

World music comes to Sisters

By **Katy Yoder**
Correspondent

Visiting musicians from around the world brought their cultures, instruments and diverse perspectives to Sisters last week.

On Saturday night, OneBeat, comprised of 25 musicians from 17 countries, played music to an appreciative crowd. The Belfry was their first live performance after arriving at Caldera a week ago. Artists from countries like South Africa, Russia, Kazakhstan, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan and Zimbabwe played on unfamiliar instruments and brought new musical styles to audience members. Instruments including a komuz, mbira and kobyz were combined with more familiar ones, creating a sound unique to the group.

From Harare, Zimbabwe, Munyaradzi Nyamarebvu summed up the reason for the tour: “I believe that music should unify people and impact positivity, peace and love in the society. Music should touch on critical societal issues and speak for the voiceless as well as reflect culture.”

Performers brought the

audience to their feet as they clapped, danced and sang. It took folks awhile to get warmed up, but once they were they transformed the newly renovated Belfry with their joyful dance moves. Co-produced by Sisters Folk Festival Inc. and Caldera, OneBeat also spent time in the schools broadening the horizons of students both musically and culturally.

Focusing on overcoming adversity through faith, a special African gospel service was held Sunday at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church. Pastor Ron Gregg introduced Lasana Kanneh to the congregation and opened the door to an amazing story and inspirational man.

Lasana’s life began in Liberia. He was born blind, and was ostracized by his community and abandoned by his father, who considered him a burden to the family. Music was a source of joy for Lasana and later turned out to be his salvation.

Raised in a Muslim family, his eventual conversion to Christianity gave his father another reason to be angry with him.

“I wasn’t too upset about that, since my father had

already abandoned me,” he recounted.

Lasana’s mother did all she could to help him survive. When he was old enough, she dropped him off at a school for the blind. But unlike the other children, at the end of the school term, his family never came to pick him up. Eventually, when the school closed permanently and they didn’t show, it was clear he was on his own.

Eventually, a kind man of faith came to his aid and offered him a place to go.

“I was forsaken by my own family,” he recounted, “but I was valued by my new family.” Until that time, to survive, Lasana sang for food on the war-ravaged streets of Monrovia with other blind men and women. In the midst of rebel fighting, at times there were bullets flying over their heads. He recounted many stories including being forced to beg for his life from an infamous warlord.

A message of hope filled his presentation. He reminded the congregation that even when life is cruel and troubles seem insurmountable, faith in Jesus will get you through. “Even when my father rejected me, God turned it



PHOTO BY KATY YODER

Lasana Kanneh performed at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church.

around,” he said. “There is always hope and you must never forget that. Continue to follow your dreams!”

Lasana opened with the song, “There is Power in the Name of Jesus.” He was accompanied by his wife, who he met in Liberia and married in 2005. They live in Portland and have four adopted children from Liberia. He still has family in Liberia, and his mother is still living there. He has not been able to return for many years, because it is too dangerous.

He asked the congregation to pray for Liberia as they face the upcoming election of a new president. He is hoping for a free and fair election and that former combatants will not rise up again and bring chaos to the region.

His final words included his memories of music carrying people through the terror of war: “There was still music. It brought us joy and encouragement.”

The congregation’s last song was a traditional hymn sung in the Zulu language.

Thank you to everyone who made this year’s Outlaw Open and Outlaw Booster Club 3rd Annual Outlaw Hall of Fame 2017 Induction Ceremony both successes!

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