

Mexico's famed Ballet Folklórico "Quetzalli" Celebrates its 25th Anniversary with a U.S. Tour Joined by award-winning musical ensemble, Tlen-Huicani

For twenty five years, **Ballet Folklórico "Quetzalli" de Veracruz** has established itself as one of the leading folk music and dance troupes in Mexico, and as one of the most cherished cultural ambassadors of their country. The company has taken the vitality of ancient Mexican traditions to all corners of the world, bringing the authentic flavor of local *fiestas* to international audiences. "Quetzalli" (pronounced kett-SAH-lee) is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a U.S. tour, sharing the richness and diversity of Mexican culture and folklore with American audiences. The group will be joined by legendary musicians from Veracruz, Grupo **Tlen-Huicani**, one of the premier interpreters of the folk music of Mexico and Latin America.

Ballet Folklórico "Quetzalli" de Veracruz was founded by Hugo Betancourt, who has been immersed in Mexico's folk music and dance since an early age. From his uncle Humberto Betancourt, a well-known musician and composer, Hugo learned the artistry of the dance and a passion for these traditions. Hugo went on to study folk dance under Maestro Alejandro Gómez Solís, in the Ballet Folklórico Veracruz, and later joined Ballet Folklórico Tonanzintla. With both groups, Hugo toured the U.S., his first steps to a successful international career.

In 1985, with Rosalinda Pérez and Manuel Vázquez, Betancourt created "Quetzalli", with the mission of researching, practicing and promoting Mexican folk dances. The troupe, which has grown from eight dancers to a company of more than 45 total dancers and 10 musicians, (17 will participate in this tour), comes from the state of Veracruz, a region in Mexico with a strong Afro-Caribbean influence and a rich musical tradition. Best known for being the birthplace of the world famous "La Bamba", Veracruz also boasts such diverse musical styles as: *son jarocho*, *danzón*, and *huapango*. In 1986, "Quetzalli" became official representatives for the Secretary of Tourism and Economic Development for the State of Veracruz. Since then, they have criss-crossed the globe, from Japan to the United Arab Emirates, Peru to France, captivating audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

"Quetzalli" is no stranger to American audiences either. During the past 25 years, they have extensively toured the U.S., "we have basically performed in all of the U.S. states but one," says Hugo. Betancourt states that one of the greatest achievements of the group has been their longevity, "After 25 years, we still perform to sold-out houses," he says. Throughout the years, "Quetzalli" has offered American audiences an exciting glimpse of these powerful Mexican traditions and has recreated local *fiestas* from Florida to Alaska.

Folk dance is one of the oldest and most deeply rooted traditions in Mexico. Each region of the country has its own representative folk dances that are an indispensable component of the local celebrations or *fiestas*. In Pre-Columbian times, for example, it was an essential part of religious rituals with the priests performing the dances. Eventually, the folk dances evolved to become a characteristic popular expression, enriched by diverse cultural influences: Indigenous, Spanish, Moorish and African. "These are ever-deepening customs that have been passed from generation to generation," says Hugo.

It was in the 1950s that these folk dances were taken from their grassroots level to theaters and performing arts halls. The Ballet Folklórico de México, created by choreographer Amalia Hernández, was the pioneer company of this trend and the first to go beyond the Mexican borders and tour around the world on a regular basis. The success of Amalia's company opened doors abroad and established an international audience for this art form, which later became emblematic of Mexican culture.

Ballet Folklórico "Quetzalli", however, aims for authenticity. "Of the touring companies from Mexico, we're one of the few that has live music in their shows, and that takes the performances to another level," says Hugo. "The presence of Tlen-Huicani makes this tour even more special... Audiences have confirmed it", Hugo says with justifiable pride. "We've had people come to us to tell us that we recreate the *fiestas* exactly the same way they are in Mexico!"

Tlen-Huicani was named "Best Folk Music Group" in Mexico by the Union of Music and Theater Critics for that country. It is led by veteran musician and harp virtuoso, Maestro Alberto de la Rosa, a highly respected musician and musicologist who founded the group in 1973. He has been part of the University of Veracruz music faculty since that time. De la Rosa has received multiple awards on national and international level, most recently from the Encuentro de Jaraneros in Los Angeles, for his achievements and contributions to the dissemination of the folklore of Mexico and Veracruz. Tlen-Huicani will contribute accompaniment to "Quetzalli"'s dances as well as performing their own segments of the show.

According to Betancourt, one of the most important undertakings for "Quetzalli" is bringing a piece of their homeland to the Mexican communities in the U.S. "We want the Mexican audiences to remember that they come from a great culture, and they should feel very proud of their roots." And, the enthusiastic response from the Mexican communities shows that they have truly succeeded in their mission. "Often we have Mexican people in the audience, people who left the country 10 or 15 years ago and haven't been able to go back since, and when they see our show they burst into nostalgic tears."

For their 25th Anniversary tour, "Quetzalli" will present dances from four different regions of Mexico, as well as the traditional Prehispanic "Danza de los Concheros" which pays homage to Mexico's millenary tradition and features elaborate feather headdresses and shell anklets. Audiences will be able to enjoy dances from the states of Guerrero, Baja California Norte and of course, "Quetzalli's" home state of Veracruz. With their brilliant costumes, joyous music, and above all, their clear passion for the richness of their culture, "Quetzalli" guarantees that they will recreate the lively ambiance of Veracruz fiesta on U.S. stages. "It will just be like being there," promises Hugo.