

Organist bridges African & Western cultures

By Jill Davis

Twenty-five-year-old Patrick Kabanda is among the youngest organists in the Diocese as he takes his position at the Church of the Intercession in upper Manhattan. But he is also an emissary from his homeland of Uganda who uses music to bridge the often negative gap between Western and East African culture. He furthered this objective this past summer when he conducted Western music workshops in East Africa. This fall he will introduce indigenous African instruments to students at selected schools in New York City.

"People here in the United States only see negative images of Africa," said Kabanda. "I want to create a link or a bridge between Africa and the rest

the Juilliard 2000 Summer Grant Program. It inspired him to propose a joint educational program that would benefit music students in both East Africa and the United States.

"There are many gifted students in East Africa who do not have the opportunity to study music due to the fact that there is virtually no exposure or funding for the arts," said Kabanda.

At first, Kabanda saw the summer program as an opportunity to visit his home. But later, he realized the impact it could have on other African musicians. The ideas multiplied.

He shipped donated music books to Kenya Conservatoire (Kenya); All Saints' Cathedral (Kenya); Makerere University (Uganda); and Namirembe Cathedral (Uganda). He also donated



Patrick Kabanda, the 25-year-old organist at the Church of the Intercession, Harlem, teaches a student in Uganda this past summer.

of the world by opening things up and exposing the positive along with the negative, and to also give many talented people the chance that they would not normally have."

A student at the Juilliard School, Kabanda is working toward a Bachelor of Music in Organ. When asked why he chose the organ, he said it has always impressed him ever since he was a choirboy at Namirembe Cathedral in Uganda. Against a lot of odds he learned to play both the organ and the piano. While his passion was to play the Cathedral's organ, he worked as a cocktail pianist at a local Sheraton Hotel.

A career in music was never regarded as a particularly desirable choice in Africa. He explained that "music is not accessible to the masses because of the uneven distribution of wealth in many African countries."

Convinced that he could pursue a career in music in the United States, Kabanda came here five years ago and enrolled in Brevard College in North Carolina. He spent two years there before transferring to the Juilliard School in 1998.

While attending orientation meetings, Kabanda became familiar with

supplies such as folders, pencils, and manuscript paper. "Growing up, music books were very scarce," he recalled.

His visit to Africa included conducting workshops and playing recitals in 17 locations in Kenya and Uganda. Workshop attendees ranged in age from 6 to 30, and as he taught, he saw his students becoming more serious and inspired.

Kabanda plans to continue opening doors and help pave the way for other talented musicians in East Africa. His activities have already sparked a new interest. Dr. Gerre Hancock, the Director of Music at St. Thomas Church in Manhattan, is interested in the possibility of establishing a link between the Namirembe Cathedral Choir and The St. Thomas Choir (such as having students from Namirembe visit the St. Thomas Choir School).

As for himself, Kabanda would like to explore other areas such as music management, administration, or artistic direction. "I have so many dreams including starting a music school. But for now I see myself as one who can help bridge two cultures that have so much to offer each other."

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