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### Cover Page Footnote

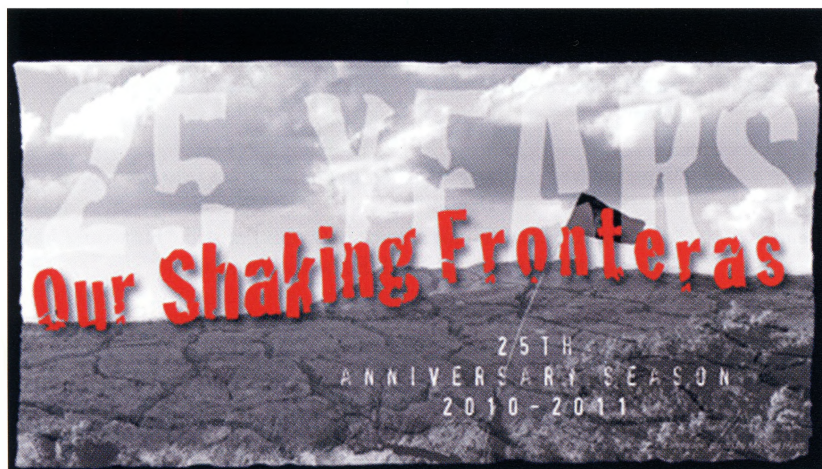
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# ARTISTIC FEATURE

## Borderlands Theater (Tucson, Arizona)

Barclay Goldsmith

By María Isabel Ochoa



Images provided by Borderlands Theater. <http://www.borderlandstheater.org>

**B**orderlands Theater is a professional theater company recognized nationally and internationally for their risk-taking productions and educational programs. In its 25th Anniversary, *Borderlands Theater* is still shaking limits and producing raw material giving voice to an invisible population. Their productions are both physically and socially from a “border” lens. It has continued to produce excellent theater and has expanded its frontiers to reach audiences beyond their Arizona borders.

This past spring, they collaborated with *Prop Theater* in Chicago in a rolling world premier production (Mexico City, Tucson and Chicago) and, local playwright and director, Tanya Saracho. She directed the play, ‘Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert’, initially commissioned by *Borderlands Theater* and based on fieldwork by Anna Ochoa O’Leary. It is a raw and emotional story based on four women that trek the desert towards the American dream. It received raved reviews as *Timeout Chicago Magazine* recounts:

Arizona was derived from a series of interviews with immigrant women deported while crossing into the U.S. Led by Marcela (Mari Stratton), their guide, the four women trek across the desert, at one point jokingly comparing themselves to ‘The Sisterhood of Traveling Pants’. There’s nothing warm and fuzzy about this sisterhood, however; Tucson playwright Kara Hartzler depicts the strained relationships of women

from varied class and racial backgrounds, forced together by circumstances, ultimately self-centered in their pursuit of a better life.

*What do you think about while you walk?* One asks. *I think about Moses and the Israelites crossing the desert,* Marcela answers.

Later, she admits that God wasn’t there at all, not in the desert. *I didn’t think it would be so easy,* she tells Lupe (Jazmin Corona), after leaving a wounded member for dead. (Scanlon, May 4, 2011)

This play is one of many that *Borderlands Theater* has commissioned that is a first-hand testimony of endless lives lost along the U.S.-Mexican border. It transcends cultures and class so that all can relate to the plight of surviving and fighting for a better life.

Borderlands Theater’s vision has remained the same since its humble beginnings.

### FOUNDER OF BORDERLANDS THEATER

Recently, the managing editor of *Diálogo* had the opportunity to interview Barclay Goldsmith, founder of *Borderlands Theater*. Goldsmith founded *Borderlands* in 1986. “[It] started as an outgrowth of a local Tucson theater collective, *Teatro Libertad*, which in turn was inspired by Luis Valdez’s world famous *Teatro Campesino*” (Allen, December 2006). Goldsmith recalls,

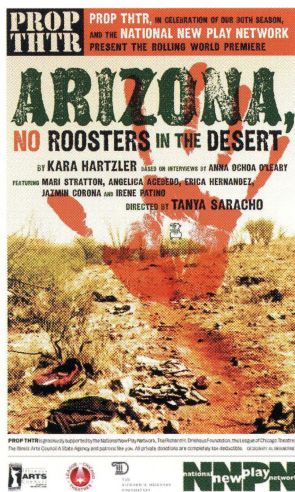
... theatre reconnected me, as an artist, into this community. When we started, it was more collective than collaborative, but there’s been a constant reexamining of the structure. We’ve been in transition away from the collective into the unknown territory of traditional regional theatre structure. (Allen, December 2006)

Goldsmith quickly adds:

I didn’t do it alone. I have had vast support over the years! There were many *veteranos* and younger new faces.

