

# 36th Annual Watts Towers Day of Drum Festival Got Rhythm

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By Ricky Richardson | Guest Contributor

Watts, CA. – Watts-The sun shined brightly on Saturday, September 30<sup>th</sup> in wonderful Watts for the annual Day of the Drum Festival. This was the first of a two-part festivals presented by City of Los Angeles, Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), and Friends of Watts Towers Arts Center.

Residents of Los Angeles are fortunate to live in Greater Los Angeles, with diverse communities that makes up the fabric of the city. It is no wonder that Los Angeles is a top tourist attraction with its various rich and vibrant cultural communities.

The marvelous work of the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), is the thread that binds all of these thriving communities together. On any giving weekend, the Department of Cultural Affairs is presenting an amazing event highlighting various cultures, communities and traditions.

September 30<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, the spotlight was on wonderful Watts Towers Arts Center & Charles Mingus Youth Arts Center for duo festivals. The Day of the Drum Festival celebrated the role of drums and drummers in world cultures, past and present. The Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival celebrated and continues to promote America's #1 Art form-Jazz, "made in America, enjoyed and appreciated all over the world."

I was fortunate to attend the Day of the Drum Festival for a day long plethora of world class drummers and dancers in the heart of wonderful Watts.

Alaadun was in attendance once again for the sacred Yoruba ground blessing ceremony. The ground blessing unites all cultures based on common themes and principles.

Nonosina Polynesia is a vibrant group based in Anaheim, California. The crowd and I were thrilled as they showcased and celebrated 52 years culture, art, song and storytelling to the infectious beats of the drums and Tahitian Dance.

I was anxious to see Bate Batuque-Bloco Obini. This was an incredible "all queen ensemble" of drummers. They dazzled the crowd while giving us a glimpse into the larger parades that takes place all over Brazil during Carnaval season. The group is led by Khalil Cummings, and is made up of a multi-cultural group of phenomenal women from

all walks of life (activist, Doctor, Educator-to name a few). Mr. Cummings extended an invite to women in the audience to join, Amaris Cox, Ashley Blanchard, Tanya Harry, Rachel Hernandez, Cynthia Jimenez, Louisa McCarthy, Bianca Medina, Izzy Pena, Ella Marie Pitts, Giavanni Washington and Celeste Young for high energy percussions and capoeira lessons.

The Drum Apostles roared with some ferocious Afro-Cuban rhythms featuring members from Cuba, Chile, Puerto Rico and Mexico. The band consisted of Joey De Leon, Christian Moraga, Daniel Rodriguez, Jimmy Branly, Yosmel Montejo and talented and in-demand vocalist Alfred Ortiz.

The tempo went up drastically during the dynamic, exciting, electrifying traditional West African musical experience brought forward by Kouman Kele West African Dance & Drum Company.

The Rhythm Roulette with Gene Coye, Donald Barrette, Munyungo Jackson and Dominic Theroux put the final beats on a successful afternoon of drumming with an eclectic rhythmic soulful infusion of musical elements. These tight rhythms blended sounds that represented the past, present and future of drumming.

The day also featured guided tours of "Nuestro Pueblo," the Watts Towers of Simon Rodia, Universal Drum circle, supervised children's activities, gallery tours, and food, arts and crafts vendors.