
In Memoriam for the Recently Departed: Lupe Ontiveros, Tony Curiel, Juan Antonio Castro, Elizabeth Peña, Goyo Flores, and Lina Gallegos

Carlos Morton and others

It all started in November 2014, at the Latino Theater *Encuentro* in Los Angeles. Someone had set up a Day of the Dead altar for recently deceased *teatro* workers with their photos and little stick-it notes with something personal about each one: Lupe Ontiveros, Tony Curiel, Juan Castro, and Elizabeth Peña, who had just died that week. Goyo Flores passed the following year in May. We stood there, drinks in hand, and made a toast to them, at the same time recognizing that we were also celebrating the nearly 50 years of Chicano Teatro that had passed since the founding of El Teatro Campesino. We mourn the passing of those who came before as we marvel at the new work being created by the ones who came after us.

Tony Curiel

Tony Curiel was born September 2, 1954, and died March 3, 2013. He was an accomplished Chicano theatre director who had a 9-year association with El Teatro Campesino (1983-1992) as Associate Artistic Director. He was Associate Professor of Drama at UC San Diego (1989-2005) and directed more than 50 professional productions over the course of his career. During his years with El Teatro Campesino, Tony directed both new and older works by Luis Valdez, including *La Virgen del Tepeyac*, *La Pastorela*, and *I Don't Have to Show You No Stinking Badges*, and he also served as dramaturg. Later, Tony directed some of the earliest professional productions of plays by Culture Clash and Octavio Solis. A member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, he directed productions at The San Jose Repertory Theatre, The Japan America Theatre, The La Jolla Playhouse, the GeVa Theatre, the Public Theatre, and Opera Pacific, among others. He was

a site visitor and panelist for the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Tony received his B.A. in Drama from UCSD and earned an M.A. in Drama at Stanford University. He was awarded a Princess Grace Theatre Fellowship in 1985. His productions received awards from the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle and Outstanding Achievement Awards in 1985 and 1987 from the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Tony's papers have been donated to the California and Multicultural Archives at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is survived by his children, Maria Allegra and Alejandro Curiel.

Barbara Brinson Curiel, Humboldt State University

Elizabeth Peña

I was stunned to hear the news that my friend and colleague Elizabeth had died. After all, we were the same age! She was smart, sexy, and funny, and had an indelible passion for people. She worked as an actress on the groundbreaking Showtime series *Resurrection Blvd.* Later, when she directed an episode, she insisted on making me an extra – “the designer” of a nightclub we had on the show. She devised a scene with her character going over drawings and color swatches. She kept feeding me lines, but I told her I had been told not to speak. She whispered in my ear, in her mischievous way, “If you say something and I put it in the show, they will have to pay you!” She made me laugh. I saw her bring depth to characters that most would be content to stereotype. It has been said that she elevated the maid to a noble character. She was simply a great actor. She was best known for her work on the movies *La Bamba* and *Lonestar*, and later on the TV series *Modern Family*. She was devoted to her husband and kids and always told a great story about how she had met him, knowing from the first instant that he was the guy for her. It was the morning of 9/11 and it was Elizabeth who insisted to the producers that we shut down filming for the day. It was the right thing to do.

John Iacovelli, Production Designer

Gregorio “Goyo” Flores

Born in 1947, Goyo Flores was raised in Calexico, California. He was a star athlete during high school and went on to become a highly decorated Vietnam veteran (medical specialist, Airborne and Special Forces). I first met Goyo in 1976 and we became lifelong friends as he regaled us with his stories of Vietnam. He had the kind of wicked humor that could take you to hell and

back, which is how he survived the war! After returning from Vietnam, he discovered his true calling as an actor, taking classes at a community college and going on to receive his B.A. in Dramatic Arts from UC San Diego, where he appeared in 1977 as Dios in my play, *El Garden*, the first Chicano play ever done on the main stage at UCSD, directed by Jorge Huerta.

In 1978, Goyo played *El Capitán* in the San Diego on Stage production of *Los dorados*, which toured San Diego County over fifty times. Other memorable roles include a Puerto Rican steam bath attendant in *Steam Bath* and The Miser in a production of *The Miser of Mexico* at UC Riverside. He also appeared in a production of *Short Eyes* by Miguel Piñero. He went on to receive an M.A. in Theater Arts from San Diego State University, where he wrote his thesis on my plays. A dedicated activist and organizer, Goyo was a member of El Teatro de la Esperanza, co-founder of Teatro Meta (Old Globe Theater), Teatro Tlaquetzque, and the Latino Ensemble of San Diego.

Goyo made his living teaching and mentoring youths at the San Diego Unified School District, Mesa College, and Southwestern College, among others. Toward the end of his life, he turned to directing. In November 2014, he staged my play *Johnny Tenorio* for Chronos Theater Group, for which he served as president. At the time of his death, he was also Chapter President of the San Diego Special Forces Association. He passed away in the company of his wife, Olga Villanueva-Flores, family, and friends on May 24, 2015, the day before Memorial Day.

