

A Better Place: The Story Behind the Song that Started a Worldwide Movement

ROME, NY, UNITED STATES, January 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Voices from Uganda, South Africa, Norway, Australia, and across the United States (Atlanta, Louisiana, Los Angeles and New York, are all singing a song of unity and appreciation of our fellow man. And it started with a single phone call.

A Better Place is a song created in 2020 to help raise awareness for a struggling music program in Uganda and the YMCA of the Greater Tri-Valley. Both were losing funding due to the 2020 pandemic.

Beginning with the Hope Music Foundation in Kampala, Uganda, creator and YMCA CEO Hank Leo began a journey that would connect artists from around the world.

"A friend and music educator (Roy Schryver) asked me if I could connect with the Hope Music Foundation to see how we could help with the orphanage's music program," Leo said.

"Hope Music Foundation helps orphans and underprivileged kids through music, dancing, and playing instruments," Leo explained. "Donations help them with the basic life needs of the



Fred Umbalo, Kampala Uganda, and children in the Hope Music Foundation's music program perform on the A Better Place music video.



Stockbridge Valley Central School in Munnsville, NY, embraced the song and it's concept, and students performed for their community in 2024 bringing the song full circle.

orphans, in addition to providing instruments, and they hope to expand to build a safe orphanage for the children.”

Through a video call, Fred Mbaalu, (music teacher and artist at Hope Music Foundation) gave Hank a video tour of the orphanage and the children’s music program.

“That was our first inter-country collaboration that would lead to A Better Place being sung on every continent around the world,” Leo said.

Through Leo’s contacts, cold calls, and partnerships with other national and international YMCAs, the creators gathered regional, national, and international musicians and recording artists, all inspired to lend their unique talents to the project.

“It didn’t take long before musicians, artists, studios, and other Ys around the world joined the movement,” Leo added.

Seeing and hearing friends and partners from around the world, especially our young people during wars and other life-threatening circumstances, sing this universally appealing song has been a blessing. To have three choirs, South Africa’s

3-time Grammy Award winners The Soweto Gospel Choir; Uganda’s Watoto Children’s Choir and Hope Music Foundation; and Norway’s Holmlia Tween joining together on the chorus is simply amazing, the creators explained.

The completed project also features Mathew Beadle on piano, regional and now California-based singer Zainep Abdelaal on lead vocals; national recording artist Melba Moore, former Billy Joel band legendary drummer Liberty Devitto on drums and New Orleans’ Mitchell Player on upright bass.

A special addition is (Atlanta-based) Christian spoken-word artist, Gloria Umanah. Central New York guitarist Justin Smithson is on guitar along with a host of Central NY-based artists Justin Smithson, Jessica Talbott, Justin Smithson, and others.

The song was recorded through the generous donation of Big Blue North Recording Studio in Utica, NY.

“We are forever grateful to Pam Jardieu and Jeff Aderman, not only for their contribution, but for their involvement from the beginning in helping to make the song the best it can be,” Leo said.

The song was mixed in Atlanta by 7-time NAACP Image Award Winner and Grammy-nominated mixing engineer Jason Brown and mastered by Adrian Carr, engineer from Northern New York State.

Closer to home, Stockbridge Valley Central School in Munnsville, NY, embraced the song and its concept, and students performed for their community in 2024 bringing the song full circle.

What began with a song to connect people around the globe through the universal language of music, the education-based project now includes a children’s book series and curriculum featuring over 40 YMCAs, partners, and collaborators who have contributed in one way or another,” Leo explained.

The project has now grown into two additional songs including “Better World Blues,” written by Mississippi Blues Artist Robert Kimbrough Sr. and “Better Place,” written by Christian Rap Artist Gabriel Day. Three children’s books were

penned by Leo to provide a companion education tool to the songs. These include “A Better Place,” “Better World Blues” and “The Boy and the Tree”, all available on Amazon and book platforms nationally.

To view the music video trailer, visit the YMCA of the Greater Tri-Valley's YouTube channel @ymcaofthegreatertri-valley or Facebook page facebook/ymcagreatertrivalley to see the video trailer.

PBS (WCNY) has agreed to air the documentary when complete.

Rob Totaro, Director of Member Advancement of New York State Alliance of YMCAs, Inc. has been instrumental in building the “A Better Place” website, www.abetterplaceproject.org with links to all project collaborators.

It is Leo’s hope that the project will continue to cultivate relationships globally with other Ys and

creative partners.

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