

Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance and Cultural Center celebrates 13th anniversary

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Reported by: Rob Faubion

Saturday, August 28 2010



The Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance and Cultural Center celebrates its 13th anniversary with a special performance on Sunday, September 12. Free and open to the public, the event will include an authentic Taino Areyto dance.

“A Taino Areyto is a ceremonial dance and is a tradition of the Taino people,”

said Dr. Ana Maria Tekina-eiru' Maynard, Founding Director of the Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance and Cultural Center. “We will do this dance in street clothes, so that everyone feels welcome and feels part of it.”

An Areyto (or Areito) is a ceremonial dance that is the tradition of the native people who greeted Columbus on his voyage to the New World, Dr. Tekina-eiru' Maynard said. The Tainos people lived in what are today Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and the Bahamas.

Today, Taino descendants continue this tradition, which Dr. Tekina-eiru' Maynard continues to research. In their most traditional form, Areytos take place on a ceremonial court called a Batey, and often mark or celebrate specific events. They are accompanied by music played on Mayohuacan - a skinless drum made from a hollowed-out tree trunk - a bajo flute, maracas, conch shell horns, and call-and-response style songs led by a Tekina.

The Tekina - the leader of the Areyto - directs the dance through repeated steps that the dancers follow, with men and women each in their own line. The songs sung at the Areytos are oral transmission of history, knowledge, and tradition.

The Taino people are the first root of Puerto Rico,” Dr. Tekina-eiru' Maynard said. “When you consider that Areytos can last for many days, it's no wonder there is so much joy in the Puerto Rican people.”

The September 12 celebration will include traditional music and dance performances by the Center's performing company and students. Special guests for the event will include Austin traditional dance troupe Folklore y Ritmos de Panama.

The free birthday celebration will take place at the Cultural Center, located at 701 Tillery Street. For more information, call (512) 251-8122 or visit www.PRFDance.org.

(Photos of traditional Taino Areyto used by permission of El Concilio Taino Guatu Macu A Boriken.)