

# Shaking it at the Lake of Stars

**Emma Johnson**  
meets the Liverpool  
club promoter on a  
Malawi mission

**A**S BOB Geldof was preparing to raise the curtain on this summer's Live 8 concerts, here in Liverpool our very own ambassador for Africa was frantically putting the finishing touches to his own fundraising spectacular.

Will Jameson is known among Liverpool's clubbing community as one of the promoters behind the phenomenally successful Chibuku Shake Shake night which has been going for over five years.

However when he is not ensuring that music fans have a great Saturday night out, the 26-year-old is busy working to help relieve poverty in one of Africa's most beautiful countries - Malawi - the best way he knows how, with a music festival.

The first Lake of Stars Festival, so called as it takes place on the shores of Lake Malawi, the third largest lake in Africa, took place in September last year attended by over 100 music fans from across the UK, joined by hundreds of locals.

In September this year Will and his team returned once again to the lake, this time accompanied by even more travellers, and now the festival is a veritable Glastonbury for Malawi with plans already well under way for next year's event.

Peaceful for decades and filled with awe-inspiring scenery and landscapes, Malawi is affectionately known as the "warm heart of Africa" due to its people's friendly and welcoming nature.

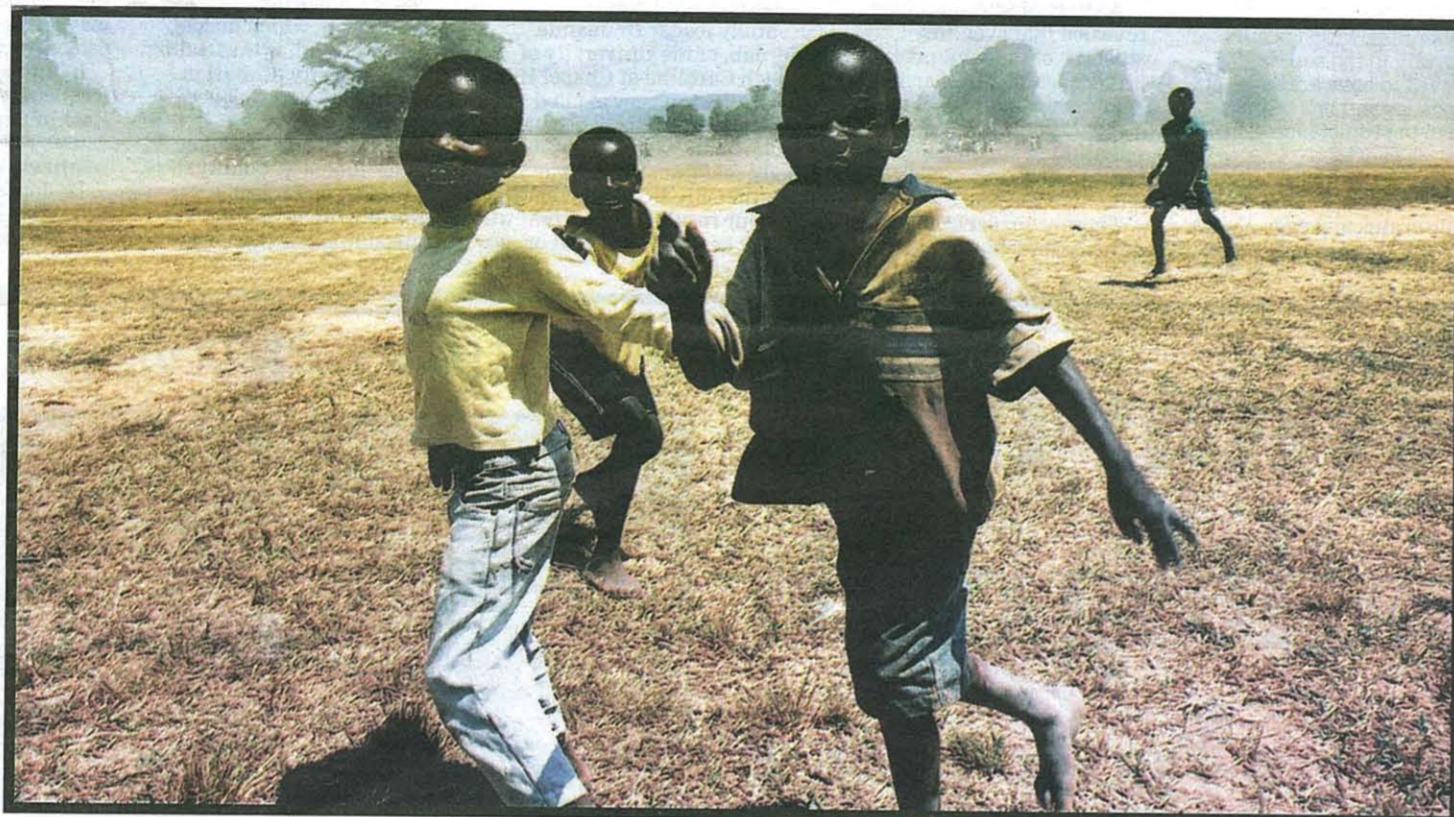
However with a largely agriculture-based economy, often at the mercy of drought and exploitation, it is one of the poorest countries in the world with 5m inhabitants currently said to be affected by food shortages.

