

# network

## HUMANITIES

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## "romantic"

Film idea about mariachis in San Francisco turns into compelling story about dignity, love and family

AWARD-WINNING DOCUMENTARY COMING TO THEATERS THIS FALL

WITH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING, YOU HAVE TO BE READY FOR ANYTHING. JUST ASK MARK BECKER, DIRECTOR OF THE CALIFORNIA DOCUMENTARY PROJECT FILM "ROMANTICO," A FEATURE-LENGTH PORTRAIT OF MEXICAN MUSICIAN CARMELO MUNIZ SANCHEZ. WHEN BECKER FIRST BEGAN "ROMANTICO," HIS IDEA WAS TO MAKE A SHORT FILM ABOUT MEXICAN MUSICIANS WHO WORK THE TAQUERIA CIRCUIT IN SAN FRANCISCO, PLAYING MELANCHOLY LOVE SONGS FOR TIPS. HE BELIEVED HE HAD EVEN FOUND THE IDEAL SUBJECT FOR HIS FILM IN 57-YEAR-OLD CARMELO MUNIZ.

"What struck me about Carmelo was how open and genuine he was," Becker remembers. "That first meeting, he told me, 'Mark, I've been waiting a long time to tell my life story, and I think this may be it.' He had this strange mixture of humility and pride, and this epic sense of his own life. I thought I had gotten lucky when I finally met Carmelo."

But it seemed that Becker's luck was short-lived. On the third day of shooting in San Francisco, Muniz told Becker he couldn't be in his film any longer because he had to return to Mexico to see his mother before she died. "I am so sorry, but I have to leave the film," he told Becker emotionally.

At that point, Becker didn't know exactly where his film was going, but this news from Muniz was jarring. He knew about Muniz's mother and was very sorry that she had taken a turn for the worse, but he didn't have a budget for going to Mexico, and he wasn't sure he was ready to take the film in a different direction.

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*Carmelo Muniz and his musical partner, Arturo Arias, play love songs for tips in Mark Becker's film "Romantico." Photo/Mark Becker*



## 8 NEW CALIFORNIA DOCUMENTARY PROJECTS UNDER WAY

NEW PROJECTS EXPLORE THE HISTORY OF MEXICAN AMERICAN ROCK MUSIC, THE LIVES OF URBAN GIRLS, THE WORK OF SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVATIONISTS AND MORE



**FORTHE PAST 30 YEARS, THE COUNCIL HAS BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF SUPPORTING FILM, VIDEO AND RADIO DOCUMENTARIES THAT REVEAL IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF CALIFORNIA LIFE.**

The list of Council-supported films, now approaching 100, contains

*José Luis Bonilla, who spent 20 years building a Mexican village in rural Santa Barbara County, is the subject of "Thinking Grande: Creating California's Mexican Wonderland." Photo/Kevin Bender*

15 Academy Award nominees, including the 2002 nominee "The Weather Underground," the 1989 Academy Award winner "Common Threads: Stories From the Quilt," the 2006 Independent Sprit Award nominee "Romantico" (see story this page)

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# CCH-SUPPORTED FILMS BRING IMPORTANT STORIES TO THE PUBLIC

By James Quay, Executive Director

**THE SUCCESS OF MICHAEL MOORE'S 2004 DOCUMENTARY "FAHRENHEIT 9/11" GAVE DOCUMENTARY FILMS A NEW LEVEL OF VISIBILITY. MOORE'S FILM WAS THE FIRST FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY TO EARN MORE THAN \$100 MILLION IN THEATRICAL RELEASE. BUT EVEN BEFORE THAT, DOCUMENTARY FILMS HAD BEEN INCREASING IN POPULARITY, WITH TOTAL BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS FOR THEM UP MORE THAN SIXFOLD IN THE FIVE YEARS BEFORE "FAHRENHEIT 9/11" WAS RELEASED.**

CCH has supported the production of documentary films since we first started awarding grants in 1975. The root of the word "documentary" is the Latin verb *docere* — to teach — and documentary films are one of the most powerful and cost-effective ways to present humanities content and analysis to the state's large audiences. CCH is especially fortunate because California is home to some of the best documentary filmmakers in the country, men and women with a passion for telling important stories, teaching us about times and places and people we would otherwise never know.

In 1968 Ralph Arlyck interviewed Sean, the 4-year-old son of his neighbors in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district for a student film. Decades later, he wondered what had happened to Sean and made a film to answer the question. You can see the same impulse in the late Garrett Scott's "Cul de Sac," which starts with an individual, Shawn Nelson, who stole a tank and rampaged through a San Diego neighborhood until he was killed by police. Scott takes this bizarre news story and turns it into an exploration of the effects of the closing of defense plants on blue-collar neighborhoods.

