

## Creative Residency explores “love, exile, religion, power...and military dictatorships in Latin America”



Artists from one of Cuba’s most respected theatres, Grupo Teatro Buendía, traveled to Chicago this fall for a five-week residency to shape a new work by Juan Rulfo, considered the father of magical realism. Students from Northwestern University reflect on their artistic experiences in an article by Yolanda Cesta Cursach, Director of Performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), who also writes about the deep exploration provided through Performing America’s Creative Residency Program. MCA Chicago will present the world premiere of *Pedro Páramo* in association with the Goodman Theatre on March 22–31, 2013.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 02

Work in progress showing of *Pedro Páramo* by Teatro Buen Dia and students of Northwestern University’s Communication School

### Cultivating Collaborations. Engaging Communities. Supporting Creativity.

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### NPN Welcomes Renewed Support

NPN is proud to announce continued support from the state of Louisiana. NPN was awarded a Stabilization grant in the amount of \$20,250 for general operating support and its New Orleans Local Network, an intentional learning community. This work is supported in part by a grant from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism, in cooperation with the Louisiana State Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency.

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# Buendía, Chicago!

BY: Yolanda Cesta Cursach

← CONTINUED FROM PAGE 01

*The Performing Americas Program's Creative Exchange provides artists with resources to travel abroad and conduct three to five week creative residencies in the performing arts. Since 2007, PAP has awarded grants to 31 artists from widely different regions in Latin America, the Caribbean and the U.S., who have conducted residencies in diverse communities from Portland, Oregon to Port au Prince, Haiti, and from Cochabamba, Bolivia to Lewiston, Maine. Creative Exchanges are flexible: artists and hosts work together to craft projects that suit the needs of the artist, while providing an opportunity for deep engagement within a community during an extended stay. These projects might not otherwise be possible without the alignment of purpose developed in the planning process, and the inroads that the host provides. PAP has supported choreographers, technical theater professionals, puppet makers and electronic musicians, among others.*

*In the spring of 2012, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (MCA) hosted a Creative Exchange with two members of the Cuban theater company Grupo Teatro Buendía from Havana, Cuba. This exchange project is an excellent example of how building partnerships and leveraging funding beyond the Creative Exchange award can create deep impact and ongoing international dialogue among artists and host organizations.*

*Yolanda Cursach, MCA's Associate Director of Performance Programs, shared her reflections on the residency she conceived with the company:*

Sugar, coffee, and cigars! If the major exports from our nearest neighbor in the Caribbean are familiar, now, thanks to NPN's Creative Exchange, you can add to your awareness one of Cuba's most venerated national resources — just as vital and stimulating — Grupo Teatro Buendía. The universally celebrated and critically acclaimed group made its U.S. debut a mere two years ago, for the 2010 Latino Theater Festival at Chicago's Goodman Theatre. I started dreaming immediately after seeing their barrier-crushing theater. Speed-forward to May 2012, where at the MCA Chicago, I am serving *cafecito*, with plenty of *azúcar*, to Buendía's founder Flora Lauten and the playwright Raquel Carrió. "We show not only our rhythms and our music, we show our scars. And that's so universal, that if the audience opens up, I think that we will embrace each other," Lauten says. "First of all, my generation made the revolution. But that doesn't mean that when years pass you have to have a passive attitude towards what you made when we were young... you have to reflect on your reality, and then you have to talk about what you think is not going in the best way."

Lauten is reflecting on the recently concluded four weeks of a Creative Exchange, where she and Carrió worked with students at the Northwestern University Theater and Interpretation Center to adapt the 1955 novel *Pedro Páramo* (which *Slate* called "the perfect novel you've never heard of") for the stage. Outside the U.S., this novel by Juan Rulfo (1917-1986, Mexico) is recognized as one of the greatest tales in Latin American literature. Rulfo is considered the father of magical realism, galvanizing writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez to raise the voices and laughter of forgotten people. Carrió brings focus to a final planning meeting: "this workshop is dedicated to the imaginary world of the actor. It explores characters and their interrelationships concerning the love, exile, religion, power and consequences that military dictators in Latin America have wrought." We jump into the details of reassembling the students at MCA Stage, where they are being introduced to professionals from the theater community for the Creative Exchange's culminating workshop performance.

Flora Lauten was born in Havana in 1945, and founded Grupo Teatro Buendía in 1986 with fellow graduates of the Higher Institute of Art in Havana (ISA). Under her direction, the group characteristically weaves traditional Cuban music and dance with language to create a strongly physical and vividly image-based theater, which bridges languages and preconceptions about Cuban life. Raquel Carrió (Havana, 1951) is an award-winning playwright, essayist, and founder of the School of Performing Arts at the University of Arts in Havana, where she is Professor of Dramaturgy and Theatre Research Methodology. She has been Lauten's artistic collaborator at Buendía since its founding.

Together they also run the group's research arm, the International School of Theater of Latin America and the Caribbean, to experiment across the cultural traditions of Latin America and the Caribbean, with the expressive means of the actor and language. For more than two decades, Lauten and Carrió have given workshops, lectures and seminars and collaborated on prize-winning work by Buendía throughout South America,



Work in progress showing of *Pedro Páramo* by Teatro Buen Dia and students of Northwestern University's Communication School

Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe. I cannot stop thinking about Buendía's artistically portentous and emotionally complete *La Visita de la Vieja Dama* (based on Friedrich Durrenmatt's *The Visit*) and *Charenton* (inspired by Peter Weiss' *Marat-Sade*), which I saw in Chicago in 2010.

