# EL PALENQUE DE DELIA

## COLOMBIAN DANCE AND MUSICAL ENSEMBLE

*Directed by Edelmira Massa Zapata*

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
INGRAM HALL, BLAIR SCHOOL OF MUSIC
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EL PALENQUE de Delia

Conjunto de Tradiciones Populares

# Delia Zapata Olivella

The name of Delia Zapata Olivella is linked to the most important expressions of folkloric dance in Colombia.

Initially, she worked with dances from the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of Colombia. Later, she extended her investigations and artistic practices to encompass the entire nation. From an early age, she was attracted by the musical and dance manifestations that abounded in the city of Cartagena, where she grew up. She delved into the discipline of vernacular dance, alongside her brother Manuel, while she was carrying her daughter Edelmira.

In 1954, she made her first tour throughout the country with the "Conjunto de danzas folclóricas de Delia Zapata Olivella," a group of campesinos from the two coastal regions in the country. In 1956 they traveled to Europe, Asia, France, Spain, East Germany, the Soviet Union, China and upon their return to Colombia they were invited to Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru.

In 1963, Delia was invited by the Instituto Popular de Cultura (Popular Institute of Culture) in Cali, Colombia, to be “Choreographer and Director of the Dance Companies,” joining, as well, the institute’s research team. While in Cali, the U.S. government granted her the International Cultural Exchange Scholarship, which allowed her to study Black dances with the great dancer Katherine Dunham. While in the U.S., Delia created a music and dance group of Colombian residents in New York City, for which she received an achievement award as well as a Bronze Medal, granted by the Colombian Hispanic American Community of New York City.

During this time, Delia seriously reflected on the needs of her home country—especially the educational ones. Upon her return to Colombia, the Universidad Nacional invited her to create folkloric dance companies at that institution, thus initiating a period where she focused on consolidating a methodology for teaching Colombian dances and transmitting popular traditions to young people from different universities and disciplines with whom she traveled and received awards.

In 1974, she organized her own company, “Danzas Folclóricas Delia Zapata Olivella,” and in 1976, she created the “Fundación Instituto Folclórico Colombiano Delia Zapata Olivella” to disseminate, research, and educate the next generation of dance teachers, as well as carrying out productions and research that would advance Colombian dance traditions.

In 1983, she was granted for the first time in the country the endorsement to initiate a bachelor's degree in dance and traditional theater at the Universidad Antonio Nariño, where she continued her pedagogical work for more than thirty years, using her own methodology to teach traditional dances.

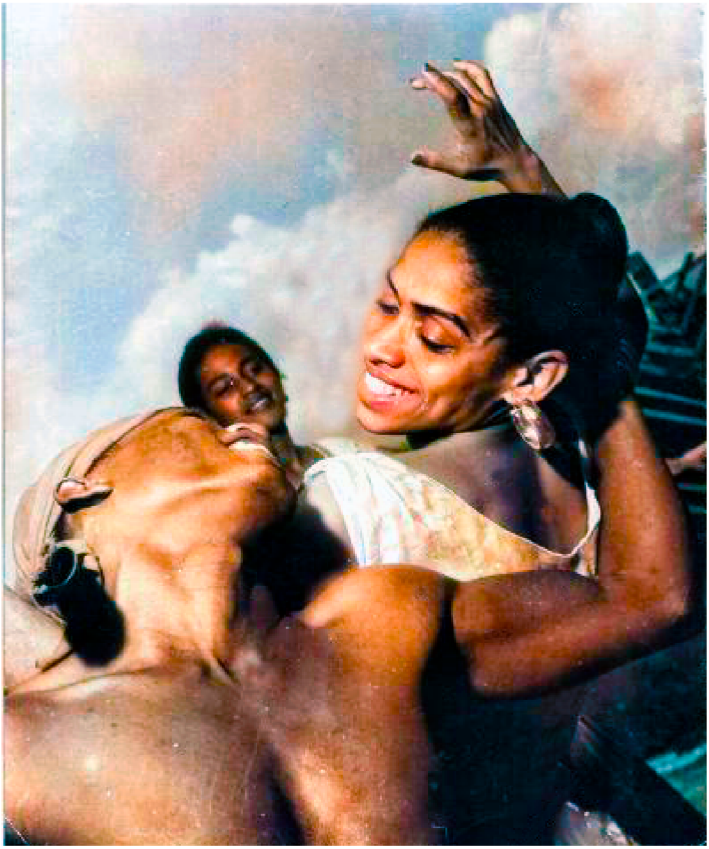
During the following years, and until the end of her life, Delia continued working with popular traditions, traversing the Colombian territory, exchanging ideas and knowledge, and receiving the highest recognition from critics. Throughout her life, she strived to leave a historic legacy for the Colombian people, becoming a symbol of the country’s folkloric history.

