

AMERICAN ARTSCAPE®

A MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

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A woman with long dark hair and a large purple flower in her hair is captured in a dynamic dance pose. She is wearing a grey, textured, sleeveless dress over a black top, and bright red high-heeled shoes. She is holding a large, flowing orange shawl that trails behind her. The background is a dark, draped curtain.

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This issue

In 2022, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) created an Equity Action Plan to provide opportunities to increase arts participation and engagement in historically underserved communities. The plan also laid out concrete policies and procedures for providing access accommodations for persons with disabilities and limited English proficiency. As part of this work, the agency has ongoing initiatives to engage Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and be more accessible to Hispanic/Latinx-serving arts organizations, such as providing Spanish translations of its funding guidelines as well as other material on the website. The Arts Endowment is committed to advancing engagement with, inclusion of, and equitable access to arts, culture, and design created by and in Hispanic/Latinx communities.

In this issue, we look at some of the Hispanic/Latinx artists and arts organizations who share, in their own words, how they are making an impact on U.S. culture today.

Cover: At Jacob's Pillow in August 2022, Vanessa Sanchez and her ensemble La Mezcla performed selections from *Pachuquismo*, which unveils a forgotten history of Mexican American female youth and explored the struggles that communities of color continue to face today. Photo by Danica Paulos, courtesy of Jacob's Pillow

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Brian Lusher
Josephine Reed



400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC
20506

/NationalEndowmentfortheArts

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The Importance of Artful Lives | *La Importancia de Vidas Artísticas*

BY MARIA ROSARIO JACKSON, PHD

In January of this year, I became the 13th chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. As I stepped into that position, I felt fortunate to be able to draw on a range of experiences that shape my approach to making sure that all people in our country have access to and benefit from the arts. My commitment to the arts started early and it started at home. My parents, a Mexican immigrant mother and an African American father, were not artists or wealthy arts patrons, but they wanted us to have artful lives—*vidas artísticas*. They looked to the arts to help my brother and me cultivate understanding and pride in our heritages. They also wanted us to be curious about other people

and able to recognize our common humanity. From an early age, I knew that the work of artists, designers, and culture bearers was foundational to expressing and even transforming the human condition—helping us tell our stories, make sense of the world, ask questions, imagine different ways of being, and connect to others.

Passionate about her Mexican culture, my mother, along with my father, made sure that my childhood summers in Mexico City included exposure to the work of Mexican muralists, Ballet Folklórico at Palacio de Bellas Artes, cultural traditions of food and music at familial events, awareness of the diverse architecture of the city, and appreciation for the work of

▲ NEA Chair Maria Rosario Jackson led the U.S. delegation to MONDIACULT 2022, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development in Mexico City, Mexico, in September 2022. Photo by Dionandrea Shorts

Indigenous artisans who came from small towns and rural areas to sell their beautiful work.

With deep appreciation for the African American experience and as a way of helping my brother and me make sense of our lives in a U.S. context, my father introduced us to African American writers, poets, visual artists, and musicians. Like my mother, he also made sure we paid attention to and knew the origins of familial and community traditions. These experiences illuminated our legacy, helping us to not only know it intellectually but also feel it in our hearts and develop a sense of stewardship for our cultures.

For decades, this sensibility of art, culture, and design being integral to our human resilience and our ability to thrive and transcend has been

core to my work. I believe deeply that the arts are intrinsically valuable and that, at the same time, they play critical roles at the intersection of other fields of practice and policy, such as education, health and well-being, community and economic development, and more. At their most powerful, the arts do not exist in a bubble, in isolation. At their most powerful, the arts are integrated into all aspects of our lives and our civic infrastructure—the mechanisms and relationships we rely on to care for each other.

At the Arts Endowment, we are committed to being a national resource—a grantmaker, convener, collaborator, thought leader, amplifier, and catalyst to advance arts engagement, inclusion, and equitable access. Our work ensures that all people have the opportunity to benefit from the power of the arts.

In this issue of *American Artscape*, we provide a snapshot of the ways in which Hispanic/Latinx artists, arts organizations, and communities are owning and sharing their narrative, their heritage—telling authentic stories, calling out important questions, and imagining futures. Hispanic/Latinx communities are original threads in America's tapestry and Hispanic/Latinx artists and arts organizations continue to contribute to our shared story in deeply impactful ways. We celebrate examples of these contributions, confident that they will inspire and help us all better understand our rich diversity and the assets available to us as we strive to reach our full potential as individuals, as communities, and as a nation.

Adelante!

Maria Rosario Jackson, PhD is chair of the National Endowment for the Arts.

► Chair Jackson with her mother, Elvira C. Jackson. Photo courtesy of Chair Jackson



DANCING OUTSIDE

THE BOX



VANESSA SANCHEZ Y LA MEZCLA

INTERVIEW BY PAULETTE BEETE

From the *son jarocho* rhythms of Mexico's Veracruz region from which her family hails to percussion styles from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil to the very American rhythm of tap, Vanessa Sanchez's work as a dancer, choreographer, and founding artistic director of the dance group La Mezcla is born from deep engagement with the music and dance traditions of the Latinx and Afro-Latinx diaspora. As Sanchez, who took her

first dance class as a very young child, explained, "It was through learning all of these different cultural music and dance forms—not just the technique, but also what this dance form means within the community that it comes from, what this music represents in where it originated—that I saw what I could create." Whether it's the role of women in the Zoot Suit movement of the 1940s or the complexity of how migrant farm workers feel about their work, Sanchez is interested in

