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Ilu Aye's music unifies listeners

By [Shanice Carr](#) on July 19, 2013 at 4:09 pm

Nationality is no barrier for percussion-based group

Sounds of island carnival music and a blend of Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican melodies filled the Bronx Music Heritage Center in Morrisania on July 18, as musical group Ilu Aye electrified the crowd.

The group's name, meaning "Drum of the World" in Yoruba, is a reflection of the percussion-based sound that makes their music of the African Diaspora familiar for natives of the Caribbean.

Norka Hernandez, the group's lead singer, encouraged the audience, in Spanish, to sing and dance along to the music.

Morrisania resident Julia Gutierrez, 30, took to her feet to salsa alongside another audience member who was similarly swept up by the upbeat rhythms.

"I'm a big fan of this group and the way they incorporate different styles into the genre" said Gutierrez.

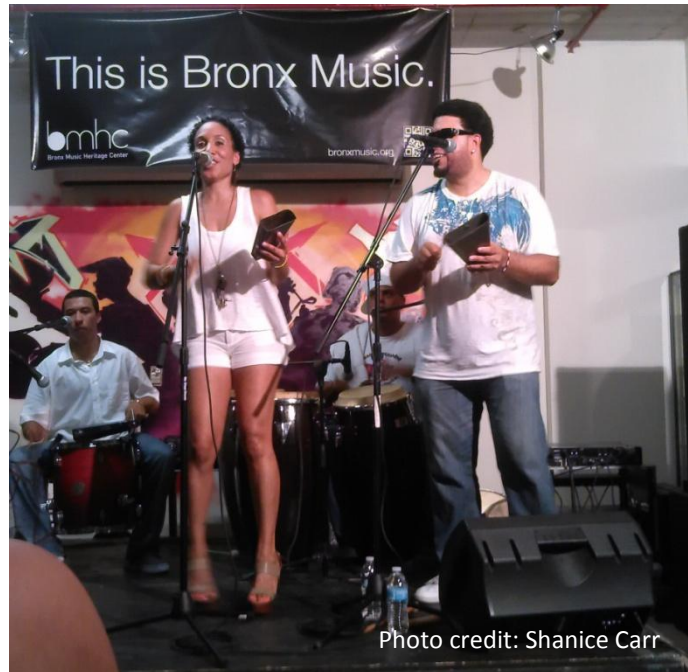


Photo credit: Shanice Carr

Ilu Aye performs at the Bronx Music Heritage Center on July 18, to kick off the three-day Bronx Rising festival.

Bronx resident Mario Llamas, 42, who studies Puerto Rican bomba dancing with Hernandez, said he was struck by “the way they combined the music of different countries,” a style musicians rarely play in live, he said.

Ilu Aye and other performers kicked off Bronx Rising’s monthly lineup, under the theme of Caribbean Carnival Traditions. The three-day event focuses on music, film and palabras (words), to raise the profile of the arts in the borough. The festival is co-curated by folklorist Elena Martinez of the cultural organization City Lore and Grammy-nominated Latin music percussionist Bobby Sanabria.

“There are not a lot of places for live music anymore in the Bronx,” said Tom Haskin, a community development assistant at the Heritage Center, adding that the center’s role is to function as “an incubator for Bronx artists, poets and singers,” and “a place for people in the community to enjoy the arts for free.”

Gonzalo Perez-Paredes, 26, a Manhattan resident who visited the Center for a taste of South Bronx-style music, said the evening made him homesick for his native Peru, where Afro-Hispanic traditions permeate the music.

“It was like being back in my country. I was missing this kind of music,” he said. “The way we dance in Peru, it is similar.”

Hearing that kind of wistfulness brought on by the music Ilu Aye plays is common, Norka Hernandez said.

“Music is a global language and if you can feel the rhythm and dance to it, it unifies us,” she said.

- See more at: <http://brie.hunter.cuny.edu/hpe/2013/07/19/ilu-ayes-music-unifies-listeners/#sthash.iMF8JEuz.dpuf>