

Understanding of Latin art, politics key to social justice, council says

Some people see art and politics as being contradictory by nature. They see art as a sublime transcendence of human boundaries and politics as a mundane definition of them. But to the people who work at the Council for Human Rights in Latin America, art can be a window to other cultures — a means of raising awareness about political and social issues.

"By understanding the culture and the roots of Latin America today, we can understand the difficulties these people now face, whether they're social-justice issues or human-rights issues or political issues," says Chris Orsinger, CHRLA office manager.

CHRLA is located just off campus at 1236 Kincaid St. Founded as the Eugene Committee for a Free Chile in 1975, the council has evolved into a Latin American cultural center as well as a human-rights organization. In the past 11 years, the council has brought numerous Latin American artists to Eugene, including poets from Chile, writers from Cuba, filmmakers from Argentina and musicians from Nicaragua.

In December, CHRLA sponsored a concert by Nicaraguan singer/composer Luis Godoy and his group, Mancotal. Godoy, considered one of Nicaragua's foremost songwriters, sings about the everyday concerns of Nicaragua's common people.

"It's music that tries to address the people of Nicaragua who had been neglected for years," Orsinger says. "They had a very high illiteracy rate (before the 1979 revolution), as well as a lot of hunger and malnutrition. Godoy plays a song called 'Bread With Dignity.' What does a song like that mean to someone who's been hungry most of their life, someone who's seen their children starving because of the economic relationship they had as a tenant farmer working for a very rich landowner? So the music reflects these changes."

Robert Guitteau, project coordinator, points out that in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua art was almost exclusively for the benefit of the elite. "Before the revolution, the people who had money bought, at will, all the pre-Columbian art and all the art by well-known artists," he explains. "All the national treasures were in people's homes. There weren't any museums. There was no effort to protect art, as is still the case in many Latin American countries," Guitteau says that since the

revolution, Nicaragua has experienced an explosion of creativity at all levels of society.

The council has brought several Nicaraguan artists and speakers to Eugene in recent years. Orsinger says that despite living under the threat of a US military invasion, these Nicaraguans bear no animosity toward people in this country.

"I think the Nicaraguans separate the American government from the American people," Orsinger says. "And I think they all come here with a desire to communicate something: that they are under siege by the contra forces organized by the United States."

"I think they want to convey a message of peace and show something about who they are, so that people here can understand that they're not something evil that should be wiped out. This kind of thing helps people in Oregon understand who the Nicaraguans are. This is an important part of what we do," Orsinger says it's a lot easier to listen to someone singing a song about his country than to listen to someone giving a speech.

Besides hosting Latin American artists and musicians, CHRLA puts on film festivals and exhibits of folk art. Another important aspect of the council, according to Orsinger, is its collection of Latin American books and periodicals.

"No discussion of the council's cultural program would be complete without mentioning our library, our resource center," he says. "It includes not only non-fiction books, but also books on poetry, books on theater, literature from Cuba, Argentina and so forth. We also have Latin American periodicals that probably aren't in the main library."

Orsinger says the council also has a videotape, film and slide library. One of the most interesting videos, he says, is about mural painting in Chile. Chilean muralists, living under a Fascist dictatorship, paint their subversive images in the middle of the night, with the certain knowledge that their mural will be painted over by the police within a day or two. The video, called "Blackboards of the People," follows this prolific process.

CHRLA plans on bringing the Chilean group Inti-Illimani (whose members live in exile in Rome) back to

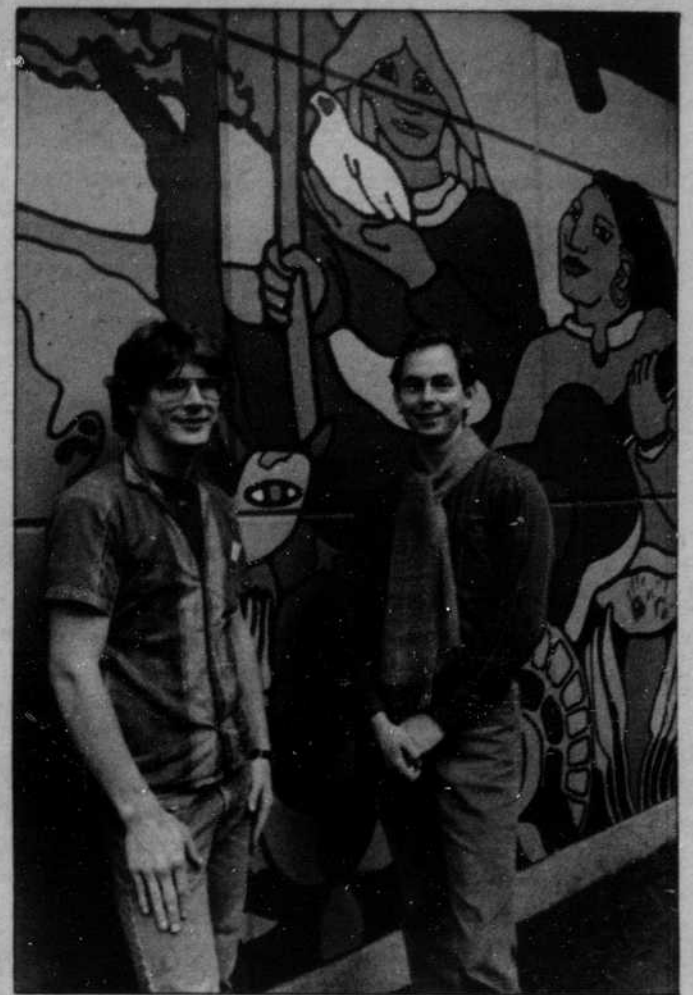


Photo by Maria Corvallis

CHRLA Office Manager Chris Orsinger (left) and Project Coordinator Robert Guitteau help the council provide Latin American perspectives such as the Peace Mural outside the council office which was painted by Chilean artist Francisco Etlicher with the assistance of Nicaraguan Alejandro Caneles.

Eugene this fall. An exhibit of Mexican folk art is also scheduled. The annual Latin American Peace Festival will be held in Skinner's Butte Park in July. Many other cultural events are in the planning stage.

Orsinger says the council will continue its cultural programs as long as there's a need to increase American awareness of the Latin perspective. "We will continue as a cultural center, and also as an educational center that attempts to educate through culture."

By Kevin Harrington

Four bands part of benefit for radio station KRVM

Four of Eugene's top bands will be featured at the WOW Hall tonight as part of a fundraiser for non-commercial, listener-supported FM radio station KRVM.

Single Mary, The Surf Trio, The Lost Falcons A-Go-Go with The Left Side Dancers, and The Imposters are donating their talents toward a concert-dance to help raise money for KRVM, which is licensed to the Eugene School District.

At-the-door admission is \$4. Doors open at 9:00 and the show begins at 9:30. Beer and wine are available to those over 21 with identification.

The WOW Hall is wheelchair-accessible, and is located at West Eighth Avenue and Lincoln Street.

For more information, call the WOW Hall at 687-2746 or KRVM at 687-3370.

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Shumba to play benefit dance

The sounds of Zimbabwe will fill the Willard-Eastside Elementary School gym Saturday night, when the marimba ensemble Shumba gives a benefit concert-dance to raise money for Bright Wings Cancer Support Center.

The event will also mark the first Bright Wings Reunion Dance for clients, workshop participants, class members or book borrowers.

Drinks and baked goods will be sold. All funds raised at the event will help underwrite Bright Wings services for families in Lane County. Tickets cost \$4 per person, \$7 per couple and \$10 per family. The dance will run from 8 p.m. to midnight.

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