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but after that, he would be on his own.

"I came, hit the ground running, looking for scholarships, looking for all kinds of jobs," he said.

His brother, majoring in computer engineering, showed him the ropes and helped him find scholarships.

Many international students major in technical trades because company sponsorship is more likely. Like his older brother and his father before him, Parfait declared his major in engineering. A couple years later, his younger brother would do the same.

His first campus job was from 2 to 4 a.m. at the school's library. From there, he worked any and every campus job he could get. He refereed soccer games, worked in the computer labs and as a teacher's assistant. He even became a resident manager so that he could get into student housing.

He remembers approaching teachers when he didn't have enough money to register, telling them that he would be attending their class and turning in homework if they would allow him to do so, promising to pay for the credits before the end of the term.

"It was some of the most humbling times in my life," he said. "It was hardest when it was a teacher you've already taken once – you're like, oh no, I can't go and talk to this teacher again."

The church he was attending in those days, Athey Creek Christian Fellowship in Tualatin, helped pay his tuition a couple of times when he couldn't come up with all the funds.

He also received scholarship money through PSU's International Cultural Service Program. In exchange for tuition, he gave 90 hours' worth of cultural presentations at local grade schools and retirement homes each academic year. The idea was to bridge the gap between Oregonians and different cultures.

His parents sent him artifacts that he would show to often distracted and bored schoolchildren while he clicked through a PowerPoint presentation about Senegal and Benin.

Each quarter, he took a full credit load, sometimes more. Because he was still grappling with English, he would record every lecture and then listen to it repeatedly later in the day, between classes and odd jobs, to decipher what was said.

He said those days he drank so much coffee that caffeine doesn't affect him anymore.

Meanwhile, he was also adjusting to American culture. Once again, he found himself being characterized by other students as something he was not.

"All of them assumed that because I grew up in Africa, I probably never saw a car, was never on a plane. People asking me, 'How in the world did you get to America? Did you swim?' Literally! I was asked questions like that," he said.

"I'd play dumb with some people and just see how deeply stupid of a conversation we could have. I would say, 'Yeah, it took me



Parfait Bassale sings at his home studio in Portland.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH GLODE

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE**Empathy Workshop: In the Shoes of an Immigrant**

What: Parfait Bassale
When: 12:30-2:30 p.m. Saturday, May 20
Where: Paragon Art Gallery
Portland Community College Cascade Campus, 815 N Killingsworth, Portland
Cost: Free

Portland Concerts in the Park

What: Parfait Bassale Band
When: 6:30 p.m. Saturday, July 8
Where: Kenilworth Park, Southeast
Holgate Boulevard and 34th Avenue, Portland
Cost: Free

Portland Soulful Pop Night

What: Parfait Bassale, Jonathan Pierce and David Pollack
When: 8-10 p.m. Friday, May 26
Where: Portland Abbey Arts, 7600 N Hereford Ave., Portland
Cost: \$7; tickets at Eventbrite.com

Live at the Art Constitutional

What: Performance in conjunction with St. John's Farmers Market
When: 11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 9
Where: St. John's Center for Opportunity
8250 N Lombard St., Portland
Cost: Free

Find up-to-date listings of Parfait's concerts, listen to his music, and learn more about his musical workshops on empathy at parfaitonline.com.

about a month to swim here."

He had a hard time making sense of the college drinking culture, and as a Christian, there were aspects of campus life he said he wouldn't allow himself to take part in.

The U.S. was fast paced, and all the food tasted like it was doused in sugar. He noticed a tension between religious groups that he hadn't experienced growing up.

He began to feel self-righteous, wondering, "What's wrong with these people?"

He continued to vent through music, spending hours in his dorm room writing French lyrics. Now that he had a computer, for the first time in his life, he could produce his own beats.

"As I was writing songs to process my own experience, I started to realize that I was being a hypocrite," he said. "Because in some cases, people didn't give me the benefit of the doubt, that I could have had rich experiences, that I could actually be an intelligent person behind a funny accent – I realized I was doing exactly the same thing as I was judging cultural traits that are foreign to what I am used to."

In 2009, he released his first album,

composed of French rap songs he had written in his early days at the university. The album is aptly titled "Bonjour Babylon."

Understanding French is not a prerequisite to enjoying this album.

At the urging of a friend one Sunday afternoon following church, Parfait picked up a guitar at Trade Up Music. It was a Hohner acoustic.

He taught himself to play the basic chords and began to transform some of his raps into song. Eventually, he began to play his more church-appropriate tunes before his congregation, where he was met with resounding support.

He was about two years into his undergraduate degree when, one day, as he was preparing to give yet another one of his PowerPoint presentations on West Africa, he decided to ditch the slide show.

This time, all he brought was his guitar. Instead of lecturing the French class at Lake Oswego's Lakeridge High School that day, he sang his songs and talked to the students about why he wrote them.

"The response from the audience was something different," he said. "They were attentive. I knew I was onto something."

He eventually changed his college major to business, and then went on to earn a master's degree in conflict resolution, also from Portland State University.

In the course of his studies, he began to research empathy, realizing it was the missing link that, if achieved by opposing sides, could solve all conflicts.

Jules explained the way he saw his little brother adapt as the family moved from country to country, and as they eventually found themselves in Portland, was different than the way others might adapt. Rather than gravitating toward people of the same background or keeping to himself, he said Parfait always sought to find similarities he could use to bring people from different backgrounds together.

Figuring out how to teach empathy while staying true to himself became Parfait's personal mission. He knew storytelling helped to build empathy, and he realized that the best reactions came when the stories were told through music.

"In academia, music is looked at as its own language," he said. "When you put monitors on people's brains and you're looking at their responses as they are listening to music, it actually triggers a side of the brain that is slightly different than when you are speaking their language. It triggers emotion, affects moods – if you are intentional about the composition, if the goal is to get them contemplative and introspective, you can achieve that."

He wrote his thesis on story- and song-centered pedagogy. By the time he'd finished, he had created an educational framework that uses songs, stories and reflective questioning to increase empathy with an audience.

Since graduating in 2013, he's used this interactive format to teach empathy at hundreds of workshops in various contexts, from high school assemblies and corporate functions to community events. In February, he taught schoolteachers in Haiti through song and music.

"A large part of Parfait is social justice and community awareness and community building, and that is very prevalent in his songs," said his longtime friend and mentor, local jazz musician Dominic Castillo. "There is no divide between him as a community member and him as a musician and an artist. They don't exist in separate boxes."

Six years ago, Parfait married his college sweetheart, Karima, who now works as a naturopath for Central City Concern. Since then, the couple have added two boys, Aushti and Nouri, to their family.

In addition to his musical pursuits, Parfait works full time as a project manager for Rubicon, and education-focused tech company.

It was through his employer's foundation arm that he was able to teach his empathy workshop in Haiti. After his first visit to the earthquake ravaged island in 2010, he wrote a song inspired by a little girl he met who had asked him to take her with him when he left. It's called "Nou Tout Haitiens," or "We are all Haitians."

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