

The Focus

BY LORRAINE-MICHELLE FAUST
OF THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

On your way home from your Latin dance lessons, do you pop a Carlos Santana tape into your car stereo before you pick up a few burritos for dinner? Nearly everyone is shaking their "bom-bom" to the sounds of Ricky Martin, Enrique Iglesias and Jennifer Lopez. Latino culture is the latest rage. It seems as if many of the same people, who just wanted Latinos to "go home," now just can't get enough of our food, music and dance. We've gone from nuisance to entertainment, but in neither case are we granted much respect as a culture of people. Latinos have been around for five centuries, and the European, African and indigenous cultures that gave birth to Latin American culture has been around for centuries more.

Why is it then that Latinos have only recently been considered fashionable? Why is Latin culture considered the latest fad?

First of all how can a culture be a fad? A culture is the food, dress, dance, music and essence of a people. It is not a pair of bellbottoms, a lipstick shade or a new type of car. A person's culture creates for them what they are. How can a person be a fad?

Latin America is comprised of several cultures. Just like the United States, from region to region we speak differently, we eat differently and we dance differently to different music. Latinos are black, white, yellow, red and every mixture in-between. This new fad has forgotten our uniqueness. It has turned us into the American ideal of a Latino, not who we really are.

Ricky Martin has been world famous

for years, but he didn't make it in the United States until he started to sing in English. He could not be recognized for his talent until he homogenized it for the North American ear. Some of the most beautiful classic Spanish songs just don't translate well into English. Most of the country misses out when they are unwilling to sample styles that are foreign to them.

Latinos are the largest growing minority group. We are growing fast, and we are finally getting some recognition for some of our "cooler" traits. There are many Latinos who are even happy about our current glory, but there is something that they are forgetting. This fad, like all other fads, will one day go the way of the hula-hoop.

This will not mean the end for Latinos, because we are not a fad.

As always, we are being judged by a series of stereotypes. The current wave of stereotypes happen to be "positive," but even "positive" stereotypes are harmful. They assume that all people are the same. They again deny us our individuality.

You may say that Latin men are sexy. Does that mean that a less attractive Latino is not really a Latino? Is it fair to compare Edward James Olmos to Antonio Banderas? If a Latin man is sexy, he is not allowed to be much more. What

kind of sense does this make?

Any minority community knows what it's like to be stereotyped and to not be recognized for its contributions to society. I am hopeful that this fad is more than just a fad. I hope that it is a misguided attempt to begin to recognize the beauty and complexity that Latinos contribute to this country. I hope that this misguided attempt will mature. Maybe then we can be looked at as individual Americans that come from a rich and diverse Latino heritage.

Film center announces 27th Northwest Film & Video Festival call for entries

CONTRIBUTED STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A juried survey of new moving image arts by independent Northwest film and videomakers, the Northwest Film & Video Festival draws over 300 entries in all genres each year and is judged by a prominent filmmaker, curator or critic (last year's judge was Simpsons creator Matt Groening). The Festival provides a forum where outstanding independent work receives public recognition, critical

appraisal and an engaged and enthusiastic regional audience. Generally, 30-45 shorts, features and documentaries are screened during the Festival, after which 10-15 shorts are selected for the Best of the Northwest touring program which travels the following year throughout the Northwest and beyond to art house cinemas, museums, art councils and universities. Total audience exceeds 6000. \$15,000+ in production service awards are awarded to Festival filmmakers. Entries are

accepted in all genres from permanent residents of OR, WA, MT, ID, AK and British Columbia as well as from students attending school in those states. Work must have been completed after August 1, 1998. Formats accepted are 1/2" VHS, 3/4" NTSC, Super-8, 16mm, 35mm. No entry fee, but \$15 for return shipping costs per entry (US \$20 for Canadian residents). Entry form required. Contact: Northwest Film Center, 1219 SW Park Avenue, Portland, OR 97205, 503/221-1156, www.nwfilm.org.

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