In her work, as in that of her brother, Manuel, one can appreciate that they did not view traditions as untouchable relics of the past, but as a living, acting, and vitalizing force nourished by the experiences of its people, expressing itself with its own voice, while structuring a future, a territory, and traditions drawn from its own set of references.

In 2001, she traveled to Africa with Edelmira, where they exchanged dance knowledge and practiced with several companies. Upon returning to Colombia, Delia passed away having contracted malaria in the Ivory Coast. Since then, Edelmira has directed the Company and Institute, overseeing their pedagogy, aesthetics, choreographies, rehearsals, administration, costumes, and other matters. Manuel has said that Edelmira is a living sculpture modeled after her mother, shaped by the work that they did together, hand in hand about the popular traditions of Colombia.

**"4 Zones in Colombia"** is one of Delia's most important productions. It was created during the 1970s when Delia selected dances from the Andes, the Colombian plains, and the Pacific and Atlantic coastal regions. With this repertoire, she traveled the world representing Colombia.

Delia's work inspires current generations, both young and adult, from various cultures, ethnicities, and traditions. Many seek to honor her name and continue her legacy by dancing, walking together as a nation, singing, and narrating the essence of Colombia. Through this, we aim to transmit the figures, choreographic forms, and ancient symbols inherent in these dances since their origins, which connect deeply to the natural world.



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# "People of All Colors"
# 4 Zones in Colombia

Forming a new colonial culture required a long time. What we see today is the result of profound transformations of mindset, habits, and customs. To understand these phenomena, we must take a closer look, discovering the attitudes, struggles, and results that the native cultures confronted when seeking to preserve their own habits and mentalities, by those who came from other continents.

In terms of dances and songs, native Americans and Africans suffered and overcame the restrictions imposed by colonizers, who regarded these practices as diabolic. Authorities had to concede certain permissions that allowed some ancestral instruments and practices to be preserved.

The eighteenth century is characterized by a general feeling of crisis that criollos and Spaniards experienced with imperial wars, the decline of commerce, the predominance of illegality and the pressure by natives and African Americans, who sought to conquer the social spaces that were only for the elites.

The independence period marked the onset of important political and social transformations that engendered a process of mestizaje, in which small societies emerged with new outlooks on their lives and work. In this way, they created a new perspective in which the creeds and icons of Catholicism mixed and coexisted with inherited worldviews, myths, and practices. These societies became cultural agents that composed, sang, danced, and transformed the regional identities of Colombian culture. Reaffirming their liberty and independence, they called themselves "gentes de todos los colores," "peoples of all colors."

The dances that ensue come from the time when the Colombian Republic was taking shape. It was a time when the connection between people and the territory forged regional identities. El Palenque de Delia, a Company of Popular Traditions, seeks to honor Delia Zapata Olivella with these choreographies. By capturing these materials from our country, Delia has also allowed us to recreate these dances, through the love that emanates from them. It is an example of the tenacity to assume and preserve life with the enthusiasm that characterizes us as Colombians.

Thank you,
Edelmira Massa Zapata

# Andes Zone

*I opened the little golden box,*
*and look what's inside*
*it carries jealousy and love*
*enfolded in feelings*

The Indigenous left his mark. The mestizo colors all forms of life and all rituals; from the mountain and ravines emerged the vision of man and things. The loving couplet in campesino rhythm is called, in some places, “bambuco," "rajaleña," "torbellino," "guabina," and other variants, such as "San Juanero." As a prologue, from the wide breadth of Andean dances, we will present:

## 1. "Carranga"

It is the most contemporary form of the evolving expressions of rural and urban Andean people.

