



The Ambassadors

The Ambassadors, an a cappella group from Nigeria, was one of the featured groups at Toronto, singing five times on the SkyDome stage and also performing on the Global Mission Stage. The following is the fascinating story of their incredible journey from obscurity to international acclaim.

The audience is mesmerized as the music, a mix of a-cappella close harmony and syncopated

rhythm, surrounds them. It is enchanting music tempered by the life experiences of seven young men from Africa, a continent full of cultures that have intrigued outsiders for centuries. The music is from the heart and the listeners are deeply touched, as both the sound and the message transport them beyond the cares of the moment to a spiritual high.

It is a scene that has happened literally hundreds of times throughout the world during the past decade

as The Ambassadors, a group of young men originally from the Adventist Seminary of West Africa in Nigeria, have sung for thousands of listeners. The travels and successes of this group are a modern day miracle.

The ensemble's roots can be traced to a quartet called The King's Ambassadors, which was formed at the Nigerian seminary in the 1960's and perpetuated in subsequent years by remaining members inviting new singers and choosing a leader as



members graduated. The present configuration and style emerged, however, when Ghoyega Adeniji was selected in 1990 to lead the group.

Under his leadership the membership expanded to six and then to eight, and the group was renamed simply The Ambassadors. The group also decided to add contemporary music to their traditional quartet repertoire. Success followed, and with it a cascade of performances and increasing clamor for a recording. In 1995 they began work on the latter and in 1996 released *Come on Home* in both cassette tape and CD formats.

They were one of only a few Nigerian groups to have made a CD and the response was overwhelming. Fame and numerous appearances on TV soon followed, as well as articles in major magazine and newspapers, frequent playings on top national radio programs, and opportunities for appearances at West African presidential summits, award shows, and other events, including a World Music Day concert organized by noted music mogul Steve Rhodes.

A single from the album, *I go Make am* (pidgin English meaning whatever you go through in life, if you have God by your side you will eventually succeed) was released also as a music video and enjoyed widespread and frequent playings.

All of this exposure made The Ambassadors and their songs a household name in Nigeria and in other parts of Africa.

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to America's Grammy awards. The Nigerian Music Industry nominated them for Best New Artist of the Year, Best Producer of the Year, and Best Gospel Artist of the Year. While honored by the nominations, they were totally surprised when they received the AMEN award for Best Gospel Artist of the year.

During this busy time all were still studying at the Seminary, in some instances delaying graduation in order to keep the membership in the group stable. The administration and teachers were very supportive, feeling that the visibility of this group and its work and message were having a profound influence on the young people of Africa and providing a witness to the importance of

getting an education.

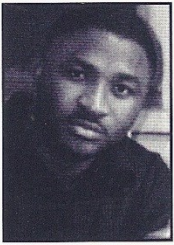
They traveled to Europe and the United States, supported by friends, generous sponsors and three different managers, one being the earlier mentioned Rhodes, known warmly as "Uncle Steve." A Swedish businessman, Jeaneric Gustavsson, was their international tour manager in 1997.

A trip to Europe at that time was met with great enthusiasm and increased acclaim. In colorful African garb, the group sang on TV, in live concerts and at important events such as the annual famous Scandinavian National Christmas Concert, a program always sold out months in advance. The trip ended with a recording session for a second CD at a studio in Sweden.

The highpoint of that tour happened at the conclusion of a concert when an elderly woman approached an Ambassadors member and spoke with great emotion in Swedish while someone translated, "In the past, we as Europeans took the message to Africa as missionaries. Now that we are old, you are bringing the message back to us."

Met 98, the satellite evangelism series sponsored by the SDA church in the fall of 1998, chose The Ambassadors as the representative group from Africa. This exposure led to popularity around the globe and increased demand for appearances.

While in the United States, they met a physician and his wife, Donald and Sandy Weaver, who arranged for

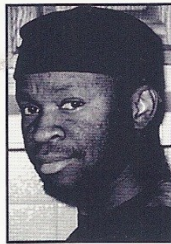


Adegboyega Adeniji

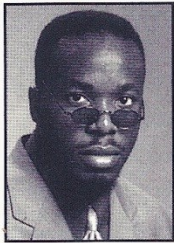
Adegboyega has been president of The Harmonics since its founding in 1990. An outstanding bass, he is the only remaining member of the original group. Over the last decade he has carefully chosen replacements and been the guiding force in shaping the identity of the group. From his earliest years, Adegboyega, son of an Adventist minister located in Nigeria, was a singer, performing and traveling with many vocal groups. A versatile musician, he is capable of singing many parts. He has many interests, including music, volleyball and others. He is currently working on a master's degree at AU.

James Agiru

Prior to going to the seminary in Nigeria and joining The Ambassadors, James, who was a successful rap artist, had little interest in gospel music. Although he was unhappy at first at the school, his contact with the seminarians led to his conversion and an interest in singing sacred music. As a member of The Ambassadors James enjoys singing about the love of God and seeing the effect of the music on those who attend. He prefers the reaction of the God-centered audiences to that of the wild screaming hip-hop fans at his rap concerts. James recently married Gabrielle Baird and, although not presently on campus, is pursuing a master's degree in business administration at AU.



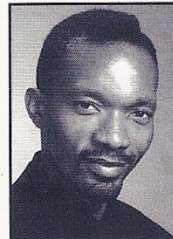
Jean Claude



From the French speaking African nation of Cameroon, Jean has sung in many groups and directed several choirs and vocal ensembles in Cameroon and Nigeria. The son of an Adventist minister, he was raised in a home where music was important. As a result, he not only has a rich music background but is a pianist and an accomplished guitar player. He sings multiple parts and is also a vocal percussionist in the group. An avid soccer fan, Jean also enjoys writing songs, listening to classical music, and traveling. He is pursuing a master's degree in communication.

