

Prospect: A Year in the Park

Daily discoveries in the mystical green heart of Brooklyn

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Meet the band



Years ago, we had a neighbor named Ed, an irascible retired guy who lived right by Prospect Park, just as we do. Every Sunday night, when the drumming would start around dusk on the edge of the soccer fields, Ed would call us in a slow Walter-Matthau-esque burn. "The drums again! Can't you hear them? Call the precinct! If we all call, they'll come and arrest them!"

We heard the drums, too, along with some sonorous horns and other contributors to a wild and throbbing beat, but they never particularly bothered us (or the cops). We figured it was some Latino guys with congas hanging out after the soccer match. (What do we know; we're Irish and Ukrainian.) Well, it turns out that the bane of Ed's existence was a Haitian "rara" band, the subject of an indie documentary we saw last night at BAM called "The Other Side of the Water." (Thanks to sound designer and Sustainable Flatbush blogger Anne Pope for the invite.)

The film is touching and fascinating. Rara is described as "part carnival, part voodoo ceremony and grassroots protest," and within genteel Haitian society it is apparently considered the devil's music. But for the young guys who gather in the park on Sunday evenings, it's a lifeline to their culture and their strife-torn homeland (and, for some, an alternative to running the streets). The story of how the group coalesced in Prospect Park back in the '90s is a great tale, and more proof of my theory that the park is a place of urban alchemy. (This is not, by the way, the Drummer's Circle; that's another scene, a free-form jam on the east side of the park.)

At the screening were the directors, crew and members of the band, who sat right behind us chuckling at their funniest lines and mingled with the audience afterwards. I told one of the

drummers about Ed, and how he'd finally up and moved to Florida in disgust; given all the Haitians in Florida, we shared a subversive wish that some rara would follow him down there. And some Sunday night I am going to check out the scene on Parkside Avenue.

Meanwhile, you can catch the documentary at another screening on Friday, Sept. 12 at 10 p.m. at the Tribeca Film Center, at 375 Greenwich Street; it's part of the Urbanworld Film Festival. Ayibobo!*

* Haitian Kreyol for "Amen" or "hallelujah"

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