

**Legal Name**

Latino Theater Company

**Project Title**

To support the launch of a National Latina/o Theater Encuentro ("Encounter") as part of the Latino Theater Commons

**Project Progress and Successes**

From October 12 - November 10, 2014, the Latino Theater Company (LTC) hosted the 2014 LATC Encuentro: A National Latina/o Theatre Festival at the Los Angeles Theatre Center (LATC). In association with our partners the Latina/o Theatre Commons, LTC gathered 150 artists, dozens of scholars, and more than 7,000 audience members to participate in the largest national Latina/o theater festival in more than 25 years.

LTC Artistic Director José Luis Valenzuela opened the festival by delivering the Encuentro Manifesto, which encapsulated the spirit and the context of the Encuentro: "We are here to inspire and to be inspired ... To pollinate our artistic dreams and the dreams of the communities we come from. ... To recognize that we are not alone, but that we come from somewhere: that our history and our language should be held high and honored. ... We are claiming our place here and now: in the American theater, in the Latin American theater, in the global theater." (The 5-minute-long Manifesto is available for viewing in its entirety here: <http://youtu.be/zSnIHPQNSWA>.)

The outcomes of the Encuentro are numerous and far-reaching, and represent only the beginning of a nation-wide movement:

**REVITALIZED ARTISTIC PRACTICE AND CREATION OF PRODUCTION OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTISTS OF COLOR**

Over the course of the Encuentro, 19 artists/theater companies presented aesthetically significant, canon-quality dramatic works mirroring the complexity of the U.S. Latina/o experience. These artists traveled from throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico, and collectively presented more than 100 productions at the festival. These productions included Pulitzer Prize winning plays, English and Spanish language plays, devised theater, experimental work, community based plays, and solo plays, which are detailed in the attached Encuentro Program.

The Encuentro artists also co-created and performed 10 devised works over the course of the Encuentro: artists were divided into 10 new "creation labs" and provided with "inspiration packets" composed of poetry, visual art, and ethnographic sources to facilitate the collaborations. A complete video of the performance of the devised works is available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bkYIw3-0G8>. (It has not been edited, and has a run time of two and a half hours.)

Another successful and significant component of the Encuentro was the nine tertulia (social gathering) events that hosted by LTC and our partners. The tertulias were well attended and provided a forum for continuing the themes raised during the Encuentro performances. The also provided a way to extend the festival's reach even further, particularly embracing the experience and wisdom of local, Los Angeles scholars and artists. To watch videos of the Encuentro tertulia -- and of several of the Encuentro's reflection sessions - please visit: <http://howlround.com/livestreaming-the-latinao-theatre-commons-encuentro-2014-cafeonda-los-angeles-sat-oct-18-mon-nov-10>.

The Encuentro developed a body of work that expands beyond the borders of regional productions, and that speaks to both the richness of the lived ethnic minority experience, as

well as to a universal humanism, underpinned by a rigorous interrogation into the state-of-the-field in Latina/o theater artistry and aesthetics.

#### COLLABORATIONS AMONG REGIONAL LATINA/O ARTISTS

One of LTC's primary objectives for hosting the Encuentro was to facilitate a national network to connect regional Latina/o theater artists and to reflect the changing face of U.S. theater. Although it is less than two months since the festival's close, the Encuentro has already initiated a nationwide collaboration among Latina/o artists. For example, New York's Pregones Theatre (one of the Encuentro's participating companies) is currently hosting a full production of Caborca Theater's Theatre's "ZOETROPE": Caborca presented "ZOETROPE Part 1" at the Encuentro, and following the festival the two companies have united to present the production in its entirety. Furthermore, Emerson College of Boston is currently collaborating with LTC to support a Fall 2016 nationwide tour of "Premeditation," the play produced by LTC at the Encuentro.

The final weekend of the Encuentro also served as the second Latina/o Theatre Commons National Convening. One hundred and twenty theater artists and scholars traveled to Los Angeles to participate in the Convening (compared to approximately 80 at the first Convening in Boston in October 2013), many of whom traveled at their own expense. Among those in attendance were representatives from several theater companies that were selected as finalists for the Encuentro, but were not ultimately selected as Encuentro artists: LTC invited all finalists to participate, and facilitated funding from the Latina/o Theatre Commons' to support the travel expenses for these artists. Their presence contributed greatly to the spirit of unity and conversations about the issues of advocacy, art making, networking/convening, and scholarship in U.S. Latina/o theater today. After three days of attending productions (10 over the course of the Convening), and participating workshops and readings, Commons members left Los Angeles invigorated in their practice and enthusiastic about the next Commons Convening, to be held in Chicago in 2015.

#### TRAINING THE THEATER LEADERS OF TOMORROW

In conjunction with the Encuentro, LTC hosted the Artistic Leaders Fellowship Program, which "graduated" 10 up-and-coming theater professionals. Each Fellow: was assigned 1-2 theater companies to partner with over the course of the Encuentro; served as the Artistic Director of one of the devised works, collectively created with a mixed group of artists from various Encuentro companies; lead pre-and post-show discussions with high school matinee audiences; received individual mentoring from LTC staff; and gained hands-on experience with the many facets of running a theater company. The Fellows left the Encuentro with the knowledge, practice, and passion to serve as the Artistic Directors of tomorrow.

