Introduction

What is Mexican folklórico dance?
- Folklórico dance is a dynamic transnational expressive medium through which Mexican communities on both sides of the United States-Mexico border create and pass on a strong sense of group aesthetics and identity (Nájera-Ramírez 2009).

Folklórico sits at a juncture between performance theater, traditional cultural arts, and national identity (political theater)...and plays a role in shaping cultural or national identity, both here in the United States and in Mexico (Garcia 2009).

What does it represent?
- According to Mexican folklórico dancer and teacher Rosa Guerrero (from Texas), folklórico represents everything: “It portrays the soul of the people... You see a representation of life in folklórico” (in Uranga-Fonseca 1997).

Overview of Mexican Folklórico

Mexican folklórico in Mexico:
- 1920-1930s misiones culturales: collection of traditional and folk dances from rural and Indigenous communities by the SEP (Ministry of Education) to be taught at public schools to form a collective/national identity and instill cultural pride.

- The Ballet Folklórico de Mexico de Amalia Hernandez, the premier ballet folklórico company in Mexico, brought it into the national and international spotlight.

Mexican folklórico in the United States:
- The role of Mexican folklórico in identity formation during the Chicano Movement (1960s).
- Continued growth of folklórico in the U.S., as well as transnational collaborations with Mexico at various levels (e.g. Asociación Nacional de Grupos Folklóricos, ANGF).
- Incorporates dances, music, and costumes from Mexico.

(Mendoza-Garcia, 2016; Nájera-Ramírez, 1989)

Current Holding in the Archives (Arizona)

Current Holdings (Arizona Archives Online):
- Within the University of Arizona alone (i.e. Special Collection, the Fine Arts Library), there exits some collection related to various aspects of Mexican folklórico:
  - Special Collections: The Papers of L. Marguerite Collier collection includes (among other things): pictures, programs, dance directions and notes, and books on Mexican dance.
  - Fine Arts Library: has a small collection of Mexican folklórico music.
  - Could not find records related to Mexican folklórico costumes (aside from images or drawing in some books).

Abstract

Mexican folklórico dance is a dance form and tradition that is rooted in the cultural diversity of Mexico, but that also has a prominent presence in the United States. The dances, music, and costumes are all embedded with the historical and socio-cultural traditions of the communities from where they originate and are therefore crucial aspects of Mexican folklórico that should be included in the archives. Current holdings, at least in Arizona, include records on Mexican folklórico dance, but these are limited to audio recordings, visual materials, and written materials; nothing on costumes. As such, I argue for their inclusion in the archives by applying a participatory approach and a post-custodial strategy, which will accomplish the following. This will ensure that the costumes are not de-contextualized by being completely removed from their communities and that they remain with those individuals who have years of experience taking care of them and know how to keep them in presentable conditions.

Why Archive Mexican Folklórico Costumes?
- Costumes embody representations of the state, region, era, or culture from where they originated and work together with their corresponding music and dances to tell stories (Hansen, 2006).
- For Rosa Guerrero, folklórico is a means of communication that utilizes multiple forms of transmission: facial expressions, arm and body movements, dance steps, and with rebozos (shawls), a part of her costume (Uranga-Fonseca 1997, 98).
- In the short documentary, Danaculatura, folklorist Dr. Maribel Alvarez discusses the importance of fabrics (and costumes) in portraying emotions and how this is a traditions that is passed down through the generations.

Considerations for Archiving Costumes

Delicate nature, sensitivity to light and dust, and ease of deterioration; limited storage space (and type of storage); and the presence of plastics.

Some Approaches / Solutions:
- A custom-built mobile carriage system for costumes reduces the amount of space needed.
- Costumes stored in natural hanging position to allow the costumes to “breath”; and
- A loose tray for storing accessories.

(Jadair & Morena, 2010; Hayes, 2010; Watson, 1976)

Recommendations

Participatory Approach:
- By involving the community in the archiving process (appraisal, arrangement, description), more accurate records of the costumes can be created. This also give the community the power to decide what should be archived and how it should be represented (Shilton & Srinivasan, 2007).

Post-Custodial Strategies:
- By utilizing a post-custodial strategy, the archives collaborates with the records creators (e.g. costume designers, dancers, or directors) so that the records are still able to be processed, with the original record returning to the creator while a copy remains in the archives so that others can access it (JSAS Glossary of Terms).

Positive Outcomes:
- Digital archives of Mexican folklórico costumes: picture (with descriptions by the folklórico dance community)
- Keeping the costumes within the community will ensure that their context is not lost (dancers will keep using them for performances).
- Mexican folklórico costumes are made from a variety of textiles that may require special handling or storage conditions.
- Traditional costume designers / seamstresses have years of experience (and expertise) maintaining and repairing costumes.

References