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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 24, 2022

Somewhere Over the Border

Geva Theatre Center presents world-premiere musical 'Somewhere Over the Border'

New work based on real-life migration story and 'The Wizard of Oz' runs
March 30 – April 24

Rochester, N.Y. – Geva audiences will be some of the first to experience an ambitious original musical when the theatre opens the world-premiere production of "Somewhere Over the Border" on Wednesday, March 30. Created by Brian Quijada (book, music, and lyrics) and directed by Rebecca Martínez, the production runs through April 24 on Geva's Wilson Stage. Geva is co-producing the premiere along with Syracuse Stage and Teatro Vista, Theatre with a View in Chicago.

Inspired by the real-life journey of Quijada's mother, Reina, from El Salvador to the U.S. and L. Frank Baum's classic tale "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," "Somewhere Over the Border" embraces the factual and the fantastical in its depiction of one young girl's pursuit of the American dream. As Reina travels north to the Mexican border, she gathers friends, faces down dangers, and holds tight to the memory of the little boy she left behind. Set in the 1970s and propelled by cumbia, Mexican mariachi boleros, American rock and hip hop, the musical is both fable and family history — and a testament to the determination born of love. Syracuse.com called it "a sweet, sometimes bracing reminder of the lengths people will go to survive." Ithaca.com said, "The cast simply sparkles, the action never flags, and the music is upbeat."

Geva audiences may be familiar with Quijada. In February 2021, the theatre co-presented the playwright, actor, and composer's autobiographical one-man show "Where Did We Sit on the Bus?" in on-demand video format. The broadcast production, produced by Bitter Jester Studios, was nominated for three regional Emmys, including Outstanding Achievement in Writing. "Somewhere Over the Border" is another deeply personal work for Quijada, who describes it as a mashup of his mother's border crossing story and "The Wizard of Oz." While he had been told the story of Reina's journey as a child, it wasn't until a chance conversation with his mother a couple years ago that Quijada learned all of the harrowing details. "It was an epic story — epic. I couldn't even put the whole thing into the play, and I was like, 'Oh, my God, this is a classic story,'" he explained in an interview with Syracuse Stage. "At first, I thought it was 'The Odyssey,' and then it kind of clicked, especially with the people she met along the way. It was 'The Wizard of Oz.'"

The show is helmed by Rebecca Martínez, an award-winning director and choreographer who is passionate about advancing Latinx representation in theatre. "Determination, resilience, courage, love, hope, joy. These are just a few words that I think of when I listen to Reina's story. I think of the remarkable journey she and many, many others have made, leaving their homes, facing risk and dangers, coming to a new country that promises much and takes much in return," says Martínez. "It is an honor and a privilege to help tell this story."

A cast of six and an onstage band of four musicians bring the production to life: Robert Ariza (Adán, Cruz), Gloria Vivica Benavides (Antonia, Leona), Tanya De León (Reina), Francisca Muñoz (Julia), Bobby Plasencia (Don Napoleon, Silvano), Arusi Santi (Narrator), Ben Meixell (Keyboard), Matt Pinto (Guitar), and Freddy Colon (Percussion) and Hector Diaz (Bass) of Rochester's premier Latin jazz band Mambo Kings. Julián Mesri (Music Director), Tanya Orellana (Scenic Designer), Asa Benally (Costume Designer), Jennifer Fok (Lighting Designer), Jacqueline R. Herter (Sound Designer), Sofia Ubilla (Associate Director), Kristin Leahey (Dramaturg), Sarah Pool Wilhelm (Assistant Music Director, Copyist), Katherine Thesing (Stage Manager), and Nolan Todd (Assistant Stage Manager) complete the creative team.

Tickets for "Somewhere Over the Border" are on sale now and can be purchased by calling 585-232-4382, online at [GevaTheatre.org](https://www.gevatheatre.org), or in person at the box office Tuesday through Sunday from noon to 8 p.m.

Geva's 49th Season is sponsored by ESL Federal Credit Union. Dr. Dawn Lipson serves as honorary season producer. "Somewhere Over the Border" is presented with support from lead co-producer M&T Bank and media sponsors CNY Latino and Mega 97.5.

The season continues with "The Chinese Lady" by Lloyd Suh, April 20 – May 8 on the Fielding Stage.

Geva is taking special care to keep everyone safe, including requiring proof of either COVID vaccination or a negative test for entry, along with masking. Patrons can find the theatre's current indoor safety procedures at [GevaTheatre.org/covid-safety](https://www.gevatheatre.org/covid-safety).

About Geva Theatre Center

Geva Theatre Center is a nonprofit, professional theatre company in downtown Rochester, New York, offering world-class productions and extensive additional programming. Founded in 1972, Geva is the most well-attended regional theatre in New York State with one of the 25 largest subscription bases among regional theatres in the country. Geva serves as many as 160,000 patrons annually, including more than 20,000 students.

Geva's 517-seat Wilson Stage and 180-seat Fielding Stage each offer a wide-ranging collection of drama, comedy and musical theatre, from classics to world premieres. The company also offers a broad slate of educational, outreach and literary programming to enrich audiences, students and artists of all ages and disciplines. Since 1995, Geva has been under the artistic direction of Mark Cuddy.

Geva Theatre Center sits on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Onöndowa'ga, or "the people of the Great Hill." In English, they are known as the Seneca people, "the keeper of the western door." They have stewarded this land through generations, and Geva pays respect and gives thanks to their elders, past and present.

Find out more about Geva Theatre Center at GevaTheatre.org or by connecting with us on social media. Facebook: facebook.com/gevatheatrecenter, Twitter: [@gevatheatre](https://twitter.com/gevatheatre), Instagram: [@gevatheatre](https://instagram.com/gevatheatre), LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/geva-theatre-center.

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