



Contact: Joe Martin
530.754.5428

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For immediate release:

Spirit of Uganda Brings Upbeat African Music and Dance to Mondavi Center

December 21, 2007; Davis, California—In the small African nation of Uganda, millions have died from AIDS, and political turmoil is a fact of life. Yet there is still time for joy in the nation's rich cultural traditions and hope for its children, as evidenced by the colorful, exuberant performances of **Spirit of Uganda**. The company, featuring 22 performers between the ages of seven and 20, will present the hope and promise of Uganda's youth in an uplifting and joyous program of song and dance at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts**.

There will be two performances on January 26, 2008, at 3 pm and 8 pm, in the Mondavi Center's Jackson Hall on the **UC Davis** campus. Tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.ARTS (2787) or online at MondaviArts.org. The 3 pm event is presented as part of the Mondavi Center's **Family Series**; the 8 pm event is presented as a Mondavi Center **Global Beat** event. There will be a free **Pre-performance Lecture** by **Milmon F. Harrison**, associate professor in the UC Davis Department of African and African American Studies, at 7 pm in the AGR Room of the **Buehler Alumni & Visitors Center** adjacent to the Mondavi Center.

There will also be a panel discussion, *HIV/AIDS and the Spirit of Uganda: Art, Epidemic, and Healing*, featuring Spirit of Uganda Executive Director **Alexis Hefley** and UC Davis faculty **Moradewun A. Adejunmobi** and **Jean A. Wiedeman** on Tuesday, January 22, at 5 pm in the Mondavi Center's Studio Theatre. The panel discussion is free and open to the public as part of the Mondavi Center's **Forum @MC** series.

The Mondavi Center Arts Education Program also present Spirit of Uganda as part of the 2007-08 **Wells Fargo School Matinee** Series at the Mondavi Center on January 24 and 25 at 11 am in Jackson Hall. Performances in this series support the **California Department of Education** Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards. Teachers, educators, and others interested in purchasing tickets may contact the Ticket Office at 530.754.4689.

Founded by Alexis Hefley in 2006, Spirit of Uganda is a project of **Empower African Children**, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating and developing opportunities for Africa's orphaned and vulnerable children to realize their full potential. The company's artistic director, **Peter Kasule**, himself an orphan who lost one of

his parents to AIDS, was an original member and director of the group **Children of Uganda**, which delighted Mondavi Center audiences with performances in 2004 and 2005.

Spirit of Uganda's upbeat performances are the epitome of youthful energy and optimism, and a showcase for high-spirited Ugandan song, dance, drumming, and stories. Kasule acts as master of ceremonies and storyteller, introducing the children's performances, which include traditional songs and dances, original folk songs, percussion ensembles, and more.

"To empower children, to make a change in this world, nothing is better than letting their voices be heard," Kasule has said. "The performers who appear here are the young faces of Africa, the leaders of tomorrow, the composers of our stories, and the makers of our memories in this new century."

The repertory for the troupe's Mondavi Center performances includes a dozen songs, dances, and musical performances, most of them adapted from traditional African sources and utilizing traditional African instruments. Examples include *Orunyege-Ntogoro*, originally a courtship dance of the Banyoro and Batoro people of southeast Uganda; *Mtwara Wa Makonde*, a drum piece from southern Tanzania; "Omwoyo Guli Kudungudha (My Heart is Pounding)," a traditional song about the nervousness of a man who is about to be married; and *Ekitaguriro*, a dance originating with the Banyankole, a nomadic, cattle-herding people of western Uganda, which imitates the graceful movement of their long-horned cows.

The performance will feature 18 different traditional instruments, including the *embaire*, one of the world's largest xylophones; *ebinyege*, leg rattles worn by young men for certain traditional dances; the *omukuri*, a flute used in the herding of cattle; the *agwara*, a trumpet from the Lugbara people of the West Nile area; the *adungu*, an arched harp with nine strings; a wide variety of traditional drums, and more. Also part of the production will be a host of colorful costumes, including traditional headdresses, bead necklaces, and gowns.

The Republic of Uganda, located at the center of East Africa, is slightly smaller in size than the state of Oregon, yet is home to more than 28 million people, roughly half of whom are under the age of 15. The country's national borders were determined by colonial Britain which joined together more than 50 different ethnic groups and kingdoms, each with venerable and distinct governing systems, languages, beliefs, and cultures, which made it extraordinarily difficult for the nation to establish effective political unity after independence was achieved in 1962. The country suffered under the leadership of two infamous strongmen, **Idi Amin** (1971-1979) and **Milton Obote** (1980-1985), but has recovered somewhat under the government of **Yoweri Kaguta Museveni**, despite a civil war that has raged since 1986.

Uganda was the first country in Africa to feel the full impact of AIDS, which emerged in the fishing villages and along the trucking routes in the southwestern part of the country in the late 1970s. Uganda was also one of the first nations on the African continent to implement policies and programs to combat HIV/AIDS, and infection rates have been reduced significantly from their peak in the early 1990s. Still, the epidemic continues to be a leading cause of death, claiming as many as 250 per day.

For Ugandans young and old, the performing arts are both a way of passing on traditions and a source of strength and inspiration, said Kasule. "Dance, music, and storytelling record our histories and instill values," he has stated. "They help raise children, celebrate milestones, provide assurance, dispense justice, proclaim beliefs, and sustain societies. For those of us who have lost our parents, our elders and neighbors, who witness the daily struggle to carry on, these rhythms and patterns are a comfort; they are our teachers and tools of survival."

"Spirit of Uganda offers an opportunity to experience some of the unique traditions of African culture, and the company's message of hope is truly an inspiration," said Mondavi Center Executive Director **Don Roth**. "We look forward to presenting this uplifting, extraordinary event."

What: Spirit of Uganda

When: Saturday, January 26, 2008 · 3 pm

Where: Jackson Hall

Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis

Admission: \$39/\$34/\$29 Adults • \$19.50/\$17/\$14.50 Students & Children

When: Saturday, January 26, 2008 · 8 pm

Where: Jackson Hall

Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis

Admission: \$39/\$34/\$24 Adults • \$19.50/\$17/\$12 Students & Children

Tickets/Info: 530.754.ARTS (2787)

866.754.ARTS (toll-free)

<http://www.MondaviArts.org>

530.754.5402 [TDD]

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