

**THEATER**

# Three companies contribute to 'Promise of a Love Song'

By Jerry Stein  
Post staff reporter

Cincinnati theatergoers will have a rare opportunity to see a stage production that has been created by not one but three theater companies.

Each company contributing to "Promise of a Love Song," which comes to the Jarson-Kaplan Theater at the Aronoff Center for the Arts this weekend, has different ethnic and cultural traditions.

The production, part of a festival of events being presented by the Cincinnati Arts Association, the Urban Appalachian Council and Appalshop that promotes Appalachian culture nationally, will have just two performances.

The plays are:

■ "Charming Billy" by Ron Short from the Roadside Theater of Appalshop, an Appalachian theater company in Eastern Kentucky. The play concerns a mother who spends her life taking care of her ill son, Billy.

■ "Silent Dancing," from Junebug Productions, an African-American company based in New Orleans; has a play about Angela, a Puerto Rican girl. She reminisces about her childhood in the '60s when her father moved the family out of Puerto Rico to New York.

■ "Star Crossed Lovers," from the Teatro Pregones, a Puerto Rican company based in the Bronx, is a drama about the love affair between Donna, a young lawyer, and a political activist, Nelson.

Short said the plays could stand alone.

"But what we have done through the use of staging and music is that one piece will echo another piece," he said. "There are thematic similarities running all the way through.

"In my play, 'Charming Billy,' Billy has an illness that causes him to have seizures. People are afraid of him because he's different

"They won't let him go to school. And he can't ride the bus. Billy can't understand why he can't ride the bus."

"In the Junebug play, this civil rights organizer is trying to organize people to combat their own inability to ride the bus."

## If you go

- **Title:** "Promise of a Love Song."
- **Contents:** Three ethnically and culturally diverse theaters collaborate on a production of three plays with the themes of exclusion and the need for love.
- **Participating theaters:** Roadside Theater of Appalshop, Whitesburg, Ky.; Junebug Productions, New Orleans; and Teatro Pregones, Bronx, N.Y.
- **Playwrights:** John O'Neal, Rosalba Rolon and Ron Short. sBook: Mel Helitzer.
- **Audience recommendation:** All audiences but not recommended for young children.
- **Music director:** Ricardo Pons; various composers.
- **Theater:** Jarson-Kaplan Theater, Aronoff Center for the Arts, 650 Walnut St., downtown.
- **Playdates:** Friday and Saturday, 7:30 p.m.
- **Tickets:** \$16 and \$22.
- **Reservations:** (513) 241-7469.

And in "Star Crossed Lovers," Short said, the Puerto Rican family in New York "is confronting different kinds of prejudices about where they can live and where they can and can't be."

"It's three different stories, but at the heart of it is the same drama - being excluded because you are somehow different. There are connecting threads."

Short said the three playwrights (also John O'Neal and Rosalba Rolon) and the companies had known about each others' works seven years ago. The biggest concern, though, for a collaboration was "what would be subject matter that would allow us to retain full qualities of our culture."

"One of the ideas was to add music from the Appalachian, Spanish and African-American culture to the plays."

Another idea, Short said, was to find a theme of universality in the human landscape "and that was at the heart of all people is every person needs love and to be loved."