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Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latino Culture

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### Rhodee and the Garifuna Flava band

As part of DePaul's "From Trauma to Resilience" programming, Rhodel Castillo, along with a traditional Garifuna dance group and his band, came to perform both traditional and contemporary Garifuna diaspora dance and music.

The night began with the dance group, in which the women entered doing the hunguhungu dance, entering the room to a drum beat with various objects, and proceeding to dance in a circle. Throughout the night they performed a variety of music including matamuerte (a dance showing the story of women coming across a body washed ashore, unsure if it's alive) and punta (a popular traditional dance and music genre, which has contemporary adaptations in punta rock and other genres). It was very interesting that, despite never having seen Garifuna dance or song before, the performance felt very familiar. The cultural exchange of music and dance across the black diaspora, especially in the Caribe and Latin America, were made apparent in the Garifuna dance troupe. The influence of African and indigenous dance, music, and ritual created a soundscape in the performance that reminded me of the cultural influence both societies had on the settler states that exist now. To see them performed with open acknowledgement of their black and indigenous roots felt like an act of resilience, pushing back against the inherent erasure of American "melting pot" ideas that detached musical inventions like rock, jazz, the banjo, and many popular dances from the black people that innovated them.

Rhodee and the Garifuna Flava band then performed. Their music incorporated both the traditional sounds of Garifuna music heard before (especially punta) with other music styles, historic and contemporary, of the black diaspora. Throughout different songs, one could hear the sounds of delta blues, reggae, dancehall, rock, and even soul/funk types of rhythms and instrumentation. These combined with the sounds of Garifuna language which both reflected the many roots of Garifuna culture while also spreading out into contact with other diasporic expressions to create a music both specific to Garifuna culture, but reaching out to the black diaspora to a whole, and to indigenous struggles. The songs spoke to the struggles the Garifuna people face with land rights, broken treaties, and being stuck in a state of “living in exile” wherever the diaspora goes, reflecting both the dispossession of land and the erasure of indigenous people throughout the Americas, and the constant forced or coerced movement of black people during and following the Atlantic slave trade. The music, as Rhodel explains it, is developed in part to help the people of the diaspora “wake up” to the shared and interlocked struggles of black and indigenous people through a lens of Garifuna struggle and resilience, and the musical connections help reflect this mission.

Another note, although a less developed one, is that Rhodel noted the Africans who eventually became the Garifuna mostly hailing from the (presumably historic) Mali [Empire]. Though the empire of Mali is different from present day Mali, I was curious how much the culture, especially the singing style, has changed between first contact and now. The modulations in the voice reminded me, especially in the more blues-y songs, of the group Tinariwen, which I believe many members are part of cultural groups that travel mostly through Mali. Though not an exclusively black African group (most of the group comes from more north and inland, it seems), their sound draws from delta blues, and I was curious about if the similar vocal modulation was a

coincidence or a sign of this shared cultural connection (or, perhaps, something that mostly came back due to the references to blues combined with the other sources of inspiration).