

Bata

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African descended Cubans. Seattle’s community of Orisha practitioners is very diverse, containing Cubans, African-Americans, Whites and Puerto Ricans. Riedlinger and O’Neal say they’ve gotten widespread interest for their project. In fact, Riedlinger says their first donor was a voodoo priestess in New Orleans. The Seattle group has a particular importance to the tradition because they possess consecrated drums. According to Riedlinger, every consecrated bata drum has to be born from another. This occurs during a ritual where the sound is transferred from one set of drums to the next. “These drums have their own ancestry,” he says. “They traveled from Cuba to New York then to places like Miami and then to Seattle. Why this group in Seattle is very important in the larger diasporic community is because they have these consecrated drums. They can do the really complex rituals for healing in the community.” The documentary will trace the history of the Afro-Cuban drumming tradition to its roots in Cuba. At a certain point during the 1800s, most of the slaves that were brought to Cuba were coming from Nigeria, Benin and other Gold Coast countries. Spanish colonizers forbade drumming, since it was a means of communication. They organized slaves into cabildos, which were African ethnic associa-

tions. These cabildos resembled community centers and enslaved Africans would use them for festivals and feasts. The Spanish thought it would be easier to control and convert the Africans to Catholicism if they were grouped together based on ethnicity or geographic origin. Each cabildo was assigned a different patron or patroness based on a figure from the Catholic pantheon. For example, one cabildo would be assigned Santa Barbara. The Africans were able to communicate by masking their African worship in Catholic imagery. For instance, the crossroads is represented by the image of the cross. In the Orisha tradition, the communication between the divine and human beings is represented by the crossroads, which corresponds with the cross and the aforementioned Santa Barbara. “These were the only times where the slaves could collect in large groups without the plantation owners thinking they were fermenting revolts,” says Riedlinger. “This is the kind of space, in secrecy, where this tradition was fostered.” He says that around 1830, two enslaved Africans recreated the first documented set of bata drums in Cuba. They went through a complex ritual to sanctify the drums, which is now used in ceremonies, specifically healing ceremonies. Neither Riedlinger nor O’Neal are practitioners. They say



Sidony O'Neal and Alex Riedlinger

the process of documenting Omo Alagba has been effective in better helping them connect with their African heritage. After growing up in the U.S., which is part of the Anglo-phone diaspora, O’Neal says that being around people that practice the Orisha tradition has helped open up conversations about her connection with Africa. She says the concept of lineage is particularly interesting. "There's a practice of moyuba, of always looking and calling out the names of ancestors, and giving thanks for your lineage and always having that present with you," says O'Neal "there's a healing aspect of the tradition that goes hand in hand with the bata drums... The drums are alive and speak their own language to connect several different worlds." For more information, visit the Omo Alagba website

Police

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Aaron Campbell. Rep. Greg Matthews of Gresham, who introduced the bill, says the legislation is needed to give vital union protections to more public employees. And he says he is stunned by the City of Portland’s opposition to the bill. “They’re not offering any amendments, they’re not working with the bill sponsors to the fix what they think is wrong with the bill,” he said. “We’ve had nothing but opposition. They just want this thing over and done and not passed.” Mayor Hales says his efforts to work with legislators have fallen on deaf ears. “Our staff has met regularly with legislators in Salem over this to express the city’s concerns,” he says. “The city is willing to work with the Legislature to address these issues. “My primary goal is to reform the culture at the Portland Police Bureau. I have expressed this to the senator. My staff has expressed this to him and to other senators. This is our primary concern here. The city’s attorneys believe HB 2418 will be a barrier to police reform. The senators seem to think 2418 will fix a problem, but they have trouble articulating what that problem is. So I

have to ask: What’s the greater good?” Sen. Chip Shields, chair of the Senate committee currently considering the bill, says it simply restores rights to public employees who were shut out of unions in the 1990s. “Republicans rammed through a dramatic change, taking lower-level supervisors, peo-

