



BUD SIMPSON AND CO. PRESENTS

AVOICE4PEACE

Running time.....45 min.

Genre.....Documentary

Rating.....NR/All Audiences

Year.....2017

Language.....English

Country of Origin.....United States

Format.....1920 x 1080, 24fps, 16:9

Links.....Official website: www.avoice4peace.org/film

Official Facebook: www.facebook.com/avoice4peace

IMDB: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt6651470>

Twitter: www.twitter.com/avoice4peace

Hashtag: #avoice4peace

SYNOPSIS (long)

In 2015, a Kenyan choral director stood on a stage in Oxford, Mississippi, looked out at the audience, and asked a very simple question: *What if people all over the world stopped what they were doing and sang?*

Since that moment, Ken Wakia, director of the Nairobi Chamber Chorus, has worked tirelessly to find an answer - *could music bring peace to a troubled world?* he wondered. Alongside his colleague Kevin Fenton, an American choral director, and his choir's leading soloist, Maureen Obadha, Ken led the way to organizing an annual international peace concert. He would call it AVOICE4PEACE, Kenya would host the inaugural event, and the song at the center of it all was a prayer for peace called Ukuthula.

On September 21, 2016 - the International Day of Peace - singers and musicians from every corner of the globe sang Ukuthula along with Ken, Kevin, Maureen, and the Nairobi Chamber Chorus in a live stream of the concert. Inspired by the movement, thousands of people all over the world shared on social media videos of their choirs singing Ukuthula, and thousands more were touched by the message of this simple prayer for peace.

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The film begins just days before the concert, and Ken, Kevin, and Maureen travel across Kenya in search of music and peace; where they find one, they find the other. In the Mara, they discover the colorful and vibrant musical culture of the Maasai and learn that *in Africa, music is life*. Traveling on to Nairobi, a trip to Kibera demonstrates that where there is music, there is joy, despite the challenges and barriers of poverty and the realities of the day-to-day in one of Africa's largest urban slums. As the concert date steadily approaches, Ken and Maureen travel to Kakuma Refugee Camp and teach Ukuthula to a refugee choir of four hundred young people, who despite their situation are some of the world's most devoted peacemakers.

AVOICE4PEACE offers a rare glimpse at the vibrant and expressive musical culture of Kenya and illustrates the meaningful contribution of three musicians who are using music - humanity's universal language - to bring about peace in Kenya and around the world. The film explores concepts of international musical collaboration, the global refugee crisis, the socio-economic challenges and cultural differences that can trigger conflict, and the idea that peace begins and ends with the individual. It teaches us that violence does not occur in a vacuum; that it's the thousand little decisions we make every day that lead to an act of violence. This timely and unforgettable documentary plants the idea in our minds that if we would just stop what we are doing and sing together -- this most companionable of arts -- we could bring peace and harmony to ourselves and to others.

Participants include: Ambassador Robert Godec, the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya; UNHCR Representative Raouf Mazou; Ken Wakia, a Kenyan choral conductor and founding director of the Nairobi Chamber Chorus; Dr. Kevin Fenton, an American choral music educator and director of the Festival Singers of Florida; Maureen Obadha, a Kenyan soloist and member of the Nairobi Chamber Chorus; Peter Twycross, co-owner of an eco-camp in the Maasai Mara; and Theresa and Joseph Okello, two South Sudanese refugees at Kakuma Refugee Camp.



SYNOPSIS (short)

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



"We're on our way now!" I shouted into my cellphone, as our small van raced across a deserted Nairobi thoroughfare; the morning sun just beginning to kiss the sky. Our United Nations commuter plane was just moments from departing on its biweekly flight to Kakuma Refugee Camp, and my producer and I were going to miss it. We arrived at a small airport to a sea of slowly shaking heads and chiding looks. We were late, and there was seemingly no hope of getting on that plane. But thanks to a heated exchange between Ken and the airport staff, we found ourselves seated at the back of a prop-job, flying high above Kenya, on our way to one of the largest refugee camps in the world.

I realized several days after our visit that our late arrival was analogy for something much more significant. I was not only late to catching my flight to the camp, but I was late to understanding the burdens placed on refugees; late to putting faces to the countless numbers; and I was late to knowing what peace means to a refugee: *having a home*.

Refugees are the result of violence that is systemic - violence that has become an epidemic - where one's only recourse is to run from it. We never set out to make a film about refugees. But as we began to explore the causes and side effects of violence around the world, and the ways that music is used to de-escalate it, we naturally found ourselves at Kakuma.

When people ask me what it was like visiting Kakuma, I ask them to imagine the sounds of movement, the sound of color, of dress; I ask them to imagine a place where the cultures of fifteen nationalities converge in a single space: I ask them to imagine *a human symphony*.

And lastly, I ask them to imagine joy in it's purest form: joy as a result of *just being alive*. This surprises most people, as it surprised me when I first visited. How could there be an ounce of joy in this place? But the young ladies and gentlemen at Kakuma expressed an intrinsic joy that I've never known - and it was because they were simply alive, living on this precious Earth.

