

# Expressions

## Volume 5

**SJSU** COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
AND THE ARTS

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# Donor & Scholarship Recipient Reception

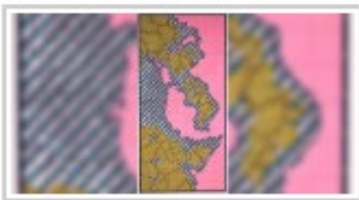
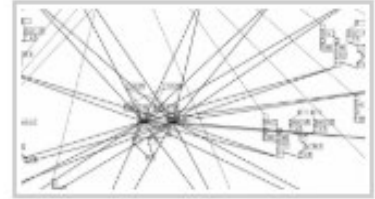
The College of the Humanities and the Arts welcomes incoming freshmen!

Production and Editing done by Marissa McPeak; Music credit to the Spartan Marching Band.



The College of Humanities and the Arts' second annual Scholarship Reception was a huge success! Have a look at some photos, as well as the speech given by music major Earnest Little, recipient of the Claude and Alberta Walker Scholarship.

# Digital Media Arts Faculty



# Zoot Suit

by Cathleen Miller

Fifty years ago, student Luis Valdez made his theatrical debut on the San José State campus as a playwright-director. From there he graduated and went on to Broadway with his famed play *Zoot Suit*, the story of the zoot suit riots in Los Angeles.

In the theme of "write what you know," Valdez remembers as a high school student walking through his East San José neighborhood, lugging a stack of books under his arm. He was accosted by members of the Blue Velvet gang, so named because of their stylish blue velveteen jackets emblazoned with their symbol: a red heart with a dagger through it. The leader called out: "Are you just showing off carrying all those books? You lifting weights?"

"I knew they were going to kick my ass," Valdez determined, so he began chatting with the *pa-chucos* using their own slang, which he'd learned from his wild cousin, Billy Miranda. "I explained that I was studying so I could go to college, and then I was going to go to law school, and after graduation I would come home and defend them when they wound up in jail." This bit of fast-talking earned him a hall pass through the 'hood that day, but this same depiction of how two cultures collide would later earn him the moniker "Father of the Chicano Theatre."



Before the Valdez clan moved to San José, they had lived in the central California town of Delano. Here Billy provided his younger cousin Luis with another important gift. "I remember he was a cool guy. When I was six he was sixteen, and he had a running partner we called C.C. Back then the movie theaters were segregated, with the white folks sitting in the center section and Latino and black patrons sitting on the sides. C.C. had been in World War II, and when he came home he decided he was going to sit in the middle with the whites. He was actually arrested, and the police questioned him for a couple of hours. But since he hadn't broken any official laws, they had to let him go. The next week all the Mexicans were sitting in the middle section of the theater."



One day when Valdez told his mother that he was returning to Delano to join the farm workers' struggle, she said: "Oh, you're going to work with C.C.?"

"C.C.?" he replied. "Is that guy still around?"

"Mijo," she smiled and added, "don't you know who C.C. is? He's César Chávez."



Thus, through this family connection Valdez began working with Chávez, and formed El Teatro Campesino. C.C. also would make his way into Valdez's writing as an inspiration for *Zoot Suit*. In the end, cousin Billy wound up with eighteen stab wounds in his chest, and Luis dedicated the play to him. In 1981 *Zoot Suit* became a Hollywood movie directed by the SJSU alum, starring his brother Daniel.

Now Luis Valdez comes full circle, returning to campus for a production of *Zoot Suit* that will be directed by his son Kinan Valdez. The play will be in the University Theatre April 23, 24, 28, 29, 30 and May 1 & 2 at 7 pm, with Valdez giving a talkback on opening night. Tickets available [here](#) soon.

# El Teatro Campesino



## El Teatro Campesino: The Farmworker's Theater

By Cathleen Miller.

At San José State [Luis Valdez](#) studied the theatre arts, examining the works of the ancient Greeks, the Romans, then moving forward to Bertolt Brecht and the concept of exploring the theatre as a forum for political ideas. Valdez also discovered *el teatro campesino* (the farmworker's or peasant's theatre), popular during the Mexican Revolution. These short, one-act plays were designed to instruct and inspire an uneducated population.

After graduation, the SJSU alumnus created El Teatro Campesino, which was born on the picket lines of the Great Delano Grape Strike in 1965. While working with United Farmworkers Union leader [César Chávez](#), "the company created and performed *actos*, or short skits, on flatbed trucks and in union halls, taking the *actos* on tour to dramatize the plight and cause of the farmworkers."