▲ Vanessa Sanchez, executive artistic director of La Mezcla, performing on a farm as part of Ayudando Latinos a Soñar (ALAS) Farmworker Friday. Photo Courtesy of ALAS

telling overlooked stories of the Hispanic/Latinx community. She wants the community to not just feel welcome but recognize themselves in La Mezcla's multidisciplinary dance performances, whether the company is performing at an arts center or an agricultural site. In her own words, here is Sanchez on the way in which her heritage informs everything she does, the founding of La Mezcla, and the challenges and opportunities of being a culturally specific dance company.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HISPANIC AND LATINX CULTURE TO HER WORK

My heritage drives everything that I do through dance, everything that I do with the company, everything that I do in my daily life. I use "we" a lot during interviews and grant applications because I truly feel that this is much bigger than me. I'm here because of my ancestors. I would not be doing what I'm doing if it weren't for my grandfather crossing the border in the

1940s, if it weren't for my grandmother who was a migrant farm worker her entire childhood. I wouldn't be able to do any of this if it weren't for the hundreds and hundreds of people who, despite colonization, land stolen, the generational trauma of enslavement, continued to fight for a better future for generations, five generations down the line, ten generations down the line.

ON FOUNDING LA MEZCLA

When I was living in Mexico, I started experimenting with putting together tap dance and *zapateado*. When I came back to the United States, I applied to put some work in a dance festival, and one of the questions on the application was company name. I was like, "We're not really a company; I'm just a choreographer." [They responded,] "If you want to start doing this, you have to have a company name." So that's where it started. It's a big learning curve going from choreographer to essentially a business

▼ Vanessa Sanchez and Diana Aburto of La Mezcla performing *Ghostly Labor* that is rooted in the history and legacy of labor in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Image from *Ghostly Labor: A Dance Film*, courtesy of Vanessa Sanchez y La Mezcla



owner. That's a big process, learning how to write grants, learning how to make a budget. As the company continued to grow, we started getting reached out to by different young people in the community who were inspired by the work we were doing, who wanted to be part of it in some way. We've started an internship program. We have begun doing outreach to do some training in the grantwriting process, bringing in the community to learn from everything we learned in creating the company.

La Mezcla in Spanish means "the mixture." I think that was a way for me to look at the different dance forms, the different musical traditions we were going to bring in to create these polyrhythmic, multidisciplinary works. I also wanted to get away from being labeled as a certain style; you know, this tap company, this political company, being put into a category. Because I think that that happens a lot with companies, and then you're put into this little box and you can only be presented in certain ways.

In creating La Mezcla, it was really important for me to represent the voices of women and gender non-binary people in a space where we can genuinely tell our stories. We're real people. We have real stories. [When we dance,] we make noise. We're rough; we're raw. We're trying to break down that myth of delicacy in all femme-representing people.

WHAT EQUITY LOOKS LIKE FOR LA MEZCLA

To be consistently equitable and accessible across the board takes a lot of thought, a lot of planning, a lot of process. We actually need these three years to develop this one work, because our work is not "I'm going to read a book, and then



we're going to go into the studio, and we're going to develop movement, and then perform it." We need to do the fieldwork. We need to see people in their space. This new project we're developing, *Ghostly Labor*, is rooted in the history and legacy of labor in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. That's not something you can read a history book on. I spent a year volunteering with a farmworkers organization to be invited into the community to start holding interviews. That's being equitable. You want to respect people's spaces. You want to respect their process, and it takes time. It would have been easier if I just went to a farm and said, "Let me pay you to interview" and was done in two weeks. That's not a real relationship. Granted, we still paid people for their time.

I've noticed, as equity and different buzzwords are coming up, what that means for funders is rather than trying to understand [equity] from a holistic perspective, there are questions put on the grant application: How is your company equitable? How do you reach the community? We've been doing that work, and now it's like I have to prove it. Historically, the companies getting funded are mostly the Eurocentric dance companies, the ballet-based and modern-based companies. You don't see a lot of dance companies rooted in Black and Brown cultural dance forms getting funding in the same way.

So whose dancers are getting paid hourly for rehearsal? What musicians are getting paid for rehearsal and performance? Something that we're also working to change is compensating everyone in the same way that these larger dance companies are compensating people because then we can actually make the work. People don't have to work eight jobs to dance on the side. I would love to see the day where my *maestras* who brought me here, who taught me everything I

▲ Kirsten Millan, Micah Sallid, and Sandy Vazquez of La Mezcla performing *Ghostly Labor*. Image from *Ghostly Labor: A Dance Film*, courtesy of Vanessa Sanchez y La Mezcla





▲ Kirsten Millan, Luna Fuentes, Argelia Arreola, and Ayla Davila of La Mezcla performing *Pachuquismo*. Photo by Danica Paulos, courtesy of Jacob's Pillow

know and have had dance companies for decades, are getting funded in the same way that ballet companies are getting funded. I would love to see that day where they can create their work and be valued in the same way that other companies have been valued for decades.

When we're talking about cultures of the Latinx diaspora, I have to say a lot of these dance forms are also rooted in Black history. That's something really important to bring to the table as we're talking about this. When we look at the larger dance field—we look at touring rosters, we look at presenters, we look at funders—a lot of those spaces see the dance forms we do as folkloric, not of the now, which isn't true. When the presenter at so and so theater is creating their season, they have one space for a percussive company, one space for an African company, one space for a *folklórico* company, and then the rest of the season is modern or ballet-based work. No shade to modern or ballet-based work, but why are we not getting those same spaces? Why aren't we getting the same amount of opportunities?

