

# MUSIC FOR CHANGE

Words by Eileen Walmsley and Emma Letcher. Photography courtesy of Malaika and Remy Whiting

This year, Gloucestershire is going to change the lives of girls in Africa. In order to raise awareness of Malaika and its work in the Democratic Republic of Congo, local resident Andrew Marshall has arranged two concerts at Gloucester Cathedral that will benefit the non-profit foundation. The amazing folk duo Show of Hands, along with Miranda Sykes, perform on 4th June and Emmy Award-winning singer, Vonda Shepard (of Ally McBeal fame) on 12th October.

You may be asking what is Malaika? Malaika is a movement. A foundation devoted to creating a generation of agents of change. Malaika was formed in 2007 by Noella Coursaris Musunka, an international model and humanitarian of Congolese/Cypriot/Swiss heritage. She was born in Lubumbashi, in the South-eastern region of DRC. At the age of five, Noella was separated from both of her parents when her father died and her mother could not support her anymore. She was sent to live with relatives in Europe, with hopes for a brighter future. She was shocked to learn of the education crisis in her birth country, where 7 million children are not attending school. She promised herself that one day she would have an impact on the beautiful nation, filled with untapped potential.

After completing her schooling and receiving a degree in business management, Noella was discovered and embarked on a career as a model, finding success in front of a camera. She has been featured in fashion magazines such as Vogue, Elle, Vanity Fair and even Cotswold Style.

Noella still remembered that first trip back to the DRC as a young adult, and in 2007 she decided to create a foundation that would craft the future leaders of the country. She named it "Malaika", Swahili for "angel". Malaika's mission is to empower Congolese girls and their communities through education and health programmes. The non-profit operates in Kalebuka, a village 30mins away from Noella's hometown of Lubumbashi.

Malaika's largest programme is the



Eve and Noella inaugurating the e-library

Malaika School. It is a free, accredited school that provides a comprehensive and high quality education to 230 girls. The curriculum is structured around daily classes in French and English, on subjects including math, science, information technology, health, and civic education. Art, music, theatre and sport are also a key part of the robust educational programming. Each girl receives two healthy meals a day - often her only ones. Great care is taken to cultivate the leadership potential of the students, from involvement in Girl Guides, to field trips and community service projects, such as planting trees. The newest addition is an e-library, with both print and eBooks in English and French. The library was inaugurated in March by Eve, the Grammy Award-winning artist. Eve is a Goodwill Ambassador for Malaika and lives in London.

Malaika wanted to extend its impact beyond the girls school, as it knew that change must be felt in all sectors. In partnership with FIFA, a Community Centre was built three years ago. It offers classes and workshops on a myriad of topics, such as literacy, health, sewing and IT. The centre serves approximately 7,000 youth and adults in Kalebuka. Malaika has also built five fresh-water wells to ensure the school, community centre, and village

have access to clean water. 10,000 people use these wells to get water for drinking, bathing and washing. They have had a marked impact on improving health and hygiene for the villagers.

Malaika has grown enormously in its nearly ten years of existence. The school and community centre have grown from ideas to safe havens for 230 girls and their entire community. Yet, there is more to be done. Most pressing is the need for a student health centre. Malaika lost one of its angels over the Christmas break last year. Myriam, a Grade 1 student, passed away suddenly due to illness. To ensure a tragedy like this never happens again, Malaika is placing the student health centre at the forefront of its fundraising projects.

Noella now lives in Cheltenham with her husband, James, and their two children, JJ (5) and Cara (2). Her work with Malaika has made Noella one of the most sought-after speakers on the subject of girls' education. She has spoken at countless venues as far-ranging as UNICEF and Cambridge University, and she has appeared several times alongside President Bill Clinton on Clinton Global Initiative panels.

Show of Hands and Miranda Sykes perform on 4th June at Gloucester Cathedral at 19.00. Vonda Shepard will sing on 12th October at 19.30. All proceeds of these events will go toward Malaika's student health centre. ■

To learn more about Malaika and to contribute to their community programmes, visit [www.malaika.org](http://www.malaika.org). To purchase concert tickets, visit [www.3choirs.org](http://www.3choirs.org).