

A ZEST FOR LIFE: Afro-Peruvian Rhythms, a Source of Latin Jazz (revised 2015)

A rich tradition In peril, contributions unrecognized.

A film by Eve A. Ma



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THANKS: Media Art Works (MAW)



AND ADDITIONAL THANKS:

Los Cimarones & Carlos López
Museo Afroperuano de Zaña & Luis Rocca
Lalo Izquierdo
Edith Maldonado

Afro-Peruvian music and dance: a rich and colorful tradition that can inspire us all.

SYNOPSIS – SHORT (55 words)

This is a documentary about Afro-Peruvian music and dance, which originated in the days of slavery. Created by a community resourceful in the face of adversity and able to survive by making fun of those in power, they are a pleasure to watch, and a source of inspiration. Filmed in the United States and Peru.

SYNOPSIS – MEDIUM (81 words)

This hour-long documentary explores a rich and colourful tradition: Afro-Peruvian music and dance. These performance arts originated in the days of slavery, created by a community resourceful in the face of adversity...a community that has made important but usually unrecognized contributions, especially to the world of music. Take, for example, the *cajón* – a percussion instrument wildly popular throughout Peru that has become thoroughly integrated into modern flamenco, and is also used in Latin jazz. In English and Spanish with English subtitles.

SYNOPSIS – LONG (142 words)

This hour-long documentary is about the rich and colorful Afro-Peruvian music and dance, and the community that produced them. Filmed both on-location in Peru and in a studio in California, our star is Lalo Izquierdo – master dancer, percussionist, choreographer, and folklorist of his community. He is ably supported in the performance numbers by the group “de Rompe y Raja.”

Afro-Peruvians are the descendants of people kidnapped in Africa and brought to Peru in the days of slavery. The community is extremely resourceful and has created many musical instruments. In recent decades, several of these, most notably the *cajón*, along with a number of Afro-Peruvian rhythms, have been incorporated into Latin jazz.

The documentary combines performance, interviews, on-location footage and photographs with a host’s narrative. Produced & directed by Eve A. Ma in English, and Spanish with English subtitles; closed captions; color; SD

BACK STORY (215 words)

A music and dance junky, I first discovered Afro-Peruvian music and dance through a friend and immediately became intrigued with the charismatic Lalo Izquierdo, brought from his native Peru to the San Francisco Bay Area by a group of performers who wanted to learn more about Afro-Peruvian music and dance. The performing group, “de Rompe y Raja,” was composed primarily of immigrants from Peru and already knew some of the basics of the tradition but needed Izquierdo to teach them more.

I first filmed simply their performance – the group and Izquierdo, and another special guest, criollo singer-songwriter Jorge Luis Jasso - with short interviews about the musical instruments. It was immediately obvious that Izquierdo – dancer, percussionist, choreographer and folklorist of his Afro-Peruvian community – had lots more to offer. I then scheduled him, along with leading group members, for the filming of more in-depth interviews.

The more I dug, the more interested I became. I contacted people in Peru who were helping preserve this tradition which, as I learned from Izquierdo, was in danger of disappearing. And finally, there was no way around it: I knew I had to go to Peru myself, which I did in December of 2014, filming Lalo Izquierdo in the land of his birth and determined to create a documentary worthy both of him and of the tradition he represents.



Lalolzquierdo



houses in an Afro-Peruvian town



Jorge Luis Jasso

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT (92 words)

I made this documentary to inform people about the wonderful culture and performance arts of Afro-Peruvians (or Peruvians of African descent). Most people outside of Peru don't even know the community exists, but it has made important contributions to the world of music and dance, in spite of a horrific past which, like that of the African-American community, included centuries of enslavement.

I was also captivated by the talent and charisma of the documentary's star, Lalo Izquierdo:

dancer, percussionist, choreographer, and folklorist of his community; and I dedicate this documentary to him.

--Eve A. Ma, producer/director, editor and host--

SOCIAL ISSUES

This documentary presents us with three very different kinds of social issues: the disappearance of traditional arts; the lack of recognition of cultural contributions of little-known communities; and the ability of certain communities to overcome horrendous circumstances with grace and humor.

Afro-Peruvian performance arts – and indeed, Afro-Peruvian culture - is in danger of disappearing. The disappearance of traditional arts across the globe has been a matter of concern to artists, anthropologists, the populations whose arts are at risk, and others, for some time. But it does not stop there: languages are also disappearing. Traditional knowledge is disappearing, including knowledge of medical remedies made of plants the modern scientists have yet to investigate.

Aside from the direct losses, the disappearance of traditional arts and cultures leave people feeling deracinated, rootless. At the same time, if every tradition is open to everyone (a concept which rapidly leads to the modification and ultimate disappearance of the tradition), then it no longer belongs to the peoples from whom it springs. And if everything is open to everyone, eventually, no one has a tradition; no one has a true past.

On top of the danger to Afro-Peruvian and other traditional cultures, we find that especially in cases of cultures belonging to numerically small minorities or to peoples not well known, often the contributions of these cultures to the larger world go unrecognized. In the case of Afro-Peruvian music and dance, we have only to think of the cajón: it is ubiquitous in modern flamenco. It is found in Latin jazz. It has entered mainstream Peruvian music in a big way. But apart from in Peru, most people are unaware of its origins, of the community from which it springs.

One effect of this is to continue the marginalization and lack of recognition of that community as a whole. How many people, outside of Peru, are aware of the existence of Afro-Peruvians? Yet how many people have been to, say, a performance of modern flamenco or flamenco fusion and seen a cajón being played on the stage? Even within the flamenco community, almost no one is aware that Lalozquierdo and the group he belonged to (Afro-Peru) made a gift of the first cajón to the famous, now deceased, guitarist Paco de Lucía when the latter was visiting Peru – and that this is when and how the cajón entered modern flamenco.

Finally, Afro-Peruvians have overcome horrendous circumstances to create a performance tradition, and a culture, full of grace, humor, and art. What a wonderful lesson to be able to pass on! It is a culture which has a great deal to offer to all of us, a lesson that could transform society. What more could we want of it, what higher goal could a culture aspire to?