Sean's and Shawn's stories are those of private lives, but sometimes the life being documented is very public. Earl Warren is the subject of Bill Jersey's "Super Chief"; J. Robert Oppenheimer is at the center of Jon Else's "The Day After Trinity." The profile of an individual becomes a portrait of an age. Sometimes it's the collective life of groups, such as Maria Brooks' "The Men Who Sailed the Liberty Ships."

Sometimes the exploration of private lives leads to public issues, as in Richard Schmiechen's story of Dr. Evelyn Hooker, in "Changing Our Minds." Hooker's research in the 1950s led the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its official manual of mental disorders.

Many of the films we have supported provide insight into contemporary issues. Jed Riffe's "Waiting to Inhale: Marijuana, Medicine, and the Law" examines the public debate over the legalization of marijuana for medical



purposes. Leslie Neal's "Juvies" explores the lives of juveniles caught in the adult criminal justice system. Robert Winn's "Grassroots Rising" looks at the struggle of low-wage Asian immigrant workers to improve their lives through community organizing. Adele Horne's "The Tailenders" examines a missionary organization's use of low-tech audio devices to evangelize indigenous communities.

It's as difficult to generalize about filmmakers as it is to generalize about their films. But I can safely say that all documentary filmmakers bring passion, tenacity and dedication to their work. They have to, because being a documentary film-

maker is a difficult business. In addition to the demanding requirements of the filmmaking craft is the never-ending work of raising funds. Rare is the filmmaker who doesn't have to interrupt her work to raise money for script development or production or post-production phases. And yet they persist, determined to bring a story or an issue to the public.

I don't want to leave the impression that CCH has supported documentaries single-handedly or with large grants. Before the Skirball Foundation began generously supporting the California Documentary Project several years ago, CCH could rarely award a grant over \$10,000. But filmmakers tell us that support from CCH helps secure funding from other sources, and we continue to guard our reputation for funding high-quality humanities documentaries, whether they have big budgets or small.

One of my favorite stories involves Rob Epstein, the director of "Common Threads: Stories From the Quilt." CCH awarded a script development grant of \$7,500 to that project and even attached conditions to the grant. Several months later, HBO awarded the film project \$500,000. I told Rob that we would understand if he wanted to forego the CCH grant — and the task of meeting its conditions — but Rob said no. He believed the conversation with CCH had helped the film, and he wanted to be sure CCH received a screen credit. We are forever grateful. In 1990 "Common Threads" won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

So when we find ourselves moved, educated or provoked by a good documentary film, we should remember the magnificent obsession and dedication that made that documentary possible and be grateful for the men and women who sacrifice to bring us these important stories.

## "California Uncovered" Selected for Sacramento "One Book" Project

**THE SACRAMENTO "ONE BOOK" PROJECT TO FEATURE A VARIETY OF COMMUNITYWIDE PROGRAMS**



**"CALIFORNIA UNCOVERED: STORIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY," THE COUNCIL'S COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES, NOVEL EXCERPTS AND POETRY BY OUTSTANDING CALIFORNIA WRITERS, HAS BEEN SELECTED BY THE SACRAMENTO PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR ITS OCTOBER 2006 CITYWIDE READING PROGRAM.**

The Sacramento one book project will feature a variety of community-wide programs, including book discussions, film programs, creative writing workshops and poetry readings, based on the book's historical and multicultural themes.

Anne Marie Gold, Sacramento Public Library director, said, "The book presents many different experiences of California, from white settlers coming over the Sierra in the 1840s to Afghans trying to feel at home in Fremont today. It is a perfect vehicle to engage people in talking about their own California experiences and listening to the stories of others."

The anthology was published by the Council and Heyday Books in 2005 as part of the statewide California Stories Uncovered campaign. It is available online and at local bookstores.

## New Executive Assistant

Patricia Croteau joined the Council as executive assistant to Executive Director Jim Quay. Previously, she worked at TIAA-CREF in an administrative capacity.

Originally from Massachusetts, Croteau holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Massachusetts.

## "A Girl's Life"

### TWO FILMMAKERS CHRONICLE THE COMING OF AGE OF FOUR SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA URBAN GIRLS

FOR FOUR YEARS SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA FILMMAKERS KRISTY GUEVARA-FLANAGAN AND DAWN VALADEZ WENT INSIDE THE LIVES OF FOUR GIRLS AS THEY EXPERIENCED ONE OF MOST IMPORTANT STAGES OF THEIR LIVES, THE PASSAGE FROM GIRLHOOD TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD. THE RESULT OF THEIR EFFORTS IS A FEATURE-LENGTH FILM, NOW IN POST-PRODUCTION, ABOUT THE WAYS THESE GIRLS NEGOTIATE THE PROCESS OF GROWING UP IN A COMPLEX URBAN ENVIRONMENT.

