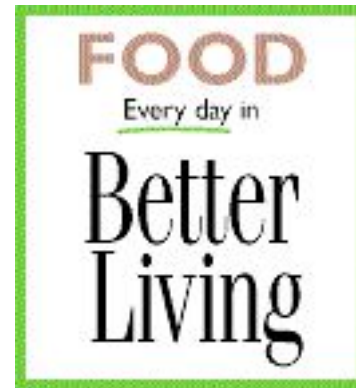




Lincoln Center's "La Casita" festival was inspired by the Latino tradition of community gardens.



Mi casita es su casita

A multinational mix of music and poetry in N.Y.C.

By **EVELYN SHIH**
STAFF WRITER

A "casita" may be a diminutive for a small home, but the global village encompassed in Lincoln Center's "La Casita" program is anything but little. More than 25 artists will be performing Saturday and Sunday in a multicultural, multilingual stew of music and poetry.

"What they're trying to do is to re-create a little bit of the culture in different parts of the world where you have dinner outside, and then you can start singing and sharing poetry," said Rana Santacruz, a musician who will be performing. "They try to re-create the environment of that situation."

The mini-festival, part of the Lincoln Center Out of Doors series, was inspired by the Latino tradition of community gardens, brought to New York in the '50s and '60s by Caribbean and Central American immigrants.

"In this day of contested immigration in the U.S., this is a celebration of what has made the U.S. great, and that's immigrants," said Daniel Dawson, one of the curators of "La Casita."

This year there are "poets from

WHAT: "La Casita."

WHEN: 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

WHERE: South Plaza, Lincoln Center, Manhattan; 212-546-2656 or lincolncenter.org.

HOW MUCH: Free.

all over the planet, representing many different types of poetic and bardic tradition," he added. "It's about talking about your heart and your life, and the importance of your life and your culture. I think everyone can relate to that."

Performers come from across the nation and internationally from India, Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador and Ukraine.

"I feel blessed to have grown up here, because you find solidarity with people you wouldn't necessarily have otherwise," said performer Kelly Zen-Yie Tsai, a spoken-word poet.

Many artists perform in languages other than English, but translations are provided only when possible, said Dawson. Because the poems and songs mostly come from folk sources, lyrics are sometimes improvised.

But one year, when Brazilian artists did a type of rap battle, "There were little blue-haired ladies who really enjoyed it" despite the language barrier, said Dawson. "We realized that we were really doing something right."

Tsai uses words from her Chi-

nese and Taiwanese heritage in her English poetry. "I haven't had a problem with a lot of people saying, 'I don't know what you're talking about,'" she said. "People say that it stands out for them. ... Even if people are misquoting back to me what they remember, they still remember. They still understand that it has meaning, and different meaning from what it is in English."

"'La Casita' is very much of that understanding," she added. "A song in Spanish will not be the same in English."

Santacruz, who performs in Spanish, tries to access not only the language but the folk traditions of his native Mexico in his music. "What I'm trying to do is to capture the feeling in the most raw manner I can do," he said. "I think that happens a lot in folk music around the world."

In that pure emotion lies the most universal language: that of empathy. Listeners "resonate with that feeling of conflict, that feeling of exile" when Tsai talks about her family's background, she said. "That's what's cool about art, because you can kind of sneak into people's emotional lives."



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