

WILLIAM CEPEDA GRUPO AFRO BORICUA

Grupo Afro Boricua is recognized as one of Puerto Rico's leading traditional dance and music companies. This twelve-member troupe of percussionists, dancers and singers brings to audiences a taste of the traditional Puerto Rican performing arts that are infused with an African aesthetic. Grupo Afro Boricua celebrates the heritage of Puerto Rico, including its African roots, and explores the traditional musical genres of Bomba and Plena and *verso negro* particularly from the Puerto Rican areas of Loiza, Santurce, Ponce and Mayaguez.

Performances of Grupo Afro Boricua feature traditional Puerto Rican music, new arrangements and original compositions. Grupo Afro Boricua performs with authentic and traditional instruments (some rarely heard) such as the Bomba drums, *panderetas*, *cua*, *guiro*, *caracol* and *maracas*. It offers the highest quality of musicianship, familiar and famous Puerto Rican melodies and songs as well as lesser known ones. Blue Jackel Entertainment released the compact disc recording of Grupo Afro Boricua "Bombazo" in 1998.

Bomba and Plena music and dance forms have their origins in Puerto Rican coastal villages and towns. The many and distinct Bomba rhythms and accompanying songs and dances remain the strongest link with African traditions in Puerto Rico today. The Bomba drum itself, a barrel shaped instrument, is traceable directly to Africa. Among the many Bomba rhythms (there are over 20) featured by Grupo Afro Boricua are *sica*, *cuembe*, *holandes*, *lero* and *yuba*.

In the call-and-response singing style of Bomba, a soloist sings a verse that is repeated by an accompanying chorus. In the drumming as well as the singing there are highly developed subtleties of timbre and rhythm. Dancers and drummers respond to the dancer's movements. As each dancer and lead drummer engage in this exchange, the visual and musical dialogue builds to a mini-climax for the Bomba piece. These segments are fully improvisational. Many Bomba songs are characterized by portrayals of everyday life such as fishing, rooster fights, religion, flirtation and seduction through dance.

Grupo Afro boricua brings traditional Puerto Rican music, history and culture to the stage, highlighting African roots and presenting a vibrant, dynamic and unique artistic expression.