"There are a lot of films about teenage girls, but no films about girls going through puberty except those that focus on physical changes," said Guevara-Flanagan, "That's only one part of it. There is a huge world of emotion and social relationships that girls experience. It's an intense period of life. We wanted to capture that."

Previously, Guevara-Flanagan produced and directed the 1998 award-winning film "El Corrido de Cecilia Rosas," which has been featured at a number of film festivals, including Sundance. Valadez, who has a master's degree in social work, has worked directly with children, teens and families for more than 20 years.

To find the right girls for the project, the two filmmakers stuck close to home, interviewing kids at Oakland and Emeryville elementary schools in the East Bay area. "We knew it would be a longitudinal study, so we wanted to make it manageable for us," Valadez said. They were searching for kids of various cultural backgrounds, kids who liked being on camera, kids whose families were interested in the project, kids who could stick to the project for four years.

The four they selected were 9 and 10 years old and in fourth grade at two elementary schools. "We decided to start with fourth graders because then we could show girls as children and follow them as they develop into teenagers," Valadez said.

The four girls — Rosie, Ariana, Isha and Esmeralda — have unique stories to tell. Rosie must deal with her Anglo mother's coming out as a lesbian and the traditional values of her Nicaraguan father; Esmeralda gets teased about her body size and being Mexican and daydreams about boys; Isha's mom follows Indian traditions and works hard not to have her family swept up by American culture while Isha experiments with Internet chat rooms; and Ariana, a tomboy who knows how to stand up for herself, becomes a stylish teenager whom other kids look up to.

The two filmmakers shadowed the girls on the school playground, in the classroom and at home. When filming, they held fast to one overriding principle: to really listen to what the kids were saying. "Adults don't listen to young people enough, and that was our frame from the outset," Guevara-Flanagan said.

"Each of these kids is facing different issues, and we wanted to be able to pull out those issues and keep track of them," she continued. "What kinds of decisions are they and their families making, and how do those decisions play out in their lives? What kinds of messages are they getting from society? How are they separating themselves from their parents and developing their own identity?"

"A big part of the story of these girls is the story of their families and following that trajectory has been fascinating," Valadez added.

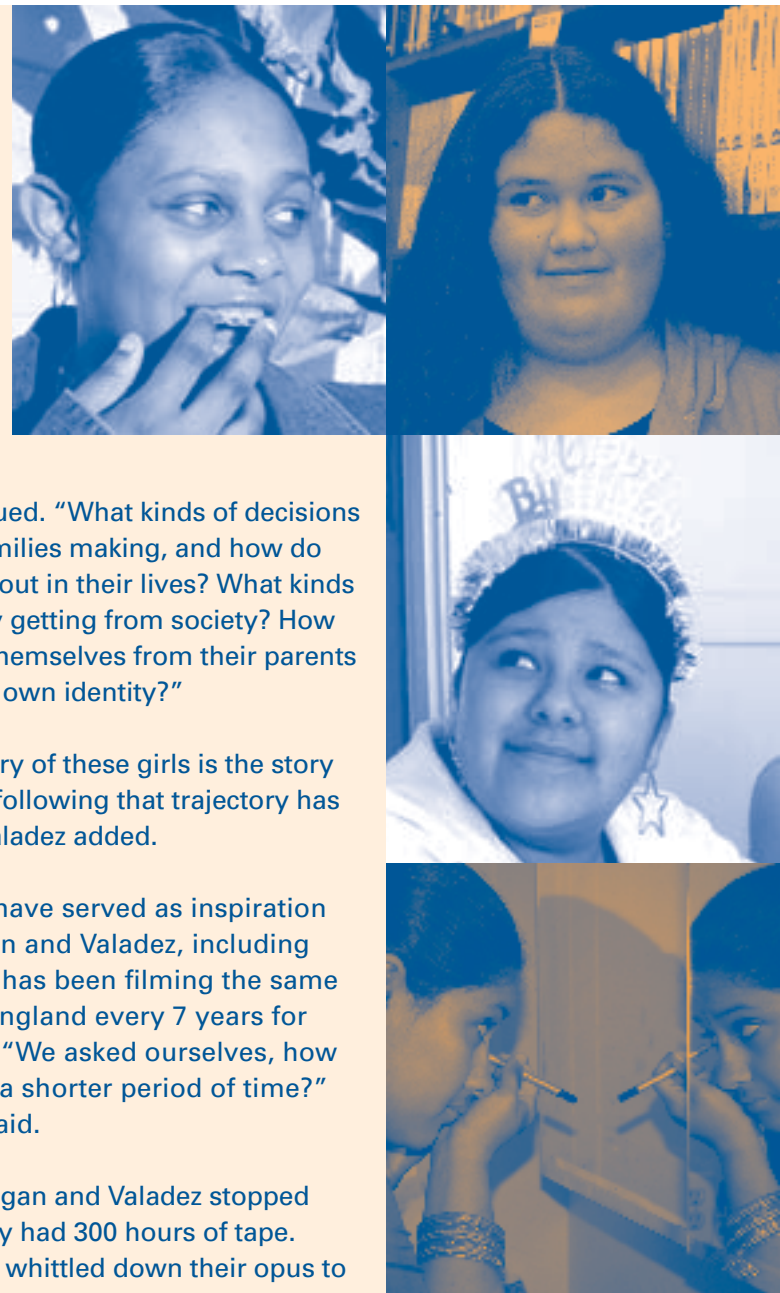
Several filmmakers have served as inspiration for Guevara-Flanagan and Valadez, including Michael Apted, who has been filming the same group of people in England every 7 years for more than 40 years. "We asked ourselves, how can we do that over a shorter period of time?" Guevara-Flanagan said.