Why are we paid less? Our work is undervalued, and I think that reflects on how we see what our worth is in those spaces. I just had a meeting with this funder who kept telling me, "You need to stop being surprised you're here." I think that comes from this legacy of white supremacy telling us we don't belong. When we continue to be put in these spaces, underfunded, underrepresented on these larger stages, we start to feel like, "Oh, that space isn't for us. So why should I try?" It's a process of tearing it all apart and then rebuilding.

Paulette Beete is the social media manager in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts.

Creating a Latinx Space in the American Artistic Landscape



It all started with the CALA International Festival, which brought together arts organizations from Phoenix, Arizona, to showcase Latinx and Latin American

dance, music, theater, film, poetry, and visual art. From there, CALA (which stands for Celebración Artística de las Américas) Alliance transitioned into a multidisciplinary Latinx arts



A view of the exhibition *Carolina Aranibar-Fernández: El desplazamiento y las flores* by CALA Alliance regional resident artist Carolina Aranibar-Fernández that highlights the ongoing threat of colonization, genocide, and displacement faced by Indigenous populations in Bolivia. Photo by Shaunté Glover, courtesy of CALA Alliance

Alana Hernandez of CALA Alliance

INTERVIEW BY DON BALL

◀ Alana Hernandez, executive director of CALA Alliance. Photo by Shaunté Glover, with support from the Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture

▼ San Antonio-based multidisciplinary artist José Villalobos performed *A Silenced "America"* at Queer ARTivismo: Cuerpo-Sexo-Poder, an event organized by CALA Alliance and Trans Queer Pueblo. Photo by Alonso Parra/Lamp Left Media, courtesy of CALA Alliance

organization with programs that traverse the city's communities, telling new stories about transborder cultural connections. Among their year-round programming are the artist residency program, Residencias Artísticas, which fosters Latinx artistic talent in the United States; a cultural literacy program, How I Became an Artista, which exposes a wide range of community members—from students to adults—in the Metro Phoenix area to the life and work of Latinx and Latin American artists; a community engagement program, CALA Presenta, in which local, national, and international artists present their art forms in public conversations; and Crossfade LAB, which presents intimate conversations with Latinx and Latin American artists about art, identity, social justice, and more.

CALA Alliance partners with the Arizona State University (ASU) Art Museum to exhibit their resident artists and to present the Crossfade LAB events, which are livestreamed with bilingual closed captioning, and with other non-arts organizations as well to reach further into communities throughout the large, sprawling city of Phoenix, which has a Hispanic/Latinx population of more than 40 percent.

We talked with Executive Director Alana Hernandez about CALA's programs and engagement with the Phoenix community, differentiating between Latin American and Latinx, and the importance of emphasizing U.S. Latinx art and its contributions to American culture.

EMPHASIZING U.S. LATINX ART

CALA Alliance started as an international festival. We've become a residency program, and a community-based organization teaching cultural literacy from a perspective not typically disseminated in schools. We work with art and artists in different forms; we're not discipline-specific. When I started in early 2021, my main mission was to make us more art- and artist-forward.

For the residency program, I wanted to make sure that our emphasis really was on U.S. Latinx art. We do three residencies per year: a regional resident, who is found through a panel-reviewed open call; an invited national resident; and, to keep with our roots, an exchange resident. The current exchange [residency] is with Puerto Rico, so it is still focused on U.S. Latinx art. This is a way to also ensure that we are making those connections outside of our region. While the Phoenix area has predominately featured Mexican American artists, we want to broaden what we think of as Latinx art. We're thinking of more dynamic and holistic stories of Latinx art, and Puerto Rico's an integral part to that.

We give monetary resources to the residents, and they have a studio space where they can create their work, which is very coveted in Phoenix. We're also providing a space in terms of scholarship. When we think of U.S. Latinx art, there hasn't really been a carved-out space. [This program] is to bolster these artists, to really understand that Latinx stories are integral to understanding the cultural history of this country.

[The resident artists] are actively encouraged to work with the community. We set up programmatic activities for them and host an



open studio. We're giving the community the opportunity to see an artist project at its early stages, what it looks like at the very beginning, when things could possibly change. So, they're developing their ideas in tandem with community when they come to us, where the community really learns about their project and why it's important to them. Then, finally, there's usually a conversation aspect, a *charlas* is what I like to call them; short, informal chats where I can tease out additional information for our audiences, and those are often disseminated via Instagram Live. These CALA Presenta charlas are a great opportunity to really look at artist studios and speak with artists who aren't necessarily from the region.

We're creating a vital space that does not exist in the current artistic landscape. We are one of the only, if not the only, residency programs specifically designed for U.S. Latinx artists. Latinx art and histories are American histories; this is really important to emphasize. Of course, the downside is I wish we didn't have to have culturally specific organizations to exist as part of the art world to have people pay attention to us. Do I believe institutions that say they are for American art should have always been looking at more diverse stories? Of course. I never want us to only rely on our culturally specific organizations. But they serve an incredibly important purpose right now because there is this need. However, I really do hope in the future that Latinx stories and histories will be integrated into the canon; when we're taught art history, it will not just be from a Eurocentric perspective.

PARTNERING WITH THE COMMUNITY

For our programming, especially our cultural literacy program, we have focused on asking: what does our community need? Who comes to us? We shouldn't assume that everyone has the same entry point, so we often partner with other organizations so we can physically move ourselves outward into the community. These partnerships are important because an ecosystem of only arts organizations is not entirely sustainable. We have partnered with organizations like Chispa Arizona, which is an environmental grassroots organization, for example, for their Earth Day celebration. We also partnered with TQP, Trans Queer Pueblo, for our recent CALA Presenta in May. They're a social justice organization that works with queer migrants who have experienced trauma, providing resources such as healthcare.



