Annual Report
2022

La Peña Cultural Center

@lapenaculturalcenter | www.lapena.org
3105 Shattuck Ave. Berkeley (Huichin - Ohlone territory), CA 94705
Origins

La Peña was established in 1975 in Berkeley, California as a community space inspired by the “peñas” of Chile, which are community gatherings centered around music, food, drink, and culture where people are in dialogue with each other around current issues. Founded by a group of Latin American & Californian allies as a direct response to the military coup in Chile that overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende on Sept. 11, 1973, La Peña opened its doors and became a space for community meetings, art activism and multicultural solidarity.

Since then, La Peña has become the home, hub and catalyst for hundreds of diasporic communities promoting social justice and cultural understanding through the arts, education and community action.

Left: Día de Muertos Celebration (Nov. 1st, 2022). Right: Frida Kahlo’s Birthday Tianguis (July 9th, 2022).
Rooted in the Latin American and Caribbean diaspora, La Peña Cultural Center collaborates with and unites communities by preserving and celebrating cultural traditions; producing creative new works; and nurturing global grassroots social justice movements with artists, activists and allies.

With the community’s support, La Peña presents over 100 programs per year, which include weekly roots arts classes for children and adults, special workshops and masterclasses, community jams and gatherings, virtual programs like interviews, documentaries and live music videos, and in-person events. Our in-person events take a wide spectrum of formats that go from concerts to panel discussions, theater and dance performances, book launches, film screenings, art exhibits, fundraisers and more.

Finally, La Peña also commissions and produces special projects in collaboration with both local and internationally renowned artists.

La Peña brings together community leaders, educators, activists, teaching artists, students, musicians, dancers, poets, and visual artists from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities. While the Latino & Caribbean community is the main group towards which our efforts are directed, we strive to be a safe place and hub for our greater eco-system by centering historically marginalized identities and experiences accross the globe.

There is a diverse spread of representation within our staff, board, committees, and volunteers in terms of the communities that we serve and opportunities for voices to be heard. Offering continuous open calls and pathways for professional development are a big priority for us to make our team be based on equity and diversity. We make sure that every opportunity at La Peña is mutually beneficial and sustainable, creating strong networks that go beyond a specific project or event in order to build a community that shows up and really takes care of each other.

In addition, we offer community-led programming opportunities that allow community members to collaborate with us on producing events of their interest and/or utilize our space autonomously. We offer opportunities for groups that are deeply rooted in the Bay to perform, educate and create in the space so that we always maintain a rich and current cultural context from which to make our decisions. This focus is intended to make us fulfill our mission very intentionally and reflect the world we want to live in both externally with our broader community and internally as a team.
With the community’s guidance and support, we are able to hold space at La Peña for a rich and broad spectrum of programs that honor and enact our mission of promoting social justice and intercultural understanding through the arts. These events include concerts, panel discussions, community gatherings, masterclasses, film screenings, art exhibits, fundraisers & more, and each of them is a crucial piece of our Programming Vision, which is divided into the following eight pillars:

Cultural Strategy & Professional Development

Roots Arts: Preservation & Promotion

Community Celebration & Solidarity

Emerging / Local Artists: Support & Representation

Social Justice Movements: Allyship & Collaboration

Memory & Historical Grounding

Collective Education: Connection & Discussion

Digital Documentation
Cultural Strategy & Professional Development

The Artists’ Adaptability Circles (AAC) is a community-driven program designed to put Bay Area artists, culture bearers and arts workers to work, creatively addressing the issues arising in their lives and communities through mutual aid. As a dual granting and leadership development program, AAC creates a shared learning environment for historically under-resourced artists, culture bearers and arts workers: BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ people, individuals with disabilities, and other historically under-resourced communities. La Peña serves as an organizational partner in this work and our Deputy Director is a part of the advisory team for the project.

Top to bottom: Chris Evans; Alma Leppla; Héctor Lugo. Members of AAC’s 2021 cohort.
Cultural Strategy & Professional Development

How the Project Works...

All artists receive $2,000 to meet with their circle, participate in larger all-circle meetings and implement their circle’s work plan.

Lead Artists receive an additional $2,000 (for a total of $4,000) to select and organize their participants, schedule meetings for their individual circle, submit any paperwork for artist payments (as well as a work plan for how funds will be spent out), and keep the process moving forward.

Along the way, Emerging Arts Professionals San Francisco Bay Area (EAP) provides training in collaborative decision-making, problem-solving, and practices that facilitate mutual aid and equitable communication. Diamond Wave (DW) provides technical and administrative support grounded in radical inclusivity. In addition to this, our advisory team is available in case a circle has trouble overcoming a hurdle or is looking for connection to community and/or resources.

