

Aurelia Fernández Marure and Margarita Larios

MEXICANS ARE AMONG THE LARGEST COMMUNITY of new immigrants to New York, and Aurelia Fernández Marure and Margarita Larios have helped assure that the cultural traditions of Mexico will add a new layer of richness and vitality to the City's cultural life. At the same time, through their work as independent artists and as guiding lights for the Mano a Mano Organizing Committee at the Center for Traditional Music and Dance, they are working to ensure that important Mexican traditions are practiced and passed to a younger generation.

Aurelia was born in the village of Alpuyecá, Morelos. Her family has a tradition of political involvement in Mexico where one of her great grandfathers fought in the army of Zapata in the Mexican Revolution. Creating traditional arts is also a family tradition: one grandfather produced leather articles, her father was a carpenter and her aunt made maracas. She learned traditional paper arts, including piñata-making, papel picado (paper cuts), and the art of making paper flowers in her childhood home as part of the elaborate preparation for annual village festivals. Aurelia came to New York in 1984 to give her three children a better education. To help make a living, she extended the tradition of making piñatas for her own children's birthday parties, to other families and produces innovative designs for sale. She has lived in Yonkers for almost 20 years and is an active member of Santa Maria church, director of a traditional dance company called Los Chinelos, and founder of the Yonkers' Alma de Mexico festival. She has presented at El Taller Boricua, The American Museum of Natural History, and The American Indian Community House.

Margarita Larios is from Atlixco, Puebla. She migrated to New York thirty years ago with her six children and is a proud exponent of the culinary traditions taught to her by her grandmother and mother. These three generations of women worked side by side in the market, selling fruit and vegetables, flowers, chiles and herbs. Margarita's grandmother taught her to cook at the age of 6. A resident of Manhattan's Lower East Side, she is an expert on all aspects of traditional Mexican cooking and has given food workshops on chiles and traditional herbs, their uses in cooking and in curative processes, on preparing tamales and other holiday fare, and on Mexican regional cooking. Margarita is an accomplished seamstress and has designed costumes for Day of the Dead productions at the Union Settlement Association as well as for Mano a Mano at the Halloween Parade. She writes verse and has adapted stories for dramatic presentation. Margarita is a founding member of the Mano a Mano Organizing Committee at the Center for Traditional Dance and has presented at The American Museum of Natural History, El Museo del Barrio, and the Dana Discovery Center in Central Park.