

Study Guide



PITTSBURGH CULTURAL TRUST ARTS EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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Show Description

For over seven decades, **Amalia Hernández's Ballet Folklórico de México** has positioned itself as the most emblematic **folkloric** dance ensemble in **Mexico** and around the world. Founded in 1952 by the dancer and choreographer Amalia Hernández, **Ballet Folklórico de México** revolutionized the concept of traditional dance and transformed the history of Mexican dance, laying the groundwork and setting the tone for thousands of dance troupes in **Mexico** and abroad with the characteristic seal of its creator. Amalia Hernández carried out in-depth research in the different states of the Mexican Republic, studying not only the traditional dances, but also the music, customs and typical costumes and then imbuing them with new meaning, recreating them, staging them and spreading knowledge of them through the theater. Through **avant-garde** thinking, she designed a show and created a cultural management model characterized by efficiency and professionalism onstage. Amalia Hernández's work was not limited to choreography, as she was also a great businesswoman and cultural promoter who, through her brilliant proposals, managed to rediscover and revalue the richness of Mexican dance.

Her hard work resulted in a group with a sense of discipline, perseverance and extraordinary teamwork that became the first professional **folkloric** dance company. Transcendental to the history of dance in **Mexico**, it also created a cultural management model never seen before in the country.

Amalia Hernández's Ballet Folklórico de México has managed to garner attention for Mexican culture and creators, acquiring enormous value through creative excellence that is comparable to other great artistic creations around the world. Today, her **repertoire** has become a classic, but one that is renewed, transformed and enriched with the passage of time. With more than 45 million spectators and countless recognitions, Amalia Hernández's artistic legacy remains strong among large audiences, Mexican and from around the world, thanks to more than 120 original choreographies with great technical rigor, elaborate traditional costumes and wonderful dancers, consolidating itself as the best company in the world of its kind.

Show Bios and Roles

Amalia Hernández was a dancer and choreographer, founder of **Ballet Folklórico de México** in 1952. From a very young age, she began a long journey through Mexican culture that would lead her to rescue the traditional dances around **Mexico**. She managed to project to the world the beauty of the country through movement from pre-Columbian cultures and Spanish influences to the revolutionary times. With her first performances in 1952, she obtained public recognition as a cultural representative of **Mexico**. Her great success established the Ballet in the Palace of Fine Arts as its permanent venue since October 11, 1959.

Salvador López is a businessman, promoter, Charro and sportsman whose participation in and commitment to his activities has always been outstanding. He joined **Amalia Hernández's Ballet Folklórico de México** in 1982, organizing tours in Europe and South America, as well as in the United States, Japan, Canada and the Dominican Republic, among others. These tours have amounted to more than six thousand performances for nearly twelve million spectators. Due to his outstanding contribution, in 1986 Amalia Hernández appointed Salvador López as the Legal Representative and administrative director of the company. From that moment onwards he was tasked with the responsibility of operating the institution, as well as establishing strategies and projects to ensure its future.



Show Bios and Roles

Amalia Viviana Basanta Hernandez is the Artistic Director of **Amalia Hernández's Ballet Folklórico de México** and General Director of Ballet México en Movimiento. Born in Mexico City to teacher Amalia Hernández and Argentine writer Joaquín Basanta, she began her dance studies at the age of 5, both in Traditional Mexican Dance at **Ballet Folklórico de México**, and in the Classical Dance profession with Nellie Happei. At the age of 13 she joined the National Ballet of Mexico under Maestra Guillermina Bravo, where she studied Contemporary Dance. Later she studied both modern/contemporary and jazz technique abroad, with teachers such as Alvin Nikolai, Murray Louise, Hania Holm, Alvin Ailey, Lester Horton, and Katherine Dunham. In 1977, she returned to be part of **Ballet Folklórico de México** as a dancer, and revamped some of the **repertoire**, strengthening the future of the Company created by teacher and choreographer, Amalia Hernández. In 1979 she was named Principal Dancer of **Ballet Folklórico de México** and later Artistic Coordinator of the Company—a position she has held for more than 15 years, along with acting as director of the School of the aforementioned Ballet for 10 years.



Vocabulary

Avant-garde — favoring or introducing experimental or unusual ideas.

Fiesta(s) — Spanish for “party (or, parties)”.

Folkloric/ Folk — based on or resembling folklore; relating to the traditional art or culture of a community or nation.

Folklórico — Spanish for “folk”.

Folk Music/ Dance — the music/dance of everyday people, based on the traditional art or culture of a community or nation.

Mexico — a country in Central America that borders the southern United States; spelled **México** in Spanish.

