

IMAGINATION STAGE, HISPANIC HERITAGE FOUNDATION AND LUTHERAN IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICE PRESENT "YEME -- A PLAY ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF REFUGEE YOUTH ON CAPITOL HILL ON MARCH 13

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WASHINGTON, DC – Imagination Stage, Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) are hosting a free, special performance of *Óyeme, the Beautiful* – a powerful and timely play about the spiritual, emotional, and physical journey of refugee youth – on March 13th on Capitol Hill at 6 p.m. at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation (212 East Capitol St, Washington, DC). The production will be followed by a panel discussion of activists on the issue.

"It is critical we bring the play *Óyeme* to advocates, policy makers, educators, and the general public to mobilize in support of the most vulnerable in our community," said Antonio Tijerino, President and CEO of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, and Board Member of Imagination Stage. "We are grateful to LIRS for hosting us at their beautiful church which reflects the way they have opened their arms to our refugee brothers and sisters who are escaping horrific circumstance in home countries. We are living at a time when these children and their parents are being villainized for doing exactly what we would do as parents. It is critical we bring their stories to life to build understanding, empathy and hope."

The evening will feature a full production of *Óyeme* followed by a panel of advocates and experts on immigration moderated by Tijerino. Panelists include: Luis Cardona, Administrator for HHS Positive Youth Development, Health and Human Services; Abel Nunez, Executive Director, CARECEN DC; and Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. To attend, please RSVP to Jessica Pettit at jpettit@imaginationstage.org.

Written by playwright Miriam Gonzales and directed by Elena Velasco, *Óyeme, the Beautiful* is performed by professional actors and inspired by the stories of students who Imagination Stage worked with beginning in the Fall 2014. For more than a year, a cohort of student refugees fleeing violence from Central America living in the Greater Washington, DC area were convened by Imagination Stage to share their stories to facilitate emotional recovery and aid in the assimilation process. Developmentally-appropriate theatre exercises and dramatic process provides the young people a way to express their emotions, build relationships with fellow group members, share their journeys, and realize they are not alone. For the past two years, the play has been touring to 15 sites (impacting 2,250 additional youth and teachers) in the Greater DC Area. Please visit <http://imaginationstage.org/in-your-community/oyeme/> for more information on Imagination Stage and *Óyeme*.

Óyeme! is a collaborative project including Imagination Stage, The Hispanic Heritage Foundation (www.HispanicHeritage.org), Montgomery County Department of Recreation, Council member Nancy Navarro, and the Department of Health and Human Service's Street Outreach Network (SON).

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Laura and Valentina are teenagers just trying to make it through another day in middle school. But, unlike many of their peers, they are refugees from Central America who have fled brutal violence in their home countries to find shelter and pursue their dreams in the United States. Step inside their shoes, hear their

stories, see their struggle, and feel their strength as we move through their day. *Óyeme, the Beautiful* brings to light the undaunted courage and beautiful spirit that fuels these young people, and teaches us the power of friendship, family, and hope.

ABOUT IMAGINATION STAGE

Founded in 1979, Imagination Stage is a 501(c)(3) organization with a mission to inspire creativity through theatre and arts education programs that nurture, challenge, and empower young people of all abilities. It offers year-round professional theatre for young audiences and classes in creative drama/acting, musical theatre, dance, and filmmaking for ages 1-18. Visit www.imaginationstage.org.

ABOUT HHF

The Hispanic Heritage Foundation focuses on education, workforce, service and culture. HHF is headquartered in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles with satellite workspaces in New York, Silicon Valley, San Antonio, and Miami (Visit www.HispanicHeritage.org). Follow HHF on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

ABOUT LIRS

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is a non-profit organization that welcomes and supports refugees and migrants entering the United States. It is one of nine refugee resettlement agencies working with the Office of Refugee Resettlement and one of only two that serves unaccompanied refugee minors.

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WHERE :

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