

STAGING HOPE

ACTS OF PEACE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Children of war tell stories of hope



Running Time: 99 minutes

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THE STORY

Imagine you are a teenager who is abducted in the middle of the night and forced to become a child soldier or sex slave. Imagine trying to sleep, as your friends go missing everyday, wondering if you will be next. Now, imagine many of the people you know and love will soon die and most of the world has no idea what is happening to you...

Teenagers like Scovia and 13 others don't have to imagine, this is their life. Having escaped their rebel abductors, these teens and their families are now living together in camps for internally displaced persons (IDP.) At the height of the insurgency in northern Uganda, these camps were in such deprived conditions that approximately 1,000 people died each week.

Their stories of suffering and resilience have never been told...until now.

THE FILM

Staging Hope: Acts of Peace in Northern Uganda is a documentary film that follows a team of actors, playwrights, and activists who use theater to help these children explore the traumatic events they have been through. Through dramatizing their stories, the teens are able to share their voices with the community and the world.

The film captures the incredible humanity and emotion between the children and adults as they construct dramatic theater performances based on their lives. The short plays address HIV/AIDS, peace, and reconciliation. These dramas also pose the taboo question; "When an escaped child soldier returns home, are his parents able to accept him?" "Is the community ready to embrace him as well?" The result is an epic play that attracts over 1,000 people to the camp and restores a sense of peace, hope, and accomplishment to these children who have endured so much.

Staging Hope is an authentic feature length documentary with personal accounts, live performances, music, and dance. It shows how actors, playwrights, and children collaborate to tell a personal story of suffering, resilience, war, forgiveness, and hope. The film gives us a strong glimpse into the vulnerable moments and powerful bonds that connect all of us as humans, no matter where we live or what we have gone through.

THE IMPACT

The mission of this program and documentary was to connect vastly different cultures and experiences through theater and advocacy. The goal was provide a platform for the Ugandan teens to share their voices with the world. Currently, these plays are reaching American audiences as students, professional actors, and volunteers across the United States are performing the readings. Parts of these plays have been performed by former "West Wing" actors Dulé Hill, Allison Janney, Janel Moloney, and Martin Sheen. The producers are seeking worldwide distribution of the film to bring global attention to this crisis to initiate change.

THE DETAILS

Northern UGANDA Background

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel movement has terrorized the people of northern Uganda for years, abducting children to fill its ranks. The Ugandan government's strategy of moving northerners into "protected villages" has turned into a displacement nightmare for 1.7 million people - over 80% of the region who, at the height of the insurgency, lived in squalid camps and lacked access to basic resources. During this time, approximately 1,000 people died each week as a result of camp conditions. Children have been the primary victims.

The Program and Production Background

In the summer of 2007, a team of actors and playwrights, who make up *Voices of Uganda*, traveled to an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in northern Uganda to work with 14 Ugandan youth on a theater program. Many of the teens had escaped from the rebel army after being abducted as child soldiers or sex slaves.

The drama program was lead by American actors, Melissa Fitzgerald and David Ackert. During the first week in the camp, Melissa visited each of the 14 children at their home, meeting their guardians and learning more about the topics each youth wanted to share through the dramas. The father of one of the youth said, *"I pray that this drama will help Francis in his future life and that it will give him courage to teach others the skills he learns."*

Playwright Winter Miller and the team of American actors collaborate with the youth to turn their personal stories into short plays. The teens chose thoughtful, relevant topics including HIV/AIDS, peace building, and reconciliation.

Throughout the drama program, the youth work tirelessly on dramatic exercises, improvising scenes to help create the plot, learning their lines, and finally bringing these plays to life. The final performance gave these teens the opportunity to share their voices and their stories with over 1,000 people in their internally displaced persons' camp. *Staging Hope* gives them the opportunity and platform to share their voices and their stories with the world.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

More than just building a stage, *Staging Hope* provides a platform for these teens to share their stories, hopes, and dreams. In addition to discovering talents, they find courage and a new voice. The following are some comments from participants and their families on what they got out of the experience:



“Please inform America the northern Ugandan insurgency is the world’s worst forgotten emergency. The people here, they’re suffering.”