In the end, Lauten and Carrió's Creative Exchange involved eight highly talented acting students and student crewmembers of Northwestern University's Communication School for a five-week intensive experimental workshop. Our aim was to workshop Carrió's adaptation of Rulfo's novel and flesh out its characters by performing it before a small invited audience.

Four weeks at Northwestern provided the students an opportunity to step into leading roles and cultivate them, as well as to explore a whole new way of approaching the dramatic process. The final six days, culminating in a 40-minute workshop performance at MCA, gave the students and professional local actors a chance to work together on a stage. The brilliant lighting by Richard Norwood, MCA's theater technical director, fully captured Carrió's description of "shadows, echoes and whispers."

Communication student Yando Lopez-Giron called the experience unreal. "It was my first performance in downtown Chicago and I'm so thankful to have been a part of it," he

said. "We reworked the story to make it more identifiable to immigrants, so my character started speaking in English and progressively ended up speaking in Spanish."

The entire workshop leading up to the performance was conducted in Spanish, and while all the actors involved were fluent, the stage managers were not. "There were definitely a few miscommunications," Rachel Stubblefield-Tave laughingly acknowledged, "but Henry and the cast were great about translating for us, and I don't think you necessarily need to understand the language of a show to grasp its meaning. Opera is famous for being seen in another language, and I think multilingual theatre is becoming more and more common."

Student actor Shawn Morgenlander agreed. "Flora and Raquel's artistry is totally different from what I'm used to in theatre," she said. "It's outwardly focused, very based in images, movements, and symbols. I had to divorce myself from the idea of psychological realism that's so prevalent in our training and embrace a different kind of reality. But the goal remained the same: working from the heart, instead of just the mind."

Still talked about by our invited audience from the Goodman, Northwestern, and broader theater community, the MCA's ambitious Creative Exchange and its culminating workshop performance also

foretell the excitement of what is to come. This December, for three weeks, the Chicago professional actors who participated in the Creative Exchange will travel to Havana to study with Lauten and Carrió at Grupo Teatro Buendía.

I am deeply grateful for the tireless and genius contributions of Henry Godinez, Goodman Theatre Artistic Associate and faculty at Northwestern's Communication School. Godinez was born in Cuba and came to the U.S. as a child with his parents shortly after Cuba's 1959 revolution. The extraordinary success of the NPN Creative Exchange is in no small way due to Godinez' guidance of the students, assisting Lauten in directing the five weeks, as well as helping to enlist the extraordinary local actors who are continuing on MCA Chicago's expanded residency this winter.

Grupo Teatro Buendía's world premiere of *Pedro Páramo* will be presented by The Goodman in association with the MCA Chicago on March 22-31, 2013, and takes place in the Owen at the Goodman Theater.

Support for this project was generously provided by the International Connections Fund of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Performing Americas Program of the National Performance Network, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation.



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## **NPN CEO to be Featured Speaker at Sphinx's First National Conference**

*The Sphinx Organization focuses on youth development and diversity in classical music, making great strides in identifying, cultivating and nurturing talented youth of color in the Detroit area and nationally. Sphinx is hosting its inaugural Convening on Diversity in the Performing Arts, February 15-17, 2013 in Detroit. NPN was a founding partner for this new effort ("SphinxCon") and CEO MK Wegmann will be a featured speaker.*

*Check out the schedule and registration at:  
[www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinxcon](http://www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinxcon)*

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## **Brave New Voices, New Leaders, New Ways of Working**

Youth Speaks (YS) is widely known for its signature spoken-word programming (*Brave New Voices*, televised on HBO), but has an additional goal of leadership and citizen development. In over 50 cities, young leaders have benefited from "Brave New Leaders" and its ongoing professional development activities. This national effort is reflected in YS' own staff development: with more than half of its Bay Area staff in their 20s, Youth Speaks puts together a monthly professional development series featuring some of area's most distinguished educators, artists and organizational experts. "I know that the work impacted our staff, but it also totally revolutionized the way we approach collaboration as an organization," says Joan Osato, producing director of Youth Speaks. The professional development series was supported in part by NPN's Mentorship and Leadership Initiative (MLI), with funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, MetLife Foundation, American Express and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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## **NPN Disrupts Time/Space Continuum: how to be in two places at once**

You can't buy a ticket for the NPN Annual Meeting Showcase in Philadelphia this December, but you can still enjoy the performances, for free, in the comfort of your own home. In addition to work from four Creation Fund artists (Teo Castellanos' D-Projects, Living Word Project, Lucky Plush Productions and inkBoat), "Live & On Stage" will feature short excerpts from a wide variety of Philadelphia's performing arts scene, curated by a local host committee. Local performers will include Elaine Hoffman Watts and The Fabulous Shpielkes, Kariamou & Company, Da•Da•Dance Project, Team Sunshine Performance Corporation, Jennifer Childs/1812 Productions, and anonymous bodies || art collective.

Tune into #NewPlayTV for live-streaming from the Painted Bride Arts Center on Friday, December 14 at 2:30 p.m. and Saturday, December 15 at 7:30 p.m. (EST).

[www.livestream.com/newplay](http://www.livestream.com/newplay)