Milagro Teatro in Portland, Oregon: An Interview with Founders and Artistic Director Dañel Malán, José González, and Olga Sánchez.

Beatriz J. Rizk

Given the momentum that Latino/a theatre makers are enjoying with the consolidation of Latino/a Theatre Commons (LTC), which has successfully gathered under one banner a good and important segment of Latina/o theatre makers, artists, and scholars thanks to the sponsorship provided by Howl-Round from Emerson University, I decided to dedicate a series of interviews to Latina/o theatre companies that have been operating for more than twenty years without interruption throughout the country. These interviews are done in the spirit of highlighting "the importance of honoring the individual and collective voices in the Latina/o theatre community"[1] that has prevailed throughout the activities that followed the initial 2013 LTC Boston National Convening. I am referring mainly to the Encuentro, a national Latina/o theatre festival that took place at the Los Angeles Theatre Center, on November 2014,[2] and Carnaval, a Latina/o playwright competition/showcase to be held in July 2015 in Chicago, hosted by the Theatre School at DePaul University.

The interview with Dañel Malán (Founding Artistic Director, in charge of Teatro Milagro, the Touring and Arts Education program), José González (Executive Director and also Founder), and Olga Sánchez, (Artistic Director), to talk about Milagro's history, goals, and accomplishments during the last three decades, took place in the offices of Milagro, in Southeast Portland, on a mild mid-winter afternoon in February 2015. During my visit, I also had the opportunity to tour the premises—a quaint historic building that showcases the oldest hand-operated elevator in the city—and attended a performance of Mexican playwright Luis Mario Moncada's engaging comedy *Opción múltiple*, aptly directed by Nelda Reyes.[3]

What brought you to Portland? Why this city out of any other place in the U.S.?

Dañel: We came here in 1984 after graduate school at UCLA, and José's family was here. The weather and the climate were beautiful, so clean and peaceful, unlike smoggy L.A. It was like a new frontier and we could be pioneers of a new theatre. We found the Oregon Trail! But José is better at that history than me.

José: She is absolutely correct. We took a trip up here when we were both at UCLA. She fell in love with Portland. So when I finished, we decided to move up here and see if we could start a new life in the theatre. It was really challenging because Portland is much different now than it was then. It was a smaller town. Now, I have no idea how many theaters there are; there must be around thirty. At that time there were maybe five. So, the opportunities were very limited for us to work. I got a few jobs in some local theaters, but they were just part-time. And, then, one day sitting around our kitchen table with a friend, we got the crazy idea to do a play. The very first play that we did was a British comedy by Alan Ayckbourn called *Relatively Speaking*. We had the idea, because I was a scenic designer and Dañel was a costume designer, that if we did this play everybody would see our great work and we would be hired and we wouldn't have to do a play again. But that didn't turn out to be the case. So, we produced the play and it was successful, and then, before we knew it, more people started coming to us to produce work. We started producing our own work. We got a reputation, of being sort of *guerrilla* producers. We produced some very edgy, avant-garde pieces from all backgrounds. At that time, honestly, we didn't know what we were going to do, but we knew that we wanted to stay working in the theatre and that was the most important thing. Eventually, more people gathered around us. We actually started producing a Festival of Greek Theatre and then, really, I think it was me, but I started to get very homesick because my background was in the Deep South, in Texas. And this was a very white area; there were very few people of color here, particularly Latinos. So I got interested in maybe going back, but she didn't want to go back to Texas. So, then, I had the idea that If I couldn't go back maybe I can bring that up here. We set about to create the First Hispanic Cultural Festival in the history of Oregon as a way of recapturing those smells, and those flavors, and those voices. Now, we were conscious that there may be other artists that were also interested here in recapturing their culture as well. For a month we invited anybody who was a Latina/o artist, whether they were musicians or dancers, to join us in this Festival and we put them on the stage. This was in 1989. We talked to

friends. We had good friends in the Poetry festival, so we asked them to do Latin American poetry, bilingual, and one of our friends, who we made at that time, Catherine Evleshin, was a dance professor at Portland State whose focus was on Cuban and Caribbean dance. She put an entire dance company together for the performance. We mounted two plays, *Burning Patience* by Antonio Skármeta, and *Roosters* by Milcha Sánchez-Scott, and then created a children's play, our very first bilingual children's play called *Pérez y Martina*, of the little fable. And, then, we had all kinds of other events going on. We made a connection with the Council of Human Rights in Latin America, and they brought a big group from Chile, Inti illimani. It was amazing to have a concert with them! We gathered this big family, and people, who didn't have any means of expression, or of opportunity, came from everywhere. A good example is when we auditioned for the plays. There were about 130 actors that came to audition for a play; not all of them were actors, and none of them had ever been able to do anything in the area before. So, this was the beginning of real interest and we moved forward from there.

