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Spreading Acceptance through Performance

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Spreading acceptance through performance

When Tricia Castañeda-Gonzales '09 returned to the Linfield stage this year, she brought Latino heritage to life through rhythmic bilingual expression.

Castañeda-Gonzales, a member of Teatro Milagro, the Northwest's only bilingual, international touring theatre company, returned to Linfield twice this academic year to perform, as well as present workshops and residencies on campus and in the community. Teatro Milagro is one branch of Portland's Miracle Theatre Group, known as the hub of Latino expression.

"Patrons have the opportunity to participate in outreach programs, classes on cooking and dance, holiday celebrations and shows that keep them on the edge of their seats," Castañeda-Gonzales said.

B'aktun 13, presented in September in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, featured the journey of three immigrants who experience indigenous prophecies about the final era of the Mayan calendar. The second show, *Frida, un Retablo*, ran in April and featured the life of legendary Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Both featured post-show discussions.

Teatro Milagro has performed from Mexico to Canada sharing cultural awareness and a passion for performance. The emphasis on these two elements captured Castañeda-Gonzales' attention after she was introduced to the company as a student by Ronni Lacroute, Linfield College trustee, at a performance of *Boomcrackefly*.

"The performance and space itself was enchanting," said Castañeda-Gonzales. "The staff was genuine and it felt like an incredible opportunity to connect with my heritage."

Shortly after, Castañeda-Gonzales was invited to join the touring company. Her work included setting the stage, organizing and implementing curriculum for residencies, and marketing performances

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— Tricia Castañeda-Gonzales '09

and workshops to the community and schools. The tour company performs for students ranging from kindergarten to the collegiate level, as well as churches, libraries and multicultural centers.

"The biggest challenge that we face during workshops is trying to push students past their personal boundaries," said Castañeda-Gonzales. "It is difficult but well worth the end result. They walk away with a new appreciation for art and new lease on life."

The Miracle Theatre Group not only challenged her as an actor and teacher but allowed her to bring diversity, acceptance and art to various communities across the nation.

"Often times the subjects are taboo" said Castañeda-Gonzales. "We hope that by presenting these issues, we open up the windows for discussion."

There are many aspects to consider for each production including funding, grant writing, rehearsals and travel necessities, Castañeda-Gonzales said. Company members are quick to adapt since each location is different. A Linfield education gives her an edge in understanding the complexities of preparing for performances.

"Linfield theatre graduates walk away with a large skill set," said Castañeda-Gonzales, who is proficient at building a set, stage, hanging lights, managing and more. "Linfield prepares you for the theatre world as a whole; my degree has been invaluable throughout my career."



Tricia Castañeda-Gonzales played the title role in Teatro Milagro's production of *Frida, un Retablo*, the story of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo whose legendary independence inspired generations of feminists.

The Linfield theatre department developed Castañeda-Gonzales' skill set and established lasting relationships. In the Linfield production of *Women in Congress* directed by Tom Gressler, she was cast opposite her best friend Wyatt Lee. They are now married and joke they owe their marriage to Gressler. Linfield professors were a source of support and guidance.

"I am who I am and where I am because of my professors [Ty, Brenda, Janet, Vicky, Rob and Jackson]," said Castañeda-Gonzales. "I am very blessed to have studied at Linfield under such incredible mentors."

In the future, Castañeda-Gonzales hopes to develop more experience as an actor on film but plans to continue her work with Teatro Milagro and become an artistic director. 🌱

— Crystal Galarza '13