

## **GALA Hispanic Theatre presents the world premiere of**

**Culture** 2015-05-11 15:53:30

Washington, DC - GALA concludes its 39<sup>th</sup> season with the world premiere of the highly anticipated bilingual musical production of ***Las Polacas: The Jewish Girls of Buenos Aires***, which was commissioned by GALA, with book by **Patricia Suárez-Cohen**, music and lyrics by **Mariano Vales**, and directed by **Mariano Caligaris**. Adaptation of English lyrics and text is by **Bari Biern** and Music Director is **George Fulgitini-Shakar**. The production will run **June 4 through June 28, 2015** at GALA Theatre, 3333 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Washington, DC 20010. Parking is available behind the theatre at the Giant garage on Park Road for \$4.

Through the stories of Rachela, we experience the dreams, losses, and struggles of thousands of Polish-Jewish women who were lured into prostitution in Argentina by a slave trading organization in the early 1900s. With haunting Slavic melodies and passionate tangos, this original bilingual musical underscores the strength and perseverance of women uprooted from their homeland and enslaved in a foreign culture.

The Zwi Migdal Organization lured girls and young women from poor Jewish villages in Poland or Russia using various ruses. In one, a distinguished man would appear in the village and place an ad at the local synagogue for young women to work in the homes of wealthy Jews in Argentina. Hoping that their daughters would escape the bleak economic situation at home, the parents would send them away with the men. Another popular scheme was to find attractive girls and marry them in quick ceremonies known in Yiddish as “shtille chupah.” The girls would leave their families and board ships to Argentina in search of what they believed to be a better life. This, however, was not the case. Their training as sex slaves began on the ship or they were married to local men in order to obtain entry visas.

The organization operated from the 1860s to 1939, but had its peak in the 1920s. At that time 430 pimps controlled 2,000 brothels with 30,000 women in Argentina. Prostitutes who failed to satisfy their clients were beaten, fined or sent to work in provincial homes. These activities went undisturbed, as many of the clients were government officials and journalists, until 1929, when one brave prostitute, Raquel Liberman, reported the operation to a sympathetic judge and the group was exposed. The Jewish community publically condemned Zwi Migdal in the press and established the Jewish Association for the Protection of Children and Women.

**Press Night and Artist Reception is Saturday, June 6, 2015** and is hosted by Her Excellency Cecilia Nahón, the Ambassador of Argentina to the United States.

The production is made possible in part with generous support from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, an agency for the National Endowment for the Arts, and The Share Fund, a donor advised fund of The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region.

### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

**Patricia Suarez-Cohen** is a playwright, writer, and poet from Argentina. Among her plays are *La Varsovia*, *Edgardo practica*, *Cósima hace magia*, *Roer Himmel*, *La Bambola*, and *La tarantula*. Her novels include *Aparate del Principio de la Realidad*, *Perdida en el momento*, *Un fragmenta de la vida de Irene S.*, *Album de polaroids*, and *Lucy*. She has also published several books of her short stories and poetry. Ms. Suarez-Cohen has received numerous awards, including the Premio Fondo Nacional de las Artes, Premio Instituto Nacional de Teatro, Premio Secretaria de Cultura de la Nación, Premio Clarin de Novela, Premio Argentores, and Premio Mario Vargas Llosa.

**Mariano Vales** is composer-in-residence at GALA and an active participant in Washington's musical theater community. His musical *Momia en el closet: The Return of Eva Perón*, also commissioned by GALA, was nominated for four Helen Hayes Awards in 2010, including “Outstanding Resident Musical” and “Outstanding New Play or Musical”. Mr. Vales is also the Music Director of the DC Youth Orchestra Program, conductor of the DC Youth Orchestra, and Director of the

Music Program at the Organization of American States, where he has overseen the implementation of orchestra programs for at-risk youth in Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and El Salvador. He is on the faculty of the Global Leaders Program of the Youth Orchestra of the Americas, and has taught at Yale University. Mr. Vales holds degrees from Yale University, Florida State University, and Universidad Católica Argentina.

**Mariano Caligaris (Director)** directed *Momia en el closet: The Return of Eva Perón*, which was nominated for four Helen Hayes Awards. He also has directed numerous musical theatre productions and revues in Buenos Aires, including *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Cabaret*, and *Les Miserables* at the Teatro Stella Maris and *La Opera du Malandro* by Chico Buarque at the Teatro Il Foro. Other directing credits include *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest* and *Baja Costura*, a new play that explores the world of human trafficking and sweatshops. He studied at the Theatre de Complicite, Teatro Obstáculo de Cuba, Courtyard Theatre Company in London, and the Escuela de Teatro de Buenos Aires.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Featured in the cast are two of Argentina's leading musical theatre artists **Martín Ruiz** as Schlomo and **Ana Fontán** as Margot, and from Washington, DC, **Samantha Dockser** as Rachela and **Joshua Morgan** as Micah. Mr. Ruiz last appeared at GALA in *Momia en el closet: The Return of Eva Perón*, and in *The Normal Heart* and *Chicago* in Buenos Aires, and Ms. Fontán, who was seen in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Hairspray* in Buenos Aires, is making her GALA debut. Also appearing at GALA for the first time are Ms. Dockser, who was seen in *Adding Machine: The Musical* at Hecht Studio Theatre, and Mr. Morgan, who recently appeared in *Soon* at Signature Theatre and is Co-Artistic Director of No Rules Theatre Company.

Other cast members are **Amy McWilliams**, who appeared in *Yentl* at Theatre J, and **Juan Bianchi**, who appeared in *Club de caballeros* at Teatro de la Luna.

**Howard Brietbart** is conductor and on keyboard. **Joan Singer**, artistic director of the renowned QuinTango, is on violin, and **Emmanuel Trifilio** on bandoneon from Buenos Aires. Other musicians are **John Nazdin** on bass, and **Jessica Zweig** on clarinet.

Scenic design is by **Luciana Stecconi**, who designed for *Los empeños de una casa* this season at GALA.

Light design is by **Mary Keegan**, who has designed for Forum Theatre and Woolly Mammoth Theatre, and costumes are by **Collin Ranney**, who has designed for Theater Alliance and Studio Theatre.

Properties are by **Alicia Tessari**, who designed for *Mariela en el desierto* and *Los empeños de una casa*. **Abbey Bay** is Stage Manager. **Freddy Mancilla** is Production Manager, **Reuben Rosenthal** is Technical Director, and **Hugo Medrano** is Producer.

## TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets are \$38 on Thursday and Sunday and \$42 on Friday and Saturday Tickets for senior citizens (65+) and military are \$26, and Students are \$20. Additional discounts are available for groups of 10 or more. Tickets for Noche de GALA and Artist Reception Night are \$50 per individual, \$90 per couple.

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**CONTACT:**

Sarah Barrie

Phone : 202 234 7174

Email: [Sarah@galatheatre.org](mailto:Sarah@galatheatre.org)