

UC SANTA CRUZ PERFORMANCE ART

Rainbow Theater celebrates 20 years

Multicultural theater closes minority gap in arts

By KARA GUZMAN

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SANTA CRUZ — When Don Williams founded Rainbow Theater 20 years ago, he wanted to give people of color performances they could relate to.

About 30 UC Santa Cruz students banded together that year to produce three plays from Chicano, Asian and African American playwrights. Since then, nearly 2,000 UCSC students have participated in multicultural shows through Rainbow Theater.

Rainbow's 20th anniversary season kicks off in November with four plays, a dance show and a poetry performance.

Williams said watching good theater is like peeking through a wall. It creates discussion.

Rainbow Theater, the only multicultural theater in the UC system, goes beyond starting dialogue about ethnicity and sexual orientation.

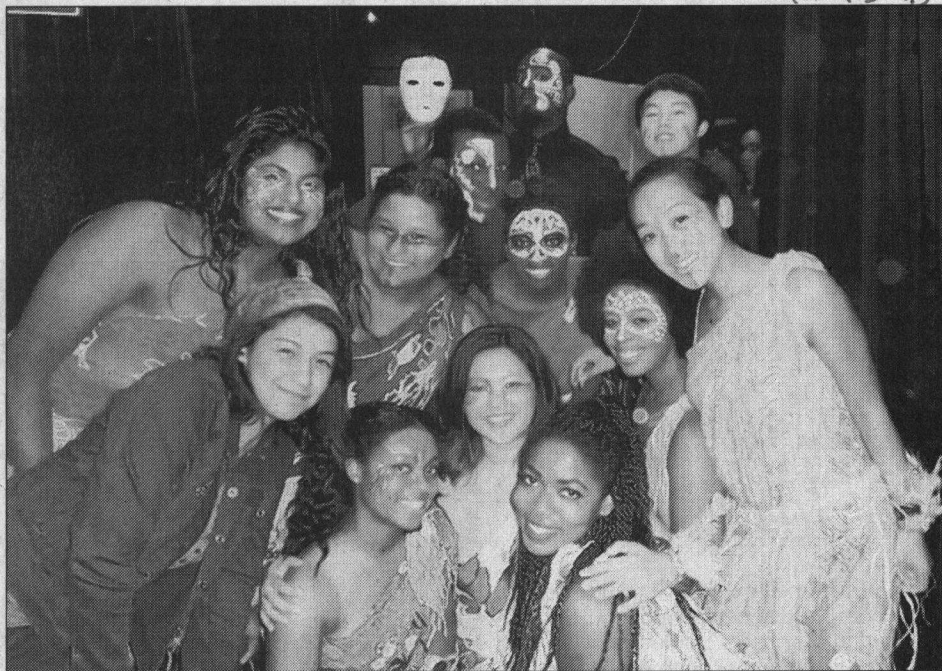
Each fall, students from the theater visit high schools in Los Angeles and the Bay Area to attract minority students to college. They give performances in high school gyms and speak afterward about financial aid and college applications.

Students of color tend to come from schools that don't have strong art programs, said Williams. "When I go down to L.A., they have empty stages but no real theater programs that they develop," he said.

Crystelle Reola, program alum and administrative associate, said that performing stories about minorities connects the actors to their high school audience.

"It finally hits them that we are students of color just like them, but we're in a space with a community that supports us," Reola said.

Reola said she stayed



RAINBOW THEATER/CONTRIBUTED

Rainbow Theater added a dance troupe 'Rainbots' in fall 2012.



RAINBOW THEATER/CONTRIBUTED

UCSC students Tony Zavala and Alma Herrera-Pazmino perform a scene from 'Blu' on Rainbow Theater's stage in November 2011.

involved with the theater after graduation because she wants more minorities in the arts.

"Our motto is to uplift others higher than yourself," she said. "If I could have other students involved with art and experience the same thing I did, it would change their lives."

Student producer and UCSC senior Karina Mendez said that the theater gives her a space to talk with others who share her struggles.

She came to college with no theater experience, but at Rainbow she's been an actor, tech crew member, director and president.

Mendez said that the theater helps minority student groups connect to a wider community.

"We're so easy and quick to find differences, but really we all go through similar struggles," Mendez said.

Gabrielle Garcia, UCSC sophomore and the theater's outreach director, will

IF YOU GO

RAINBOW THEATER
20TH SEASON

SHOWS: 'Song for Coretta' and 'Cleveland Raining,' 7 p.m. Nov. 1 and 9, 3 p.m. Nov. 3; 'CHICAN@S: The Living and the Dead' and Poet's Corner, 7 p.m. Nov. 2, 3 and 8; 'Dreamers' and dance performance, 7 p.m. Nov. 15, 16 and 17

WHERE: All shows at Stevenson Event Center, UCSC campus

COST: \$10 or free with UCSC ID

DETAILS: Visit www.cadrc.org or call 831-459-1861

be taking the troupe to visit her high school in East Los Angeles next month. "I think it's important for people to know it's not just a minority story," Garcia said.

She said she's interested in creating a space for people of all backgrounds.

"Everyone's story matters," Garcia said.

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