When Guevara-Flanagan and Valadez stopped shooting in 2004, they had 300 hours of tape. Since then they have whittled down their opus to five hours and ultimately hope to have a 90-minute film for release in 2007. To finish they need another \$175,000, which they are now trying to raise. In the meantime, they spend four days a week in the editing room, trying to find the best story line for each girl.

The filmmakers still keep in touch with the four girls and hope to involve them in screenings once the film is ready. "I look forward to being around them again," said Guevara-Flanagan. "They're now in high school. and they all have stepped up academically. The future looks bright for all of them."

For more information about "A Girl's Life," visit [www.agirlslife.org](http://www.agirlslife.org).

*Clockwise from top: Ariana, Rosie, Esmeralda and Isha, the four young girls featured in the soon-to-be released documentary "A Girl's Life." Photos/Kristy Guevara-Flanagan and Dawn Valadez*



## Council Welcomes Three to Board of Directors

THE COUNCIL IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT CINDI ALVITRE, PEDRO CASTILLO AND DAN DURAZO HAVE JOINED THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

Cindi Alvitre has been a cultural and environmental educator and activist for nearly three decades. She helped found the Ti'at Society in the 1980s and was the first woman chair of the Gabrielino-Tongva Tribal Council. Alvitre holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology, a master's degree in history and museology, and is currently pursuing a doctorate in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA.

Pedro Castillo is associate professor of history at UC Santa Cruz and provost of Oakes College. He cofounded and was the former director of the Chicano/Latino Research Center at UC Santa Cruz. In 1999 he was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the National

Council for the National Endowmen for the Humanities, where he served until 1995. Castillo holds a bachelor's degree from Arizona State University, a master's degree from Northern Arizona University and a doctorate from UC Santa Barbara.

Dan Durazo is founder of TeleNoticias and executive vice president of Durazo Communications, one of the nation's leading Hispanic-owned marketing communications agencies. Durazo holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Maryland and is a member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

## New California Stories Report Available

The Council has just issued its newest report on California Stories: "California Stories 2004 – 2005: A New Approach to Strengthening Communities." The new report contains independent findings confirming that California Stories projects are helping to promote a sense of community. To find out how these projects are making a difference in California communities, download the report from the Council's website: [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).



# “romántico”

( continued from page 1 )

But he recognized that Muniz’s personality and sensibility were something special: “I decided to let his story unfold even though it meant abandoning my original idea.” Becker now sees what a lucky break Muniz’s leaving was. “I had a certain amount of luck in making this movie, but I did recognize that Carmelo had something unique and compelling to offer,” he says.

**“I decided to let his story unfold even though it meant abandoning my original idea.”**

Becker’s poignant documentary chronicles the struggles of the soulful Muniz to support his family, first in California, where he manages to send money home despite living in dismal, crowded conditions, and then in Mexico, where jobs are scarce and pay is a fraction of what he earned in California. The film, nominated for a 2006 Independent Spirit Award in the Best Documentary category, winner of the Grand Prize at the Bilan de Film Ethnographique in Paris, and selected for screening at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival, portrays Carmelo as a flawed, indomitable man of great compassion and charm.