We're really proud of these partnerships that speak to the communities' needs in that way.

We also partner with the ASU Art Museum. There are a lot of touchpoints throughout our organizations. For example, one component of our residency program is to have exhibitions. For the national resident, we have built in a solo exhibition at the ASU Art Museum. While they might be coming from New York or Texas, they might not always have the opportunity for a solo museum show, and we can provide that.

The Crossfade LAB is also co-organized with myself; Julio César Morales, senior curator at the ASU Art Museum; and Josh Kun, who is a MacArthur Fellow and interim dean at the University of South California Thornton School of Music. This program happens twice a year and is livestreamed so people from around the country can join in to see Crossfade LAB. It's also bilingual, so we have bilingual closed captioning, which I think is very important, especially as we grow and we try to be the most accessible, diverse organization we can be.

▲ Puerto Rican-born, Phoenix-based Estrella Esquilin was in residence in Guadalajara, Mexico, as the first participant in GDL>>PHX Residencias Artísticas. Her artwork explores the use of building materials, constructed spaces, text, and collage. Photos by Alonso Parra/Lamp Left Media, courtesy of CALA Alliance



▲ In partnership with the Sagrado Galleria, CALA Alliance hosted How I Became an Artista: Cyanotype Workshop with Annie Lopez in which community members explored the process of cyanotype printing, a process that played a significant role in Lopez's work in the 1980s. Photo by Shaunté Glover, courtesy of CALA Alliance

► New York-based multidisciplinary artist Guadalupe Maravilla (U.S./El Salvador) and Grammy Award-nominated artist Álex Anwandter (Chile) participated in the March 2022 Crossfade LAB livestream, moderated by author Josh Kun. Photo by Shaunté Glover, courtesy of CALA Alliance

I'm really proud of what we've done with the cultural literacy program, How I Became an Artista. We could always do more, and I think we're doing a great job with our modest resources. We work with local artists, which is important. [Recently,] we had Annie Lopez, who is a more senior artist who's been working in the region since the '80s and makes up part of a cohort that started the Chicano movement here in Phoenix. I think people know nebulously what the Chicano movement is, but she taught us what it was like to really be there. We also have teaching artists, some of them are emerging artists, and they're focused on activities using materials that are found and gathered from this community. For example, we went to the West Side, which is historically a Latinx population that is underserved, and brought a teaching artist, Yaritza Flores Bustos, who led a workshop on papermaking, reusing materials found in the community. We then provide free materials that allow youth and community members to create these projects.

Overall, the demographics of Phoenix is pretty significantly Latinx. Most of the people that do [participate in CALA's programs] are of Latinx origin, but we do have a healthy mix at times. Something surprising we have learned from this program is that we previously thought about the cultural

literacy program as more youth-oriented, but that's just not who's necessarily coming. We get a lot of 20- to 26-year-olds, and some significantly older than 26!

LATINX V. LATIN AMERICAN

As an organization, I want to make sure that we spotlight U.S. Latinx art and artists. I have a background in art history. The option we were given was to be Latin Americanists, which is different than Latinx. When we get into an institutional context at museums, it is assumed that they are the same or that they are, in fact, synonymous. That's simply not true, and so I hope, as we move forward, that what really is understood is that Latin American is a complicated term itself. Art from Latin America is very different [from U.S. Latinx art], the context is different. The context of this country is so different.

I often say it's more of a Latin American diaspora here in the United States. It's really important to underscore that we are not monolithic. There are textures and dynamism in our communities, and they're integral to understanding the stories of this country. I'm really optimistic as we move forward. Latinx art is very in vogue right now, and I hope that there is a sustained commitment to understanding these kinds of stories of where we are and who we are.

Don Ball is executive editor of American Artscape.



THE POWER OF MUSIC



José Díaz of Diaz Music Institute

INTERVIEW BY AUNYE BOONE

José Díaz has enriched Houston, Texas, with an array of musical leadership, education, celebration of Hispanic/Latinx heritage, and community engagement. In 2000, Díaz established the Diaz Music Institute (DMI), one of the top Hispanic music organizations, where students can receive quality music instruction at a low cost. DMI is a key player in developing partnerships with schools and other organizations in Houston's lower-income neighborhoods. Serving as the artistic director of DMI, Díaz formed four programs to meet the needs of the local community: Caliente, DMI's repertoire ensemble; Noché Caliente, an evening music festival; the Latin Jazz Summer Workshop; and the Latin Jazz Jam Music Festival.

Under Díaz's leadership, students have been able to travel outside of the community to play alongside top Latin jazz artists, including Latin Grammy nominee Oskar Cartaya and four-time Grammy winner Oscar Hernández. Several DMI alumni have performed with top artists, such as Stevie Wonder and Tori Kelly.

Among Díaz's accolades as an educator and musician, he was inducted into *DownBeat* magazine's Jazz Education Hall of Fame, received the Mayor's Hispanic Heritage Award, and was selected by FOX 26 and Univision Television stations as a Hispanic Hero. He was also honored in 2021 as a Country Music Association Foundation Music Teacher of Excellence recipient.

We spoke with Díaz about the importance of preserving Latin music and why it matters, how DMI reaches out to lower-income youth, and the unique ways in which the arts can be showcased within communities.