But what made a successful businessman decide to devote his time to this little-known corner of the dark continent?

"I first visited Malawi when I took a gap year between my A-levels and university," explains Bristol-born Will, who came to Liverpool to study literature at John Moores University and never went home. "I signed up with Gap Challenge and wanted to go to New Zealand really but they sent me to Malawi. We were the first gap students to go there - me and nine girls. I didn't even know where Malawi was at first. I thought it was in the Caribbean! Wildlife

... were great and every day was an adventure.

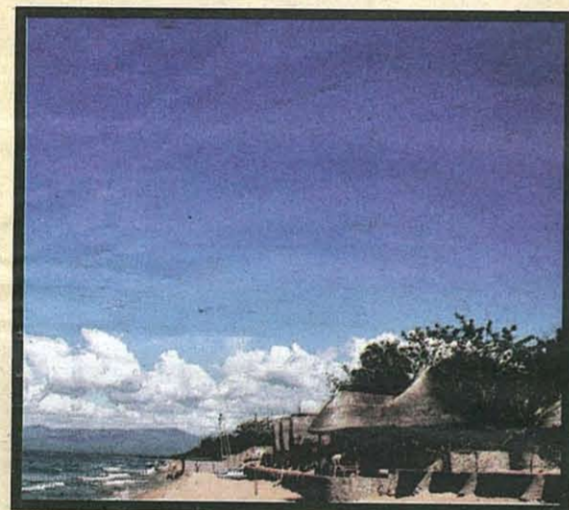
"When I came back to the UK to study we started up Chibuku. But being in Malawi affected me so much I talked about it all the time and really wanted to take



Malawi is one of Africa's most beautiful, friendly and welcoming countries



Club's inspiration: Malawi's national beer



The perfect beach

## The real Malawi

- The full name for Malawi is the Republic of Malawi and it has an elected President as its head of State.
- It sits between Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique and covers an area of 118,000 square kilometres.
- Malawi has a population of 11.6m and is a member of the Commonwealth.
- The capital of Malawi is Lilongwe and the official language is English.
- The country has no ocean coastline but its Lake Malawi (also known as Lake Nyasa) is the third biggest lake in Africa and is known as the Lake of Stars because of the glittering effects of light on the water.
- In 2003, the life expectancy at birth for a person born in Malawi was just 38 (figures from www.cdc.gov).
- In 2003, 900,000 people in Malawi aged between 15-49 were believed to be living with HIV/Aids and it resulted in 84,000 deaths (www.cdc.gov).



The festival is a mix of DJs and live music

other people there and show them what all the fuss was about." These days Chibuku Shake Shake, which takes its unusual name from a Malawian beer drunk from cartons, is Will's full-time job, working with co-promoter Richard McGinnis on the Liverpool club and various Chibuku offshoots at other clubs both in the UK and abroad.

However Will admits that Lake of Stars preparations take up at least half of his working hours these days.

Last year's festival saw Andy Cato from the dance act Groove Armada topping the bill, while this year Felix B of Basement Jaxx and dance music DJ Yoda were the star turns, supported by numerous Malawian bands and other British DJs.

"We cover the headliners' travel and accommodation but they ask no fee," says Will. "These people can command up to £3,000-£4,000 for a gig and they are missing a weekend's work."

"But they have been up for doing it because it's such an off-the-hook idea it appeals to these sorts of artists who have done everything else. They have

done the big football stadium gigs and they are more interested in doing something different and meaningful."

For next year's event Will is looking at taking it on a more varied musical tip and is already in talks to take acts like UB40, Tracy Chapman and Manchester-band The Doves to the Lake of Stars while Andy Cato is expected to make a return.

"It's great having the DJs from the UK side but we want to get people who will be very recognisable to Malawians too." Nevertheless, even with the co-operation of high-profile musicians willing to work for free, as any promoter will testify, the logistical nightmares involved in putting on any festival are many.

