

Teacher Study Card

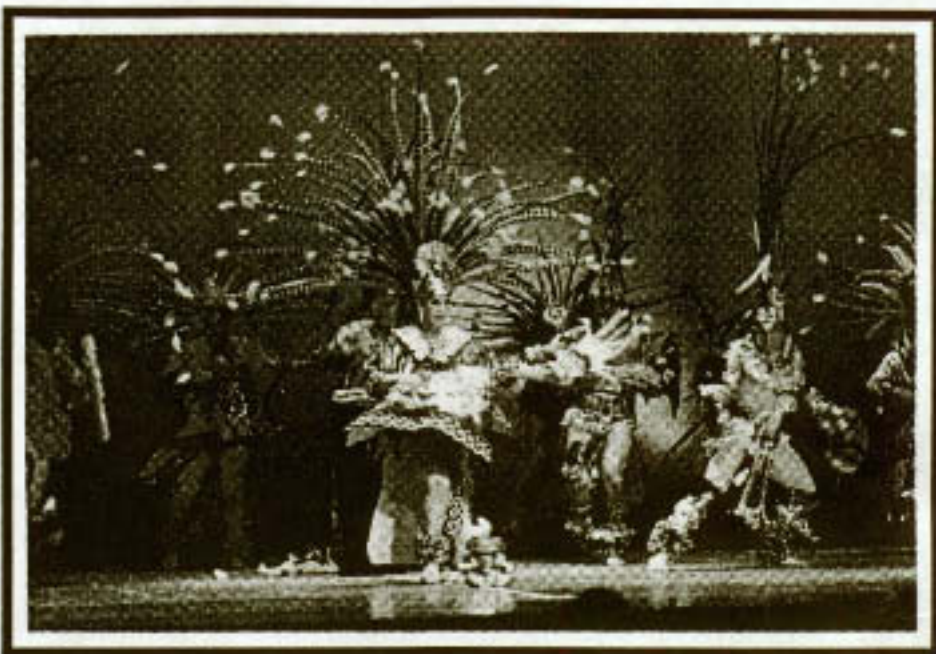
BALLET FOLKLORICO

ABOUT THE COMPANY

The full name of this spectacular folk dance company is the **Ballet Folklórico Mexico de Los Hermanos Avila**, founded in 1972 by Carmen and Jesus Avila (sister and brother) who are still performing with the company. Joined by a second and third generation of Avilas, Jesus is the director while Armando Contreras is choreographer, costume designer and artistic director. The authentic traditional regalia, lavish and colorful, are an important part of the show as they transform the energetic dancers from one scene to another. The majestic costumes are symbolic and are adorned with beads, suede, and colorful pheasant tails, some of which are six and a half feet in length.

The Ballet Folklórico Mexico has been recognized by U.S. and Mexican officials as one of the most exciting groups presenting authentic regional dances of Mexico. The group has received proclamations and commendations from the State of Wisconsin, as well as from the Mexican Government Tourism Office. The dancers consider themselves multi-cultural ambassadors from around the world. Many of the dancers are college students, some come from Mexico, Puerto Rico and from as far as Japan and China. While the home base of the group is in Madison, Wisconsin, some members have performed in Germany, Russia and Mexico. The dancers perform rigorously and in great precision practicing four to five days a week.

The Ballet was created to preserve Mexican folk dances. It also serves as a means to provides others with the opportunity to appreciate diversity among cultures.



ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

The program includes historic dances from **Azteca, Michoacan, Guerrero, Sonora, Jalisco**, and other regions of Mexico, as well as dances dedicated to the "**soldaderas**," the courageous women who supported and even fought alongside the men during the Mexican revolution. Regional dances reflect the unique tradition of a great country where many groups were physically isolated from one another, yet shared for the most part, language and common spirit. The Ballet transcends cultural influences from around the world. Mexico is a land of many faces. It has mountains and beaches, deserts and tropical rainforests, uninhabited wilderness and one of the largest cities in the world. Food, music, dress and dance vary from one region to another, even from village to village.

A 900 year pilgrimage to find a symbol that would tell the people where to build their empire, ended when a band of Aztecs discovered an island on which they saw an eagle devouring a serpent over a cactus. The island in Lake Texcoco was inhabited by Aztec men and women, where they celebrated life (with their Gods) with magnificent rituals and ceremonies, in which music and dance were key elements. Elaborate feathered outfits were thought to provide mystical communication with the Gods.

