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MANUAL for a DESPERATE CROSSING

and

LETTERS from CUBA

by María Irene Fornés

Streaming at BYUArts.com

NOVEMBER 19–21

BYU COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS AND COMMUNICATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND MEDIA ARTS

LETTERS FROM CUBA
AND
MANUAL FOR A DESPERATE CROSSING

Written By
María Irene Fornés

Scenic & Projection Designers
Elisabeth Goulding & Erin Bjorn

Costume, Makeup, & Hair Designer
Astrid Melendez

Sound Designer
Conrad Smith

Dramaturgs
Laynie Calderwood & Angela Moser

Project Engineer
Taylor Glad

Production Stage Manager
Jennifer Reed

Directed By
Kris W. Peterson

November 19–21, 7:30 pm
Streaming at BYUArts.com

Photography, video and audio recording, and screen recording are forbidden during the performance.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When I was nine years old, my parents sent me, along with my cousin Maria, to live with our Costa Rican grandparents for the summer. The hope was that we would come back having learned to speak fluent Spanish. I remember having to sit behind the seats in my aunt's pick-up truck for the long ride to LAX. It was hot and uncomfortable and those twelve hours felt like a lifetime. I don't remember feeling scared or nervous about the plane ride, even though we were two unaccompanied minors traveling to a different country. We felt safe because we knew our family was waiting for us on the other side and that we would be loved and taken care of.

That summer was my first memory of occupying a space that many biracial and bicultural children experience. At home, my long dark hair and olive skin meant I was too dark to be all the way American and in Costa Rica my language barrier meant I was too American to be completely Latina. I was a part of two different and simultaneous worlds but unsure about my place in either one.

Tonight, you'll see the gift that Fornés has given to anyone who finds themselves in a similar situation. You'll feel the poetry of the longing to leave home and the longing to love home. You'll see how those long journeys are complicated by elements beyond our control. More importantly, you'll hear the languages of both worlds. We are a resilient and strong people made stronger by those we love and those with whom we surround ourselves. We are thrilled to share our stories with you tonight.

—Kris W. Peterson, *director*

LIST OF SCENES

Letters from Cuba

The play takes place simultaneously in New York City and Cuba.

INTERMISSION

Manual for a Desperate Crossing

1. En un bote de remos. . . . . On a Small Boat
2. En un lago. . . . . On a Lake
3. El riesgo . . . . . The Risk
4. Planes y arreglos . . . . . Plans and Arrangements
5. Bin-ban . . . . . Bin-ban
6. La balsa. . . . . The Raft
7. Materiales modos y formas . . . . Materials Ways and Means
8. Empacando . . . . . Packing
9. Otros ayudan. . . . . Others Help
10. En la Balsa . . . . . On the Raft
11. La tormenta . . . . . The Storm
12. Al pairo . . . . . Adrift
13. Un barco pasa . . . . . A Passing Ship
14. Destilando el agua. . . . . Distilling the Water
15. Un barco en la distancia . . . . . A Ship in the Distance
16. Sesenta barcos . . . . . Sixty Ships
17. Pescando. . . . . Fishing
18. Un solo se acerco . . . . . Only One Came Near
19. Remando . . . . . Rowing
20. Sed . . . . . Thirst
21. Cayo Hueso . . . . . Key West

CHARACTER & CAST LIST

Letters from Cuba

LUIS
Marco Vega

FRAN
Darci Ramirez

MARC
Benjamin Wright

JOSEPH
John Valdez

JERRY/GERARDO
Daniel Mesta

ENRIQUE
Max Jennings

Manual for a Desperate Crossing

BALSERO 1
John Valdez

BALSERO 2
Marco Vega

BALSERO 3
Daniel Mesta

BALSERA 4
Darci Ramirez

BALSERA A
Kris W. Peterson

BALSERA B
Maria Angelica Sanchez Carr

BALSERA C
Jessica Mingorance Pereira

CHORUS
Issac Torres

STAFF

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MEET THE CAST

Maria Angelica Sanchez Carr
Balsera B

Like the characters in this play, Maria is a refugee who escaped communist Cuba as a child. She graduated from BYU Theatre and Cinematic Arts program in 1989, and has been working in film and television since.