Dañel: When we first moved here, I had a background in Arts Education. In Los Angeles, I worked for the Beverly Hills Parks & Recreation Department and, then, I came up here and worked for the Portland Parks & Rec. I also went into Special Education, working with special needs students. It was my goal to have a children's program because I was already working in education. The little play *Pérez y Martina* was seen by teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL). They invited us to take the show to their schools. Ever since that time, they were always asking: "When are you going to have another play? When are you going to come out to our schools? Now, do you have workshops?" So, it was sort of paralleling our children. It was all happening at the same time: getting a house, moving here, starting the company, and having two kids. The education program kind of grew with our own children, starting with school programs for Elementary School, then programs for Middle School, and programs for High School. And every year, it was, "well you have a new play for the Middle School, so when will you have a play for High School?" It became a need-based program and we are still the only bilingual touring educational theatre program in the Northwest. In fact, if you google bilingual touring theatres, what comes out generally is Teatro Milagro. We go all around the country, and even went to Mexico once. As you know, it's an expensive venture to get all the funding together to take your company, but we went and performed with Actores del Método, in 1986, and from there we went to the Cervantino in Todas Partes [The Festival's

extension into the rural areas] and toured our show there. We've wanted to go back ever since, but it's hard to find the funding for such ventures and the right connections. It was a good experience. It helped to launch us and build our resume. We went on to New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Missouri, Kansas and even Canada. We have a map in the touring office with push pins of all the places we have performed throughout the country.

Olga: I'm very recent. I didn't come on board until 2003, as full time Artistic Director. But I started here working as a free-lance director in 1989. I was in Seattle for about 10 years. I was the Artistic Director for Seattle Teatro Latino and was a member of Los Norteños writers' group. I had produced a number of their readings. Personally, I usually wrote scenes from plays, or short pieces. People got really interested in writing dialogue, and someone asked, "Can we do something about learning how to write dialogue?" Sure, so Kathleen Alcalá and I, we connected with the Empty Space Theatre, which no longer exists in Seattle. She knew the dramaturg there, Leonore Bensinger. And we said: "Can we work at the Space and maybe connect with some dramaturgists and we'll bring the actors, and we'll bring the writers?" We created what was called "Una noche de liberación." It was an evening of very short ten-minute plays from writers who were normally novelists, journalists, and except for one, none of them were playwrights. Each wrote a piece and they were performed. And it went well, really well; the week-end was sold out. One of our writers was Juan Baca, who had moved to Portland and had been working with Milagro. And he said: "You know, you should bring it down to Miracle, in Portland." And I asked: "What is Miracle in Portland?" He replied: "It's a Latino theatre company." I was surprised: "There's a Latino theatre in Portland?" We had created Seattle Teatro Latino, but it was very grassroots. There were a lot of professionals; we would get together to do a project, and then we would go out and do our own work and come back together when we had time again. For us to know that there was an established Latino-dedicated theatre company in Portland was revelatory. I came down here with him, and I met José, and we said "This is what we do." And José arranged to host 25 actors and writers and everybody came down for the week-end. They found places for all of us to stay, at their Board members' houses and all over. We performed for a week-end, we did two shows, and we had a great time. It was a lovely, great experience. Interestingly, three members of Los Norteños moved to Portland within the next few years, and we formed a new writers' group called Los Porteños, with no idea that this was also the affectionate term for people of Buenos Aires! We simply wanted to continue working

