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**From:** John Ferguson <john.ferguson@americanvoices.org>  
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**To:** Allan Aitken geneaitken@mac.com  
**Conversation:** American Voices Newsletter, Vol. 9, No. 1



Dear Friends,

Happy New Year and welcome to the latest news from American Voices.

As we move into a new year, I would like to express my gratitude to all our artists, donors, sponsors, program partners, students, volunteers and audiences who have helped make 2008 such an astounding year for cultural diplomacy from Sudan and Afghanistan to Iraq and Lebanon.

2008 was our fifteenth anniversary! Since 1993, American Voices has developed an extraordinary network in more than one hundred countries. Millions of television viewers and radio and live audiences have enjoyed our concerts, tens of thousands of students have benefited from our summer academy programs and workshops and hundreds of universities and conservatories have received significant donations to their libraries. We have designed our programs to bring the essence of America to the doorstep of countries emerging from conflict or isolation and are grateful for our many ardent fans.

Highlights of 2008 include the expansion of our Unity Academy program in Iraq now reaching over 750 youth from throughout the country, the accompanying documentary, *Camp Unity*, due out in 2009, our return visit to Kabul and groundbreaking new programs in Sudan.

In 2009, we are planning to expand our network of summer youth programs to Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan and Afghanistan as well as continue the Hiplomacy, Jazz Bridges and Broadway programs for which we are already well known. In addition, we are offering a series of tributes to Abraham Lincoln in many of our 2009 program offerings.

We have high hopes that with the incoming administration a new emphasis, and the funding to back it up, will be applied to cultural diplomacy programs that have the potential to help mend relations with our long time allies and new friends. We also encourage individuals, business and foundations to support our efforts to bring the American educational experience and performance to countries like Iraq and Afghanistan; nations torn apart by conflict but now on the mend. It is vital that we roll up our sleeves and reach out to youth and the next generation of leadership in these nations if we want to enjoy an enduring and peaceful relationship. Please give [now](#) to support this vital work.

**John Ferguson**  
 Executive Director, American Voices



Profiles in Cultural Diplomacy:



**Zuhairah:**  
 Iraqi Pianist and  
 Founder of the Youth  
 Orchestra of Iraq



Meet Zuhairah, a pianist from Baghdad. She was one of nearly 300 young performing artists who travelled at great risk to Northern Iraq to participate in American Voices, inaugural Unity Youth Performing Arts Academy in 2007. In this safe haven, she studied under some of America's best music teachers and was able to perform publicly for the first time in years. She has recently started a campaign to establish an Iraqi youth orchestra, members of which American Voices plans to support through our Unity Academy 2009. Zuhairah is working hard to make Iraq a better place and provide opportunity for youth. She was recently quoted in the UK press as saying 'I am aware that I cannot erase years worth of war and conflict damage, but what I can do is bring positivity back in people's lives.' American Voices is proud of our Unity Academy alumni!

Please [donate](#) now to support our programs for Iraqi youth

Profiles in Cultural Diplomacy:



**Dr. Gene Aitken:**  
 Intrepid Jazz  
 Educator

Dr. Gene Aitken Conducts the Jazz Ensemble of the College of Fine Arts, Erbil, Iraq



CEDr. Gene, is the call you hear when in earshot of the jazz room at the Unity Academy. Our most tireless faculty member was regularly teaching from 9am to 9pm every day, working with a dozen jazz ensembles and classes ranging from the rank beginning to aspiring young professionals. Dr. Gene is quickly becoming a regional expert in Oriental Jazz, having formed several ensembles with traditional Arabic instrumentalists (Oud, Kanoon, Ney) from Mosul and Kirkuk. Though retired from heading the jazz program at the University of N. Colorado, Dr. Gene maintains an active schedule taking him throughout the US to China, Nepal, Lebanon and of course, Iraq. He is currently cataloging, housing and distributing our enormous donation of music scores from Alfred Publishers as well as actively soliciting donations of music instruments and scores from donors throughout the U.S. Thanks to Dr Gene, dozens of new woodwind, brass and percussion instruments have been donated in Iraq and throughout Asia.