## Trying to eke out a living

We meet Carmela, his wife, and his two teenage daughters, Juanita and Lupe, who are happy to have him back after a three-year absence in California but miss the money he sent home. Then we follow him as he tries to eke out a living, singing and playing in a mariachi band at local weddings, performing in bars for prostitutes and their customers, making and selling ice cream on the streets of Salvatierra.

He will do anything to get by, and has great compassion for anyone struggling, including the prostitutes he entertains with his music. He knows from his own experience what people are driven to do out of

economic necessity and he doesn’t blame them for it. He’s too close to it himself, and that keeps him working nonstop. His whole reason for being seems to be to keep his family going, so that they can have a decent life.

Much of his time he spends trying to figure out how to get back to California. At one point, he seeks advice about how he can cross the border legally from a man with connections to the American embassy. We see the pain on Muniz’s face as he hears what he will need: a credit card, a secure job and a sizeable bank account, and we realize how absurd the requirements are, given Muniz’s desperate straits. “I knew Carmelo planned to talk to this guy, and we got there beforehand to film, but I didn’t know what would transpire. I didn’t know what an emotional scene it would become.”

Becker sees the political ideas in his film as subtext to Muniz’s personal story. “I didn’t want to make a film about what’s wrong with U.S. immigration policy or the situation of Mexican migrants,” he says. “This isn’t an issue-oriented film. My motivation was to tell a human story that transcends a particular era.”

Becker, who co-edited the Independent Spirit Award winner “The Lost Boys of the Sudan” and directed the short documentary “Jules at Eight,” wants the film to pull us along the way a good novel does. For inspiration, he looks to the cinema verité films of the 1960s and 1970s and particularly singles out “Salesman,” the 1969 Maysle brothers film about door-to-door salesmen who sell expensive Bibles to low-income Catholic families. “That film captures people at their most honest and most vulnerable, and the subtle moments push the story along. I try to approach documentary filmmaking in that spirit.”

Becker made four trips to Mexico over the five years of making “Romantico.” Money was a constant concern, and he was forced to spend valuable time seeking financing instead of working on the film. “I’d get just enough grant money for the next shoot and then I’d have to write another 17 more grants,” he says. Funding from CCH and the Skirball

**Left:** In “Romantico,” Mexican musician Carmelo Muniz makes and sells ice cream to supplement his meager income. **Right:** As part of a mariachi group in Salvatierra, Mexico, Carmelo performs at funerals and weddings. Photos/Mark Becker





Foundation, CCH's California Documentary Project partner, accounted for roughly half of the film's funding. "It's very possible that 'Romantico' would not have been completed without that support," Becker says.

## "My motivation was to tell a human story that transcends a particular era."

The Documentary Project funds enabled Becker to concentrate solely on editing the film without having to take outside work. Becker also received funding from the Sundance Documentary Fund and participated in several of the Sundance Institute's weeklong intensive labs for filmmakers, working on his film under the guidance of experienced editors.

In January 2005 "Romantico" premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and since then has been featured at more than a dozen other festivals, including those in Los Angeles, San Sebastian and Munich.

### Muniz overwhelmed at screening

Muniz saw the film for the first time at the festival in Morelia, Michoacán, which took place in the town's main plaza. "I purposely didn't send it to him beforehand because I wanted him to have the experience of seeing it with other people without interruptions," Becker says. After the screening, Muniz got a standing ovation from the hundreds of people in attendance. "He was overwhelmed," Becker says. "People treated him like a movie star. He then stood up and answered people's questions. One of those related to his assertion in the film of wanting to be somebody and to be known for something. He told the crowd that now maybe he had achieved that goal by telling his life story in the film."

Becker still keeps in touch with Muniz, though not as frequently as Muniz would like. "When I told him the filming was done, he was disappointed," Becker says. "He loved the process, he loved the crew coming down, he wanted it to continue."

Muniz still lives in Salvatierra and appears to be resigned to staying in Mexico. His oldest daughter, however, crossed the border with a *coyote* after the film was finished and now lives in San Bernardino. "Carmelo told

me he didn't sleep or eat for two weeks after that happened," Becker says. "It's such an irony, too, given that at the beginning of 'Romantico' we see Carmelo in San Francisco using a payphone to talk to his family in Salvatierra — and now it's his daughter calling home."

Becker hopes the film will find a large audience. Given its upcoming schedule and the current debate about immigration, that just may happen. The film will be released in theaters this fall and shown on the Sundance Channel in 2007. And it continues on the film festival circuit, with screenings planned for festivals in Holland, Germany and France this year.

"I am so happy that the film has had a real life and now a chance for an even greater one," Becker says. "It was crazy hard work, and not financially rewarding, but it was worth it, and I hope that all the attention will make the next film easier to make."

