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New Jersey State Council on the Arts
Folk Arts Program
P.O. Box 306
225 W. State St.
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in support of Mr. Nelson Baez's application as a Master to the NJSCA's Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program. I believe that Mr. Baez has the abilities and commitment necessary to successfully teach adults.

I've known Mr. Baez since November 2005 when he performed as part of *Segunda Quimbamba Ensemble* during Opening Ceremonies for Latino Heritage Month at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. At that time, I was impressed by his abilities and knowledge as a *bomba* drummer. Since 2007, the Center for Latino Arts and Culture hired Mr. Baez as *bomba* instructor for its *Artists Mentoring Against Racism Drugs & Violence (AMARD&V): Healing through the Arts* Summer Camp. During the five-week summer program, Mr. Baez worked with 50 children ages 10-16 to develop basic skills on the barrel drum, *cuá* sticks, and maracas, learning in the process several traditional *bomba* rhythms. His duties also included teaching Rutgers University camp counselors; ages 18- 23, the intricacies of *bomba* as they were also required to perform. In a very short time, the children and counselors learned how to play together as an ensemble and memorized several well-known *bomba* songs in call and response fashion. At the end of the summer camp, the entire group of children and university students showcased what they learned with Mr. Baez. The highly competent quality of their performance can be credited to his dedication and his ability to engage the children in learning this important art form.

Mr. Baez' approach was so successful that many of the children decided to constitute themselves into a permanent *bomba* ensemble and have formed the *AMAR La Bomba Dance Ensemble*. The diverse group is made up of youth ages 5 – 17 and although based in New Brunswick is open to the surrounding communities. They are currently engaged in community based presentations during the regular school year and have performed throughout the state, in various venues such as elementary schools, at community health programs, at local hospitals, and at Rutgers University. Their enthusiasm, along with their parents' commitment, demonstrates the impact of Mr. Baez's work. Mr. Baez also founded and now directs an ensemble for adults, titled *Cimmarones*. They have become the standing folkloric dance group at a local restaurant in New Brunswick. They have also lectured and held music workshops on several occasions on campus for the Upward Bound, at Rutgers Day, and for the *Music of the Caribbean* course taught at Livingston College. They recently performed at Middlesex County College for a fundraiser for Haiti. They were enthusiastically welcomed by both new comers to *bomba* and aficionados.

It is therefore my strongest belief that support from the NJSCA Master in Folk Arts Program will continue to enhance Mr. Baez's skill and knowledge and will be of significant benefit to communities in our region. I give Mr. Baez my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

Sandra Rocio Castro
Associate Director