Zapateados are dances enjoyed throughout the state of **Guerrero**. They reflect the rhythm of people willing to express the joy of life with all their strength. In the state of **Sonora**, the **Yaqui Indians** perform their elaborate **Deer Dance** before beginning the hunt.

Dance is very important to Mexico and to Mexicans. Almost everybody dances socially, learning at least a few of the many different club-style dances. Children are taught to dance every year in school. The best are allowed to participate in the school's own Ballet Folklorico. After school there are many professional dance groups throughout Mexico, and quite a few outside of Mexico. What you will see in these performances are a few of the different styles of dance in Mexico. One of the goals of the Ballet is to be able to awaken a sense of culture within the students' own lives, creating interest in, and pride in their own cultural backgrounds, and engendering a sense of respect for other cultures.

DANCES

Paso de Camino

This dance honors the four directions: north, south, east and west. The dance begins with the performers lowering their bodies in a symbolic homage to each of the four directions.

Guadalajara

This is a dance that honors our ancestors, the Aztecs. It also contains various tap combinations which are called **zapateados**.

Tonancin

The entire dance is performed in a circular configuration to show reverence to the mother of all peoples, mother earth. Dancers also demonstrate reverence to the heavens and to the land when they raise and lower their outstretched arms in unison.

Fuego

This spectacular dance is dedicated to the sun. The Aztecs worshiped the sun as a force that creates and sustains life.

El Segundo Jarabe and Diana

These are dances whose movements give a taste of the history of Michoacan, a region that was strongly influenced by Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries.

La Raspa

The purpose of this dance is to encourage children to carry on the dances and traditions of Mexico and other cultures. It involves audience participation and teaches children and adults alike some basic movements and steps of this well known Mexican dance.

Son de la Negra and Jarabe Tapatio

These flirtatious dances from Jalisco highlight the courtship of this region of Mexico. The men's costumes show influences from Spain and France while the women's costumes show influences from Spain and China.

Son de la Negra is a love song that the men of Jalisco dedicate in admiration to the dark, exotic beauty of the women of this region.

Jarabe Tapatio, commonly known as the **Mexican Hat Dance**, is the fast-paced, happy love song that is considered the national folk dance of Mexico.

VOCABULARY

Ballet Folklorico - Used to signify groups that dance the folk dances of Mexico, as opposed to groups that dance classical ballet, a French invention.

Pinata - A traditional children's game. It is a paper-mache object in any shape desired, filled with goodies. The children take turns trying to hit it while blindfolded, until it breaks and releases the toys and candies.

Plano - A step, where the whole foot is suspended in the air and then hits the ground flat.

Tacon - The heel of the shoe. As a step, where the whole foot is in the air and only the front of shoe hits the ground.

Gatillo - A step where in the front part of the foot remains on the ground, only the heel lifts and then strikes the ground.

Sencillo - Where the foot hits the ground once.

Doble - Where the foot hits the ground twice.

Huehuetl - The big drum used by the Aztecs to give them rhythm.

Teponastle - A smaller percussion instrument used to give a higher-pitched sound.

Guaje - A hollowed-out gourd filled with seeds, used as a rattle. Every dancer carries one.

Penacho - The elaborate headpieces worn by the dancers.

BALLET FOLKLORICO MEXICO

de los Hermanos Avila



The **BALLET FOLKLORICO MEXICO** de Los Hermanos Avila has entertained both child and adult audiences for more than 25 years. Founded in 1972, by Jesus and Carmen Avila (brother and sister), they were soon joined by a second and third generation of Avilas. Internationally recognized by the United States and Mexican officials, the **BALLET FOLKLORICO MEXICO** has been named one of the most exciting groups presenting regional and traditional dances from Mexico.

While showcasing a variety of regions such as Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacan, Sonora, and Veracruz; you will discover the fascinating folklore of the Aztecs, the romantic lyrics and poetry of the Mariachi's, and the heroes of the Mexican Revolution. The **BALLET FOLKLORICO MEXICO** weaves foot-tapping fun into the history of Mexico.