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For more information about "Romantico," visit [www.meteorfilms.org](http://www.meteorfilms.org).

**Top:** Carmelo sings and plays guitar with great skill and a sense of pride. **Bottom:** Carmelo's wife and oldest daughter, Juanita, outside the family's home in Salvatierra, Mexico. Photos/Mark Becker





and the Emmy Award-winning film "A.K.A. Don Bonus." Council-supported films have also receive awards from the Sundance Film Festival, the International Documentary Association and the Directors Guild of America.

This past December the Council announced the latest recipients of its California Documentary Project program: five film projects, two radio projects, and one photography and oral history project. The documentaries, now in various stages of development, represent a range of subjects from the history of Mexican American music to a multipart radio series on the efforts of conservationists to preserve the environmental integrity of California's Sierra Nevada mountains.

"These projects will open windows into the unseen lives of a diverse group of Californians, bringing their struggles and their achievements to our attention," said Council Executive Director Jim Quay.

#### The following projects received awards:

#### FILM PROJECTS

**"A Girl's Life."** Oakland producers-directors Kristy Guevara-Flanagan and Dawn Valadez document the dramatic transformation of four urban girls of color. We meet the girls at age 9 when they identify with their families as well as cartoon characters and then see them four years later as they push the limits of what is acceptable and discover the difference between who they are and what others tell them they should be.

**Top right:** "The Chinese in Hollywood" project examines films like "Captured in Chinatown" (1935), one of many Hollywood "B" movies that exploited the perceived mystique of American Chinatowns. Photo courtesy of Arthur Dong. **From left:** Among the groups featured in "Chicano Rock" is the band Tierra, led by the Salas brothers Steve (front left) and Rudy (in the white suit and hat). Tierra reflected the growing Chicano political activism of the 1970s. Photo courtesy of David Reyes. Prach Ly, a Cambodian American rapper, is the subject to the upcoming film directed by Michael Siv. Photo courtesy of Prach Ly.

**"The Chinese in Hollywood."** Award-winning filmmaker Arthur Dong tells the story of Chinese Americans in Hollywood feature films from the early 1900s to the present day. "I hope to take a personal journey into the world of moviemaking and reveal what it means to be the 'other' in the entertainment industry," Dong said. Among Dong's previous films are "Sewing Woman," based on the story of the filmmaker's mother, and "Forbidden City, U.S.A.," about Chinese nightclub performers in San Francisco in the 1930s and 1940s.

#### "Chicano Rock!: Rock 'n' Roll and Latino Identity in California."

This 90-minute documentary by producer and director John Wilkman tells the story of Chicano rock 'n' roll and how it defined — and continues to define — the Latino community in East Los Angeles. Among the musicians profiled are the musical pioneer Lalo Guerrero and one of rock's first superstars, Ritchie Valens. "This is an important chapter in the history of American music that remains little known and largely ignored," Wilkman said.

#### "Thinking Grande: Creating California's Mexican Wonderland."

Mexican immigrant and successful businessman José Luis Bonilla spent 20 years building a Mexican village in rural Santa Barbara County, retreating to Mexico before the work was finished amid permit disputes with the county. This film by Kevin Bender and Mexican filmmaker

Julio Fons chronicles Bonilla's story and the building of Bonilla's folk art masterpiece.

**"100,000 Dalamas."** San Francisco producer and director Michael Siv chronicles the life and music of Prach Ly, a young Cambodian American rapper. As structure for the film, Siv uses the songs of Ly's recent CD, "Dalama ... The Lost Chapter." "I hope to show how young Cambodian Americans are trying to envision their future and forge a new cultural identity," Siv said.

#### RADIO PROJECTS

**"Pastures of Plenty: The History of California Farmworkers."** This multipart radio series by Santa Cruz-area producer Rachel Goodman celebrates the rich history of California's agricultural workers. Among other things, the series will explore farmworkers' struggle for racial and economic equity and their individual and collective efforts to shape their lives.

**"Saving the Sierra: Voices of Conservation in Action."** This multipart radio documentary by producer Catherine Stifter chronicles the efforts of community conservationists to preserve the history, culture and environmental integrity of the Sierra Nevada. As part of the project, a portable recording studio will be set up at events in Sierra communities to capture stories. "We want radio listeners to see the issues facing

the Sierra as affecting the health of the entire state of California," Stifter said.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY AND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**"Living Under the Trees."** Award-winning Berkeley photographer David Bacon documents the contemporary living and working conditions of migrant Oaxacan farmworkers who live in makeshift encampments throughout the state. "These communities are an important part of the state's farm labor workforce but are virtually invisible," Bacon said. "I hope this project will help change that."

