



Posada Navideña: Calidanza Dance Company

School Show Study Guide
from the Artist

Luther Burbank Center for the Arts
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Posada Navideña

Calidanza Dance Company

Educators Guide

Director: Steven Valencia

Style: Ballet Folklórico/Traditional Cultural Arts

Genre: Dance

Culture: Mexican

About the Company

This California Company hails from Sacramento, the state's capital. The show evokes a visual fairytale with vivid characters in lavishly colorful costumes flowing from one folk dance to the next in a single choreographic symphony. *Posada Navideña* dances are crafted like a large choreographic canvas featuring many episodes and contrasting rhythms. While paying tribute to the remote Mexican homeland, the Company does not just present the dances of ancient peasants; instead, it infuses village ritual with modern technique. Calidanza's musicians use folk instruments to interweave regional music within the dance pieces. The resulting performance showcases tradition with skillful choreography and an ensemble of disciplined artists. Wonderfully costumed, this performance is filled with exhilarating dancing, music and history.

Company Mission

Calidanza Dance Company's mission is to promote artistic excellence in Mexican folk and contemporary dance. Calidanza makes dance accessible to both audiences and participants and educates through quality productions, innovative choreographies and engaging programs. Calidanza offers performances for students and families, in theaters, schools, and now in a modular, virtual, education series with performances, artistic insights, and activities.

calidanza.org

Production Note

This program was filmed at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts, in Santa Rosa, California, using COVID safety precautions on stage and throughout the theaters. The colorful masks worn by the Calidanza performers come from Mexico.

Mexico

Mexico is the northernmost country of Latin America, just south of the U.S. The Rio Grande river forms about two-thirds of the boundary between Mexico and the United States. Among all the countries of the Western Hemisphere, only the U.S. and Brazil have more people than Mexico. Mexico City is the capital and largest city of Mexico. It also is one of the world's largest metropolitan areas in population.



Few other countries have so wide a variety of landscapes and climates within such short distances of one another. Towering mountains and high, rolling plateaus cover more than two-thirds of Mexico. The climate, land formation, and plant life in these rugged highlands varies greatly within a short distance. Mexico also has tropical forests, dry deserts, and fertile valleys.

Indigenous Cultures

Mexican folk dance has its origins in native cultures of the region. In Tenochtitlan, Mexico City today, dances had magical purposes and were learned in special dance schools located next to the great temples.

Many indigenous dances demonstrate an incredible spectacle. From the agility of the dancers to the rhythm of the shell rattles on their feet to the beautifully feathered costumes, every aspect was incredible.

Dance was one of the main aspects of indigenous cultures and they had a variety of rhythms. The dances for the older men were slow and accompanied with soft chants. The younger generations danced to faster music with more complicated steps. There were also acrobatic dances and war dances in which some eight hundred dancers danced all day without a single mistake to please their war divinity Tezcatlipoca.



Even today there are some indigenous groups that perform, such as the Yakis in the state of Sonora, the Huicholes in the state of Nayarit and the Chamulas in the state of Chiapas. The music that accompanied indigenous dances was complex and the instruments were simple. In addition, chants served as the musical base for many of the dances. There were chants of war, love, and adoration to the gods.

Colonial Influence

During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Spanish came to Mexico and along with them conquest throughout the Americas. French and Dutch colonists settled in some areas of Mexico and Africans escaping slavery set up colonies in the West Coast of Mexico. We can see their influence in Mexican folk dances.

Music & Dance in Mexico

There are so many different kinds of music in Mexico. This is because there are so many kinds of people. Mexico has large orchestras that play classical music and pop music is very popular. There are organized performances and dances that are danced outside, in the streets in the central square of a town or village. Music and dance are a way to celebrate life. The people celebrate the harvest, weddings, or *quinceañeras*, Christmas, or the Day of the Dead, and people come together to celebrate with songs, dances, masks, and food. Many regions in Mexico developed dances with styles which blend indigenous and Spanish characteristics.



Mexican music has an extensive variety of rhythms and melodies. Like the costumes, Mexican music expresses the identity of the people and the history of the place. A well-known type of Mexican music is mariachi, which originates in the state of Jalisco. There is a large variety of instruments in a Mariachi band, including harps, trumpets, guitar, guitarrón, and violins.

Regalia

Dance regalia includes different pieces that a performer needs to represent the dance. Indigenous civilizations placed great importance on dance regalia. The Spanish and French brought their own variety of costumes and mixed with indigenous style.

