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URBANTHEATER COMPANY ANNOUNCES BENEFIT PERFORMANCE OF THEIR CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED PRODUCTION OF CARMEN RIVERA'S OBIE-WINNING PLAY *LA GRINGA*, JANUARY 4-6, 2018 AT THE VITTUM THEATER

PRESENTED IN ASSOCIATION WITH ADVENTURE STAGE CHICAGO, ALL PROCEEDS WILL BENEFIT PUERTO RICO'S ESCUELA DE ARTES PLÁSTICAS Y DISEÑO WHICH WAS CONSIDERABLY DAMAGED BY HURRICANE MARÍA

Chicago, IL (December 8, 2017) — UrbanTheater Company (UTC) announced today a benefit performance, presented in association with **Adventure Stage Chicago**, of their critically acclaimed box-office smash production of Carmen Rivera's *La Gringa* at the **Vittum Theater, 1012 N. Noble St.** in Chicago, during Three Kings (Reyes Magos) Weekend, **January 4-6, 2018. Showtime: 7:30 p.m.** Ticket prices **\$75** (Rebuild, which includes pre-show reception meet & greet with the cast at all three shows) and **\$27** (Relief). For tickets, visit http://bit.ly/LaGringa_RebuildPR or call 773-342-4141

Partners for this benefit performance include Adventure Stage Chicago, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Mike Oquendo Events, The Puerto Rican Agenda, The Puerto Rican Cultural Center and the League of Chicago Theatres.

All proceeds raised will benefit **Puerto Rico's Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño (School of Fine Arts and Design)**. The Escuela de Artes Plásticas y

Diseño de Puerto Rico grew out of a series of workshops taught by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (Institute of Puerto Rican Culture). Based near the grounds of El Morro Fortress in Old San Juan and with teaching facilities and classrooms located at the newly restored Hospital de la Concepción in the Ballajá Barracks, the School was hit hard by Hurricane María: it lost most of its archives, book and art collections, its offices were flooded and classrooms destroyed. The total cost of damages has been estimated at one million dollars and the school could potentially lose students as many begin to seek transfers to the United States to complete their studies.

The Chicago theater community has stepped up to contribute to the cause. The League of Chicago Theaters has committed to providing stipends for the play's cast and crew and the Goodman and Steppenwolf Theatres are helping to cover rental expenses. UrbanTheater Company expects to raise a sum total of \$30,000.

"I met Richard Santiago-Berrios, an accomplished artist and professor at Escuela de Artes Plásticas y Diseño (EAPD) and his students, last year the 23rd Annual Fiesta Boricua [held in September]. I reconnected with Richard this year at the 24th Fiesta Boricua when he, Osvaldo Budet, an artist and former student of Richard's, and members from AgitArte's collective were in town on a commission to paint a mural," recalls UTC Executive Director **Ivan Vega**. "In October, Richard returned to Chicago after Hurricane María hit but as an evacuee. His wife and kids went to Florida until things became stable again. The school, which was already hurt by the economic crisis, received another big blow from Hurricane María.

"As the only Puerto Rican focused theater company in Humboldt Park, we were called to action to organize a benefit to help Puerto Rico but it was important to join forces with Chicago's theater community," Vega continues. "I wanted us to use *La Gringa*, since the production was still fresh and speaks to the Puerto Rican experience, to create three benefit performances where 100% of the money raised went directly to help rebuild EAPD. As an artist and an administrator, I know the importance of education and the power of art. The extraordinary individuals I've met from the school have inspired me to unite my community to make a difference".

"*La Gringa* is an oral account of Puerto Rico's rich culture and the importance of celebrating it. I feel this story is a perfect tale to remind people that 'Puerto Rico se levanta' [Puerto Rico Rises]. The arts are important to the magical fabric of *La Isla del Encanto* and this benefit performance is our communities Regalo de Reyes to EAPD," adds Artistic Director **Miranda González**. "By UTC pulling together theaters Adventure Stage, The Goodman Theater, Steppenwolf, League of Chicago Theaters, Mikey O Productions, and Community partners the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and The Puerto Rican Agenda we will shine light on the island arts community."

