

STATE \$ FOR VODOO RITES IN B'KLYN PARK

By DON BRODERICK

Worshippers will perform voodoo ceremonies in Brooklyn's Prospect Park tomorrow — and the state is paying for it.

The New York State Council on the Arts provided public funds for a celebration of the bicentennial of the Haitian revolution that will include voodoo rites, music and dance.

The Brooklyn Arts Council dispersed \$1,250 of state money to pay for the performance, to be held in the park's Concert Grove at 2 p.m.

The rituals will be demonstrated by La Troupe Makandal, a New York-based Haitian performance group headed by master drummer Frisner Augustin, who told The Post he will perform "Petro" rites in celebration of the voodoo spirits.

According to anthropologist Migene Gonzalez-Wippler, the Petro rites can be used to summon "the darkest forces of death" for the worship of Gede — the voodoo god of the dead.

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"Voodoo is based on natural forces that are not really concerned with good or bad. They are quite neutral," Gonzalez-Wippler told The Post.

"It's people who use them for their own particular purposes, and some of them can be quite black."

The term voodoo derives from an ancient African word that means "protective spirit."

The voodoo religion is a conglomeration of beliefs from several African countries, but is strictly a New World phenomenon.

The Petro rites are the same ones depicted in the James Bond movie "Live and Let Die" and sometimes require a blood sacrifice.

Ritual drums are used to call down various gods, who then "mount" initiated believers who

become "possessed" by the god.

Funds for tomorrow's ceremony were provided by the New York State Council on the Arts.

"The money was strictly to be used for artists' fees," said NYSCA spokeswoman Ann Marie Nolan.

But Augustin told The Post his world-renowned troupe will perform actual ceremonies — although there will be no animal sacrifices.

He will solicit donations to pay for food and alcohol which will be offered to the various voodoo gods during the rites, Augustin said.

"The killing of animals would not be suitable. The contract specifically excludes the use of animals," said Chuck Riechen-thal, associate director of the Brooklyn Arts Council.

"Whatever else they do on the side, the only thing [our] funding is for is artists, dance and music.

"It's an authentic piece of choreography and they have a fine track record of dance."