

# The Children of the Rain

By Eduardo Stnaley

More than 20 youngsters and their parents perform la “Danza de los Rubios” (Dance of the Blondes), a dance that represents the arrival home of the arrieros (muleteers) after a long working day. These and other Mixtec dances are performed by local group, Se’e Savy (“The Children of the Rain,” in Mixtec). Rehearsing through long nights in Madera, mothers and wives sew female costumes and purchase male costumes from Oaxaca with their savings.

For this group, no pay check is received for their efforts, but they feel highly compensated. By recreating parts of their culture, they educate others. Even many Oaxacans “discover” their culture here through activities organized by Se’e Savy.

Take for example, the Day of the Dead, November 1st and 2nd. Se’e Savy group members organize the event for the Madera community. Adrián López, one of the founders, explains with pride that he planted the flowers that mark the path to the Altar of the Dead using the seeds he brought from Oaxaca. It is the flower of Cempoaxóchitl, traditionally used to adorn altars and tombs during the Day of the Dead. Legend says that a dead person can see the luminous effects of this flower.

A pre-Hispanic tradition after the Conquest fused with Christian elements, the Day of the Dead celebration is important to Mexican culture and to the thousands of Oaxacans living in the California’s Central Valley.

For indigenous cultures, death is considered a positive human transition as it represents a continuity in the creation of life and its cycle. In essence, collective health is important and not the individual salvation. A dead person disappears to return to the world of the shadows, melting into the air, the fire, and the ground in a way that embraces the universe.

Many parents enjoy having their children participate in cultural activities. Another member of the group explains that they want to include more youngsters, particularly those born here, so they can have the chance to learn about the culture of their ancestors.

Participants often use their own money to buy the traditional dresses and the masks used for some of the dances. This is the case for the “Danza de los Diablos” (Devil’s Dance) and “Danza de los Rubios” where masks play a crucial role. Little is known about how la Danza de Los Diablos arrived to Oaxaca, but some historians have suggested its influence was brought by African slaves during colonial times. The dance is a ritual dedicated to the God “Ruja”, to whom slaves prayed to in order to escape misfortunes.

Recently, Se’e Savi performed three dance numbers in this year’s Guelaguetza in Fresno. Guelaguetza is a traditional celebration where indigenous people of all regions of the state of Oaxaca come together to offer their crops to the Gods. Guelaguetza symbolizes

"offering" in Zapotec language. Today, this celebration has evolved to include dances and performances.

Due to the increased presence of Oaxacan immigrants in California, several dance performers in Los Angeles began the Guelaguetza celebrations. They, too, performed in Fresno. Se'e Savi organizers hope to become more involved in this event. Se'e Savi has a membership of approximately 40, all of whom are temporary farm workers, family members, and friends.

Hundreds of miles away from their beloved Oaxaca, this group of migrant farm workers and their families are bringing the joy and beauty of their culture to Tamejavi.

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