“Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.” 1 Chronicles 16: 23-24 NIV

This was the call to praise at the dedication of GIAL’s new Center for Excellence in World Arts (CEWA) on May 14. CEWA’s move into a newly-renovated suite of offices and a large classroom will provide a collaborative space for several arts partners to work together: GIAL’s World Arts program, SIL’s Ethnomusicology and Arts Group, and the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE). Historically, these groups have enjoyed fruitful collaboration, as they share a common goal—to prepare students to engage local communities in creating for God’s kingdom in their own artistic languages. The core arts courses at GIAL, as well as a set of World Arts textbooks, came out of that collaboration.

The celebratory opening program began with a speech by GIAL’s Academic Dean, Dr. Doug Tiffin, rejoicing in the vision and provisions for space God has given. The ribbon was cut by GIAL President Dr. David Ross. Inside the newly-finished space, CEWA faculty members Dr. Robin Harris and Dr. Brian Schrag spoke about the founding of the World Arts program at GIAL and the vision for preparing Arts Specialists to serve communities around the world. Dr. Harris then introduced several special guests: John Franklin, executive director of Imago Arts (Canada); Frank Fortunato, OM Arts International; Bill Taylor, a leader in the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission; and Jill Ford, Director of the Arts program at All Nations Christian College in the UK. Ms. Ford presented CEWA with a specially-commissioned work of art by one of her former students—a beautiful textile piece titled “Every Tribe, Every Nation,” to reflect the nations coming to God.

Brad Keating, SIL arts specialist, introduced a new video series (in progress), “Arts Consultants at Work,” that will show what arts consultants do. Finally, Dr. Harris acknowledged people who have supported the creation of CEWA and Dr. Ross ended with prayer.

One of the evening’s many highlights was a drama. The GIAL drama team, coordinated by Michelle Petersen, performed a dramatic interpretation of the poem “Jesus of the Scars,” written in 1917 by Edward Shillito. Another high point was the music in several styles and languages provided by the Izibongo world worship band. Also, Dr. Brian Schrag sang and played the kundi, a harp-like instrument he learned among the Mono people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In fact, he played two of them at once—something he had never done before!

This dedication was a celebration of how the arts from all cultures can communicate Truth in powerful ways and of how GIAL and its partners in CEWA are preparing students to cross cultural boundaries, researching arts, sparking creativity, and responding to communities’ needs.
Arts for a Better Future
Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya
April 6-10, 2015

BY DR. ROBIN HARRIS, DIRECTOR
GIAL’S CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN WORLD ARTS

As I begin to write, I can hear the sounds of the Muslim call to prayer drifting through my open window. The increasing Islamization of Kenya has been a topic of discussion this week after the massacre of 148 (largely Christian) students at Garissa University in northern Kenya just as I was getting ready to fly to Nairobi. Visible manifestations of heightened security marked this visit. Security guards checked us entering church compounds for services and at the mall. At Daystar University, guards at the gates examined each car entering and exiting, and guarded both entrances of the seven-story building where we lived and taught. We used electronic pass cards for the 7th floor where we lived. As the largest Christian school in Kenya, Daystar is a possible target for Al Shabab, so I am grateful that this course was unhindered by violence. Please continue to pray for Kenya, especially for the Christians.

I was impressed that even with this recent tragedy, I didn’t hear of anyone backing out of the course due to fears about security. In fact, I was delighted to see a full course of 30 participants. The broad demographics represented demonstrated the wide appeal of this course. Out of 30 participants, we had nine Arabic-speaking students from North Africa, and five American cross-cultural workers working in Mali, Lebanon, and Nairobi. We had students from Daystar, but also from nearby Nairobi University and Kenyatta University. In addition, the participants represented a wide range of vocations: pastors, Christian leaders, church planters and other missionaries, as well as college students studying community development, communications, and arts of all kinds (dance, visual arts, music, drama, poetry).

This course exposes students to GIAL’s Center for Excellence in World Arts (CEWA), and three of the Americans expressed interest in further studies, two in possibly doing a full MA, and an additional person for just Arts and Trauma Healing.

As we have come to expect, participants responded powerfully to the message of the course—how to equip local communities to create for God’s Kingdom in their own artistic languages. Although not all of the evaluations are in yet, here are just a few of the many responses that we’ve received:

- This course has helped me differentiate between culture and Christianity and challenged me to remove the veil of judging what I don’t understand.
- I cannot say enough how grateful I am for this past week. The content and process were excellent, but even more than that, I feel like just being around people who really believe there is a place for the arts in how we engage cultures with the gospel was so encouraging and affirming.
- I have learned to see God as a God of all cultures. Our job as Christians is to be his representatives and not to promote our own forms of worship.
- As a pastor, I think this course is very necessary for pastors, because if these principles can be taught from the pulpit, not only taught but applied, the church, and ... society, will be better. I recommend that it be taught regularly and ... not only in classrooms, but also in churches.
- This… has changed the negative view I had for my country and culture. It has shown me that all cultures truly do come from God and that He views us as beautiful and worthy to be part of His Kingdom in Heaven…This new knowledge has made me a proud African but better yet, I am proud that God made me a Kenyan because that's where He thought I would thrive best.

Arts for a Better Future is a one-week intensive credit course offered every June at GIAL and as a workshop in several countries around the world. For details, see www.gial.edu/cewa.