WAR/DANCE

CO-PRESENTED WITH THINKFILM
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TRIBECA CINEMAS

STUDY GUIDE

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
For the past twenty years, northern Uganda has been at war with a rebel force, the Lord’s Resistance Army (L.R.A), and the country’s children have been the greatest victims of the conflict. But here, the children are not only the victims of the rebels, they are the rebels. The L.R.A has a chillingly effective process to fill its ranks – abducting innocent children.

Ugandan children are getting ready for the biggest event of the year, the National Music Competition. Over 20,000 schools will compete, but only one will go home the champion, and no one expects it to be Patongo. Schools in refugee camps don’t win awards.

War/Dance follows the courageous efforts of Patongo’s students as they pour their hearts into winning this year’s music competition. The war has stolen their homes, their parents, and their childhood. Patongo’s refugee camp packs 60,000 people into its endless squalor. There is no electricity, no running water, and no safe place. The bullet holes in the school walls tell the stories the children would rather forget. Two years ago, the L.R.A. dragged 29 students from Patongo’s schoolhouse to “join” the army.

Each child has a story to tell. Rose, a 13-year-old choirgirl, is trying to piece her life back together after witnessing the brutal aftermath of her parents’ grisly murder. Dominic, 14, is an escaped child soldier and virtuoso xylophone player who is haunted by the memory of the two people he was forced to kill. And Nancy, a 14-year-old dancer, struggles to keep herself and her three baby siblings alive.

After a lifetime of trauma, the Patongo Primary School students have something magical to look forward to. They have qualified to compete in the National Music Competition in Kampala. Most have never left the camp, but they dream about towering buildings, plentiful soda, and soldier-free streets. Unlike the wealthier schools from the south, Patongo’s students need everything, from school uniforms to instruments. Despite the odds, the children endlessly practice their performances, driven by heart, talent, and the need to rebuild their lives. If their bus can safely make it through rebel territory, they’ll take the stage and give it their all. Win or lose, these children will show what true heart can achieve.

ABOUT THE FILM:
**ABOUT THE CHILDREN**

**Rose**, age 13, is a choirgirl trying to piece her life back together after witnessing the grisly aftermath of her parents' execution by rebel forces.

“Before my father died he told me singing was a great talent. When I sing I think of him”

**Dominic**, age 14, is an escaped child soldier and virtuoso xylophone player, who is haunted by the memory of the three people the rebels forced him to kill.

“I want to be a musician because playing the xylophone is a gift from God. Without music, there would be no life.”

**Nancy**, age 14, is a dancer who, after rebels murdered her father and abducted her mother, kept herself and two baby siblings alive in the bush for days until they fled to the camp.

“Songs make me forget about what is happening in the camp. all the disease, no food, people dying. Dancing is like closing my eyes and being with friends. It feels like home.”

**ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

**SEAN FINE AND ANDREA NIX FINE (DIRECTORS)**

Fine Films is an award winning film production company based in the Washington DC area. The company was created by Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine in 2003, the same year they were married. For the last decade, Sean and Andrea have been producing, directing and shooting documentaries for the finest documentary outlets in television and theatrical release. They have worked in over thirty countries, from dangerous war zones to the Arctic Circle, to bring unknown human stories to the screen.
The Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa, bordered on the east by Kenya, the north by Sudan, on the west by the Democratic Republic of Congo, on the southwest by Rwanda, and on the south by Tanzania. The southern part of the country includes a substantial portion of Lake Victoria, within which it shares borders with Kenya and Tanzania. Uganda takes its name from the Buganda kingdom, which encompasses a portion of the south of the country including the capital Kampala.

**ABOUT GEOGRAPHY OF UGANDA:**

Although landlocked, Uganda has access to several large water bodies, including Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, Lake Kyoga and Lake Edward. The country is located on the East African plateau, averaging about 2,950 FT above sea level. Although generally tropical in nature, the climate differs between parts of the country. Uganda includes several offshore islands in Lake Victoria. Most important cities are located in the south, near Lake Victoria, including the capital Kampala and the nearby city of Entebbe. Uganda also has several rivers most important of which is the White Nile, one of the world’s longest rivers, whose source is Lake Victoria and whose waters pour into the Mediterranean Sea.