From these authentic roots, El Teatro Campesino has grown to be the preeminent Latino theatrical company in America. In 1971, the company moved permanently to San Juan Bautista. El Teatro Campesino has won many awards over the years including an Obie, an Emmy, a Peabody Award (for excellence in public television), thirteen Bay Area Drama Critics Awards, and numerous Los Angeles Drama Critics Awards.



El Teatro Campesino now is engaged in developing works for the next generation. But for founding artistic director Luis Valdez, the collaborations remain very much a family affair, as he joins with Lupe, his wife of 45 years, who writes and designs costumes, and their sons, Anahuac, Kinan, and Lakin, all of whom write, produce, act, and direct for the stage as well as film.

The whole clan has participated in the creation of *Valley of the Heart*, a play Valdez says was influenced by the work of two other SJSU alumni: Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her husband, James Houston, authors of *Farewell to Manzanar*. *Valley* mines California's history and also that of Valdez when his family settled on a farm that the government had seized from a Japanese family during their internment in World War II. "I wanted to capture the multicultural fabric of life in this state," he notes. (Rumor has it that a San José production of *Valley of the Heart* is in the works.)

For decades, Luis Valdez has modeled the advice he offers today's students: "Be prepared to create your own job. Use your ingenuity, creativity, stick-to-itiveness. It's never

a mistake to do art. What makes us human is our ability to create, and art enhances our ability to communicate, to create compassion," he says, describing the very traits that have symbolized his career and that also embody the creativity, motivation, and innovation that the College of Humanities and the Arts strives to instill in all students.

## College of H&A Video



We are proud to make public the H&A College Video, produced by our own [Spartan Film Studios](#). Professor/director [Babak Sarrafan](#) teamed up with Hollywood contacts to provide guidance for the students, giving them an opportunity to learn from industry professionals and participate in a high-end production. Previous projects have included MTV-bound music videos, commercials, "[Green Ninja](#)" shorts, and feature films shot each summer.

The outstanding production value of the film might lead one to believe that its creation was a walk in the park. But with only four days to enact the vision, scheduling was a struggle. Sarrafan explained: "Organizing all the programs and locations we had to film was very challenging. We had four days planned and had to work the puzzle for times, availability, and daylight."

But the final product was well worth it. "We had a very positive face-to-face response the day of the premiere, and various kind e-mails from others after watching it online," said Sarrafan. "I'm very pleased that David Kahn [TRFT Department Chair] and Dean Lisa Vollendorf gave us this project and trusted our artistic approach and experience to deliver a quality product." Indeed, Dean Vollendorf is proud of what the students have accomplished with the expert guidance of professors in the College. This is just one of hundreds of H&A projects that help prepare students for careers in the visual and performing arts!

### **Film Credits:**

Writer, Director, and Editor: Babak Sarrafan

Producers: Nick Martinez, Barnaby Dallas, and William (Fred) Guess

Director of Photography: Jim Orr

Key Grip/Gaffer: Chris Burns

Colorist: Rob Sciarratta  
Composer: Steven Erickson

## Profile: Luis Valdez



### **The Hungry Mouth of Creativity**

*By Cathleen Miller*

His theatrical career began because his dad's truck wouldn't start.

Luis Valdez's father was packing up the family, who would be taking down their tent and moving on after they'd finished picking cotton in the San Joaquin Valley. Instead, they watched as all the other migrant workers left for the next location. While Mr. Valdez figured out how to repair the truck, Luis's mother decided to send her six-year-old son to the local school in Stratford. Each day he took his fish taco lunch in a paper sack and, as instructed, carefully brought the sack back home to reuse the next day. One day the sack was missing from the classroom shelf, and he asked his teacher if she knew what had happened to it.

The teacher explained that she had torn it up. She led the frightened boy into a room and showed him something magical that would change his life: she was using his lunch sack to make a paper mache mask of a monkey. "Why are you doing this?" he asked.

He had attended Stratford for only 30 days, but by the time this conversation was over several important things had happened: first, Luis had discovered the arts; second, he had learned that his first-grade class was putting on a play; and third, Luis agreed to star in this production as the monkey, wearing the mask made from his lunch sack.



He eagerly anticipated his moment of glory when the play would premiere in the old school's auditorium on the coming Saturday, with the band playing and the community watching. On Tuesday, however, he learned his family had been evicted from the labor camp and would be leaving town the next day to look for work. Luis remembers driving away in the fog, brokenhearted at leaving school and missing his theatrical debut. "During that moment a hole opened up in my chest which never closed, and I have poured into it my plays and stories. It became the hungry mouth of my creativity."

