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CONJUNTO BLUES

Written by Nicolás R Valdez
Directed by Ruben C. Gonzalez

An official selection of the Los Angeles Theater Center Encuentro De Las Americas 2017 and featured at the 35th Annual Tejano Conjunto Festival, *Conjunto Blues* tells the story of the Mexican-American experience through the accordion music of the South Texas border region.



(An Image from the most recent production of *Conjunto Blues* presented at the Los Angeles Theater Center Encuentro De Las Americas 2017; Photo Credit: Haldun Morgan)

“Nicolás Valdez's CONJUNTO BLUES, is an ethnographic tour de force of solo performance. Combining humanism, candor, and humor with incredible musicianship, CONJUNTO BLUES conveys an alternative story of American folk music that must be told.”

- Marc Pinate, Producing Director at Borderlands Theater

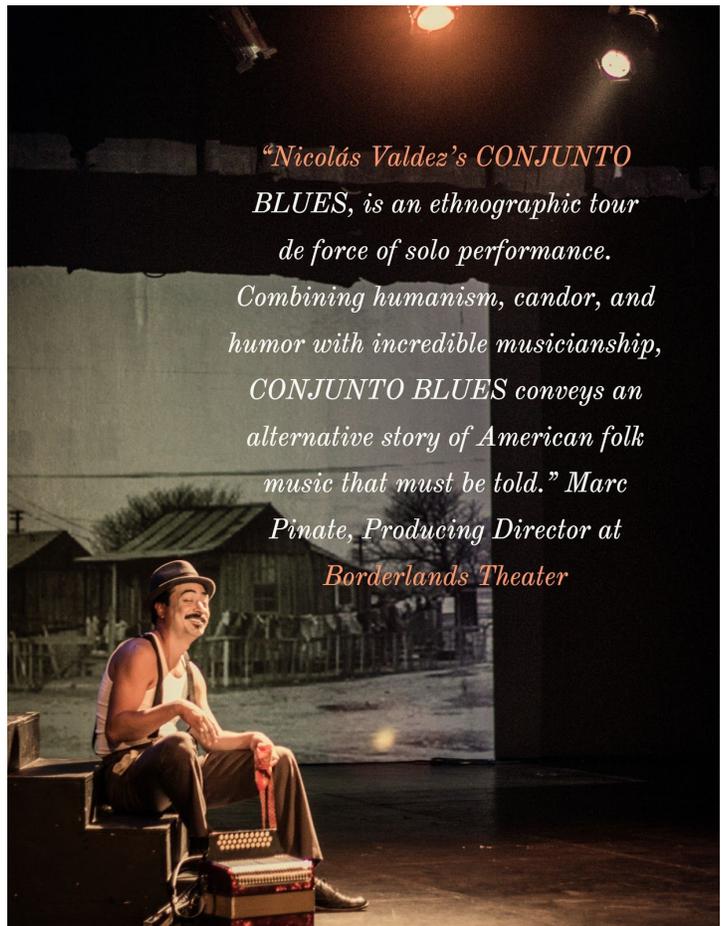
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ABOUT THE SHOW

Conjunto Blues is an exploration of the social and historical conditions that led to the development of Conjunto music as an expression of cultural resistance and liberation. The play centers around playwright, actor, and musician Nicolás Valdez's personal experience growing up in the Conjunto music scene and is loosely based on the relationship with his grandfather, himself a Conjunto music aficionado. Audiences are taken through a shifting landscape of memory and reflection that is highlighted with traditional music, historical imagery, and documentary footage featuring interviews of Conjunto musicians and influencers including the 2017 NEA National Heritage Fellow Eva Ybarra, Jesse Borrego Sr., Salvador "El Pavo" Garcia, and former Tejano Conjunto Festival Director, Juan Tejada. Filled with a cast of colorfully poignant characters, *Conjunto Blues* is a show for audiences of all ages and backgrounds that is sure to entertain and educate.

“Valdez embodies a masterful candor as a performer, seamlessly transitioning between characters and time periods, owning each spirit so naturally, reflecting his having lived alongside the legends he emulates.” - Adam Tutor, Rivard Report

Conjunto Blues made its World Premier in April of 2013 in Denver, Colorado through the support of Su Teatro and by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Performance Network. A tour of Arizona in the fall of 2015 through collaborations with Borderlands Theater, Performance in the Borderlands, the Center for Leadership and the University of Arizona culminated in a performance at the historic FOX Theater in downtown Tucson. The following year *Conjunto Blues* was presented at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts center as part of the 35th Annual Tejano Conjunto Festival. After a year of further development with fellow actor and director Ruben C Gonzalez, *Conjunto Blues* participated in The Los Angeles Theater Company's 2017 Encuentro de las Americas that featured three weeks of artistic exchange, cross-company co-creation, and presented performances, in repertory, for audiences in Los Angeles.



“Sending Conjunto Blues to Los Angeles allowed us to articulate the unique cultural experience of the Tejano community and this specific South Texas musical genre not just in Los Angeles but on an international stage. The Encuentro provided an opportunity for our theatre program to connect with other artists, share ideas, and bring back fresh approaches to theatre in San Antonio.”

