

NIGHT & DAY

The San Diego Union-Tribune

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TALES OF JOY



'FANDANGO FOR BUTTERFLIES
(AND COYOTES)' CELEBRATES IMMIGRANTS'
IMAGINATION, PERSEVERANCE AND
HAPPINESS AT LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE **18**

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Paul James and Christopher Michael Rivera. Photo by Rich Soublett II.

IMMIGRANT SPIRIT

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE'S 'FANDANGO FOR BUTTERFLIES' TELLS STORIES WITH MUSIC, DANCE AND JOY



BY PAM KRAGEN

Thanks to San Diego's proximity to an international border, many of its local theaters have produced plays and musicals over the years about the immigrant experience.

But playwright Andrea Thome said that too many of the immigrant stories she has seen portrayed in the American media focus on their suffering and struggle. Her play "Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)," which opens Tuesday in its West Coast premiere at La Jolla Playhouse, instead celebrates the strength, resilience and imagination of immigrants who come together one night for a fandango celebration at a New York community center.

Thome, whose parents are Chilean and Costa Rican-American, said immigrants do suffer in their journeys to America as well as their assimilation processes,



MARIA BARANOVA PHOTOS

Carlo Alban and Silvia Dionicio (above) and the larger cast (top) of "Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)."

but that's just one piece of who they are. And fandangos — joyful multicultural gatherings of improvised song, dance and storytelling — celebrate immigrants'

bravery, triumph against the odds and their shared experience.

"I see immigration as a radicalization of imagination,"

Thome said in a recent interview. "You have to imagine your life in a place you've never been, and you have to draw on that store of imagination to get you through what can be a very difficult journey for some people. Fandangos celebrate that imagination, creativity, community and solidarity."

Produced by New York's En Garde Arts, "Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)" made its world premiere in February 2020 at the La Mama experimental theater club in Manhattan's Bowery neighborhood. The show's originally planned five-borough city tour was interrupted by the pandemic, but it resumed last fall. Since then, the En Garde Arts production has traveled to Penn State and the University of Maryland. In keeping with En Garde's site-specific ethos and the play's subject matter, the La Jolla Playhouse run will be followed by a week of free shows at community centers

in Chula Vista, San Ysidro, Escondido, Oceanside and more, as an outreach to the county's immigrant communities.

Playhouse artistic director Christopher Ashley describes "Fandango" as a "warm and joyous show."

"It's a celebration of indomitable immigrant communities — people enthusiastically gathering to sing and share stories, even in the midst of a threat that lingers just outside their walls, underscoring humanity's intrinsic need for connection," Ashley said in a statement.

En Garde Arts was founded in 1986 by Anne Hamburger. In 1999, she closed En Garde to accept a position as artistic director of La Jolla Playhouse, but she left after just one year for a top creative post in Disney's theme parks division. She returned to New York in 2008 and relaunched En Garde in 2014.

Thome said Hamburger reached out to her in spring 2017

and asked if she'd be interested in developing a play based on interviews with undocumented immigrants in New York. Intrigued by the idea, Thome began interviewing friends and acquaintances who — like herself — came from immigrant backgrounds. After gathering 15 stories from a variety of Latin American immigrants, she presented the play's first reading in November of that year.

It was a straight, verbatim, documentary-style play with a little music mixed in, but the six central characters had no interaction or relationship with one another. To give the play more of an interactive narrative, Thome worked with composer Sinuhé Padilla and director José Zayas to tell the now-fictional characters' experiences at a fandango event.

The fandango tradition originated about 400 years ago in the region of Veracruz, Mexico, though similar events occurred earlier in Spain and Africa. Because immigrants in Veracruz spoke different languages and dialects, they found a common language when they gathered together for an evening of music, dance and storytelling. The folk music style that originated in Veracruz is known as *son jarocho*. Immigrants would gather around a wood platform, play instruments, sing in Spanish and other languages and rhythmic tap-dancing, a style that has carried on to this day.

"Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)" features an original *son jarocho* score by Sinuhé Padilla, a Mexican musician, producer and artistic director. Padilla leads fandangos around the country, and he is the lead musician in the "Fandango for Butterflies" cast.

Padilla said that while there is a vibrant and world-famous fandango culture in Veracruz, contemporary fandango communities have popped up around the world, including Japan, Europe, South America and New York City. There's also a long-running fandango Fronter-



MARIA BARANOVA

Sinuhé Padilla is the composer and lead musician in En Garde Arts' "Fandango."

'Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)'

When: Opens Tuesday and runs through Sept. 25. 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays; 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays; 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays.

