The Western Stage celebrates El Teatro Campesino’s 50th year
with Corridos! Tales of Passion and Revolution

Author: Daniel Tarker

SALINAS, Calif. – This summer, The Western Stage (TWS) at Hartnell College celebrates the 50th anniversary of landmark Central Coast theatre company El Teatro Campesino with a spirited new production, Corridos! Tales of Passion and Revolution - newly revised for The Western Stage by El Teatro Campesino's visionary founding artistic director and in-house playwright, Luis Valdez.

Corridos! will fill the Mainstage Theater August 29 through September 19, 2015, with a vibrant collection of stories based on Mexican ballads from the turn of the 20th century and the early years of the century. Performances are Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2:00 p.m., at 411 Central Avenue in Salinas. Details are at westernstage.com.

Corridos! is Valdez’s own celebration of a vibrant and powerful Mexican folk tradition. Before the age of mass communication—radio, television, and the internet—every culture developed ways to share news, gossip, and important moral lessons. In Mexico during the early part of the 20th century, these ways took the form of the corrido, popular folk songs that would over time evolve into myths to be passed down from generation to generation.

In this play with music, Valdez takes audiences on a journey, showing them the evolution of the corrido dating back to its early form as a way to share morality tales. Later it would be used to document such historical stories as the experience of women fighting in the Mexican Revolution and eventually to comment on the experience of Mexican immigrants to America after the Revolution.

By drawing upon both the songs themselves as well as highly stylized European and Mexican theatrical techniques, Valdez elevates these earthly tales of human tragedy and sometimes comedy to the level of myth—much like the actual corridos themselves did to these stories as they were performed and shared by communities over time.

Valdez mastered this form of storytelling 50 years ago when he founded El Teatro Campesino to help farm union organizer Cesar Chavez educate farm workers about labor rights. In order to inform field workers with limited literacy about the dangers of pesticides and the benefits of organizing, Valdez and company performed short plays on the backs of flatbed trucks in the middle of produce fields, drawing on familiar stock characters and situations the field workers would easily recognize and understand to get their point across. Valdez found inspiration in both the traditions of the Italian commedia dell’arte, which used these techniques more for comic effect; and the Spanish Mission dramas, which used them to educate and “indoctrinate” Native Americans.
Now five decades old, El Teatro Campesino has made its home in the Central Coast town of San Juan Bautista, a rural community where the company has continued to support and celebrate Mexican-American culture by producing vital and engaging productions deeply rooted in Mexican-American theatre tradition.

Additionally, Valdez has become an icon of Central Coast theatre, bringing his award-winning play Zoot Suit to the boards on Broadway and to the silver screen in his 1981 film adaptation of the play, directing the film La Bamba about the life of Ritchie Valens, and serving as the first chair of the Teledramatic Arts program at California State University, Monterey Bay.

Directed by The Western Stage veteran Lorenzo Aragon and El Teatro Campesino founding company member César Flores with musical direction by Jesus Covarrubias, this production features the design talents of Theodore M. Dolas (scenic), Derek Duarte (lighting), Juliane Starks (costumes), and Jeff Mockus (sound).

The Western Stage's 2015 Season continues with David Ives' adaptation of the Pierre Corneille comedy The Liar; Matthew Spangler's Tortilla Curtain, an adaptation of the T.C. Boyle novel; and the Mel Brooks musical The Producers. For more information, go to westernstage.com.

DETAILS

WHAT: Corridos! Tales of Passion and Revolution by Luis Valdez, a celebration of a powerful Mexican-American folk tradition produced in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of El Teatro Campesino

WHEN: August 29 - September 19, 2015, at 7:30 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and at 2:00 p.m. on Sundays.

WHERE: The Mainstage Theater for The Western Stage, Hartnell College, 411 Central Avenue, Salinas.

TICKETS AND INFO: Admission is $26 general admission, $24 for seniors, $20 for Hartnell Faculty/Staff, $12 for children, Free for Hartnell Students. Group rate discount also available. For tickets and more details, go to westernstage.com or call 831-755-6816.

PRESS: For press tickets, contact Dennis Beasley at dbeasley@hartnell.edu or 831-759-6012. Download high-res publicity photos at http://bit.ly/corridosphotos

About Hartnell College
The Hartnell CCD serves over 16,000 students annually through its main campus in Salinas, the Alisal Campus in East Salinas, the King City Education Center, and various outreach learning centers throughout the Salinas Valley. Hartnell College, a Hispanic Serving Institution, provides workforce training and basic skills courses, and prepares students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Hartnell College is recognized for its innovative public and private partnerships that support world-class STEM education, career technical education, fine and performing arts, humanities, and athletics. We are growing leaders through opportunity, engagement and achievement. For more about Hartnell CCD, visit www.hartnell.edu.

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