

Senses of Pride

Joaquin López serves up food, theater, music and more

This year's production of *American Sueño* at the Miracle Theatre, part of January's Fertile Ground Festival, was a piecemeal triumph. Interweaving four individual tales of family, coming out and the Latino-American experience, the performances were laced with powerful, affecting emotion. The effort that went into these moving portrayals was nothing if not painstaking, requiring workshop interviews with real people in Portland over a period of months. The soundtrack nurtured a truly organic atmosphere, and few walked away without being touched by the character of Augustin Obrero de la Torre—played by Joaquin López—a gay, undocumented immigrant working as a musician to support his elderly parents, who are unaware of his homosexuality. López's contributions outside of this one production have been equally infused with careful thought, passion and a profound capacity for art and family.

López was born in Los Angeles. His family moved to Beaverton when he was just five years old. After graduating from Southern Oregon State University, where he studied theater, López briefly revisited his Southern California roots, studying vocal performance at the Los Angeles Music Academy. He returned to the Portland metro area in 2000 and has been here ever since.

López's family owns the popular Alberta Arts District taqueria La Bonita,

where he works in addition to running his own catering business, Mayahuel Catering. His days are also busy giving private voice and songwriting lessons, teaching guitar and songwriting for grades 3-12 throughout the Portland area and with the afterschool Sun Program and the I Had a Dream Foundation, rehearsing for the June 4 remount of *American Sueño*, and putting together this year's Voz Alta for Portland Latino Gay Pride. In short, López's time is stretched to the seams.

López told *Just Out* he views the balancing act of responsibilities like "a candle burning at both ends," and that his art is conceptual in turn.

"[My projects] all kind of bleed into each other," said López. "My artwork, my musicianship, my writing, some of it was used for *American Sueño*. I pulled from my own library to use for Voz Alta, and so I'm just sourcing things. I'm not creating anything new. I just take from what I know and put it together and focus it on the evening or focus it on the show."

López's love of Mexican folkloric music and storytelling is largely evident within his projects—even within the scope of his food.

"Food for him is really a metaphor, it's not just 'we need to feed,'" said David Martinez, co-founder of Portland Latino Gay Pride. "It represents our culture, so he's all about the display. He really takes so much

pride in everything he does."

López began catering for Portland's Latino Gay Pride in its inaugural outing (2006) but joined the planning committee last year, sowing the seeds for the very first Voz Alta at Miracle Theatre. This year's performance will incorporate the event's La Lucha theme, alongside Mexican folkloric and popular music, and original music featuring Los Palmeros Mariachi band vocalist Edna Vazquez in accompaniment with López.

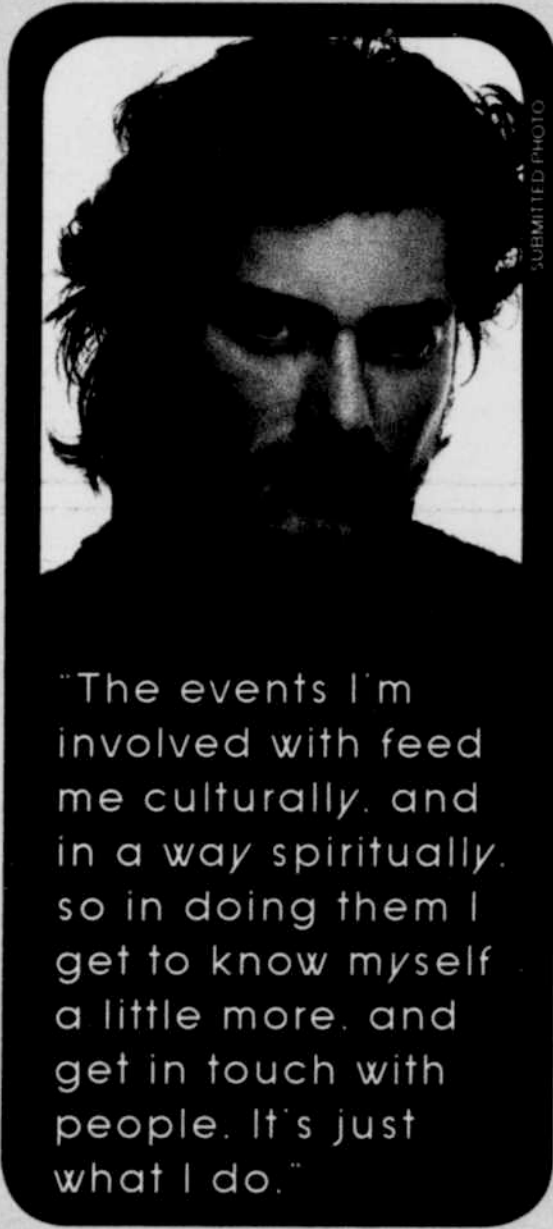
"Many things in Voz Alta are wanting to step outside your present self for a better life," explained López of the show's message. "So we have poems that are rooted in someone trying to look outside their relationship to find happiness. We have some people coming from [one] country into another country like this one trying to find life outside themselves. We have people who have been oppressed wanting to find life and be living."

