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La Virgen, the Americas' Great Miracle Play, Prays for Alms

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If you've ever wondered what it must have been like to attend a miracle play and feel its thrilling, communal, populist expression, you can find out next week, when *La Virgen de Guadalupe, Dios Inantzin,* will be performed at Los Angeles' downtown cathedral. This is a theatre experience worth getting on a plane for a quick pre-holiday trip to LA. *La Virgen* is in rehearsals right now despite a significant funding deficit, persevering in its own act of faith.

La Virgen tells the story of Juan Diego whose vision of the Virgin Mary, and the miracle that proved his devotion, form the basis of Christianity in the Americas. It is 1531 and Spanish missionaries have just encountered the indigenous people; the priests do not believe the Virgin could have shown herself to a simple peasant. Why, they wonder, wouldn't she show herself to us?

The answer, given in this remarkable production, is that faith belongs to the people. And the people will be there – 3,000 of them filling the cathedral to capacity, many arriving early to save seats for their entire families. You see, the production is free. Playwright Evelina Fernandez told me, "We decided to move forward on a shoestring budget because it is our tenth anniversary at the cathedral and because of the hundreds of families who attend year after year. For many of them, this is the only holiday celebration they can attend together and *La Virgen* has become an alternative to other high priced holiday offerings like the *Nutcracker*."

But the Latino Theatre Company, which produces this spectacle, still doesn't have all the money required. They launched a Kickstarter campaign and raised some of it. People can further support *La Virgen* with a donation, or by purchasing some of the few reserved seats. The Archdiocese has been approached, and I hope Archbishop José Horacio Gomez will come forward and cover the deficit.

The production boasts a cast of more than 100 in colorful, feathered costumes; miraculous, operatic singing; and Sal Lopez's signature performance as the gentle and humble Juan Diego. Yet in many ways the real star is the audience, because their pleasure and respect for the experience exemplifies how sacred theatre can be.

"It's a spiritual offering from the Latino Theater Company family to the Los Angeles community and all of the participants in the pageant; children, youth, seniors, singers, dancers, musicians, actors," Fernandez said. "After nine years we feel a social and spiritual obligation to offer this gift of empowerment especially now, when many are feeling powerless."

Photo by Armando Arorizo

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