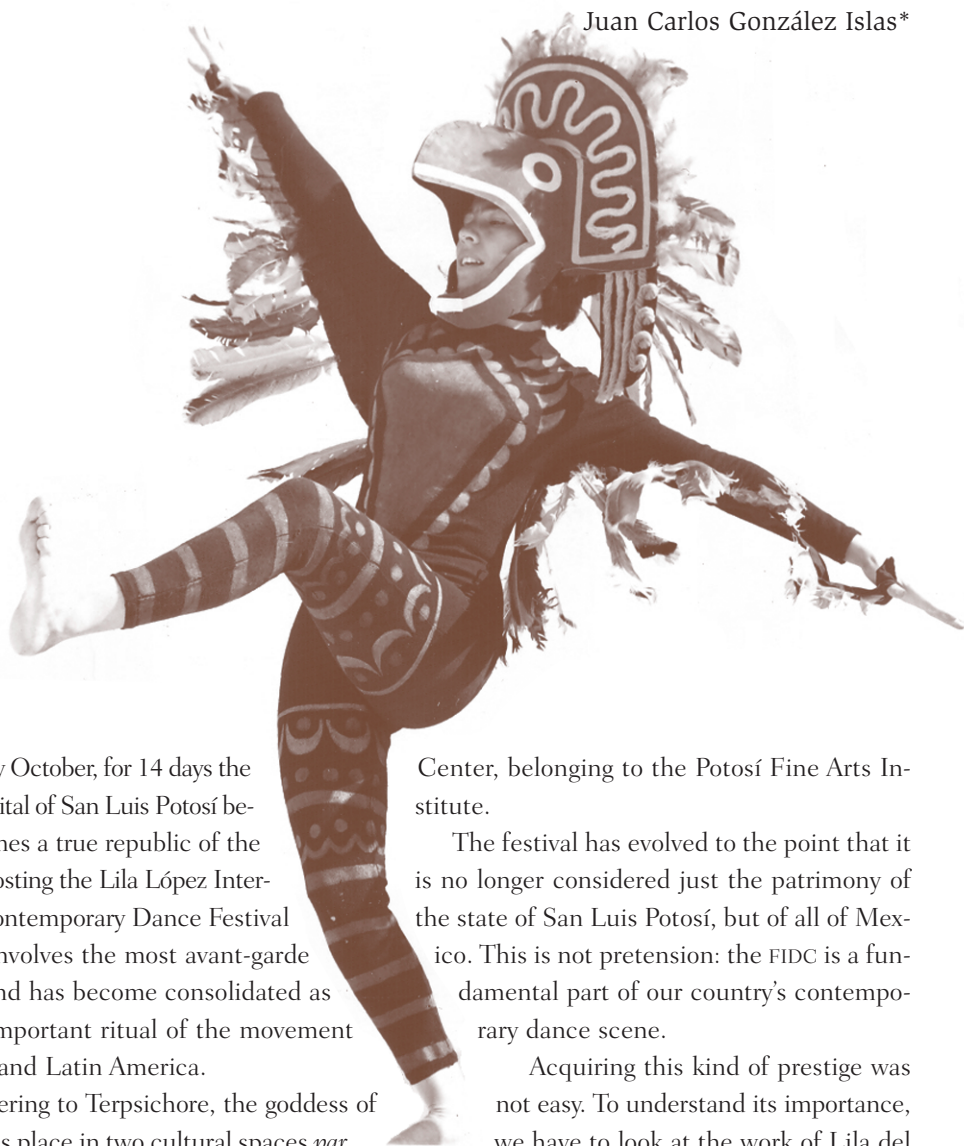


The Lila López International Contemporary Dance Festival

Juan Carlos González Islas*



Every October, for 14 days the capital of San Luis Potosí becomes a true republic of the dance by hosting the Lila López International Contemporary Dance Festival (FIDC). It involves the most avant-garde in dance and has become consolidated as the most important ritual of the movement in Mexico and Latin America.

