

theater

Culture Clash

Gay director helms Spanish-language dramedy

by Stephen Blair

Passion trumped practicality when gay theater director Daniel Jáquez decided what he really wanted to do with his life.

Raised in Juárez, Mexico, he earned a degree in mathematics at University of Texas and became a successful actuary. "Then I started taking acting lessons in New York," he explains. Smitten with stagecraft, he kissed his steady paychecks goodbye and became a New York-based freelance director.

"I call myself a New York director, but I live in Connecticut," he clarifies. "It's just for business purposes for pretentious people who only hire New York directors."

Jáquez has worked on and off in Portland since he did a residency with Miracle Theatre Group in 2001. He won a directing Drammy for Miracle's production of *Icarus* that year, and in 2003 he directed the compelling *Two Sisters and a Piano* for Artists Répertoire Theatre.

Prior to becoming artistic director of Miracle Theatre Group in 2003, Olga Sanchez met Jáquez through the Lincoln Center Director's Lab in New York and suggested he look into directing opportunities at Miracle.

"Daniel is very versatile," she notes. "He's able to handle all kinds of material from a classically stylized drama to a near-farcical comedy. He is a very nurturing director, very respectful toward the actors, the designers and the whole production team."

Now he's working with Miracle again for a production of *Rosalba y los Llaveros*, a 1949 dramedy by prolific Mexican playwright Emilio Carballido. The play will be performed by Teatro Español, a division of Miracle that has the distinction of being the only Spanish-language acting ensemble in the Pacific Northwest. Thursday, Friday and Sunday performances will be subtitled.

In the play *Rosalba* is an educated and arrogant young woman from Mexico City who joins her mother to visit relatives in rural Veracruz. In her campaign to illuminate the lives of these country dwellers, she tells some lies and exposes some family secrets.

"All the characters grow because of the conflict," Jáquez says. "Rosalba affects her relatives with her Mexico City ways, and they prove that countryside morality is just fine, too."

Jáquez sees elements of British sitcoms and Anton Chekhov dramas in *Rosalba*, with a dash of *Green Acres* to ratchet up the silliness. "It's a good chance to laugh and explore societal relationships in Mexican culture. These boundaries still exist."

Jáquez has an open and often funny conversational style, talk-

ing openly about his childhood and his personal life. He speaks fondly of James Love, his partner for the past four years. "I've had so many partners over the years," he says. "This relationship is about commitment and working through problems and becoming more compatible."

During the past six years Jáquez has grown quite fond of Portland. "It's a small big city or a big small city—I'm not sure which," he says. "I like it because it's liberal and open, and I have opportunities to know artists here. It's not as oppressive as I thought it would be."

Though he's clearly proud of Latino productions he's done with Miracle and Artists Rep, Jáquez worries that he might have painted himself into a corner. "Now I'm only being hired to do Latino theater," he says. To potentially broaden his Portland theater options for the future, he hopes to network with Portland Center Stage and other mainstream companies.



Daniel Jáquez

Jáquez names Chekhov, Mario Vargas Llosa and Tennessee Williams as some of his favorite playwrights. He has never written a full-length play, though he has taken playwriting classes and has written many individual scenes. "I need to mature more as a writer and not expect the final draft to come out on the first try," he says.

For now he's happy to stick with directing.

"I'm a very physical director," he says. "I see actors as athletes. They need to build stamina so their bodies get used to the high energy level. I'm always up there with them as a cheerleader and a motivator."

As a general rule he likes to take off his director's cap when he goes to see a play. "I like to lie back and let it take me as an audience member. But," he admits, "that's hard to do if there are horrible problems with the production." **10**

MIRACLE THEATRE GROUP presents *Rosalba y los Llaveros* through April 28 at 525 S.E. Stark St. Tickets are \$15-\$18 from 503-236-7253.

Portland freelance writer STEPHEN BLAIR directed a play in college that used a Rubik's Cube, a toy gun and a huge cardboard box as props.



When a Mexico City girl visits her Veracruz relatives, she begins to unlock many family secrets in *Rosalba y los Llaveros* through April 28 at Miracle Theatre.

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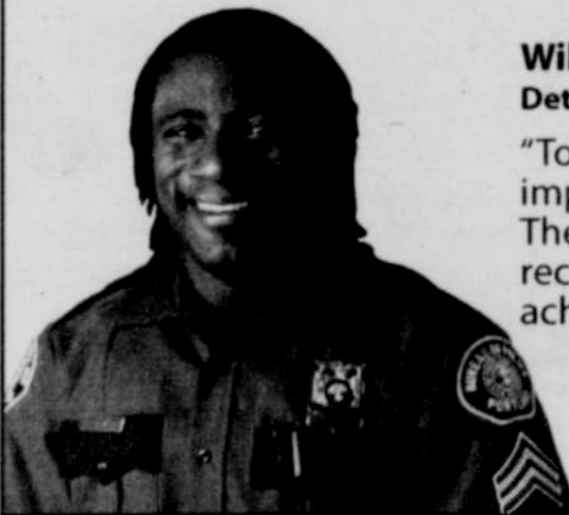


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