## 2. "Torbellino"

According to ancient Andean traditions, our society's history is weaved together by a thread. Upon walking the land with fast movements, in long processions, life is braided. Time comes and goes, passes and returns. Such are the steps of this dance, light, linear or circular, swift like wind traversing a mountain.

## 3. "Bambuco"

It expresses the greatest joys and sorrows of the people, having profound spiritual roots so deep that it is impossible to define precisely. It is a national tune, it tells half of our history, from the independence wars until the Republic's formation. It contains the sighs and laughter of countless trovadores, which may be romantic or danceable, whose music is livelier and joyful. More than inspiration of the soul, it is the very life of the Colombian people.

## 4. "San Juanero"

From the warmlands, down the mountain sides, the "san juanero" is a variant of the "bambuco rajaleña," which encompasses a picaresque philosophy of wooing.

# Plains Zone

*I don't eat in meetings*
*cause I'm no soldier*
*I don't do rodeos*
*cause I'm no cattle*

It was a rushed learning that came with the criollos, the plantation owners, and the soldiers who synthesized Spanish memories left from the time of independence. In their melodies, one finds verses, choruses, and rounds of every kind that bespeak their authors.
Distinguished singers, enamored of their land, sang couplets about cattle farming, travels, horseshoeing, and farming tasks, as well as narrations of life and love in the plains. Their typical instruments include a cuatro, requinto, and two small maracas— called capachos- and harp.

## 1. "Pasaje"

In the oriental plains of Colombia, the word “pasaje” refers to any traditional song that is used as background music for dancing and for regional narratives. The dance is characterized by its difficulty, which requires coordinating the feet with complex rhythms. Its most notable shape is the "careo," a heel-stomping dialogue performed by a couple facing each other.

## 2. "Joropo"

Quintessential dance from the plains that expresses feverish love with ample and effusive freedom. Its central purpose is to invite and entice women to a playful game of steps and figures.

# Pacific Coast

*The worldly toils*
*are not all for me,*
*I must die singing*
*because crying I was born*

When the colonizers came to the Pacific coast, they brought a constant influx of prisoners from Africa, who were forced to work in the abundant gold mines, exerting rigorous control over mining centers through catechism, which permeated in later manifestations of music and dance, such as the "alabaos," "arrullos," “jugas," "romances," and other cultural expressions like “currulao,” “abozao," and "patacoré.” The region's artistry manifests itself through the "marimba ensembles"-that reflect an important African influence-and the "Chirimía"-which includes European wind instruments-that perform local compositions which bear unique features.

In the Choco and San Juan regions, the spontaneous rhythm of freed slaves intermixes frequently with European, courtly, choreographic structures, adapting the established patterns to elaborate original dances based on the structure of the "quadrille," a salon dance popular in the nineteenth century. In this way, African and European lived experiences are combined through short rhythmic formulas with satiric mimes and gestures. This gives rise to the danza, contradanza, and jota from Choco, as well as other dances like the polka and mazurka.

The religious festivities of the Pacific coast unify the spiritual practices of all inhabitants, thus other cultural practices with Spanish influence emerge, such as the “arrullos al niño Dios," and the “alabaos.” The marimba, cununos, tamboras, and guasás, all of African origin, still resonate in the Pacific coast. Throughout the Cauca, Atrato, San Juan Neyá, and the Patía rivers, many black communities preserve their identity through these ancestral legacies.

# Pacific Coast

## 1. "Currulao"

Classified as a "matrix dance," currulao gives life to other dances. It is performed in unpaired couples or as a group, since it is always danced by three or more couples. It is also named "bambuco viejo," a dance of Blacks, Mulatos, and Zambos that was very popular throughout the country in its formative period.
Its movements are fast, accompanied by foot stomping, and features a dance of courtship between men and women. It is especially flirtatious on the side of men, who jump and spin with their handkerchiefs and hats, intending to attract the attention of women, who pretend to shun them and in the end yield to their charm by joining in an accelerated beat with vigorous movements. This dance replicates ritual and sacred practices where both men and women take advantage of the circumstances to advance their amorous affairs.

