



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

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Fieldworker(s): Carlos Fernandez

Interviewee(s): Leonor Sanchez

Event: Interview

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Brief summary of tape contents: Interview with Leonor Sanchez, founder and ex-president of the Association Peruanos Unidos of Merrimack Valley (Lawrence, Lowell, Haverhill, Villa Rica, Manchester NH, Lexington) and director of the APU Dance group.

Counter/ABS	Contents
00:00	Experience as an immigrant: She arrived in the U.S. thirty-one years ago (1972) with her husband and five children, at a time when there weren't many Latinos in Lawrence and there was a lot of work opportunities. She arrived with a degree in education and was able to start working as a teacher's aid while she continued her university studies. She obtained a bachelors degree in education. She then worked for twenty-five years in a social service program for migrant families working in agriculture and fishing industries in Middleton.
02:25	Upon retirement, and because of her desire to continue working with children, she decided to found a dance troupe that focuses on traditional dances of Peru, which she loves so much. She also established the Association as a way to promote her culture, including foods, dance, visual art, poetry and literature. As president of the association, Ms. Sanchez is very active in give lectures about Peruvian culture throughout the region. Other members of board of directors for the Association also make presentations.
04:00	The Association has obtained a 501.c3 status which allows them to solicit funds. They are not a membership-funded organization and depend on grants and donations for their activities. Currently they organize the Noche Peruana (Peruvian Night) during the Hispanic Week. The event is open to Latinos and non-Latinos and is usually held the Sunday before the Hispanic festival. This year is their seventh year of having the Peruvian Night.
05:15	She was born in Lima, where her mother was from. Her father was originally from Huancayo but as a military officer had to relocate frequently due to various assignments. Ms. Sanchez recalls how she was able to travel through Peru and

learn to appreciate regional traditions of various regions. She was educated in a Catholic convent, which she says helped her grow in culture, and taught in the mountains of Peru, where she became more sensitive to the needs of the impoverished population. She also learned to appreciate her country's roots. She says that there is so much to learn about Peru; each town has its own traditions, customs, foods, and ways of speaking Spanish. There is also an Indigenous community of Quechua speakers that is diminishing. She notes that many non-Quechua speakers are studying the language, but she has yet to put her mind to it. But that language is also part of the Peruvian culture.

- 07:00 I ask whether her family had an interested in arts and culture. Ms. Sanchez explains that her interest in traditional arose from her work as an educator. She notes that Peruvian schools require that children participate in artistic activities of some kind or another. Teachers are required to organize public events every three months in which children perform dance, exhibit painting, crafts, or perform poetry. She chose to teach children folk traditions because of her own personal knowledge of regional traditions. These events—known as *quermés*—were perhaps the only recreational event that took place in the communities in which she worked. She explains how Indians traditionally begin their day before dawn, prepare their *fiambre* (lunch meal)—leaving children their own meal to take to school—and then leave to work in the fields for hours and hours, carrying along their small bag of *coca* leaves. They would return home around six or seven o'clock in the evening. The entire town would be empty and Ms. Sanchez would stay with the children in the school. By lunchtime, many of the kids when back home to eat their meals, while some stayed in the school [perhaps not having meals themselves?]. She noted the efforts that their parents made in order to make ends meet. So every month or so, she would organize an event where people would come together, prepare foods, and enjoy the children's artistic presentations. These events supported the purchases of materials and supplies for the school, and make repairs or even additions to the school. She notes that the government paid her salary, but it could not afford to cover the maintenance of the schools or purchase of educational materials.
- 10:00 She notes how, in Peru, salaries for educators are in general not good. Moreover, the quality of one's job assignment as a recent graduate depends on having the right political connection—or *vara*. Those who have no connections end up being assigned to posts among the Indians in the mountains. In her case, she worked at her post for five years. During that time, her husband had the opportunity to immigrate to the U.S. to work; she came with him with their five children a short time after, not wanting to remain in the mountains because of the limited opportunities available there to her children.
- 11:20 Ms. Sanchez is very grateful for the opportunities she has had in the U.S. and notes that without the facilities available in the U.S., she would not been able to improve her situation as quickly as she might have in Peru. Her children have all grown up in the U.S. and have their own families. She proudly states that she has twelve grandchildren. Nonetheless, she continues to miss her home country and, being retired, tries to travel every year during the winter months (January-April). During her stay, she studies additional dances and crafts.
- 12:30 She notes that in Peru there are many arts center where one can learn dance, crafts, and art. Moreover, the cost for these courses is relatively small: \$60 per each three-month series of classes. She indicates that her plan for this coming year (2005) is to learn to play the *cajón* [a type of Afro-Peruvian idiophone made from a wooden box with sound hole in the back]. She notes that many of the dances