WHY MUSIC EDUCATION MATTERS

I grew up in Chicago, and when I was starting my music training in the '70s, arts and culture during that time was awesome. There were so many musicians in the neighborhood or at the schools I attended. The teachers were active musicians and played with Earth, Wind

▲ (Left) José Díaz, founder and artistic director of Diaz Music Institute. Photo by Sharon Adame

(Right) Students in a saxophone master class at Diaz Music Institute in Houston, Texas. Photo courtesy of Diaz Music Institute

& Fire, B.B. King, and Bobby “Blue” Bland. The Diaz Music Institute came about through my frustration of being a band director in a [Texas] school district and witnessing limitations to kids’ growth and opportunity. So, I decided to create an environment that was very similar to the way that I grew up.

I wanted [students] to develop that hunger and desire to play at a semi-professional, if not a professional level, while they were still in their teens. One of the biggest motivators is DMI’s mentorship program, where we have famous artists that come in and perform with the students. The first major concert that we did was with Eddie Palmieri, a legendary, Grammy Award-winning Latin jazz pianist and an NEA Jazz Master. As we started developing the program further, I noticed that kids in the program were excelling at a high rate. We have a 100 percent high school graduation rate with all of the students. DMI alumni have gone on to play alongside Grammy-nominated and Grammy-winning artists and have been recognized at the Stellar Awards and the Gospel Music Association Dove Awards. Many of them have gone on to attend prestigious schools like the University of Miami, Harvard University, or the University of Texas.

▼ Teaching artist/
trombone coach
Yankar Gonzalez
leads a trombone
master class. Photo
courtesy of Diaz
Music Institute

PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

I think that the preservation of Latinx/Hispanic music is important to help celebrate and empower us as a culture. At the institute,

we focus on Afro-Caribbean music, Brazilian music, and Latin music. When we talk about Latin music, we’re talking about music that’s been popular in Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru. All of the Hispanic countries have some aspect of Latin jazz that incorporates their culture and their rhythms into it. To me, it’s one of the genres that helps tie us all [together] as Hispanic, Latinx, Latinos, Latinas, or however people want to identify themselves. Preservation of cultures and music is important because it lets everyone know who they are, what their history is, how to express themselves, and what makes them feel joyous. When I was growing up, almost every other weekend was a family reunion with music all the time, and we had to get up and dance! Parents were picking up babies, dancing with the babies, and it was “party time” all the time. When we don’t preserve or give a history of how we evolve as human beings through our music, we start losing generations. Our music will help explain how we’re much more alike than different. I think that’s the travesty, when we take the arts so lightly in school, because it really hurts us in terms of knowing who we are and appreciating each other.

One of the challenges is getting students to understand how even though they are learning a culturally specific genre, the things that they will learn and perform in this genre will actually help them in other genres. What’s been truly remarkable is that we have a good number of alumni that have gone through the program and can illustrate that for me. We had one young lady, Latonia Moore, who was a vocalist singing Latin jazz, and now she’s one of the top opera singers in the world. She won a Grammy two years ago for *Porgy and Bess*. What I explain to kids is that music is a language, and the language and the rhythmic aspect of it permeates through other genres.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SUMMER CAMPS

I establish relationships with the band directors at Houston school campuses and they become our coordinators for summer camps. This is not something that I do by myself; it is something that’s done with team effort and relationships. The kids play a major part, because we want to



have a program that's relevant for them, and the best way to keep things relevant is to simply ask them, "What do you see yourself doing in music?"

Within the summer camp, they're getting music theory, they're getting master classes, they're getting exposure on hand percussion so they can develop rhythm. I also hired a dance teacher because kids don't move like they used to anymore, and I hired a vocalist because I feel that everyone needs to sing in some aspect. The last camp that we did actually helped jumpstart a jazz program at a high school that no longer had one, a very historic high school in terms of the jazz world. People like Illinois Jacquet, Joe Sample, and [NEA Jazz Master] Hubert Laws, legendary musicians, came out of that school.

INFUSING LATINX/HISPANIC MUSIC IN THE COMMUNITY

[In August,] the youth group Caliente, the one that I put together with kids that were excelling at the highest level, performed. It was just amazing to watch what they were able to accomplish in the short amount of time. Tia Fuller, an incredible saxophonist, came in to perform with them. One of the things that she remarked, "I don't know what you're doing or how you're doing it, but you got these girls empowered. They're unapologetic, they're driven."

The theater seats approximately 2,500 people and we had a full house. I noticed that a lot of folks have been coming to our concerts for years even though they have no association with any of the student performers. I had a couple of people stop me and say, "Man, I've been watching that little girl grow up in the group. We noticed her when she was 11 and now she's 18." They're so excited that they saw this young lady play hand percussion on the conga drums and grow up before their eyes.

One of the non-arts organizations that we have partnered with over the last 15 years is the East Aldine Management District. Recently, they built a new facility that features a covered theater within a park. We've hosted several performances in this location. This past April, we held the first East Aldine Jazz Festival. The artists at the festival are all youth groups, like high school jazz ensembles, middle school jazz ensembles. I wanted kids to have an opportunity to build camaraderie with other kids from other schools. I hired multiple guest artists to perform with these young people. The artist played a couple of tunes with them, and it was exciting because the



kids never had that opportunity before. Over 400 people from the community came.

Not only do we have kids who are Hispanic—we're talking about Mexican, Colombian, Puerto Rican, Venezuelan, that whole cross mix there—but we're also talking about African American students; we're also talking about Asian students and Anglo students all in the group, and they're all loving it, just respecting cultural tolerance, knowing who you are, where you're going, that kind of stuff. Every kid is able to use whatever they learn from within themselves to be able to express themselves, how they see and how they feel it. And what they also really love and enjoy is the fact that they're all coming together for it. That was a super strong thing, when you see smiles and them hanging out and talking and celebrating.

