University of Namibia Choir Performs at IU Bloomington and IU East

In late September, Indiana University hosted one of Africa’s most dynamic young choral ensembles, the University of Namibia Choir. Currently on its first tour to the United States, with sponsorship from the U.S. Department of State, the UNAM Choir spent three days in Indiana. They performed, gave workshops and interviews, and met fellow musicians and students on the IU Bloomington campus and at the IU East campus. IUE has had an important faculty and administrator exchange program with the University of Namibia for the past two years.

Created in 1997, the 50-strong UNAM Choir is considered one of the cultural gems of Namibian youth. It has toured in Africa and Europe, with performances that have been described as “a breathtaking kaleidoscope of the finest choral and dance traditions and cultural rituals of Namibia’s various indigenous communities and of the African continent itself, often woven into a tapestry of original musicals.”

The UNAM Choir prefers to sing in four-voice a cappella that is traditional in Africa, accompanied by drums or a small band. Their repertoire consists of religious, concert, traditional, and folk music. They sing in all Namibian languages, 5 African (Kwanyama, Ndonga, Herero, Lozi, Kwangali) and 3 European (German, English, Afrikaans). Their performance of Oshinyandwa, an original musical drama written by Namibian dramatist and actor Aldo Behrens, patron of the choir and UNAM’s dean of humanities and social sciences, has spellbound international audiences.

International recognition and support for the choir’s outstanding artistry has come from the Ford Foundation, the German Cultural Exchange Service (DAAD), the British Council, several diplomatic missions in Namibia, and several multinational corporations, such as Coca-Cola.

This year, thanks to support by the U.S. Department of State and invitations from the Yale Glee Club Choir, Rutgers University, and IU, a U.S. tour was finally made possible.

For this inaugural visit, the choir, with a smaller group of 20 voices under the direction of its conductor, Bonnie Pereko, produced a brand new program that was more dramatic, inspirational, and entertaining than anything it had done before.

The UNAM Choir’s visit to IUB included a public performance at the Grand Hall of the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center, where they also met informally with Wells Scholars Honors College undergraduates. They held joint classes with the International Vocal Ensemble taught by Mary Goetze of the School of Music, and the African American Choral Ensemble directed by James Mumford of the African American Arts Institute. Mumford was interested to see the differences in how Africans performed African-American gospel songs.

IU students reacted to the choir performance and class participation with overwhelmingly enthusiasm: “Having them there, learning from them, and then them learning from us—I really was totally pepped about that whole experience!” Other students added: “What a wonderful, wonderful performance and message,” and, “I was really inspired by the Namibian choir’s energy and spirit.”

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a chapter on “e-Government in Spain, Results and Prospects” for a forthcoming book.

Utiang P. Ugbe is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Community Economic Development, Southern New Hampshire University in Manchester, New Hampshire. His proposed dissertation research is on the communal management of dawadawa (African locust bean) trees and seeds in Obudu area of Cross River State, Nigeria. He is studying the effect of two variables (entrepreneurial acumen and social networks) on the economic benefit (in financial terms) derived by the dawadawa resource appropriators. He wants to find out if the strength of these variables—and consequently the amount of economic benefit derived by resource appropriators—differs among the women, men, and youths in the study community. After completing his doctoral studies, Ugbe wants to start an IFRI collaborative research center in Nigeria. Therefore, his main interest in the International Forestry, Resources, and Institutions (IFRI) training is to deepen his knowledge on the theoretical foundations of the study of common-pool resources, the IFRI framework and protocol, as well as the IFRI relational database and its applicability to the study of forest management and human well-being of forest communities in Nigeria.

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**VISITING SCHOLARS**

Their last performance was a videotaping at IU’s Radio and Television Services as guests of The Friday Zone. This weekly television show, hosted by Echo Shappell, is WTIU’s Emmy Award-winning children’s series airing on Public Broadcasting Service stations covering the Indianapolis metro area and south-central Indiana.

The choir spent their last full day in Indiana at IU East and offered an evening concert held at the Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Richmond. Tim Williams, director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs that sponsored the event, says, “This is just an example of the international reach of Indiana University, and it is an honor for IU East to assist in hosting our talented visitors from Namibia.”

The UNAM Choir’s visit to Indiana University was made possible through the auspices of the Office of International Programs, African Studies Program, Office of the Vice President for Institutional Development and Student Affairs, and the Office of the Chancellor at IU East. For further information, contact Shawn Reynolds, associate director of the Center for International Education and Development Assistance; telephone: (812) 856-5861; e-mail: shreynol@indiana.edu.

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