

THE EXCHANGE PROJECT
presents

**Junebug Productions,
Pregones Theater and
Roadside Theater
in**

PROMISE OF A LOVE SONG

**Three theater companies
Three cultures
Three stories of love**

**Written by:
John O'Neal, Rosalba Rolón, and Ron Short**

**Directed by:
Steven Kent and Rosalba Rolón**

The Exchange Project is a collaborative project of Junebug Productions, of New Orleans, Louisiana, Pregones Theater, of Bronx, New York and Roadside Theater, of Whitesburg, Kentucky. *Promise of a Love Song* was developed out of a four-year exchange among the artists of the three companies and their home communities.

Promise of a Love Song is a play about love. It is a tapestry of stories told from very specific realities and worlds. From the Appalachian mountains to the southern African American communities to the Puerto Rican neighborhoods in New York City, these stories of love have been created by artists with these distinct perspectives. The stories are: *Charming Billy* (Roadside), *Star Crossed Lovers* (Junebug) and *Silent Dancing* (Pregones). Each story is told in segments throughout the play, with poignant, fun and dramatic music -- mountain music, jazz, boleros and salsa -- sustaining each story and connecting them. These elements make *Promise of a Love Song* a much larger, universal story, while preserving each company's distinct perspective and style.

The Setting: Tonight's play is set here, in this theater, on this very night. Actors and musicians from three theater companies from different parts of the country come together on this stage to tell stories of love, staged with Appalachian, Puerto Rican/Latin American and African American music.

The Characters: We meet MOTHER and her son, BILLY, from the Appalachian mountains; FATHER and his daughter ANGELA, newly arrived in New York from Puerto Rico; and two southern, African American activists and lovers, DONNA and NELSON, and their son, DONALD.

There will be one fifteen minute intermission.

THE COLLABORATORS

Executive Producer Theresa R. Holden
Dramaturg Rosalba Rolón
Writers John O'Neal of Junebug Productions
Ron Short of Roadside Theater
Rosalba Rolón of Pregones Theater
(as dramaturg to "Silent Dancing" by Judith Ortiz Cofer)
Directed by Steven Kent and Rosalba Rolón
Composers Ricardo Pons of Pregones
Donald Harrison, Jr. of Junebug Productions
Ron Short of Roadside Theater
Desmar Guevara of Pregones
Song Lyrics and Music by Ron Short
Lighting & Set Designer Douglas D. Smith
Costume Designer Theresa R. Holden
Production Manager Nicole McClendon
Actors *Star-Crossed Lovers*-Junebug Productions:
Donna: Adella Gautier
Nelson: John O'Neal
Donald: Andrew Baham
Silent Dancing-Pregones Theater:
Father: Jorge Merced
Angela: Soldanela Rivera
Charming Billy-Roadside Theater:
Mother: Kim Neal
Billy: Ron Short
Musicians Junebug Productions
Andrew Baham
Pregones Theater
Waldo Chávez, Bass
Desmar Guevara, Keyboard
Roadside Theater
Ron Short, Banjo, Guitar, Fiddle
Guest Musicians
Luis Disla, Conga, Flute, Sax
Justin Padro', Drummer
Documentor Arnaldo Jose Lopez
The Exchange Board Dudley Cocke, Roadside Theater
John O'Neal, Junebug Productions
Rosalba Rolón, Pregones Theater
Project Consultant Alvan Colón Lespier of Pregones Theater

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STORY BEHIND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Promise of a Love Song is born out of ambition: To connect otherwise isolated cultures and bring them face-to-face in the making of art; to encourage artists with very different experiences and aesthetics to compare notes and pool their creative resources; to then stage and tour a play relevant to each community and of vital interest to the nation at large. Conceived back in 1995, the Exchange Project initially saw Junebug, Roadside, and Pregones theaters traveling in a round-robin fashion to introduce themselves and their works to each other's world. Artists met with the community in workshops, story circles and music jam sessions; they were presented at local arts centers and schools; they joined their audiences in informal discussion and celebration. Each time, they were greeted in home-style, enjoying the best home cooking and the stories that are best heard around it. The performance stage was clearly but one of many spaces where the Exchange Project would develop.

Following the excitement of the initial two-year exchange, a joint production was proposed in 1997. At first, the artists entertained disparate ideas of what their play could be--folk music revue, history lesson, multicultural cabaret.... But, within the year, one proposal, said to have come to an ensemble member in a dream, won everyone over: Love stories, a musical play. Everyone agreed that love and music would best capture their exchange, all about cultures and styles and the ties that bind.