**ABOUT DISTRICTS AND COUNTIES OF UGANDA:**

Uganda is divided into 80 districts, spread across four administrative regions: Northern, Eastern, Central and Western. The districts are subdivided into counties. A number of districts have been added in the past few years, and eight others were added on July 1, 2006. Most districts are named after their main commercial and administrative towns. Each district is divided into sub-districts, counties, sub-counties, parishes and villages.

Parallel with the state administration, five traditional Bantu kingdoms have remained, enjoying some degrees of mainly cultural autonomy. The kingdoms are Toro, Ankole, Busoga, Bunyoro and Buganda.

**WHAT IS THE LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY?:**

The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), formed in 1987, is a rebel guerilla army operating mainly in northern Uganda and parts of Sudan. The group is engaged in an armed rebellion against the Ugandan government in what is now one of Africa’s longest-running conflicts. It is led by Joseph Kony who is based on the Ten Commandments and Acholi tradition. The LRA is accused of widespread human rights violations, including mutilation, torture, rape, the abduction of civilians, the use of child soldiers and a number of massacres.

**WHY YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN UGANDA:**

Uganda continues to experience difficulty in advancing respect for human rights in matters concerning torture, child labor, and liberties. There are as many as thirteen ‘security’ organizations of the Museveni government, some directly answerable to the President and not constitutionally based and established by Act of Parliament. These organizations persecute opponents of the government, carry out abductions, disappearances, extra-judicial killings and torture and act both independently, interdependently with each other, and in cooperation with the Ugandan Police. These organizations also harass the free media and official parliamentary opposition.
Uganda has more than 50 tribes, each tribe has its dancing style, implying they are various dances from different regions of the country.

**AMAGUNJU DANCE FROM CENTRAL BUGANDA [ROYAL DANCE]**

This is folk dance from Buganda kingdom [royal court]. In Buganda kingdom it’s a taboo for the kingdom to be ruled by a woman. One day the king died [king molondo] who had many wives. Some of these wives were expecting so the medicine men and traditional doctors had to search for a wife who was pregnant with a baby boy.

Namulondo was expecting a baby boy. She had to sit on the throne to show people that it’s not her ruling but the unborn child. When this baby was born, he layed on the throne; however, kings were not supposed to cry as this would bring curse to the kingdom. Musicians, uncles, and aunts created Amagunju dance that kept the baby boy entertained and stopped his crying.

**AGWARA DANCE FROM NORTHERN UGANDA BY ACHORI PEOPLE**

This dance gets its name from the local trumpets called the Agwara. The men blow the trumpets as the women dance.

**MWAGA DANCE FROM EASTERN UGANDA [BY BAGISHU PEOPLE]**

This is a Ceremonial initiation dance of the Bagishu people in Uganda. The dance reflects that for a young boy to become a man he must be Circumcised. Before the circumcision takes place, the boy to be circumcised dances for 21 days to possess the spiritual powers of no fear to become a man.

**GAZE DANCE OF THE LUGBARA PEOPLE**

Gaze is a traditional dance of the Lugbara people from the region of the West Nile, along the boarder with Zaire. This dance reflects the transition from the dance movements of the Lugbara to those of the Congo style of dancing.

**OWARO**

Owo is a ceremonial dance from the Samya-Bugwe region of Uganda. Samya is one of the smallest populations in the country.

**EKITAGURIRO**

This dance comes from Ankole Western part of Uganda region. This dance is performed by the older men and women and is used to demonstrate the love that the Ankole people have for their cattle. The singing in the dance imitates the sounds of the cattle “even the sound of the milk coming from the cow”. The flute that is played during the dance is the same used to herd cattle. The stamping movements used by the men in the dance are similar to a cow’s walk, and the women use their hands to represent the long, beautiful horns of the cow.

**RUNYEGE, ENTOGORO [A MARRAIGÉ DANCE]**

Runyege, Entogoro is a dance performed in the Toro region in western Uganda. Sometimes, more than ten men Conflicts to marry one beautiful girl. When this happens, the community organizes a big ceremony, and all the male candidates must come and dance. The girl then chooses the best dancer.

In this culture, people believe that the best dancer represents the best married life. The dance also indicates who is the strongest man, and families do not want to give their beautiful daughters to weak men who will struggle to provide food and water when there is a drought. So in this dance, the man who gets tired first loses, and the man who dances until the end wins. A girl may want to marry a man who gets tired early in the dance, but she has no choice but to marry the winner.

