



## [ArtsEtc.: Feature](#)

### **Empowering change, one song at a time**

**Recognized by the Peacedriven Campaign for 'Embers of Ubuntu,' Kevin Paris receives honor for his inspirational songwriting abilities**

By [Ann Rivall](#)

Wednesday, February 2, 2011 5:09 p.m.

Updated Wednesday, February 2, 2011 11:49:33 p.m.

For most college graduates, life-after-diploma resembles a dark abyss of unemployment or an aversion to real world expectations — picture Benjamin Braddock's despondent outlook on his post-grad future at the beginning of "The Graduate."

For Kevin Paris, this wasn't the case.

After graduating from the University of Wisconsin last spring with a degree in international studies and an African studies certificate, Paris chose to pursue his love of music, sidelined after years of studying too hard, and released his debut album, *Mangos For Breakfast*, last May.

The album, a folk- reggae potpourri of thoughtful lyrics and melodies, expresses Paris's reflective disposition and talent, and it also recently snagged him some international acclaim.

In January, Paris was awarded the Peacedriven Songwriting Award for "Embers of Ubuntu," a song he wrote after studying abroad in South Africa and recorded upon his return with his best friend, Andrea Brubaker.

"I submitted 'Embers of Ubuntu' because I knew its lyrics fit well with the messages the Peacedriven Campaign fosters, supports and raises awareness about," Paris said in a recent interview with The Badger Herald.

The Peacedriven Campaign aims to motivate social activists by empowering our generation to take a stand for peace, with their main vehicle of activism manifested in their annual Peacedriven Songwriting Award.

As the recipient of this year's Peacedriven Songwriting Award, Paris is given a cash prize, and for listeners who have yet to discover his soulful melodies, they're awarded the chance to hear "Embers of Ubuntu" on the Peacedriven Campaign's website.

The essential meaning of "Ubuntu" stems from an African humanitarian philosophy, and it's what the panel of Peacedriven judges felt Paris so eloquently communicated in his submission.

On the Peacedriven Campaign's website, Campaign Director Anthony Stokes praised Paris for translating the benevolent message of "Ubuntu," writing a song that defies the current trends of the music industry, which some critics could argue is oversaturated with songs devoid of substance.

"Music gathers, reaches and moves people in ways that nothing else can. It would be an awful mistake, shame and missed opportunity not to harness such a tool to catalyze and foster benevolent change," Paris said, commenting on his divided role as an artist responsible for spurring audiences to question and think while also providing sincere, relatable music.

“It needs not be a song trying to change or encourage anything, Rather, just an honest song we can listen to, understand, relate to or confide in,” Paris added.

Though lyrical ideas for “Embers of Ubuntu” began taking shape while Paris was in South Africa, it wasn’t until he returned home to friends did the song’s meaning truly cement itself.

Paris said many of the attitudes expressed in “Embers of Ubuntu” emerged from “conversations about happiness, life, love, compassion and more with a beloved friend of mine and many, Neha Suri.”

Suri passed away last February after losing a battle against bacterial meningitis only a few months shy of graduation.

“I guess I just wanted to mention this to send a renewed, continual batch of great love, recognition and thanks to her for her role in the song and award, and for her beautiful, uplifting, radiant role as an exemplary, loving friend and human being,” Paris said.

Celebrating the remembrance of his cherished friend and taking life after diploma in stride, Paris is soaking up the rays in São Paulo, Brazil, enrolled in his own version of grad school, majoring in self-discovery while also brushing up on his Portuguese.

“It’s been the perfect episode for this point in time in my life, filled with joy and new experiences in many different forms,” Paris said.

While visiting family in São Paulo, Paris hopes to begin working on his sophomore effort. And as an internationally award-winning artist recognized for creating empowering music, it’s easy to assume his outlook on songwriting would be transformed.

“To be honest, it doesn’t make me feel different about songwriting or the significant roles songwriting plays because my opinion on that hasn’t changed — it has only been reconfirmed,” Paris said. “This is a beautiful thing.”

*In celebration of the award, “Embers Of Ubuntu” will be available as a free download from the BandPage tab on Kevin Paris’s Facebook music page until Feb. 21. Visit [kevinparismusic.com](http://kevinparismusic.com) or iTunes to hear more from his first album, Mangos for Breakfast.*

Have a thought? We welcome your input, but please be polite and stay on topic wherever possible. Your comment may be deleted if it is inappropriately off topic or promotional or if it is unnecessarily rude or contains personal attacks. We may delete comments for other reasons as well. Just keep it simple and focus on your points as respectfully as possible.

We allow and encourage comments employing satire, wit and irony to make points. Do not flag comments just because you disagree. Flagged comments will be immunized from further flagging unless they stray far from the guidelines and do not add to the discussion. **Before flagging a comment you think is offensive, consider your time might be better spent rebutting it than censoring it.**

Copyright © 1995-2011 The Badger Herald, Inc. Some rights reserved.  
Full copyright terms available at <http://badgerherald.com/about/copyright.php>