

Humble beginnings for touring soul singers

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No passport? No problem.

The acappella group Soul Influence will take you on a journey through Africa in 90 minutes when they perform at the Lebovic Centre for Arts and Entertainment - Nineteen on the Park Friday.

"For what they do, they're amongst the best," said Steven Foster, cultural facility and programming co-ordinator at the arts centre. "It's visceral. You feel what they're singing. It's a very unique experience."

The six-member vocal group got its start in 2003 with just two members from a Toronto Seventh Day Adventist church. Shortly thereafter, a third person from their congregation joined, then a fourth and so on.

The group planned to perform only during their church services, but they became "bigger than what we anticipated. Before we knew it, we were getting invites left, right and centre," said Simba Nyawiri, one of the group's original members.

Soul Influence performs traditional African songs that are Zulu, Shona, Bemba, Tonga and Swahili in nature, among others. But they add a contemporary and Christian twist to them.

"Africans generally sing, no matter what ... we're doing. ... We sing while we're happy, when we're sad, when we're working," Mr. Nyawiri said.

"It helps you get on. ... Not feel the

COMING UP

pain of the work. Music has a way of easing the pain, easing the soul," the bass singer said.

Soul Influence is more than an acappella group. Members are also AIDS ambassadors to Africa.

"In life, we are our brother's keeper. We need to do what we can in the time we are afforded to help humanity," according to their website.

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Soul Influence has sung alongside Alicia Keys, Nelly Furtado, Chioniso Mawarire, K-OS, Keisha Chante and Stephen Page.

They have also released two CDs - *Gigo!* and *Koba Mnandi*.

The show begins at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$35 for adults, \$18 for students and are available from <http://nineteenonthePark.com/>



Soul Influence hopes to take you on a trip to Africa at Nineteen on the Park Friday.

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