GALita presents La llamada de Sylvia MÃ©ndez

Entertainment 2021-09-23 12:15:20

Washington, D.C. GALitaa program of GALA for the entire family, is proud to present the world premiere of ***La llamada de Sylvia Méndez: Separate Is Never Equal*** by Cornelia Cody. Commissioned by GALA Hispanic Theatre and directed by Elena Velasco, this bilingual production will be presented at GALA Theatre, 3333 14th Street NW, Washington, DC 20010 on **October 16, 17, 23, and 24, 2021**. The theater is located one block north of the Columbia Heights Metro station on the Green and Yellow lines. Discounted parking is available at the Giant Food garage on Park Road NW.

The story of Sylvia Méndez and her family's struggle to desegregate the schools in 1940s California is told by Sylvia's classmate and best friend, Rosita. The two girls meet at Hoover School, a two-room shack designated for children of Mexican descent. The Méndez, along with four other Mexican-American families fight to integrate the public schools so that Sylvia and the other Mexican children can receive the same education as non-Hispanic students.

Also on the line is the friendship between Sylvia and Rosita. Through songs, games, and poetry, the two girls grow very close. But Rosita's parents, who are migrant workers, are afraid of "rocking the boat." They do not join the Méndez in their legal struggle. This causes a rift in the friendship between the two girls.

On February 18, 1946, Judge Paul J. McCormick (an Irish-Catholic American) ruled in favor of Méndez and his co-plaintiffs. However, the school district appealed. Several organizations joined the appellate case, including the ACLU, the American Jewish Congress, the Japanese-American Citizens League, and the NAACP, which was represented by Thurgood Marshall. On April 14, 1947, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the ruling in *Méndez v. Westminster* in favor of the Mexican families. After the ruling was upheld on appeal, then-

Governor Earl Warren moved to desegregate all public schools and other public spaces in California. *Méndez v. Westminster* set an important precedent for ending segregation in the United States. Thurgood Marshall, who was later appointed a Supreme Court justice in 1967, became the lead NAACP attorney in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case.

In 2007, the U.S. Postal Service unveiled a stamp commemorating the *Méndez v. Westminster* case and in 2011, Sylvia Méndez was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama.

"I love the fact that Sylvia Méndez's story involves so much of the American fabric," says playwright Cornelia Cody. "You have a Mexican-American family working the farm of a Japanese family, an Irish-Catholic judge, a Jewish lawyer, and then, of course, Thurgood Marshall, a champion of human rights."

The play includes a lot of poetry—the writing of it as well as the comfort and enjoyment it can bring to us. "I wanted to give poetry a central role in the play," adds Cody. "I want children to witness the power of language."

Performances of ***La llamada de Sylvia Méndez: Separate Is Never Equal*** are scheduled on **Saturdays, October 16 and 23, and Sundays, October 17 and 24, 2021 at 3:00 pm.** The duration of this show is

approximately 50 minutes and is appropriate for the entire family.

ABOUT PLAYWRIGHT, DIRECTOR, AND PRODUCTION

Cornelia Cody, born in El Salvador, is a poet, playwright, and the author of children's books, textbooks, and academic papers on humor. She has written and/or adapted bilingual scripts for GALA, Discovery Theatre at the Smithsonian, Theatre Hopkins, and Children's Theatre Association. For GALA, she has written *Rigoberta, ¿dónde estás? A Journey through Guatemala*, *Picasso,* and *VolcanO.* She has adapted adapted *Bodas de sangre, Platero y yo* (named one of the best D.C children's play in 2014) and *Las aventuras de Don Quijote.* As an actress, Cody performed at The Shakespeare Theatre, Center Stage, Arena Stage, The Kennedy Center, and in numerous television commercials. At GALA, she had lead roles in *La zapatera prodigiosa, Doña Rosita la solterona, Don Perlimplín, Eloisa está debajo de un almendro,* and *Entre mujeres.*

Cody taught theatre studies at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts for over 20 years. Her one-woman show, *Mongrel: The Life and Words of Dorothy Parker*, was performed off-Broadway at the York Theatre and at Goucher College where she has directed, taught, and led workshops on bilingual theater. She earned a Master of Arts from The Johns Hopkins University (Writing), New York University (Performance Studies), and University of Maryland (American Studies), where she pursued her Ph.D. She now lives in the Netherlands. Cody's bilingual book of poetry for teens, *Piñata*, is due to be published soon.

Elena Velasco (**Director**) is the Artistic Director of Convergence Theatre, a DC-based multidisciplinary performance collective whose work focuses on issues of social justice. She is an associate professor of theatre at Bowie State University where she teaches directing, physical theatre and theatre for social justice. Ms. Velasco's director/choreographer highlights include: *Guerrilla Theatre Works: A New Nation, This Is All Just Temporary, Guerrilla Theatre Works: At What Cost?, Witch, Bhavi the Avenger* (Convergence); *Córiolanas* (Capital Fringe); *Hansel and Gretel, Rough-Faced Girl, Magic Paintbrush, Tío Conejo* (Synetic Theater); *Bid to Save the World* (Source Festival); *Godspell* (Bowie State University)*; La Pérdida, Nurse Fawn* (Catholic University). Her credits as a choreographer include *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Avant Bard), *Hampton Years* (Theatre J), and *1776* (Keegan Theatre). Ms. Velasco serves as the co-director of Multiculturalism and Diversity for the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, and is an affiliated artist with Óyeme, Imagination Stage's educational workshops and touring production. She has a MFA in Directing and BA in Drama from Catholic University. www.elenavelasco.net

Featured in the cast are **Melissa Strova-Valencia** and **Delbis Cardona**, who have appeared together in GALita's *Rigoberta, ¿dónde estás?* and *VolcanO*. Also appearing are **Diana González-Ramírez**, **Skye Ellis**, and **Edwin Bernal**, who are making their GALita debut.

Scenic Design is by **Mariana Fernández** who also designed for GALA's *Like Water for Chocolate* and *En el tiempo de las mariposas*. Lighting Design is by **Alberto Segarra** who designed for *El perro del hortelano* at GALA last season. Costume Design and Properties are by **Tessa Grippaudo**. **Konstantine Lortkipanidze** is the Sound Designer. Production Manager is **Vanessa Losada**; **Ilyana Rose-Dávila** is Stage Manager and **Devin Mahoney** is Technical Director.

ABOUT GALita

Since 1980, GALita has produced children's theater by Hispanic playwrights in both Spanish and English that inspire a sense of joy, discovery, pride, and identity in our community's children. GALita also has commissioned new works and adaptations based on classic Hispanic literature, presented international theater companies such as Teatro Gayumba from the Dominican Republic, produced several children's film

festivals, and collaborated with Kids Euro Festival on children's programming.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets are $10 each (children), Adults $12 (general public performances). For more information call 202-234-7174 or visit www.galatheatre.org.

This production is supported by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the Dimick Foundation, and the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs.