

STAGELIGHT

LATINA CHRISTMAS SPECIAL



An American Comedy of Latina Proportions



SoHo Playhouse

SoHo Playhouse
15 Vandam St, NY, NY 10013

ATOMICTUNA PRODUCTIONS and SOHO PLAYHOUSE INC

Presents

LATINA CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

An American Comedy of Latina Proportions

CREATED BY

DIANA YANEZ

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY

MARIA RUSSELL SANDRA VALLS DIANA YANEZ

VIDEO PROJECTIONS
YEE EUN NAM

SOUND
IVAN ROBLES

PUBLICITY
LUCY POLLACK
JOE TRENTACOSTA

PRODUCERS

DIANA YANEZ MATTHEW QUINN DARREN LEE COLE GEOFFREY RIVAS MIKE BLAHA

DIRECTED BY

GEOFFREY RIVAS

The performance will be approximately 90 minutes without an intermission.

Creator's Notes

This is our "little show that could." From the very moment that it was first performed in 2014, we knew we had something wonderful. There's not enough space to tell you the whole history, but here's a few important people to thank. Suzanne Morris, my coach and friend; when I told her my idea for *Latina Christmas Special*, an homage to the holiday TV shows I grew up with that never represented my own home experience, she simply insisted I pursue it. (Remember her name because she comes back later.)

Producer Matthew Quinn hardly knew me when I approached him about the show idea (not a word had been written), and yet he believed. He just did. Without him, we never would've gotten off the ground. My first choices for collaborators were stand-up comical genius Sandra Valls and super-talented and hilarious Maria Russell. I asked Sandra and she immediately jumped on board. You know, it's thanks to her that I wrote my first one woman show—the circle is now complete. When I asked Maria, she responded immediately. She said NO. She just didn't feel comfortable with performing as herself . . . on stage . . . alone. That's when our mutual coach and friend, Suzanne Morris (remember her?), came to the rescue. When I told Suzanne that Maria had turned me down, she said, and I quote, "Oh, she is going to do it. Let me talk to her." And true to her word, Maria stepped forth and has been rocking the house ever since.

Next came someone very dear to me, our director, Geoffrey Rivas. A friend of Maria's, Geoff came one night during our second run in 2015 and then immediately bought tickets for the next night. Before the run ended, he offered to direct (and boy did we need it—it's like herding cats), and thanks to him the Latino Theatre Company produced us, and overall we leveled up.

To every single one of the people I just mentioned thank you from the bottom of my heart. Without you, we never would've gotten to where we are today. And they aren't the only ones. Thank you also to SoHo Playhouse and Darren Lee Cole. Thank you to the Latino Theater Company and Combined Artform. Thank you especially to Kurt Hall, but also Emily Fenster, Jennie McNulty, and Sheila Higgins, our often all-volunteer film crew. Thank you to Vivian Varela. Thank you to Maria's husband, Crack (Craig Kirby). Thank you to Eva Russell and her Christmas tamales. Thank you to Suzanne Broderick. Thank you to our former crews, Michael Navarro, Amber Espinosa-Jones, Emily Lehrer, Noah Gamboa, Ivan Robles, and Yee Eun Nam. Thank you to dear Michael Blaha and his wise breakfast counsel. Thank you to the love of my life, Marjorie Duffield, an artist in her own right and my hero, who has supported me with her unconditional love and expert guidance. You make my life mucho better. And finally, to Mami, Daddy, and Andrew—my story is your story. Thank you and I love you.

Who's Who in the Cast

DIANA YANEZ (*Creator, Writer, Actor, Executive Producer*) is a first generation Cuban-American. Her legendary videos have reached viral proportions (over 15 million views on YouTube) with hits like "Spanish for Your Nanny," "Let Me Borrow That Top," and "My Puss" (co-written and performed with Margaret Cho). A national-TV-commercial diva (State Farm, Verizon, Home Depot, etc.), she's always cast as the friendly Latina mom or stern nurse (same thing, basically). *Viva La Evolución*, Diana's one-woman show about growing up Cuban-American and queer in Miami during the AIDS crisis, won the New York Fringe Festival's Overall Excellence Award. She traveled the country with Cyndi Lauper's True Colors tour, and also toured with Margaret Cho performing original comedic songs, sketches, and comedy. Television credits include, among others, "Criminal Minds," "Boston Legal," "Crossing Jordan," and "Without a Trace." "The Pip &