Max Jennings
Enrique

Max is a high school senior at American Fork High School. Recent credits include Otto Frank in *The Diary of Anne Frank* at American Fork High School and Osrik in American Fork High School's production of *Hamlet*.

Daniel Mesta
Jerry/Gerardo, Balsero 3

From Easley, South Carolina, Daniel Mesta is a graduate of BYU's Theatre & Media Arts program. Recent credits include Vanya in *Vanya and Sonya and Masha and Spike* at BYU, and Ilya in *The Seagull*, and the Doctor in *Gianni Schicchi*. He was named a Kennedy Center National Fellow in Dramaturgy earlier this year.

Darci Ramirez
Fran, Balsera 4

Darci is a sophomore in the BFA acting program with a minor in anthropology. She is thrilled to have a chance to appear alongside such amazing performers in a work such as this! Previous BYU credits include Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* and Curly in the (late and great) *Wendy and Peter Pan*. Her upcoming credits include Navi in the *Time Traveler's Radio Show*, a podcast to be released in January.

Isaac Torres
Chorus

From Kansas City, Missouri, Isaac Torres is a sophomore majoring in Finance with a minor in design thinking. This is his first production, and he is excited to tell this story.

John Valdez
Joseph/Balsero 1

John is an actor, screenwriter, stunt coordinator, producer, director, and second generation Filipino-American. He has a BA in Theater Studies, is a certified stuntman, and is passionate about creating media with a focus on movement and particularly action. John is currently fundraising to produce his first full-length feature length screenplay, a coming-of-age action/romance about a queer POC.

Benjamin Wright
Marc

From American Fork, Utah, Benjamin Wright is a senior majoring in Exercise and Wellness, minoring in Creative Writing.

MEET THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Erin A. Bjorn
Projection Co-Designer

Erin (MFA Theatre Production and Design, BYU, 2008) works professionally in costume, costume crafts, projection, and lighting design and has designed projections for most of BYU's Dance productions for the last decade. Favorite other credits include masks for the film *Echo Boomers* (2020), projections for *Enchanted April: a New Musical* at Theatre Two @ Theatre Row, (NY, 2019), and the clothing for Ben Hammond's sculpture of Martha Hughes Cannon to be displayed in the U.S. Capitol building.

Alayna Calderwood
Dramaturg

From Northern Virginia, Alayna will be graduating in April with a degree in Theatre Arts Studies (emphasis in Dramaturgy) and a minor in Mandarin Chinese. This is her first university production in the role as dramaturg; however she has been involved with many student level productions as dramaturg.

Patrick Egbert
Assistant Sound Designer

Patrick is a sophomore seeking a degree in Theatre Arts Studies with emphases in Sound and Lighting Design. His most recent project was Assistant Sound Designer for *Illusionary Tales* here at BYU. Most of the time he is not designing at school he is working at the Hale Centre Theatre as a technician.

Kris W. Peterson
Director, Balsera A

Kris is an actor/director/educator with an MFA in Staging Shakespeare from the University of Exeter. She has completed acting and directing coursework at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London where she studied under Philip Bird, Glynn MacDonald, and Yvonne Morley. She is currently a theatre education and directing professor at BYU. She is the co-founder of Happy Accidents Theatre Company and Dark Lady Shakespeare Company. Much love to her husband, Tony, and her lads, Max and Sam.

Conrad M. Smith
Sound Designer

Conrad Smith is a senior in Linguistics while studying sound design and information technology on the side. Aside from various educational interests he takes every opportunity to learn more about language and practice writing.

Taylor Glad
Project Engineer

From Orem, Utah, Taylor graduated from BYU in Theatre Arts Studies in 2018. Recent credits include show programming for BYU Homecoming Spectacular and audio engineering and mixing for *Into the Woods* (BYU), *Wizard of Oz* (Hale Center Theater), and *Fly More Than You Fall* (Noorda Center).