## 2. "Danza, contradanza, and jota from Chocó"

The steps of this dance are always done in quadrille. The quadrille was a popular dance in the nineteenth century in European salons, danced by colonizers in the Americas. It has varied and complex figures executed in succession to which the natives of the Pacific coast introduced changes and subtleties, developed out of their own creativity, adapting the established patterns to joyful and picaresque melodies and movements. It was intended to satirize European salon dances.

# Atlantic Coast

*I like white rum*
*like the one that likes it most*
*I like white rum*
*even though it's frowned upon*

Music and dances from the Pacific coast represent our mestizaje (miscegenation) influenced by Indigenous, Hispanic and African peoples. Nowhere else has there been such a balance between mother cultures. They are manifested in various airs, disseminated extensively throughout the region. Although in certain regions one ancestry is accentuated over others, exchange is the norm.

## 1. "Bullerengue"

It has a heavy drum component, accompanied by singing and clapping. It has a slow and profound rhythm of a ritualistic character. Bullerengue is also considered one of the matrix dances because many variants emerge from its rhythm. It forms part of the group of “singed dances." Initially, Delia encountered this dance in San Basilio de Palenque, the first free city in America. It was used as a puberty initiation ritual, intended to introduce marriageable women to the community, in other words, it was used as a fertility ritual. It is also used in rites of passage, especially in funerary rites, where it takes the name of "lumbalú."

## 2. "Cumbia"

Cumbia's origin is linked to the American intermixing of cultures, stemming from the tri-ethnic roots of our ancestry, whose features blend in different portions and form the basis of Colombian culture. This is demonstrated by the instruments and choreography that accompany the music: indigenous flutes, African drums, and Hispanic dresses and singing. It extended throughout Bolívar, Córdoba, Sucre, Atlántico, and Magdalena...the land of cumbia takes the form of the nation's most broad and varied Latifundia. Everywhere, Cumbia is central to popular festivities. Its recognition reaches the continent's-and even the world's most distant corners.

# Atlantic Coast

## 3. "Mapalé negro"

In colonial ties, it was called "calenda" and was loathed and banned by colonizers who found its characteristic hip movements obscene. Drums, maracas, claps, and singing form the music's basis. It is part of another group of songs and dances that emerge from the "son de negro." Delia retraced the steps of this dance after a long research process focused on its rhythms and melodies. In her study, Delia elaborated her choreography based on the descriptions of black dances made by Tomás Carrasquilla in his book La Marquesa de Yolombó. Vestiges of this dance also survive in the Antilles.
It is danced in rows. Men, standing across women, realize gestures and movements that allude to the revolving cosmos. It is clearly a dance of fertility in which bodies evolve, uniting and separating from each other through perpetual hip movements.

## 4. "Son de Negro"

The constantly accented drums provide the dancers with the keys to personal expression through gestures and virtuosity as they jump and wiggle, get in and out of the rhythm without missing the constant beat that animates participants in variously themed street games and other popular celebrations.

## 5. "Fandango"

"Fandango" was earlier played with gaitas and drums during patronal celebrations of native cultures. The appropriation of European instruments enriches the musical creations of the Caribbean coast, giving way to diverse airs, such as the "porro" and "fandango." These dances propel the entrance of rituals into street celebrations, characterized by joy, collaboration, and a spirit of renewal. When the participants are not parading in the streets, they congregate in the square, where, just as in the "cumbia," dancers form a large circle that runs counterclockwise. Women, with small, serene steps, maintain the circle, while men freely spin around them, in a true display of revelry.

# Credits

## Dancers

Andrea Solano
Adriana Laverde Luz
Ángela Bohórquez O.
Miryam Enith Ibarra V.
Felipe Guerra
Miguel Antonio Pejendiño
Hannover Domínguez
Miguel Ángel Guerrero

## Director

Edelmira Massa Zapata

## Musicians

Laura Alarcón
Gildardo Morales Gámez
Juan Sebastián Martínez
Frederic Martínez

## Photographer

Pablo Guerra

## Sponsors:

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