

Concert: African-American

WE'VE never been to Africa, but our root is deep," Edwina Lee Tyler declared, as she and the four women in A Piece of the World drummed out African rhythms Tuesday at the Kitchen. That statement summed up a concert by two all-female bands who performed African-American music for voices and percussion.

Women of the Calabash opened the program with songs that reveled in four-part vocal harmonies, anchored by the deep contralto of Madeleine Yayodele Nelson, and in the women's virtuosity on calabashes — beaded gourds that are played as rattles, stick drums and hand drums. An exuberant, eclectic set — from Carole King to a cappella reggae to Brazilian

capoeira — climaxed with a defiant Zulu song from South Africa.

Edwina Lee Tyler and A Piece of the World were more theatrical and a bit more didactic. Like Women of the Calabash, Miss Tyler's quintet sang and played calabashes and cowbell, and on one calypso-inflected tune they used a steel drum. Their specialty, however, was extended drum pieces, with dramatic crescendos and fade-outs, that often featured dancing by Miss Tyler and Roberta Stokes and exhortations by Miss Tyler.

Folk music that has been transplanted is never exactly authentic; it loses some local inflections and becomes less spontaneous. But on Tuesday, both groups brought an all-American spirit to their music.

Jon Pareles