

Anita Miller works to make 'micro' fest a cultural gift

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In 2017, Anita Miller took to the stage as Ofelia in Tallahassee Hispanic Theater's production of "Anna in the Tropics." As Miller portrayed the matriarch of the Nilo Cruz play, she couldn't help but reflect on her own mother who had passed away suddenly just one year prior to the production.

"My role was an homage and tribute



Miller

to my mother, grandmother and aunt and an expression of my admiration for those women who had such a profound effect on my life," says Miller. "I tried to connect with their love, selflessness, fierce loyalty to their families, sense of fun and love of dance, music and parties. Through this play, I was able to let go and give voice to what I had

observed as a child."

Miller helped to co-found the Tallahassee Hispanic Theater in 2016 with artistic director and president Alejandra Gutiérrez. The group recently presented their Third Micro Theater Festival in March which is available for viewing online through the end of April. The idea of "micro" festivals originated in Madrid, Spain, and Miller says it was Gutiérrez's

See MICRO FEST, Page 3C

If you go

What: Third Micro Theater Festival

When: Available to view online through April 30

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information and to access the festival, please visit <https://www.tallahasseehispanictheater.org/>.

Micro festival

Continued from Page 1C

brainchild to bring the concept to Tallahassee.

Typically performed in a small venue for an intimate, traveling audience, the festival was held at the Goodwood Museum and Gardens for two years before being presented in an online format given COVID-19 distancing restrictions. This year the festival features recordings of three short Hispanic plays: "Mosquita muerta (The Dead Mosquito)," "The Russian Plan" and "The Union of Maite and Jose, Inc."

"I love how the arts have adapted to the changing world because of the pandemic," says Miller, who helped to organize the filming of the festival at the Monticello Opera House. "They didn't stop, they just found a new way to do it, and that's been really inspiring to me."

While her introduction to Hispanic theater and literature came later in her acting career, Miller credits Gutiérrez with helping her to connect with her mother's Columbian heritage. Miller grew up in the Panama Canal Zone in the 1960s and 1970s in a bi-cultural and bi-lingual world.

In her home, she spoke English given her father's American background, but was determined to speak Spanish fluently so she could communicate with her mother and maternal grandparents and cousins.

She was introduced to theater in fourth grade, but truly fell in love with the art form while watching lavish Panamanian community theater productions every summer. With the encouragement of her high school theater teacher, Rick Johnston, Miller developed her talents onstage in productions of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Our Town" and "Antigone."

"When you are onstage and you are performing something that you've worked on, your performance is enriched by the audience's enjoyment of it and their response to it," says Miller. "It's a symbiotic relationship. You are experiencing that moment together and that's when the magic happens."

Miller earned a dual degree from Northwestern University, taking classes in radio, television, film, acting and communications. She worked internships at television stations and was married shortly after graduating. Miller then spent several years away from the stage and poured her passion and focus into raising her five children.

It wasn't until her daughter got involved with theater in school that Miller stepped back into the arts. She auditioned for and landed a role in Monticello Opera House's production of "Steel Magnolias" in 2010 and has never looked back.

Miller has acted in Florida State Uni-



The Third Micro Theater Festival is available to view online through April 30. PROVIDED

versity student films and participated in Theater with a Mission's golden age Spanish plays. Additionally, she serves as a board member and secretary for Tallahassee Hispanic Theater. She feels proud to contribute to an organization with a mission that is close to her heart.

"Once I met Alejandra, I just felt like I had found my theater home," says Miller. "I try to support her vision and help her with whatever she needs. In our mission statement we talk about creating cross cultural interactions and bridges. I want folks to come to our plays and appreciate all aspects of Hispanic culture and art."

While the Third Micro Festival persevered in an online format this spring, Miller says the group already has their sights set on the Fourth Micro Festival that is slated for August. The Tallahassee Hispanic Theater is planning to return to the Goodwood Museum and present a mixture of serious and comedic plays, many which will be translated by Gutiérrez into English for the first time.

Miller says they hope to have music and food vendors but are still working out the details given social distancing measures. Ultimately, no matter the shape the festival takes, she is hopeful that the troupe can continue to build bridges between cultures.

"I see the Micro Theater Festival as a way to bring everyone together," says Miller. "This is our gift to you, whether it's the beautiful music, the plays or the food. Experience our Hispanic culture in all these different ways and, hopefully, when you hear someone speaking Spanish or you run across a Hispanic person, maybe you'll have a little more appreciation for that person. Appreciation and tolerance."

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).