His family of migrant workers remained on the move, but whether they were living in a tent or a barn, they always carried with them the complete set of *Encyclopædia Britannica* his father had purchased. Neither parent had received the opportunity for much formal education, but they encouraged their children to read.

When Mr. Valdez found steady work tending to orchards, the family was able to settle down in East San José. Later Luis graduated from James Lick High and then pursued his

dream of attending San José State. He landed a scholarship for math and physics, planning to follow his older brother in becoming an engineer.

In the mornings he'd walk over to meet his cohorts at Winchell's Donuts on Fifth St. before all of them headed to their 7:30 class. He took a short cut through Hugh Gillis Hall, and soon he was peeking around backstage. The flickerings of his early dramatic career—and its painful demise—surfaced. "I decided I can't deny this part of myself—I have to give it a try." During Luis's sophomore year at SJSU he changed his major to English with a playwriting emphasis.

Fifty years later a plaque on the SJSU campus reads: "This site is a landmark in the history of Chicano/Latino theatre."

In the Hal Todd Theatre, Luis Valdez, 1965 San Jose State graduate and world famous playwright and Father of Chicano Theatre in the United States, directed his first full-length play, *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*, on January 14-15, 1965. At the suggestion of Dr. Harold Crain, Department Chair and mentor, Luis became a playwright-director, which led him to create his company, El Teatro Campesino\* (The Farmworkers Theatre). Founded in 1965 on the

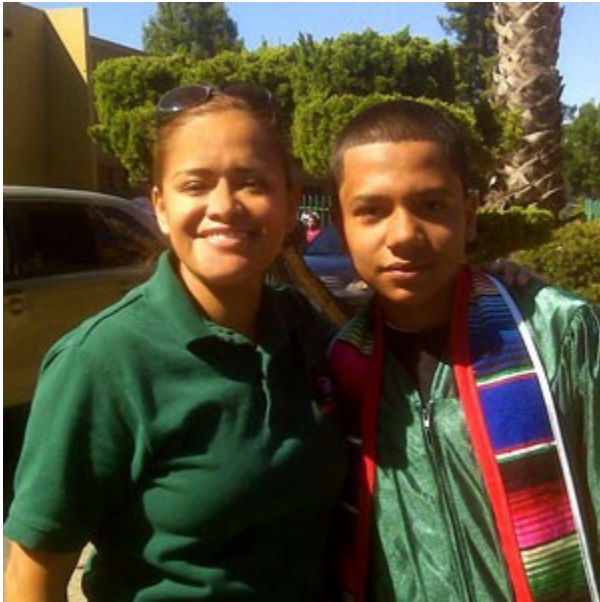


Delano Grape Strike picket lines of Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Union, the company created and performed "actos" or short skits on flatbed trucks and in union halls inspired by the lives of their audience. Luis Valdez went on to write and direct successes such as *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*, becoming the first Latino to present a play on Broadway.

The College of Humanities and the Arts is proud to have such a distinguished alum and artist as Luis Valdez. His life is an artistic and humanitarian inspiration for all.

Please see our feature stories on [El Teatro Campesino](#) and [Zoot Suit](#) for more information.

## Profile: Maria Trejo



### **Rebellious Student Becomes High School Advisor**

*By Yesenia Ortega*

The room displayed posters of César Chávez and Frida Kahlo, a wall covered with pictures of current and previous students, and a name plate at the front of the desk: Maria Trejo, Student Advisor. Years ago Trejo, of all people, wouldn't have imagined finding herself here. Who knew that a once rebellious student would be advising at-risk youth, guiding them towards graduation?

"I struggled a bit in high school," she laughs. "I was a bit of a pain at times, I guess. I didn't necessarily push myself, and I wasn't on the university track."

So how did an underachiever end up working as a counselor in an East Side Union District high school?

As a student at San José State University, Trejo struggled to decide on a course of study until she finally chose to work with students. Through her personal experience, she understood the hardships lower-income and culturally diverse students face in the education system. "A lot of talented Latino students get lost in the high student-to-counselor ratio. I wanted to help change this."

As a past at-risk student herself, she identifies with her students. It was through the help and guidance of her teachers that she was able to attend San José State University. She received a bachelor's degree in Spanish, a master's in education, a Pupil Personnel Services Credential, and a teaching credential, all of which helped her get become an advisor at Andrew Hill High School.

Looking back, she thanks her past educators for leading her to the path she now travels.

