

Afro-Peruvian Folkloric: Festejo and Zapateo



As in other parts of the Americas, Africans arrived in Peru as part of the Spanish trade between the 16th to the 19th-centuries. Their labor built coastal cities and enriched valley farms; their contribution to music and dance created a fusion known as *landó*.

The styles of Afro-Peruvian dance to be presented in *People Like Me* are traditional *festejo* and *zapateo*. These styles come from "El Carmen," a village locat-

ed in the Chincha province south of Lima, in the coastal region. This is a distinct region where the pronounced legacy of African slaves adds a unique flavor to the ever present Spanish and indigenous heritage.

Though in many parts of the Americas indigenous peoples were decimated, Peruvian indigenous culture continues to be a strong presence in Peruvian life and art. However, the unique coastal styles of music and dance are dominated by African and Spanish influences, with indigenous elements. Some subtle aspects of the song format and the musical intonation, and some costuming elements, can be traced to indigenous peoples. Much of the instrumentation and language of the songs are clearly Spanish, and the syncopated rhythms, call and response song format, and many of the dance movements are African in origin.

The Africans that arrived in Peru were brought mostly from the regions of Angola and the Congo, but also many other people of African descent arrived who were born in Panama, Spain, and Brazil. Since the African ethnic groups were so mixed by the time they reached Peru, most religious traditions and languages were lost, though some music and dance survived.

In *festejo*, a festive social dance, it is easy to see the African influence in the rhythmic movements and isolations of the torso and pelvis. *Zapateo* (footwork competition) exhibits the subtle and intricate footwork based on African rhythms, which is related to North American clogging and tap dancing. Though not directly influenced by each other historically, dancers in both Peru and North America developed

percussive dance under similar conditions and circumstances, attesting to the creativity and adaptability of strong traditions such as those from West Africa.

The piece presented by the acclaimed De Rompe y Raja, entitled "Amador," incorporates zapateo and festejo, which is one of the most popular Afro-Peruvian song and dance genres. This piece illustrates how the oral tradition transmitted important cultural information and aesthetics through generations.

Amador is a black "Bozal," meaning African born. He is a guardian of the Afro-Peruvian tradition, a mentor. He plays the Peruvian cajón, or box drum, he dances and does zapateo, passing on tradition. His students learn and play with him in a joyous dialogue of syncopated call and response, percussive music, and energetic dancing. Watch for dialogue between the guitarist, the drummers, and the lead dancer's footwork, and also between percussion and the dancers' pelvic movements.



Here's a translation of a famous song about Amador:

"If you listen at night, he is playing his cajón,
he will play with his two hands, shiny black hands
Panalivio, Malivio, ZÁ"