Mestizaje — the whitening of Indigenous people during the colonization of the Americas specifically by Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. In English, this word translates to “of mixed race”.

Mestizo – Mexican people who are of both native and Spanish blood and cultural heritage. In English, this word translates to “mixed-race”.

Plaza(s) — Spanish for “plaza”; in the Spanish-speaking world, the *plaza* is the center of town activities, where people gather for social, cultural, and political events.

Repertoire — A stock of plays, dances, or pieces that a company or performer knows or is prepared to perform.



Cultural Context

- **Folkloric** dance reflects the traditions, cultures and beliefs of people in a particular region.
- Before the Spanish conquest, the indigenous peoples had magnificent dance art. Many of the dances involved acrobatic feats and incorporated colorful costumes. The dances were used for rituals, celebrations and religious festivals.
- Hernan Cortés's arrival in 1519 marks the beginning of the Spanish conquest of the indigenous people. In the conquest and the subsequent colonization, they destroyed much of what was beautiful of the Indian civilizations and broke the hold of the Aztec religion and sacrifices in exchange for Christianity.
- The Spanish colonizers also brought the culture of Spain's artistic golden age marked by its folk **music** and **dance**. The early dances Spaniards brought with them were their own religious and solemn ceremonies as well as celebrations.
- One of **Ballet Folklórico de México**'s most famous numbers is the *Jarabe Tapatío*, or "the Mexican hat dance."
- After being banned in the 1700s by Spanish authorities, the *Jarabe* became more popular than ever and took on rebellious overtones. Illegal dances popped up in **plazas** as people expressed their dissent through choreography. After Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, the *Jarabe* was elevated to national dance status.
- The result of the intermingling of Native and Catholic customs is seen today at **fiestas** where the Catholic Mass and dances of ancient origin both take place in or near the church.
- A lot of what we know as Mexican tradition is a mix of indigenous and Spanish customs.
- There have been attempts at using **Mestizaje** to create a national identity through art, music, and dance.
- **Ballet Folklórico de México** has become a symbol of **Mestizaje** and the mixing of Spanish and Indigenous Mexican music and dance forms.
- **Amalia Hernández's Ballet Folklórico de México** combines elements of **folk** rituals and regional characteristics with classic European influence.
- Each dress and dance in **Ballet Folklórico** represents a specific region in Mexico.

Supplemental Activities

Put it All Together!

One of the dances seen in **Ballet Folklórico de México** is *La Vida es Juego*, a dance based on Mexican toys and games. Let's create our own version of this dance with our own cultural references!

Step 1: Choose a theme song from a popular videogame (e.g. Pac-Man, Super Mario Bros., or Pokémon)

Step 2: Separate the class into groups of three or four.

Step 3: Instruct the groups to create an eight count of movement (or two depending on the size of your class) to the music of game. Ensure that all students contribute to the movement phrase.

Step 4: After 15 minutes, come back together as a class and let each group teach the moves they created.

Step 5: Put all the groups' movement phrases together in one big dance!



Pre and Post Show Discussion Questions

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

1. What are other elements of producing a show outside of dance and choreography?
2. Ballet Folklórico de México incorporaste a variety of dances from various cultural origins, including Spain and Indigenous peoples. Can you think of other dance forms that draw upon other cultural origins.
3. Ballet Folklórico de México combines traditional and contemporary forms of dance in their show. What are some popular songs or dances that you know that you would like to see turned into a stage production?
4. You will see a blend of dance styles in this production, highlighting various regions of México . Name the various regions in Mexico, and discuss their unique features and cultural offerings.

Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. What did you notice about the music? How did it make you feel?
2. Name some differences you saw between this performance and a traditional ballet?
3. Are there any numbers that stood out to you? Why?
4. What was unique about this performance compared to others you've been to?



School Day Matinees

Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! The Musical! (grades

PreK-2) - *waitlist*

Thursday, April 24, 2025

Friday, April 25, 2025

360 All Stars (all grades) - *waitlist*

Wednesday, May 14, 2024

Thursday, May 15, 2024

123 Andrés (grades PreK-2) - *waitlist*

Friday, May 16, 2025

Scan for more information



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Professional Development Workshops

Developing Authentic STEAM Experiences in the Classroom

Saturday, March 8, 2025—for K-12 Educators

ACT 48 Credit Available

Connecting to the Community

Saturday, April 12, 2025—for Early Childhood and K-12 Educators

ACT 48 Credit Available

Visual Arts and Social-Emotional Learning

Saturday, May 10, 2025—for Early Childhood and K-12 Educators

ACT 48 and PQAS Credit Available

All workshops held in the Trust Arts Education Center (805/807 Liberty Ave).

Light breakfast provided. Register in advance.

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