Francis, 17



“What I like about the drama about HIV/AIDS is it can educate people how to protect themselves against the disease.”

Scovia, 20



“What I would like to tell you is, when you go back to your place, don’t forget us. And us too, we’re not going to forget you for what you have given us and we should never forget you at all.”

Grace, 20



“If we just kill you, how should we do it (they asked) I was afraid to answer because when you answer this, they will kill you.”

Michael, 19



“The film will bring these stories to audiences worldwide, not only illuminating the situation in northern Uganda, but giving tools and opportunities to become involved and to act to bring the atrocities to an end.”

John Prendergast, former Director of African Affairs
at the National Security Council and
Co-Chair, ENOUGH Project

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

MELISSA FITZGERALD - *Producer/Co-Artistic Director*



Melissa Fitzgerald is an actor, producer, and activist. Her acting career has included film, theater and television. She is best known for playing the role of Carol on the award-winning political drama *The West Wing*. Melissa produced the award winning short film *Hope Not Lost*. Throughout her life, Melissa has been dedicated to community service and outreach. In 1995 she and David Ackert co-founded *Voices in Harmony*, a non-profit organization that works with at risk teens on a mentoring theater program. Melissa has been extensively involved in local, state and national political organizations and campaigns and served on the Advisory Board of the *American Democracy Institute* (Impact Center), dedicated to giving young people the skills necessary to be powerful forces of social and political change. Her writing has been featured in the *Huffington Post* and *The New York Times*. Melissa also won the Nick Kristof contest, "Your Turn to Tell the Story", for her writing on Darfur.

Melissa served on the board of the International Association of Physicians in AIDS care (IAPAC) and traveled to South Africa as an IAPAC volunteer. In 2005, Melissa represented International Medical Corps (IMC) at the G8 Summit as part of the ONE Campaign to end poverty. The following year Melissa traveled to northern Uganda as an IMC volunteer. She remains deeply involved in advocating for peace in northern Uganda and the surrounding region. Melissa is a graduate of The University of Pennsylvania and the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre.

KATY S. FOX - *Producer*



Katy is completing her thesis and will shortly graduate from the University of Pennsylvania, with a Masters of Science in Organizational Dynamics. Her thesis titled: *Advocacy through filmmaking: Producing Staging Hope: Acts of Peace in Northern Uganda*.

Prior to graduate school, Katy worked in Los Angeles where she gained extensive film and television production experience. Credits include work on the classic independent film "The Last Supper" and associate producer of "Campfire Tales" and as production associate on *Taken*, the Emmy award-winning SciFi Channel hit produced by Steven Spielberg and Leslie Bohem. Katy has also worked on the production team on several of Christopher Guest's films including the most recent one, "For Your Consideration". Katy then went on to produce the documentary, "Staging Hope: Acts of Peace in Northern Uganda". Recently Katy produced the documentary, "Halfway Home" which profiles servicemen and women who are struggling to readjust to life away from combat. The film features Former Senator and Vietnam Vet, Max Cleland and Iraq War hero, Sergeant Tommy Rieman. "Halfway Home" is narrated by Martin Sheen. Katy resides in Los Angeles, CA.

BIL YOELIN - *Director*



Bil Yoelin has focused most of his filmmaking career on creative storytelling through the medium of documentary film and television. As editor, his credits include the award-winning independent documentary *The Target Shoots First*, which won him Best Editor at the 2000 Slamdance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. The film also won Best Documentary that year at the Slamdance, New York Underground and South by Southwest film festivals. Since then Bil has edited several behind the scenes documentaries for Warner Bros. Home Video and for many Steven Spielberg films on DreamWorks Home Video, including *Saving Private Ryan*, *A.I.*, *Minority Report*, *Catch Me if You Can*, and special features for a reissue of *The Color Purple*. He has recently done his share of docu-reality programs for television, including *Tabloid Wars* for Bravo!. In 2006, Bil expanded his editing and storytelling to the genre of travel documentaries, for *5 Takes: Pacific Rim* (Discovery Travel Channel). The project included traveling, shooting and editing a one-hour episode each week, chronicling five travel journalists through Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Bangkok, Thailand.