Where: La Jolla Playhouse at the Mandell Weiss Forum, 2910 La Jolla Village Drive, UC San Diego, La Jolla

Tickets: \$25 to \$65

Phone: (858) 550-1010

Online: lajollaplayhouse.org

izo festival that's staged each year at the Friendship Park wall between San Ysidro and Tijuana.

"Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)" takes place at a community hall in New York, where a group of undocumented immigrants have gathered for a fandango. There they await news of loved ones who have yet to arrive in America, celebrate the return of family members and worry about those who may have been caught up in immigration raids, like the one that is expected the following morning. The play's lead character, played by Jen Anaya, is "Mariposa," the Spanish word for butterfly. Although Mariposa is a fictional character, many of the stories the characters tell are drawn directly from Thome's interviews with Mexican, Honduran and Dominican immigrants.

"The play is about something that is not fiction," Padilla said. "It's a real story and a real com-

munity center that exists in New York and many countries around the world. It's this beautiful tradition held by people who immigrate to this country who share an identity. You don't have to be Mexican, you don't have to be a dancer, and you don't have to be a musician. You can just be a person who goes and shares their story and traditions."

Padilla said that because the play has been produced at different site-specific locations and the cast changes from time to time, the show changes slightly from night to night, in keeping with the improvisational nature of fandango. The stories and score are bilingual, but live translations are projected onstage in both English and Spanish. And at the end of each performance, the audience is invited to join the fandango cast either onstage or outdoors, if they choose.

Thome said reactions to the show vary, depending up on the audience members' personal experiences. "We see a lot of tears, a lot of laughter, and a lot of emotions about feeling represented," she said.

"There's also a feeling of freedom afterward. The fandango allows you to free yourself."

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NIGHT & DAY DIRECTORY

ARTS IN THE PARK: A FREE family-focused, community event. A full day of entertainment, music, dance, circus acts, art, food and kids activities. — August 27, 2022, 10 am - 5 pm, Memorial Park, 373 Park Way, Chula Vista, CA 91910, FREE. <https://www.onstageplayhouse.org/arts-in-the-park>

Holy Smoke, Deep Pit BBQ & Community Event: 85th Annual Join us on September 4th in the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park that borders Cleveland National Forest. The Best BBQ Plate \$15, Kids \$10. Beer Garden, Dancing, Shopping, Kids Games, Grampa's Attic, More shopping. Raffle Hourly, Grand Prize \$1,000 cash. Barbwire Band, Free Admission, Free Parking, and lots of Fun for the whole family at bargain prices. (619)445-3620. — Labor Day Sunday September 4th, 11 AM to 5 PM, 9136 Riverside Dr. Descanso, CA 91916, Free Admission Free Parking. (619) 445-3620



THE CONRAD PREBYS 2022 SUMMER SEASON AT THE RADY SHELL AT JACOBS PARK™

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26 | 7:30PM

TCHAIKOVSKY'S SYMPHONIC TALES

Rafael Payare, conductor
Jesse Perez and Shana Wride, narrators
San Diego Symphony Orchestra

TCHAIKOVSKY: "Waltz" and "Polonaise" from *Eugene Onegin*
TCHAIKOVSKY: *The Tempest Fantasy Overture*
TCHAIKOVSKY: *Francesca da Rimini*
RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: *Russian Easter Overture*

Music Director **Rafael Payare** leads the Orchestra in Tchaikovsky's symphonic tone poem *Francesca da Rimini* that will have you gripping your seat, his fabulous Waltz and Polonaise from *Eugene Onegin*, and much more in this spectacular evening of symphonic storytelling.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27 | 7PM



Funk...check. Soul...check. R&B...check. Three legendary groups, dozens of charted hit songs, from "Give Me the Night" to "Why Can't We Be Friends?" to "Brick House" and so many more. One stage, one night only. **George Benson, WAR and The Commodores** come together for a concert that will live on in San Diego concert lore for years to come.

Note: The San Diego Symphony does not appear in this program.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4 | 7:30PM



JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA WITH WYNTON MARSALIS

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra
Wynton Marsalis, music director/trumpet

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Wynton Marsalis make their Rady Shell debut. Fifteen of the finest jazz soloists and ensemble players today perform a vast repertoire, from rare historic compositions

to Jazz at Lincoln Center-commissioned works, including compositions and arrangements by Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Thelonious Monk, Mary Lou Williams, Dizzy Gillespie and more.

Note: The San Diego Symphony does not appear in this program.

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All artists, dates, programs and pricing subject to change.