Pen Show," her web series with co-star/writer/creator Marjorie Duffield, is available on YouTube. A passionate storyteller and performer, Diana created *Latina Christmas Special* with the intention of shedding light on the universal truths of holidays past, childhood, and family, regardless of one's heritage. www.dianayanez.com

MARIA RUSSELL (*Writer, Actor*) Whether it's comedy or drama, you always know Maria Russell is in the house...she's very loud! You may have seen her in "Teen Wolf," "Why Women Kill," "Criminal Minds," "Major Crimes," "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," "The Bold and the Beautiful," "CSI" (where she first met and worked with director Geoffrey Rivas), and the box office horror hit *Lights Out*. Airing March 2020, catch Maria returning for Season 2, as Lt. Liz Salazar, the bossy yet lovable bully on truTV's hit comedy show "Tacoma FD." Maria is also an accomplished Salsa dancer and

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performer with a dance background in ballet, jazz, and hip hop. This self-proclaimed Mexiuanian (you know... Mexican and Lithuanian), is a proud native Angeleno who is extremely passionate about animals; especially her fur babies Boris and Natasha. Maria wishes to thank Diana and Sandra for their love, laughter, and support! Geoffrey "Papa Bear" Rivas for his beautiful insight and his dedication to the girls and this show. For Matthew Quinn and Darren Lee Cole, Maria has no words to express her gratitude for you both! A very special thank you to Suzanne Morris for always believing in her and that she could do this even when Maria didn't. Suzanne actually forced Maria to do the show (Kidding...not kidding) Maria dedicates this show to her inspiration and rock, her beautiful mom, who always told her that she could be anything she dreamt of because "You're from America", and to her hero...her daddy, and to her amazing and supportive husband, Crack! (She means Craig!) Instagram: @MariaAnnRussell MariaAnnRussell.com

SANDRA VALLS (*Writer, Actor*) is a comic, actor, singer, writer, and badass. She is best known for her hilarious performances on 2 Showtime hit comedy specials, "The Latin Divas of Comedy" and "PRIDE: Gay and Lesbian Comedy Slam." Curve Magazine included her in their Power List as One of the Most Influential Queer Women in the Country and also voted her One of the Top 10 Funniest Lesbian Comics. Latina Magazine voted Sandra One of the Top 33 Bad Ass Comics with Latin Roots and One of the Top 10 Latina Comics to Solve SNL's Diversity Issue. Also a human rights activist, Sandra was honored in her hometown of Laredo, TX with the 2013 International Woman's Day Award for being a trailblazer and for empowering women. She holds a musical theater degree from The University of Texas at Austin and The American Musical and Dramatic Academy in NYC. Sandra is honored and blessed to have co-written and to be co-starring in this powerful, beautiful, empowering show with her talented hermanas, Diana Yanez and Maria Russell. See? Not all Latinas are brown with big...um...accents!! Deep thanks to Director Geoffrey Rivas for guiding us to greatness. And to Matthew Quinn who has been with us from the beginning; We are forever grateful to you for all your all. Thank you, Darren Lee Cole, for welcoming us into your theater home. This is the best Christmas gift ever! Sandra also thanks her sister Connie and her brother Gill (Yes! She also has a great brother!) for always believing in her and for being the best siblings ever! Thank you to the family, friends, and fans who have traveled

to come see this show. Your love and support brought us here. Brendalee Denisov...gracias...for your love and inspiration and, and, and... Sandra dedicates this show to her parents, Gilbert and Consuelo who made her who she is today. Special thanks to Peter Mayer for blessing us with this song about noticing the goodness, the beauty, the miracle, and the holiness in everything. www.welovesandra.com

GEOFFREY RIVAS (*Director, Producer*) a native Californian, graduated from UCLA with a Master of Fine Arts Degree with a concentration on acting. He has received numerous nominations for his stage work and is a founding member of The Latino Theater Company. The company, under the Artistic Direction of Jose Luis Valenzuela, has been producing award winning Latino theater nationally for 30 years. Film credits include *Under the Tuscan Sun*, *Dragonfly*, *Luminarias*, *La Bamba*, *Born In East L.A.*, *Pow Wow Highway*, *Bound By Honor*, *Above Suspicion*, and *Foto Novelas* for PBS, for which he won an ALMA award in 1998. A highlight of Geoff's prolific career on television was 9 years as Detective Vega on the original series, "CSI" (CBS). His directorial debut, Jozanne Marie's solo show, *Beautiful* - for which Jozanne won a NAACP award for best actress - drew much praise and favorable reviews as did his latest show, *Home* starring Nancy MA. *Latina Christmas Special* was further developed under his direction and is widely considered to be the longest running and most successful show ever presented by the Latino Theater Company.

