

FEBRUARY 14, 2020

# Festival

*UTRGV BALLETS  
FOLKLÓRICO*

50

*Years of*

**'ALEGRIA'**





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# UTRGV Ballet Folklórico marks 50 years with 'Alegría' performance

**BY FRANCISCO E. JIMENEZ**  
STAFF WRITER

EDINBURG — The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's Ballet Folklórico is celebrating its 50th anniversary with performances of "Alegría" this weekend.

"Alegría" is a celebration of Mexico's history and culture, going as far back as the pre-Hispanic era. The show takes the audience on a journey through different parts of Mexico, showcasing each region's distinct music and dance.

Miguel Peña, UTRGV Ballet Folklórico director, is only the third director in the

program's 50-year history.

"Back then it was Pan American University, I believe," said Peña. "It was founded in 1970 by Dr. Amilda Thomas. After that, it's been only three directors in the whole history of this ballet. The first was Amilda Thomas, then it was Francisco Muñoz, and then me. I took charge of the group in 2015."

Peña joined Ballet Folklórico as a freshman at UTPA in 2006.

"I danced with them for I believe seven years," said Peña, who taught as a teaching assistant while in the engineering program. "I stopped dancing

in 2013, or something like that. While I was a dancer in there, I was also assistant director to Francisco Muñoz. I started dancing in 2006 when I was a freshman in college, and all the way through my masters."

Peña said that while he enjoyed teaching, dance was also a passion for him.

"My other passion has always been dance, so combining dance and teaching is the best thing that has ever happened to me," Peña said. "When I got the position, at the beginning it was a challenge because since I stopped

dancing with the company in 2013, when I came back as a director (in 2015), it was a challenge to separate the friendships that I have in the company from my professional work. That was a challenge, for them to see me as the director now. As time passed, we got better as a company and as a team."

Directing "Alegría" has been an honor for Peña, which he described as a big celebration. He said that his program has worked diligently to make this year's show bigger than in previous years.

"Every year we try to make the

show better and better, and prepare the students even better than last year," Peña said. "We want to make this show perfect for us, for the audience, for the people that came before us, for all the 50 generations that Ballet Folklórico has had. We want to make it perfect for them and show ... the best of the best from the 50 years."

Renay Lopez, 22, of Edinburg is one of the dancers who has been working hard to put on a great performance. She said that one condition of preparing for the performance is making sure that her body is prepared for the workload of the show.

### ALEGRÍA 2020

UTRGV

Ballet Folklórico celebrates the collaboration between dancers, musicians, choreographers and scene designers recreating the magic, color and passion of Mexico.

**WHEN** 7:30

p.m. Friday and Saturday,  
2 p.m. Sunday

**WHERE** UTRGV

Performing Arts Complex, 1201 W. University Drive, Edinburg

**COST** \$15

general admission,  
\$10 student/senior  
and \$5 per child

"It takes a lot of toll on our bodies," Lopez said. "A lot of (preparation) involves working out as much as you can, maybe four or five times a week, making sure that you're not eating too bad. I don't eat super clean, but I do try to maintain a certain diet. Since we do put on a two-hour show, it's good to keep our bodies in shape, to keep up with our stamina."

Lopez said that she is proud to be a part of the production that she has seen since she was a child.

"I've been coming to Alegría even since before I was dancing, maybe around 10-years-old," said Lopez. "To be in this production and knowing that it's the 50th anniversary, it's just something amazing and beautiful. Being able to represent our culture here in the Valley to people that come from out of state, it's an amazing

feeling to get to do that. I enjoy doing what I do."

Lopez is part of a strong core of dancers that Peña says distinguishes UTRGV Ballet Folklórico from other programs throughout the country.

"This is a very, very strong region for folklorico and music and dance," Peña said. "We have very good mariachis as well. Since we have a lot of folklorico high school programs in the region, the teachers start preparing the students since they are maybe 12-years-old. When they come to us, when they come to UTRGV Ballet Folklórico, they have a very strong background in folklorico. Every year is even better because we prepare the future teachers of those students. It's always going to get better and better."

Shows for "Alegría" are scheduled for this weekend at the UTRGV Performing Arts Complex Auditorium in Edinburg. A performance is also scheduled for Sunday, March 22 at 7:30 p.m. at the TSC Performing Arts Center in Brownsville. Tickets can be purchased at [www.patron.utrgv.edu/alegria](http://www.patron.utrgv.edu/alegria).

