On August 14, the International Programs office of IU South Bend sponsored a benefit performance of Rwandan traditional dance for the children affected by the genocide in Rwanda. The benefit, held in the IUSB Recital Hall, was organized by the Rwandese community in Indiana-Michigan. The fundraiser was very successful, and Gabrielle Robinson, Director of International Programs at IU South Bend, reports on the staging of this special performance.

The idea for the benefit came from two IU South Bend international students, Rose Illobigiza and Gaetan Gatete. At what then seemed the height of the Rwandan catastrophe—although it turned out to be only its beginning—Rose came to my office. She talked about the deaths of parents and close relatives. She told terrifying stories of children—brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces—who are lost, orphaned, or whose fate is unknown at this time. All the students from Rwanda have suffered such losses. And, Rose told me, with all their grief, or because of it, they felt impelled to act in some way. It is this urgent need to do something, to help especially the children affected by the terrible situation, that generated this dance performance.

Despite the tragic events motivating the benefit performance, the students put together a wonderful evening of Rwandan traditional dance. Gaetan Gatete did most of the organization, working with students from the area—from IU South Bend, Andrews University, Southwestern Michigan College, Western Michigan University, and Michigan State University. The event also grew to include John Bosco Bizimana, a professional dancer with the Intwali Cultural Troupe in Canada, and Esperance Mwiza, a singer from Oregon.

Everyone involved in the performance worked long hours, with dedication to make this event the best possible introduction to Rwandese culture. As I watched the rehearsals, I was not only impressed by the hard work of all the Rwandese students, but was also privileged to experience the wonderful fellowship of this group—their warmth, openness, and enthusiasm.

An especially popular part of the August 14 performance was “Intore,” or “Warriors’ Dance,” with its high energy generated as the male dancers, dressed in leopard-skin cloths and sisal headdresses simulating a lion’s mane, leapt about the stage shouting and drumming. In an elegant and sensual women’s dance, performers wore long skirts of black and white cloth with black tops and shining white shawls. There were also dances which reflected the country’s more recent experiences, such as “Mama, Ndore,” (‘Mama, I am staying—I am staying in Rwanda’). An emotional highlight of the evening was a poetry reading by a group of Rwandese children about the loss of their relatives and their hopes for a peaceful future. For the final dance the audience was invited to join the performers on stage. At first, they came hesitantly, but eventually most of the audience was dancing with the performers, trying out the steps and getting to know each other.

The local communities responded enthusiastically to this benefit performance for the children of Rwanda. We raised about $3,500, which will be used for food, clothing, medicine, and education.

GABRIELLE ROBINSON

Donations may be sent to:

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