

Passing It On

PDX Latino Gay Pride celebrates youth, literature and La Lucha in 2010

COVERAGE BY RYAN J. PRADO



Like all big ideas, Portland's Latino Gay Pride celebration started small. Through a commitment forged by co-founders David Martinez and Melanie Davis following Portland Pride 2004, the pair sought to establish an evolving annual celebration of the LGBTQ Latino population, with a promise to meet the needs of their community as it grew. Just five years after the first Latino Gay Pride festival—a mid-week evening event dubbed *Noche de Familia y Mariposas*—grounded the Latino gay community in a more public forum, the festivities have become the largest freestanding Latino Gay Pride event in the United States.



EDGAR ROSALES

"When you get strong leaders and encourage the community itself to be involved and to take ownership, the more positive results you get," explained Davis of the scope of La Lucha 2010, which takes place June 2-6 at various locations throughout the city.

With each passing year, the struggles of Latinos across the country continues, as national issues concerning immigration, same-sex marriage and even surmounting stereotypes have mobilized further community organization. In keeping with the theme of Latino Gay Pride 2009, this year's five-day festival centers on "*la lucha*," or "the struggle." Martinez related that the ongoing premise of strife within the gay Latino community is something that can be built upon year after year, which explains 2010's evolution into the tag "*la lucha continua*," or "the struggle continues."

"We realized there was a lot more we could do with it," said Martinez. "It's sort of a fun play with wrestling, and the whole *lucha libre*, but then it's a real recognition of the fact that our community continues to struggle."

One big change to La Lucha 2010 is the addition of the festival's first literary events,

which will feature acclaimed New York City-based, Puerto Rican-born radical Latino writer and activist Charles Rice-González, along with Portland expatriate, novelist and spoken-word poet Charlie Vázquez. Both Rice-González and Vázquez have thrived within New York City's Nuyorican arts scene. Their talents have helped spotlight queer Latino writers who have for too long lived in the shadows of mainstream Latino and American cultural movements.

The literary angle begins Thursday, June 3, with an event at Aura Restaurant and Lounge. Rice-González will read from his new novel *Chulito*—a coming-of-age tale about a young, hip-hop loving Latino coming out in the South Bronx. Vázquez will read from his new tome, *Contraband: A Revolution of the Soul*, about a secret government worker who escapes to tunnel communities during a bloody revolution in the United States.

Portland writers Jimmy Radosta and Karol Collymore will join with readings of their own, with emcee duties handled by fellow scribe Stephen Marc Beaudoin. Vázquez hopes to promote the canon of queer Latino literature to others in the community.

"Many people think of readings and literature and poetry as dull and boring, and nothing could be more untrue," explained Vázquez, who will also take part in an event called "*Voces de Jóvenes*," or "Youth Voices," along with Rice-González on June 5 at Portland State University. Rice-González and Vázquez will also appear at a separate book reading and signing Friday, June 4 at PSU.

"There are scores of queer Latino writers documenting our presence and history and it's crucial that, as queer Latinos, we read and enlighten ourselves to our own history, as well as the overall American history we are taught in

school that excludes us," continued Vázquez. "No one can tell our history more accurately and honestly than we can."

Martinez echoed those sentiments, stemming from his own desire for literature that would speak to him as a gay Latino.

"When I was coming out, what I did was try to learn about my community," said Martinez. "A lot of the gay literature didn't reflect me. Part of [presenting this event] is we wanted to make people aware that there are some authors that are Latino and queer. If anything, we thought there was a lack of information that this type of literature is out there."

The commitment to family and the passing on of support, leadership and education to gay Latino youth has remained a paramount goal of the event's planning committee and board. To that effect, the free Youth Voices event debuts this year, joining established Latino Gay Pride events such as Chicas Who Brunch—also June 5—as well as the previous day's La Lucha Dance Party at Boxxes. The Queerzone group at Outside In has been brought in as partner and leader of the event, along with PSU student groups M.E.Ch.A. and Las Mujeres.

Kicking off La Lucha 2010 again this year is "*Voz Alta*," or "Loud Voice," conceptualized by Portland Latino musician and actor Joaquin López. This all-ages event will feature an intimate performance of music and words from López and fellow singer Edna Vazquez on Wednesday, June 2 at the Miracle Theatre. Sandwiched in the middle of the schedule is an encore of the popular Miracle production *American Sueño*, which debuted during the Fertile Ground Festival in January.

Capping off the five-day festivities is the official La Lucha 2010 Festival, taking place at the Jupiter Hotel and featuring the new *Reina*

de la Lucha competition. With assistance from sponsor Verizon Wireless, audience members will have the opportunity to text-vote for their favorite "*reina*," or "queen." Sashaying down the runway during this event will be legendary drag performer and former Latino Gay Pride emcee Meesha Peru, along with Tryniti LaCroix, Adrienne Alexander and Vivica Valentine in a "Lip Sync for your Vote" free-for-all.

As if five days of literature, runway drag, dancing, *libre* masks, theater and incredible food weren't enough, La Lucha 2010 will again recognize Portland leaders whose vision, activism, creativity and community involvement have set them apart. The recipients of the 2010 Mariposa Awards include Bradley Angle House's Lupita Mendez; Cascade AIDS Project's Maricela Berumen; Salvador Candela, volunteer with new gay Latino group SOMOS (more information on p. 45); the aforementioned Ms. Peru (né Carlos Quezada); grassroots multicultural organization Umatilla Morrow Alternatives; and Witham & Dickey printing service. Honorees will be recognized throughout the festival but will receive their awards at Chicas Who Brunch.

La Lucha 2010 may be the most involved Latino Gay Pride mounted to date, but it's far from the celebration's peak, according to the event's founders. In fact, it's most likely still only the beginning.

"I see us continuing to strengthen," said Martinez. "I see us continuing to increase in visibility and build with these new leaders we have, and have them carry it forward."

"I go to a committee meeting and really get tears in my eyes because it's everything that [Martinez] and I committed to each other and promised the community it would be," said Davis. "Everything that we visualized has become a reality."



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