Please [donate](#) now to support our jazz education programs worldwide



American Voices' first trip to Sudan drew enthusiastic crowds at concerts and workshops in Juba and Khartoum. In a 'Musical Bridges' program designed to bring American Voices Michael Parks Masterson and John Ferguson together with local pop, jazz and traditional musicians. We prepared and performed numerous radio and television performances as well as three public concerts together with over 30 young Sudanese musicians. Our partners on stage ranged from Juba's 'Freedom Boys' to a Khartoum-based duo rapping in all the national dialects including Darfurian. Executive Director John Ferguson said "Normally I turn these kinds of joint performance programs over to my jazz teams, but in the case of Sudan, really wanted to be involved on stage. The most interesting musical challenges were what to play with traditional musicians in Juba when two elements of the band were apparently playing in different tunings and keys! That challenge dissipated at the performance when, once on stage, the excellent musicians and dancers launched into pieces we had never heard before. The 'Khartoum Hip Hop Challenge' was actually artistically quite liberating when upon analytical listening, I realized that their complicated sampling contained a loop of only two chords. minor. It was great to see so many young people from Sudan University at our concert."



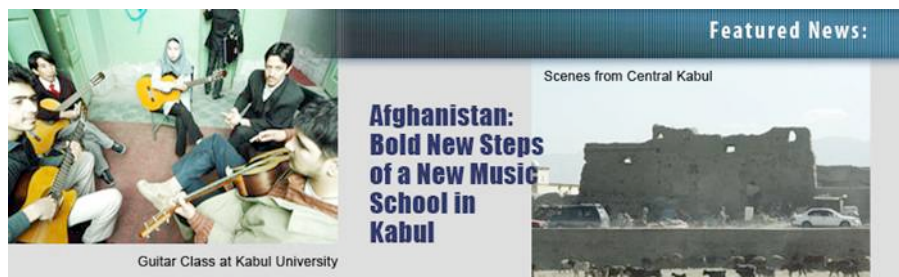
Other highlights of the trip were the marathon evening performance in Juba which was apparently the first performance by American artists ever in Juba. Despite the impossibly bumpy unpaved roads and general difficulty of getting everyone in the same room at the same time for rehearsals, this was a great show and a great experience for all involved. We are looking forward to a return visit.



On his last day in Sudan, John Ferguson gave a lecture recital called 'Variations on America', for the music department of Sudan University in Khartoum. The program ranged from 'Rhapsody in Blue', to minimalist works by Frederic Rzewski and the students lapped up the opportunity to hear virtuosic piano repertoire for the first time as well as discover a world of genres and composers that was completely new to them. We are currently preparing a large donation of several boxes of music scores and educational materials, including jazz methods for these enthusiastic future professional musicians at Sudan and Juba universities.

Sudan is Africa's largest country. As part of the peace agreement between the Khartoum government and Southern Sudan in 2005, there will be a referendum in 2011 in Southern Sudan to choose independence or to remain an autonomous republic within Sudan. It is a very complicated landscape and political situation. We understand that considering the continued conflicts in Darfur, our visit could be considered controversial. However, upon having been there, American Voices is more convinced than ever before that cultural exchange programs such as ours offer the possibility for greater mutual understanding between peoples. For more on Sudan, please visit: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudan>

[Give](#) to our 2009 projects in Sudan



American Voices spent one week in Kabul in late October giving workshops at Kabul University as well as at the newest arts education institution in the country, the Vocational Institute of Music, a high school program training aspiring musicians for a career in music as well as preparing them for university. Many of the school's students are orphans or blind, and the institution is doing admirable work in their first year in giving these disadvantaged youth an education that will last a lifetime.

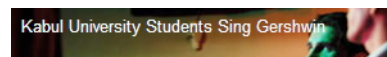
The program started memorably with buying a Clavinova during a middle of the night layover in Dubai. We then had to beg Dubai Airport Authority to allow it on the plane as oversized and overweight baggage. Somehow our charm and desperation worked and we did get the Clavinova to Kabul where it now resides at the Vocational Institute of Music.

One element of our program involved preparing Afghan traditional and pop songs with Zabih Jawanmard, a specialist in the songs of Ahmad Zahir, aka the Afghan Elvis for his transcriptions into Dari in the 70s of Elvis hits such as *It's Now or Never*, and *Love me Tender*.

American Voices, Michael Parks Masterson and John Ferguson joined in on Afghan favorites such as *Leyli Jan*, and prepared joint performances with the orchestra of Afghan National Television.