A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

In order for DMI to stay relevant, we've got to deal with things that are relevant for kids now: dealing with recording technique, dealing with copyright issues, dealing with how to brand yourself, how to create a business for yourself. It's essential for their survival in the future.

During the pandemic, we created the Global Entrepreneurship Summit. We had entrepreneurs from all walks of life and cultures come in and talk about the business aspect of their craft. We even had a CEO of an instrument manufacturing company talk about how he started his business. I think those are things that kids need to know about, they need to hear about, and they need to be exposed to while they're in high school.

Aunye Boone is a writer/editor in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts.

▲ Diaz Music Institute workshop students in an improvisation class. Photo courtesy of Diaz Music Institute

TELLING OUR STORIES

Rebecca Medrano of GALA Hispanic



Theatre

INTERVIEW BY PAULETTE BEETE



For more than 45 years, GALA (Grupo de Artistas LatinoAmericanos) Hispanic Theatre has been promoting and sharing Hispanic/Latinx arts and cultures with the Washington, DC, community. From their first play, *La Fiaca* by Argentine Ricardo Talesnik, to their current NEA-supported production, *Revoltosa*, an 1897 zarzuela adapted by contemporary Spanish playwright Paco Gámez, GALA has developed and produced works that explore the breadth of Hispanic/Latinx performing arts. In addition to their productions, GALA has a year-round bilingual education program, Paso Nuevo, for high school students to learn theater arts skills.

Co-Founder and Executive Director Rebecca Medrano credits the theater's longevity to the fact that they're learning something every day. "It was a crazy idea when it started. It is still crazy but worth doing, because I would have been bored doing anything else. I learned so much. Every day I learn from the young people. I learned from the community we serve. Every day is a new day and a new opportunity. And I think that's the joy of it. And that's really what's behind a lot of creativity, or what gets people to be creative, is the joy of creating."

In her own words, here's more from Medrano on the importance of GALA Hispanic Theatre to the DC community, the difficulties of running a culturally specific organization, and the importance of producing plays in Spanish.

▲ Rebecca Medrano, co-founder and executive director of GALA Hispanic Theatre. Photo courtesy of GALA Hispanic Theatre

◀ The historic renovated Tivoli Theatre in Washington, DC, home to GALA Hispanic Theatre. Photo by Maxwell MacKenzie, courtesy of GALA Hispanic Theatre



PROMOTING THE CULTURE THROUGH THE THEATER

We were founded in 1976 in response to a big influx of political exiles fleeing very repressive regimes in South America. We are located in Columbia Heights [in Washington, DC] at the intersection of a changing neighborhood that was formerly principally African American and Latino and now is really developing into a quite mixed neighborhood. We have renovated a historic theater, the Tivoli, that was built in 1922 into a permanent performance space with 274 seats.

The core of our mission is to be able to provide opportunities for Latinx artists to tell their stories. These are stories that have been marginalized, unfortunately. These are stories that are not told on mainstage theaters, American theaters, yet they are a part of the mosaic of our American culture. We like to shine a light on that and have been doing that through theater, through dance, music, film festivals. We are really a cultural center in the heart of the city, preserving and promoting Hispanic/Latinx culture and using theater as a vehicle for social justice and social change.

I think we create a bridge of understanding, and we need to continue to do that so that non-Spanish-speaking, non-Latinx people are introduced to this culture, and there's increased tolerance and we can deal with all of the issues that the country faces now of divisiveness and racial hatred and immigration-bashing.

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC THEATER

One of the biggest challenges is that we are perceived as a community organization, which we are, but not as a professional arts organization. There's also very little awareness of the contributions [of Hispanic and Latinx artists] to this culture. I wish we didn't have to do so much to educate people about artists that we know are influential and that also influenced the culture here in the United States. People like Mario Vargas Llosa, who taught at Cornell and is one of the greatest writers, or Victoria Santa Cruz an Afro-Peruvian dancer—we're going to do a show about her.

The challenge is also the media. The media doesn't have an understanding of our cultural

▼ Laura Virella, Luz Nicolás, and Fran Tapia in the NEA-supported production of *Revoltoza* (*The Troublemaker*) by the GALA Hispanic Theatre. Photo by Daniel Martinez, courtesy of GALA Hispanic Theatre



context, so they don't review us or don't feel it's important to review us. There's also the challenge of training bilingual performers, training and retaining them, and the challenge of historic, systemic racism in funding, certainly by many larger foundations or institutions, who just do a kind of global funding for one ethnic group.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE

The use of Spanish is extremely important because this country, the United States of America, is the second-largest country in the world after Mexico for Spanish-speaking people. There is a huge need to preserve that language and to provide a link for immigrants to stay connected to their native language and culture.

We perform in Spanish, mainly with projected surtitles. However, we have developed bilingual musicals. We performed *In the Heights* for the first time in Spanish and English, as we did with our musical *Fame*. Our recent musical *On Your Feet* in Spanish also had some English. Our bilingual children's programs are intentionally developed bilingually within the same play because children have an easier time transitioning from one language to the other.

We really feel that language is key to your cultural heritage. Once you lose that language, you're losing a part of your cultural heritage. So it is our mission to preserve that and to share that with the wider non-Spanish-speaking public.

What we think is most important is to give the audience the best possible experience, because for many people, it's the first time they're seeing theater in Spanish. And they're amazed to see what we're able to do.

