

Leonardo Ivan Dominguez

Dominican Republic: folklorist, musician, teacher, founder and director of Conjunto Folklórico de Alianza Dominicana

Object: balsie drum

Estaba tocando bongos con los viejos. El grupo se llamaba Los Soneros de Borojol. Ese era el barrio donde crecí en Santo Domingo, cerca del puerto. (Spanish)

[I used to play bongos with the elders. The group was called The Soneros from Borojol. That was the neighborhood where I grew up in Santo Domingo, close to the port.]

I was a founding member of the Ballet Folklórico of the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo. In 1973, I was invited to be part of a group called Convite with the most versatile guitar player, Luis Díaz, and the poet Jose Rodriguez, who wrote the most beautiful songs. Convite was more than a music ensemble. It was a research project. 'Convite' was the name for a collective labor party. This is what we did, collective work. We were brothers and sisters with a passion for Dominican culture and folklore, and for a new life in the Dominican Republic. During the time of the President Balaguer [1966-1978], there was great repression. They were killing young people. We were in jail more than ten times to try to stop us from performing because of the message of our lyrics.

From 1990 to 1994, I was the director of all the public markets in the city of Santo Domingo. We tried to have more efficiency, but some people were looking for money. They told me I could not be part of the team because I didn't use the battea—a sink that you can move from place to place. They said I didn't wash. It's a metaphor that means I did not take money, and I did not allow anyone else to take money.



So I resigned and decided to come to the United States. My whole family was here. In Convite, I played the balsie. It is a drum similar to the tambora, but with only one skin. The balsie is used for the pri-pri, a rhythm from Villa Mella. It's also sacred and is used in the salves and the rite of the *espíritu* santo to the north of Santo Domingo.

Bio:

Leonardo Ivan Dominguez has worked for more than 45 years as a researcher and educator in Dominican folk traditions. Ivan was born in a working class neighborhood of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and raised by his Haitian grandmother who imparted her knowledge of folk religion, music, and dance to him. In the 1970s, Ivan travelled to remote regions of the island, documenting and learning traditional rural dances as a member of Santo Domingo University's folkloric dance troupe and the musical group, Convite. After moving to the U.S. in 1995, Ivan has continued sharing his knowledge of diverse music and dance traditions with Dominican youth in New York through programs of the Conjunto Folklórico de Alianza Dominicana, which he founded in 1996. In 2006, he was recognised by the Dominican Cultural Ministry for his long career as a folklorist.