

Totonac Danza de los Voladores wow the 96th Annual Ceremonial

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 18 August 2017 12:44



This year's Ceremonial extended schedule featured some new shows as well as the return of some time-honored favorites.

The Totonac Danza de los Voladores also known as "Palo Voladores" (pole flying) made their return to the Ceremonial stage. Set for two nights at the Pow Wow grounds, rain cancelled the Friday night showing, but the Saturday evening show not only made up for the previous night, but proved that this group was sorely missed.

The "Voladores" as it is pronounced in Spanish, is actually called "Kosne" in the native tongue of Totonac. Group leader, Apolinar Simbron, who is from the Totonac tribe, says this also is the name of the village as well as the language of his village. He is not Aztec nor Mayan, but Tontonac.

"I want my family to keep learning the language, the culture; they don't teach this in the

Totonac Danza de los Voladores wow the 96th Annual Ceremonial

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 18 August 2017 12:44

universities,” Simbron said.

He explained that societal pressure has caused his ancient culture to slip away, so to keep the voladores tradition alive, his son and other family members continue to perform the death-defying ritual all over the world.

The performance or ritual consists of dance and the climbing of a 30-meter pole (100 feet) from which four of the five participants then launch themselves tied with ropes and descend to the ground.

The fifth remains on top of the pole, dancing and playing a flute and drum. According to one myth, the ritual was created to ask the gods to end a severe drought. The purpose of the pole flying is to represent the Bald Eagles; each pole flyer represents the four directions of the earth.

The origin of the pole flyers dates back over 2,000 years ago in the village called “Tajin” (City of the Lightning/Thunder), where the temples can be seen even to this day, according to Simbron.

Starting at the age of 14, Simbron was traditionally brought into it by his uncles and his grandfather. This has been passed on from generation to generation. He says they do not train pole flyers ... pole flyers are born. Now 56-years-old, this is his twentieth year as a performer. He’s performed at the Ceremonial for 18 of those years.

The group consists of six men, including Simbron himself, three of whom came directly from Mexico; his son, Anthony Simbron who is 14-years-old; and a nephew from Albuquerque.

“I am really proud of them that it makes me cry, not because I am sad, but very happy,” Simbron said.

Each of the performers is dressed in Totonac regalia, which consists of red pants with a white shirt, a cloth across the chest, and a cap. The hat they wear is adorned with flowers for fertility;

Totonac Danza de los Voladores wow the 96th Annual Ceremonial

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 18 August 2017 12:44

mirrors represent the sun; and from the top stream multicolored ribbons represents the rainbow.

When preparing to ascend the pole, the group begins by saying prayers, not only for themselves, but for the audience that is watching them. They circle the pole once, and then turn around and go the opposite way. After this is done, the performers began the climb up where the main prayer is done by the performer playing the flute. He plays a prayer towards the east and into the other directions, Simbron explained.

“In English you would call this is called a ‘trance.’ He then dances completely around until he is once facing the east again. He then does this in reverse and this could range up to five minutes, he then sits down and does more prayers,” he said.

The flute player does this while leaning all the way back in each direction with no safety harness whatsoever. Each pole flyer is tied with a rope around the waist and each one is responsible for one another. When all the blessings are given, a signal is given by the one playing the flute. Each pole flyer leans off backwards and begins to descend. They fly in a downward spiral to the cheers of the entranced audience until they touch ground.

Fourteen-year-old Anthony Simbron says it really doesn't bother him at all, and he's not frightened to take the downward plunge.

“I don't really think about it. I just climb, and I've gotten used to it,” he said.

Under the management of Native Star Entertainment, Knifewing Segura, the group has been with him since 1994.

“They've been in my talent agency for a long time,” he said. “Ceremonial asked me to bring them back, and everything has been great ... nothing but positive. They've never disappointed and they are a really good group.”

Totonac Danza de los Voladores wow the 96th Annual Ceremonial

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 18 August 2017 12:44

The group has traveled extensively throughout North America, Russia, London, Japan, and numerous places.

Ceremonial-goer Dion Loma was in utter amazement of the performance.

“I just couldn’t believe what was going on. I was excited and nervous at the same for these guys,” he said. “Completely exciting ... that is all I’ve got to say is wow.”

Another audience member, Noel Vela, said she couldn’t believe her eyes.

“That was crazy,” she said. “(It’s) so crazy it was fun watching them. Everyone was so quiet when they began to climb that pole. I’m glad I came.”

One Ceremonial attendee, Jasmine Trina, said she could feel the tension from the silence as the pole flyers sat up top awaiting the finale.

“It was so scary quiet,” she said. “Who knows when we will experience this again, this is one of those once in a lifetime moments you may never see again.”

Simbron says this performance is a way to show Western Civilization that his tribe is neither gone nor dead.

“We are not extinct,” he said. “I want to share this to all my Native American brothers. It is an honor to be in the Ceremonial and I feel proud.”

On a side note, a Go-Pro camera was attached to one of the pole flyers, and this painted a whole new picture of these daring men. The top of the pole is about 1-foot in diameter. The wind blew wildly as one of the performer’s is shown dancing on the platform, and his feet is bigger

Totonac Danza de los Voladores wow the 96th Annual Ceremonial

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
Friday, 18 August 2017 12:44

than the platform.

He next sits down and is smiling. He does not look shocked, but completely at ease as his other brothers are there with him.

By Dee Velasco

For the Sun