

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Free African Diaspora Concert Marks 10th Year

HARTFORD – For the past nine years, the Nzinga’s Daughters group has organized and presented a free “Music from the African Diaspora” concert in July. Several professional musicians representing a variety of styles including R&B, jazz and gospel music have shared the stage.

Bob Snell, an accomplished Latin percussionist, teacher and composer who, along with his Latin All-Star Band, has provided Latin-inspired music for the past several years, fell ill this year and is unable to perform. Organizer Dayna Snell, his daughter, wanted to provide the same level of quality music concert goers have grown to expect. So she asked local favorite Ray Gonzalez and his quartet to perform at the concert for less than half of the group’s usual fee.

Gonzalez, who leads a 13-piece salsa band, agreed to come with his smaller group, the Ray Gonzalez Latin Jazz Quartet, forgoing any payment for himself. “I got the feeling she was a nice person. She explained the situation to me,” said Gonzalez, describing himself as a spiritual person. “Sometimes you just do things by instinct.”

Snell met Gonzalez after attending one of his concerts. When she called and asked him to perform, he wanted to help a fellow musician put on a free concert, he said. “I know how we musicians have to struggle to do things.” Snell is thrilled to have Gonzalez and his quartet performing. “He works with kids, and he puts together one of the greatest Salsa concerts on the riverfront,” she said. Snell, a licensed clinical social worker and manager with the state Department of Children and Families, has voluntarily run an arts enrichment nonprofit for kids for 20 years – the Queen Ann Nzinga Center in Plainville.

Three girls from the program will be singing at the July 31 concert and one also will be playing the keyboard.

For the second year, the concert will be held in the 900-seat Belding Theater at The Bushnell in Hartford. Last year’s concert drew about 525 people. Snell’s goal this year is to fill at least the 600 seats on the main level. (The racially mixed, all-ages audience has grown each year as people have heard of this foot-tapping event.)

Nzinga’s Daughter’s Presents Music from the African Diaspora is will be July 31 at 7 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Performers include: Nzinga’s Daughters; jazz singer Nikki Mathis and musician and Conga player Alvin Carter Sr.; VOICES; Boston-based Changes; and Fade to Black, a folk-R& B mix in the vein of Marvin Gay; Hank Bentley; and Bill Beverly. Karen Oates and her brother Jalen Oates will be dancing and singing to funk music. The concert is geared to an audience of all ages, and children are welcome.

The concert is made possible with grants from the Greater Hartford Arts Council, the Evelyn Preston Foundation, the Grace L. and George L. Long Foundation and the Michael and Janet Suisman Community Access Fund.

Several Hartford restaurants are offering a 20 percent discount on meals purchased by concert goers, including: DISH Bar and Grill; Trumbull Kitchen; Vito's by the Park; The Asylum Café; and Tinkers. Morton's the Steakhouse is offering an entrée discount special – 2 steak dinners for \$99.

About Queen Ann Nzinga's Center

Snell, who has a master's in social work, has worked unpaid on nights and weekends for 20 years to found and lead the Queen Ann Nzinga's Center, Inc. She is the 2010 recipient of the Celebrate Plainville Community Service Award giving by the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain. Shortly after Snell became a state social worker, she noticed a difference between the African American clients she served and her own upbringing as an African American woman. Her family has lived in Plainville for three generations. While she had parental and grandparent support and was surrounded by people who believed in her, she found her young clients lacked the strong foundation that had helped her. (Her mother, musician Gail Williams, is the founder and leader of Nzinga's Daughters Performing Ensemble, producer of the African Diaspora concert, a bass player and artist.)

So Snell, a singer and member of a musical family, started an organization whose mission is to empower children and youth through arts and culture. The program provides participants weekly sessions on African and African-American history, using storytelling, poetry, drama, music, dance and other art forms. The children in her program participate in the annual Kwanzaa performance held each winter and they'll serve as ushers for the African Diaspora concert. For more information, see www.nzingasdaughters.com.