

The Garifuna Collective Featuring Umalali

Since its inception the Garifuna Collective has consistently provided a uniquely rewarding experience - Garifuna music and dance performed by composers and musicians who push the boundaries of their dynamic, centuries old musical traditions and make it accessible to an enthusiastic worldwide audience.

And now the *Garifuna Collective featuring Umalali* continues to break new ground with performances that leave no doubt as to why UNESCO, in 2001, officially proclaimed the language, dance, and music of the Garifuna people of Central America as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”.

This is a rare opportunity to experience contemporary Garifuna roots music and performances as distinctive and spirited as the culture from which they spring.

Garifuna culture was forged when slave ships carrying captured Africans wrecked off the Caribbean island of St Vincent in the 1600s. The survivors swam ashore, mixed with the island’s indigenous Arawak population and created a unique, vibrant and resilient culture that continues to this day to evolve with its own distinctive language and music.

After being exiled to the island of Roatán off the coast of Honduras by British colonial forces in 1796, the few thousand surviving Garifuna went on to establish villages up and down the Central American coast where they steadfastly preserved a language and culture so unique and vibrant that it’s no wonder it has been honoured with a UNESCO proclamation.

Today, this vitality and ability to adapt while holding fast to a rich cultural heritage drives the Garifuna Collective, a multigenerational, multitalented and progressive ensemble that’s the living embodiment of this continually evolving “Masterpiece of Humanity”. And with tours planned for 2017 – 2018, the Collective is taking the women’s group *Umalali*, whose name means “voice” and whose singing captures the power and passion of Garifuna female expression, to the world stage.

Hailing from Belize, Guatemala and Honduras, Desiree Diego, Sofia Blanco and Chela Torres are three women whose songs draw on the wellsprings of Garifuna culture while echoing the joys and sorrows of contemporary life.

This is a seasoned collective representing the cream of today’s Garifuna musicians and dancers, with a dynamic that comes from over a decade of playing together and crafting some of the most original and refreshing modern roots music to ever come out of the Central American and Caribbean region. Drawing upon a deep reservoir of talent and experience while restlessly exploring new frontiers in a changing world, the Garifuna Collective continues to evolve in ways that captivate old fans and electrify new audiences.

Over a foundation of ancestral beats, the unmistakable and powerful sound of the two traditional Garifuna drums – the *Primero* and the *Segunda* – along with driving maracas, turtle shells, acoustic and electric guitars and swinging bass grooves blending with evocative melodies and powerful call and response vocals, these artists tell their stories through music, dance, and traditional costume.

The *Umalali* performance opens with the women holding hands as they deliver a traditional a cappella *Abueymahani* song before the drumming begins and, one by one, the instruments

join in. The first half of the concert consists of six or seven songs from the group's highly acclaimed *Umalali* and *Watina* albums, incorporating *Paranda*, *Hungu Hungu* and *Gungei* styles sung in Garifuna. Each song tells a compelling story that the lead singers describe at the beginning or during a musical breakdown.

Midway through the performance, the group comes together for a traditional combined medley with the three women performing several dances with traditional call and response singing. One of the dancers slips backstage to reappear in a white *Jankunu* costume set off with a striking mask and crown with seashell knee rattles providing accompaniment. Then the guitars and bass, driven by drums, maracas and turtle shells, kick in to create an uplifting and extremely danceable group experience.

The concert's finale brings home the meaning of a vibrant sing-along, *Lidan Aban* - "together as one."

The Garifuna Collective has performed in over 25 countries, with appearances at Grand Performances Los Angeles, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, the Montreal International Jazz Fest, Rio Loco in France, Germany's Afrika Festival and a range of venues and festivals worldwide, and has been part of the most celebrated Garifuna albums of all time, including the critically acclaimed *Wátina*, recipient of the Womex and BBC World Music Award and voted by Amazon as the Number One World Music Album of All Time.

Whether on a sandy Caribbean beach or before a large international audience, the Garifuna Collective provides an unforgettable, universally enjoyable and deeply moving experience that never fails to captivate audiences of all ages and cultural backgrounds. No matter where you come from or what your musical interests are, you'll return home richer for the experience.

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