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Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars Bringing Uplifting Music to EIU's Doudna

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Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars, who achieved worldwide fame after fleeing civil war, will perform their uplifting songs of hope, faith and joy at Eastern Illinois University on Saturday, April 16.

The concert is to begin at 7:30 p.m. in the Dvorak Concert Hall in EIU's Doudna Fine Arts Center.

From 1991 to 2002, the African country of Sierra Leone was wracked with a war that forced millions to flee their homes -- including a group of people who began playing music together in a dusty refugee camp in Guinea.

Now, just seven years later, the group has gone from being unknown musicians to being the subject of an acclaimed documentary film, touring the world, appearing on "The Oprah Winfrey Show," and sharing the stage and studio with Aerosmith and other international stars.



Though the band members are now able to afford luxuries such as cement walls and refrigerators back home in Sierra Leone, the world's third-poorest country, they are still faced with the daily struggles shared by most of their countrymen.

The band has suffered many losses, including the death of original member Mallam, who was known as the honorary "mayor" of the Magazine Wharf slum, where he made a living selling rice whisky and palm wine. He died at age 49 -- the average life expectancy there.

The senseless deaths and illnesses of friends and family, and the slimming hope for great change in their country as a result of peace, has only strengthened the resolve of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars to do what they can to turn their country around.

Their weapon in this struggle is music, and their message, while offering critique and condemnation of wrongdoing, remains positive and hopeful.

Optimism in the face of obstacles, and the eternal hope for a better future, motivates their lives and music.

"It's been a long struggle out of the war, out of miserable conditions," said Reuben M. Koroma, the founder of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars. "So now we are trying to develop ourselves as a band and be based in our country. We are really moving towards finding ways of elevating ourselves somehow.

"But we do not just think about ourselves alone. We try to bring out sensitive issues that are affecting the world. It is all of our responsibility that the masses are suffering. We bring our positive messages into the world so we can expect a positive change in the world. And, most importantly, bring about peace."

The group's first album, "Living Like A Refugee," was released in 2006. Their second studio album, "Rise & Shine," was released in March 2010.

Also in 2010, the group was among the artists recording a new version of "We Are the World" in support of Haitian earthquake relief efforts.

The group has also collaborated with Aerosmith on the certified gold record "Instant Karma: The Amnesty International Campaign to Save Darfur," as well as their own special appearances on "In The Name Of Love: Africa Celebrates U2" and on the soundtrack for the Oscar- and Golden Globe-nominated film "Blood Diamond."

The Sierra Leone Refugee All-Stars' appearance at EIU is generously supported by EIU African American Studies and the University Board.

Tickets -- \$15 for the general public; \$12 EIU employees and seniors; \$7 for students -- may be purchased in person at the Doudna Fine Arts Center Box Office, by telephone at 217-581-3110, or online at www.eiu.edu/doudna.

The Doudna Fine Arts Center, located on the EIU campus, is a division of the EIU College of Arts and Humanities.