Transport that festival thousands of miles away and you are really hike up the stress level and potential disaster factor.

"People thought I was mad when I first proposed the idea," he laughs. "But for every person who said I was crazy there was someone else saying it sounded like a fantastic adventure."

"I wanted to offer people something different and do

something worthwhile at the same time."

When Will started making initial enquiries about staging the festival it quickly transpired that lots of other people were willing to go along with his wild idea.

"I put together an email about it and sent it out to everyone in the Lonely Planet's Malawi guidebook while building up interest here too.

"The enthusiasm made me feel even if I could not get that many people from the UK, the support I would get from Malawians meant I could make it work.

"And there were all these people in Malawi saying 'Yes we can do this'. I went out to Malawi for three weeks in 2003 to look at different sites and hooked up with an English ex-pat who has a bar in the capital and who was well-connected to book all the Malawian acts. He suggested the Chintech Inn (on the shores of Lake Malawi) as a venue, which is owned by the travel company Wilderness Safaris who run the top safari lodges in the country.

"They brought in all the contacts we needed and they had put on festivals before and that meant we had the main two

issues on the ground sorted."

Still there was the not-so-small matter of getting all the sound and light equipment, no to mention the artists and the actual UK visitors.

"All the rig - that's 200kg of equipment - was flown to Africa by DHL for free," says Will, who also negotiated special airfares with STA for students from the UK who wanted to attend the festival.

All money raised by the Lake of Stars festival goes towards the Children of the Wilderness, a Malawian charity which puts money towards children's schooling and education about Aids and HIV.

But for Will the festival is about raising more than just cash. "Lots of different charities help Africa by giving them handouts but I wanted to do something more."

"Malawi had a great tobacco industry but obviously that has reduced now. Tourism could be a new industry for the country. Malawi is safe and it is small enough to get around. There is some now but it makes a very minor contribution to the economy. I would like to see that grow bigger."

"At the moment the Malawian government does not have the money to market itself as a tourist destination. I would like the Lake of Stars to become a showcase for what Malawi has to offer to both the top-end tourists looking for safari holidays and the backpackers.