LETTERS FROM CUBA & MANUAL FOR A DESPERATE CROSSING

A STUDY GUIDE

BY LAYNIE CALDERWOOD
AND ANGELA MOSER,
DRAMATURGS

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ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

MARÍA IRENE FORNÉS

María Irene Fornés is a name that should be known by every student of storytelling and theatre. She was a brilliant playwright, an ingenious creator, and loved experimenting on stage. Born in Cuba, Fornés chose to write in English but never hid the bicultural inspiration in her works. Her imagination was profoundly Cuban. Throughout her lifetime, she often said, “Cuba is my soul.”

Entirely self-taught, Fornés based her work on styles of painting and movies rather than other theatre or literature. She once said about her writing process, “Let the thing you want to write come to you; become intimate with your own imagination.”

Experimentation is what drew her to theatre. Fornés was always trying new things, which makes it difficult to assign a specific style to her plays. There is no “Fornés signature” to capture the attention of either the casual theatergoer or the middle-brow critic. Even her admirers are at times made a little uncomfortable by Fornés' different voices.

In these plays, Fornés explores character by adjusting her approach to realism. She presents people without tying them down to psychology, moralism, or even sentimentality. Her characters are not required to explain themselves, or to interpret their own actions; they are shown in emotive moments, and immediate thought processes. The author lived by the phrase, "Expose everything about you. The bad and the good. Then you are a free person." Watching a play by María Irene Fornés allows the audience to focus on compassionate representation of the human condition.

All quotes taken from this book:
Robinson, Marc. *The Theater of María Irene Fornés*. The John Hopkins University Press, 1999.

FORNÉS FUN FACTS

She only completed an elementary education.

She would sometimes buy an object from a thrift store and base an entire stage design on that object.

She won a total of nine Obie Awards.

She immigrated to the United States at the age of fifteen.

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett was the only play that she ever saw.

She lived most of her life in New York City.

ABOUT THE PLAYS
SOBRE LAS OBRAS DE TEATRO

Letters from Cuba takes place in a liminal space, meaning that the stage is simultaneously Cuba and New York City. This shared space allows us as the audience to take an intimate look at letters being exchanged between a brother and sister; the brother, Luis, is in Cuba and Fran, his sister, has already immigrated to the US and is living in an apartment in New York.

Manual for a Desperate Crossing is a story of Cubans trying to reach the coast of Florida. They are fleeing the communist regime and are so desperate to leave Cuba that they innovate handmade rafts in order to cross the Florida Straits. The situation almost seems fictional, but is a well-documented event called the "Cuban Diaspora" (see section "A Fourth Wave: Balseros").

The play was initially written as an opera and has only recently been adapted for a non-operatic stage. The musical nature of this play builds gorgeous poetry around a deeply tragic situation. Fornés dedicates the play with this beautifully simple line:

"To Horacio, and to thousands of men, women, and children who perished crossing the Florida Straits on rickety rafts."

In response to the most recent calls for wider civil change, the BYU Theatre Department is actively working to better fulfill the prophet's invitation to "abandon all attitudes and actions of prejudice." The first step is diversifying the stories that we tell on stage; *Letters from Cuba* and *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* quickly emerged as a vital and important place to begin.

On her inspiration for this production, director Kris W. Peterson made the following statement:

"As a Latina faculty member I am interested in diversifying the representation in our productions, so I began reading work by Latinx playwrights. María Irene Fornés' one acts spoke to me and her experimental staging seemed to lend itself well to the brand new and experimental format of Zoom."

We hope you enjoy the production and find meaning in the world we are creating on this digital platform—distanced, yet closer than ever.

STATEMENTS FROM THE CAST

DECLARACIONES DEL ELENCO DE ACTORES

This production has one of the largest Latinx casts that has ever performed for BYU Theatre. This exciting breakthrough was best expressed by our director, Kris Peterson: "Representation matters." Below are some statements from the cast on what it means to them to be involved in *Letters from Cuba* and *Manual for a Desperate Crossing.*

Used with permission

Maria Angelica Sanchez Carr: It means a lot to me to be part of *Manual for a Desperate Crossing*. After a 7-year ordeal trying to leave communist Cuba, my parents, sisters, and I came to the US as refugees seeking freedom. We didn't come on a raft, but I have an understanding of the desperation that can drive a person to make such a crossing.

See 4thWallDramaturgy.byu.edu for more of Maria's story.

