

Politics and Music By Chilean Group

A combination concert and political rally took place Friday night against considerable odds. Quilapayun, the Chilean ensemble now headquartered in Paris, had visa problems and only landed at Kennedy Airport at 8:50, 20 minutes past the scheduled starting time of their program at Hunter College. Nobody at the hall seemed to have any idea when the group would actually arrive, and while the audience was milling in the lobby, the organizers of the event were desperately struggling to put together an alternate roster of performers.

At about 9:15, the improvised hootenanny began, ballads, little speeches and sing-along instructions pacifying the audience with various degrees of success. Barbara Dane, the American folk-singer seemed rather flustered by the impromptu challenge, Mike Glick rose to it with assurance, and Suni Paz, an Argentinian, lit up the hall with her enormous charm and vitality. There was also a group from the Philippines whose chief contribution was something called "The Masses Only Are the Makers of History."

Finally, at 11:25, Quilapayun appeared on stage, to a standing ovation and shouts of (presumably) solidarity from the largely Spanish-speaking audience. As the seven black-cloaked singers and instrumentalists began a ballad by Victor Jara (who was murdered during the same military coup that sent Quilapayun into exile), it was immediately apparent that the long wait had not been in vain.

With great flair, the ensemble fused ancient Indian and other folklore styles with contemporary protest lyrics, projecting always a sense of urgent intensity. Some of their arrangements seemed rather fussy, but it was an imaginative and effective fussiness, their resonant voices, often in close harmony, reminding one of an energized "Compagnons de la Chanson," the unusual instruments adding a fascinating splash of exotic color.

Because of the near-abortive nature of Quilapayun's American debut, Hunter College has scheduled a return visit on April 4.

ROBERT SHERMAN