In the **Azteca**, the authentic costumes transform the energetic dancers into the descendants of the prehispanic population who faithfully preserve a traditional ritual.

From **Jalisco**, the land of Charros, Chinas, and Mariachi's, comes the blend for a perfect fiesta - Symbolic of all Mexico to the world!

From Tamaulipas to Veracruz, the **BALLET FOLKLORICO MEXICO** will take you on a live rhythmical and colorful excursion throughout Mexico.

Ballet Folklórico Mexico de los Hermanos Avila

Typically Performed Dances

Paso de Camino

This dance honors the four directions. The north, south, east and west. The dance begins with the performers lowering their bodies in a symbolic homage to each of the four directions.

Guadalajara

This is a dance that honors our ancestors, the Aztecs. It also contains various tap combinations which are called zapateados.

Tonantzin

The entire dance is performed in a circular configuration to show reverence to the mother of all peoples, **mother earth**. Dancers also demonstrate reverence to the heavens and to the land when they raise and lower their outstretched arms in unison.

Fuego

This spectacular dance is dedicated to the sun. The Aztecs worshipped the sun as a force that creates and sustains life.

El Segundo Jarabe and Diana

These are dances whose movements give a taste of the history of **Michoacan**, a region that was strongly influenced by Spain in the 16th and 17th centuries.

La Raspa

The purpose of this dance is to encourage children to carry on the dances and traditions of Mexico and other cultures. It involves audience participation and teaches children and adults alike some basic movements and steps of this well-known Mexican dance.

Son de la Negra and Jarabe Tapatio

These flirtatious dances from **Jalisco** highlight the courtship of this region of Mexico. The men's costumes show influences from Spain and France while the women's costumes show influences from Spain and China. Son de la Negra is a love song that the men of Jalisco dedicate in admiration to the dark, exotic beauty of the women of this region. Jarabe Tapatio, commonly know as the Mexican Hat Dance is the fast-paced, happy love song that is considered the national folk dance of Mexico.

Ballet Folklorico Mexico de los Hermanos Avila

Performance Notes

About the Company:

The full name of this spectacular folk dance company is the *Ballet Folklorico Mexico de los Hermanos Avila*, founded in 1972 by Carmen and Jesus Avila (sister and brother) who are still performing with the company. Joined by a second and third generation of Avilas, Jesus is the director while Armando Contreras is the choreographer, costume designer and artistic director. The authentic traditional *regalia*, as lavish and colorful as it is, is an important part of the show as it transforms the energetic dancers from one scene to another. The majestic costumes are highly symbolic and adorned with colorful beads, suede, and pheasant tails which can be up to six and a half feet in length.

About the Director:

Born in Torreón Coahuila Mexico in 1959, Jesus started learning cultural dances in the fourth grade at Cuahutemoc elementary school in Mexico. As part of a school activity, the children learned to perfect regional dances. Every year on May 10, Jesus and other children exhibited with great pride and enthusiasm the culture of their region through dance. At festivals hundreds of dance groups from different regions of Mexico gathered to represent their towns. Impressed by the flamboyance of the various regions, Jesus decided to learn the dances of other regions.

Now directing the Ballet Folklorico Mexico, a well recognized dance troupe of more than 20 members from around the world, Jesus has been acknowledged by professional dance groups and has often procured some of these dancers to perform with his troupe. Every year Jesus sponsors *Danza de Pluma* (a troupe in Mexico) at the Fiesta de Guadalupe. He also serves as artistic advisor for The Call for Peace Drum and Dance Company. Jesus' dance troupe has donated many hours performing for non-profit organizations and at benevolent functions. Performances at Festival of the Lakes, Triangle Ethnic Festival and Fiesta Hispana have earned him the admiration of his people, community and family.

About Mexico:

Mexico is a land of many faces. It is best described as many lands within a land. It has contrasts such as mountains and beaches, deserts and tropical rain forests, uninhabited wilderness and one of the largest cities in the world. Food, music, dress and dance all vary from one region to another, even from one village to the next.

Dance is very important to Mexico and its people. Almost everyone dances socially, learning at least a few of the many different club-style dances. Children are taught to dance at school, and the best get to participate in each school's Ballet Folklorico. After graduating from high school, some students join one of the many professional dance groups throughout Mexico. This tradition has even spread to areas outside of Mexico.