



# SIERRA LEONE'S REFUGEE ALL STARS

## PROGRAM

*There will be an intermission.*

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**Saturday, January 28 @ 8 PM**

Prince Theatre



This engagement of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars is made possible through the ArtsCONNECT program of Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

## AFRICAN ROOTS, AMERICAN VOICES

Part of the African Roots, American Voices series.

## PROGRAM NOTES

Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars bring the spirit of Freetown to Philadelphia! The band formed in a refugee camp during their homeland's civil war that ended in 2002. They have gone on to build a global following with the enduring power of hope that's the heart of their music. The All Stars infectious songs are tinged with reggae, highlife, gumbe and palm wine influences heard over the radio during their childhoods in Sierra Leone. Their lyrics tell stories of overcoming obstacles and an ability to see the light at the end of any tunnel.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Throughout the 1990s, the West African country of Sierra Leone was wracked with a bloody, horrifying war that forced millions to flee their homes. The musicians that would eventually form Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars are originally from the capital city of Freetown, but were forced to leave after various violent rebel attacks. Most of those that left the country made their way into neighboring Guinea, some ending up in refugee camps and others struggling to fend for themselves in Guinea's capital city of Conakry.

Founding member and lead singer, Reuben Koroma, and his wife Grace left Sierra Leone in 1997 and found themselves in the Kalia refugee camp near the border of Sierra Leone. When it became clear they would not return to their homeland anytime soon, the couple united with other musicians in the camp whom they had known before the war, to entertain their fellow refugees. After a Canadian relief agency donated two beat-up electric guitars, a single microphone and a meager sound system, Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars were born.

The senseless deaths and illnesses of friends and family, including some of the band's original members, and the slimming hope for peace in their country, has only strengthened the resolve of Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars to do what they can to turn their country around. Their weapon in this struggle is music, and their message, while offering critique and condemnation of wrongdoing, remains positive and hopeful. Optimism in the face of obstacles and the eternal hope for a better future motivates their lives and music.

"It's been a long struggle out of the war, out of miserable conditions," notes Koroma, "We try to bring out sensitive issues that are affecting the world. It is all of our responsibility that the masses are suffering. We bring our positive messages into the world so we can expect a positive change in the world. And, most importantly, bring about peace."