Unfortunately, our final gala concert at the Afghan Radio and Television was cancelled due to a bombing at the Ministry of Culture that morning, but our other five days in Kabul did result in several television broadcasts reaching millions of Afghan homes through Tolo TV and live performances for the Daniel Pearl Music Festival and at the U.S. Embassy.

Perhaps one of the biggest achievements of the project was being able to give movement workshops to the theater



students of Kabul University. We had originally planned to focus on theater exercises, but the students were begging for movement classes which culminated in a short but historic performance together at the University. We hope to be back soon with a summer music and theater academy program featuring six faculty from the U.S.

[Give](#) to our 2009 projects in Afghanistan



## Alfred Publishing Donation



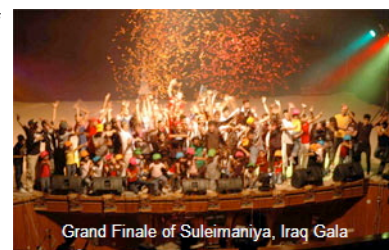
Alfred Publishing materials donated to Basrah, Iraq Institute of Fine Arts

American Voices is pleased to announce that we have been given another significant donation of music scores and educational materials from Alfred Publishing. In addition to the scores donated in June for our Iraq program, these many pallet loads of music will allow us to make a real difference in the nearly empty music libraries of many of our University and conservatory partners in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and beyond. As this goes to press, Dr. Gene Aitken is preparing ten boxes for shipment to the Cairo Conservatory, Juba University, Sudan University, Vocational Institute of Music in Kabul and Kabul University. There will soon be more donations to our Iraqi partners in Kirkuk, Mosul, Erbil, Baghdad, Basra and Suleimaniya as well. Thank you Alfred!

## Annual Drive

We want to thank all of you who renewed your membership in Friends of American Voices. American Voices appreciates those of you who gave despite the financial turmoil of recent months. We also welcome our new corporate donors, RonCo Consulting (Kabul) and Chevron (Turkey) as well as the IanThom Foundation.

If you missed our annual drive mailing, it's not too late! We now have a profile at Network for Good ([networkforgood.org](http://networkforgood.org)), you can now donate [here](#) with your Credit card or [give](#) via our website or PayPal.



Grand Finale of Suleimaniya, Iraq Gala

## American Voices 2.0

Follow our Tweets on Twitter: add @Americanvoices, at twitter.com

**YouTube:** *Hairspray in Iraq?* Visit our You Tube channel for new videos from the Unity Academy 2008 in Iraq! [www.youtube.com/americanvoices](http://www.youtube.com/americanvoices) and click on @show all playlists, for Unity Academy 2008

**Donate securely with your credit card online through Network for Good:**  
<https://www.networkforgood.org/donation/MakeDonation.aspx?ORGID2=300222175>

## Updates from Recent Programs:



**Jazz Bridges:** Mike Del Ferro was in [Minsk](#) for joint performances and workshops at jazz festivals and the University of Culture

**Hiplomacy:** Houston's HaviKoro/Urgeworks flew to [Bishkek](#), Kyrgyzstan for a week of joint performances and workshops with rappers, B-Boys and B-Girls in Bishkek and provincial capitals.

**Egypt:** John Ferguson was at the [Cairo Conservatory](#) for four days of masterclasses and workshops with young Egyptian pianists

**Lebanon:** John Ferguson was in Beirut for lecture recitals for students at the American Community School of Beirut. Additionally, he continued preparations for this summer's Lebanese-American Youth Performing Arts Academy.

**U.S. Visit:** In October, Executive Director John Ferguson was invited to lecture on American Voices and cultural diplomacy at the University of Texas at Austin and at Carnegie-Mellon University.

## Upcoming....

- **Turkey:** Broadway Bridges Musical Revue to tour Ankara and eastern provinces January 21 to 25. Performances by American Voices artists and 25 Turkish aspiring Broadway performers from Ankara n Ankara, Adana, Mersin and Gaziantep.
- **Belarus:** Minsk on Broadway from February 4 to 18 supported by Department of State,s Cultural Envoy program
- **Greece:** Broadway concert in Athens on February

- **Summer Youth Performing Arts Academies:** Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon from July 1 to August 17.

Please [give](#) to support our 2009 activities!

For more information about our program or to inquire about a donation or sponsorship opportunities, contact us at:

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