that the group performs are Afro-Peruvian and the *cajón* is the main instrument used to accompany the dances. She wants to learn to accompany the girls in their dance performances.

- 13:30 The dance troupe often uses recordings during their performances, but they also have a musical group called *Tanhuantinsuyo* (literary meaning “Four Points”). She explains that the colonial city of Cuzco was constructed within the limits of what was known as the *cuatro sullos*, a regional Inca kingdom that predates Spanish conquest. According to Ms. Sanchez, *suyo* means a colony or settlement, or perhaps what one would call a neighborhood today. During the conquest, the rebel leader Tupac Amaru was captured and dismembered by pulling his arms and legs apart in the four directions. Tanhuantinsuyo is composed of acoustic guitar, organ, electric bass, cajón, and zampoña, a type of end-blown flute. All are members of the Association and reside in Lawrence. Miguel Cabrera, a physician with the Family Health Center, is one of the members of the ensemble and plays several instruments, including cajón. The musical director of the group (and currently President of the Association) is Roberto Chuica Jr. (978-975-0474), who plays zampoña or guitar. Other musicians include Roberto Chuica, Sr., guitar; and Julio Barraza, singer. The group came together a year ago, after Leonor bought a *cajón* from Peru. Every year she brings materials, costumes, and other items from Peru.
- 18:00 Three years ago, Sanchez applied and secured a block grant to support the Peruvian Night and lessons in *zampoña* for children. They have been unable to secure another grant from them, but they do get funding from the Lawrence Cultural Alliance for the Peruvian Night each year. Initially, the group tried to raise the money necessary for the events by asking members of the Peruvian community to donate funds, but they quickly found that they couldn’t do it all the time.
- 19:10 [Who participates in it and what they learn.] Mrs. Sanchez notes that all of the girls that are currently participating in the ensemble are from Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic). All of them enjoy dance and are not so concerned about what kinds of dance they learn. They want to learning to enjoy the music, but through that Mrs. Sanchez is teaching them about other things. Traditional mountain music from Peru such as *wayno* or *marinera* does not really interest them; they are more interested in the Afro-Peruvian dance. After they learned these dances, she begins to teach them other dances from the mountain regions of Peru, such as *marinera*, vals (which she says students think is too slow), and the *tondero*, although she acknowledges having better luck teaching dances from the mountains to the youngest children. To the girls, Mrs. Sanchez is now starting to teach *movido selvático*, a type of dance similar to the Colombian *cumbia*. She has also taught them *saya*, which is a bit difficult.
- 22:25 [How many and how old are the children with which she works]. The current group is composed of 25 children. She split them up in three levels: a group of advanced girls, regardless of their age; a second group; and a third group composed of the youngest children, whom she teaches mountain dances such as the *wayno*, *waylas*, and dances from the *selva* (jungle).
- 23:30 She says that there are some dances that the girls find less appealing, including the *saya* and the *diablada*. They are not difficult, but very different from anything else they know. The Afro-Peruvian dances are very close to home and they keeps them coming back to learn more. They only have one boy in the ensemble. Demístocles Devers (a dancer who studied with Quity Morgan and is now carrying on studies at the Phillips Academy) was a member of the group for

