

## **Singing a song of social injustice**

By **Carrie Simmons / Daily News Tribune**

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**W**ALTHAM – Waltham High students experienced the power of music in fighting social injustice yesterday during two special performances at Brandeis University.

Freshmen studying the uprisings against authoritarian rule in Latin America and the continuing struggle for democratic reform were entertained with the sounds of Sol y Canto, a musical group dedicated to performing songs of the "Nueva Cancion" or New Song movement.

The movement began in the 1960s in response to social struggles brought on by political dictatorships in Latin America. The music combines traditional songs and rhythms with lyrics about freedom and justice.

"The conditions in which it arose were conditions of turmoil," said Brian Amador, who founded Sol y Canto with his wife Rosi.

The musicians opened their performance with "Manifiesto" written by folk singer Victor Jara, one of the founders of the New Song movement in Chile who wrote about the struggles of common people in his country.

Rosi Amador translated "Manifiesto" into English before they sang in Spanish.

"The song has meaning when it beats in the veins of the one who will die singing the truth/Not the fleeting flatteries or foreign fame but the song of a lark to the depths of the earth," she said.

During the coup of General Augusto Pinochet, Jara was arrested, tortured and killed.

The musicians also performed "Juan sin Tierra," or Juan without land, a Mexican ballad written in the early 1900s after land owned by peasants was seized under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz.

"Poor people didn't have enough land to grow their own food," said Brian Amador.

Sol y Canto introduced students to instruments from the Andes region of South America including the Kena flute and the Charango, a small guitar which Indians -- who Spaniards prohibited from playing the guitar -- could carry under their ponchos.

Waltham students were invited to the university campus as a part of MusicUnitesUS, an educational outreach program created by Judy Eissenberg, artist-in-residence at Brandeis.

MusicUnitesUS has been bringing Waltham students to Brandeis for musical education performances for the last three years. The program provides lesson plans for teachers to connect the musical instruments and traditions with the social studies curriculum.

Prior to their Brandeis visit, students in Leah Cosby's class looked at popular songs by contemporary artists like Shaggy, U2 and Bob Dylan who are concerned about injustice in society.

All of the freshmen were asked to write their own protest songs about an issue that mattered to them.

Two of Cosby's students wrote songs protesting the war in Iraq. They are worried that if the war continues, the draft could be reinstated and they could be the next to serve. Many of the young women in Cosby's class wrote about the pressures of being sexy and thin, she said. Others wrote about bad parenting.

"It was a very powerful unit," said Cosby. "It was one of the few assignments where there was 100 percent participation."

Freshman Ryan MacPherson wrote "Injustice Song," a song protesting drunk driving.

MacPherson wrote the rap song from the perspective of a drunken teenager who crashes into a car and kills another teenager, who he later finds out is his sister's boyfriend.

"I scream and scream, but no answer from this dude/Then it finally sinks in, what did I do?/I can't believe what I've done/This kid was young, someone's brother, someone's son."

MacPherson's last verse asked those who drink to designate a driver so that lives don't have to end like the one in his song.

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