Max Jennings: I am so excited to be a part of this production and to show the experiences of the Latinx community—both the joys and the struggles of those who immigrated to America. As my grandmother immigrated from Costa Rica I hope to show honor and respect through this medium.

See 4thWallDramaturgy.byu.edu for more *declaraciones*.

DRAMATURG'S NOTE
NOTA DE DRAMATURGO

The Real Stories of Immigration

In all honesty, this dramaturgical project really pushed me out of my comfort zone. I am a white American; the last immigrants in my ancestral line lived nearly 200 years ago. But even more, I grew up understanding a single story of immigration. I've always been told people come to America for a better life, to pursue their "American Dream." I've always been taught that every immigrant gains more by coming here than what they leave behind.

Prolific Nigerian writer, Chimanda Ngozi Adichie, says, "The problem with [single stories] is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" (The Danger of a Single Story, TED Talks). I found in my dramaturgical process that many immigrants *did* experience some components of the single story I had been taught all my life, but that all of their processes were more complex and layered than I originally had assumed. These complexities challenged me; they made me rethink and question a lot of what I felt I had known.

These complexities are an integral part of *Letters from Cuba* and *Manual for a Desperate Crossing*. We watch characters reach for a dream in America that they believe in, but we experience heartbreak with them as we witness what they sacrifice as well.

I am grateful for María Irene Fornés. I'm grateful that in her wisdom, she crafted these two plays that inspired a journey of relearning for me. I hope that you can have a similar experience.

Laynie Calderwood

LIVED EXPERIENCES
EXPERIENCIAS VIVIDAS

The avant garde style of María Irene Fornés paints a beautiful and intricate backdrop of the feelings involved with the immigration process. We wanted to ground the work in the meaningful stories of our friends who have immigrated to the US within the last 20 years or so. While not all of the stories are of people from Cuba specifically, their stories give dimension to Fornés' gorgeous writing by providing multiple perspectives. To read more of these stories and interviews, click **here**.

Paco from Cuba

Paco just decided he'd had enough. He was either going to fight against the communist regime in Cuba, or he was going to leave. He had heard stories of people building rafts, but after being denied asylum in the US, he headed for Spain instead.

Correa-Lazaro Family from Peru

Arminda was a women's rights activist in Peru. She knew the work was important, but that it put her family in great danger. When her husband was jumped on the way home from work, they decided it was time to leave for a safer life.

Lucas Orides from Brazil

A failed business venture in Brazil caused Lucas to rethink what his goals were in life. Through the help of a few great friends, he applied for a student visa, earned another degree, found great work with the US Health Department and met the love of his life.

Carmen from Cuba

Carmen already knew she needed to get out of Cuba, but being harassed in the park by two police officers for not stopping to sing the national anthem was the last straw. She applied for the Green Card lottery and she won. She has never looked back.

Diego Salinas from El Salvador

When he was just 5 years old, Diego's parents fled El Salvador after a series of US foreign policies devastated the country. Now 24, Diego is struggling to reconcile his Salvadoran heritage with his American upbringing.

See 4thWallDramaturgy.byu.edu for more *experiencias vividas*.

DRAMATURG'S NOTE
NOTA DE DRAMATURGO

Sharing the Burden of Biculturalism

The first time I read both of these plays I had a feeling of familiarity. I had the impression I had read those stories before, even though I had not. I never crossed the ocean on a boat. I never feared I might not make it to the other side. I did not leave my family thinking I might not see them ever again. But I left, too. And that feeling, that heaviness in your heart that comes from leaving, belongs to all those who leave their motherland. I was 18 years old when I hopped on a plane at the Rome airport and landed in Salt Lake City, Utah. I had never been on an airplane before. I didn't speak any English. So you might have guessed why this play is relevant to me. You might be thinking why is it relevant to you? And why now?

This is the story of many people you pass by everyday. Being bicultural is hard, and sharing the burden makes it easier. This is important because compassion and understanding are what make us human beings. More understanding and knowledge equals more power in our relationships. Now is always the best time to increase awareness. Now is a gift, no reason to wait longer. María Irene Fornés was able to unmask some of the deepest feelings that belong to the human condition. It is worth watching. It is worth learning about it.