The offering to Terpsichore, the goddess of dance, takes place in two cultural spaces *par excellence* in the city of San Luis Potosí: the Peace Theater and the Raúl Gamboa Cultural

Center, belonging to the Potosí Fine Arts Institute.

The festival has evolved to the point that it is no longer considered just the patrimony of the state of San Luis Potosí, but of all of Mexico. This is not pretension: the FIDC is a fundamental part of our country's contemporary dance scene.

Acquiring this kind of prestige was not easy. To understand its importance, we have to look at the work of Lila del Carmen Isabel López Patiño (1933-2001), affectionately known among dancers nationwide as "Maestra Lila," a visionary of her time. She fought to make the festival a space where dancers and choreographers from all over the country could stay abreast of new developments and where they would have the means to express themselves

* Head of information for the San Luis Potosí Ministry of Culture.

All photos are previously unpublished, from the 1964 San Luis Potosí Ballet. Courtesy of the SLP Ministry of Culture's Press Department.

by presenting their own choreographies. Her enthusiasm paid off when the festival was founded.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF A DANCE PROMOTER

Lila López was born July 8, 1933 in Mexico City. When she was nine, she entered the Mexican Electricians Union Children's Ballet, directed by Magda Montoya. In the early 1950s, the talented youngster entered Sergio Franco's group, with which she toured New York, performing at different venues, including the Modern Art Museum. She studied at the Martha Graham School and went to classes taught by Yeichi Nimura at the Ballet Art Studio. She also studied with Xavier Francis, Guillermo Arriaga and the National Ballet of Mexico. She ventured into Spanish dance with Óscar Tarriba and taught in Mexico City at Alfon-



so Arau's Studio, attended by popular stars of the time.

In 1954, Lila participated as guest teacher in the Modern Dance Ballet Quintet, directed by Magda Montoya and Ricardo Silva, with which she toured several cities in Mexico. In 1960, she joined the Official Ballet of Contemporary Dance, under the auspices of the National Fine Arts Institute (INBA).

In 1961 the INBA hired Lila to give modern dance classes at the Potosí Fine Arts Institute. Three years later, she founded the San Luis Provincial Ballet, which years later was to host the FIDC.

THE FESTIVAL IS BORN

The FIDC's immediate predecessor was the choreography Lila López promoted at the First Potosí Cultural Fair in August 1977. The Modern Dance Experimental Group, under the auspices of Amalia Hernández's Choreography Workshop, participated.

At first, the fiesta was called the National Contemporary Dance Festival of San Luis Potosí, and

it took place in July and August, with the support of the INBA, the state government and the Potosí Fine Arts Institute. Beginning in 1981, the number of dance groups from all over the country who came to the festival grew.

In 1990, during the 10th National Contemporary Dance Festival, it became international, as it continues to be. In 2001 Governor Fernando Silva Nieto decreed that Lila López's name should be added to the festival's title, in homage to her invaluable work.

López always had the support of her inseparable partner, painter Raúl Gamboa Cantón, and of her dear friend and closest collaborator, Carmen Alvarado. It was Alvarado who took responsibility for organizing the twelfth and thirteenth festivals when Lila López was no longer there to do it.



AN EXAMPLE TO BE FOLLOWED

On the basis of the solid organization and dissemination of contemporary dance by the FIDC in our country, other states have begun to organize their own festivals. The FIDC is consolidating its work as an example to be followed: today there are more than 30 festivals throughout the country that use the operational model that *Maestra Lila* implemented from the very start.

In its 26 years, the FIDC has hosted more than 450 choreographers who have presented about 1,400 dance pieces. The workshops held during the FIDC have involved more than 1,600 students, while about 145 Mexican groups and 70 foreign companies have attended. In addition, the FIDC includes other artistic activities like national photography and visual arts contests organized around the theme of contemporary dance. Since 2004, the FIDC has been held in October in order to attract more internationally renowned companies and insure its prominence nationwide. The goal is, as *Maestra Lila* would have wanted, to become one of the world's most important international festivals. ■■■