MATTHEW QUINN (*Executive Producer*) has been involved in theater production and venue management for over 20 years in San Francisco and Los Angeles. He created COMBINED ARTFORM, as a production company in 1998 with Producer Bertha Rodriguez and has produced, co-produced, presented, booked and promoted hundreds of shows. He has been an active player as an advisor, venue manager with the Hollywood Fringe Festival since its onset in 2010, He has been involved with 15 shows in the Hollywood Fringe including Top of the Fringe and Best Comedy WOMEN (w/Beth Dies) and *Pick of the Fringe* (w/Fringe Management). Also, in 2010, Matthew started the ENCORE Awards, for "best of" Hollywood Fringe and in 2016 BEYOND ENCORES. From the ENCORES, he has co-produced extensions of *Pulp Shakespeare*, *Pokemusical* and *Sunny Afternoon*. In 2016, he and Bertha Rodriguez partnered with Studio C Artists to explore stage to film/TV models. In 2017

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Asylum Consulting started to expand in production and promotional services to other individuals and companies. Starting in 2018 Matthew Quinn has become a West Coast scout for the NYC ENCORES and Soho Playhouse as well as an associate producer on the Fringe Encore Series and *Latina Christmas Special* coming this December. In 2019 Matthew and Asylum expanded their services to International companies in Tokyo and the UK. He looks forward to the future of Fringe and Independent Theatre. www.theaterasylum.com

DARREN LEE COLE (*Producer*) Darren has produced over 150 productions through Cole Theatricals in New York, Los Angeles, Sweden, Canada, England, Scotland, Costa Rica, and many other states and countries. Darren became Producing Artistic Director of the SoHo Playhouse in 2004 where he has produced or directed an additional 50 groundbreaking works that have won many of Off-Broadway's most prominent theatre awards. Darren also brought New York quality theatre to Costa Rica when he founded Teatro Jaco in 2010. In doing so, he has significantly impacted the country through an infusion of international culture and arts. In recent years, he has become an executive and artistic producer of the Fringe Encore Series, taking the best of the many Fringe Festivals across the world and encoring them through his Off-Broadway theatre or international tours.

MICHAEL BLAHA (*Producer*) Mike has produced theatre all over the world, including *Richard Parker* (Best International Production, Hollywood Fringe), *Echoes* (by acclaimed UK playwright Henry Naylor, Best International nominee, Hollywood Fringe), *runt* (Chicago, New York, Minneapolis), *Hoboken to Hollywood* (L.A. Weekly Best Musical), *Bukowsical!* (Best Musical, New York Fringe), *Job: The HipHopera* (multiple Los Angeles area Best Musical nominations) and *Rite of Passage* (Battersea Arts Theater, London; Hong Kong Fringe Festival). In addition, he has produced over 60 shows at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe including *runt* (Fringe First; Sony Radio Academy Award for Best Drama (BBC World Service production)), *A Night in November* (Tapwater Best Actor Award), *At the Sans Hotel* (Stage Best Actor nominee), *Sabotage: In Fine Form* (Perrier Award Nominee, Best Newcomer), *Pajama Men: Versus vs. Versus* (Best Double Act; Soho Theatre London Box Office record holder), *This is So No About the Simpsons* (starring Harry Shearer of "This is Spinal Tap" and "The Simpsons"), *Land of Smiles* and *Re-Animator the Musical* (Musical Theatre Network Best Musical Nominees).

His film producing credits include *Chi Girl* (Slamdance Grand Jury Prize Winner), *runt* (Best New Director nominee, Pan American Film Festival), *The Dogwalker* (Best New Director nominee, Cinequest), *The Who: The Vegas Job*, *Tropicalia* (Telluride Film Festival) and the short film *The Legend of Beaver Dam* (numerous festival Best Short awards; Sundance Honorable Mention). Mike is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Southwestern University School of Law, one of the co-authors of Entertainment Law (Matthew Bender, 4th ed.), and an Arbitrator for the Independent Film and Television Alliance. He is also the President of New Musicals, Inc. and on the Board of Directors of Filmmakers' Alliance.

BRANDON BOGLE (*Light Design*) is a freelance Lighting Designer, Playwright and Actor based in NYC. He currently is the Technical Director at SoHo Playhouse and is grateful to have the opportunity to work on shows like *Latina Christmas Special*. ■

All the biographies contained within the "Who's Who" section of this program have all been provided by the production. Any opinions or ideas expressed are not necessarily that of *StageLight Magazine*.

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