

Maria Ortiz feeds Latin culture with magazine

Amanda Sieradzki
Council on Culture & Arts

Maria Ortiz, founder and publisher of *Cultura Latina* magazine, vividly recalls her childhood festivities surrounding Three Kings Day. Growing up in Puerto Rico, her family would fill three shoeboxes full of grass and water and place them under her bed. Ortiz fell asleep in anticipation.

Similar to the Christmas tradition of leaving milk and cookies for Santa, Ortiz says children wait for the three kings to pass by on their camels and wake up in the morning to find gifts filling their shoeboxes. It was important to Ortiz to keep these traditions alive while living in Tallahassee, inspiring her to start her magazine and organize the Three Kings Day Celebration, which will take place at The Junction at Monroe on Jan. 4.

"We fail to see that other cultures are very alike," says Ortiz. "When we take a

look at all cultures and all celebrations, part of that unification is usually food and dancing. That is why Three Kings Day Celebration was so important to me, because I see through communication and gatherings we can be a stronger community in all aspects."

Ortiz studied business administration but continues to immerse herself in art. Her mother taught her to draw figures and paint. She most enjoys acrylics and continues to take classes in mixed media and watercolors. Ortiz looks up to the late artist Bob Ross, gathering her brushes and the biggest canvas she can get a hold of to immerse herself in painting the natural world.

"He can take you to a new world just by painting," remarks Ortiz, who has followed along with the artists' PBS "The Joy of Painting" show to create several paintings.

Ortiz paints in silence and is private about her work however—only display-



Ortiz is CEO, publisher, creative and graphic designer, and salesperson for Cultural Latina magazine. MARIA ORTIZ

ing a few on a wall in her home rather than selling them. Many times the art will allow her to reflect on her internal

thoughts and feelings. A dark still life with red circles evokes a somber mood, while bright oranges, reds, and whites reflect Ortiz's personal, eclectic wardrobe with pops of color bursting.

Though she spends most of her morning hours painting, Ortiz takes to her computer around midnight and will work until four in the morning on her designs for *Cultura Latina*. She started the magazine in 2007 and acts as the CEO, publisher, salesperson, creative and graphic designer.

"It is my big canvas," says Ortiz, who enjoys how the magazine combines her passions for cooking, dancing, music, art and culture. "Creating the magazine is part of the art that has been in me all these years. It marked a milestone in my life because it was the unification of my talents and also a way to unify the community."

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Ortiz

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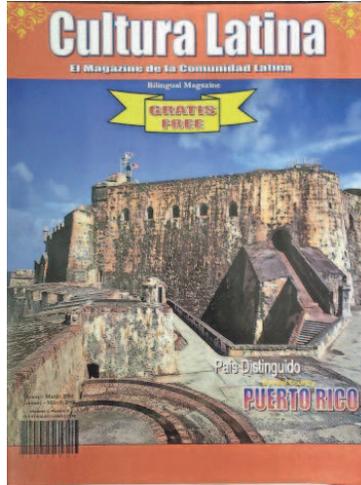
Her first magazine featured Mexican culture, which Ortiz said opened many people's eyes to the true history behind Cinco de Mayo and the Battle of Puebla. Her second favorite publication featured her home country, Puerto Rico, and shared her family recipe for arroz con gandules — a rice specialty with pigeon peas, bacon, ham, onion, peppers, tomato, cilantro and achiote.

"It is one of my favorite plates," says Ortiz. "My abuela was the one that showed me how to cook."

Much of what Ortiz cooks is a fusion of her and her husband's heritages. His Mexican influence has her making tacos some days, while other times she will try making something new like bandeja paisa from Colombia.

In Tallahassee she samples many dishes from different Latin American restaurants to gather inspiration. Similarly, she connects with many of the same countries' music and dance during Latin nights across the city's different venues. She loves moving to salsa, merengue, and bachata beats.

Ortiz says that dance is a major part of the Three Kings Day Celebration. Sometimes called Epiphany, this year's third annual celebration will feature music by Jacksonville based group Caribe Groove. Since it will overlap with New Year's celebrations, Ortiz is excited to bring in live music for the dancing. The evening will also include raffles and

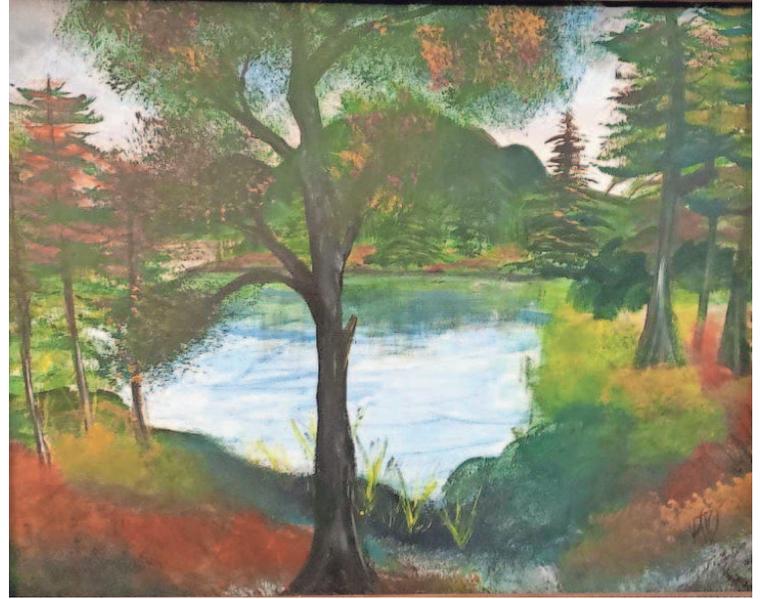


has a \$10 entrance fee.

When it comes to bringing people together, Ortiz firmly believes in creating from the heart. No matter if she is uniting cultures through movement, music, art or food, she is passionate about getting the word out any way she can.

"Art is a sentiment that we plaster on canvas, that we need to express," says Ortiz. "We are talking through our art, that's why you have to do it from the heart."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



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If you go

What: Three Kings Day Celebration

When: 9:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 4

Where: The Junction at Monroe, 2011 South Monroe St.

Cost: \$10

Contact: For more information, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/three-kings-day-celebration-tickets-74385255301>.