

Los Danzantes de Aztlán

Brief History

Los Danzantes de Aztlán, is a unique Mexican Dance program founded in 1970 by Prof. Ernesto Martinez in the Department of Chicano and Latin American Studies and is currently directed by Dr. Victor Torres. The vibrant Danzantes offer a spectacular and colorful expression of Mexican regional dances. The dance troupe has been a success with audiences wherever it has performed. The troupe has consistently earned top awards in national and international folkloric dance competitions and has become a leading Mexican dance company in the Central Valley. The troupe plays an important role in the Chicano/Latino community in terms of recruiting Latino students to the university and in terms of promoting diversity on campus. Moreover, *Los Danzantes de Aztlán* is the only Mexican folkloric dance troupe in the CSU system to be recognized as an Official Representative of the University .



Los Danzantes de Aztlán: A Program in Chicano and Latin American

Los Danzantes de Aztlán has auditioned twice for the *San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival* (postcard on right)—a prestigious, and the largest, ethnic dance festival in the country. The troupe has been selected both times due to its high level of professionalism and excellence. The troupe is scheduled to perform June 18-19, 2016 in the historic Palace of Fine Arts.

Performance History

Throughout its history the troupe has been invited to perform in Spain; Mexico (Guanajuato, Ensenada, Rosarito, Tijuana); Fort Worth, Texas; Nevada (Las Vegas and Reno); Phoenix, Arizona; and at the World Expo Fair in 1974 in Washington.

The troupe averages 22 performances per year, requiring excellent discipline and time-management from the students who often work at least 20 hours per week and carry a full load of courses.



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Los Danzantes de Aztlán performing at the annual "Noche de Cultura" show as the guest group at Cal State Northridge



Innovative Programming and Student Leadership

Active student involvement and leadership is key to the success of Los Danzantes de Aztlán. Students help conceptualize, plan, coordinate, and execute major creative events. Some examples of include the following:

- El Festival de Los Danzantes – a weekend of *folklorico* dance workshops and performances. Participants come to Fresno State from as far away as Oregon and Texas to take dance workshops.
- CSU Folklorico Show – This annual program founded and hosted by Los Danzantes features dance groups from various Cal State campuses. The purpose is to expose and inspire local high school dancers to the different campuses where they may be able to pursue higher education and their passion for dance.
- "Christmas in Mexico" - This is the oldest *folklorico* Christmas show in the Valley. Besides Los Danzantes, it features local high school and youth groups. The purpose is to bring these young dancers and their families to campus so as to inspire them to one day attend and be a Danzante.



- High School Folklorico Summit – A collaboration with the Fresno Unified School District to bring FUSD student to Fresno State to take dance workshops from members of Los Danzantes and to learn about Fresno State and how to get into college.



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Program founder Prof. Ernesto Martinez (Left) was a pioneer and a visionary. He established the first high school *folklorico* program in the Valley at Selma High School in 1968 before starting the very first curricular-based Mexican Dance program in Chicano and Latin American Studies (1970) –Los Danzantes de Aztlan.

Los Danzantes is the only university program in California to be curricular-based. Students can earn credit towards a B.A. or minor in Chicano and Latin American Studies.

Ernesto Martinez Memorial Scholarship

In 2013, a scholarship was established in his memory Prof. Martinez was as committed to excellence as he was passionate about Mexican dance. He demanded these qualities of his Danzantes students as well. These qualities have established Los Danzantes de Aztlan as a highly professional and high caliber group, not only in the Central Valley, but throughout California and the U.S. and Mexico. The scholarship goes to support students that exemplify these qualities – both in dance and in their academics.

Student Leadership

Students are involved in all aspects of the program – teaching, planning, organizing, and performing. Through these activities and through the mentorship of Dr. Torres students learn valuable leadership skills that serve them well once they graduate. Los Danzantes is not only about developing good dancers, but about developing great leaders able to make positive contributions in the community. Former Danzantes have become business leaders, community leaders, educational leaders, and even a sitting Associate Justice of the 5th District Court of Appeals (Rosendo Peña). Raymond Ramirez, below, is now the Equity Coordinator at Fresno City College.