AVOICE4PEACE is a small window into the lives and music of Kenyans, including the refugees that call Kenya home. I hope that you let this film 'sink in', and I hope that it leaves you with renewed sense of humanity, and that it helps you discover - like I did - that it's never too late to bring a little more peace to this world.

VISIONARY'S STATEMENT



As a choir conductor, I very rarely interact with the audience whilst conducting a piece of music. I must say that this, in fact, is for me a good thing as it gives me a sense of security on stage. But for one song - Ukuthula - I usually sing with the choir. This is usually my opportunity to face the audience and see their reaction to our performance. In most cases, I tell the audience the meaning of the song after we perform it. That notwithstanding, the audience's reaction to this song has always been that of intense emotion which implied to me that they intrinsically understood the message in the song even without understanding the words.

On the evening of December 12, 2015, lights dimmed and we took the stage at the Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts at Ole Miss, standing all round the audience as we usually do in this song. An air of emotion filled the room as Maureen sung the first note. The audience adjusted their sitting position and you could hear a pin drop. I am always moved by the power of this song but this evening was different. Even with the dimmed lighting, I could see the audience absorbed in this song. In that moment, I thought to myself I cannot remember how many times we sang this song with the exact same reaction from the audience and what would happen if the world sang it together? We asked audiences at our successive concerts whether they would join us in singing this song to spread the message of peace around the world and the response was a resounding, YES! On September 21, 2016 several choirs and individuals joined the Nairobi Chamber Chorus and Festival Singers of Florida in performing this song as a prayer for peace in the world.

Both Festival Singers of Florida and the Nairobi Chamber Chorus undertook to lead the project AVOICE4PEACE. Dr. Kevin Fenton, the founding director of Festival Singers of Florida and myself thought of having a film as a legacy for this project. As teachers, both Kevin and I know the value of giving young people an opportunity to excel. I asked Kevin to find one of his former students who would like to do this for us. He reached out to Bud and the the journey (and final product) has exceeded all of our expectations. Bud started fundraising and the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi very kindly came in and financed the deficit which meant then that Bud could produce this film - a cultural artifact - worthy of the mission of AVOICE4PEACE.

CAST



Ken Wakia

Director, Nairobi Chamber Chorus

Ken Wakia is the director of the Nairobi Chamber Chorus and is the Cultural and Educational Affairs Specialist at the U.S. Embassy in Kenya. Ken is spearheading AVOICE4PEACE and was the first to suggest we create a film documenting the legacy of the AV4P project. Ken and Kevin Fenton are colleagues and have hosted each other's choirs on their international tours.



Kevin Fenton

**Director,
Festival Singers of Florida**

Dr. Kevin Fenton, conductor and artistic director of the Festival Singers of Florida, is professor of choral conducting and ensembles at Florida State University where he has served since 2000. He holds the Ph.D. from Florida State University, the M.M. from the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri in Kansas City and the B.M.E. from Friends University in Wichita, Kansas.



Maureen Obadha

Soloist, Nairobi Chamber Chorus

Maureen Obadha was born in Nairobi, Kenya. She is a versatile singer/songwriter and vocal trainer. She started singing at the tender age of four in church and in school performances. A former Bachelor of Arts (music) student at Kenyatta University and Master of Arts in Drama from San Francisco State University, she enjoys teaching beginner piano and vocal performance. Maureen is an active member of the Nairobi Chamber Chorus and has recently shared the stage with the Kenyan Boys Choir, performed at Classics at the Go Down, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Concert in the United Kingdom and most recently with Stephen Schwartz and Rob Fischer.

CREW

Bud Simpson

Director/DP

AVOICE4PEACE is Bud's first feature-length documentary. His production company, Bud Simpson and Co. is based out of Atlanta, GA. He is thrilled to share this film with the international filmmaking community and looks forward to the dialogue that it will create. Bud studied history at Florida State University and was a faculty member up until 2017, when he decided to pursue film full-time.

Brett Bittner

Camera Op/Sound Recordist

Brett is a director and DP based out of Sioux Falls, SD. Brett joined the production team and assisted in the filming of AVOICE4PEACE. Brett has worked on over fifty documentary projects for leading nonprofits and businesses in the United States.

Diana Benocilla

Lead Animator

Diana's work represents some of the most exciting new talent in the field of animation and graphic design. Her contribution to the film includes the credit sequence seen at the end of the film as well as the film's one sheet (poster). Diana is applying to several top design programs in the United States. She is thrilled and honored to be a part of the AVOICE4PEACE team.

Luka Sharron

Sound Design

Luka is a sound designer and foley artist based in Tallahassee, FL. With over ten years of experience in the field, Luka brings a wealth of knowledge to the production. He is excited to be a part of the team and looks forward to seeing where the film will go.