Clothing for dancing includes appropriately decorated blouses, skirts, dresses, pants, shirts, vests, coats, and *jorongos* (ponchos). The accessories include the *tocado* which is used to adorn the head with bows, flowers, ribbons, and earrings; the *toca* such as hats, handkerchiefs; the *tocara* which covers the face such as masks; and the *tronco*, which are pieces of clothing used on the neck or on the waist, such as a scarf.



Shoes are a very important part of the regalia. For many dances, women use special high heeled shoes with nails on the toes and heels. The nails attached to the shoes are used for the purpose of obtaining different sounds from each of the different steps and dances. This is called *zapateado* (footwork). Men may use boots or a type of sandal called *huaraches*.

Selections from the Performance

Celebrations in Veracruz

The Mexican state of Veracruz has an extensive history. After the Spanish conquest of Mexico in the 16th century, the Spanish continued their slave trade in the new world. Africans, mostly from Conga and Angola, were brought to Mexico via the slave trade. The African people brought much of their culture with them including their dances and music. Much of the culture of Veracruz is based on a combination of African, Spanish, and indigenous cultures.



La Rama

Veracruz has some of the most festive celebrations for Christmas in the country. This includes *La Rama* celebration. People get together in plazas of Veracruz, the streets and around their communities. A decorative branch (*una rama*) is carried by celebrants and followed by a procession. Songs are sung celebrating Christmas while the traditional *conjunto jarocho* serenades the celebration.



La Bamba

One particular dance performed in this portion of the performance is *La Bamba*. This is traditionally performed at weddings in Veracruz with the bride and groom accompanying the band (*son jarocho*) playing during the ceremony.

De Colores

“De Colores” is a popular Mexican folk song, originally from Spain, then brought to the new world, thought to have been around since the 16th century. People are often invited to sing along. The song speaks of all the colors in the world evoking happy emotions by appreciating the beauty around all of us.



Cantos de Posada

The song “Pidiendo Posada” (“Begging for Shelter”) is a customary Christmas song sung during the posada, representing the Nativity story of Joseph and Mary going from door to door, seeking shelter, before the time came for Mary to give birth to Jesus. During this performance, experience some of Mexico’s most beloved Christmas melodies with musical ensemble Vinic Kay.

La Piñata

Piñatas are a favorite part of Mexican celebrations, especially for birthdays and at Christmas. The piñata is a colorful, decorated container, often in the shape of a star though other shapes have become common. Piñatas are made out of papier-mâché, cardboard, pottery, or cloth, and suspended over the heads of the people at the party. The piñata is usually filled with candy and treats. When a person at the party breaks the piñata with a stick, the treats spill out, to be enjoyed by everyone.



Danza de Los Viejitos

This dance of the "old men" has indigenous roots traced to the Purepecha tribe in Mexico, from present-day Michoacán. The dance was originated to honor the “old God” or "God of Fire" (tata Huriata) in order to receive favor from the god such as good harvest and health. The dance was reserved for the elders, originally using a mask of a child. The music is from the purepecha tribe called pirekuas. Viejitos has a comedic side and shows the ability of the elders to move and dance as swiftly and precisely as younger dancers would.



Carnaval en Sinaloa

Sinaloa is located in the northern part of Mexico, where dance traditions represent the beauty and elegance of the women of Sinaloa. The movements of the men in these dances are influenced by the dance movements and traditions of the Pascolas, derived from the ethnic group, Los Mayos. Carnaval in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, is one of the largest in Mexico; its roots can be traced back to the



Christian religious observance of Lent that calls for self-denial. People would converge to have large feasts, in order to dispose of food they would be giving up for Lent.



Navidad Jalisiense

Defined by the Mariachi music, dances from the state of Jalisco are the most known and widely danced throughout the world. Christmas is celebrated in the plazas with families starting with the 12 days before Christmas. Dances are typically courtship dances between the men and women; the *sones* (songs) sing about the daily life and adventures in Jalisco. Women movements are graceful

and pleasant while the men use strong movements to capture the women's attention.

La Azteca

The Aztecs were one of the last remaining native groups in central Mexico; the empire was eventually conquered by the Spanish. The Aztecs had a remarkable culture with a proud tradition of respecting and honoring their gods and their people. Many of the traditions involved paying homage to their gods, and asking for rain, a good harvest, health, or love.

This dance in this performance, "Azteca," represents a peace accord between tribes; the people would gather in a festive environment to celebrate peace between tribes, offering good will and friendship. The drums were used, in ritual, to signify of the presence of deities, either the Huehuetl (represented by the large drum) or Teponazti (represented by the side drum); these were often linked to gods of war. The shells are used to mimic wind, connecting the *danzante* (dancers) with nature; the shells are often used as a percussion.

Classroom 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 see? 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?