The deadline for the next round of grants for the California Documentary Project is October 2, 2006. The guidelines are now available on the Council's website at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

The California Documentary Project is supported through a partnership between the Council and the New York-based Skirball Foundation.

## In Memoriam

CCH mourns the passing of filmmaker Garrett Scott and actor, director and storyteller Estelle Busch, both of whom had strong ties to CCH.

### Garrett Scott, 1968 – 2006

Scott died unexpectedly in San Diego on March 2 at age 37. His death occurred two days before his documentary "Occupation: Dreamland," about American soldiers in the doomed Iraq city of Falluja in 2004, received an Independent Spirit Award. The Council gave Scott his first grant as a filmmaker for his widely acclaimed film "Cul de Sac: A Suburban War Story," a chronicle of a San Diego man's tour of suburban destruction in a stolen U.S. Army tank. This past December he received a California Documentary Project award for a film project about city politics in San Francisco in the 1970s.

Council Associate Executive Director Ralph Lewin remembers the first time he sat down with Scott to talk about his idea for "Cul de Sac." "He had a warmth and openness that made you feel like an old friend and possessed an intellectual curiosity that served him well as a filmmaker," Lewin said. "His capacity and commitment to tell a story that could be used to better understand our society was unique. His passing is a great loss, and we will miss him."

### Estelle Busch, 1914 – 2006

Estelle Busch died March 15 of a heart attack in her Los Angeles home at age 92. Busch was executive director of Synthaxis Theatre Company in North Hollywood and received several grants from CCH for theater-based public humanities projects. She was actively involved in her company at the time of her death and, among other things, co-produced "ThuGun and Natasha," an anti-gun and -violence play written by her longtime partner, Mary Mann. With the aid of a CCH grant, she was touring the play in Los Angeles schools as recently as February 2006.

CCH remembers Busch with fondness and deep respect for her contributions to the strengthening of community life in California. She firmly believed in the power of theater to transform individuals and communities, particularly those made voiceless by discrimination and oppression, and to inform, educate and inspire people of good will to action. We will miss her.

# "THE NEW OKIES"

## EXHIBIT SHOWS PARALLELS BETWEEN CONDITIONS FOR STRAWBERRY PICKERS AND THOSE FOR OKIES

**MARCH THROUGH JULY IS STRAWBERRY SEASON IN THE SANTA MARIA VALLEY IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY. DRIVE BY THE VAST FIELDS AND YOU CAN PROBABLY PICK OUT THE SMALL FIGURES OF STRAWBERRY PICKERS — MOSTLY MIXTEC INDIANS FROM THE MEXICAN STATE OF OAXACA — AS THEY MAKE THEIR WAY DOWN THE LONG FURROWS.**

Now an exhibit of 60 photographs by six Santa Barbara News-Press photographers illuminates the lives and working conditions of Santa Maria strawberry pickers. A collaborative effort of the Santa Barbara News-Press, the Santa Barbara County Arts Commission and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and funded by the Council under the California Documentary Project, "The New Okies" presents images of present-day migrants alongside photographs by Dorothea Lange of Dust Bowl migrants of the 1930s.

"We wanted to make a connection between what happened in the 1930s, when armies of displaced people came to California to perform backbreaking work, and what's happening today," said Melinda Burns, a senior writer for the Santa Barbara News-Press who spearheaded the project. "In some ways, things are not much different."

Burns has written extensively about the Mixtec community and has made three trips to Oaxaca over the past 10 years. In 2005 she won a prestigious Best of the West journalism award for her coverage.

During her decade of writing about the community, Burns has seen it grow significantly, from fewer than 1,000 when she started to more than 11,000 today. The growth, said Burns, has been fueled by the booming strawberry industry, highly dependent on cheap labor, and the economic situation in Oaxaca, where soil erosion and overgrazing have forced Oaxaca farmers to migrate. "They had to leave because they couldn't make a living farming in Mexico,"

Burns said. "There's been a huge exodus, with some towns in Oaxaca almost abandoned."

Burns has written about many of the problems faced by strawberry pickers, including sharecropping arrangements that trap farmworkers under mountains of debt. "What happens is that a produce company advances credit to a small grower, usually a former picker, to grow strawberries. Under the arrangement, the grower or sharecropper, agrees to sell his fruit exclusively to that company. The problem is that if the weather is bad or the price of strawberries drops, the sharecropper goes into debt and can't pay his workers. Hundreds of pickers don't make minimum wage because of this system."

