

From Teatro Campesino to now: Latino theater in Kern County

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Project Summary

Despite being the birthplace for the Teatro Campesino, Kern County does not have many Chicano/ US Latino theater venues and performances. Using in-depth interviews and a countywide survey, I seek to analyze the potential lasting influence of the Teatro Campesino on contemporary Kern County theater. I also seek to analyze the current theater opportunities and offerings for Chicanos and US Latinos theater in Kern County.

Introduction

Kern County has a heritage of having internationally renowned Chicano theater, but there is currently not a dedicated Chicano or Latino theater group in the area. In 1965 Delano, CA was the site of the Grape Boycott which led to the formation of the UFW (UFW, n.d.) Located in Kern County, this city became central to agricultural side of the Chicano movement. As part of the mission to educate farm laborers on the issues of the strike, boycott, and the Chicano movement, Luis Valdez joined the founders of the UFW and founded his Teatro Campesino which was “a union tool for organizing, fund-raising, and politicizing” (Broyles-González, p. xii). Teatro Campesino was vital to the UFW, therefore to the Chicano Movement as it was understood in the agricultural regions of Kern County. By extension, it became a symbol of Chicano and US Latino identity. It was a form of agitprop performance which is defined as “propaganda; *especially* : political propaganda promulgated chiefly in literature, drama, music, or art” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, n.d.)

in-depth interviewing and using qualitative data from a survey to bring a more rich and nuanced understand of the state of Latino theater in Kern County (2005).

Expected Results

I expect that, despite being the location where the Teatro Campesino originated, there aren't very many venues or avenues for Chicano/ US Latino actors, writers, and directors to perform or present original works. I speculate that the legacy of being the birthplace of this group is not very strongly connected to the identity of local artists because the Teatro Campesino moved to Northern California and dissociated from the UFW in 1971 (El Teatro Campesino, n.d.), only six years after having started on the picket lines of the Grape Boycott in Delano, CA with the UFW. In addition, I speculate that, despite there being many community theater options in Kern County, there are not as many opportunities specifically for the Chicano/ US Latino demographic.

Importance of Study

The importance of the Teatro Campesino within the Chicano Movement and, more generally, the US Latino heritage is indisputable. It is the most well-known example of the US Latino theater company, not just on a regional level, but also nationally and internationally. While US Latino theater is currently having a strong moment on the national level, due mostly to the influence of Lin Manuel Miranda's work on Broadway

