

The Citizen

More Than Just Music, Choirs and Orchestras Showcase best of SA Talent

By Sibusiso Mkwanazi, Published: July 2010

Abundant enthusiasm. This is the first thing you notice about Neeta Helms, present of Classical Movements Inc, besides her intriguing half Indian-half Canadian accent. Her love for music was not always a priority for her though.

“I have an MBA in finance and marketing and at 21, I was recruited to head up a division within HSBC in Hong Kong,” she says of her previous life.

“I did it for a while but I always knew that music was meant to play a huge part in my life. I started arranging musical nights for colleagues and that is how my real calling came about. I quit and followed my heart.”

Classical Movements Inc. is a company based in Alexandria Virginia that commissions new music, arranges tours for orchestras and choirs and hosts classical music festivals such as the Ihlombe! South African Choral Festival, which is now until August 8, country wide. It showcases not only local talent but unique circumstances too.

“The All Saints Blind Choir from Ga-Rankuwa is simply phenomenal. As if music is not difficult enough to learn, they have their own disabilities to overcome first before even attempting anything. Disabled people are what they can do, especially in music. This group learns the song by ear and from there has to remember the notes without reading from the score,” she notes.

Then there is the issue of the premiere taking place in Soweto.

“The Regina Mundi Roman Catholic Church in Soweto is known for the vital role that it is why the first show took place there yesterday. I’d have had it in Sandton or other higher classes like that, but we decided against this. South Africa has the largest proportion of people who sing than any other country in the world and most of them are in the more “real parts” of South Africa,” she points out.

The township also affords the Canadian and American choirs a chance to witness a part of our country that they would otherwise not have seen.

“Music is a big part of what we do but we are also in cultural exchanges. The international choirs simply love this country and all it has to offer. We have also taken South African award winning choirs and orchestras overseas and they have learnt a tremendous amount about other cultures and customs,” she says.

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They have also partnered with accomplished names in choral music like George Kamxadana.

“Since African heritage and history, music was not recorded, so he is transcribing it through generational folklore. African parents always used to sing to their kids and these were passed down to their kids. He is playing a vital role in preserving the music and also so that other people in the world can play and enjoy it too.

“What we aim to do with the festival is to raise the profile of choral music in South Africa and to educate through workshops and discussions. We will be asking if choral music is an elitist genre and if there is a negative side to competitions.”

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