



JAMES CARBONE / CORRESPONDENT

ON STAGE: Students of Creative Planet school of the Arts sing during the opening performance of their musical, "Mapambano," the story of a peaceful warrior during their end of the school year musical in Baldwin Park.

Musical focuses on struggles

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BALDWIN PARK — After months of academic and artistic education Creative Planet School of the Arts ended the year with a struggle.

Last week the school's 40 students performed their end of year musical, "Mapambano," which means "the struggle" in Swahili.

School officials said Mapambano focused on the difficulties children living in Africa and Asia experience.

"Our kids have learned a lot

about the plights in Africa and Asia specifically about the AIDS epidemic that the children in Africa live with and child labor in Asia," said Michelle Benton, one of the school's teachers. "While the musical has nothing to do with AIDS, it shows the struggles in Asia and Africa including the difficulties with poverty."

Creative Planet School of the Arts has been in Baldwin Park since 2000 and was established to give at-risk kids a safe and nurturing learning environment, said Billy Rugh, the school's principal.

"Every musical has a differ-

ent theme and is really a roundup of what the students have learned throughout the year," Rugh said. "It's always nice to see their creative talents come alive."

The private, nonprofit elementary school offers students traditional academics along with elective courses and after-school classes in drama, dance, music and visual arts, acting, piano, ballet, creative writing and yoga.

Benton said the students were excited to perform the musical for a real-life audience.

"They worked really hard

and were so happy to be able to perform the musical in its entirety," she said. "They had a great time."

Although the musical centered around struggles, Benton said it left the students with a positive, lasting impression.

"The musical ends with hope and trying to bring an end to all those struggles that were displayed," she said. "Ending it that way was very important to us."

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