“...the timing couldn’t be worse.”
—Mayor Hales

ple who are really lead workers, out of bargaining units in the 1990s with SB 750,” Shields told *The Skanner* in an email. “Allowing people who are essentially lead workers back into the union is good for their families and reasonable public policy. ‘The sky is falling’ hyperbole doesn’t hold up under even the most elementary level of scrutiny. And the city’s credibility is plummeting around here because of it. The claim that this bill will require everyone

including police and fire chiefs to be in the union is beyond absurd.” Currently the mayor is making a case before the state Employee Relations Board, saying the Police Commanders’ Association should be decertified because it is inappropriate for managers to be in a union. More than 51 police managers belong to the commanders union. Hales says the bill will leave his case dead in the water. “HB 2418 drastically narrows the definition of supervisor to allow unions to petition to include the upper level management in the police and fire departments in their membership,” Hales says. “It essentially dissolves the distinction between officers and managers. At a time when the city is working hard to reform the Police Bureau and the bureau’s relations with the community, the timing couldn’t be worse.” Rep. Matthews says police and fire chiefs as well as deputy chiefs and other managers would be exempt from joining unions. He considers many senior staff members have a hand in job transfers, reviews, suspensions, assignments and other activities that impact employee pay.

He also said he thinks the city’s opposition is rooted in the financial costs of paying overtime to union employees and other contractual obligations. Non-union employees are expected to work any hours their bosses demand and with fewer protections. Asked how governments can fire police officers who have lost public trust or proved themselves unfit to serve, Matthews said decisions should be made based on how well officers followed correct procedures. Officers shouldn’t be fired as a political response to a public outcry. He offered the example of two Oregon State Police Officers, one a union member, the other a Lieutenant, not eligible for the union. Imagine they were in a life-threatening situation and followed every procedure by the book, he said. If deadly force was used and there was a public outcry, one officer would have union protections; the other might be fired simply because a public swayed by emotion demanded it. The Oregonian’s editorial board, however, points out that Portland City employees who don’t belong to a union do have the right to appeal to city’s Civil Service Board.

Rock

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as well as music and dance, arts and crafts, soccer, basketball and other fun activities. Nonprofits, health and social service agencies also will be at the celebration, to let people know what’s available for them, and to sign up children and teens for all kinds of summer activities. “Parents: come on out and encourage your children to come out to be involved with positive activities this summer,” says Catherine Nicewood, president of Rockwood Neighborhood Association. “We have a lot going on all summer.” No kidding! The Rockwood Intercultural Summer Experience, known as RISE, will offer youth programs and activities designed to keep children and teens safe, healthy and happy. A host of different agencies and nonprofits have come together to produce RISE, including Pathfinders, the “I Have a Dream Foundation,” Rosemary Anderson High School, Reynolds School District, the City of Gresham, and many more. The Aztec

Dancers, for example, say they will be in the plaza from 7p.m. to 9p.m. every Wednesday evening. Making sure children and parents have enough to eat is part of the plan. But the details of where food will be provided are still under discussion.

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“Rockwood has the second-highest poverty rate in the state – behind Warm Springs reservation,” Nicewood says. The neighborhood is also one of the most diverse in the city with sizeable numbers of Black, Latino and immigrant residents. Data from Pathfinders, which drew infor-

mation gathered by Multnomah County’s public safety coordinating council, shows that 8,607 people—about one-third of the neighborhood’s residents- live below the official poverty line. And since one-third of Rockwood’s residents also are under 18, the neighborhood has a high concentration of

hungry children. Nicewood says RISE was created to make sure children and teens aren’t left to hang out on the streets, hungry, penniless and with nothing to do this summer. “We did have the PAL Youth Center here, but that’s gone,” Nicewood says. “ The Boys and Girls Club is trying to take that

over, but it has a lot of work to do. And the only other program is the Salvation Army, which serves 40 children and has a long waiting list.” High crime rates have been a problem in the neighborhood, but Nicewood says the public perception of Rockwood as crime-ridden doesn’t tell the true story. “Rockwood has the highest density of any neighborhood in Gresham with over 15,000 people,” she says. “When you look at the statistics, it doesn’t have any more crime per capita than any other area. So we want to change that image.” Other events planned for the summer include: Aug. 3: Nadaka Festival includes cleaning up Nadaka Park from 9 a.m.-noon followed by a community festival from 1 p.m.-3p.m. Free hot dogs and fun for kids. Park is at 176th and Northeast Glisan. Aug. 6: Rockwood Neighborhood Association’s National Night Out from 5:30-8p.m. at Vance Park, 1400 SE 182nd Ave.