

Héctor Morales

Peru: Afro-Peruvian percussionist and jazz drummer

Object: the cajón

Mi relación con la música afro-peruana y criolla empezó desde el día en que nací. Esta es la música que mi padre tocaba para nosotros en casa. (Spanish)

[My relationship with Afro-Peruvian and Creole music started since the day I was born. This was the music my father loved and the music he played for us at home.]

I must have been about nine years old when, after a party, someone left a cajón, a Peruvian box drum, in my uncle's house. The cajón or "box" is simply that, a box. Boxes are typically used to store or carry objects like cloth, groceries, or documents; in my homeland Peru, they carry much more than that. The cajón is our national instrument, a simple wooden box that was turned by the Afro-Peruvian community into a drum. The cajón is the carrier of the musical traditions brought to Peru by African people brought as slaves during the years of the transatlantic slave trade. While all the adults were busy talking, I sat on the cajón and started playing along with the Creole music in the background, and since that day, I became the official "cajonero" of the family.

When I came to America, I brought a cajón with me—I used it as a suitcase for my t-shirts and clothes. But there were many things in that cajón and in me that the x-ray machine at JFK airport could not catch: my thoughts and dreams and the rich musical culture of the coast of Peru. The cajón was the catalyst for this journey of growth and discovery. It allowed me to grow deeper roots to my own music but also to grow branches, expand, and make connections with other closely related musical traditions such as jazz, Arabic, and African music.



Bio:

Peruvian drummer and percussionist Héctor Morales blends the sounds of diverse musical traditions such as Afro-Peruvian, jazz, and Latin music into his playing as well as his composition. Héctor is currently based in the NYC area where he leads his band, The Afro-Peruvian Ensemble, and participates in other musical projects with upcoming young artists of the NYC music scene. He has been featured in videos produced by the LP instrument company and Congahead and has performed internationally on stages including Lincoln Center Outdoors, BAM, The National Museum of Peru, the Society of Musicians and Composers of Chile Auditorium, the Jerusalem Music Festival, and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Héctor graduated from the prestigious William Paterson University Jazz Program and has been teaching in NYC schools since 2003.