

Ballet Folklórico: Using dance to create community

Students must maintain grades, discipline

By Steve Alldredge
RFWJ Correspondent

Transcending cultural barriers through the art of dance is at the root of what Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's Folklórico troupe is all about, and, right now, the entire Mid-Valley community is coming together to help the Garcia family transcend the total loss of their Basalt home and all of their belongings in a recent trailer fire.

Ximena and Joel Garcia are part of the Ballet Folklórico program and were performing on March 9 in Willits with the entire family present when the fire consumed their home and killed their beloved pets. A GoFundMe campaign (link at the end of the story) has been created to assist them.

"People are responding so nice," says Folklórico director Francisco Nevarez-Burgueño, or Paco as he likes to be called. "When I see the list of contributors, I start crying. I can see the generosity of the community. That has affected all of us."

Using the tragedy as a rallying point to bring together the Mid-Valley community, Ballet Folklórico moves forward as it prepares for its next performance in May.

In 1998, the leadership of Aspen Santa Fe Ballet (ASFB) decided to expand their programming, and they created a free, after-school instruction in Mexican folkloric dance to offer something for the kids and for the local artistic community.

In 2002, ASFB coaxed Nevarez-Burgueño, then the leader of a Brooklyn, New York, dance company to venture to the mountains of Colorado and view what they had created in the way of folkloric dance.

Paco says of that first visit to the Roaring Fork Valley that he "fell in love with mountains." He has been the director of Ballet Folklórico (BF) ever since.

"Most of the folk dances in Mexico are from little towns and communities," Navarez-Burgueño says. "They tell stories about their history, about their cultural traditions. My goal is to teach the [Roaring Fork Valley] kids who are born here these Mexican dances and traditions."

Paco explains how Ballet Folklórico performs music from many different regions of Mexico and reflects the many different cultural styles and music.

"We have a huge repertoire," he says. "In 18



Photo by Jordan Curet

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet Folklórico takes to the stage during a past performance. The program provides after-school instruction in Mexican folkloric dance to children in Basalt, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, Rifle and Santa Fe public schools.

years, I have been expanding more and more, teaching these kids about the different regions and states of Mexico. I have even worked in indigenous people from the Pacific coast, [from the state of] Nayarit."

On Saturday, March 9, Ballet Folklórico's performance at The Temporary in Willits featured dances and music from the Jalisco and Colima states in Mexico with a live seven-piece Mariachi band accompanying the many kids that performed that night.

"Every single village has its own identity," Navarez-Burgueño says. "Many different types

of races and identities. Northern people are different than people in the south. They can appear stronger with more movement to their hands. In the south, they are more soft-spoken,

"It's a very nice way for these kids to see the world. I have been so lucky to have Aspen Santa Fe Ballet back me up with these kids and this program."

— Francisco ("Paco") Nevarez-Burgueño

more respectful. All of that is reflected on the stage."

In the March 9 performance, male dancers in one dance used crudely fashioned knives to rep-

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resent the machetes many indigenous people still carry around as part of their community life.

“When people get together for parties, they always carry the machetes in the waistband,” Paco notes. “Those dances are a show off for the males.”

A highlight of any Ballet Folklórico performance is the patterns created when the young ladies twirl their dresses. In the conservative life of the small Mexican communities, women are not allowed to wear clothes that bring attention to them, so one of the few times they can get young men to notice them is twirling in a colorful dress. The mosaic-like patterns jump to life when the ladies spin and whirl.

Currently, the Ballet Folklórico program encompasses 194 kindergarten to high-school-senior students from Rifle to Basalt. Under the leadership of Navarez-Burgueño and the ASFB organization, they have created a program that builds self-esteem and positive youth development while they learn about the history and cultural traditions of Mexico and bond with other local kids.

In order to participate in the BF Company, the students have to be responsible with their grades and with discipline.

“We supervise their grades. If we see something is weak, I have a lady who works with me. She is the one to help me identify any kids with problems,” Navarez-Burgueño says.

For the kids, the program and the Company become family. Some of them participate from kindergarten to when they graduate from high school. Many of the kids go on to college, become professionals or own businesses. And now, with Ballet Folklórico teaching and entertaining for 21 years, the kids of BF are now having kids. Thus, a second generation is being created.