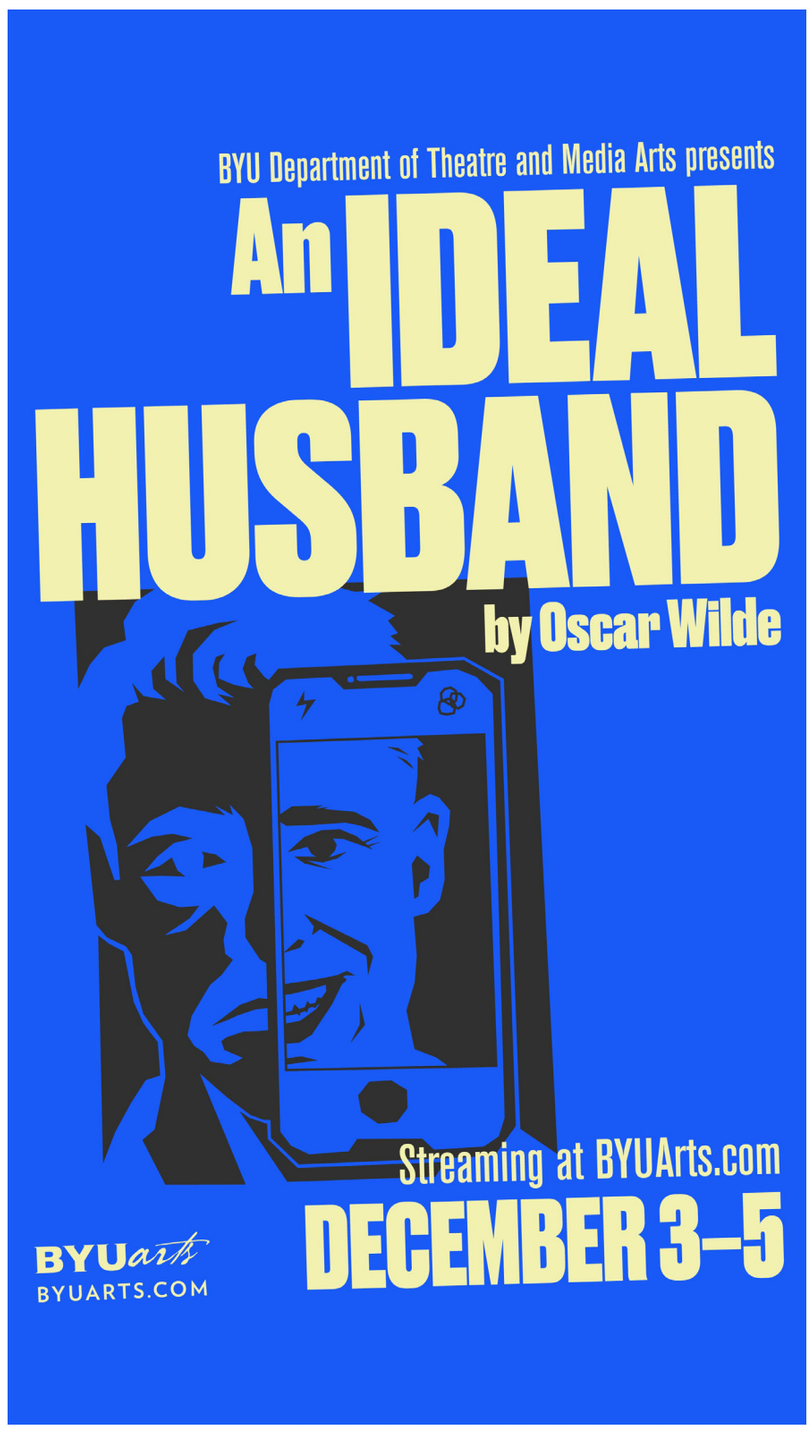
Angela Moser

COMING SOON

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

December 3–5, 7:30 PM
Streaming at BYUArts.com

A classic Oscar Wilde comedy of class, honor, blackmail, and political corruption. This play from 1893 is made timely as it discusses and parodies marriage and masculinity.



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This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants, and awards for actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers, and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for invitation to the KCACTF regional festival and may also be considered for national awards recognizing outstanding achievement in production, design, direction, and performance.

Last year more than 1,300 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.

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