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Mexican Invasion

Dance troop tells history of Mexico through performance

BY JEFF WOLFSHOHL
The Battalion

A new kind of culture is coming to Texas A&M. For the first time, "Ballet Folklorico de Mexico de Amalia Hernandez" will make Bryan-College Station one of the stops on its national tour.

Ballet Folklorico will perform with a 14-member chorus, making this the largest and most spectacular touring company from Mexico to perform in the United States in more than two decades.

Amalia Hernandez is the brains behind the entire project.

Adam Friedson, producer of the dance, said Hernandez began conducting research more than 40 years ago.

"Amalia was very aware of the Mexican culture, so she undertook documenting with pencil, paper and audio tapes in order to capture the ritual practices of daily village life," Friedson said.

Friedson said Hernandez did not limit what she could learn and achieve.

"She studied everything from the specific dances of the 'Day of the Dead,' [aspects] of culture, and the different texts to be familiar with the empires and how they were created," Friedson said.

This year Ballet Folklorico celebrates its 47th anniversary.

With each year, audiences increase, spreading the awareness of the Mexican culture.

Friedson said they have already visited more than 90 countries, and over 85 cities in the United States.

"The fact that we have toured in the United States every year is very unique for a dance company," Friedson said.

"We are not just an entertainment event, we speak from the heart and soul of Mexican culture."

The Ballet Folklorico is centered in the Palace of Fine Arts of Mexico City. When the ballet company began, it was composed of only eight members.

"Amalia held open auditions in order to start her own dance school, adding to the few existing dancers," Friedson said. "She created a program that now is very well known."

Friedson said Hernandez has expanded the numbers over the years, as well as the impressive reputation.

"There are now over 300 members, and it is a dream come true for a dancer to be admitted into the program," Friedson said.

Kelly Whitted, president of the Dance Arts Society, said she is excited about the program coming to A&M.

"I think any kind of performing arts at A&M is beneficial because [we are] known as sometimes

just an engineering college," Whitted said.

Whitted said it is great for the A&M community to see a show as unique as the Ballet Folklorico.

"A lot of people have never seen anything like this; it is a different kind of dancing," Whitted said. "The show will be a new variety of performing for many of the audience members, so it will give the A&M community a new taste of ballet dance."

Whitted said she also sees this as an opportunity for A&M to benefit in the long run.

"There is an interest for dance art and A&M needs to bring in more of these types of performances," she said. "Texas A&M has to be more accepting in order to shoot for Vision 2020."

Friedson said the tour covers 15 cities in less than six weeks.

"This is more work than football players do for games, yet the dancers love the opportunity

to perform under Amalia," Friedson said.

Friedson said Ballet Folklorico performs six games a week.

Friedson said Ballet Folklorico performs something too descriptive for words and the usually uplifting.

"What's unique about Amalia is that the combination of music, costumes, and the movement layered on with the history of Mexico, she creates an almost archetypically rich experience," Friedson said.

The Ballet Folklorico introduces the authentic side of Mexico.

"Many things, like poverty and government problems, that are known about Mexico, what the country is all about," Friedson said. "Amalia has the highest beauty, and we want to influence and encourage an appreciation of the culture's richness."

Friedson said the Ballet Folklorico is a celebration of life.

"The show is universal for Mexicans it is about who we are and the pride of our culture," Friedson said.

Those who attend Hernandez's creation will be transported to another time.

Though Friedson is the producer for the Ballet Folklorico, he said he felt overwhelmed watching the show as a graduate member.

"In Oklahoma City, the crowd to watch the performance was, where I was and some problems were. Amalia spell over you, and you're gone away."

The Ballet Folklorico has performed at the Shrine Auditorium in Dallas.

This is the first time the ballet has come to Aggieland as a college station area.

Erin Angie Castro, president of the Awareness for Mexican Culture (CAMAC), was amazed upon learning A&M would be a performance nation.

"I have heard incredible things about this dance company, and it almost seems that they decided to come to Texas," Castro said.

Castro said the benefits for the local community are great.

"It's a very unique opportunity for Bryan-College Station, Texas A&M and particularly the Hispanic community," Castro said. "It's a chance to showcase our culture and educate about this tradition."

Ballet Folklorico de Mexico de Amalia Hernandez will perform tonight at 7:30 in the Shrine Auditorium.

Tickets are available through TicketMaster and at the MSC Box Office.



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