Ayite Milomfa

A rhythm bassist and a vocal drummer with the Ambassadors from the French speaking West African country of Togo, Ayite has both sung in and directed vocal groups. He was also a drummer and keyboardist in an instrumental touring group for many years. He joined the Ambassadors in 1991 "by virtue of his ability to shiver the shower in the dorm bathroom while singing his low notes." The oldest member of the group, Ayite has a bachelor's degree in theology and a master's in religion. He is currently pursuing a degree in software engineering. He enjoys sports, traveling, electronics, and good music.



them to explore the possibility of doing graduate study at Andrews University. Since all of the members of the group had completed their undergraduate degrees in 1998, they were keenly interested in doing so, but could not because of the cost.

AU responded with scholarships, and the Weavers and other friends assisted with financial support and housing so that the men were able to register in the winter quarter of 1999. The group was elated at this turn of events which made it possible for them to not only continue their education but also to stay together as a group.

The Weavers continue today as the group's sole sponsors, with Sandy, whom they affectionately call "mom," now serving as their manager. She coordinates their extensive tours and frequent performances throughout the United States.

Along with the success and fame of the last decade, including, most recently, first place at the Powerlife 99 Talent Search at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame which included a cash award, free recording sessions, and airing on gospel music stations nationally, there have also been times of difficulty. Tough choices about what music they would and would not sing as a gospel performing group, or where they should or should not perform, have been persistent challenges.

Working and living together as closely as they do has created a supportive family dynamic within the group, despite the fact that no two members are from the same area in Africa or speak the same language and that there have been continuing changes in personnel during the last ten years.

Several of them have had a number of close calls in near fatal accidents. In one such accident, member Emmanuel Osuyah sustained a complex leg fracture so serious that amputation seemed likely. Miraculously, twenty-one days later the leg started to heal and within a short time he was able to rejoin the group.



The challenges today for the group are similar to those of all students everywhere, except for the rigor of their performing schedule.

Weekends and school breaks are totally consumed by travel and a daunting schedule of performances. Additionally, they are now working on a third and fourth CD with a major recording studio in Detroit.

It is not an easy life, yet when they stand up front and begin to sing and see the effect of their ministry

on the faces of their audiences, they find renewed strength and the passion to continue.

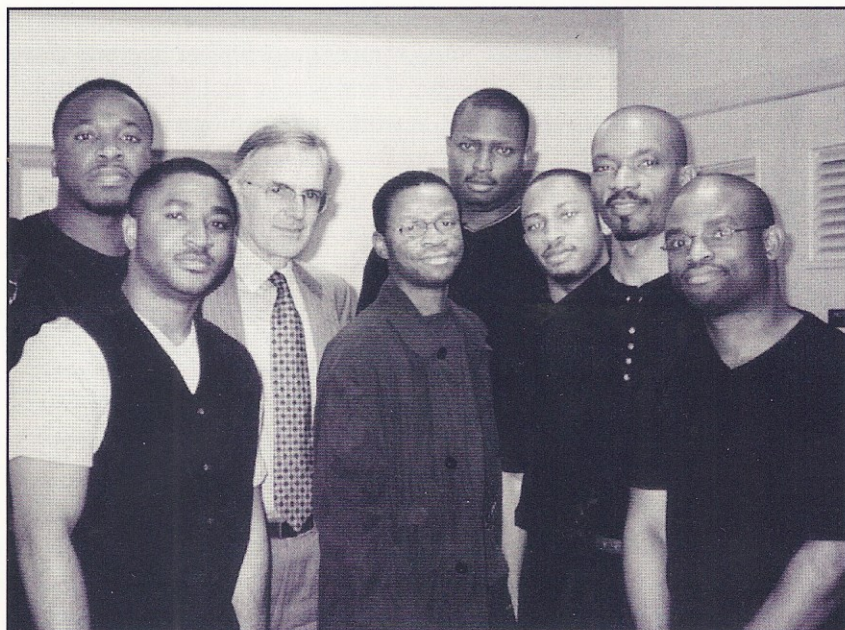


Donald and Sandy Weaver

When The Ambassadors talk about their present ministry in music and their future together, they speak often of an enabling and indispensable eighth member of the group, the Holy

Spirit. They are confident, given His leadings in the past, that they need not worry about the future.

Dan Shultz



The Ambassadors with Andrews University president Niels-Erik Andreasen

Henry Nevanguma



From the Southeastern part of Nigera, Henry has sung from childhood, directed choral groups, and, in addition to singing in the group, is a frequent soloist. He is an avid soccer fan, devotee of good music, and loves to

travel. Henry graduated from Andrews University this spring with a master's degree in business administration. Although he now resides in Ohio, he joins the group for performances.

Emmanuel Osnyah



Emmanuel sings tenor and cites his father as his greatest musical influence. "He taught me the beauty of music by waking me up to it every day of my life as a child, and today life to me is music."

From Nigeria, Emmanuel has formed and directed many groups and choirs and enjoys good music, traveling, and doing creative activities. "My most challenging experience was my accident. I never believed anything could keep me from getting up and moving, but I was helpless until my Lord rescued me. He healed my fracture, put my bones back together and set me off on His errands." Emmanuel is taking a master's degree in business administration, health care management.



Isaac Uloroh

Isaac has sung in numerous groups since his childhood, spent in Akwa Ibom State, east of Nigeria. He has a wide vocal range and is referred to as a vocal

percussionist extraordinaire. A skilled soccer player whose skill has been praised by some of today's famous players, and a lover of adventure, Isaac enjoys interacting with people, particularly little children, an experience often filled with humor. He also writes songs, poetry, and drama.