

## Latino Music and Dance at 21<sup>st</sup> National Cinco de Mayo Festival

The National Cinco de Mayo Festival moved to a new location for its 21<sup>st</sup> year in Washington, DC, where thousands of people enjoyed a breezy, sunny day of music, dance, food and crafts celebrating Latino culture.

The new venue, on the grassy National Mall between the Smithsonian Castle and the Museum of Natural History, attracted some 10,000 people drawn by the sounds of mariachis and salsa bands, the sight of colorful costumes swirling on the outdoor stage, and the smell of warm burritos and grilled beef tacos.

In previous years, the Festival was held at the nearby Sylvan Theater, the outdoor amphitheater at the Washington Monument, which is under repair.

“I loved the location this year in the middle of Mall,” said Festival organizer Maru Montero. “When you were watching the performers on the main stage, you could see the Capitol, the Washington Monument and the Smithsonian museums. Our Latino culture truly shined in the heart of one of the great cultural centers of the United States.”

Montero, who founded the Maru Montero Dance Company in 1992, said the free day of family fun was made possible by the Washington DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities and Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs.

More than 100 Latino artists, writers, musicians, dancers and other performers were showcased at the Festival. Participants came from as far as Los Angeles and Guatemala, but many of the performers are stars of the local cultural scene and represented nearly a dozen countries from Mexico to Bolivia, Peru and Cuba.

The day began with a stirring tribute to the people who lived in Latin America before the arrival of the Spanish. The musical group Mystic Warriors played the haunting sounds of Andean music, followed by the youth companies of the Maru Montero Dance Company – the Mini Monteros and the even-younger Micro Monteros – wearing feathered Aztec costumes and performing a pre-Hispanic dance called *concheros*.

The young dancers of the Monarca Dance Ensemble brightened the stage with their brightly colored Mexican folk costumes, and they were followed by regal dancers from the Tehuantepec region of the Mexican State of Oaxaca in their traditional handmade dresses and lavish gold jewels.

Eileen Torres and the Orquesta La Leyenda stepped up the pace with a lively performance of salsa music and dance. The audience joined them on stage for one of many dance contests, and the winners went home with \$100 gift cards and official Cinco de Mayo hats and t-shirts.

Telemundo personality Sulema Salazar introduced Mariachi Los Amigos, who played Mexican favorites. The crowd sang along with songs about love lost and paths not taken; they shouted, cheered and whistled their enthusiasm.

The crowd could not stop dancing during the performance of La Grandeza Nortena and the upbeat sound of *banda* music from Northern Mexico. Dancers from the Maru Montero Dance Company joined in and performed a set of traditional folk dances representative of Jalisco, Tabasco, and Veracruz.

The Festival's closing act was Cecilia Villalobos and the Orquesta La Sensual with a high-energy salsa show that left the audience calling for more.

Throughout the day, more than 1,000 children visited the craft tent and learned how to make hair braids, piñatas, dream-catchers, puppets of mariachis and folk dancers, and pre-Hispanic masks. The craft tent was staffed by students, many of them bilingual, from Washington, DC, high schools.

The Art Pavilion was curated by Mexican artist Gloria "La Tarasca" Valdes. The show featured paintings, books and other work by Sharon Wise, Irene Glaser, David Amoroso, Ricardo Garcia and Alberto Roblest.

Special guests included cartoon celebrities Maya and Miguel, who danced on stage and walked through the crowd to shake hands and pose for pictures.

Food was provided by the Zambrana family and their company Latin & American Flavors. The menu included authentic food from Latin America, including beef and chicken tacos.