Carlos Morton, University of California, Santa Barbara

Lina Gallegos

Lina Gallegos was born in Galveston, Texas. The oldest in a large, first-generation Mexican-American family, she was the first in her family to attend college, graduating *summa cum laude* with a Bachelor's degree and later earning a Master's degree at the University of Houston. She taught middle school and high school Spanish and French and worked as a radio newscaster. Moving to Los Angeles in 1989 to focus on her acting career, she became part of the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts family, performing in many plays, including *La falsa crónica de Juana la Loca*, *Doña Rosita la soltera*, *Rosalba y los Llaveros*, and *Women without Men*, for which she won a Cesar Award for Best Actress. She then started writing plays, all produced in Hollywood, including *Maggie's Madness*, *Latino Lunacy*, *Damn Joe*, *Yellow Tulips*, *Hot and Bothered*, and *Paloma*, which she later adapted with Yolanda Romersa into an award-winning short film. Her biggest success

was with *Wild in Wichita*, which won the MetLife prestigious “Nuestras Voces” prize and the ACE award for Best Play. It was produced three times in Los Angeles in one year, travelling three different communities. First at the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts/LADiversified Productions, directed by Denise Blazor, then at LATC, produced by Jose Luis Valenzuela/Latino Theater Company, and finally at Sinergia/Frida Kahlo Theatre, produced by Ruben Amavizca, with the same company of actors performing in both Spanish and English but totally different sets and concepts. In New York, it was produced by the Repertorio Español and subsequently received the HOLA award for Outstanding Achievement in Playwriting. Her last performance was at the Whitefire Theater’s Fall Shorts, where her ten-minute play *How Dick and Jane Fell in Love* was performed. Lina was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and died in December, surrounded by her family and her second family of colleagues and friends.

Denise Blazor, director, actor, and writer

Juan Antonio Castro

Juan Antonio Castro was born on July 2, 1942, in Dallas, Texas, and passed away on November 10, 2013, in Gig Harbor, Washington. I met Juan in 1964, when we were undergraduates cast as sword carriers in a professional production of *King Lear*, directed by John Houseman. We stayed in touch and became the best of friends. Juan began his career as a professional actor, singer, and musician. After a stint in New York, he returned to Los Angeles and began to work in television, playing (often) stereotypical Mexican or Native-American characters with as much dignity as Hollywood allowed. In response, he was one of the founders of Nosotros, an organization of Mexican-American actors dedicated to improving the portrayals of Latinas and Latinos in the profession.

After earning an MFA in Directing from UCLA, Juan began directing as well as teaching acting, his final “starring role.” Juan’s last teaching appointment was at Mesa College in San Diego, California. This man was a teacher and a director of the highest standards. He was gentle and nurturing, yet diplomatically forceful when he needed to get the best performances out of his student actors. His careful methods resulted in excellent performances and productions as his students evolved from being assigned supporting roles to being cast in challenging major roles.

Castro was an exceptional director with a keen eye for the *mise-en-scene*. He was an actor’s director, sensitive to the frail egos and insecure postures

we often find in our profession. He was kind, gentle, and compassionate with his students and equally accessible to all of the production staff and faculty. He loved his students and they clearly loved him. It was always a joy to see the respect and admiration Castro's students had for him whenever I visited his campus.

Perhaps the best testament to our success as teachers is where our students go when they graduate. Juan was phenomenal, placing his students at major institutions across the country. When we gathered at Mesa College to celebrate Juan's life, people came from across the country, everyone in awe of what "Coach" had taught them, not just about acting or the theatre but about Life. He is survived by his wife, Jewel, and we all miss him, but his presence lives on in all of the people whose lives he touched.

Jorge A. Huerta, University of California, San Diego

Lupe Ontiveros

Lupe Ontiveros was an award-winning actress, producer, activist, and visionary. She was a force of nature, full of life and love for the arts and her community. Lupe and I met in 1978 when she played my mother in Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit*; we became lifelong friends. Lupe was an incredible talent who, like many Latina actors, was rarely allowed to play the roles she was capable of. But, she opened doors and cared deeply about those actors who came after her. Her accomplishments are many. Here are a few highlights of her amazing career. Whether portraying "La Nacha" in the Oscar-nominated film *El Norte* or serving as a founding member of LA's Latino Theatre Company, Ontiveros made both memorable and lasting contributions to the entertainment industry. Her film credits include *Picking Up the Pieces* (with Woody Allen), *Chuck and Buck*, *As Good As It Gets* (with Jack Nicholson), *The Brave* (directed by Johnny Depp), and *Mi familia* and *Selena* (both directed by Gregory Nava). Other credits include *Goonies* and *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze) and *Storytelling* (Todd Solondz), to name a few. Ontiveros also starred in the HBO feature *Real Women Have Curves*, for which she received the prestigious Special Jury Award from The Sundance Film Festival for Best Dramatic Actress. Her passing has been an incredible loss for all of us, especially the Latina/o artistic community.

*Evelina Fernandez - TCG Fox Foundation Fellow
Latino Theater Company*