

Sweet Dreams: Rwanda documentary chronicles remarkable female drumming troupe

Written by Kam Williams



The 1994 Civil War left the beleaguered African nation of Rwanda a bloody mess, both literally and figuratively. Not only had the warring tribes, the Hutus and the Tutsis, hacked each other to death with machetes to the tune of about a million bodies scattered across the countryside, but to this day many of the survivors of the ethnic cleansing remain totally traumatized by the slaughter they'd witnessed.

Consequently, much of the populace still walks around in a daze sporting blank, 1,000 yard stares some refer to as battle fatigue or shell shock which shrinks refer to clinically as post-traumatic stress syndrome. For, it is understandable that it might be hard to get over a conflict which pitted neighbor against neighbor, and even relative against relative.



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One survivor, theater director Kiki Katese, determined to do something about alleviating the suffering, asked, "How do you rebuild a human being?" So, she founded Ingoma Nshya (meaning "new drum, new kingdom"), an all-female drumming troupe comprised of both Tutsis and Hutus, with admission being conditioned on checking ones tribal allegiance at the door. Besides affording the 60-strong membership an opportunity to pound rhythmically on congas, the gathering simultaneously served as a support group offering healing and reconciliation.

In 2010, Kiki came up with another innovative idea, namely, opening Rwanda's first ice cream parlor. This time, she enlisted the support of Jennie Dundas and Alexis Miesen, proprietors of a place located half a world away in Brooklyn called Blue Marble Ice Cream.

The game New Yorkers answered the call, traveling to Rwanda to help Kiki realize that dream. Together they created Sweet Dreams, a shop owned and operated cooperatively by a number of the women from Ingoma Nshya.

All of the above is affectionately recounted in "Sweet Dreams," an uplifting documentary co-directed by Lisa and Rob Fruchtmann. Kiki and her companions cut a sharp contrast to the bulk of their fellow countrymen peppering the desolate background, lost souls who seem broken in spirit between mourning murdered kin and facing bleak prospects for a better tomorrow.

A female empowerment flick featuring a blend of ice cream and drumming as a viable path to rehabilitation and reconciliation.

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