together, and Milagro has continued with Los Porteños in a number of ways over the years. A couple of years later, Rubén Sierra, actor, writer, professor of theatre at University of Washington and Portland State University, who had launched the Group Theatre, many years prior, was directing me in a show called *Voices of Christmas* that he had created. That's another theatre that has closed. He was back and forth, commuting from Portland to Seattle; he would come in and direct, and because I was connected with the Latino actors, he asked me: "Olga, would you put together a reading of my play *When the Blues Chase Up a Rabbit* that I would like to share with the community in Seattle, to get some feedback?" So, I got together a group of actors; we had about two or three readings. Afterwards, we'd go out to dinner and talk about the play, so I got to know the play really well. Coincidentally, the play was being selected by Milagro to be produced the following fall. He was ready to go and direct it when he got diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in the spring. He said, "I'm not going to be in any shape to direct any play in September," So, they were looking for a director and he recommended me because I was so familiar with the play. I accepted, "sure, I'd be honored." I came down and directed the piece. He was very generous. The play was about a young man in a wheelchair from an accident in school that had left him crippled for the rest of his life. And he was angry, bitter, and emotionally useless. His father is dying and his mother is taking care of him. So the father says, "Look, I'm leaving and you don't have time to be useless and you don't have time to be bitter and angry. You'd better get your stuff together because once I go you will have to be the man of this house." The young man replies: "I can't be the man of the house, I'm in a wheelchair." So the father tells him: "Shut up, get to it, because I'm going." So it's really about him, finding his own strength even though he is crippled, and the accident had to do with a racist thing that happened in school. The kid got angry, he ran out and got hit by a bus. The story is about the boy, and Rubén wrote it about himself. But when he came into rehearsals, he knew he was dying. And he said this is what you have to know when you are dying. His generosity at rehearsals, telling stories about what it's like when you know that you are seeing the end of your life, he had to tell this story. He came to opening night. He lasted about a month after that, and he passed away three days after the show closed.

José: Rubén founded the Teatro del Piojo, way back in the 70s. The Group Theatre was one of the premier multi-colored theatres in the country at that time. He has given his life to the theatre, as an artist and as a manager.

It was a great honor that we were able to produce his play, which had never been produced before.

Why the name "Milagro"? Where did that come from?

José: Originally, when Dañel and I started the company, we selected the name ARTPAZ. That reflected my Latino roots, but also our genuine belief that you can see peace through the arts, that there was a social element to it, or a redeeming element. But when we incorporated as a non-profit, in 1985, we felt it was appropriate to find another name. We knew right away that we would not be successful as a commercial theatre company and that we had to be organized as a non-profit, hopefully, to take advantage of some opportunities of funding, and things like that, which may come our way. So, we started the process of thinking about a name, how we were going to call it. "Miracle" occurred to me one day. As I have told people, we believe in miracles; otherwise we wouldn't be doing this. And then, also, it was a miracle if we can get the show up at those times. It was a little fun and a little serious. It was originally called The Miracle Theatre Company. Officially, it's still listed as the Miracle Theatre Group, but about two years ago we rebranded the company and now we call it "Milagro."

Let's talk about how the changing times have affected Portland, how the community has evolved, and what made you start producing plays in Spanish written by Latina/o and/or Latin American playwrights.

Dañel: I have always produced bilingual plays, which for our audience here are plays with some Spanish in them. The impetus to do an all-Spanish play is a big risk-taker. Credit goes to Olga for making the program successful, not because of getting an audience, but because of getting actors. As José mentioned, when we did the first Festival, 130 people came, but they were not performers. It was very hard living in a predominantly Anglo community and trying to find people who speak Spanish, just even trying to do a bilingual play, never mind doing an all-Spanish play. So the way Olga was able to build a successful program was by starting training from a very early time. We trained our talent and built a pool of actors. The reason for the bilingual plays is because, as I mentioned earlier, we were doing plays for ESL students. Now, in the twenty-first century, everyone is trying to learn Spanish, so if your play is bilingual you can go back and forth. Here, they cut most foreign languages programs, except for Spanish. Here in Portland that is considered in High School the number one language that students should

learn to speak. That is also why building an audience for an all-Spanish play helps, too. We bring school groups in when we have the performance here at our theatre as well.

Olga: From the 1990s to the 2000, the demographics of the Latino community grew by 144%.

