Romeo and Juliet*. *Romeo and Juliet*, in its exploration of the headstrong and passionate nature of adolescent love and the folly of prejudice and violence, is a highly appropriate play to mount in Rwanda. The play tells of young love, strong passion, and reckless clashes across generations and families; it does so in lyrical verse, humorous prose and with a range of fascinating characters. Nineteen years after the Rwandan genocide, our production of *Romeo and Juliet* addresses the futility of violence and the importance of commonality between people previously regarded as dissimilar. Many in our cast self-identify as survivors and have lost family members during the genocide. The actors are encouraged to utilize personal experiences to inform their understanding and adaptation of Shakespeare’s characters. As parallels are drawn between the story of *Romeo and Juliet* and individual experiences, the play’s relevance in Rwanda becomes further contextualized.

A distinctive feature of the production is that it will be performed in three languages: 60% of the play will be performed in Kinyarwanda, 20% in French and 20% in Shakespeare’s iambic pentameter English. Our adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* also includes traditional Rwandan dance and music, and has incorporated Rwandan symbolism into the set design. There will be seven free stage performances of *Romeo and Juliet* in Rwanda: five in Kigali, and two outside of the city. The cast is composed of actors ranging in age from 17-25, drawn from different communities within Kigali. Juliet is played by Tete Divine, who lost her father and siblings in the genocide, and the double-cast role of Romeo is taken by Muhamed Nshimiyimana, a traditional Rwandan dancer, and Eric Shema, whose father is a PhD candidate in Saskatoon, Canada. The

directing team is also collaborating with Rwandan youth to assist with costumes, make up, set construction and painting, lighting and administrative work.

Production Dates and Times

August 2nd, 3rd, 4th: SOS Technical School, Kigali.

August 7th and 8th : Kimisagara, Kigali.

August 9th: Gitarama, Rwanda

August 10th: Butare, Rwanda

About Youth Bridge Global

Youth Bridge Global is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that facilitates youth theatre productions in domestic and international developing communities ---particularly those that have been affected by war. Youth Bridge Global has previously presented eight Shakespearean productions in Majuro in the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific, one in China, and five in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina endured a horrendous war in the early 1990s that involved ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide. Our productions in Bosnia aimed to bring together the children of the former warring factions in this country in reconciliation ---the Muslim Bosniaks, the Catholic Croats, and the Orthodox Serbs. In a nation where schools are still segregated by ethnicity, multiethnic artistic ventures such as YBG's plays offered a rare opportunity for former "enemies" to commit to working in harmony on a project that transcended ethnicity. Our central goal in Rwanda is similarly one of reconciliation. Even more important than the final quality of the production (which we anticipate will be very high) is our concern for what our student actors learn during the production process--about themselves, cooperation, respect for individual differences, selflessness and art. Eight weeks of intensive effort on a demanding and world famous play under the close supervision of the directing team will surely lead to profound psychological and social growth on the part of the performers.

About Ishyo Arts Center

Ishyo Arts Center is one of the major Rwandan cultural organizations, which is committed to protecting freedom of expression and creation and providing the highest level of artistic excellence in all aspects of the performing and visual arts and one in which the education and development of a diverse community of artists and audiences is assured.

For more information on this project please visit youthbridgeglobal.org or our blog at ybgrwanda.com

For press information please contact Charlotte Pfeffer \ ccpfeffer@gmail.com \ +250789175734