Strawberries are the No. 1 cash crop in Santa Barbara County, with the industry grossing \$203 million there in 2005. While the strawberry business is booming, strawberry pickers are among the poorest workers, earning between \$7,000 and \$12,000 per year. Many survive in Santa Maria by living in groups of 10 to 15, borrowing money to survive during the winter months or traveling to other areas to pick crops. "Few Mixtecs have been able to escape from field work, unlike the Okies before them who picked crops for 10 years and then moved on to jobs in the defense industry during World War II," Burns said.

To produce the exhibit, Burns, along with News-Press photographers, visited the farmworkers in the fields, their homes, churches and social gatherings. "The Mixtec have a rich culture that people don't see," Burns said, "and we wanted to capture that." The biggest challenge was getting permission to photograph in homes. "For every 10 people we asked, nine would say no," Burns said. "It was hard, and sometimes it made me question whether what we were doing was a good thing because people were so afraid."

The photographs in the show should allay Burns' fears. In one image, a bride and groom who met in the strawberry fields embrace their relatives after the wedding ceremony. In another, a dozen boots are heaped outside a motel room, where many Mixtecs live together. And in a third, we see inside a van carrying pickers, half asleep, to the fields in the predawn hours.



**Clockwise from top:** A group of Mixtec farmworkers heads for Burlington, Wash, a 19-hour drive from Santa Maria, to pick cucumbers near the Canadian border. Photo/Len Wood. Daycare for farmworker children in an RV in Santa Maria. Photo/Spencer Marley. This couple rents a plot of land to grow Oaxacan corn on the outskirts of Santa Maria. Photo/Rafael Maldonado.

Burns hopes the photographs will make people more aware of the Mixtec people in their midst and the county's dependence on migrant labor. "Thousands of acres once used to graze cattle have been converted to profitable strawberry fields, which are highly dependent on migrant labor. I hope this exhibit will draw attention to the people behind the county's No. 1 cash crop and give the public a glimpse of what their lives are like."

"The New Okies" will be on display at the Channing Peake Gallery, County Administration Building, 105 E. Anapamu St., Santa Barbara, through Aug. 25.

In connection with the "The New Okies," the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, with support from the Council, has mounted "Taking Root: A Century of Migrant Workers in California," an exhibition of 25 black and white photographs of farmworkers from the 1930s to the 1960s. "Taking Root" is on view through Aug. 6.

## Free Community Events

A NUMBER OF FREE EVENTS WILL TAKE PLACE IN CONNECTION WITH "THE NEW OKIES" AND "TAKING ROOT" EXHIBITS.

### SATURDAY, MAY 20

**3 p.m.:** Panel discussion on migrant labor and documentary photography, moderated by Santa Barbara Museum of Art Curator Karen Sinsheimer. Santa Barbara County Planning Commission Hearing Room, County Administration Building, 105 E. Anapamu St.

### SATURDAY, JUNE 3

**3 – 5 p.m.:** "The New Okies: Same Fields, Different Workers." Five farmworkers, past and present, talk about their experiences as migrants in the fields of California. In Spanish and English. Santa Barbara County Planning Commission Hearing Room, County Administration Building, 105 E. Anapamu St.

### MONDAY, JUNE 19

**6:30 p.m.:** "The New Okies: Covering the Story." Santa Barbara News-Press senior writer

Melinda Burns, photography editor Len Wood and other News-Press photographers will discuss the newspaper's long-standing effort to document the lives of Mixtec Indians in the Santa Maria Valley and Oaxaca, Mexico. Faulkner Gallery, Santa Barbara Library, 40 E. Anapamu St.

### THURSDAY, JUNE 22

**5:30 p.m.:** Screening of John Ford's 1940 classic, "The Grapes of Wrath," with an introduction by UC Santa Barbara Film Studies professor Charles Wolfe. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State St.

### THURSDAY, JUNE 29

**5:30 p.m.:** An evening of short documentary films. Sundance Film Festival Award-winning filmmaker Cedar Sherbert will screen his short documentary on a day in the life of a Santa Maria Mixtec migrant worker and his family during the strawberry harvest. Also, "Al Otro Lado," a 90-minute documentary about immigration and drug trafficking through the lens of Mexico's 200-year-old tradition of *corrido* music. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State St.



**Above:** A strawberry picker works quickly before a rainstorm begins in a Santa Maria-area field. Photo/Mike Eliason

## Who We Are

The mission of the California Council for the Humanities is to foster understanding between people and encourage their engagement in community life through the public use of the humanities.

The Council is an independent, not-for-profit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities supported through a public-private partnership that includes funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, private foundations and corporations. The Council also receives essential support from individuals.

To learn more about the Council and how you can participate in its programs, please visit us online at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

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INSIDE The people behind the booming strawberry industry

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