WORKING WITH THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

We were founded by and for the community and rooted in the community. We continue to stay in touch and engage with our audiences so we know what they would like to see us produce and present, and make them a part of that process. We have done a lot of work using community artists and community residents to develop works about issues that affect them, such as housing, education, immigration.

We've worked with performing artists to do story circles, especially during the pandemic, in underutilized spaces in the community, bringing

together residents, seniors, and youth to ask about the issues affecting them, and then creating stories and dramatic works around those issues. We've performed, for example, with day laborers and engaged them in producing the work about the issues that they face as day laborers in the city.

Principal to our connection with families, especially immigrant families, is the Paso Nuevo program for teens who are underserved. Many of them are new arrivals. Some of them have arrived unaccompanied. They come to GALA where they are free to create, express their fears, their hopes. They have a wonderful experience. They produce plays, writing their own stories, performing on our stage for the community.

We always do three of these shows throughout the year to invite community members to come and have a discussion with the youth and give us their feedback. We continue to get our lifeblood really from the people we are serving.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

I'm hopeful that there will be more opportunities for theaters of color and Latinx theaters, particularly to serve their communities. The funding challenges remain. We're not one group. There are many Latinos, there are many cultures. And it is very difficult to break through that barrier of funding by major organizations as a culturally specific organization. On the flip side, now that there is a lot more attention given to inclusion, diversity, and equity, it has provided us more opportunities for funding. It has also opened up our opportunities for partnerships because there are many non-culturally specific theaters interested in producing our work and in expanding their audiences.

We would love to see more [Latinx] theaters flourishing and more support, because I do believe there is a great need for it, given that, as I said before, the U.S. is the second largest Spanish-speaking country in the world.

It would be great if we can develop a working network [for Latinx theaters] to do conferences and bring together educators, artists, directors, and writers. There still needs to be more work done to get our voices out there and to make sure that people understand that we're an integral part of the history of this country.

Paulette Beete is the social media manager in the Office of Public Affairs at the National Endowment for the Arts.

RESILIENCE

through the Arts



Disaster Recovery with
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña

INTERVIEW BY BRIAN LUSHER

All photos courtesy of ICP



It is understandable that Puerto Rico might be experiencing a strong case of *déjà vu*. Hurricane Fiona raging across the island in September 2022 was bound to bring back bad memories of the two-punch devastation of Hurricanes Maria and Irma in 2017, from which they were still recovering. Among the local governmental organizations to first start recovery efforts back then was the island's arts agency, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP), or Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. "We were the first state agency issuing checks in Puerto Rico" after the 2017 hurricanes, stated Freddy E. Vélez, deputy director at ICP.

While Puerto Rico suffered from a complete loss of electricity, much as it has with the 2022 storm, and blocked roadways, ICP managed to work with federal agencies and local organizations to facilitate access to the arts through the program *Cultura Rodante* (Culture on Wheels). The idea was to provide communities with comfort and help them find some normality by bringing artists and arts organizations to different places throughout the island to work with local constituents. Even Poetry Out Loud, the NEA's national poetry recitation contest for high school students, continued with ICP's assistance despite the power outages.

In addition to being Puerto Rico's arts agency, ICP also oversees the General Archives of Puerto Rico, which contains important historical public documents; the National Library; and the Collections Unit, which stores artworks and historical objects that are often loaned to other institutions, all of which required damage assessments and recovery recommendations.

The NEA, working with ICP and partnering with local organizations and other federal agencies, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), has conducted numerous workshops on funding opportunities for cultural nonprofit organizations. In addition, the NEA worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Interior, National Archives and Records Administration, and the National Park Service, along with ICP, to conduct important historical preservation workshops on topics such as cemetery repair work at historic sites and climate considerations for the management of historic properties, especially those vulnerable to flooding and projected sea level rise.

ICP has looked to private sources as well to help rebuild Puerto Rico's arts ecosystem. They received funding from the Mellon Foundation to digitize important historical documents to preserve them and entered into an agreement with Google Arts and Culture—an initiative that was generated through the relationships developed when Lin Manuel Miranda presented a benefit performance of *Hamilton*—that shares some of ICP's art collection with the world.

We spoke with Vélez, consultant Isabel Rosa, and Specialist on Nautical Archeology Juan Vera from ICP about how the arts agency leapt into action after the devastation, its interaction with the NEA and other federal and local organizations, and how it moved forward after the hurricanes. The conversation took place before Hurricane Fiona hit the island.

BRINGING CULTURE TO HEAL COMMUNITIES

Freddy E. Vélez: So, we were here at the headquarters [after the 2017 hurricanes hit], and it was like, how the hell are we going to work with this? We didn't have any electricity. We didn't have power plants or generators. We didn't have anything. It was like, well, let's see what we can do.

Isabel Rosa: The [state arts agency] has to be a facilitator and have the openness to see how you can best serve your constituents, which is what matters. And that goes from the general public all the way to your arts and cultural-specific sectors.

Vélez: Through the leadership of Carlos Ruiz Cortés [executive director of ICP], we decided to go on implementing a project, which was crazy at that time, going all over Old San Juan, which

◀ Freddy Vélez, Isabel Rosa, and Juan Vera of Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP), or Institute of Puerto Rican Culture.

◀ Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña's *Cultura Rodante* project started in Old San Juan, bringing cultural activities to those affected by the hurricanes in 2017.



▲ ICP took Cultura Rodante to different parts of Puerto Rico, including such places Humacao.

was almost impossible, and having cultural representation in terms of poetry or even doing a drawing with chalk on the floor at the shelters. We were able to get a listing of the shelters that were open from the Departamento de la Vivienda, the state housing agency of Puerto Rico. First, we focused on shelters because we knew they were operating, they had space and hundreds of people. Then we started realizing that there were more people outside of the shelters, so we decided to go directly to the communities.

