

Danzas Españolas

Shivadam Adam Burke, Sept 8 2024

When Debbie asked whether I'd be willing to lead a Dance circle for the Hispanic community in Phoenix, and I enthusiastically agreed, neither of us had any sense that we might be making history.

As the manager of the DUP North America website since 2009, it wasn't until I posted the event, with Spanish-only text, that I realized I had never posted a non-English event in the listings. After checking with Sky and others, it appeared that this would be the first Spanish-language-focused Dance circle in North America!

I had not led in-person circles in Phoenix since the beginning of the pandemic, when I switched from two monthly meetings to co-leading twice weekly on Zoom.

Debbie, a Mexican woman living here, had attended many of our circles. The week she emailed, I had been giving more thought to resuming in-person Dances, after two people had inquired about my plans. Moments before reading her message, I had been practicing "O, Madre de Dios / ilumina mi camino" for my evening Zoom, and there appeared my new local circle.

I didn't expect I would resume conducting within the rich Latin@ community here. ("*Latin@*" beautifully overcomes the gender-limiting designations, Latino/Latina.) Debbie would translate for me while my nascent Spanish speaking skills remain too limited to lead a full session. She loves the Dances and wanted to share them with her community. For my part, having been leading in Mexico and Chile in recent years, and always hoping to extend the reach of the DUP, it felt so natural to accept the invitation to do a circle like this, especially in my city, where the Latin@ community represents nearly 50% of our population.

I came to our first planning session with several Dances that have Spanish words. Debbie quickly redirected me to the broader scope of our work, explaining that some women in the circle were married to Muslims and would appreciate Arabic, while others have connections with the Jewish diaspora in Venezuela, so Hebrew would be good. Debbie has yoga students, so Sanskrit would be important to include. In short: the mix would be mostly mantric Dances, centered around sacred phrases, like always.

The circle was a great success. We had the perfect number of attendees for the relatively small space, and after the initial feelings of apprehension among newcomers, everyone took to the Dances readily, easily flowing into the movements, melodies and words. Even a young girl, around 9, danced all the way through our one-and-a-half hours.



This weekend marked Ganesha Chaturthi (Ganesha's "birthday"), so we walked dharma-clockwise into holding hands, singing "*Gan Ganapataye namo namah*," an auspicious opening mantra for this new circle. After sharing names and my three recitations of the Sufi Invocation in Spanish, we began with Grace Marie's Bismillah, followed by Haida Haida, O Madre de Dios, Thousands of Suns, and then concluding with Grace's Beloved Zikr. We opened the circle with Arabic names for Love, and we closed with more.

Afterwards, with energy high, folks asked me to lead another song so that they could play along with instruments they brought. We shared a joyful Altissimo Corazon.

Any Latin@ gathering invariably includes lots of colorful flowers and food - and, of course, group photos! (Debbie explained: "If there are no pictures, the event didn't happen.") This one proved no exception, and my request for only vegetarian food was happily - and deliciously - honored by the community.



As people lingered with plates of fruit, pita, hummus, spicy guacamole, and Debbie's homemade jamaica and chai, one topic that arose out of lively post-dance conversation was some reflection about Thousands of Suns, the Dance honoring Kali. One woman explained to me that Latin@s generally don't feel comfortable with Her, regarding Her more as demon than deity. Then Sarah assured me that those who came to the circle - most of whom attend other events at this holistic center - were already more open minded from the start, and that the words of this Dance helped to soften any trepidation that may have been felt in the room.

We had dedicated the benefits of our session to the people of Venezuela, and also those affected by the war in Gaza. One Venezolana expressed her deep gratitude, adding that her heart felt full.

Debriefing, Debbie kindly thanked me for being, in her words, flexible and supportive with this group. I responded: "This brings tears to my eyes. The community was so sweet, with so much heart. I love being with Latin@s, thankful for the heart expansion I feel, and to learn different ways of doing things. I'm so grateful and excited to continue."

Indeed, because of the abundant joy we shared, we do plan to continue, insha'llah. I'm so grateful to be able to extend the reach of this practice.

Ya Shakur! Ya Fattah! Alhamdulillah!



~Shivadam Adam, Aug 15/Sept 8, 2024