

TimeOut

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MAY 20-26, 2016



Folklorico Footsteps

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's Cultural Dance Program Celebrates Season Finale

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Different Cultures Clap Hands

ASFB Dance Program Succeeds Through Director's Dedication

BY CHRISTINE BENEDETTI, TIME OUT WRITER • PHOTOS BY JORDAN CURET



Young boys are wielding machetes and stomping their feet. Occasionally a shout rises up from the group.

It's noisy and dizzying. Above it all someone yells "otra vez!"

And from the top they go, practicing the same set of steps and coordinated hand movements for the dance again, waiting to hear what choreographer and instructor Francisco "Paco" Nevarez-Burgueño tells them to do next.

There's no goofing off for this group of boys, ranging in age from 6 to 16. While girls sit against the wall inside Carbondale's Third Street Center, braiding each others' hair waiting for their turns, the boys rehearse the traditional Mexican dance until Nevarez-Burgueño is satisfied.

"Be proud, chest out," he says, demonstrating at the front of the room how to circle a sombrero in a windmill in front of his body.

The boys stand a little straighter and do it again.

A Director of Distinction

Folklorico is an 18-year-old program put on by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. More than 240 students in the Aspen and Santa Fe communities participate in it, and Nevarez-Burgueño has been at the helm for 14 years.

"Every year has more and more new fac-

es in the program," Nevarez-Burgueño says. "It has been growing every year."

Nevarez-Burgueño travels the valley from Basalt to Rifle, teaching kids of all abilities five days a week. One student in the advanced group commutes from Rifle to Carbondale on Monday nights to participate. The program was developed by ASFB directors Jean-Philippe Malaty and Tom Mossbrucker to engage the entire student community in arts, Nevarez-Burgueño says. While many of the dancers are Latino, Anglos have also joined, making it a literal holding of hands across cultures.

Dancing is a tradition in many Mexican families, including Nevarez-Burgueño's own; he was born in Chihuahua and spent much of his youth in performing groups before becoming a professional dancer in New York City. He was recruited by ASFB from there to head the Folklorico program in the valley. Introducing different styles of movement to students of all backgrounds is one of his favorite parts of the job. He demands a lot from them, and in turn there's a shared respect. But that's not to say it's all serious.

"My favorite part is to interact with the kids," he says. "I like to teach them how to dance, to move and help them discover how they can move their bodies. And then looking at their smiles after they've seen

how they can accomplish it."

His role and that relationship, which has arguably single-handedly made the program an award-winning and nationally-touring success, was recognized by the state of Colorado earlier this month when Nevarez-Burgueño was given the Governor's Creative Leadership Award. He accepted it in Carbondale during the Colorado Creative Industries Summit on May 6.

Though the recognition is deserved, Nevarez-Burgueño says he has no plans to change course.

"I'm going keep directing here in Colorado and continuing to enrich the lives of students here in the valley every day," he adds.

Bailando Bilingual

Nevarez-Burgueño's classes are a melting pot, which is a reflection of the valley's makeup, where downvalley schools are more diverse than Aspen's.

"I started because I saw my cousins dancing and wanted to be a part of it," says Andy Loya, a sophomore at Roaring Fork High School. "I don't see it as just a sport. When we come together it's a family."

Folklorico and Nevarez-Burgueño have seen him grow up. He's been in the program since he was 6, and says his goal is to influence young kids to look up to the older group and "say I want to be just like that" — similar to his own experience a decade ago.

Tavia Teitler, a junior at Roaring Fork High School, remembers the first time she saw the Folklorico program in action.

"I was just enamored," she says. "I asked my grandmother to make me a skirt right away."

Teitler joined as a first-grader, and dancing in Folklorico has been a part of her life ever since. Her grandmother is still helping on the costume side of the program, which is quite extensive. The ornate skirts and dresses are a stunning spirograph of color, and the dancers are their vehicle.

"Some of the skirts have 25 yards of fabric," says Nevarez-Burgueño, who hand-sews many of the pieces himself, along with help from his mother and sister. "In the recital this Sunday, there are easily 40 dances. Every dance has a different costume, and there are 20-25 kids in each dance. You do the math."

It turns out to be between 800 and 900 costumes, which is an enormous undertak-

ing given the additional orchestration Nevarez-Burgueño and the dancers are required to do.

"Sometimes I am getting to be overwhelmed," he says.

But the lessons the students learn, both physically and mentally, are worth it. His dedication, and theirs, is what makes it a success.

It's time to take a bow, for the season, and then do it an *otra vez*.

christine@aspendailynews.com



Francisco Nevarez-Burgueño receives the Governor's Creative Leadership Award

Folklorico 2016 Recital

Presented by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
Sunday, May 22
6 p.m.

Aspen District Theatre
\$20-25

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