López is also finding time to organize the *Sabor a Mexico*, or "Taste of Mexico," on June 24 at the Jupiter Hotel. He revealed that the event would not only include heaping helpings of Mexican food, but a large exhibition of Mexican art—once again perfecting an amalgam of the senses. According to Martinez, this is nothing new.

"For us, he's been a constant worker, and then he also has that artistic, theatrical bent," said Martinez. "He gives this perspective that we really need in terms of what our messages mean."

"The events I'm involved with feed me culturally, and in a way spiritually," explained López. "So in doing them I get to know myself a little more, and get in touch with people. It's just what I do."

Voz Alta descends upon the Miracle Theatre Wednesday, June 2 to kick off La Lucha 2010. From 6 to 7:30 p.m., there will be food, tequila and beer tastings. Doors to the theater open at 7:30 p.m., and the show begins at 8. There is a \$5 suggested donation. All ages.



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La Lucha 2010 AT A GLANCE

Wed., June 2, 6-9PM

Voz Alta

A "loud voice" evening of music, drama and song. Miracle Theatre, 525 SE Stark; \$5 suggested donation, all ages.

Thurs., June 3, 6:30-9PM

Escribir, Leer, Luchar

Literary event featuring Charlie Vázquez and Charles Rice-González. Aura Restaurant + Lounge, 1022 W. Burnside; \$5 suggested donation, 21 and over.

Fri., June 4, 3PM

Book reading and signing featuring Vázquez and Rice-González.

Portland State University, Room TBA; free, all ages.

Fri., June 4, 7PM VIP Reception, 9PM doors

La Lucha Dance Party

Red carpet, guest DJ and more. Boxxes, 1035 SW Stark; \$5 as of 9 p.m., 21 and over.

Fri., June 4, 8PM

American Sueño

Miracle Theatre; \$20 general admission tickets, \$15 students, all ages.

Sat., June 5, 11AM-2PM

Chicas Who Brunch

Networking and social event with a focus on LGTBQ Latinas, their experiences and contributions. Jupiter Hotel Courtyard, 800 E. Burnside; \$25, 21 and over.

Sat., June 5, 3-5PM

Voces de Jovenes (Youth Voices)

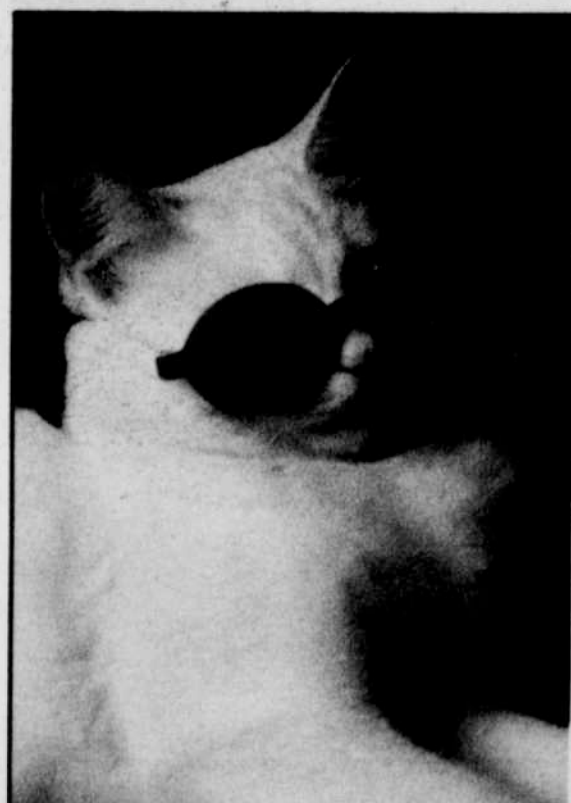
Spoken word, original poetry and storytelling for youth with guest authors Vázquez and Rice-González. PSU's Smith Memorial Union Building, room 327; free, teens and up.

Sun., June 6, 4-8PM

Portland Latino Gay Pride Festival

The closing event, featuring local and national entertainers and artists and the announcement of the 2010 Mariposa Award recipients. Jupiter Hotel, 800 E. Burnside; \$5 suggested donation, 21 and over.

Visit latinogaypridepdx.com for more information.



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