Future plans for Navarez-Burgueño and the kids of Ballet Folklórico?

“My plans are to keep working hard with



Photo by Jordan Curet

Under the leadership of Paco Navarez-Burgueño, Ballet Folklórico has created a program that builds self-esteem and positive youth development while participants learn about the history and cultural traditions of Mexico.

these kids,” he says. “We have been excelling. We have a good level of dance techniques, and we are receiving invitations from international organizations, like in Mexico and Colombia, to go and do workshops. And we are doing festivals and folklorico conventions here in the United States. For many of these kids, it’s the first time they have flown on a plane or had a chance to visit another country.

“It’s a very nice way for these kids to see the

world,” Navarez-Burgueño continues. “I have been so lucky to have Aspen Santa Fe Ballet back me up with these kids and this program.”

To offer your help to the Garcia family, please contact Aspen Santa Fe Ballet (970) 925-7175 or go to: www.gofundme.com/garcia-family-emergency-fund.

According to Navarez-Burgueño, the fundraising effort has raised about \$61,000 of its \$75,000 goal.

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paid back, are you willing to give up current services? Well, that is wrong. The people who live in Basalt now — even if they are new residents — don’t want things to change, obviously. Yet the people who overpaid are owed the money and being penalized. How about wording it ‘since the town of Basalt made a mill levy/TABOR error, we are paying it back? Going forward we will be reallocating funds.’ It seems there are plenty of funds, especially in light of them wanting to stop the tobacco tax so as not get too much money.”

Singer is especially miffed that, if an election is held on the TABOR overcharge, only current registered voters living in Basalt will be able to vote.

“In a nutshell, I think the error was made and needs to be fixed,” Singer continued. “I do not think property owners affected who do not live in Basalt now should be excluded from a vote on their money. No matter how temporary or transient current residents might be, they get to vote, but people like me who still own property in Basalt but now live outside Basalt do not. Also, people who paid in and have since sold do not get a voice and might not even know they are due money.”

Singer is not the only person who has issues with the survey.

Amy Oliver Cook is the executive

vice-president of the Denver-based Independence Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank that fully supports TABOR.

“A couple of us went through the survey,” Cook said. “The questions themselves aren’t too bad, but the results of these types of online polls are highly suspect because they are prone to sample bias. What they are likely to tell you is which side is better at getting people to do an online poll. If they really want to know how residents feel, then they should hire a reputable polling firm to conduct a survey. Or just do the right thing, and give the money back. At the very least, ask voters what they want via a ballot measure.

“It’s really an unscientific poll, such as a newspaper poll,” she continues. “You don’t get a real representation of how the general public feels. I’ll say this — it’s a terrible way to decide whether or not the city is actually on the right or wrong track.”

Cook’s observation about “sample bias” is one that often accompanies such surveys.

Though its definition fills entire books and courses of study, in a nutshell, sample bias is a bias in which a sample is collected in such a way that some members of the intended population are less likely to be included

than others.

There are also issues with the preferences and preferred outcomes of the people putting surveys together making their way — sometimes purposefully, sometimes inadvertently — into the questions, which can often be considered to be leading in nature.

Another concern that falls under

“We are hopeful to receive surveys from as many people within the community as possible. When the survey results are available, those results will be tabulated and presented to Council publicly, continuing the Town’s transparent approach to this topic.”

— Christy Hamrick

the sample bias rubric is the interpretation, packaging and presentation of information gleaned from a survey.

Hamrick was asked, “How will the process of aggregating and interpreting the responses play out? Who will do that? Will that process be conducted in a transparent manner? When will that process be completed?”

She responded, “All results will be tabulated and presented to Town Council at one of their regular public meetings in April. The results

will be made available to the town and are considered a public record. A decision about whether there will be an election will be made by the election deadline per the calendar of election deadlines from the Secretary of State.”

Ballot language for a proposed election would need to be adopted by the town by mid-September in order

to appear on a November ballot.

Singer remains frustrated.

“First, if you are not on the Facebook pages and do not currently live in Basalt, you will not know about the survey, nor will you know that anyone is able to fill it out,” Singer said. “All previous info shared makes it seem only current residents can offer thought, feedback and vote. I think the town owes money to all property owners that were overcharged due to their error.”