José: I think 1990 was a signature year, in terms of the census, because it was the year when Latinos became the majority minority in the State—they represented 4.5 percent of the population in so far as they can document it. And, then, when we hit 2010 the population grew to 12 percent. So, pretty much tripled, it was incredibly dramatic! We presented the first Spanish language production here by Repertorio Español, a play by Dolores Prida called *Botánica*. This was in 1993. We didn't know if there would be an audience or not, it was a big risk for us. Gilberto Zaldívar called me. They were doing a national tour, sponsored by Mervyn's. He said, "We'd really like to come in to Portland. We can do it for $3,000." And I said "Oh my god, let's see what happens." We put all our forces together; we contacted everybody. We brought over 600 people to see that performance and just made enough money to pay them back. That was the first thing we had for an audience of Spanish language theatre. The play was very successful, but we didn't feel that we as a company were prepared to do Spanish-language theatre yet. We knew that we had to do a lot of building to get there. So, in 2002, almost ten years later, we produced a staged reading of *Te llevo en la sangre* by Mónica Silver of Argentina. We filled the house, it was standing-room only. It was incredible the response. With that, then, we said "we can do this now." Also, at that time, we had enough actors that were Spanish-speaking actors. There was still some training that needed to be done. Before we were ready to mount a full production, we started doing workshops to develop technique and we did small readings, or little plays, over a series of years.

Olga: When I came on board in 2003, and I came in to see a play that I was auditioning to direct, they were producing *La barca sin pescador* [by Alejandro Casona]. It was part of a Festival but it was really clear that the actors needed training. So, when I came in, I asked if we can do a series of trainings. It wasn't workshops, it was a whole series every week-end through the season. We found a terrific teacher called Christy Drogosch, really well trained. A Spanish teacher, so her Spanish was perfect. She did workshops every week for the ensemble. The first year, they developed *Fuenteovejuna* [by Lope de Vega], because we had presidential elections and we wanted to do something revolutionary. But because we only had eight actors, we did a

deconstructed *Fuenteovejuna*. It was a beautiful production, with puppets, and people playing six characters. It was unintelligible, but it was gorgeous! We actually did it the next year in English; Daniel Jáquez did an adaptation with William Sam Gregory, who is a local playwright. The next year we continued to work with a series of workshops, this time with Pablo Jimenez, who had trained with Growtowski. He brought in all these movements and masks and we created the first variation of *Jardín de sueños*, thinking we can reach out to the Spanish-speaking children's theatre community. Then we stopped the training program, and just started focusing on plays. The next year we did *Ardiente paciencia*, and then *Rosalba y los Llaveros* [by Emilio Carballido]. We did a full production of *Te llevo en la sangre*. Then came *Bodas de sangre* [by García Lorca], a play that I had directed in English, and now I got to direct it in Spanish. It was great! Every time we did a Spanish language play, we would offer a series of workshops before we got into rehearsals. So, we built skills specific to the production. The two-year training program was really impactful in terms of building the ensemble. A team of actors still work with us today, not all of them. Some of them have gone out and done other things, but some are still with us.

What about the regular season? How do you plan your year in terms of what you want to accomplish?

Olga: Dañel is really in charge of the Touring and Education Program. She designs all the programs and selects the plays well in advance, and it's kind of amazing to watch. I get to work in what we call the main stage and the plays that get produced up here. I have been here now for 11 years and there has been a transformation over time, regarding how many plays we do during the season, what kinds of plays they are, where the Spanish-language plays fall. More recently, especially because I am a little more narrative-based, there have been more narrative pieces. But not exclusively, we have directors that have come and made some interesting movement-based, clown-based, acrobat-based kind of work. So, it's changed from when I arrived. We had a play in September, the "Día de los muertos," and we had a rental in December. Then we had the touring show that would premier in January, then three plays throughout the spring. There was a Festival in the middle of the spring time, the Festival Primaveral, and that's when we had the Spanish-language play. Then, eventually we dropped the play in September. We felt it wasn't feasible. It was in 2009, and the economy sort of tanked. We decided to do something different. We actually had an Associate Artistic Director with

