

Lorenzo Trujillo: A man on a musical mission

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Viva Colorado

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Preserving the music of early Colorado and New Mexico has been musician Lorenzo Trujillo's life mission. But in the age of rap and hip hop, it's unclear if the next generation will be as zealous as he is of sounds that go back almost two centuries.

"It's not something that is popular out there. It's a niche area of music," said Trujillo, an award-winning violinist. "It's from a time in history that people don't necessarily relate to."

Even though Trujillo - who is also an accomplished lawyer and educator - believes this music is "going to go away," he's still passionately devoted to preserving and presenting the rich cultural traditions of his ancestors, and to educating others about them.

To that end, over the past 40 years, Trujillo has presented thousands of concerts, lectures, and demonstrations and has written extensively about the music and dance of the Southwest. He has also recorded seven CDs. Many of them include music that has never been recorded, like "Las Cuadrillas," a five part traditional suite featured in his latest CD "The Golden Age of the Southwest: From 1840 to Hollywood."

"Some people play golf, some people watch every sports game on TV. I spend my time on this very passionate mission to leave a path, leave footprints in the sand that say this is who we are based on who we were," said Trujillo.

Since he can remember, Trujillo has been surrounded - on both sides of his family - by music and dance from the "period when Colorado was being settled." His grandmother, on his mother's side, lived in Arroyo Seco, New Mexico, and she would always want to have her grandkids dance with her. So, from an early age, he learned to dance cuadrillas, waltzes, polkas - all dances from the 1800s that were staples at family gatherings, he said.

"It was something we did as a family," he added. "That's what the key was."

His father played the guitar and his mother was a folk dancer. But it was his aunt, Eva Nuñez, whom he remembers always singing.

"My aunt was one of the most prominent and notable Latina singers and violinists in Colorado for many years," Trujillo said. "Growing up, I learned my songs from her. We'd be in the kitchen and she'd make us warm tortillas with mantequilla and jelly and she'd sing to us and, of course, we'd start singing with her."

As he reminisced, he couldn't help singing: "Muñequita linda, de cabellos de oro To this day, (that's) one of the songs that really warms my heart," Trujillo said.

Comfort music is what he calls it, and somehow it stuck with him. But, he said, "This is not a big money maker, this is for the love. This is a love and a passion."

Those two motivators pushed Trujillo to pursue a master's degree in arts at the University of Colorado, where he established a folkloric dance program with a grant he received from the National Endowment for the Arts. From there, he went on to become a touring performer and traveled across the country singing and dancing.

Through the years, he's created and directed several folkdance companies, including Southwest Musicians and Mariachi Alegre. In his late 30s, he decided to go back to school to add to his already impressive list of degrees. But this time, he went a completely different route by becoming a lawyer.

"I came to realize that I love the arts and the arts are a way to transcend culture and reach into people's hearts - not only Latinos, but mainstream America," Trujillo said. "But I also knew that there were two places of true change, and that is in education and law."

Trujillo has been incredibly productive in both. As an educator, he served several years as the assistant dean of students and professional programs at the University of Colorado Law School. As a lawyer, he has received many distinguished awards for his work, including the National Hispanic Bar Association Latino Lawyer of the Year in 2007.

Still, his heart is in his music.

"It's been a part of my inner soul that has always fed me, and I like it, so I still do it to this day," he explained.

Today, he is highly involved with Tesoro Cultural Center at The Fort in Morrison, which is dedicated to celebrating the rich heritage of the Southwest through lectures, workshops and events, including its famous annual Spanish and Indian markets.

He also devotes a lot of his limited free time to Hilos Culturales, an organization created to "encourage and promote the celebration of Spanish and Colonial folk music" of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico.

Trujillo helped create both foundations and sits on their boards. In fact, he has been involved in the creation of the majority of Colorado's Hispanic cultural organizations in one way or another.

"The music he plays, the songs he plays, the instruments they use, the way they sing reminds me of many of the performances I heard as a child in my small little hometown," said Vincent de Baca, a history professor at Metropolitan State College of Denver whose family hails from northern New Mexico.

"He's on a mission to teach young people about the meaning of this music, which is important because it connects us with our past," de Baca said.

But both de Baca and Trujillo believe the music is dying and worry about the effects that will have on future generations.

"If we're not connected to our past, to our ancestors, we lose our identity, we lose our sense of self," de Baca said. "Without roots, we have no anchor."

Trujillo agrees.

"We have all these Hispano-Latino kids that are lost. It's important that they know they have a rich history, a beautiful history, one of successes, achievements, prominent individuals," he said. "We're not just a bunch of people that have no past. We have a past, it's a rich past. It's one to be recognized, honored and treasured. And when we lose that, there's nothing."

Upcoming Performances Lorenzo Trujillo has several upcoming performances. For more information, you can visit his personal website: www.lorenzotrujillo.com