

Freila de la Caridad Merencio-Blanco

Hailing from Havana, Cuba, Freila began her professional career at the age of five, dancing with her grandfather, Fransisco "Tato" Castañeda, in the group *Liberacion 75*. She was raised in a milieu of Afro-Cuban cultural traditions, becoming a practitioner as well as performer. She gained national recognition in 1990 when she joined *Raices Profunda* under the direction of Juan de Dios Ramos. During her tenure with *Raices* (1990-2005) Freila ascended to the position of principal soloist and choreographer, traveling to France, Belgium, Japan, Mexico, and Switzerland as an invited artist and teacher. She has also performed with Yoruba Andabo, NG La Banda Ballet Español de la Habana and has numerous other credits as an actress and choreographer.