



La Mezcla & Ayudando Latinos A Soñar

A Collaboration to Bring Dance to the Fields

UC SANTA CRUZ | Campus +
Community



CAMPUS + COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT
ISSUE 2022-9

PREPARED BY: JA BULSOMBUT

[TRANSFORM.UCSC.EDU/WORK/CAMPUS-COMMUNITY/](https://transform.ucsc.edu/work/campus-community/)

Invisible Labor on California's Central Coast

Ghostly Labor: A Dance Film explores the history of labor in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through tap dance, Mexican Zapateado, Son Jarocho, Afro-Caribbean movement, and live music. The film is the culmination of a years-long collaboration between new media artist John Jota Leños, San Francisco-based dance company La Mezcla, and non-profit Ayudando Latinos a Soñar or ALAS. A Professor of Film and Digital Media at UCSC, Leños' work explores the convergence of memory, social space, and decolonization using animation, participatory cinema, installation, and performance. Leños is a firm believer in art's potential for both personal and social transformation. He initiated the collaboration with La Mezcla to explore the history of labor exploitation on California's Central Coast while uplifting the power and joy of collective resistance. A multi-disciplinary dance and music ensemble rooted in Chicana, Latina, and indigenous traditions, La Mezcla is led by Vanessa Sanchez, a lecturer in UCSC's Department of Performance.

The third partner, ALAS, is an advocacy organization dedicated to serving Latino/a farmworkers and their families in Half Moon Bay founded by Belinda Hernandez-Arriaga, a community activist and Assistant Professor of Education at the University of San Francisco.

Baile Campesino: Bringing Dance to the Fields

The collaboration between Leños, La Mezcla, and ALAS follows in the tradition of Luis Valdez's El Teatro Campesino, the cultural wing of the United Farm Workers Union in California's Central Valley. El Teatro Campesino was founded in the 1960s to spread awareness about the Delano Grape Strike and raise money for the striking workers. Theater performances took place in the fields, entertaining and politicizing farmworkers. Leños, Sanchez, and La Mezcla have put their own spin on El Teatro Campesino: bringing dance or Baile Campesino to the fields to honor and give back to the farmworkers who work the land and provide sustenance to the community and beyond.



Honoring the Labor that Feeds Us

Alongside distributing groceries, providing warm clothes, and offering health services to farmworkers in the area, ALAS coordinates “Farmworker Fridays” to provide farmworkers with lunch everyday Friday. Leaños and La Mezcla took part in this initiative, supporting the staff and on some occasions performing for the farmworkers during their lunch break. They also helped ALAS raise money for the farmworkers’ basic needs, such as rain ponchos, socks, underwear, and gloves. After a year working with ALAS, Sanchez began developing dance pieces for La Mezcla based on video interviews with the farmworkers. Using the interview material, Leaños worked with La Mezcla to compose “El Camotal” in the traditional Son Jarocho style. The song honors the important work farmworkers do to grow food to sustain the community and uplifts the skills and knowledge they possess and will pass on.

Leaños and La Mezcla requested to perform on the land of one of the few Latino growers in Half Moon Bay, Serafin Avila Garcia, during the winter fallow season. Supported by the San Francisco Arts Commission, the team filmed the performance on Garcia’s farm, completing production in the summer of 2022. The film, titled *Ghostly Labor: A Dance Film*, honors the farmworkers and the unseen yet essential labor they expend in feeding the communities locally and around the world.



Future Directions

As of fall 2022, Leaños and La Mezcla are planning a dance performance and screening for the farmworkers, as well as another fundraiser where ALAS can collect warm clothing and other essentials in preparation for the winter season. After winning “Best Short” at WildSound Film Festival in July 2022, *Ghostly Labor* continues to be screened at festivals around the country, including upcoming dates at the Sans Souci Festival of Dance in Boulder, Colorado, the CAPITOL Dance & Cinema Festival in Washington, DC, and the San Francisco Dance Film Festival.

For Further Learning

Trailer Link: <https://vimeo.com/743603361>

Questions? Contact us.

ALAS

<https://www.alasdreams.com/>

alas@alasdreams.com

jleanos@ucsc.edu

“Together with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, Luis Valdez brought political art and theater to the farmworkers out in the fields while they were on breaks. It would activate them and organize them, while also giving them access to art and theater. Their ultimate goal was organizing workers into unions. We half-seriously spun Teatro Campesino it into Baile Campesino. This is our version of Teatro Campesino - going to entertain farmworkers, bring art, music and dance - and lunch - to their workplace as a way of honoring their work and giving back.”

- John Jota Leños