PAUL FREEDMAN - *Writer/Editor*



Peabody award-winning and Emmy nominated filmmaker, Paul Freedman, began his career as an editorial assistant for television commercials. As an editor and director, his commercial credits include spots for Nike, Diet Coke, Southwest Airlines, Nissan, Lexus and Budweiser and many more. Paul's first documentary role came as editor on a film about minor league baseball. Since then, his love of the documentary form has led him to win numerous awards covering a vast array of subjects around the globe. His latest film, "Halfway Home", profiles servicemen and women who are struggling to readjust to life away from combat. The film features Former Senator and Vietnam Vet, Max Cleland and Iraq War hero, Sergeant Tommy Rieman. His film, "Sand and Sorrow", was shot on location in Darfur, Sudan and aired on HBO. The acclaimed doc chronicled the international community's legacy of failure to respond to genocide and featured Elie Wiesel and Barak Obama. George Clooney narrated.

Paul has directed and edited episodes for the History Channel Series, "Food Tech". He is also creator of the America's Army Real Heroes program "mini-films" profiling men and women of the US Army and Army National Guard who have been awarded medals for valor in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

JOHN PRENDERGAST - *Executive Producer*

John Prendergast is a human rights activist and best-selling author who has worked for peace in Africa for over 25 years. He is the co-founder of the Enough Project, an initiative to end genocide and crimes against humanity affiliated with the Center for American Progress. John has worked for the Clinton White House, the State Department, two members of Congress, the National Intelligence Council, UNICEF, Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group, and the U.S. Institute of Peace. He has been a Big Brother for over 25 years, as well as a youth counselor and a basketball coach.

John is the author or co-author of ten books. His forthcoming book, *Unlikely Brothers*, due in May 2011, is a dual memoir co-authored with his first little brother in the Big Brother program. His previous two books were co-

authored with Don Cheadle: *Not On Our Watch*, a New York Times bestseller and NAACP non-fiction book of the year, and *The Enough Moment: Fighting to End Africa's Worst Human Rights Crimes*. John has been profiled in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, *Men's Vogue*, *Time*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *GQ*, *Oprah Magazine*, *Capitol File*, *Arrive*, *Interview*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*.

CINDY LANDON - *Executive Producer*

With 18 years of experience in the entertainment industry and in TV syndication, Cindy Landon brings considerable expertise and many valuable contacts to her philanthropic work for international and local charitable organizations. Currently, she is Co-Chair and Host for the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine's (PCRM) 25th Anniversary Gala to be held in April of 2010 in Malibu, California. As such, Cindy Landon spends a significant amount of her time dedicated to supporting charitable organizations that are committed to helping children, the environment, animal rights and holistic health.

Notable as well is her involvement as President for the Michael and Cindy Landon Foundation, Founding Champion and advocate for the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCan), Honorary Board Member and Event Host for Free Arts for Abused Children, Co-Chair and Event Host for Malibu Global Awareness benefiting Doctors Without Borders and Sponsor and Event Host for Voices of Uganda. She also is Co-Producer of the documentary film, *Whaledreamers* (www.whaledreamers.com) and Executive Producer of the upcoming documentary film, *Staging Hope* (www.voicesofuganda.org) Cindy Landon is the mother of two children and lives in Malibu, California, along with nine dogs, two horses and two parrots. When not working on her own projects, Cindy likes to adventure travel, practice yoga and run.

MARTIN SHEEN - *Executive Producer*

Growing up in Dayton, Ohio, Martin Sheen (born Ramón Gerardo Antonio Estévez) always wanted to be an actor. His father thought otherwise, but undeterred, Sheen finally borrowed a few bucks from a local priest and headed for New York. That was 1959. Now, almost five decades later, he has piled up Emmys, Golden Globes, and other awards and accolades for his performances in movies such as *Badlands*, *The Subject Was Roses*, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Departed* and *Bobby*, and on television for "Kennedy," "Blind Ambition" and his seven seasons in the role of President Josiah Bartlet on NBC's "The West Wing." He has received many honors for his tireless work as an activist for social and environmental causes, including the César E. Chávez Spirit Award and the Shinnyoen Foundations' Pathfinder's Peace Award.