In addition to the individual skills each Fellow gained, they also developed a strong sense of community and collaboration amongst themselves. For example, Fellows Alex Meda and Arielle Brown have continued their partnership beyond the Encuentro (Ms. Brown was assigned to Ms. Meda's company, Teatro Luna, during the festival): Ms. Brown is currently the Interim Artistic Director of Teatro Luna West, the west coast branch of the company. Furthermore, Teatro Luna will present their devised theater piece, "Generation Sex", as part of the LATC's East of Broadway Spring Season 2015: in addition to Ms. Meda and Ms. Brown, several additional Encuentro artists will participate in the production.

The Fellows also took it upon themselves to implement a fundraising campaign amongst the Encuentro participants, to ask them to give back to LTC for our role in hosting the Encuentro. The video they created as part of the Fellows' Precente campaign (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZtdLunQH6k#t=23>) raised \$3,270, and beautifully expresses the impact of the Encuentro on the lives of the many people it touched.

## DEVELOPING NEW AUDIENCES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

LTC hosted 2,500 Los Angeles high school students at the Encuentro. Students were bused from their LAUSD schools to attend student matinees and participate in pre-/post-performance discussions with Encuentro artists. There was no cost for students or their schools, as LTC raised funding from donors to support the program. More than 73% of LAUSD students are Latina/o and this program allowed those students to see their stories on stage and to experience live theater, many of them for the first time. During their post-Encuentro reflections, the Fellows described these student matinees as some of the most poignant moments of the festival.

In conjunction with Time Warner Cable and Ovation, LTC also hosted "STEM in the Theater with Wilmer Valderrama" ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC\\_0GPDT1v4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC_0GPDT1v4)) during the Encuentro. This two hour long presentation was livestreamed, with hundreds of LAUSD students in the audience. The program highlighted the role of STEM in the field of theater (namely lighting, sound, costume and set design), in order to both educate and excite youth about the wide array of STEM careers available to them.

## INCREASED EXPOSURE FOR U.S. LATINA/O THEATER

The Encuentro received more than 45.5 million media impressions, with 27 earned media placements. Highlights of the nationwide media coverage of the Encuentro include:

- A featured cover story in the Calendar Section of the "Los Angeles Times";
- Exclusive coverage by national syndicated show "American Latino TV" (which has 72 million household viewers);
- News agency EFE's story on the festival was widely picked up in national and international media (including Fox News Latino); and
- LTC's social media engagement rose almost 600% over the course of the Encuentro.

The Encuentro was a tremendous success, with an impact that will resonate for years to come. In the words of Mr. Valenzuela, the "Encuentro represents nothing less than the coming of age of Latina/o theater in this country."

## **Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project**

LTC's greatest obstacle with hosting the Encuentro was projecting audience size, and struggling to reach our estimate. Historically, LTC has estimated audience size based on the scale of the production, which resulted in LTC projecting an audience of 20,000 for the Encuentro. The actual audience size for the Encuentro was approximately 7,000. While this number is far below our projection, the Encuentro marked LTC's highest-grossing consecutive four-week period in almost three years - almost double the second-highest period. Many of the Encuentro audience members purchased festival passes, and were regular attendees at the LATC over the course of the festival. Furthermore, with 45.5 million media impressions for the festival, we are confident that the Encuentro reached a wide audience outside of the LATC. However, since the Encuentro, LTC has established a new policy for projecting audience sizes based upon historical box office data, and from there ensuring that the budget of each production is in line with this estimation of box office revenue.

The lower-than-projected Encuentro audience was also the result of unanticipated challenges with marketing the festival. LTC was unable to hire our new Marketing Director, Albert Villalta, until just over a month before the start of the Encuentro. Although LTC had begun developing marketing strategies prior to his hire, the majority of the festival's creative assets (including its website) had to be developed and launched over a short period of time. Furthermore, LTC had assumed that the theater companies/artists selected to

participate in the Encuentro would possess existing marketing assets that could be incorporated in to the Encuentro marketing campaign; this proved not to be the case. LTC has learned two valuable lessons as a result of this experience, which will be incorporated into our marketing practices for our future large, collaborative efforts: when developing our pre-production timelines, allocate a generous amount of time for developing and launching the marketing campaign; and establish marketing expectations with partners prior to beginning collaborations.

**Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

- José Luis Valenzuela's Encuentro Manifesto: <http://youtu.be/zSnIHPQNsWA>
- Productions of the 10 co-created, devised works at the Encuentro:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bkYIw3-0G8>
- The livestreamed Encuentro tertulia and reflection sessions:  
<http://howlround.com/livestreaming-the-latino-theatre-commons-encuentro-2014-cafeonda-los-angeles-sat-oct-18-mon-nov-10>.
- Encuentro Fellows' Precente campaign video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZtdLunQH6k#t=23>
- Livestreamed "STEM in the Theater with Wilmer Valderrama" by Time Warner Cable and Ovation: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC\\_0GPDT1v4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC_0GPDT1v4)
- Howlround Café Onda -- links to numerous reviews and articles about the Encuentro and its shows:  
<http://howlround.com/cafe-onda>

**If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N**

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

Yes. To contact LTC about the Encuentro, please call Lupine Reppert, Director of Development, at (213) 489-0994.