us at the time: Tony Sonera. Tony said, "Let's do play readings, because you can't not do something during Hispanic heritage month." And, then, it was sort of really auspicious, kind of serendipitous, people started to call us, saying, "We are going to be in town with our flamenco company. Can we perform there?" Sure, we had some space in September. He created this thing called "Luna Nueva Festival" that he actually launched. It was really quite beautiful and it has been transformed throughout the years. This past year we brought Rickerby Hinds from UC Riverside to do his *Dreamscape* show. That was really great to have here! Then, we had Paco Padilla perform here, and a maestro cubano Efraín Hernández, who plays the lute. So, we have the Festival, then we have the "Día de los muertos," which is kind of an explosion. This sort of became our holiday show. People look forward to it and we even have a fundraiser dinner around it. We have a space called the Zócalo. We have a visual artist who comes in with his team of artists called Fusionarte. They create a series of *altares*, usually related thematically to the play. Then, again, we have the rental because there is a company that has been here longer than I have, which is called The 3rd Floor. They are a sketch-comedy group and they have been performing every December for I don't know how long. We have the Touring show and many times Dañel would do an ancillary installation also in the Zócalo. The Zócalo serves as installation space, as a workshop space, etc. Then, our Spanish-language plays, which by the time we did *Ardiente paciencia* we felt we were ready to invest in as a main stage production. One of our Board Members suggested that we do supertitles, so we started doing supertitles, projected, which was huge. And that became our February show. We had a spring time show that was sort of my experimental slot and that is when we did the shows that nobody would come to see, which is really frustrating but very exciting. But what happened is that we had sort of a crisis in Portland. We had a space in the city that had two theaters and housed twelve different companies, three major ones, and one of the companies that was there was the Jewish Theatre Collaborative. What happened there is that the guy who owned the building basically put everybody out. There were protesters, but he said "It is my building and I can do whatever I want with it." All the theatre companies were sent out to try to find homes. So, we welcomed the Jewish Theatre Collaborative here, because we had a long relationship with the Artistic Director Sacha Reich. She was actually an Artistic Associate when I came on board. She got that April slot, the experimental slot, and we have the May slot, and that's usually an English-language play. It's usually a bigger play, a boisterous play.

This year we are doing *American Night: The Ballad of Juan José* by Richard Montoya. So, that is how our season has evolved.

What is the composition of your audience, and how has it influenced your choice of works?

Olga: In terms of picking plays, we look for something that represents the pan-Latino experience.

José: That was an important issue at the very beginning that we had to consider. Because we are on the West Coast, it is so easy to identify us as a Chicano theatre company. I didn't want that to happen. I felt that one of the biggest issues that we were facing at that time, because of the growing Latino population but in a still very dominant white population, was a complete misunderstanding about Latino culture and Latino people. So, rather than reinforcing stereotypes, what we wanted to do was much more like pan-Latino, with works that represented every country, every culture that we possibly could. So, over the last 30 years, we have done Mexican, Central American, South American, Caribbean, Spanish, American, Puerto Rican, Chicano plays, you name it, as a way of showing to people that Latinos are very complex, that we have a lot of backgrounds, and we have a lot of differences in terms of our culture, our foods, our customs. When you get to the urban centers, we find that the community is much more diverse. So, statewide, Mexicans still represent 65 to 70 percent of the population. When you get to the urban communities, the equation somewhat changes. There are a lot of Central Americans, South Americans, and Islanders: *cubanos y puertorriqueños*.

Olga: Interestingly, I think is less about identity than it is about whether people are comfortable going to the theatre. Even if the majority of the community may represent Mexican heritage, it is more about whether, as a community member, you feel that going to the theatre is something that you do culturally, which means that we have representation from all the different communities. Probably the majority of our Latina/o audience members are of Mexican heritage, because they are the majority, but I would say that we have a good representation of Colombians, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, people who come because they like going to the theatre. And if it is theatre in Spanish, wow, that is something interesting, different, and appreciated because we are the only people doing anything like this in the region: Latino theatre, with the history and with the trained actors, and with the commitment. It's more about building a theatre-going audience than the heritages. On the other hand, what's interesting about Portland in terms of the non-Hispanic community, because

the majority of our audience is not Latina/o, we don't have a majority in the community. It's people who are curious, who are well-read, progressive; they want to know more, they have traveled a lot, and many have studied Spanish and want to refresh their relationship with the culture, culturalists. That's our English-speaking audience that comes to see the show.

