

Sept. 27, 2006

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for musician Ed East's Afro-Latin Project. As a professor of Latin American literature, I teach in the area of Caribbean literature and culture. For many years, I have given a course in the Dept. of Spanish & Portuguese on the literatures of the Hispanic Caribbean. In order to show students the impact of music and performance, I always include selections from Afro-Cuban dances and music, as well as more contemporary pieces that show the wide appeal of Cuban music and its derivative, "salsa." Now, with the presence of the Afro-Cuban Drum and Dance Ensemble, and Ed East's proposed Afro-Latin project, music can literally come into the classroom, expanding students' understanding of the Caribbean and Latin America. As a Cuban-American and scholar of the Caribbean, this project is important as it creates a forum with which to engage in the culture of my native island, and helps overcome the sense of geographic distance and displacement.

I had a chance to see the group perform last year at the Space/Place concert; they brought the music alive and, at the end, the audience enthusiastically joined in the dances. The connection to a wider community, one of the goals of the Afro-Latin project, is crucial to heighten cultural diversity awareness. It will have tremendous appeal, not only in academic circles, but in communities where the Latino population has been growing. The Afro-Latin project is one of which we can all be proud. The goal is to bring different strands of this legacy, from the Caribbean to continental Spanish America (Peru and Mexico), where the African heritage is just now being recovered.

In short, the project has my enthusiastic support.

Sincerely,

Adriana Méndez Rodenas
Professor of Spanish and International Studies
Director, Caribbean, Diaspora, and Atlantic Studies Program, International Studies