

DAY OF FUN, TRADITION AND MUSIC IN HARTFORD HONORING WOMEN WITH DANCE, SONG

CHRISTOPHER KEATING, Courant Staff Writer. Hartford Courant. Hartford, Conn.: Jun 2, 1996

Music and dance entertained hundreds at Keney Park on Saturday at the third annual "DanceAfrica Hartford" celebration honoring African American women.

Saturday's program, part of a three-day weekend celebration, included free outdoor performances by three dance groups and six musical groups that performed on a large stage near the park's entrance at Woodland Street.

"We want people to celebrate their heritage," said Kim Beckford, the assistant artistic director at the Charter Oak Cultural Center, which co-sponsored the event. "It's all about reclaiming the family. We have to give thanks to our mothers because without them we wouldn't have half a chance."

Since Keney Park is also the site for Family Day in August, Beckford said the organizers "couldn't find a more fitting place" to hold the event than the Hartford park. The festival's theme this year is "a celebration of women of the African Diaspora."

Hundreds of people attended, including many bicyclists who stopped by as they passed through Keney Park on the Hartford parks bike tour.

DanceAfrica was started 19 years ago at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York City, and has expanded to various cities around the nation.

"To bring it to Hartford is a way of saying communities are linked together," said Chuck Davis, an artistic director who conducted a dance class Friday night in Hartford as part of the weekend event. "It's a celebration of the African traditions on these shores."

Saturday's program included performances by groups known as the Nayo Dancers, the Hartford Steel Symphony, People of Goodwill and African Sounds. Led by five drummers, the Nayo Dancers performed in colorful costumes of yellow, green and red.

Between performances, the crowd listened to recorded music, such as "Africa Unite" by Bob Marley. Vendors, who came from as far away as Brooklyn, Boston, and the Bronx, arranged their displays on grassy areas away from the stage. They sold everything from food and jewelry to trinkets and pictures of Dr.

Martin Luther King, Louis Armstrong and Frederick Douglass.

The celebration continues today at 4 p.m. at Weaver High School on Granby Street with performances by the Roots of Brazil dance troupe, the Pure Movement dance company and the Artists Collective's "Eclipse" choreographer's workshop. Concert tickets are \$10 at the door for adults and \$7 for children.