Left to right: Thomas Aguilar, Tricia Rainwater-Tutwiler, Zackary Forcum. Members of AAC’s 2021 cohort.
La Peña is a cultural homeplace where every week, children and adults study the musical and performance traditions that have nourished struggles of resistance, sustained cultures, and contributed to the well-being of communities in Latin America and beyond. Roots Arts classes encourage us to think beyond consumer approaches in order to become producers of our own culture. **Check out our calendar at Lapena.org!**
This year, we brought back into our space eight weekly Roots Arts classes and rehearsals: Mexican Son Jarocho, Capoeira, Adult Bomba & Plena, Youth Bomba & Plena, Afro-Peruvian Dance, Mariachi Folk Music, Yoga en Español, and Community Chorus.

We also hosted one monthly and one special Sunday Community Roots Arts Gatherings: an Afro-Cuban Rumba Jam led by culture bearer Bruce Williams and an end-of-year Batey Boricua led by teaching artists Shefali Shah and Héctor Lugo.

In addition, we offered four special Salsa, Bachata & Merengue Dance Class Series taught by Venezuelan dance performer, choreographer and teacher Juliana Mendonca.

Finally, we presented two Afro-Colombian Music Workshops led by Colombian musicians Johanna Castañeda, Carlos Rienzo, Ronald Polo, and Andrés Fonseca.

An estimate of 400 community members benefited in 2022 from our Roots Arts classes and workshops, connecting with and learning from vital cultural traditions!
When working at the intersection of the arts and social justice, it is essential that we prioritize the co-creation of safe and welcoming spaces in which our communities can get together, celebrate their whole selves, and uplift each other with tenderness and respect.

In addition to dedicating full programs towards honoring our community’s diversity, creativity, and resilience, we advance this culture of mutual care by setting up clear expectations and accountability through our Community Agreements, which we establish with the community and share at the beginning of each of our events.

Top to bottom: “¡Lalo no se va!” Afro-Peruvian Concert; “Walking through Memories of Oblivion” book launch; BAILA! Community Dance Party (2022).
In March of this year, we debuted a monthly community dance party called BAILA! to create an inclusive space of belonging for folks of all backgrounds to enjoy latinx dance & music. Featuring special collaborations each month, BAILA actively supports local musicians, dance teachers, and grassroots organizations! This is a recurring event that happens every third Friday and welcomes over 300 people per night.

In addition, we offered seven special community-led events that were specifically intended to showcase, uplift and celebrate our community’s history, talents, and resilience: ‘Timbeko in the Bay’ Cuban Concert, ‘Celebration of Life’ Rumba, Mosaiceye’s 5th Anniversary, ‘Walks Through Memories of Oblivion’ book launch, ‘Lalo no se Va’ Concert, In Lak’ech Dance Academy 5th Anniversary, and Paul Chin’s Hall of Fame.

An estimate of 4200 community members came to La Peña in 2022 to enjoy these special events and connect with their community through art, music, and literature!
Emerging / Local Artists: Support & Representation


At La Peña we recognize that in order to create strong, free, and thriving communities, we need to create paths for creativity to be encouraged and properly developed. Our new Empowering People of Color Open Mic series, along with our Tianguis & Holiday Marcados, and our digital Artists Directory, are concrete ways in which we celebrate and support emerging/local artists through a lens of equity and inclusivity.
This year, we launched an Empowering People of Color Open Mic series that is intended to offer our stage for local/emerging poets, musicians, comedians, and performers to develop their craft and take their careers to the next level. This is a recurring program that happens every second Friday and hosts between eighteen and twenty artists per night.

We also grew our Summer Arts & Crafts Tianguis, taking it onto the street and therefore being able to offer space for fifty three local artisans to promote their artistry and their businesses.

We developed a digital Artists Directory on our website that celebrates and supports the work of local artists. The directory currently has 169 artists listed and it grows every week.

An estimate of 1500 community members benefited this year from this type of programming, either participating as an artist or as part of an audience, client, or community member.
Social Justice Movements: Allyship & Collaboration

A big part of La Peña’s mission is to nurture grassroots social justice movements in the understanding that the fight for our liberation needs culture not only as an ally or as a campaign strategy, but as the actual foundation that allows us to imagine, desire, and enact radical change in the first place.

We support these movements and organizations in different ways depending on their needs and their modes of operation. Fundraisers, panel discussions, and free workshops for the community are some of our main forms of collaboration. Contact us at Lapena.org to know more!

Top to bottom: Mapuche Allyship Workshop; BAILA! Community Dance Party Coat-check Fundraiser; “Primera” Film Screening + Workshops (2022).
This year, we directly supported six local social justice movements through fundraisers during our BAILA Community Dance Parties: Amazon Watch, Multicultural Institute, California Domestic Workers Coalition, Chiapas Support Committee, Oaxa.Cal, and Direct Action For Farmworkers.

We also offered two free workshops for the community that focused on Black and Indigenous Allyship: ‘Centering the lives of Chile’s Mapuche and Black communities in a new constitution,’ led by Jaime Huenchullan, Jakelin Curaqueo, and Mery Cortez; and ‘Workshop for Allies of the Mapuche People’ led by Ximena Soza and Majo Calderón.

