



The mission of the CFAR is to provide a multidisciplinary environment that promotes basic, clinical, behavioral and translational research in the prevention, detection and treatment of HIV infection.

NEWS BRIEF:

- Learn more about Stories of AIDS: Mau a Malawi at www.storiesofaids.com
- Picture credits for this newsletter: Kaitlin Houlditch-Fair, Jon Haas, and Frank Sun
- National HIV Testing Day is June 27! We will have several testing events around the triangle and will share more on this in the June newsletter. For more info on the day: www.hivtest.org/press_files/
- Our UNC Center for Infectious Diseases offers free lectures and info sessions! Check out their event page: <http://www.med.unc.edu/infdis/events>
- The 2012 XIX International AIDS Conference will be held from 22 to 27 July 2012 in Washington, DC. For more info, visit: www.aids2012.org/

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Stories of AIDS: Music and Narrative as Activism

Mau a Malawi: Stories of AIDS (SOA) is a concept album to contribute resources to supporting new programs that will teach orphaned and vulnerable children income-producing skills and nurture hope and confidence. It was co-produced between Malawian singer-songwriter Peter Mawanga and Irish fiddler Andrew Finn Magill. Andrew Finn Magill received a Fulbright-mtvU fellowship in 2010 to create this album.

The album's music is a fusion between Mawanga and Magill's musical styles. Each song comes from interviews with Malawians living with HIV/AIDS and the lyrics are centered on hope and courage.

This month, CFAR chatted with Mr. Magill to find out the inside story of making the album, and how stories of individual struggle can yield beautiful and potent music.



In Depth with Andrew Finn Magill: The Making of SOA

CFAR: "How did you make *Mau a Malawi: Stories of AIDS?*"

Andrew: This is a question which gets a lot of action in conversation whenever people find out about the Stories of AIDS project. It is a good question. My rehearsed answer usually involves the origin of the idea and how I got in touch with Malawian musician & social activist Peter Mawanga, me a naïve college student and him a talented and seasoned musician understandably cautious of involving himself in outsider projects spotlighting Malawi. But I think what people really want to know now is the ins-and-outs, the grit and dirt--the logistics of recording an album of internationally professional caliber in a place like Malawi.

The first thing I did was try and cede artistic ownership to Peter. I always saw my role as a facilitator, or as advertised, the *producer*. "What do you mean you're not going to play on the album?" I remember Peter asking me. Peter's passion is musical collaboration and he had long been relishing the opportunity to cross musical streams with someone of a completely different musical profile. My caution to not impose by

keeping the personnel Malawian was taken for ludicrousness in Peter's mind. As soon as we had our first musical brainstorming session it was clear I had some new roles expected of me.

I arrived in Malawi in late December--right when the rains had come full force. You could count on a torrential downpour every afternoon between 12 and 2pm. I would often spend these afternoons in my Lilongwe dining room pumping out riff after motif after chord sequence. The best music has a muse and this was clearly forced musical labor (although not to say I didn't enjoy this labor and some sweet licks didn't come out of it).



The premiere of Stories of AIDS at UNC's Memorial Hall



**Malawian musician
Peter Mawanga**

**“This is the kind of
thing I could keep
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I wanted to have a diversity of ideas from which I could develop once the songs did begin to coalesce.

I'd periodically play these neonatal compositions for Peter and I remember him saying, "You've been listening to too much West African music Finn. We need to get you some Malawian music." I was guilty.

In February of 2009, we were fortunate enough to do more than a dozen narratives about AIDS with many men and women from Lilongwe, Dowa, and Salima. Quotes were starting to stand out in my mind:

~ "I am ready to fight this war (against stigma) with you." –Noell

~ "So it's hard for women to have an option. That's how women die in Malawi." –Kate

~ "The most important thing is the love that is there" –Graphiud Kaziputa (speaking on HIV discordant couples)

People were starting to evoke certain chords and melodic motifs. I began revisiting old pieces of music I had done and creating new ones. I would bring my song skeletons to Peter's tiny studio in Lilongwe and in his toaster of a studio with its tin roof, we would sit in the muggy afternoon heat and songwrite. He would *Malawi-fy* my musical ideas and disassemble them when necessary. Peter is just as musically responsible for the final product as I am.

It's weird and perhaps counter-intuitive to be creative under a deadline. You can't force great art right? Well we clearly had to...by April we had already carved in studio time into the calendar and we couldn't change the dates. Our songs needed to be polished by August---the big recording month. I was still off collecting narratives whenever I could, narratives that could have been enormous wellsprings of musical inspiration for more songs. August began to loom over my head like a heavy December rain cloud and I remember journaling constantly that "it'd be a miracle if we pull this off in time."

Even after months of re-writing and re-composing, we were constantly making last minute changes and re-writes. I'll never forget asking Peter "Can we record that lullaby you wrote for Monica? The song for the orphaned girl?". He said, "I haven't written that yet, Finn. What did you want me to write?"

Since Peter asked me this days before we were supposed to record this track, I was a little shocked. And only slightly worried. Sure enough, a few days later Peter walked into the studio and delivered a spellbinding song for Monica he had roughly composed the day before. The song was perfect. All I had to say was "lullaby. Peter. Go" and Peter channeled exactly what it was I had in mind. It left everyone in the studio on the knife's edge of everything he sang. Moments like these were huge sighs of relief and also cruelly ironic knowing how many months of time I had agonized over other melodies and song structures.

The ten tracks on *Mau a Malawi: Stories of AIDS* are only a fraction of the music inspired to us by the people we interviewed. For this precise reason we included several new pieces about other people outside the album's ten in the theatrical debut of the album on October 14th, 2011. This is the kind of thing I could keep doing until the day I die. As long as people continue to share emotionally gripping stories, there will be music left to write.



Spotlight on Andrew Finn Magill

Andrew Finn Magill (UNC '09) is a violinist & guitarist who straddles genres. He has toured Canada & the U.S. with the Glasgow-based Paul McKenna Band, the 2009 Scots Trad Music winners of "best up and coming band" and twice toured France with Liz Knowles & Kieran O'Hare as part of the international phenomenon *Celtic Legends*. At UNC he played violin in *Charanga Carolina* and sang in the Achordants all-male a capella group.

Andrew's background is in traditional Irish music, having been a two-time finalist at the All-Ireland fiddle championships starting when he was just 14. In 2009 he was awarded a Fulbright-mtvU fellowship (fulbright.mtvu.com) to do *Mau a Malawi: Stories of AIDS* a public health project about AIDS with musician/activist Peter Mawanga. The net result is a concept album and enormously successful fall 2011 show at Memorial Hall which merged Magill and Mawanga's music with Jon Haas' film *If My Eyes Could Sing*, a documentary of the Stories of AIDS project. Learn more at www.storiesofaids.com



Photography: Frank Sun

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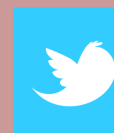
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