

# Sharing Culture through Music...



One of the many blessings St. Leo's experiences is its wonderful diversity which opens us to receive the gifts of the various cultures that make up our community.

In a typical American fashion our refugees and immigrants, like previous German, Italian, and Irish newcomers, assimilate to life here while still retaining and celebrating their heritage.

Alexandre Phillip Marembo, son of Renovat and Anastasie, who is now a junior at the University of Cincinnati, knows first-hand the trials and fears of those fleeing their home countries to escape the violence of war. He also understands the power of their culture and traditions.

When refugees are dispersed to many different countries some of that cultural identity is often lost but in this media age it's possible to reclaim it and share its beauty with others. Alexandre knows this well. He and a few of those he grew up with started an organization called "BYT" Burundi's Youth of Tomorrow." Our goal is to motivate or inspire younger Burundians all over the world to stay focused, remember who we are, and work as hard as possible to be successful," he said... "We usually meet every other Tuesday through google hangout as early as 6, 7, 8 AM to talk. " They recently helped a few students get in school back home but lack the resources needed to help many more.

Alexandre said that he "knew for a really long time that I could make good music but I never expected people to react to it the way they do," since he started writing in his native language." I realized that when I write in my language, I express myself better that way and most importantly, young kids and elders listen to my music. I've had people from different ages write to me, telling me how much I've touched and changed their lives," he said. "It's been unexpected but then it motivates me to keep on with the way I do it."

Themes of the songs differ and some require more work than others, but all have positive messages. "I know the power of the media," he said, so I can't promote the negative... Four of his favorites are "Ama Celebrate, Mfura Ya mama, Ijoro Rirerire and Umugenzi Nyakuri." They talk about overcoming situations that are beyond our strength, appreciating the things we sometimes overlook like our parents. Others are relationship-related themes. His songs are available on YouTube and SoundCloud under Marembo or Marembo Music.

He has performed many places including schools, refugee events, weddings, both locally and in other states. He recently performed in Louisville, Kentucky with his all-time favorite artist and in Houston, Texas on New Year's Eve.

He is working on a bachelor's degree in fine arts and plans to go to graduate school for further study in film, most likely directing after he graduates in 2018.

It's a long way from the refugee camps but Alexandre never forgot his roots and the faith that sustained him and his family.