Dañel: The touring company is a lot more complicated because, as I mentioned before, the first year that we took the show out the ESL teachers that invited us became advisers of the program. Once you get outside of Portland, the demographics really change a lot. There is a community called Woodburn, which is not too far from the city, but it's more rural and a farm-labor community. The plays started out being very simple because they were for young elementary school kids, and were based on fables and folk tales. They were "carpa" style, with a lot of movement and mask work. We started with one play and then looked for models of other touring companies. A lot of children's companies have a repertory of plays, such as five maybe, and they tour those five plays for ten years. But since we had such a small pool, both for schools and community at the time, we would do just one play, and then a year later, the teachers would say, "Okay, we have all seen it." So then we needed to do another play. We did a play about Zorro, and then we did a play called *The True History of Christopher Colombus*, which was boycotted by Christian schools in Southern Oregon. So we saw a political opportunity to start doing a little more serious work. The needs of the community were growing and we had moved up into high school and college performances. This was about 1996, when we were invited to collaborate with Actores del Método in D.F. The same teachers who helped launch our program were advising us, and saying: "Well, I am from El Salvador, maybe you can do a play about that," or "I'm from Peru, why don't you do a play about that?" Looking at the issues that would be interesting and educational for the community, I wrote a play in 1999, *Entre dos mundos*, about Radio Venceremos in El Salvador, and we did a play called *mipueblo.biz*, which was also a website. The play was about internet empowerment and the organization of the communities into *colectivas* in Peru, which sell their wares online. The point about this is that you couldn't find these kind of plays that we could adapt. We had four people that we found that could tour, speak Spanish, act and maybe sing, so we had to create plays for the people we had. It's hard to find plays that fit the traits of the actors, so it's easier to write the play for the actors. Over the last twenty years, I have written a lot of these plays for the touring company. The most recent one, *Cuéntame Coyote*, was about two

cousins crossing the border through Arizona. I went there and I met with people from the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation and was gifted a Coyote tale to put into the play. I met with all the immigration's service programs, and went to a deportation hearing. There are two coyotes in the play; there is the two-legged coyote who smuggles the cousins, and the other is a four-legged coyote who is from the Tohono O'odham tradition called "Ban." A trickster, similar to Elegguá; he is the guardian of the crossroads. He is the one who eventually leads them, and tricks them. In the Arizona heat, when you die, you turn into a skeleton in about three days. I met with a tracker while I was there who I developed the character around. He goes out and finds the bones, gets the DNA samples for the bones and sends them home to their families so they can bury their relatives. This year was really pivotal for me though because I'm shifting away from that role of playwright and working to build an education program. This last December I worked with Lakin Valdez, of Teatro Campesino, and he created a wonderful work that is just now starting a national tour, called *Searching for Aztlán.* As we toured many college campuses and talked to MEChA students, we discovered that across the country they are starting to lose their identity and strength. We created the work around that idea, and around the closing of the Mexican American studies program in Arizona. In the play, this woman gets lost in the storm, and then she goes on an adventure, much like the Wizard of Oz. That's how the plays are created and launched for the program. And along the way, having gone from Elementary, to Middle and to High School and to College. Now I have gone full circle again, and I'm reinvesting in plays that I wrote years ago for Elementary School. So, I brought back my *Aventuras de Don Quijote*. And I wrote a play called *El niño Diego*, about when Diego was a boy in art school. And out of that, also building a curriculum, writing curricula for the teaching artists to do residencies. For example, *El niño Diego* has a curriculum called "living mural project," where the kids learn about murals; they become murals, they act out murals. It's sort of a whole program, is not just the play. So you can go to school and you can have kids see art, kids create art and kids do art. The theatre of the future needs to be out in the schools, otherwise we are going to lose that. Audiences are declining, so the best way to build audience is to start from when they are really young and have them see plays, have them be in plays, have them be excited about theatre. So, my process as Artistic Director is more circular, more integrated, more holistic.

For someone who follows Milagro Teatro regularly, what's new and what's in the works for this year's programming?

Olga: Talking about pan-Latino, this year is very Mexican and Chicano oriented. The Festival was actually very diverse, and that is the direction that we are moving for next year's Festival that we are planning now, Luna Nueva Festival. One of the things that we noticed and we feel that we are trying to work against is the siloing of culture. The notion of being just Latino felt restrictive. Latino means many things. We opened up this year's festival to include stories of Japanese heritage, and of course *Dreamscape*, which is an African-American story. Even though playwright/director Rickerby Hinds is from Honduras, it's very much about that kind of racism and violence in California, not that it is not seen in other places in the country. We are trying to open up the definition of the Luna Nueva Festival. Next year, we are also going to be multi-cultural, inviting various partners that we have in the community to be part of the Festival focusing on children. We are looking at presenting a puppet show based on an Ecuadorian story, *When People Were Animals*. We have also invited: Taiko Drummers, which is Japanese culture; the Obo Addy Legacy Project, which is African drumming; the Metropolitan Youth Symphony, which is cultural but a different kind of event; and Nuestro Canto, another local Mexican-heritage story-telling company. The festival is going in that direction, not only multi-disciplinary, since it has been that from its inception, but multi-cultural. For the "Día de los muertos" we did last year, we created a play called *¡O Romeo!* In which Shakespeare meets "Día de los muertos." People went: "how do you do that?" We found a way and it was very funny! This year's "muertos" is going to be more folkloric; it's going to be called *La muerte baila*. La muerte goes on strike, she doesn't feel people respect her, and there is also a metaphor of "un muerto" who doesn't want to go back. The whole thing about "el día de los muertos" is that they go back. So, he says: "I'm done, I don't want to see those people ever more." There is a grudge, and they have to get over it so they can have a happy reunion. December, our comedy group is coming back, The 3rd Floor. Then, in January we are looking at a new touring show that Dañel has asked me to write, that's very exciting! It's about sex-trafficking in this area, how young immigrant girls in particular get lured into that life by men who promise them things, and who then say, "well, now you have to do me a favor," and, then, the girls become prostituted. It's very tragic, but it is happening too often. These women are basically being preyed upon; Latinas, people from different cultures, go to the mall and these guys buy them smoothies.

