

Music group garners support for Africa

Globe-trekking brothers and musicians Isaac, Taylor, and Zac Hanson of the band Hanson have spearheaded a campaign to raise awareness and donations for the impoverished and HIV-stricken in Africa. A 2006 visit to Soweto, South Africa spurred the band to develop “Take the Walk,” encouraging their fans to walk one barefoot mile before their concerts.

By [Alison Walkley](#) 29 May 2009



Left to right: Zac, Taylor, and Isaac Hanson (Photo courtesy Bryan Johnson)

Between 7 September 2008 and 16 May 2009, an entire journey around the world has been travelled. Now with 28,000 miles behind them, Hanson is looking forward to continue their impact in Africa.

The impetus to get involved with aid in Africa came to the Hansons in their hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma. A few of their friends developed encrypted cell phone technology that AIDS patients can use to communicate with their doctors. Zac told MediaGlobal, “The doctors over there had said, ‘Wow, if we had some sort of way to assist and stay in communication with our patients we could help to make sure they were staying on their medication.’”

Energised by the idea, the band was further moved to contribute upon their first visit to Africa three years ago. “There’s a certain optimism, particularly about the whole culture of what I’ve seen of that continent that is unexpected,” Zac said. “That kind of spirit of entrepreneurship and people who are wanting to build something and create something, that was really inspiring.”

Intending to distribute their knowledge of African poverty to the world, the Hansons sought a way to marry their music with the cause. Zac explained, “The idea was to tell the story through our record in some form and then we started by giving away the song ‘Great Divide,’” the first song off of their 2007 album “The Walk”, featuring singers from the DD Dliwayo School Choir and Iris Ministries Zimpeto Centre Choir in Soweto. “We were over there and it was kind of like, well maybe we can add this music or a little bit of this culture into what we’re doing.”

After that initial trip, Hanson returned to the States and made “Great Divide” available on iTunes for their fans to purchase for a dollar, all proceeds going to five goals they agreed upon: the construction of clean water wells, cell phones for AIDS patients to communicate with their doctors, anti-retroviral medication, building schools, and providing shoes to those without them.

This final goal was conceived through a partnership with Blake Mycoskie, the founder of the non-profit TOMS Shoes, who donates one pair of shoes to a child in the developing world for every pair sold.

After meeting with Mycoskie, the Hansons decided to incorporate TOMS’ mission into their campaign. “Before every concert we’re going to ask people to walk a mile barefoot and then we’re going to talk about

buying shoes and why they're important," Zac related. "And as we did that we saw an incredible outcry from our fans of support."

To date, over US\$28,000 has been raised with more money coming in from fans and donors every day. Now, the brothers are trying to figure out what's next. "We really want to go [back to Africa] for the benefit of all the people who have taken part, to really be able to say, 'Here's the wells, here's the schools, here's the people that you've affected,'" Zac continued. "I think that's one really important thing that really needs to happen more and more, which is really giving people the sense and the reality that they are really affecting individuals, not just a greater cause or charity."

Since Hanson is currently in the studio working on their next record, slated for release in 2010, they are unsure when they will be able to travel abroad again. Until they do, Zac was adamant that their music would continue to spread their message.

"I hope that we find a creative and inspired way to communicate that to people," he said. "I mean you hear [the African influence] in the songs particularly on 'The Walk,' and I think the record we're working on now... [you hear] the confidence and inspiration of all the people that have come and supported what we've tried to do in a record that I think shows that more...triumphant message of, 'Hey, we can actually do something.'"

As celebrities with a cause, Zac said his brothers and he feel fortunate to have a "spotlight" to raise awareness. "You have a tool that many people don't have when you're a celebrity," he acknowledged, "of having people who want to hear what you have to say and I think it can be obviously a great tool for people really help them make a difference... That said, it's not something that's outside the grasp of every normal person who's willing to put their heart into it, put their effort into it. I think the most impactful people in the world are people that never made it to the cover of *People* magazine."

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