Rosa: [That was] Cultura Rodante, which was pretty much taking artists to different parts of the island. It was really effective since artists got to have their income while they showcased their work in communities that were in need of some degree of normality. We were leveraging heavily the NEA funding that was available. I remember telling [the NEA], “We would like to use the regular funding as emergency funding and also provide it for Cultura Rodante.” And at the Arsenal de la Puntilla Española, we did eventually set up a co-working space with internet and also facilitated washing machines and potable water for artists, arts organizations, and employees.

Vélez: Cultura Rodante, from October 2017 to December 2018, had more than 934 events featuring over 160 cultural resources all over Puerto Rico, benefitting over 142,000 people in 78 municipalities, including the island municipalities of Vieques and Culebra.

Rosa: You would have the artists that we hired with the NEA funds to be able to at least cheer up these families that had lost everything or bring some normality to wherever it is they were staying—whether it was juggling, painting, or theater art.

Vélez: A lady stated that it was the first time she was able to laugh after the hurricane.

Rosa: And with Cultura Rodante, you started having more participation from the private industry. For example, Liberty, which was one of the main private internet and communications providers, they facilitated internet hotspots.

Vélez: What was Cultura Rodante evolved through the pandemic. In 2020-2021, we had 700 virtual interventions through our social media platforms with over 1,830 cultural resources, reaching over 2.6 million people.

Rosa: Cultura Rodante evolved from an emergency program into a regular program. It is so successful and flexible that it evolved into a virtual program [during the pandemic] and now it's phasing back to a regular program.

FACING CHALLENGES

Vélez: Every challenge or threat we see as an opportunity. [For example,] when we defined the low rate of 501(c)(3)s [the nonprofit designation required to receive NEA funding] in our cultural organizations, we took action.

Rosa: We submitted a grant to the NEA for a pilot program, the grant writing/grants management program, to allow nonprofit organizations to get their IRS tax-exempt status, or work toward getting it, and to be able to apply for funding that we allocate through our sub-awards as well as directly to the NEA. So that was of extreme help. It is still underway. And we're also giving one-on-ones to further that initiative. The NEA came with IMLS and NEH to share what the

competitive opportunities are under the three agencies, and you guys just came back [in August 2022], so that was beautiful. And we've seen an increased number of applications from the arts and cultural sector to the three federal agencies.

I think that we never had the knowledge that the [hurricanes] brought forth. It uncovered many problems across the board. It also allowed for different activities that would otherwise never have occurred. And that includes all of the workshops that concern historic property conservation. This exchange of knowledge with the experts in the field locally, with national and international experts in Puerto Rico—to learn how to perform this construction, this preservation, the whole thing—I think that it wouldn't have happened otherwise.

Juan Vera: There's so much more to be done. But that's what we're here for. We know these sorts of events are going to be occurring more frequently than in the past for different reasons, climate change, et cetera. So, in the reconstruction process, we have to plan with that in mind. Try to avoid less damage in the future. Historic preservation activities and workshops for specialists, to address the damaged buildings, were excellent and necessary. These were possible with the collaboration of experts from the federal government, including the Department of Interior and National Endowment for the Arts.

COLLABORATIONS

Rosa: I'd say that pretty much there is no doubt that arts and culture have to be engaged when it comes to recovery. The National Assembly of State Art Agencies has an article that states how you can spearhead and have your economic development gain some traction faster involving arts and culture. And we can attest to it through various natural disaster moments.

We received a lot of support from the federal government, different agencies including the NEA. I think that the state art agencies, in facing a disaster such as the one we did, need all the help they can get. Yes, you need to participate in all those meetings, at least have a voice in there, and pretty much accept all the help you can get from anyone. I have to say that we truly appreciate the National Endowment for the Arts. I can't express how important the assistance was as a state arts agency and to our constituents—pretty much from the general population all the way to top-tier museums, higher education

institutions, specialized schools, everything. I mean, it's definitely a joint effort.

Vélez: Another byproduct of the emergency, we were able to establish new networks through the municipalities and local communities. We realized that we have a broader constituency than we previously thought, so we established the cultural networks so we'll be able to communicate more agilely in terms of getting back into the local community. Also, we realized the big museums have unique needs that we might be able to help or be a facilitator in terms of our assessing damages and whatever might be of need.

Rosa: I have to say, it was beautiful to see how museums collaborated with artists. I know that the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo did amazing things for artists of all different fields. You had these big, solid institutions playing a significant role at the same time with everything that had to be done. For the sake of continuity, mental health, economic health, just getting it done.

Vélez: And I think it was an opportunity for broadening their constituency.

Rosa: Going forward, we're always available for those states and communities that go through natural disasters, available to provide any assistance they need on how to insert arts and culture into the recovery process. We're pretty much natural at it by now.

Brian Lusher is the historic preservation officer at the National Endowment for the Arts.

▼ The audience in San Juan waits for trovadores to perform traditional folk music as part of ICP's Cultura Rodante project.



Check out our online-only material!

We feature an audio piece on third-generation Mexican American luthier Manuel Delgado of Nashville, Tennessee, whose preeminent acoustic guitars (as well as the *vihuela* and *guitarrón*, which are used in Mariachi music) are highly coveted.



(Above) Luthier Manuel Delgado with one of his guitars.
(Left) One of luthier Manuel Delgado's *vihuelas*, used in Mariachi music. Photos courtesy of Delgado Guitars