

Preview

CityMusic Cleveland launches "Journeys of Hope" concerts

by Mike Telin



CityMusic Cleveland will present the first three free public concerts titled *Journeys of Hope* on Sunday, March 2 beginning at 2:00 pm at the Lakewood Public Library. The concerts are part of CityMusic's [Roots to Branches - Music Celebrating Refugees](#) project. This is the first in a series of four articles.

"We actually started the project because of a conversation Eugenia Strauss had with Father Bob Begin from St. Coleman's Church," said CityMusic Principal oboist and VP for Community Engagement Rebecca Schweigert Mayhew.

Through the help of the Refugee Services Collaborative with whom Mayhew, Strauss and CityMusic board member Sawsan Alhaddad started working with early on in the project, they discovered that every year 70,000 refugees come to the United States with over 500 settling in Cleveland, primarily from Bhutan/Nepal, Burma, Somalia, and Iraq.

Some come from once-prosperous but now war-torn countries, and many highly educated people find themselves working in unskilled jobs in a place where their credentials and experience are meaningless.

"The Collaborative has been our guide through the project and their level of expertise is amazing, said Mayhew, who admits the first step was to truly understand the difference between an immigrant and refugee. "Unlike immigrants, who decide to leave their countries for another, refugees are forced to flee their homelands and have little choice in their ultimate destination."

Mayhew points out that it was The Cleveland Foundation who funded the formation of the Refugee Services Collaborative (RSC) which acts as the umbrella organization for the thirteen local refugee service agencies. "The RSC was very happy to assist us and very helpful in giving advice: first, who to contact within each refugee community and second, how to initiate contact with sensitivity." Mayhew adds that although they were fairly certain they would meet artists, they weren't sure if artists would be willing to participate in the project.

The *Journeys of Hope* concerts will feature musicians, singers, dancers, poetry and story readings and speakers from Burma, Somalia, Nepal/Bhutan, Sudan, Iraq, Burundi, Russia and the Democratic Republic of Congo with assistance from the CityMusic Global Ensemble.

Mayhew says that a lot of the music that will be heard at the *Journeys of Hope* concerts is being incorporated into Dan Visconti's *Roots to Branches*, a work commissioned by City Music especially for this project which will be premiered during concerts on March 12 through 16. "This weekend's concerts are a great way for people to hear the music in its traditional form before hearing how Visconti uses the same music in his composition.

Also included on the March concerts is Cambodian composer Chinary Ung's *Khse Buon* for cello solo. Regarding the *Roots to Branches* project, Chinary writes: "This is a wonderful project that goes right to the heart of where we are today in the world. Some of the musicians in remote parts of the world are heavily influenced by the West. They want to "catch up" to the West. On YouTube they see hip hop and other popular music. Of course it is not our decision what they do. The musicians must decide what music to make, to create, but I encourage them to keep the global picture, not to forget their roots. We must remember to represent the people who don't have voices, who are not on YouTube. I was studying western music, composition, in New York, but after we had the genocide in Cambodia I immersed myself in Cambodian music and dedicated myself to preserving it and performing it. It was only later that I could come back to composing."

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