

Discovery Theater



presents

Bokamoso

South African Youth Theater

presented in partnership with the National Museum of African Art

THE BOKAMOSO YOUTH THEATER grew out of the work of the Bokamoso Centre, part of the Pretoria Anglican Diocese's Tumelong outreach program. The Centre was founded to counter the crime and desperate poverty destroying the township community of Winterveldt, 40 km north of Pretoria, South Africa.

Bokamoso means *Future* in the Setswana language. The hundreds of youth that have entered the aptly-named Bokamoso program receive counseling, job training, educational tutoring, art and recreation opportunities, family intervention, AIDS Education, and free health care. After three months of intensive work, these young people either return to school, or move into child advocacy or job internship programs. They re-enter their community ready to make powerful, positive contributions, having been mentored by strong adult leaders.

In 2001, youth at the Centre worked with American peace activist Roy Barber to create a musical play, *Won't Happen to Me*, an outcry of warning, hope, and compassion from the epicenter of the African AIDS crisis. In 2003, they brought it to Washington DC, where they worked with students at St. Andrews Episcopal School in Potomac, Anacostia High School, Wilson High School, Georgetown University, Howard University, and George Washington University, and with youth at the Children of Mine Center in Anacostia, St. Columba's, Christ Episcopal, St. Albans, and Second Genesis Recovery Treatment Center. In 2003 and 2005, the Bokamoso company also worked with Barber and with Leslie Jacobson of Horizons Theater and GWU to create productions about changing gender roles in a rapidly transforming country, and the healing of families from domestic violence as young people begin to create a new South Africa. Today's Smithsonian appearance is part of their third U.S. tour.



The Smithsonian Associates

Discovery Theater Artistic Director

Roberta Gasbarre

Handout by Anne Stewart O'Donnell

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Past + Future = Music



The Bokamoso Youth Theater grew out of the work of the Bokamoso Centre, which calls upon the power of music and tradition to make a community from its young participants. As Moses Makeeba, a facilitator at the Centre, puts it, "We love to sing, and we begin each day at Bokamoso with about thirty minutes of singing. This makes us feel good!" After the singing, workshops begin on a variety of subjects, including *Ubuntu*, the African renaissance, recalling days when Africans lived in unity, when whole villages helped raise the children, and the young saw every older person as a parent. Today, having evolved from the daily singing sessions, Bokamoso Youth Theater empowers young people to speak with courage and clarity through art.

The word *Bokamoso* means "Future." Community storytelling and creating theater gives these young people the tools to create a new vision for the future of their township, which is challenged by unemployment, extreme poverty, and other remnants of Apartheid. "If you can imagine and 'act' change, you can create it," says their American friend, Roy Barber.

At the same time, says Barber, this "Future" Youth Theater also reaches back to the past, connecting the township community with its cultural roots. In African cultures, community concerns have always given rise to music, dance, and storytelling. The Bokamoso Youth Theater uses these traditional arts to address modern concerns such as AIDS and domestic violence, as well as to share their culture with American audiences.

Activity: Imagine That!

1. **Think of a change** that would make your school or neighborhood a better place.
2. Next, imagine yourself in the future. **Write a newspaper story** telling how you and your friends, family, neighbors, and teachers made that good thing happen!



Discuss It!

Who can YOU think of who imagined change... and then brought it about?

Learn more about the Tumelong Centre and its work at www.tumelong.org.za/centres.htm

Contributions can be made to
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