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A Clever, Mischievous Boy

Carlos Morton is the guardian angel of Latino theatre directors and producers

By Kat Avila | Web Published 3.20.2004

There was a time when I went into Los Angeles and every other person I spoke to would mention how playwright Carlos Morton had helped him or her obtain work. I thought, he must be the guardian angel for Latino theatre directors and actors.

Now, that doesn't mean he's a goody two-shoes. Far from it, he has always left me with the impression of being this clever, mischievous boy to whom one shouldn't turn one's back. He was a Mina Shaughnessy Scholar (1981) and a Fulbright Lecturer at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (1989-90).

K: Kat Avila
C: Carlos Morton

K: Where are you working now?
C: I am the director of the Center for Chicano Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara, as well as professor of Dramatic Art. You can check out our website at: <http://research.ucsb.edu/ccs>

I'm doing basically the same thing I was doing while interim director for UC MEXUS [University of California Institute for Mexico and the U.S.] at University of California, Riverside.

K: Catch me up on your latest



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writing projects.

C: One of my latest plays is "Paso Del Norte." [A drama set in El Paso, Texas.] My very latest is a Spanish-language piece, "Los Mojados," that I wrote for the Universidad Veracruzana scheduled to premiere in Xalapa, Veracruz, in May. It's about the relationship between the Chicanos and the Mexicanos.

K: Of your work to date, which play has been the most produced?

C: Probably "The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales" because the problem of police brutality does not go away.

K: Which play of yours do you hold up to your students as a model of good playwriting?

C: I would say "Danny Rosales" because it's about a man with hubris who brings his house down on top of him.

K: As the director of the UCSB Center for Chicano Studies and having previously been the interim director of UC Mexus in Riverside, have research concerns changed?

C: Immigration by indigenous communities from Mexico to the U.S.A. is the latest phenomena. Michael Kearny calls the Zapotec and Mixtec migration to California, "Oaxacalifornia." Also, a big Nahuatl-speaking population movement to the East Coast, especially New York.

K: Where have you traveled?

C: I've traveled mostly to Latin America and Europe, the Middle East. In May, I've been invited to spend a week at the University of Balamand in Tripoli, Lebanon, as well as to a conference in Bamberg, Germany.

I also collaborate with El Teatro La Fragua in Honduras. They have produced my play "Romero De Las

Americas" en Espanol. A play about the death of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador in 1980. My plays have also been produced in Mexico by La Compania Nacional de Teatro de Mexico. My latest, "Los Mojados," will be produced by the Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Veracruz.

K: Early Valdezian theatre was interactive storytelling. I think video games are the next stage of that. If you could develop a video game for Chicanos, what would it be about? Characters? Weapons? Who would win the game?

C: Oh, wow, I gotta think about this one!!!

Kat last interviewed Carlos in 1992 regarding his play "The Child Diego" about muralist Diego Rivera.

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