

Amalia Hernández Dancer and Choreographer

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Amalia Hernández was a pioneer in creating the Folk Ballet of Mexico, a vast yet compact company that became an institution which acquired a certificate of naturalization and its own legitimacy before larger and larger audiences both in Mexico and abroad.

Modern dance in Mexico owes its beginnings mainly to a group of splendid dancers and choreographers who, starting in the 1940s, unleashed a veritable Mexican movement of modern dance. One of these brilliant women was Amalia Hernández, born September 19, 1917. In addition to being an outstanding dancer and chore-

ographer, she used her energies to create professional, monumental performances, that originated and were inspired in folk and vernacular dance. Her abilities and gifts as a maker of works of modern dance inspired by nationalism allowed Amalia to retrieve the essential elements of folk dances that, nationwide, over several centuries, had become representative of the zeitgeist, the ceremonies, the yearning for grace and dance talent, as well as the most direct, colorful and agile expressions of the Mexican way of being itself.

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Like other members of her generation, Amalia sought out and compiled basic information, rhythms and stage production secrets both through specific studies and her eloquent, direct experience. She added to this, however, a quality that in today's world has become basic to the functioning of all the performing arts: organizational ability.

Amalia Hernández was a pioneer in creating a vast yet compact company that became an institution which, at the same time, acquired a certificate of naturalization and its own legitimacy before larger and larger audiences both in Mexico and abroad. When she founded the Folk Ballet of Mexico, then, in 1952, she was fully aware of the implications and had her hand on the pulse of the many details involved in a dance company's professionalism. She made sure, for example, that all the different elements that went into it were functional: the artistic director, the rehearsal choreographer, the *régisiseur*, the rating of the dancers according to aptitude and technical training, the stage manager and his/her assistants, the wardrobe master/mistress, the set designer, the teachers of the different dance techniques (mainly classical), the business manager, etc. Amalia clearly mastered all these aspects and foresaw the need to either train people for them or shift responsibility to a professional to oversee them. At different times she oversaw not two, but three or four permanent or traveling companies that brought to wide audiences in Mexico and abroad a brilliantly staged repertory that has won the company to date more than 200 nation-

al and international prizes. Amalia herself was given the National Prize for the Arts in 1992.

An important and little known side to Amalia Hernández was her profound love of all forms of dance. Despite having immersed herself as a choreographer and dancer in modern and folk dance, she never stopped supporting classical and contemporary dance, both through personally hiring teachers, dancers and choreographers and by supporting the production and the very existence of companies and groups in these two genres. Amalia also offered scholarships and direct financial support to dancers in both genres so they could study here in Mexico and abroad.

Amalia Hernández was part of the historically special group of talented, beautiful women who established modern dance in Mexico, the direct predecessor of today's theater and contemporary dance, women like Guillermina Bravo, Ana Mérida, Josefina Lavalle, Martha Bracho, Rosa Reyna, Guillermina Peñalosa, Raquel Gutiérrez, a stunning generation that was clearly a precursor of Mexico's feminist movement. But Amalia Hernández added to these talents her lucid vision and her detailed organizational efforts aimed at recreating before the eyes of the world the popular dance that we as Mexicans always favor with joy or community solidarity, as spectators or participants. Amalia's death on November 4, 2000, is a respected and respectful threshold for future generations of Mexican dancers and choreographers to continue and broaden out their exemplary professional efforts and work. **MM**

