



Illinois Humanities | August 2020

# GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Three Questions: Q&A with Myrna Salazar, co-founder & executive director, Chicago Latino Theater Alliance (CLATA)



## Project

"Destinos" 3rd Annual Chicago International Latino Theater Festival

## Location

Chicago, IL

## Organization

Founded in 2016 through a new collaboration between the National Museum of Mexican Art, the International Latino Cultural Center, and the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance, CLATA aims to produce the country's leading Latino theater festival ("Destinos"), to provide organizational and financial support for Chicago's Latino theater groups, and to build a permanent home for Chicago's Latino theater companies to thrive and grow.



## Project

"Destinos" takes place at several venues throughout Chicago, with over 93 performances, 10 student matinees, 50 post-show discussions, 4 panel discussions, and 3 workshops. Last year the festival presented work by 5 local theatre companies, 3 national companies, and 3 international companies. Primary partnerships for last year's festival included Aguijón Theatre Co., Repertorio Latino Theatre Co., Teatro Vista, Urban Theatre Co., and Water People Theatre, as well as Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Goodman Theatre, and Steppenwolf Theatre.

## Q1

What is the most important thing people should know about your work?

Myrna Salazar: The Chicago Latino Theater Alliance (CLATA) is unique, because for the first time in Chicago, three of the most prominent and long-standing Latino arts and culture organizations joined forces to increase awareness of Latino Theater. CLATA was co-founded in 2016 by Executive Director, Myrna Salazar, Carlos Tortolero, National Museum of Mexican Art (NMMA), Pepe Vargas, International Latino Cultural Center (ILCC) and Carlos Hernandez, Puerto Rican Arts Alliance (PRAA) who collectively bring over 75 years of arts programming in Chicago. We foster and showcase new thought-provoking Latino theater artists and produce the acclaimed *Destinos*-Chicago International Latino Theater Festival.

*Destinos* is one of its kind in the Midwest and one of a few in the nation. Our festival fuels the vital connection of Chicago's exciting local Latino theater by enriching it with their national/international counterparts. *Destinos* productions are presented in both English and Spanish (subtitled) to general and student audiences with post show conversations to further engage and break down barriers including language or hearing impairments. Through theater, CLATA nurtures an open dialogue between Latino artists and audiences of differing backgrounds to mutually evolve their artistic voices and create a broader outlook on the world.



## Q2

### Who makes your work possible?

MS: CLATA's success can be attributed to so many individuals and organizations. From our hardworking staff to the passionate and talented artists in the theatre industry, CLATA is able to adapt and propel forward to unimaginable heights!

We also are very grateful for the support given to all of us by foundations, government and corporations, among them: Illinois Humanities, MacArthur Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Field Foundation, Reeva & David Logan Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, DCASE, Illinois Arts Council, Allstate, Southwest and individual donors and volunteers. Other partnerships include: American Writers Museum, Latino Policy Forum and Poetry Foundation, who have co-sponsored a specific *Destinos* production that is relevant to their organizations' mission.

Since the inaugural 2017 *Destinos* festival, CLATA has created outstanding relationships with some of Chicago's amazing theatres who help fulfill its mission to present culturally savvy first-voice Latino productions that engage and incite cross-cultural exchange. Partners like: Aguijon Theater, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Chopin Theatre, The Den Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Miracle Center, Teatro Vista, Repertorio Latino Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre, UrbanTheater Company, Victory Gardens Theater, and Water People Theater. Through these partnerships, the general audience has come together to celebrate and experience amazing new works of local itinerant theater companies and invited groups from the United States and Latin America. CLATA is committed to presenting these works on a citywide scale and to varying audience demographics, and these partnerships are instrumental in making that happen. Festival productions have spanned Chicago's Back of the Yards, Belmont-Cragin, Bridgeport, Hermosa/Logan Square, Humboldt Park, Lincoln Park, Loop, Pilsen, Streeterville, and Wicker Park neighborhoods.

## Q3

### How do you see the arts/culture/humanities as being essential?

MS: The Arts, in general, are significant in our everyday lives. Every waking moment is brought to you by an artist, it can be a graphic on your phone, the food you eat at a restaurant, a program you are watching on your television, or music you listen to on your way to work. [The Arts allow the general populace to connect and be a part of something bigger than ourselves.](#)

Theatre, I strongly believe, fuels this vital human connection on a visceral level. As we gather in a space from our different walks of life, no distractions, we in that moment are united in an experience. An experience that can create empathy and challenges us to understand ourselves and others. Together, we can explore cultural differences, which also highlights our similarities. [What we see on a stage, can heal us, move us, and inspire us to achieve things we never could have imagined for ourselves.](#)

In general, theatre and the arts are essential. To the Latino community, and any other community of color, representation in the Arts is fundamental. *Destinos* is one of the few places where the vibrancy, talent, and diversity of the U.S. and International Latino experiences are told for and by Latino artists.

### Anything else you'd like to add?

MS: During this pandemic, CLATA is doing everything possible to adapt programming to go on digital platforms. We are streaming past *Destinos* festival productions and hosting discussions that examine relevant social and political topics such as immigration, labor, gentrification, LGBTQ rights, and afro-latinx and indigenous representation on stage.