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## Media Release

### South African Zulu choir inspires Australia



The Connections Zulu Choir, who set foot in Australia on 4 June, has amazed audiences across Vic, NSW and ACT with their unique sound – a true fusion of African and Western music.

The 20 young singers, who had never travelled further than a few hundred kilometres from their home in KwaNuyswa, a rural community in South Africa, have travelled over ten thousand kilometres to Australia.

As part of their three week tour, the Connections Choir are performing alongside a group of young Australian musicians under the combined name Simunye Sound, meaning 'we are one sound'. Their voices cross a range of styles including gospel, traditional Zulu, soul and kwaito (South African hip hop).

The choir is made up of teenagers and young adults from the Valley of a Thousand Hills in South Africa. They live in the epicenter of the world's HIV/AIDS pandemic, surrounded by poverty, and yet their musical abilities – without the benefit of formal training – are absolutely breathtaking.

All funds raised from the concerts go to the World Changers Academy, an Oaktree partner project located in the choir's community. The concerts are also raising awareness about the issues that young people in South Africa face, including poverty, crime and HIV/AIDS.

Behind the tour is The Oaktree Foundation, Australia's only youth-run international aid and development organisation. The Oaktree Foundation is run entirely by volunteers under the age of 26 and works to empower developing communities through education.

Olivia Brian, spokesperson for The Oaktree Foundation, said that the project has so much heart behind it.

"The choir in South Africa and the team of volunteers here in Australia have worked tirelessly to make this happen because they believe in the power that music has to unite people and to communicate important messages of social justice," she said.

Nhlanhla Jila, more commonly known as 'Bass', the leader of the Connections Choir, said the choir is about more than just the music.

"For many of us the choir is a refuge from the daily challenges that we face," he said. "It provides a hobby, and something to look forward to when we are struggling to find work. This is definitely more than just music – though we do love the music!"

Bass said the choir was excited to be in Australia.

"We feel so lucky that we've been given this amazing opportunity to travel to Australia and share our music with the people here. This trip is the biggest thing any of us have ever done," he said.

The choir is travelling over 1,500km, performing at 20 concerts and to over 7,000 audience members.

The tour is the experience of a lifetime for the choir members, who had the opportunity to collaborate with rock band Evermore and perform in front of 2,500 people at Evermore's concert in Melbourne.

The Connections Choir tour has been made possible by the generous support of NAB, Lander & Rogers, MotorOne, the City of Melbourne and the Durban City Council.

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