

## **Peru Profundo performs at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, 2006**

By Kathy Bardales

Peru Profundo Dance Company was proud to be selected amongst so many talented Latino dance companies in Chicago to perform at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival at the National Mall in Washington D.C. from June 29-July 4, 2006. This was a festival visited by nearly a million people that included exhibits from Alberta Canada on scientific developments, Native Basketry from all over the nation, performances by musicians from New Orleans as well as Latino art, music and dance from Chicago.

The exhibit in which we participated was called Nuestra Musica: Latino Chicago, sponsored by Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the Mexican Institute of Culture and the Illinois Arts Council. The exhibit was born out of a lengthy collaborative research study between the Smithsonian Institute and the Old Town School of Folk Music about the pioneers of Latino music, dance, arts and culture in Chicago. The exhibit brought together artists such as muralist Gamaliel Ramirez, Aztec dancers Nahui Ollin, guitarist Nelson Sosa, marimba musician Carlos Mejia, as well as large musical groups such as Sones de Mexico Ensemble, Banda Ansiedad and AfriCaribe, amongst others.

Before I share with you the details of the festival, however, I must share my experience as a researcher previous to the selection of the artists to go to Washington D.C. I was part of a panel of researchers who met and interviewed artists, musicians and dancers from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guatemala, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and El Salvador. The driving questions that led the interviews were: "How do the arts shape,

and how are they shared by, community and identity?” as well as “What characterizes Chicago’s Latino community as unique and distinctive from other Latino communities?” In one of my collaborative interviews, I met Peruvian percussionist Alfredo Espinoza at the restaurant Taste of Peru.

Before integrating into his current group Trio Peru as a “cajonero”, Espinoza belonged a group called “Los Chalanés” which then consisted of master guitarist Roberto Arce on first guitar and Anibal Bellido on second guitar. For those of you who are not familiar, Roberto Arce was a pioneer of Criollo guitar music in Chicago and a master teacher at the Old Town School of Folk music before moving to Orlando for health reasons. Los Chalanés, at the time, gained popularity in the Peruvian community in Chicago by playing at Peruvian festivities and cultural events as well as evening Peñas, where Criollo music is celebrated by people who dance and sing along with the jamming musicians. Little did Alfredo Espinoza know that he would soon be reunited with his old friend Roberto Arce.

Unfortunately, Anibal was not able to attend the festival but Alfredo and Roberto showed resilient spirits and brought joy to a great deal of people for the first week of the festival. In the sweltering heat of the East Coast summer, Peru Profundo and Los Chalanés collaborated on three or four performances scheduled each day under tents. When we were not scheduled to work together, we often gave support to each others’ workshops and radio interviews by being there to dance, sing or play. We will always fondly remember the Valses, Polkas, Festejos, Socaboms, Marineras, Huaynos and

Tonderos we danced to their music. As their presenter, I will remember the jokes Roberto told to warm up the audience, the questions we answered for the audience and the emotion in Alfredo's voice when he sang those Criollo lyrics for thousands.

We also formed bonds with other Latino artists in Chicago, who we otherwise might have never met. The structure of our city of Chicago sometimes keeps us safe and cozy in our own community and with our own people. However, this festival was an opportunity to break those barriers and acknowledge that when it comes to music and dance, Latinos have plenty in common and need to come together more often as a force united rather than separate. In addition, our dancer Brando Alcazar participated in every show and workshop offered in the festival whenever he wasn't dancing with us showing off his footwork in the Zapateado Mexicano, trying the "Pasito Duranguense" or doing the "shakey-shakey" in a Cumbia or Salsa.

As a dance company, we rediscovered our identity as a family-oriented and authentically Chicagoan group unique from others. Together with Los Chalanes we touched the hearts of Peruvians and Peru-lovers visiting the festival in Washington D.C., many of whom approached us afterwards to thank us and to ask when we were performing again. I will close this article by sharing with you a memory of a young lady in the audience who came to after one of our shows with tears in her eyes and said, "You really know how to explain the music and dances. I've been to Peru three times already. You see this Chacana necklace? I keep it close to my heart. Thank you."