It's gang related also. The play is called *Broken Promises*. It's a problem for immigrants because a lot of times the girls feel that the parents don't know what's going on. So they look up to these "cultural experts," who are these gang members, who know what's going on. They feel that they have some power but then eventually they lose this power because they are in a compromised situation. Back to the current year, we did a Shakespeare play, the touring show *Searching for Aztlán*, about what it means to be Chicano now, which is touring around the country. We just took it to Eastern Oregon, to Fishtrap, a big writing conference. Then we just launched *Opción múltiple*, which is a Mexican play, by Luis Mario Moncada. This play had strong roles for five women, and we have a lot of women actors. The Jewish Theatre is going to come in with an adaptation of a novel, *The Ministry of Special Cases*, by Nathan Englander. It's about the disappeared in Argentina. They actually worked with Los Porteños to do a program in January called *Echoes*. Los Porteños wrote about the disappeared, whatever that meant for them. Then, we are finishing the season with *American Night: The Ballad of Juan José*—a Mexican who crosses over. He is a former police officer who just had it with the corruption and decides to become an American citizen. So he crosses over, and he is studying and studying for the exam. It's late the night before his exam and he falls asleep because he is working so hard. And he has this big dream. In the dream, American history just comes at him, from the beginning, the Founding Fathers and all these characters. It's very surreal and wild, and crazy, and they are basically saying: "America sucks." It's sort of re-visioning American history. He is asking himself: "Why would I want to be a citizen of this crazy country?" But at the end, they have a town hall meeting and all of these characters come forward and they all get to speak, and say whatever is on their mind. And he says "Oh, this is why I want to be here, they may be crazy but at least they have a voice." It's pro-U. S., but paying the price, in spite of all the history, and knowing that at least there is hope.

What is the future holding for Teatro Milagro?

Olga: We are actually writing a proposal to try to create a *zarzuela*, a modern *zarzuela*, sort of a Cuban-based *zarzuela*.

José: We want to make a relationship with the Metropolitan Youth Symphony, and the artistic director and conductor is Colombian. Maybe that is a good connection, plus New World as opposed to Spain. We are also looking at making a partnership with the Portland Opera. The Youth Symphony, the Opera and us, all together, I think it will be the first time that anyone has

produced a *zarzuela* in the Northwest. It will be wonderful if we find an existing work that is perfect, but we can also take something and update it, particularly now with the Cuban politics. It's a big project.

From left to right: Beatriz J. Rizk, Olga Sánchez, Luis Mario Moncada, José González, and Milagro's Season Sponsor Ronnie Lacroute. Photo: Grace Dávila-López (February 14, 2015).

Photo: Milagro Teatro Archives.

Notes

[1] Anne García-Romero, "Introduction," "The 2013 Latina/o Theatre Commons National Convening: A Narrative Report" by Brian Eugenio Herrera. The Report can be found at: <http://howlround.com/>. See also Teresa Marrero, "Latina/o Theater Commons National Convening: Historic Event, for Latina/o Theater in the United States," *Gestos, Teoría y Práctica del Teatro Hispánico.* 29.57 (April 2014): 149-51. Print.

[2] See Grace Dávila-López, "Encuentro 2014: una muestra del estado actual del teatro latino," *Latin American Theatre Review* 48.2 (Spring 2015): 163-76. Print.

[3] For further information on the company, please visit the webpage: <www.Milagro.org>.