**EKIZINO [FROM WESTERN UGANDA]**

Ekizino is a royal dance from the Bakiga people of kigezi which is known as “switzerland of Africa” because of its weather and landscape similar to most European countries. During colder seasons, Ekizino is the warm-up dance. Since Kigezi is a hilly region, the men who go out farming early in the cold mornings must jump around for a while to get warm and also to stretch their muscles after work. Traditionally, the people also used to stamp the ground until they found signs of water. Therefore, this dance represents their jumping and stamping.

**BAAKISIIMBA, NANKASA, MUWOGOLA**

Baakisiimba, Nankasa, and Muwogola are traditional folk dances that originated in the palace of the Buganda Kingdom, which is located in the central region of Uganda in east Africa. This kingdom is bordered on the south by Lake Victoria, which is the home of Nalubaale, the wife of Lubaale, one of the Bugandan gods. A former Bugandan king greatly enjoyed the local beer, tonto omwenge. Tonto is made from banana plants, and the name is taken from the Lugandan word tontomera, which means, “Do not knock me”. At one gathering, this king drank too much of the beer and became quite happy. (In Buganda, it is taboo to say that the king is drunk; you can only say that the king is very happy.) The king then started praising the people who had made the beer, saying abaakisiimba, which means “those who planted the bananas”, and bebaakiwoomya, “they made it delicious”.

The musicians at this gathering created an abaakisiimba rhythm that imitated the words of the king, who was so happy and relaxed that he began to move and dance. While the musicians mimicked the king’s words on their drums, the women mimicked the king’s movements, which eventually became a dance that is now performed throughout Buganda by all generations. There are three major movements in this dance: the first is Baakisiimba, the second is Nankasa, and the third is Muwogola.

**ACHOLI CULTURAL DANCE ASSOCIATION**

The Acholi Cultural Dance Association was founded in 1997 in Kitchener, Ontario by a group of South Sudanese Canadian immigrant families. The group strives to keep their cultural traditions alive through dance while teaching their children about the Acholi heritage. The Acholis are part of the Luo group and live mostly in southern Sudan and northern Uganda as well as western Kenya and eastern Congo.

The mostly children’s group has performed at numerous Sudanese community events and churches and were featured at the “Refugee Day” at Kitchener City Hall.

Led by Joseph Oywak, the group uses singers, drummers and musicians with a large dance troupe to perform the Dingi dingi which is an all girls dance said to have originated when the men were away at harvest time. It is a dance with many different steps and sequences and is one of the most popular traditional dances of the Acholis.

Acholi Cultural Dance Association performed at Afrofest in 1999.
FURTHER READING

1. *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*  
   by Kumar Rupesinghe

2. *The Culture of Violence*  
   by Kumar Rupesinghe

3. *The Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda*  
   by Rosa Ehrenreich

4. *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*  
   by Phares Mukasa Mutibwa

5. *Documenting Women’s Experiences of Armed Conflict Situations in Uganda*  
   by Isis-WICCE (Organization)

6. *Uganda, the Dilemma of Nationhood*  
   by G.N. Uzoigwe

7. *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*  
   by Sylvia Tamale

8. *War, Violence, and Children in Uganda*  
   by Cole P. Dodge and Magne Raundalen

FURTHER WATCHING

   A bizarre accident in Uganda finds Scottish doctor Nicholas Garrigan appointed personal physician to infamous Ugandan leader Idi Amin and, over the next eight years, struggling with his own complicity in the dictator’s brutality and barbaric reign of terror. Reissue. (A Fox Searchlight Pictures, releasing Fall 2006, directed by Kevin Macdonald, starring Forest Whitaker, James McAvoy, Kerry Washington, & Gillian Anderson)

2. *General Idi Amin Dada* (1971)  
   A documentary about the life and times of the former dictator of Uganda, Idi Amin.

   Jesse James Miller’s documentary Uganda Rising charts the lengthy war between Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni’s army and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group led by Joseph Kony, a man who claims to converse with higher powers. The LRA add to their numbers by kidnapping children in Uganda and training them to become mercenaries, occasionally committing atrocities against their very own families. Museveni responds to these tactics by rounding up citizens into camps that have on occasion been as deadly as the LRA. - Perry Seibert, All Movie Guide

   It is a documentary recorded in 2003 based on the experiences of three college students (Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole) in Northern Uganda. The filmmakers are from San Diego, California in the United States. They went to Sudan to ‘find a story,’ but ended up in northern Uganda where they found thousands of people affected by the insurgency of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). The resulting story focuses on the war’s effects on children, particularly child soldiers, referred to in the movie as Night Commuters.

