

Coming down the mountain

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior Reporter

Folk band brings music of Andes to Lincoln

Ken Rynearson feels a connection with the folk music of the Andes that he doesn't feel with the music of his own culture.

"Andean music kind of creeps into your heart," Rynearson said. "It seems to have this enormous capacity for emotion."

As a member of the Andean folk band Kusi Taki, Rynearson wants to introduce his fellow Nebraskans to the "cosmic music" of South America's indigenous people.

Saturday, he and the six other members of Kusi Taki will offer that chance during the group's release party for its new album, "Canto Alegre."

"Canto Alegre" — Spanish for "happy music" — features 12 folk songs from Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and Chile. The band spent about a month and a half recording and editing the CD at Lincoln's Startracker Recording Studio.

Kusi Taki's release party will be Saturday from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Culture Center, 333 N. 14th St. In addition to the band's performance, broadcasting senior Marc Karti will screen a documentary he made about the group. Food and drinks also will be served.

Band founder Oscar Rios Pohirieth says the instruments the band plays define the emotions inherent in the music while giving audiences insight into the lives of the Andean people.

"The sound of the instruments and the sound of the pan pipes are somehow bound with nature, like the Andean people," Pohirieth said. "The instruments themselves are very native instruments made of reeds. It shows how (the Andean people) choose to use natural resources."

Rynearson added that the music communicates the hardships the Andean people have had to endure.

"In the music, you can see how they have dealt with the cold, the scarcity of food, and the conquest and fall of their culture. They don't have a lot of luxuries other than their music instruments," Rynearson said.

Despite these hardships, Pohirieth said, the music contains an element of joy.

"When I hear the music, it makes me happy," Pohirieth said. "It makes me forget about distress, about everyday life. It takes me to a different place."

It was these qualities of Andean music that made the musicians name the band Kusi Taki. The name comes from Quechua, the native language that is spoken in the Andes and literally means "happy music."

"It sounds kind of funny when it is translated into English — like it's Prozac

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KEN RYNEARSON
member of Kusi Taki

music," Rynearson said. "It just has this attitude that no matter what goes on, we can still enjoy life."

Origin stories

Kusi Taki traces its beginnings to Pohirieth — a native of Veracruz, Mexico — who founded the band about five years ago after hearing an Ecuadoran folk band at the Nebraska State Fair.

"I was surprised to hear this type of music here in Nebraska," Pohirieth said. "I was moved. I thought, 'I should form a group ... to keep the music alive here in the States.'"

Pohirieth began looking for people with an interest in music. He found six musicians who had musical knowledge of various instruments but not Andean music.

"They had to work very hard to learn and to appreciate the music," Pohirieth said. "I think that is the beauty of the band, though: that they are all Americans with a love for the music."

The group learned about Andean music by listening to tapes and hearing similar bands at events like the state fair and Haymarket Heydays, Rynearson said.

"We visit with the groups and sometimes get to play with them," he said. "We've had some great inspirations and made some personal friendships, as well."

Rynearson says the group now rehearses weekly at Pohirieth's house and usually has at least one public performance a week at a variety of different places and events, including coffee houses, church

services, elementary schools and Spanish and international music classes. The band has even played at an event for the FBI.

"You get to know the FBI in a completely different way," Rynearson said, laughing. "They are actually really nice people."

The group's last performance was at the Crib in Nebraska Union last Thursday. Rynearson said the audience was evenly split between university students and outside Lincoln residents.

"Generally, people who have already been interested in the music come to our performances," Rynearson said. "If you see it or hear it once, you get hooked. People really remember it."

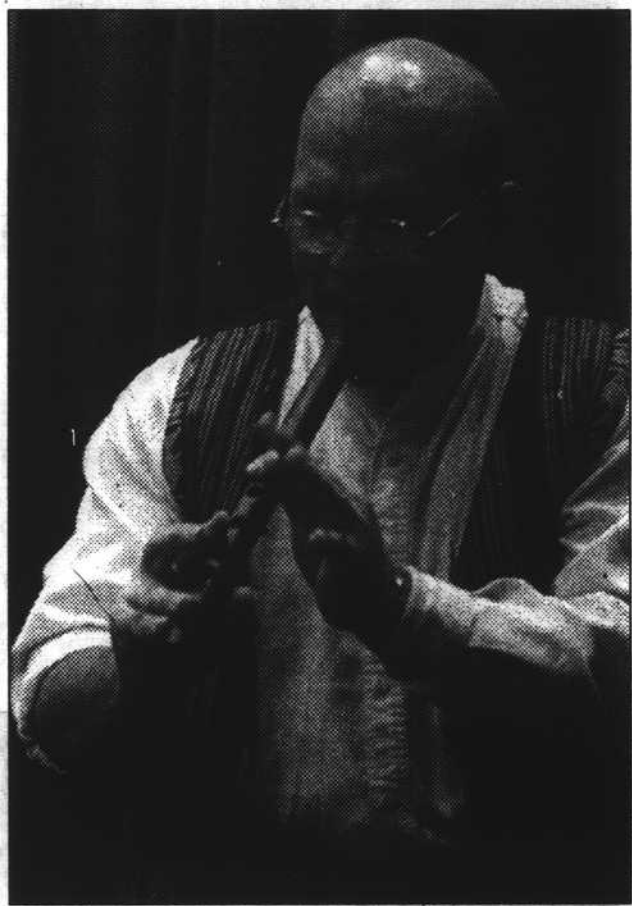
Cause for celebration

During their performances, the members of Kusi Taki play traditional folk songs, some of which are more than 300 years old.

Rynearson described the majority of the pieces as "festive songs," which traditionally would be played at carnivals and other celebrations.

"They have festivals in South America that go on for days," Rynearson said. "Often, a specific location will have a song that is their trademark."

However, Rynearson said the band also played more introspective songs, motivating people to turn inward and think



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

ABOVE: KUSI TAKI flautist Oscar Rios Pohirieth performs a song native to the Andes mountains culture. The Lincoln band will perform Saturday at its CD release party in the Culture Center, 333 N. 14th St.

TOP: PERCUSSIONIST Mark Vanek vigorously lays down a South American beat Thursday in The Crib.

about their lives and personal problems.

The instruments the band plays are both traditional Andean and contemporary.

One important component of the band is the wind instruments. Band members play a flute, similar to a recorder, called a

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