

# Shall we DANCE? Or shall we say ¡BAILAMOS?

THE GROUP IS BEST KNOWN FOR what is seen on stage: the colorful costumes, the complicated footwork and the bright red smiles. However what isn't as immediately obvious about the **ASFB Folklórico** program is its impact on the families, students and community involved.

Having a child in the Folklórico program means much more than dropping your kid off at dance lessons twice a week. For some parents it means driving three-plus hours back and forth to practice. It means helping braid headpieces while waiting outside the dance studio during lessons. It means helping dancers quick-change out of their costumes before their next entrance on stage - sometimes with less than two minutes to completely change everything from their dress to their shoes to their earrings.

For Kenny Teitler, Karla Stukey and their two daughters, Folklórico has become a whole-family affair. Their daughters have both danced in the program for 13+ years.

In this time, Teitler served as the president of the Folklórico parents association (which no longer exists) where he was in charge of leading fundraising efforts and helping coordinate performances. Stukey currently serves as the educational coordinator for the dance group, helping students plan for college, as well as providing general academic support. She also runs the performance group's leadership team. Additionally, both Teitler and Stukey have helped plan, organize and chaperone much of the group's travel both within the United States and abroad. Even Stukey's mother Faith Magill has become involved by helping **ASFB Folklórico Director Francisco "Paco" Nevarez-Burgueño** sew costumes for the group.

Norma Baez is the mother of three young dancers, the oldest of whom is 13 and part of the advanced traveling group. Baez helps wherever she can be

**Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's FOLKLÓRICO** program has made a name for itself with its award-winning after school dance classes and jaw dropping performances. To the families involved, it's more than a dance. It's a cultural bridge.

**TAVIA TEITLER**

useful, which often includes getting costumes and props ready for shows, acting as a chaperone and assisting backstage with costume changes and organization during performances. For Baez and her family, Folklórico has served as a way to connect to their cultural roots.

"My children take pride in the fact that, through Folklórico, they know a part of their culture that often gets forgotten, since we are living here in another culture. Folklórico is a way for them to learn about our culture through music and dance," Baez said. "My kids feel the way that the history of the dances they are performing relates to them, and they realize that even though we live here, some part of them is from Mexico," Baez said.

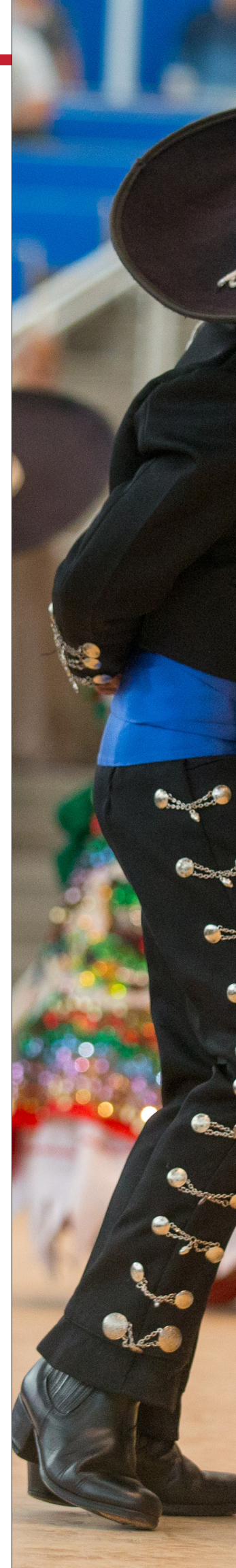
The Folklórico program teaches much more than dance steps. "The program is a perfect platform for learning everything," Stukey claims, "from perseverance to self respect to compassion, teamwork, follow-through and ability to look at things from other people's perspectives."

Teitler agreed, adding that "what my daughters have learned most of all in this program is how to look outside of themselves to see another perspective that they otherwise wouldn't have been exposed to."

This learning isn't confined to just the students either. "I am learning alongside my children," Baez said. "Even though it's my culture, there are things I didn't know that I'm learning from them, like which traditions come from which places," she added.

## PHOTO:

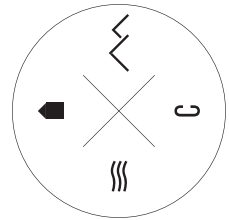
These dancers are performing the Mexican Hat dance, the most traditional Folklórico dance, paired with a potpourri of various famous traditional songs.  
(credit: Jordan Curet)







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Because the Folklórico program is situated within the United States and because an increasing number of Anglo students and families are participating in the programs, an important part of this learning is figuring out how to connect the Anglo and Latino communities.

"The Folklórico program is a great bridge between the two cultures," Baez said, explaining why for her, these cross-cultural connections add an even deeper level of meaning to the art form. "When children begin to learn, at such a young age, how to share these two cultures, it benefits everyone."

Teitler expressed similar sentiments, sharing that "Folklórico has opened up a pathway that wouldn't have existed without the program. It has allowed for cross-cultural relationships to develop and it has allowed for a broader understanding and a deeper appreciation of the Mexican culture," he said.

An essential part of what makes this merging of cultures possible is the community that is built within the program. "When a group becomes a team, it becomes a family and crossing cultures all of a sudden happens naturally... you become one group and one family and one team instead of different people," Teitler reflected.

“When I see the Latino kids dancing it makes me really happy. But when I see the Anglo kids dancing, it makes me even prouder because you can feel that they want to learn about our culture. Their curiosity and compassion mean a lot.”

... NORMA BAEZ

"It is amazing because through Folklórico we feel like part of the Anglo culture, and the Anglos also feel proud when watching the children dance," Baez said. "Even if sometimes they don't understand the history or the music, you can see the pride on the Anglo parents' faces when they see their children on stage and this is really beautiful."

The ASFB program has come to fill important gaps in our community. Stukey points out that Folklórico has "stretched way beyond just an after school program and has become a way to get parents involved outside of their homes in something they understand and take pride in."

Baez also mentioned the importance of the discipline children learn in the program, which is often hard to teach at home.

"For 15 years, this program has been a consistent part of our children's lives and our lives too," Teitler shared. "The expectation of excellence in the Folklórico program has carried over into other parts of their lives and has had a profound impact on who my girls have become."

#### PHOTO:

Tavia Teitler in the Aspen Independence Day parade.  
(credit: Anna Stonehouse)