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## John Lennon Educational Tour Bus Visits Stanley Middle

By Jean Follmer



Liyana wows the crowd at Stanley Middle School Photo Jean Follmer

When Alan Plutzik, President of the Warren W. Eukel Trust, asked Stanley Middle School Band Director Bob Athayde to find a venue for "Liyana" to perform, Athayde booked them immediately. The renowned group from Zimbabwe was only available for two performances so Athayde also managed to book them with fellow Band Director Randy Porter at Westlake Middle School in Oakland.

Liyana's music has been classified as Afro-fusion and sometimes as World-fusion" or Global-music. In other words, Liyana blends many musical genres including gospel, reggae and traditional Zimbabwean music. The lead singer, Prudence Mabhena's native tongues are Shona and Ndebele. The group performs in those languages as well as in English, Dutch, German, Hebrew and Spanish.

While at Stanley, the group performed a moving rendition of "We are the World." Liyana hails from the King George VI School for the Disabled in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The group is comprised of 8 musicians who range in age from 17-23. Each of the members was born with a significant physical handicap; many of them are in wheelchairs. In Zimbabwe, handicaps are viewed as a form of witchcraft or evil. "Music has truly changed our lives," says Mabhena.

Liyana was on tour with the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus. According to the organization, "The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus is a non-profit state-of-the-art mobile Pro Audio and HD video recording facility that provides hands-on experiences for students of all ages."

Although Liyana has toured internationally, 2009 represents the first US tour for Liyana. When Athayde asked one of the band members if he liked the United States, he replied "America is 20,000 times better than I thought. I get bacon every morning in the hotels." "I just found those kids from Liyana were just joyful. We all need to see kids in wheelchairs trying to make something happen," said Athayde.

The Tour began with a performance with the Inspiration Gospel Ensemble at the Lafayette Presbyterian Church in Fort Green, Brooklyn in New York. They have

made many stops on both coasts, including performances in Los Angeles for both Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and the Inauguration of President Obama. The final performance will be at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark. The PG Family Foundation, led by Jonathan Plutznik, served as Liyana's Executive Producer for the Tour. For more information, visit [www.lennonbus.org](http://www.lennonbus.org) or <http://liyanatour.com/>.

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