The three companies started playing off each other's ideas: Talking about family, about politics, about food, about what's funny and what's not; arguing over right and wrong, on and off the page. The dialogue extended to the stage, with each company playing their music, dancing along, or else, engaged in debate over what's Blue about the Blues, whether Delta, Bluegrass and Bolero have anything in common. Oh, they fought sometimes, and disagreed, and sometimes agreed to disagree. They quarreled like lovers. Mostly, they worked, each and everyone, overtime and without losing track of that one promise of a promise.

It's a fitting reminder to say that collaborations are trials of the soul. And if that's what it takes to build community, then there's no greater challenge than to keep the *Promise of a Love Song*.

THE EXCHANGE PROJECT COMPANIES

JUNEBUG PRODUCTIONS is a professional African American arts organization located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Its mission is to create, produce, and present high quality theater, dance and music that inspire and support people who work for justice in the African American community and in the world-at-large. Junebug Productions currently has 10 plays in its repertoire, three of them inter cultural collaborations. For the past 19 years, the company has toured the U.S. and performed internationally. John O'Neal, Junebug's artistic director, co-founded the Free Southern Theater in 1963 as a cultural arm of the southern Civil Rights Movement. In the post-segregation era, Junebug Productions remains conscious of those bloody, difficult integration struggles that have now created a new set of equally challenging conditions. A vital legacy of the Movement is the recognition that the greatest subsidies required for the development of culture usually come from the artists themselves. Therefore, Junebug Productions has evolved a working style based on collaboration among creative artists, managers, and community organizations who share a commitment to similar goals and a desire to maximize scarce resources.

PREGONES THEATER founded in 1979 and based in the Bronx, is a professional theater ensemble creating innovative and challenging theater rooted in Puerto Rican traditions and popular artistic expressions. Pregones also presents performing artists from diverse cultures with the aim of offering Latino and other communities an artistic means to question, reaffirm and enhance their roles in society. To date, Pregones has staged over 40 new works, has performed in more than 100 cities, has presented nearly 300 artists to audiences in the South Bronx, has trained more than 1,000 children through free theater workshops, and has performed to tens of thousands of residents throughout the Northeast region. Pregones is involved in local, national and international producing and presenting networks, and participates in festivals and conferences around the world. Throughout the years, experienced Pregones artists have served as mentors to many younger, newer Latino artists who have worked with the Company. This mentoring relationship has produced some of the strongest voices in contemporary Latino theater.

ROADSIDE THEATER is a part of Appalshop, the multi-disciplinary cultural center which produces and presents work that celebrates the culture and voices the concerns of the people living in the thirteen state Appalachian Mountain region. Founded in 1975 as a professional Appalachian theater, Roadside has grown to include an array of innovative programs. For the past 20 years it has toured its original productions nationally and internationally. Its contribution to the American theater includes the development of a unique dramatic form drawn from the musical and storytelling traditions of central Appalachia; the creation of a rich body of Appalachian dramatic literature where none existed before; the co-creation, with theater companies of color, of plays that explore issues of culture, race, class, and place; the elaboration and documentation of a community cultural residency methodology that builds community cohesion and diversifies American theater audiences; and the advancement of new talent for the professional theater by mentoring new theaters dedicated to creating new American plays and by teaching play writing in universities. Roadside currently has nine plays in its national touring repertory.

ARTIST'S BIOS

Junebug Productions:

Andrew Baham (Actor, Musician) Andrew is a graduate of the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts with a concentration in jazz studies. He has experience playing trumpet in the production of “One Mo’ Time”, a story about vaudeville in New Orleans. He currently tours with Walter “Wolfman” Washington and Delfeayo Marsalis. This is the first production where he has an acting role. He lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Adella Gautier (Actor) Adella is Associate Artistic director for Junebug Productions. She has over 25 years experience in the arts as an actor, director, playwright, storyteller and educator. She lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

John O'Neal (Actor, Writer) John is the founder and Artistic Director of Junebug Productions. He also founded and directed the Free Southern Theater. He has written and performs in 4 volumes of the Junebug Jabbo Jones plays and has written many other plays. John has taught in numerous colleges and universities and has won several playwrighting awards and fellowships. He lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Pregones Theater:

Waldo Chávez (Electric Bass) Waldo is a bass player and composer of Salvadoran origin. He studied at the New School of Social Research in NY and the Berklee College of Music in Boston. He has worked with various musical ensembles and has toured extensively in Mexico and South America. He has worked with Pregones since 1993. He lives in Elizabeth, NJ.

