

The historical value, as well as the color and solemnity of the acts on horses, led to the declaration of Las Cuadrillas de San Martín as a national cultural heritage in 2002.

The 43rd International Folk and Tourism Festival of the Eastern Plains of Colombia will take place in San Martín, department of Meta, from November 10 to 16, 2009. This is a cultural festivity where the central event is the Cuadrillas de San Martín, a colorful horseback choreography that dates back over 300 years.

Origins of the Cuadrillas

According to the chroniclers of the municipality, their origin may be attributed to Brazilian priest Gabino de Balboa, who used horseback riding parades to represent two historical facts: the battles between Spaniards and Arabs and the conquest of America by Christians.

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What are the Cuadrillas about?

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The Cuadrillas de San Martín are a grand artistic expression in which forty eight horsemen split into four groups of twelve members each. The groups are then classified as galanes (the Spaniards), Indians (from the Guahibo tribe), Arabs, and cachaceros (African Blacks), the four ethnic groups involved in Latin America's process of racial and cultural mixing.

The horses, as well as the attire worn by the horsemen, have special features according to the group they belong to. The cachaceros ride black horses; the Spaniards, white horses; the

Guahibo Indians, sorrel: and the Moors, yellowish white.

Also, animal skins, beast teeth, and feathers from turkeys and exotic birds are used to dress up the protagonists; make-up based on annatto dyes, honey, and coal is used by the cachaceros.

Acts of the Cuadrillas

The presentation of the Cuadrillas de San Martín has ten acts and takes place in a coliseum designed especially for the purpose.

The first five acts have to do with war and go by the following names:

- El Desafío (the challenge),
- El Saludo (the salute),
- Las Alcancías (the moneyboxes),
- El Peine (the comb),
- Las Medias Plazas (the half plazas).

The other five refer to peace and are called as follows:

- Las Oes (the O's),
- El Caracol (the snail),
- La Culebra (the snake),
- El Paseo (the promenade),
- La Despedida (the farewell).