*Borderlands Theater* has been fortunate to have a tireless board that collaborates a great deal with community non-profits bringing to light through their work, issues important to the community. Goldsmith emphasizes:

WE CAME OUT OF COMMUNITY ACTIVISM,  
CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, DEMANDING A VOICE FOR BORDER PEOPLE  
BECAUSE THEY ARE CITIZENS OF THE WORLD.



We wouldn't be around without the energy and vision of Associate Artistic Director, Eva Zorilla Tessler; Education Outreach guru, Alida Holguin Wilson Gunn; and Literary Manager, Toni Press-Coffman who represent together, collectively, 55 years of dedicated work with the company.

Indeed, *Borderlands Theater* has accomplished and solidified partnerships that have reached beyond Tucson and Arizona. It has developed and co-produced plays by Guillermo Reyes at *Bravo Theater* (Phoenix) and Joan Holden (lead writer) with the *San Francisco Mime Troup* ('13 Days: How the New Zapatistas Shook the World', also was on national tour, 1998.) For the past decade through the U.S.-Mexico program it has undertaken bi-national collaborations with theaters in Hermosillo (*Casa de Cultura Sonorense*), and Mexico City (*CEUVOZ: Centro de Estudios y Uso de La Voz*, Luisa Huertas Director and *El Circulo Teatral*, Victor Carpinteiro and Alberto Estrella Directors). There's been a constant cross-cultural exchange, Carpinteiro and Huertas have both performed in Tucson and Goldsmith has directed plays in Mexico City. Plays have been written by the late Victor Hugo Rascon Banda ('La Mujer Que Cayo del Cielo' and others) and Mario Diamant ('Cita a Ciegas'/Blind Date). Rascon Banda is one of Mexico's most prolific playwrights, his work is often about *El Norte* and the border or *el fronterizo*, he too has found a home at *Borderlands Theater*.

Goldsmith proudly adds their most recent collaborative:

*Borderlands Theater* is the founder with nine other theaters of the *National New Play Network* (NNPN), now an organization of 27 theaters nationally. *Prop Theater* in Chicago is one of those theaters; we champion the development and production of new plays. NNPN recently sponsored the rolling world premier of 'Arizona: No Roosters in the Desert' with *Borderlands*, *Prop Theater* and *El Circulo Teatral* in Mexico City.

We value our collaborations and successes in Chicago, says Goldsmith. *Prop Theater* has twice hosted the NNPN's showcases. *Goodman Theater* produced 'Oedipus El Rey' (based on Sophocles), written by Luis Alfaro, right on the heels of the *Borderlands* world premier in 1999.

There are many challenges ahead for *Borderlands* in light of what is happening in Arizona. However, they have found deeper commitment to their work. Goldsmith says,

Especially when we are in the center of the storm. We don't have the luxury of embracing themes and ideas not connected to PLACE. We are geocentric in the good sense of the word, knowing that our landscape in certain issues stretches far and wide.

I recently convened with a group of Latino(a) playwrights and producers at *Los Angeles Theatre Center*. In the early *teatro* days we got together yearly at TENAZ Festivals. It was good to see some of the *veteranos* like Jorge Huerta (retired UCSD professor with decades of commitment to *Chicano Theater*), Jose Luis Valenzuela, Evalina Fernandez, Josefina Lopez and several from *El Teatro Campesino*, who have been along with others in the room, constant *teatristas*. There was *platica* once again about forming a support network.

I am not Latino, so I couldn't speak for the people in the room. Latino(a) playwrights, like many playwrights, are desperate to have their work produced and so many theaters won't take chances on new plays. *Borderlands* worries that we have lost touch with the base audience of working class Chicanos/Latinos that gave us inspiration at the start back in the late sixties. The new Latino audience is educated, (in an academic sense), professional, and global; it mirrors, except for culture, the main stream audience that occasionally comes to our theater.

One thing remains the same, *Borderland Theater* wants audiences to support, even demand more new plays. Goldsmith shares,

In Mexico, where I have directed and lived for several years, I see many, many young faces in the theaters. It is cheaper there, comparatively speaking, and this gives me hope.

#### WORKS CITED

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- Scanlon, Suzanne. Rev. of *Arizona, No Roosters in the Desert*, dir. Tanya Saracho. *Timeout Chicago* 4 May 2011. Print.

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