

Biography of Luis Valdez

Luis Valdez (b. 1940)

LINKS

Perspectives in American Literature: Luis Valdez

<http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap8/valdez.html>

This site provides a list of Valdez's primary works, awards, and honors and a selected bibliography.

Luis Valdez

<http://arts.endow.gov/learn/NCA/Valdez.html>

The National Endowment for the Arts offers a biography of Valdez, who serves on the National Council for the Arts.

El Teatro Campesino

<http://elteatrocampesino.com/>

El Teatro Campesino is the thirty-five-year-old theater that Valdez founded.

Luis Valdez

<http://us.imdb.com/Name?Valdez,+Luis>

The Internet Movie Database also provides a biography of the writer/director.

BIOGRAPHY

Luis Valdez, one of ten children, was born in 1940 in Delano, California, to campesinos, or farm workers. When he was six years old, he watched a teacher use part of a paper bag to make papier-mâché masks for a theater production. This experience transformed his worldview and eventually led him to the theater. His experiences in the fields, however, lasted until he was eighteen, when he went to San Jose State College. Although in deference to his parents he began college as a math and physics major, after less than a year at San Jose State he joined the theater and declared a major in English. He wrote and acted in plays at San Jose State, where his first full-length play, *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa* (1964), was produced.

After college he joined the famous San Francisco Mime Troupe. In 1965, still a member of Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Union, he founded El Teatro Campesino, or the Farm Workers Theater, for which he became artistic director and playwright. The theater, which has won a number of awards and is now part of the Mexican American Centro Campesino Cultural in Fresno, began as a theater for striking farm workers and their union, earning money writing for the union and spreading news about its activities. Eventually, Valdez began writing plays on a number of related subjects, such as the

Vietnam War in *Dark Root of a Scream* (1967). He wrote several plays in a form he called *mito*, or myth. One of them, *Bernabé* (1970), introduced a figure who was a zoot suiter and focused on historical issues concerning Chicanos. Another of his important plays, *Los Vendidos* (*The Sellouts*) was written in 1967 and continues to be performed.

In 1978, Valdez produced *Zoot Suit*, his first major success and went on to write *Bandido!* (1982), which he calls "an antimelodrama," about a Mexican bandit named Tiburcio Vásquez, who holds the unpleasant distinction of having been in 1875 the last man publicly executed by the law in San Jose, California. *I Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges!* (1986), set in California during Ronald Reagan's presidency, concerns Buddy Villa and his wife, Connie, who have spent their working lives as extras in TV and films. Videotaped inserts and music make this play a multimedia experience.

In addition to his activities as a playwright, Luis Valdez also directs films and plays. He directed the film *Zoot Suit* (1981) and the film *La Bamba* (1987), the biography of the Mexican American rock 'n' roll singer, Richie Valens, who died in a plane crash with Buddy Holly in 1969. Valdez also wrote the script for that film. In 1987, he produced a television version of his 1983 play, *Corridos! Tales of Passion and Revolution*. Performances of *Corridos!* filled a relatively large house in San Francisco for six months before moving to Los Angeles. Its subject is Mexican history, something many in his audience knew little about.

Available at: <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/LITLINKS/drama/valdez.htm>

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