- Joel C. Settles, Director of Theater and Performing Arts.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nicolás R. Valdez is a San Antonio, Texas-based Interdisciplinary Performance Artist with over 15 years of experience as a Cultural Arts Educator and Activist. Nicolás began his training in traditional Conjunto Music by Master Accordionist Valerio Longoria Sr. at the age of 9. At 15 he was a founding member of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center’s youth theater company Grupo Animo. His theater credits include a national tour with Teatro Campesino during the 25th Anniversary production of *Zoot Suit* and the Los Angeles Theater Company Encuentro De Las Americas 2104 with Su Teatro’s production of *Enrique’s Journey*. Over the years, Nicolás has developed a unique style incorporating Music, Poetry and Theater into culturally relevant performances that speak to the experiences of the communities along the US-Mexico border. He regularly performs with Los Nahuatlantos whose music is a synthesis of traditional Latino styles with contemporary elements. Los Nahuatlantos have been featured at the 2013 International Accordion Festival and the 32nd Annual Tejano Conjunto Festival. Their first full-length album, *Tierra Sin Fin*, was released in 2017.

DIRECTOR

Ruben C. Gonzalez received his training at the London Academy for Performing Arts, Circle in the Square Theatre School (NYC), El Teatro Campesino and holds an MFA from University of California, Davis. His stage directing credits include, *Aliso in Worker Land*, *Pilgrimage*, *The Throw Down!*, *Alienation*, *The Chronicles Of Odisia Sanchez*, *Perra Pumps' Last Call*, *Mi Abuelo Fue Un Brazero* and *Iya*. As an actor, he's performed at The Mark Taper Forum, South Coast Rep., El Teatro Campesino, Teatro Vision, The Pasadena Playhouse and The Los Angeles Theater Center. On the east coast at INTAR, Lincoln Center Institute, HB Studios, Primary Stages, The Kennedy Center and The Puerto Rican Traveling Theater among others.

MUSICIAN

Luis Gonzalez joins *Conjunto Blues* on the Bajo Sexto (a 12-string guitar and the traditional accompaniment to the Conjunto accordion). A Musician and Educator from San Antonio TX, Luis started playing guitar when he was 15 years old later attending San Antonio College to pursue his music degree. Luis has been engaging local youth as an instructor at Alamo Music where he has taught for the last 3 years. He has performed in several theater productions in the South Texas area, including Tanya Saracho's *Enfrascada* at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. He recently traveled to Los Angeles, CA for a 3 week run of *Conjunto Blues* at the LATC Encuentro De Las Americas. An accomplished musician and composer, his genres include Classical, Jazz, R&B, Cumbia and Conjunto. Luis is also a member of the San Antonio based group Los Nahuatlatos.



MEDIA TECHNICIAN

Rogelio Garza is an Activist, DJ and Educator focused on new media studies, critical pedagogy and event production. Working through new media, social networks and video production Rogelio's work is centered around narratives and identity perspective storytelling. Using this same identity centered formula, he has created a classroom curriculum to teach youth to critically analyze the world and their place in it. CoFounder of The F.I.R.M.E. Process, he has been fortunate enough to see youth thrive and continue to develop their own pedagogical processes built out from the classroom practices. This approach in narrative and conjectured storytelling has also allowed him to work not just in an educational setting but with artists from various disciplines. *Conjunto Blues* is his latest project using video mapping to share the history and culture of San Antonio, TX through interviews and the performance of Nicolás Valdez.

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Joel Celestino Settles is a Multidisciplinary Performer, Educator, Director and Cultural Arts Administrator. He is a founding member of the award-winning sketch comedy group Comedia A Go-Go and co-founder of SALTA the San Antonio Latino Theatre Alliance. He has performed in, written and/or directed works at the Guadalupe Theater, Jump-Start Performance Co., Teatro Campesino, the Latino Cultural Center in Dallas TX, and MACLA in San Jose CA among others. He is proud to have formerly served as the Theatre Program director for the award winning and nationally recognized youth arts education program SAY Sí and was a member of the 2014 Directors Lab at the Lincoln Center in NYC. His most recent work as a Theatre Artist focuses on the creation and production of plays that deconstruct and comment on the social, economic and political power structures of contemporary America. He holds a BA in Political Science and currently serves as the Director of Programs/Theater Manager for the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, TX.

“A music-laced family story woven into the history of conjunto music”

- Debra Martin, San Antonio Express News

LINKS

Conjunto Blues Promo Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Am463APZeo>

Radio Interview on KPFK GLocal Village

<https://soundcloud.com/user-653554044/nicolas-valdez-interview-with-yatrika-shah-rais-on-kpfk-global-village>

SA Express News Article

<https://therivardreport.com/nicolas-valdez-embo-dies-conjunto-sound-at-guadalupe/>

The Rivard Report Review

<http://www.expressnews.com/entertainment/music-stage/article/San-Antonio-bred-Conjunto-Blues-will-play-12249564.php>

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