Desmar Guevara (Composer, Keyboard) Desmar is a Puerto Rican pianist and composer. A graduate of Puerto Rico's Free School of Music, he continued his studies at Berklee College of Music in Boston. He is a veteran of several Pregones productions and has worked with the company since 1992. Desmar lives in The Bronx, NY.

Alvan Colón Lespier (Project Consultant) Alvan joined Pregones Theater in 1981. With Pregones Alvan has worked as an actor, director, and co-producer and has been key in developing the major productions in Pregones' present repertory. He is the Producing Director of the company's Touring and Residency program and lives in the Bronx, NY.

Jorge Merced (Actor) Jorge is an Associate Director of Pregones Theater and has been a member of the company since 1987. He has received several awards including the ACE Award as Best Supporting Actor and three consecutive nominations as Best Leading Actor. Jorge is the director of Pregones' Arts and Education program. He lives in the Bronx, NY.

Soldanela Rivera (Actor) Soldanela obtained a BFA in Dance from Sarah Lawrence College. Dance credits include touring with Elizabeth Streb/Ringside, and choreography for Ricky Martin. Soldanela has participated in several Pregones productions, including the 1998 tour. She also actively works with other Latino companies in New York City. She lives in Jersey City, NJ.

Rosalba Rolón (Writer, Dramaturg, Director) Rosalba was born and raised in Puerto Rico. Rosalba founded Pregones in 1979. Throughout her career she has performed in over 80 productions, 37 of them with Pregones Theater. She has earned two consecutive ACE Award nominations for Best Actress. She has lived in New York for the past 24 years, and currently resides in the Bronx, NY.

Roadside Theater:

Dudley Cocke (Exchange Project Board) Dudley is director of Roadside. He recently directed Roadside's collaboration with traditional Pueblo Zuni, New Mexico artists, *Corn Mountain/Pine Mountain*, and is currently directing Roadside's *Singing on the Mountain*. He often writes and speaks about rural cultural issues. He lives in Norton, Virginia.

Kim Neal (Actor, Musician) Kim has been with the Roadside ensemble for 13 years and performs in all of Roadside's repertory. She also conducts extensive playwrighting and performance residencies in communities. Her singing can be heard on Roadside's latest recording, "Singing". She lives in Big Stone Gap, VA.

Ron Short (Actor, Composer, Guitar, Banjo, Fiddle, Lyricist) Ron is a playwright, actor and musician with Roadside Theater. He performs in all of Roadside's repertoire and is the author of Roadside's *Pine Mountain Trilogy* and Roadside's newest play, *Singing on the Mountain*. His solo LP, *Cities of Gold*, and the recent CD, *Singing* feature many of his songs. He was raised south of the mountain in Dickenson County, Virginia and lives in Big Stone Gap, Virginia.

Other Artists/Collaborators:

Theresa Holden (Executive Producer) Theresa is the Director of The Artist and Community Connection, a not-for-profit planning, producing and educational service organization for artists and communities working with artists. Theresa began her career as an actor, director and designer in professional theater and then taught theater in college for 9 years. For the past 10 years she has directed and produced projects across the country which seek to deepen and broaden the relationship between artists, communities and audiences. She lives in Austin, Texas.

Steven Kent (Director) Steve is an acclaimed director and acting teacher working with numerous American theater and dance companies. He recently staged *Streetcar Named Desire* at the national Theater of Croatia. Steve is stage director and dramaturg for Junebug Productions and has directed for Roadside Theater and Urban Bush Women. He lives in Los Angeles, California.

Arnaldo Jose Lopez (Documenter) Arnaldo earned both B.A. and M.A. degrees in English Literature from Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA, where he lived and worked as a graphic designer. A Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Spanish at N.Y.U., he likes to write on issues of social activism, arts, poetry and translation. If he could sing, he would be a Bolerista. He lives in New York City.

Nicole McClendon (Production Manager/Company Manager) Nicole earned a B.A. in Drama from the University of Dallas. With UD, Nicole worked and performed in various aspects of the theater in Dallas, Rome, Italy and Greece. Before joining Western & Southern Arts Associates as a sales associate, Nicole worked as a stage manager with the Dallas Children's Theater. She lives in Austin, Texas.

Douglas D. Smith (Lighting and Set Designer) Douglas D. Smith has been designing Sets, Lights and Projections in the Theatre for over 17 years. He has created more than 200 theatrical designs in diverse genres of performance. From classical to contemporary, minimalist to multimedia, and opera to performance art. He holds a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Design from the University of Southern California. Additional credits include Production Design and Art Direction for Feature films, Commercials, and Music Videos. He currently lives in Los Angeles.