

Retelling of Rivera's childhood coming to Coaster

Teatro Milagro, Tolovana Arts Colony present bilingual play

By Erick Bengel
Cannon Beach Gazette

The childhood story of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera gets the fairy-tale treatment in *El Niño Diego*, a 40-minute bilingual play that Portland's Teatro Milagro (Miracle Theater) will perform at the Coaster Theatre Playhouse at 7 p.m. March 7.

"Diego Rivera is one of the most revered Mexican painters in the last couple of centuries," said Lisa Kerr, program coordinator of the Tolovana Arts Colony. People who aren't familiar with Rivera may be familiar with his paintings, she said, "because they've been made into posters 100 times over."

El Niño Diego ("The Boy Diego") imagines what would have happened if Diego (played by Brian Burger) — who, in real life, was a child prodigy sent to live with a *curandera* (medicine woman) because of his poor health — had met the Aztec goddess Coatlicue in his youth. The goddess gives the boy a magical paintbrush, which Diego thinks will make him a legendary artist.

When a dastardly art school director (played by Ajai Terrazas Tripathi) and his dimwitted minion (played by Ana Silva) try to exploit Diego's "magical" talents, Diego's nurse, An-



SILVIA MALAN-GONZALEZ PHOTO

In *El Niño Diego*, Diego Rivera, kneeling, receives a magical paintbrush from the Aztec serpent goddess Coatlicue, conniving director Jose Manguino, left, tries to exploit Diego's talents and Diego's nurse, right, tries to convince Diego that he doesn't need magic to be a great artist.

tonia, helps Diego realize that he doesn't need magic to make great art.

"In our story, he discovers he doesn't need outside magic," said Alida Wilson-Gunn, the associate artistic director of the Milagro's touring program and director of the Coaster production. "He has the strength inside to create, and that it's not the magical paintbrush at all. It's his own ability that will propel him forward in his career."

Political themes

Beneath the slapstick and family-friendly fantasy lies a serious political subtext, playwright Dañel Malán said.

The evil school director, Jose Manguino (who, in

reality, wasn't evil), is trying to squeeze money from the school's arts program for his private enrichment. The character represents the forces in favor of defunding the arts in public schools, Malán said.

"It's a kids' show, so it doesn't get too heavy with political commentary," Tripathi said.

He added, however, that — in addition to incorporating Rivera's interest in pre-Columbian indigenous culture, mythology and folklore — the play expresses Rivera's philosophy of social equality, that "art should be for all people, as opposed to the bad guy who thinks that art is something to commodify."

"It's a very sweet story. It has villains and heroes and goddesses and magic," Wilson-Gunn said. "It's a play written for youth to encourage them to participate in the arts, to make (the arts) more accessible, especially for those who may not have much exposure to the arts."

Reaching out

Teatro Milagro is coming to Cannon Beach courtesy of the Tolovana Arts Colony, which late last year received two grants — \$3,300 from the Meyer Memorial Trust and \$1,500 from the Clatsop County Cultural Coalition — to pay for the performance.

Kerr, who secured the grants, wants to hold more

events that involve the town's Hispanic community and integrate Hispanic art and culture. Money left over from the Meyer Memorial Trust grant will help fund multicultural cooking classes in April, May and June, she said.

"We thought Teatro Milagro was the perfect way to do it because it's a bilingual theater, and that might bring out more of the Hispanic population," she said, adding that, if *El Niño Diego* proves popular in Cannon Beach, the arts colony may arrange for a more adult-themed production in the future.

the Milagro cast from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Tolovana Hall, 3779 S. Hemlock St.

"Kids so seldom have a voice in the arts," Wilson-Gunn said. This is why it's important, she said, to ask children after an artistic experience, "what they felt about it. What did they see? What did they remember? What did it mean to them?"

Malán said she hopes her play conveys the value of art to the children in attendance. "People don't really understand how important the arts are."

If you go

WHAT: *El Niño Diego* (The boy Diego), performed by the Teatro Milagro (Miracle Theater)

WHEN: 7 p.m. March 7

WHERE: Coaster Theatre

COST: \$20 per family (which could be any number of individuals), \$5 per individual, or whatever a person can afford. Attendees pay at the door; tickets will not be available ahead of time.

STORY: The childhood story of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, done in fairytale style; suitable for children

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