

In any language, Inti's music speaks volumes

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REVIEW

Musician and Chile native Jorge Coulon asked the audience at the Ormond Beach Performing Arts Center if anyone spoke Spanish. A smattering of hands went up as Coulon and his South American folk band, Inti-Ilimani, prepared to perform at the venue Thursday night.

If Coulon had later asked the almost-full house how many understood Spanish, every hand would have gone up. No, the "Intis" didn't give instant Spanish lessons, or translate the lyrics of their vocal pieces from their native Spanish to English. They didn't have to do so. Music this spirited has a way of bypassing one's brain nodes and speaking directly to the heart.

And so it was with Inti-Ilimani (pronounced Inte-E-geemane, from "Inti," meaning

"sun," and "Ilimani," a mountain near La Paz, Bolivia). These eight lads from South America (mostly Santiago, Chile) breathed life into flutes, clarinet and bamboo panpipes, beat wooden boxes and congas, sang like tragically spurned lovers, and flailed guitars and ukulele-like instruments as if they were penitents beating sin out of flesh.

"We don't know if music is the sound of peace time," Coulon said as the concert opened. "But we believe music will be a way to hope."

At times the Intis' music was as delicate as butterfly wings, as on the instrumental "A La Caza del Nandu," and on "El Surco," which featured gentle Spanish vocals by violinist Daniel Cantillana. Other songs featured four or five members on various percussion instru-

ments, making a beautiful racket as robust as a Carlos Santana piece.

That TV psychic who speaks to the dead has nothing on the Intis, who must have had some sort of hoodoo mental telepathy going on. Each and every member played a multitude of instruments, often switching several times during the course of a single song, so that Christian Gonzalez' zampona (a bamboo flute) danced for a while with Juan Flores' charango (the ukulele-like instrument), which leap-frogged over Coulon's harp, which fluttered next to Cantillana's violin, which soared over the rumbles of the cajon (a wooden percussion box) taken up by Gonzalez.

Or perhaps the fact that the band formed 36 years ago had something to do with their startling, seamless interplay, even if not all original members remain.

Coulon's opening statement

about the power of music in unsettling times wasn't some distant cliché for the band. From 1973 to 1988, the Intis lived in exile in Italy while the brutal dictatorship of Pinochet took over their native Chile. It was a dire time in which many of the country's artists, poets and musicians, and others, met an unknown, almost certainly horrific fate among the so-called "disappeared."

Even if Coulon hadn't related a bit of that sad history in introducing "Vino del Mar," the melancholy love song would still have spoken volumes about loneliness and displacement.

But mostly the Intis lived up to the sun in their name. Anyone who heard their sunny, effervescent music, as well as their mournful songs, can truthfully say, "Yes, I understand Spanish."

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