

New Works by GALA's Youth Performance Group

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – **Paso Nuevo**, GALA's award-winning youth education program, presents **Hidden Behind an Empty Smile/Escondidos detra de una falsa sonrisa**, an evening of original work brought to the stage by a new group of Paso Nuevo participants and directed by Quique Aviles, Matthew Vaky and Alina Collins Maldonado. Performed in English and Spanish, **Hidden Behind an Empty Smile** will be presented on Friday, December 19 at 8 pm at GALA Theatre, 3333 14th Street, NW.

Through a collage of poems, monologues, and scenes, **Hidden Behind an Empty Smile** explores social issues facing the community and nation and personal struggles experienced by the youth. The show also features special dance performances by guest artists Sally Yu and La Union.

The Paso Nuevo members who have helped develop, present and perform in **Hidden Behind an Empty Smile** include **Bryonna Adams, José Aguirre, Leslie Ayala, Obed Ayala-Amaya, Juan Coca, Michael Escobar, Daniel Flores, Ciarati Frias, Emma Frias, Cecilia Fuentes, Daniel Garcia, Eveilin Guevara, Daniel López, Jennifer López, Christian Martinez, Eduardo Portillo, Steven Romero, José Salmeron, Christian Sánchez, and Alexander Torres.**

Admission is free, but donations will be accepted. For more information, call 202-234-7174 or visit www.galatheatre.org.

Parking is available behind the theater in the Giant Food garage on Park Road, NW. The theater is also easily accessible from the Columbia Heights Metro station on the Yellow and Green lines.

ABOUT PASO NUEVO

Now in its 22th year, Paso Nuevo is GALA's after-school theater arts program that targets at-risk Latino youth, ages 12 to 18. The workshops are held throughout the year and provide a safe environment in which youth can explore issues of identity and cultural differences, articulate their values, increase self-esteem, and gain bilingual skills that will enhance their academic control all aspects of the theatrical process, from conception to technical direction and marketing.

Under the guidance of **Quique Avilés, Alina Collins Maldonado** and **Matthew Vaky**, the young artists of Paso Nuevo use their talents and artistic expression to create a positive change in the community.

Quique Avilés is a poet, actor and community activist whose performance and poetry addresses social issues. A native of El Salvador, Quique has been writing and performing about issues of race, identity, and the plight of poor people in the United States for almost 30 years. His poetry and commentary have been featured on NPR's Latino USA and This I Believe. As a performer he has made appearance from public libraries and parks to GALA, DC Arts Center, the Kennedy Center and, most recently, at the national conference of the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures in Philadelphia.

Alina Collins Maldonado is co-director of the Paso Nuevo program. Alina is a professional DC actor, solo performer, and teaching artist. She has been seen in productions at the Shakespeare Theatre Company, Source Festival, and Capital Fringe Festival. Her one woman show, *Bag Lady Blues*, has been performed at venues in Virginia and Maryland. Alina is a 2012 graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University where she received a BA in Theatre and a BA in Women Studies Cum Laude.

Matthew Vaky is co-director of the Paso Nuevo program and also a professional actor and director. With more than 20 years of teaching experience, he is on the staff at Capital City Public Charter School, where many of the Paso Nuevo participants attend school. Prior to Capital City, Matthew taught at El Colegio Charter High School in Minneapolis for eight years and also taught adult acting courses for more than 25 years at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. In Washington D.C., Matthew teaches acting at The Studio Theatre, and has been an adjunct professor at George Mason University. Matthew has a B.F.A. and an M.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon University, and a M.A. in Teaching from the College of Saint Catherine. He has directed more than 60 shows and is a member of the Actors Equity Association.

This program is made possible with generous support from the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs, the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, The Inter-American Development Bank-DC Solidarity Program, the Children & Youth Investment Trust Corporation, Wells Fargo and Bank of America.

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CONTACT:

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