DAVID ACKERT - *Co-Producer/Co-Artistic Director*

David Ackert has served in the corporate, education, and non-profit sectors as a Trainer, Marketer, and Strategic Planner since the mid '90s. He has developed and implemented business development programs for national legal, accounting, and financial service firms. He has served as coach and advisor to over 200 CEOs, government executives, and VPs, hailing from local companies, as well as global entities like Disney, NBC, and TWBA\Chiat\Day. David has written for and contributed to over a dozen articles in publications including the LA Times, The National Review, and the San Francisco Business Journal, and quoted in several trade publications and books on business strategies for the entertainment industry. He has participated on numerous panels and lectured in seminars on business development, effective communication, and time management techniques. He also teaches strategic planning and marketing courses through UCLA Extension. He is the founder and leader of the Growth Group, a chapter of Provisors, which caters to Los Angeles business professionals under the age of 40, and is a founding member of the Advisory Board for California Executives.

David is a published fiction author - his latest story "Stray" appeared in the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. He is also an accomplished professional actor, having performed in numerous plays, films, and television shows such as "CSI:Miami", "NYPD Blue", "Six Feet Under" and the "West Wing". He serves as the VP of Organizational Development for the Boy Scouts of America's WLACC, and serves as Chairman of the Board of Directors for Voices in Harmony, a non-profit arts organization he co-founded in 1995 that provides extra-curricular and classroom programs for at-risk youth. He was one of the nine people awarded as a "Difference Maker" from Ithaca College in its recognition of alumni who have made a meaningful impact through community service initiatives.

PAMELA GRINER – *Line Producer*

Pamela Griner's production credits include feature films, commercials, music videos, and some television. She has a specific interest in non-fiction films, which were the focus of her thesis project for her M.A. in Media Studies at Cal State University, Los Angeles. Past production work includes Christopher Guest's films *For Your Consideration* and *A Mighty Wind*. She is also active in several political and volunteer organizations and she also holds a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

LESLIE THURMAN - *Associate Producer*

Leslie Thurman directs outreach initiatives at Warner Bros. Entertainment, a division that focuses on community outreach, volunteerism and special projects aligning the Studio with nonprofit and NGO partners. Prior to joining the Studio, Leslie was Director of the William Morris Agency Foundation, where she developed and launched the initial mission and focus, as well as advised top-tier individual and corporate clients on program related investments. She directed development, communications and outreach for a \$120 million international humanitarian agency, International Medical Corps.

MARLENE TOWNS - *Associate Producer*

Marlene Morris Towns is a clinical professor of Marketing at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business where she teaches undergraduate courses in Marketing Fundamentals and Entertainment Marketing, and executive education courses in Media & Entertainment Branding and Fashion Retailing. Marlene has served as a consultant at several organizations including Andersen Consulting (Accenture), Pepsi Cola, AT&T, Geneva Films, the New York State Attorney General's Office, Dream Nightclub (Washington DC) and the U.S. State Department.

WINTER MILLER - *Playwright*

Winter Miller is an award-winning playwright. Plays include: *In Darfur*, *Paternity*, *The Arrival*, *Amandine*, *The Penetration Play*, *Conspicuous*, and *Home/Away*. *In Darfur* premiered at The Public Theater for a sold-out run, followed by a SRO performance at their 1800-seat venue in Central Park, a first for a play by a woman. She travelled to the Chad/Sudan border with Pulitzer-winning Times columnist Nicholas Kristof. Winter has worked in theaters across the U.S. and in London, Uganda and Canada. She is a founding member of 13Playwrights. Recent fellowships include: Sundance Institute, Cherry Lane Mentor Project and Hedgebrook.

Working with Ugandan youth forever changed her understanding of the nature of theater and survival. Winter teaches playwriting and mentors young actors and writers.