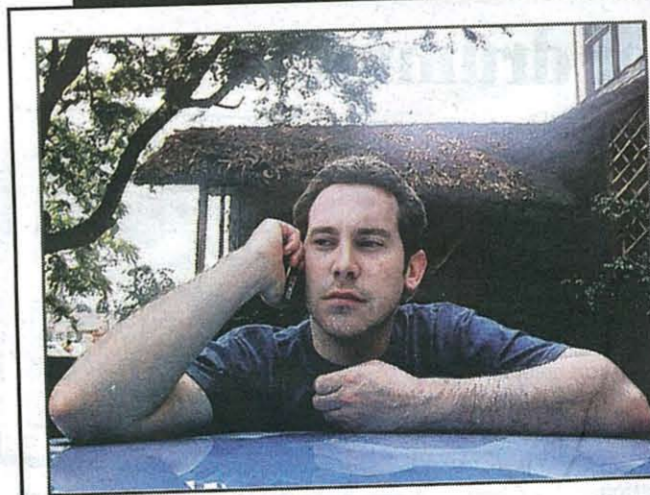
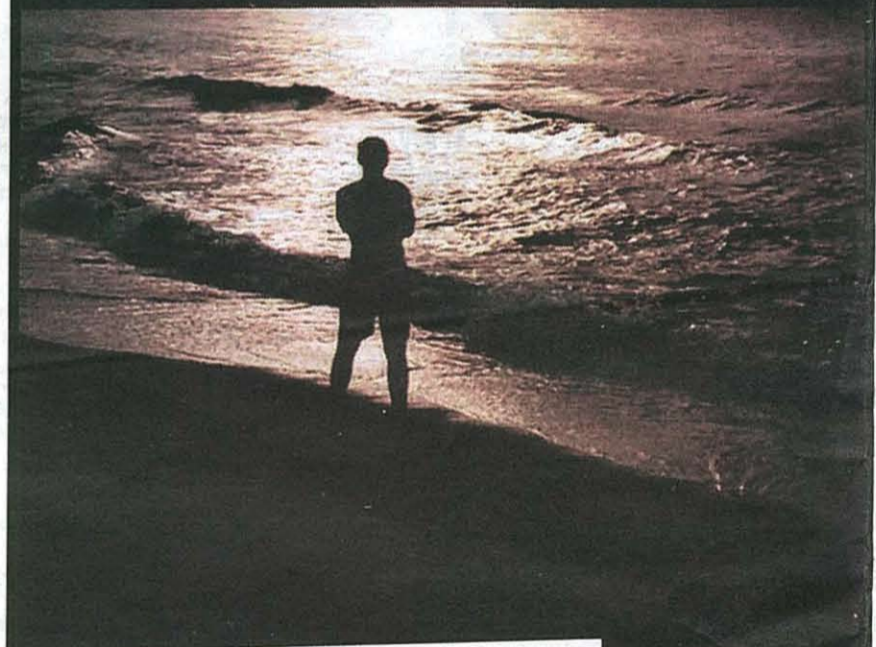
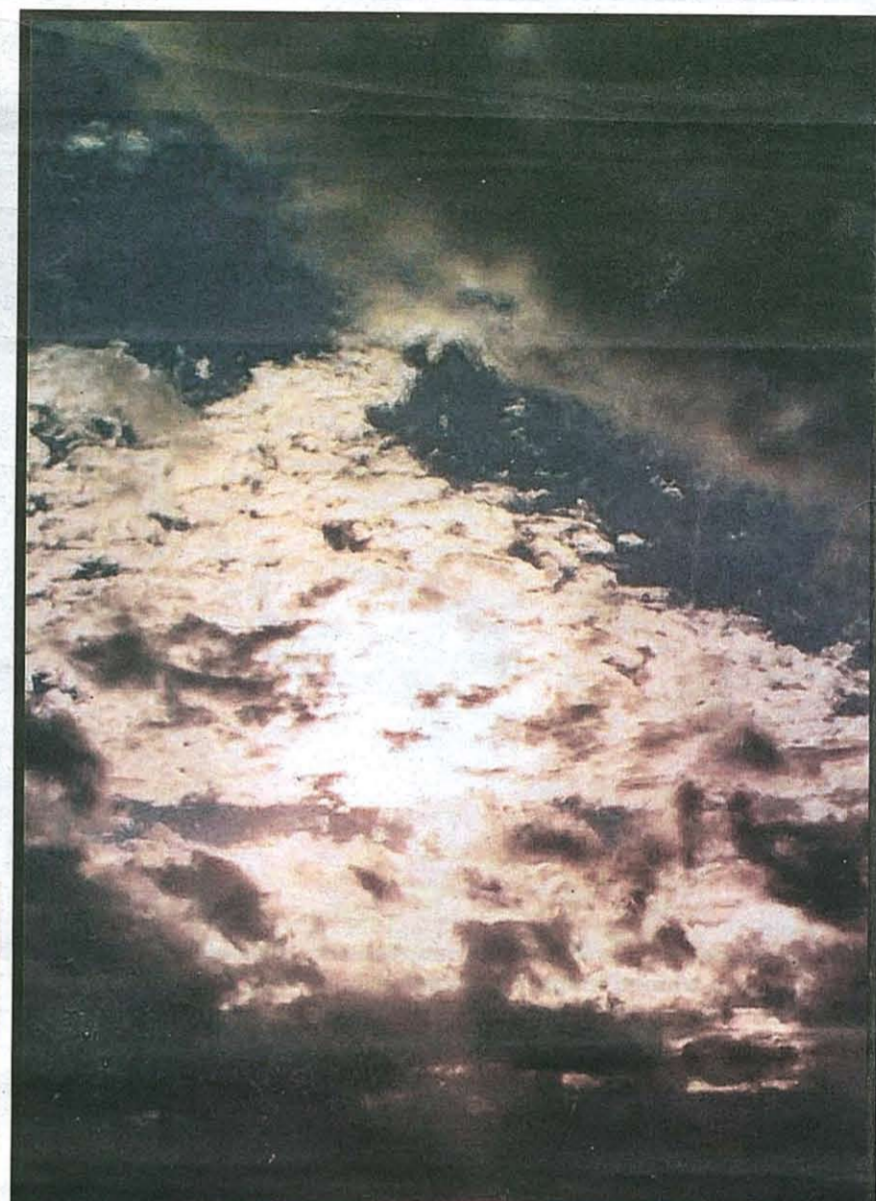
"We had the Malawi Minister of Tourism at the event this year."

With his objective of raising Malawi's profile in mind, does Will see a future for himself as a tireless anti-poverty campaigner like the great Saint Bob?

"My partner in Chibuku, Richard, has me down in his mobile as Bob Geldof," he laughs. "I have tried to speak with Bob Geldof and would like to get him on board but I could never see myself becoming like him."

IF YOU are interested in attending next year's Lake of Stars event in Malawi or would like to help with fundraising, call Will Jameson on 07725 428377 or email will@chibuku.com. For more details on the festival; visit www.lakeofstarsfestival.co.uk

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Will Jameson at home, left, and, above, on the shore of the Lake of Stars