- several years and learned all of the dances. She had four other male dancers in the group who went on to study ballet and tap with Quity Morgan.
- 25:40 The group began in 1995. Initially they rehearsed at the Library, which facilitated the space free of charge, every Saturday and sometimes during the week. They have also worked out of church basements, then at a community room from a bank on Essex Street, and finally at the Lawrence Ballet Academy. They pay a nominal fee (\$1 per child per day) twice a week to Ms. Morgan for the use of the space. She says having developed a good relationship with Quity Morgan and that Ms. Morgan provides scholarships to the best kids in her (Ms. Sanchez') group so that they can figure out whether dance is something that they want to pursue further. If it is not, then the girls have a chance to try something else.
- 28:40 She reiterates that in Peru, each teacher is required to teach some kind of art form. In her recent travels in Peru, she has seen that this continues to be the case. She notes that this is not true of the U.S.: the practice of art is lost. There are a number of small groups in Lawrence that are struggling to provide art related activities to children free or at a very low cost. If they didn't do it, there wouldn't be such activities. She explains how the Essex Arts Center is a good place to learn fine arts but it can be expensive. Other places, such as the Lawrence Ballet Academy, are also businesses. Local public schools can't provide arts classes because it is not within their budget to do so. She discusses how her grandson is able to take flute lessons at a middle school in Towson; but these opportunities are not available in Lawrence.
- 31:20 Ms. Sanchez notes that she sells Peruvian crafts in fairs and out of her own home. One of the reasons she continues to return to Peru each year is in order to study Peruvian crafts such as jewelry and weaving. It is an activity in which she uses her creativity; it also keeps her busy and connected to her "roots."
- 32:15 Because schools don't have the budget to teach arts, then it is up to groups such as theirs and *Movimiento Puertorriqueño* to volunteer their time. Several years ago the two groups collaborated with the Essex Arts Center to make a series of murals: one of a Peruvian mountain scene, which they kept as backdrop and often use for the programs. The scene was painted on canvass, allowing it to be rolled up and stored. Essex Arts Center provided the space; funding for supplies, materials and the instructor were paid with funds received through a block grant through the City of Lawrence. She notes that this kind of funding from the City is very important. Even if it only provides for supplies and materials and space to do these projects, it has a great impact on the children.
- 38:20 Proceeds to show photographs of the mural project, members of the Association, the dance troupe, and other events. She notes that the Essex Arts Center provided the technical expertise and space necessary to complete the mural project. She describes various elements in the mural depicting the Peruvian landscape: the sea, the mountains, and the sky. They continue to use the mural painting as a backdrop to their performances; other murals made as part of the project were used during the Hispanic Week Parade competition, for which they one the first prize that year.
- 40:30 She is planning to focus next on the teaching Peruvian music, specifically on *zampoña*. They plan to apply the next round to Lawrence Cultural Council grants for this purpose. She has not applied to sources outside of the City of Lawrence before; now with the 501.c3. status, she plans to seek additional sources. They need to determine what to do. She wants to continue with the dance troupe because they keep the culture alive and present Peruvian culture in Lawrence as well as elsewhere. By focusing teaching Peruvian music to youth, she will be able

to then involve them in the dance and then not depend so much on contracting musicians from outside of Lawrence. They need to by at least a couple of guitars, flutes or *zampoñas* of professional quality, and cajón. They also need a *quijada de burro* (jawbone of an ass) and maracas. She notes that registration—especially among boys—would go up if they would offer music classes of this sort.

