



# FIERCELY NEW

It's a great month for theatre that is fiercely new and passionate. Our first stop is to talk with Dañel Malán about the remount of her popular play, *Frida un Retablo*.

Our next two shows are part of the fabulous Fertile Ground series that graces our city each January. These two shows, *Sonnetscape* and *The Godmother* have strong ties to the LGBTQ community.

## *Frida un Retablo*

Frida Kahlo was one of Mexico's most acclaimed artists. Yet her life was anything but charmed. She endured (and triumphed through) a tumultuous marriage (to superstar artist Diego Rivera), childhood polio that left her crippled, and later, an automotive accident that damaged her for life.

Playwright, and Teatro Milagro co-founder, Dañel Malán, creates a powerful look at the life of Kahlo in *Frida un Retablo* (a Retablo is a small sacred painting in Mexico). A trio of actors represents Frida, Old Frida and the Spirit of Frida. The play itself is written with a good deal of gender fluidity.

### WHAT ATTRACTED MALÁN TO KAHLO?

I felt connected in so many ways. It overwhelmed me that in 1930 in Mexico this woman could do whatever she wanted. She could say, "I am a communist, I'm bisexual ... I am Frida Kahlo. I think that's why she's so iconic, especially in the lesbian community.

### WHAT MADE HER SO ICONIC?

She could be herself, Malán reflects. She visited Tehuantepec (Mexico). There the women are in charge — they make all the decisions. She thought, Why can't every place be like that.

*Frida un Retablo* runs January 10 - 18 .  
milagro.org.

## *The Godmother*

We talk with playwright Sandra de Helen.

### WHAT (OR WHO) INSPIRED YOU TO WORK IN THEATRE?

The women's movement. When I was at the University of Missouri-Rolla, I was one of only 500 women in a sea of 5,000 men. I was the first woman to write for the school newspaper in its 104 year history, and my column got me death threats (seriously) for my attempts at humor. So, I decided to do feminist theatre when I left there, went to Kansas City, Mo, met Kate Kasten, and we founded Actors' Sorority. When I moved to Portland I founded the Portland Women's Theatre Company.

### WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT YOUR SHOW WILL COMMUNICATE?

The theme of the play is "family first." But this is a mob family. So, there may be some questionable values. We explore them.

### WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THIS STORY?

I was inspired by two things: One, the estimable playwright Marsha Norman said her most popular play is the one with a gun in it; and two, an article in the *Kansas City Star* about women running mob families — godmothers. I decided to write my own version of that story set in Kansas City during prohibition (which meant virtually nothing there, thanks to the mob) with a lesbian godmother and a mob of mixed ethnicities.

What makes theatre an appealing discipline for you?

I like to play! Theatre is where grownup people use their skills to create make believe for all of us. We create it together, and it takes all of us to make it happen: playwright, actors, director, designers, builders, and especially the audience. Theatre needs every single one of us, and then the magic is real, right there in our laps."

*The Godmother* plays January 27 at 8 p.m.  
fertilegroundpdx.org

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