

## Joyful sounds to ring out for African grandmothers



**By Brock Weir**

After a resounding success of their first concert last fall, Aurora's grandmothers and gran-mothers are back this month looking to become bigger and better than ever.

GranAurora, the local chapter of Grandmothers to Grandmothers, an arm of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, is putting the finishing touches on Joyful Rhythms, the second annual concert to benefit the cause.

Grandmothers to Grandmothers connects African matriarchs with their Canadian counterparts. Women in Africa are often left to care for their grandchildren, left orphaned from the scourge of the AIDS pandemic, and through these Canadian connections, can build international networks and mutual exchanges of care and support.

The concert gets underway at Newmarket Theatre next Friday, October 30, and features the Bruce Cassidy Band and Friends, along with vocalist June Garber and dancer Elisha MacMillan. Last year's event raised \$3,000 for the Foundation, and they hope to build on that significantly this time around.

"We thought we could grow, do more, get our name out there more and have some more people," says Pat Parker, a founding member of Gran Aurora. "We want it to be a joyful occasion."

Adds Lenore Pressley, who joined the organization as a "Grand-other" just over a year ago, "It is the teamwork of all the grans working together and making sure everything is going to be perfect as much as possible."

Grandmothers to Grandmothers was founded by the Stephen Lewis Foundation nearly 10 years ago. It was born out of a Foundation conference which welcomed African grandmothers to meet Canadian grandmothers. From there, the organization was formed and has since grown to 270 groups across the country.

Since GranAurora was founded in the basement of Aurora United Church seven years ago, they have raised over \$85,000 through annual teas, craft sales, and concerts such as these to support their African counterparts.

"I had been interested in GranAurora for years but [joined] after spending a month in Malawi and seeing what was happening with HIV, AIDS, the stigma attached to it, how the children really suffered and how the grandmothers were trying so hard to pull together," says Sharon Willan. "I got involved with many different kinds of works. It is very, very important for food, education, shelter and medication."

Ms. Pressley was also looking for an outlet where she could exercise her interest in women's rights, but found something much more

with GranAurora because they advocate for the rights of the grandmothers as well as the children.

For founding member Geri Adam, an added enticement is the money that is raised through the organization goes directly to those who need it and is targeted for what they need. Only eight per cent of funds raised go to Foundation administration, she adds, with the rest of the work being done strictly by volunteers. And, this volunteerism has begun to see dividends with African grandmothers having the resources to step up and advocate for the changes they want to see in their world.

Joyful Rhythms will be preceded by a craft and jewellery sale made by members of GranAurora. Doors open at 6 p.m. with the concert getting underway at 7.30 p.m. Tickets are \$35 and available from the Newmarket Theatre Box Office at 905-953-5122.