Finally, we developed a Resources Page on our website that as of now centers the work of 72 local and global social justice organizations, grassroots movements and direct action groups, nonprofit institutions, and community centers. This page continuously receives input from the community and gets updated every month.
La Peña is historically rooted in the International Solidarity Movements that responded to the U.S.-backed coup that, on September 11th of 1973, overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende and inaugurated seventeen years of dictatorship in Chile. Today, upholding that legacy of deep cultural and political rebellion, we sustain yearly programs that are intended to keep our memory alive, ground our present in the lives of our ancestors, and pass our knowledge onto the new generations. Our Sept. 11th, 1973 Memorial and our Día de Muertos Celebration are good examples of this type of events.
This year, we brought back into our space the most important and long-lived legacy event that La Peña has: our September 11th, 1973 Memorial was held to commemorate 49 years of the U.S.-backed coup in Chile. Community members gathered and shared different offerings during a meaningful evening.

We also hosted a Día de Muertos Celebration that included a presentation by Oaxacan-born and raised multidisciplinary artist and sound healer Ernesto Hernández Olmos. There was also an art exhibition and vendors selling Cempasuchil flowers, Paint your own Sugar Skulls, and Craft Activities for kids.

An estimate of 250 community members attended these events, connecting with their roots and upholding the past as a guide for the future. We also started conversations with community members in order to grow this programming pillar in 2023.
Collective Education: Connection & Discussion

One of the main pathways through which we push our culture forward is by providing different opportunities for us to learn from each other, discussing complex and timely topics that shape the way we interpret the present and imagine the future. Youth Workshops, Masterclasses, and Film Screenings + Q&A’s are examples of this type of programming that seeks to be highly accessible for the community and very diverse in its content. Thank you to our partners and collaborators who open a space for us to ask the questions that need to be asked today!

Top to bottom: “Los 80 en La Peña,” presentation & discussion; “Youth for Justice” Muralism Workshop; Fist Up Film Festival (2022).
Collective Education: Connection & Discussion

In numbers...

1. This year, we supported a research project from the Freie Universität Berlin that analyses the effects of entertainment media in the Latinx diaspora and its impact on people’s historical consciousness, memory images and political formation. We hosted a free event for the community and researcher Hannah Müssemann led the presentation and discussion.

2. We also hosted a section of the 13th Annual Fist Up Film Festival, in which we screened contemporary films that are made to create an impact, inspire discussion & foster understanding.

3. Finally, we presented two workshops that made us think about the impacts of art in our daily lives: ‘Youth for Justice’ Muralism Workshop led by Ernesto Olmos, and ‘Poética de lo Cotidiano’ Photo Masterclass with Héctor González de Cunco.

An estimate of 160 community members participated in these events as either researchers, interviewees, filmmakers, students, artists, or as part of the audience.
Digital Documentation

Due to all the changes and new challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to us, we are committed to expand the reach and accessibility of our programs so that they can be enjoyed by all of our community members, including those who are unable to come to our space due to geographical distance, health conditions, or personal preference. Thanks to the efforts and expertise of our Production Crew, we have developed a digital strategy through which we can document our artists’ performances, ideas, and projects via professional photography and videography, giving them high quality materials to advance their careers and take their work to the next level. See our videos on our Youtube channel @lapenaculturalcenter!
Digital Documentation

In numbers...

**10**

This year, we launched a digital strategy that allowed us to create ten professional videos that showcase some of the main components of our programming as a cultural center while also offering high quality materials for artists to develop their careers. These videos also serve as archival material for future research and community inquiries.

**1200**

We also hired professional staff that allowed us to produce and share over twelve hundred photographs that highlight our events, collaborators, and community members. These photographs also serve as archival material for future research and community inquiries.

**3310**

An estimate of 3310 people have watched our videos on Youtube during this year, expanding not only the reach of what occurs physically in our space, but also exposing artists to a wider audience beyond the Bay Area and therefore increasing professional opportunities.
Partnerships

La Peña is characterized by basing its main programming decisions on the unique and diverse needs of the community that it collaborates with. We are honored and proud of being partners with such a rich array of artists, community organizers, activists, teachers, and arts administrators who make our work make sense. If you’d like to collaborate or be in partnership with us, contact us at Lapena.org!

Artists Directory on our website. Check it out at Lapena.org/Artists.
At La Peña, we have many pathways for our community to contribute to our mission and be part of our efforts to create a more equitable, creative, and exciting future for everyone. Check them out below, get in touch with us, and see you at La Peña very soon!

1) See our calendar of events and contact us: Lapena.org
2) Subscribe to our weekly newsletter: Lapena.org/email-list
3) Present a project or idea: Lapena.org/proposals
4) Volunteer: Lapena.org/volunteers
5) Follow us on social media: @lapenaculturalcenter
6) Be a featured artist in our directory: Lapena.org/supportartists