   They found that thousands of children flee their homes nightly, in order to escape being abducted by the LRA. Children in Uganda are regularly abducted by these rebel soldiers to be trained as child soldiers. The children who run from their homes walk miles, often to cities like Gulu, to find shelter in hospitals or bus parks - virtually anywhere far away from rebel camps.

   The filmmakers have also started a related nonprofit organization designed to help curb the problem. This is accomplished primarily by sending volunteers to Acholiland, the affected region in Northern Uganda, to aid former child-soldiers in reintegration into normal civic life through education and extensive psychological evaluation and treatment. It has been established in the United States and is currently involved with distributing copies of the *Invisible Children* DVD to as many people as possible.
1. The Refugee Community History Project has collected the previously untold stories of refugees who have settled in London, since 1951 in order to highlight the enormous contributions they make to the city. [www.refugeestories.org/groups/ugandancommunity.html](http://www.refugeestories.org/groups/ugandancommunity.html)

2. UgandaCommunity.com is a communication hub for Ugandans and friends of Uganda worldwide. It is the culmination of what started as an informal grouping of a handful of Ugandan families in the Washington, DC area in 2002 - known at the time as the Uganda Hospitality Group. Today, they have Ugandans receiving direct e-mail communication in areas as far-flung as California, South Africa, the Netherlands and Australia, to mention but a few. They also have several members based in Uganda, of course. [www.ugandacommunity.com](http://www.ugandacommunity.com)

3. uNight: For the Children of Uganda works to mobilize the public and build a network of concerned citizens in the United States and abroad to raise awareness to help stop the 20 year civil war in Uganda and to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims, two generations of children whose culture and way of life has been systematically destroyed by war and neglect. [www.unight.org](http://www.unight.org)

4. THETA African Solutions for African Challenges has comprehensively trained close to 2000 traditional health practitioners (THPs) in HIV/AIDS education, counseling and care and linked them to the biomedical health system in 15 districts of Uganda. After THPs have acquired new knowledge and skills and given their in-depth understanding of the community, they come up with initiatives to address the social and health challenges their communities are facing. These initiatives include client support groups and associations and vary from district to district. For many of the initiatives membership, it includes THPs clients, PLWA, widows, orphans and vulnerable children. They mainly engage in livelihood programs and activities to improve and increase access to HIV/AIDS prevention and care services for the unprivileged rural communities. [www.thetaug.org/cip.html](http://www.thetaug.org/cip.html)

5. The Uganda Conflict Action Network (Uganda-CAN) is a grassroots campaign of citizens working, through awareness building and advocacy to end the 20-year war in northern Uganda. Working closely with Ugandan peacemakers and activists, Uganda-CAN works for a more responsible global citizenship, advocating a U.S. policy that hears and responds to the suffering of those caught in the midst of poverty and war, particularly in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. [www.ugandacan.org](http://www.ugandacan.org)

6. Children of Uganda was originally called the Uganda Children’s Charity Foundation, Children of Uganda was founded in 1995. As a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization headquartered in the United States, Children of Uganda works in conjunction with local non-governmental organizations in Uganda to provide education and support to over 700 children in need. We have administrative offices in Dallas, Texas and Kampala, the capital of Uganda, where programs are administered by more than 50 local staff members dispersed in three districts of Uganda.

The mission of Children of Uganda is to support and empower hundreds of orphans and vulnerable children in Uganda to lead successful and productive lives. Our vision is that all children in Uganda receive an education to become healthy, productive members of their community who assume leadership roles and positively impact Ugandan society. [www.uccf.org](http://www.uccf.org)

7. GuluWalk is an initiative started by two Canadians to highlight the plight of Acholi children in northern Uganda who trek each night to town centers in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader - for fear of being maimed, raped, abducted or even killed by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel paramilitary group that has been operating in northern Uganda since 1987.

