

October 9, 2015

In 2004 a group of people from Ann Arbor contributed to building a secondary school in Meru, Kenya specifically for the "poorest of the poor" children in that community who otherwise would not be able to attend beyond primary school because they were either orphans or their parent(s) could not afford to pay for their secondary education. The school (BLISS) started with 26 students in one classroom that year and has grown to 500 students in the ten plus years it has been in very successful business. Three years after the opening of BLISS, I was volunteered to go there to start a Western-style concert band program. The first attempt was unsuccessful, largely because it mainly involved adults. The second try was the charm because it was only for the students at BLISS where every student started on recorder half a year before being transferred to a wind or percussion instrument. Currently, there are three ensembles working at the school and the top group was judged second best of 14 groups performing that the National Music Festival of Kenya held this past August. It was discovered by members of the Kenya government that only students from this school showed major increases in their annual test scores taken every November and it turned out that all those students were band members, so the government has decided perhaps they should put band programs in all their schools. Since they will expect Kenyans to teach these classes, they will need to establish training programs in their universities to accomplish this. We (in the USA) will help with this!

In addition, a string program was started three years ago in one Primary School there but it's 136 students are currently without a teacher which we hope to remedy soon. There is also great potential for further growth of this total program at three other schools in the same "campus" area in the coming months. There are a number of American Music Companies who have offered gifts of instruments and rehearsal equipment for this program but we have no building for safe storage/rehearsal space to be able to accept these offers. I knew we would have to build a rehearsal building eventually but thought perhaps after ten years but we now need to do this, thus the fund raising effort being done this fall here in Michigan.

We have used the Chelsea High School Music Building as a starting point and adjusted somewhat for the conditions and needs at the building site in Meru. An architect in Meru has developed drawings/plans for this rehearsal building with cost estimates in US dollars at \$210,000. Two orchestra students from Huron H.S. in Ann Arbor came up with the plan that if they could convince Michigan's great school music programs to participate by asking each of their students to contribute one dollar, it would probably pay for the entire building cost and what a tremendous gift from Michigan school musicians to those young Kenyan musicians whose community could never afford to provide such a facility. These Huron students thought most all of our school ensemble programs would find it a worthwhile endeavor to support and an easy activity to accomplish with their students. I think this type of activity has never been attempted here in Michigan.