To commemorate the 20th anniversary of *La Gringa* as “the longest running Spanish-language play in off-Broadway,” UrbanTheater Company in association with Mike Oquendo Events raised the curtain on their own production of the play on November 11, 2016. Five weeks later, UTC had no choice but to extend its run for three more weeks. Each performance of the eight-week run sold out.

Last September, thanks to the Nelson Roman, Ward 2 City Council and Palante Theater Company—based out of Holyoke, Massachusetts, the company’s mission is to showcase works that highlight the Puerto Rican/Latinx experience—and the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts, UTC staged *La Gringa* at El Mercado, a community space in Holyoke. The play opened on September 21, a day after Hurricane María wreaked havoc on the island. All five performances were dedicated to the people of Puerto Rico and Mexico (an 8.2 magnitude earthquake hit that country’s Southern coast on September 7 followed by a second 7.1 one in Mexico City September 19). The performances provided a space for reflection and healing for the community.

La Gringa centers on María Elena García who travels to Puerto Rico to visit her extended family during the Christmas holidays. Although this is her first trip to Puerto Rico, she has grown up with an intense love for the island and even majored in Puerto Rican Studies in college. Upon her arrival, however, she realizes that Puerto Rico does not welcome her with open arms. The majority of the Puerto Ricans on the island consider her an American—a *gringa*—and María considers this a betrayal: If she’s a Puerto Rican in the United States and an American in Puerto Rico, María concludes, then this makes her a nobody everywhere. Her journey to come to terms with who she is leads María into misperceptions and misadventures. But will an unlikely ally help her find her way to the other side?

About the Director and Playwright

Carmen Rivera (Playwright) is an Obie Award-winning playwright whose other Off Broadway productions include *La Lupe: My Life, My Destiny* (2002 ACE Award – Best Production); *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water, To Catch the Lightning* (1997 Nomination ACE Award – Best Production); *The Next Stop* (INTAR / Repertorio Español); and *Under the Mango Tree* (INTAR). She also co-wrote, with Cándido Tirado, *Celia: The Life and Music of Celia Cruz*, (HOLA Award 2008, Outstanding Achievement in Playwriting), which played Off-Broadway at New World Stages and toured Florida, Chicago, Tenerife, Canary Islands and Puerto Rico. Twelve of her other works have been produced at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM); Teatro Circulo; SOHO Rep; Nuyorican Poet’s Café; National Public Radio (NPR); UrbanTheater Company in Chicago and many other theaters. She holds an MA in Playwriting and Latin American Theatre from New York University.

Miranda Gonzalez (Director/UTC Artistic Director) was a founding ensemble

member of Chicago's Only All Latina Theater company Teatro Luna and has devised and developed plays since 2000. After performing as an actress for 10 years she decided to turn her artistic endeavors towards directing. Previous directing and development credits include: *La Gringa*, *GL 2010*, *Of Princes* and *Princessas* at the 2010 Goodman Latino Theatre Festival; *10x10 Festival*, *Lullaby*, *The North/South Plays* workshop at the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs; *Crossed*, *Crime Scene Chicago* with Collaboraction; and Melissa DuPrey's *Sushi-Frito* at Free Street Theater.

About UrbanTheater Company

Founded in 2005, UrbanTheater Company is committed to the creation and exploration of urban-inspired works that convey, illuminate and empathize with the human experience. As a platform for multicultural representation in the performance arena, UrbanTheater Company serves as a bridge between Chicago's urban and Latinx communities and a vehicle of performing arts. UrbanTheater Company engages itself in the work of community responsibility and strives to raise awareness and contribute to the important conversations concerning many of the social issues facing our diverse backgrounds. UTC's current Board of Directors is composed of: Juan Linares (President), Jerry Conner (Vice-President), Marty McCaffrey (Treasurer), Miranda González (Secretary) and Iván Vega.

For more information about UrbanTheater Company, visit <http://urbantheaterchicago.org>. Follow UTC on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/UrbanTheater>, Twitter <http://twitter.com/UrbanTheater>, and on Instagram <http://instagram.com/urbantheater>.