- 42:45 [Other resources in the area.] She has collaborated with groups in Boston, particularly for the Independence Day (July 28). COPEMA (Colonia Peruana de Massachussets) organizes a *quermés* event in which they participate. COPEMA organizes folk dance troupe, a soccer mini-championship, a *quermés*, and a parade. There is a group, Inca Son, directed by Villalobos.
- 45:25 They also celebrate October 12. Peruvian Night, Independence Day, and October 12. They also celebrated a religious festival for El Señor de los Milagros (The Lord of the Miracles), during the entire month of October, although it is more the community in East Boston who celebrates that festival.
- 47:00 The greatest challenges for the Peruvian community today are unity and obtaining the voluntary support of all of its members. Latinos come the U.S. to work and improve their situation. It is very difficult to get them to donate their time, which they would otherwise be using for work or family. Contributing time to these activities involves sacrificing time for other things, and not everyone is ready to do that. Moreover, many even work on weekends, so they can't participate in the activities, either as organizers or audience. The situation is different with the Dominicans, for example, not because they are more patriotic, but because they are more established here with their families, and have roots here. Peruvians that come here usually come one or two, but not with their families. The people that participate in the board of directors of the Association are those whose families are now here and their economic situation is better off. Those that have just arrived are struggling to survive, so I understand that they can't sacrifice their work time during weekends. They say they would like to help, but they can't. Unlike in the Dominican community, where if someone is unable to help there are others who may be able to do so, the Peruvian community is so small that we quickly run out of resources.
- 51:10 We discuss the process of assimilation that is experienced by youth these days and how that impacts on the continuation of cultural traditions in the Peruvian communities. Ms. Sanchez notes that after so many years of working as president of the Association she is burnt out. She has been working with the new president, Roberto Chuica, a young professional recently graduated from college. She has great hope for how he will give continuity to the organization, while she focuses more on the artistic and cultural heritage aspects of working with youth. Even her children beg her to not get involved in any more activities and projects. She was involved for several years in the Hispanic Week, at a time when they were at a low point, with several tens of thousands of dollars in debt. At one point—this was ten years ago—she was postulated as a candidate to president of Hispanic Week. She had the interest in pursuing a 501.c3. status for the organization (at that point it had been working twenty years without one), but there was great resistance from the Dominican and Puerto Rican groups to this: they wanted to maintain the Hispanic Week under the auspices of the Spanish Community Program, Greater Lawrence Community Action Council. [Historically, the SCP-GLCAC, led by Isabel Melendez, has served as umbrella for the Hispanic Week.] Ms. Sanchez discusses the pros and cons of this kind of organizational relationship. More recently, she has decided to focus her energies on the needs of the Peruvian community and the APU board will be considering this year whether

or not to participate organizing the Peruvian Night next year, or just organize the Independence Day event and other cultural performances.

- 1:03:00 The APU organization represents families residing in the Merrimack Valley, including Lawrence, Lowell, Haverhill, Villa Rica, Manchester (NH), and Lexington. It includes some 20 families in Lawrence; four in Haverhill, four in Lowell; five in Manchester; and so on. They have a total of 50 members, representing some 200 or so Peruvians in the region.
- 1:06:00 She believes in the benefit of developing a forum where artists and other constituencies with interest in the arts could meet with cultural organizations in order to identify human resources in this community, identify resources and needs. Such a forum could also help develop strategies for addressing common needs. The forum should be organized in groups with specific tasks, and the City should be fully involved. She also believes that the MA Cultural Council, funding sources, and media should also be invited so that they begin to understand what are the needs in the community and how they can collaborate with them. She finds that Latino newspapers and other media generally respond well to their events and activities, but non-Latino media does not. Moreover, she believes that media response tends to be selective and to some extent favors larger groups that have greater political weight. She would like to see some kind of shared office space that the various organizations could use to do their labels, mailings, prepare flyers, copying, etc. which are the basis of the promotion of any event. This might be in the form of a City Cultural Affairs Office. Another important need is a space for rehearsals: the city would benefit from having a community arts center where various groups could rehearse and perhaps even present their work. Poetry Hoots (organized by the Robert Frost Foundation) are open to poets writing in various languages, including Spanish, but non-Latinos mostly attend them. She believes that having a performance space would open possibilities for Latinos to present exhibits, poetry, music, and dance recitals and events.
- 1:27:00 Ms. Sanchez sells Peruvian crafts. She produces jewelry and woven textiles herself, but the rest she imports from various Indigenous artisan groups (including women's prison cooperatives) in Peru. She imports the materials from Peru and her focus is on crafts that can be sold quickly. She rents space at various craft shows, including Cape Cod in October and Manchester during their Latino Festival. She has approximately one exhibit per month. She has been doing it for the last three years. She also leaves some of her crafts in consignment at various shops, including in Lowell and Haverhill (a gallery located in the art district, which also sells crafts by Moroccan and Brazilian artists). Asked if there are other craftsmen or women that she knows of, she names Dora, a Guatemalan artisan that works with the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. She also noted that Jude Charles of the Haitian American Club might know about Haitian artisans in Lawrence.