

Billboard®

March 13, 2010

MUSIC



WORLD BY EVIE NAGY

Don't Look Back

Although Moving Forward, Refugee All Stars Honor Their Roots With 'Rise & Shine'



Billboard

March 13, 2010

In the weeks following the earthquake in Haiti, many well-meaning artists rushed to help, hosting benefits and raising funds, yet few of them could relate to the sense of horror and loss felt by the citizens of the devastated country. But for the members of the Refugee All Stars, which formed in a refugee camp in Guinea during Sierra Leone's civil war, feelings of displacement were still fresh—and the band decided to act. The All Stars posted the first single from their forthcoming album on their Web site, selling "Global Threat" for a minimum donation of \$1 and donating 100% of the proceeds to the International Rescue Committee.

Even as they work to help victims in Haiti, the All Stars are trying to move beyond their own past as they prepare for the March 23 release of their second album, "Rise & Shine" (Cumbancha). Most of the band's current audience knows the group from the 2005 documentary "Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars," and the act's previous album, "Living Like a Refugee."

"Obviously the story is still there. It's an important part of what they do," manager Kevin Morris says. "But musically, this is a giant leap forward for them."

"They recorded [the first album] around campfires and in low-quality studios and that was part of the charm, but we knew that wasn't going to last forever. The group had to demonstrate that they had the chops to be a touring and recording band that wasn't going to ride on their story alone," Cumbancha founder Jacob Edgar says. "So we thought, 'How are we going to make this special?'" The group was finishing a tour in New Orleans, and the city's musical resources

and compatibility provided an answer. "New Orleans has had a lot of struggles in recent years just as Sierra Leone has, and the people of the city have experienced displacement, as well as the redemptive power of music," Edgar says.

"I think it doesn't fall into the pitfall of the classic, overproduced second album from an international group," says filmmaker Zach Niles, who worked on the documentary and now co-manages the All Stars. He also notes that while much of the band were musicians long before they entered the camps, many

members were in "party bands" that focused on cover songs. "Having their own band that tours around their world gives them a new freedom to write songs," Niles says. "They're finding new ways to combine dancehall and traditional music."

The band will extensively tour the United States, including a May 2 stop at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, but the campaign will focus on Europe, where Edgar will use Cumbancha's network of international partners to

distribute the film for the first time and book an extensive tour.

"We've focused on developing the European market for them because that's actually where they have no presence whatsoever," Edgar says. "It's funny because for quote-unquote 'world music,' Europe is really the strongest market in a lot of ways—it's ironic that they're so well-known in the U.S. and so little-known in Europe. So we have a lot of growth [potential], and that's pretty exciting." ♦♦♦



'Obviously the story is still there. It's an important part of what they do. But musically, this is a giant leap forward for them.'

—KEVIN MORRIS,
MANAGER

