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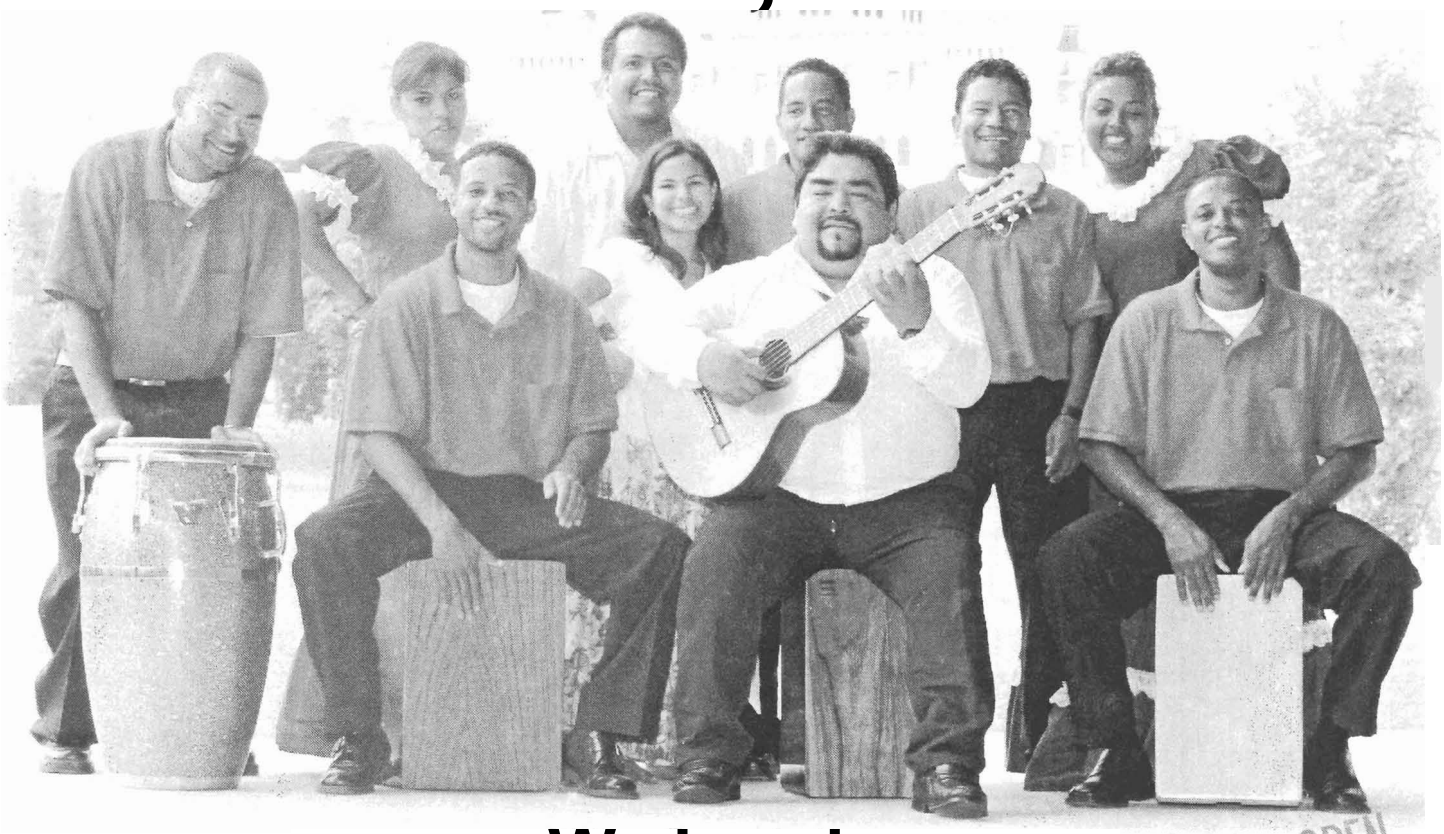
HOMEGROWN 2005
The Music of America

Traditional music and dance "homegrown" in communities across the United States

AN ACQUISITIONS AND PRESENTATION PROJECT

NEGRURA PERUANA

AFRO-PERUVIAN MUSIC AND DANCE FROM HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT



Wednesday
October 12,2005
12 NOON - 1 PM
Coolidge Auditorium
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NEGRURA PERUANA

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"Peruvian music" usually calls up sounds of Andean panpipes and images of colorful Inca dancers. The coast of Peru has also given the world a unique musical tradition that blends Spanish, indigenous, and especially African influences into a dynamic, percussive dance style with a character and energy all its own.

Connecticut's Negrura Peruana performs the music and dance of Peru's African and criollo population, originally living in the coastal area around Chincha south of the capital and later transplanted to the urban center of Lima. Enslaved Africans brought to Peru to work plantations eventually intermarried with Spanish settlers and native Indians, blending families, traditions, and music. African rhythms forbidden on drums could be played surreptitiously on packing boxes, giving rise to the signature instrument in the music of black Peru, the cajón. This music, a form of resistance to social and racial domination, always existed among those of African descent (currently numbering about two million, or one-twelfth the population), but did not become well known or popular in Peru until the 1990s.

The music played by Negrura Peruana uses a small number of percussion instruments, including the cajon, the quijada de burro - the jaw of a mule, the campana - a cowbell, the cajita - a little box played by flipping its lid, conga drums, and bongos. Recently the group has added a guitar player. Songs often take a call and response form, with texts featuring storytelling, satire, and social commentary. The song Toro Mata, one of the most popular in the repertoire (recorded also by Celia Cruz), compares a black man to a bull trapped in a bullfight.

Negrura Peruana features four dancers in addition to the seven musicians. Dances representative of Afro-Peruvian culture include the festejo, a dance of celebration and sometimes competition between men; the lando, with a slower tempo possibly derived from a matrimonial dance with Angolan roots; the zamacueca as a more Spanish-influenced version of lando; and the alcatraz, which tells a humorous story with two dancers trying to light a piece of cloth on their back ends - or avoid being lit. Growing up in Lima, members of the group heard and played these styles all their lives, with music as a central part of community celebrations, gatherings, and informal competitions. Although they are not professionally trained musicians, their performances show a deep love for the music and a spontaneous but highly skilled mastery of the complex rhythms, accents, and phrasings especially when accompanying the dancers.

Members of Negrura Peruana immigrated from Lima to the Hartford area of Connecticut in the late 1980s and early 1990s, seeking work. The first performance by Gustavo Chavez and Carlos Navarro took place in 2002 at Central Connecticut State University, when they were invited to demonstrate Afro-Peruvian music during the performance of a local Andean-Peruvian group. Since then the full group has appeared at a number of high-profile venues, such as the recent concert by Afro-Peruvian music icon Eva Ayllón (nominated for a Grammy in 2002), and also at local events such as Hartford's Latino Expo. Negrura Peruana is a popular band for festivals, special activities, and house parties throughout the growing Peruvian community in Connecticut. They have participated in workshops in New York City with Afro-Peruvian musicians including some from the internationally known group Perú Negro, under the auspices of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance. In accordance with their mission to bring a greater awareness of the music of black Peru to audiences, Negrura Peruana continues to give workshops in Hartford and educational presentations at Central Connecticut State University, including the opening of the new Africana Center and the Peru Club for students.

For more information on Negrura Peruana, call Lynne Williamson at 860-278-2044 x 251 or Lynne.Williamson@icrweb.org or Gustavo Chavez, 860-895-1008 or gche@aol.com

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The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American Folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival presentation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs. and training. The Folklife Center includes the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Check out our web site www.loc.gov/folklife