JAMIE DUNLAP - *Composer*

After being on the road in cover bands from Seattle for much of the 80's, Jamie made the move to LA and graduated from the Musicians Institute in '89. There after working for the Latin jingle house AZ Productions for four years, Jamie sharpened his composing skills writing music for numerous National and Regional commercials.

Then breaking away in 1997 to form the successful music post company Mad City Productions with Partner Co-Owner Scott Nickoley writing and producing score and source cues for film and TV. Recent clients include South Park, MTV, CMT, The History Channel Maris Entertainment (Independent Feature Films).

JONATHAN FURMANSKI - *Cinematographer*

Jonathan Furmanski has been shooting for film and television for the past 14 years, starting with independent films including *Minimum Wage* – winner of Best Cinematography at the 2000 No Dance Film Festival – moving into commercials and industrials for dozens of clients such as PBS, Merrill Lynch, Vogue Magazine, Time Warner Cable, Nabisco, Nike, MSNBC, VH-1, and CNN. Credits include: *loudQUIETloud*, about the band Pixies on their 2004 reunion tour; *Arctic Son*, about a father and son reconciling in the Yukon Territory; and *I Am An Animal: The Story of Ingrid Newkirk and PETA*, about the world's largest animal rights organization.

TONY HARDMON - *Cinematographer*

Tony Hardmon is an award winning cinematographer of verite documentaries. His credits include programs for HBO, PBS, Discovery Channel, National Geographic, and MTV. He has collaborated on several films with acclaimed documentary filmmaker Liz Garbus. These credits include *The Execution of Wanda Jean* (HBO), *Girlhood* (TLC), and *Juvsies* (A&E). His recent credits include Michael Moore's *Sicko* and Stacy Peralta's *Made in America*. Other credits include the IDA and Emmy Award winning film *A Walk to Beautiful*, and the Emmy nominated *Hard Road Home*. Tony was also the additional cinematographer on the Academy Award nominated feature documentary *Jesus Camp*. He also photographed *The Boys of Baraka*.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Staging Hope is a project of Voices in Harmony, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that has been using the creative arts to effect social change since 1995. All donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent the law allows.

Please donate and be part of the solution. In the spring of 2007, the Voices team leapt into action to document this horrible situation and raise awareness and in an uplifting and inspiring way. Please donate now to ensure that the Voices team can continue their advocacy campaign, complete the feature length documentary and continue to support the teens in northern Uganda. Any contribution is welcome and tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. **Raise your Voice with ours and donate now, www.staginghope.com**

OTHER ADVOCACY

The Campaign to Date

- Members of the Voices team met with senior Senators on the Appropriations Committee to advocate for additional assistance for northern Uganda in the supplemental to the 2008 budget. Congress and the President approved allocating 17.5 million dollars for northern Uganda.
- Voices participated in the IRC's Freedom Awards. Tom Brokaw introduced actors including Liv Ullmann and Dulé Hill who performed the Ugandans' monologues followed by clips of the film. At the event, General Electric announced a one million dollar gift to IRC's program in northern Uganda for girls' education.
- The World Affairs Council of Philadelphia presented a Voices program that included a monologue performed by Allison Janney, clips from the film and a panel discussion with a group of experts including John Prendergast.
- The Los Angeles, New York and South Carolina kick-offs of GuluWalk included Voices presentations to raise awareness and funding for programs in northern Uganda.
- Invisible Children's "Displace Me" and "Rescue Me" events included Voices presentations for over 8,000 attendees.
- The Voices team presented a program at Resolve Uganda's 2008 lobbying event on Capitol Hill. Voices also participated in the 2009 lobbying on behalf of the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, which unanimously passed the US Senate.
- Voices has just begun working with high schools and universities to educate students about the situation in northern Uganda, coaching the students to perform a collection of plays and monologues for their community, followed by a letter-writing campaign to their elected officials. A recent example of this is The Stella Adler School of Acting's Art and Social Activism Festival in New York, Weston School District Weston, MA, Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, PA and several others.