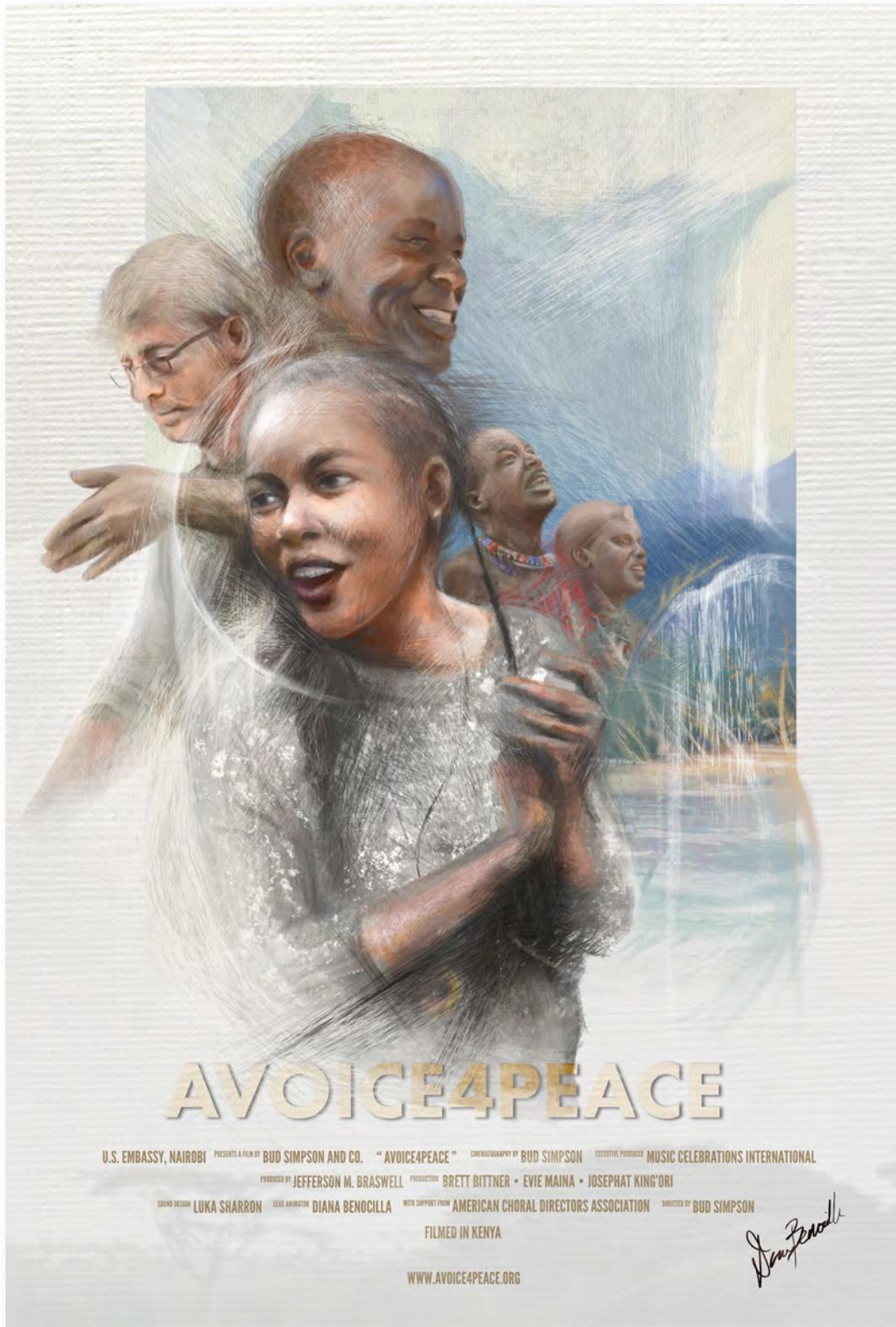
Kakuma is a peaceful place - a peaceful area to live. And we don't call it a refugee camp, we *call it a home*.

-Teresa (South Sudan)

When I heard it [Ukuthula] for the first time - I just look at the writing and I hear the sound - I said I'll do it. Because I want the whole world to hear me, *to hear me speak of peace.*

-Okello (South Sudan)





One Sheet, artwork by Diana Benocilla



Download hi-res photos at
www.avoice4peace.org

CREDITS

CAST (alphabetical)

Kevin Fenton as Himself
 Ambassador
 Robert F. Godec as Himself

UNHCR
 Representative
 Raouf Mazou as Himself

Maureen Obadha as Herself

Peter Twycross as Himself

Ken Wakia as Himself

Teresa (Kakuma) as Herself

Okello (Kakuma) as Himself

CREW

Director/DP Bud Simpson

Producers U.S. Embassy, Nairobi,
 Music Celebrations International

Associate Producer Jefferson M. Braswell

Co-Producer Jinna Mutune

Camera Operator/Sound Recordist Brett Bittner

Graphic Artist/Animator Diana Benocilla

Sound Designer Luka Sharron

Location Managers Evie Maina, Josephat King'Ori