Through the years several teachers came to her aid in times of need, whether it was for behavioral, educational, or financial issues. "I had great teachers who took care of me. A teacher once took care of me while my grandmother was in the hospital after suffering a heart attack. She had her own family, but she took me in. I'm assuming that I would have gone to foster care if she hadn't helped me. I was lucky."

Trejo hopes to achieve these same goals with her own students. Her current advising position allows her to meet with more students one-on-one and help them with any social or emotional issues that prevent them from being successful in class: bullying issues, theft, mediations, teacher-student relationships, and much more. "I had a lot of teachers who always took care of me in some way. I have to do the same for my students."



Trejo's students also help her, she claims, because back in 2009 they convinced her to expand her college education and pursue a teaching credential. "The teaching credential gave me more job security, and it was a stepping stone in order to apply for a counseling job or what I do now, campus advisor. I needed to get my foot in the door as a certified employee. It was the right choice."



So what's next for the rebel-turned-counselor?

"I'm focusing on improving how I deal with the discipline issues that we have at school. It's difficult to remain calm at all times when you have the same kids making the same bad choices. Treating kids with respect is important, but also providing structure and setting clear expectations is always something that I want to improve on."

San José State University is the primary source for teacher education in the Bay Area. The College of Humanities and the Arts is proud to serve approximately 500 students seeking a teaching credential in Chinese, Spanish, French, English, Art, Music, Theatre, Creative Arts, and Liberal Studies.

# It's a Dean's Life Vol. 5

## February 2015

There is something very special about the start of a new year, but for educators the turning of the year also brings the joy of another semester. The year 2015 has started with a bang as SJSU welcomes 30,000 students back to school!

In the past three years, the College of Humanities and the Arts has taken great strides to unify and strengthen the arts and letters programs, encouraging development and bringing to light the many achievements of the faculty and students. This New Year perhaps marks the biggest step in that goal: the opening of the H&A Student Success Center. Located in Clark Hall room 244, the Success Center is a one-stop shop for students within our college who seek General Education advising. Dean Lisa Vollendorf explained, "Faculty, staff, and students all expressed that we need to find better mechanisms to support students as they progress to degree." Read more [here](#).

This spring brings the promise of a tremendous theatrical lineup in the [Department of TV, Radio, Film, and Theatre](#). As we highlight throughout this edition of the newsletter, we honor Luis Valdez with a production of *Zoot Suit* this spring. We also are proud to be producing the socially important *Dead Man Walking*. A full schedule of events can be found on the [department's website](#).

Would you like to join me at Carnegie Hall this spring? The SJSU Choraliers and Concert Choir under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Benson will make their Carnegie Hall debut on April 27, 2015. The Choraliers will sing a short program of American music featuring Professor Layna Chianakas, mezzo soprano. The Concert Choir will then perform Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem* with a professional orchestra and soloists from New York under Dr. Benson's direction. You can learn more and support the students' trip by [visiting this link](#).

We are in full recruitment season on campus! Across SJSU we are recruiting sixty-four new faculty members, eight of whom will be in the College of Humanities and the Arts. These eight new professors will teach in areas as diverse as writing instruction, sculpture, dance, orchestra conducting, philosophy, Chinese, and American Studies. Stay tuned for more information about the new faculty as the year unfolds.

Many major events are scheduled for the next six months. I look forward to the numerous readings scheduled by our [Center for Literary Arts](#). I also look forward to the [Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies](#) exhibit on Beethoven in Politics (which opens in February), the Mari Kodama benefit concert March 15, and the Center's thirtieth anniversary gala on July 24. For more information about the numerous Beethoven events, also [visit this link](#). The [School of Music and Dance](#) has an embarrassment of riches scheduled in the form of concerts and performances this spring, and the [Departments of Art and Art History](#) and Design will be showcasing student, faculty, and professional artists' work all semester. I also look forward to the Kazuki Fukuda-Abe Endowed Lecture on Japanese Contemporary Art at 5 p.m. in the Student Union on March 6, 2015. There are many

more events to attend, so I invite you to bookmark and frequently visit our College [calendar](#) so you don't miss anything!

Spring always brings a sense of joy and optimism, so I close with the warmest wishes to all of you for being part of [College of Humanities and the Arts](#) network of supporters, students, staff, faculty, alumni, and donors. We will continue to educate globally-informed, creative, compassionate citizens this semester, and I will be first in line to express my admiration and thanks to everyone whose work and support makes that education possible.

With warm regards,



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Lisa Vollendorf  
Dean, College of Humanities and the Arts