

PACIFICO DANCE COMPANY

Art Form: Dance

Style: Traditional and Modern

Culture: Mexican

MEET THE ARTIST:

Pacífico Dance Company, California's premiere folklórico troupe, are brilliant artists whose works combine the essence of traditional styles with modern dance idioms. A leading international dance company, Pacífico is based in Los Angeles. They strive to enlighten all audiences while providing Latinos with powerful insights into their own heritage. They have toured to New Mexico, North Korea and the People's Republic of China. Director *Adriana Astorga-Gainey* began her dance training at the age of seven in Mexico City, where she attended the National Ballet Folklórico School, under the direction of the legendary *Amalia Hernández*. *Astorga-Gainey* also trained at La Escuela de Danza Mizoc and with *Rafael Zamarripa Castañeda*. Her classical ballet training was with *Don Hewitt* and *Joanna DiGiovanna*; modern with *Don Bondi*, *Davinci Burks* and *Rudy Pérez*. She earned a BS degree and a teaching credential from Cal State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Spectacularly costumed, this performance is filled with exhilarating dancing, music and history. It begins with a solo dance accompanied by the musical sounds of a rattle. The audience is given an overview of the dances and the influence of European cultures. *Danza de Los Viejitos*, a traditional dance, is a mockery of old age. Three masked dancers use canes to portray old people who can still surprise us. The next set of dances is introduced by involving the audience in the movements of the bull and iguana, the animals that are featured in the dances. Costumes are modeled so students can appreciate their relevance, as are props such as fans. Rhythmic footwork, an important part of Mexican dance, is explored as students try a few patterns on stage. Next is the suite called *Fiesta en Veracruz*, one incorporating complex footwork, and the other featuring a giant-head puppet from the carnival parades. *The Mexican Hat Dance*, the national dance of Mexico, follows. The program concludes with *Jalisco*, a dance famous for whirling skirts and mariachi music. It is a tribute to *Amalia Hernández*, in which some students join the dancers.



PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Mexico, which shares the southern boundary of the United States and extends to Central America, has snow-capped mountains, humid plains, hostile deserts, thick jungles, lush farmland and beautiful coastlines. These geological features have influenced the dances, music and costumes of the various regional dances. From the time of the Olmec Indians to the birth of modern Mexico, more than 30 distinct cultures have influenced Mexican civilization, including several European ones. The Aztecs remain the most extensively documented of all Amerindian civilizations at the time of European contact in the 16th century. However, the Mayans were also a great influence in the southern part of Mexico and Central America. It is important to note that dance, music and ritual have been very significant in all of these cultures, but when European cultures mixed with indigenous people, they produced a new group called mestizo (mixed). *Danza de Los Viejitos* originated in the state of Michoacan, perhaps the richest folk art region in all of Mexico. Located in the southwestern part of Mexico, Michoacan takes its name from a Nahuatl (Aztec) word meaning "the place of the fishermen." Its history is diverse, dominated early on by the powerful Tarascan tribe, also known as Purépecha. The following set of dances, *El Toro Babon* and *La Iguana* come from the state of Guerero in Western Mexico. This lush tropical area blends the spicy richness of many South American and African cultures with the tranquility and independence of the native coastal people. *Fiesta en Veracruz* (Totonacs) highlights *Zapateado*, or rhythmic foot patterns, and *Bamba*, the dance where a couple ties a ribbon into a bow

with their feet. The state of Veracruz has humid jungles where pre-Hispanic cultures like the Totonacs still survive. The final dances from Jalisco (Mestizo) dances, like *The Mexican Hat Dance*, emerged from the rancho culture and express courtship. At the end of the dance, when the man places his hat on the floor, it shows his love for the woman.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What stood out for you in this performance and why?
- Did you see any similarities in the dances you saw performed and the dances you and your friends do? If so, what similarities did you spot? How were they different?
- Describe the costumes that you remember. Can you name the dance they went with? The region or state of Mexico?
- Which two dances contrasted the most? In what ways were they different? What cultures influenced each of them?
- What did you learn about the Mexican culture from watching and listening to the performance?
- What most surprised you or interested you about the performance?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/VIS. ARTS:

Diego Rivera is considered to be one of the most popular and well-known Mexican artists of his time (1886-1957). He painted the Mexican people, their traditions, the political conflicts, and the life surrounding them. Diego created an art form that was specifically Mexican, drawing strong, simple, expressive images that were painted with bold strokes and strong colors. As a young man, he visited Italy and was greatly impressed by the church murals that showed various scenes, visions and stories. When he returned to Mexico, he made murals instead of painting on canvas, for it was a way to share Mexico's history and stories with all of the people.

Go to the library or internet and research the art of Diego Rivera. Bring pictures of his paintings and murals to share. Select and discuss specific paintings, noting the mood, colors, use of space, shapes and subject matter. What words, images, ideas and feelings does each painting evoke in the students?

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Select two pieces of Mexican music, one traditional and one more modern. Listen to each of them and find ways that you would move naturally to each one. Possible choices could include "Jarabe Tapatio" (Mexican Hat Dance) and a mambo by Pérez Prado. You will probably find that the traditional music has a stronger, driving underlying beat, while the mambo is a little freer. You might begin by moving one part of your body, such as shoulders, head, feet, etc. Exchange ideas with others.
- ⇒ Select two of the dances you saw in the performance and write a paragraph describing each one. Then, see if you can make contrasts and comparisons between them in a third paragraph.
- ▶ Find a map and locate Mexico. Notice where it is in relation to the United States. Locate the states of Michoacan, Guerrero (Acapulco Harbor), Mexico, Veracruz and Jalisco.
- ▶ Pacifico strives to maintain the integrity of the art form of Mexican folkloric dance, while creating new works that incorporate modern dance. Talk about what it is like to be an American and also to have traditions from another culture. How do you combine two cultures? Give examples from your own life or from people you have observed.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- Cavalier, Debbie, Jurey, Edward B. and Cruz, Maria Arias, Eds., *Mexican Folk Dance*. Warner Brothers, 1994.
 - Corona, Vicki, *Mexican Folk Dance, Vol. 11*. Dance Fantasy Productions.
- The listings above are available from Amazon.com.
- *Artsource*® unit of study, Ballet Folklorico de Mexico, featuring the work of Amalia Hernández. Available from the Music Center Education Division, 213-972-3377.
 - Web Site: www.pacificodance.com