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Prime Stage Theatre's March production of *In the Time of the Butterflies* features cast of Pittsburgh-based Latinx actors and director

"Pittsburgh is fortunate to have a wealth of Latinx talent," says Wayne Brinda, Prime Stage co-founder and producing artistic director

PITTSBURGH, PA, January 23, 2019 — On both days of a recent winter weekend, director Ricardo Vila-Roger sat behind a desk in Prime Stage Theatre's West End studio reviewing headshots and resumes and watching intently as dozens of professional Pittsburgh actors auditioned from script sides that featured dialogue in both English and Spanish. There was no language barrier, though. Like Vila-Roger, all the actors were Latinx in one form or other.

Auditions were being held for roles in Prime Stage's March 2019 Pittsburgh premiere of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, a stage production based on Julia Alvarez' historical novel about dictator Rafael Trujillo's bloody reign in the Dominican Republic from the 1930s to the 1960s and the four Mirabal sisters, code named the "Butterflies," who sparked a revolution to overthrow his regime. Three of the sisters were assassinated in 1960.

To say that the "Butterflies" are deeply meaningful to people of Latinx heritage might be an understatement. Today they are considered national heroes in the Dominican Republic for the courage they demonstrated in taking on a corrupt government. The United Nations General Assembly was so moved by their experiences that in 1993 it designates each November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

So when Producing Artistic Director Wayne Brinda made the decision in 2016 to schedule *In the Time of the Butterflies* as part of Prime Stage's current Season of Courage, there was only one caveat: that the director and cast (with the exception of one American character) must include and feature Latinx professionals.

"On one hand," said Brinda, "because the play features dialogue in both English and Spanish, authenticity could only be achieved if the cast members have strong familiarity with the language and the culture. To be compelling, entertaining, and engaging, it has to be accurate!"

Producing this story enables Prime Stage to present a range of programs with local partners through the National Endowment for the Arts Big Read program which honor and raise awareness of the local Latinx community. "Prime Stage has always strongly promoted diversity in all its forms, and knowing that there are so many truly accomplished and talented Latinx performers and artists in Pittsburgh inspired me to green-light this production," he said.

"We are also honored that Minou Mirabal, the daughter of Minerva, one of "the Butterflies" endorses the program. She will meet with students, present the NEA

keynote address, and meet with audiences during the opening weekend of the production. In this way, Prime Stage continues to truly bring literature, culture, and history to life in unique ways."

Vila-Roger, a University of Pittsburgh artist-in-residence of Caribbean descent who acts in addition to directing, is proud to be helming this production. "There aren't a lot of plays produced in Pittsburgh that give Latinx folks the opportunity to explore and play our heritage," he said. "I'm proud to be associated with this production and, I can tell you that there's already a buzz about it in the local Latinx community."

Veteran Latinx-Pittsburgh actor Enrique Bazan, who landed the coveted role of dictator Rafael Trujillo in the production, is looking forward to playing the real-life villain. "All actors want to play the bad guy," he said. "And playing an actual person who made life so difficult for so many Dominican people gives me the opportunity to create more awareness about how he impacted our culture."

Prime Stage's production of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, along with nearly 20 book and play discussion programs that are scheduled across the Pittsburgh region in early 2019, are part of an initiative funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) Big Read in collaboration with Arts Midwest, which has selected Prime Stage as the only Pennsylvania organization to participate in the 2018-2019 Big Read.

Tickets are available at www.primestage.com.

About Prime Stage Theatre

Prime Stage Theatre is a Pittsburgh theater organization that presents professionally produced plays based on works of classic and contemporary literature. Founded in 1996 by Wayne Brinda and Connie Brinda, the organization also presents a diverse variety of community and educational programs for students, teens and adults. More information is available at www.primestage.com.

About the NEA Big Read

Since the program began in 2006, the National Endowment for the Arts has funded more than 1,400 NEA Big Read programs, providing more than \$19 million to organizations nationwide. In addition, Big Read activities have reached every Congressional district in the country. Over the past 11 years, grantees have leveraged more than \$44 million in local matching funds to support their NEA Big Read programs. More than 4.9 million Americans have attended an NEA Big Read event, approximately 82,000 volunteers have participated at the local level, and 39,000 community organizations have partnered to make NEA Big Read activities possible. For more information about the NEA Big Read, please visit arts.gov/neabigread.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. Visit arts.gov to learn more about NEA.

About Arts Midwest

Arts Midwest promotes creativity, nurtures cultural leadership, and engages people in meaningful arts experiences, bringing vitality to Midwest communities and enriching people's lives. Based in Minneapolis, Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 25 years. For more information, please visit artsmidwest.org.