Each night, tens of thousands of children referred to as "night commuters", ranging between the ages of 3 and 17, walk up to 20 kilometres (12.45 miles) from Internally Displaced Person (IDP) Camps to larger towns, especially Gulu, in search of safety from the LRA. It is estimated that around 20,000 children have been abducted by the LRA since 1987 for use as soldiers and sex slaves. [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/GuluWalk](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/GuluWalk)

8. Act for Stolen Children was created by the United Nations. It is a mass media campaign that brings together government leaders, UN bodies, NGOs, Ugandans and other supporters in New York and released a signed declaration in support of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The advent of the campaign signifies unprecedented collaboration between grassroots, non-governmental and governmental organizations working for peace in northern Uganda. [www.actforthestolenchildren.org](http://www.actforthestolenchildren.org)
The war in northern Uganda is in its 21st year, but you can help end it. Here’s a list of ways you can take political action and organize your community in support of the peace in northern Uganda:

**POLITICAL ACTION:**

○ **Email Congress:** Email a letter to your Congressional representatives through www.afjn.org, urging them to act responsibly for peace in northern Uganda. Click here to find out how your representatives have voted on African issues.

○ **Call Congress:** Call the Capital Switchboard at 202-224-3121 to connect with your Representatives to ask for sustained US leadership to end the war in Uganda. Click here to find out how your representatives have voted on African issues.

○ **GuluWalk:** Visit www.guluwalk.com to find out how to get involved in grassroots action for peace in northern Uganda.

○ **Displace Me:** Visit www.invisiblechildren.com/theMovement/dispaceMe and unite in solidarity with the 1.4 million displaced persons in northern Uganda.

○ **Sign Declaration:** Sign World Vision’s Children Should Never Be Soldiers Declaration, which will then be sent to US political representatives. www.worldvision.com

○ **Sign-Up for Updates:** Sign-up to receive Uganda-CAN’s political action updates and alerts. www.ugandacan.org/newsletter

**COMMUNITY ACTION:**

○ **2006 Action Packets:** Download Uganda-CAN’s 2006 Northern Uganda Action Packet and other community action resources to organize your community to help end the war. www.ugandacan.org/volunteer

○ **Northern Uganda Faith & Action Kit:** Download the Africa Faith and Justice Network’s Northern Uganda Faith & Action Tool Kit and organize your faith community to pray and act for peace today. www.afjn.org

○ **What’s at Stake in the Juba Peace Talks?:** Find out what’s at stake in the Juba peace talks between the LRA and Ugandan government - and tell us what YOU think is at stake. www.ugandacan.org/peacetalks.php

○ **Invisible Children:** Organize a screening of the documentary *Invisible Children* at your school or in your home community. www.invisiblechildren.com

○ **Uganda Rising:** Organize a screening of the documentary Uganda Rising at your school or in your home community. www.ugandarising.com/home

○ **The Name Campaign:** Buy a nameplate necklace and support The Name Campaign’s efforts to help the children of war-torn northern Uganda. www.creativevisions.org/name
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What do you think was the role of the Ugandan National Music Competition in the students from War/Dance’s lives? Do you think their participation in the competition changed them in a long-term way? How so?

- In the film, Rose is 14, Dominic is 13 and Nancy is 14. If you were to think about the timeline of their lives and compare it to your own—what are the differences? What were you doing when you were 13? How do you think you would be different if you had some of their experiences?

- How has the war defined Ugandan youth?

- What role does music/dance play in Ugandan society at large?

- Why do you think that music and dance is such a powerful tool for people who experience difficulties in their lives? What are some examples of ways that people in the US or NYC use art as a way of expressing themselves and overcoming strife?

- Do you think that a film like this needed to be made? What was the film's impact on you?

FURTHER CLASSROOM PROJECTS:

- Get involved! We have provided a list of organizations that are involved with the crisis in Uganda. You can help build awareness, raise money or write letters to people who can help—as a classroom, choose an organization and work together to get involved.

- Express yourselves! Find a way to tell your own story using song, dance or art. As a classroom, each student can write or make a poem, story, song, picture, photograph, or dance and share with the classroom. Each piece of work should address something, big or small, that the student has overcome. When projects are finished, students should share their work in the classroom.

- Share! The students featured in the film may not have known that you personally would hear their stories, but you did. And therefore, they shared something of themselves with you—so write a letter or create a video letter for the students featured in the film. We’ll send them to the producers of the film.