

2017

## Mi Cultura Y Yo

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### Recommended Citation

Gómez, Daniel (2017) "Mi Cultura Y Yo," *CouRaGeouS Cuentos: A Journal of Counternarratives*: Vol. 2 , Article 24.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/courageouscuentos/vol2/iss1/24>



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# Mi Cultura y Yo

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Daniel Gómez

The culture and traditions of México spread out all over the world. Those who live within a Mexican household will realize this in a few ways; whether they have their mom blasting Spanish music very early in the morning, or being able to smell all the amazing aromas of their mother's cooking. One tradition that a Mexican family could also do is enrolling their son or daughter in a folklórico dance group to learn the many regional dances of México. Growing up within a Mexican household, I was accustomed to these traditions except for being put into a folklórico group, which was what I had always wanted to do.

My interest in wanting to dance ballet folklórico Mexicano started when I was 10 years old. I attended a summer festival and noticed one of my friends was one of the folklórico dancers who would be dancing at the festival. I noticed her partner was wearing a charro suit. It was at that very moment that I wanted to learn how to dance folklórico. I had asked my parents if they could enroll me in folklórico classes, but they never did. I kept asking them to enroll me in folklórico classes for the next eight years, but they still didn't enroll me into any classes. Finally, I had an opportunity to dance folklórico at my high school.

In high school, I was a member of the tennis team. The head coach of the tennis team was also the director of the ballet folklórico group in my high school. He had asked me one day if I wanted to join the group and I would be able to get out of conditioning with the tennis team. As much as I wanted to take that opportunity, I declined the offer because I was the team captain and I did not want the other tennis players to think that I was the coach's favorite just because I decided to dance folklórico. I had to play the role of a team captain and the captain never leaves his group behind.

Finally after graduating from high school, I thought to myself, well I wasn't able to take folklórico classes thus far, but I was going to be attending Humboldt State University (HSU). Coming up to HSU, I wasn't sure if I was going to like it or not, because I was a student coming from the city of Norwalk, a city within Los Angeles County, and I would be living so far away from my family.

At the beginning of my freshmen year in 2013, I immediately started feeling homesick and cried every night. Around the third week of my freshmen year I was wondering what clubs and organizations Humboldt State University had to offer. I thought to myself, "I highly doubt there will be a ballet folklórico group up here, especially since Humboldt was predominantly a white community and the Hispanic population was around 15% at the time." At that point, I gave in to the realization that I would never be able to dance ballet folklórico Mexicano until I returned home in the summer or until I graduated from Humboldt State University. I did not know it yet, however, but my life would change that same week.

I was already into my third week as a freshman. It was a Tuesday and I had just finished one of my classes and was headed back to the dorms so that I could rest until my last class of the day. As I was walking towards the UC Quad, I heard the familiar sound of mariachi music. It was a son Jalisciense. I started doing some footwork to the music. I saw two female students with long skirts tabling for their club. The two students noticed me dancing and ran to me and dragged me to their table, I found out that the club they were tabling for was for the Ballet Folklórico de Humboldt. My face had the biggest smile I have ever made because I finally found a folklórico group that I would be able to join. They told me that if I was interested in folklórico to join their group as well as enroll into the folklórico class offered by the Physical Education department.

I decided to join the group and after the first day of attending, I immediately fell in love with it. The professor Elizabeth Rivera and her daughter Leonora Rivera, who was also Elizabeth's assistant, were very impressed of how I was able to keep up for a

newcomer to the class who had no prior experience in folklórico other than watching dance groups performing at many different events. After eight long years of not being able to take classes, I was now part of a folklórico dance troupe at the collegiate level. If I had never found out about the Ballet Folklórico de Humboldt group, I most likely would have gone back to Norwalk to be closer to my family, but I'm very glad I found the folklórico group here and joined it.

By joining the Ballet Folklórico de Humboldt group at Humboldt State University, I got to meet many new friends, many of whom have danced folklórico since the age of eight. Other members were new to folklórico and, like myself, were just starting to learn how to dance. In the time I have been a member of the group, I have learned to dance around twenty-five to thirty different dances from different regions of México. I learned all the dances Elizabeth Rivera and her daughter Leonora were teaching us at an exceptionally fast pace and so I quickly became one of the most experienced dancers within the Ballet Folklórico de Humboldt.

Of the regions that I have learned dances from, such as Veracruz, el Norte, Sinaloa, Nayarit and Michoacán, my favorite is the regional dance of Jalisco. I enjoy it because it is the region that I have always seen represented at many festivals. I also enjoy the attire that is associated with these dances: the elegant traje con sombrero de charro. The women dance in colorful skirts with different patterns and colors. I also enjoy the music of the mariachi, as it is always lively and cheerful and full of excitement.

I had learned a lot during my first year dancing with the Ballet Folklórico de Humboldt. I got in better shape little by little. Despite being almost a 300-pound young man, I am trying to slim down. Just like when I am learning to dance a new regional dance, I know it takes time and commitment in order to achieve my goal. In February of this year, the Ballet Folklórico de Humboldt group attended the University Folklórico Summit, a three-day conference organized specifically for universities who have ballet folklórico groups in their institutions. During this conference, we learned about how to get our group out and known to the university, as

well as how to fundraise for our group. We also got to connect with various university folklórico groups, like UC Santa Cruz, Fullerton, San Jose State, and UC Irvine.

With every dance I learn with the Ballet Folklórico de Humboldt, I gain more knowledge of the terminology of the dance steps as well as identifying when the music changes to start the next step in the dance. I have been dancing with the group for four years now. I have become a veteran dancer and the only guy in the group who has mastered every single dance our folklórico group has been taught.

With the dancing skills I have acquired in the four years I've been here, I have become a role model to some members in the group as well as an assistant in the class. Many faculty members from the university's Dance Department, the World Languages and Cultures Department and the Critical Race, Gender & Sexuality Studies Department have always complimented my dancing capabilities. During the folklórico class that is offered every semester at Humboldt State University, I am almost always in charge of teaching the men in the class the steps for each dance that we learn. I teach the students especially when we are learning a dance where the men are required to use machetes.

In dancing folklórico or any other type of dance style, I have learned that dance is not just an art, it also tells a story. The regional dances of México all tell a story from México's history. It is very important to keep the Mexican traditions and culture alive by telling these stories through the form of folklórico dance. By learning so many dances from the different regions of México, I plan on spreading and keeping Mexican culture alive at Humboldt State University for the remaining time I still have here by dancing with my folklórico group and in the future as well, when I become a folklórico dance instructor.