



CACAO

A VENEZUELAN LAMENT

SEPT. 22-25, 2022



RUTAS 2022

A message from the creator of Cacao

This is the story about regaining a part of myself that I lost when I was moved out of Venezuela, my conuco (my home). This story is an homage to the knowledge keepers and the cacao farmers who sow the history of Venezuela with their sweat. This play is dedicated to my great grandmother, Maria Concepcion Valdiviezo de Mata “Concha.”

Esta es la historia que recupera una parte de mí que perdí cuando me mudaron de Venezuela, mi conuco (mi hogar). Esta historia es un homenaje a los guardianes del conocimiento y a los cacaoteros que con su sudor siembran la historia de Venezuela. Esta obra está dedicada a mi bisabuela, María Concepción Valdiviezo de Mata “Concha.”

Maria Victoria Mata Soledad (Hija de Milena Josefina Mata, nieta de Juan Mata y Arcadia Soledad)

Production Credits

Creator | Choreographer | Director | Artistic Producer

Victoria Mata

Creative Producer

Alison Wong

Associate Choreographer

Nahiti Ortega

Performers and Collaborators

Irma Villafuerte (Milena)
Misset Parata (Yusmelda)
Victoria Hernandez (Hortencia)
Nico Solarte (Centeno)
Nickesia Garrick (Ensemble)
Roshanak Jaberri (Ensemble)
Falcioni Patiño (Ensemble)
Diana Reyes (Ensemble)

Screen Appearances

Belkys Figueroa
Ivan Lira
Carlixta Palacios
Yamile Perez Palacios
Nahiti Ortega
Ivanna Lira
Petra Diaz

Environmental Designer

Trevor Schwellnus

Multimedia Artistic Director/ Field Work Camera

Alexandra Gelis

Visual & Projection Designer

Alejandra Higuera

Singer

Y Josephine

Composer

Jackeline Rago

Shadow Puppetry & Paper Cut-out Artwork

Brescia Nember Reid

Sound Designer

Thomas Ryder Payne

Lighting Designer

Gabriel Cropley

Rehearsal Music Director

Guillermo Da Costa

Costume Designer

Nahiti Ortega

César el Hayeco

Wardrobe Support

Milena Geary

Dramaturge

Beatriz Pizano

Administration Support

Daniela Arango

Communications Manager

Magda Arturo

Researcher & Writer

Heather Evans

Rehearsal Stage Manager

Flavia Martin

Patrick Lynn

Production Stage Manager

Tanvi Vyas

Production Manager

Charissa Wilcox

Crew

Matt Armour

Mike Dowdall

Caleb Kachkowski Ford

Amber Pattison

Sandy Plunkett

Fer Sandoval Pezoa

Adrien Whan

Stage Design

Trevor Schwellnus

Charissa Wilcox

Gabriel Cropley

Associate Musicians from Venezuela

Belkys Figueroa

Mariángel González

Ivan Lira

Ivanna Lira

Alexis Machado

Angelina Marrero

Glenxis Machado

Betsayda Machado

Calixta Palacios

Yusmari Palma

Yamile Pérez

Jesus Rondon

Leodimer Vaamonde

Glenxis Verde

Yaritza Verde

Fieldwork Mentors | Elders | Cacao Farmers

Carlixta Palacios

Yamile Perez Palacios

Lourdes Josefina Ramirez Sanoja

Maria de los Angeles Ramirez Sanoja

Fieldwork Production Support

Eloi Araujo Mata

Joel Carrasquel

Nahiti Ortega

Carlixta Palacios

Misset Parata

Yamile Perez Palacios

Peter Simon James

Mariela Soledad

Fieldwork Photographers

Luis Carlderon

Alexandra Gelis

Cyntia Iradi

Carlos Lasala

Jorge Lozano

Volunteers

Uche Ama

Ana Cisneros

Coralia Cortez

Joseph Cretu

Nikole Daniels

Heather Evans

Rachael Edge

Valezka Gomez

Daniela Arango Marciana

Angeline Monegro Medina

Esta Noj

Marcela Ramirez

Darian Razdar

Marcela Lucia Rojas

Lilia Leon Tovar

Fernanda Yanchapaxi

Synopsis

Prelude

Quitiplás ensemble | Irma Villafuerte, Victoria Hernandez, Nico Solarte, Nickesia Garric, Roshanak Jaber, Falcioni Patiño, Diana Reyes

Music Composition | Jesus Rondon, Los Vasallos de Venezuela

Singer | Betsayda Machado

Scene 1: Bus to Choroní | Bus a Choroní

From a distance, the interior sounds of a local bus on a dirt road.

Scene 2: The arrival | La llegada

A busy plaza in a coastal town with dirt roads surrounded by rustic, colourful colonial homes. Milena's path is interrupted by locals preparing for the San Juan.

Scene 3: Suitcase | La maleta

Milena and Yasmelda reunite after thirteen years.

Scene 4: The reunion | La reunion

Milena's family and neighbors welcome her back and she's exposed to the political divide in her hometown.

Scene 5: Centeno is Leaving | Centeno se va

Centeno, Milena's childhood best friend, tells her he's leaving Venezuela.

Scene 6: Planting stars | El Sembrador de Estrellas

A tribute to those who have walked across the border out of Venezuela, leaving their hearts and spirits behind and engraved in the plains, mountains, and oceans of home. Poetry by Helena Rago Rodriguez.

Scene 7: Hortencia & Milena

Milena attempts to convince her aunt Hortencia to sell the land, but Hortencia reminds her of the importance of the teachings of the cacao bean.

Synopsis

Scene 8: The Harvest | La Siembra

Hortencia hands Milena a machete and her world is transformed into a surreal visitation of ancestors.

Scene 9: I am from here | Yo si soy de aqui

Milena undergoes a search for herself.

Scene 10: Your whispers | Tu suzuro

Milena meets the Milena that never left Venezuela—the version of herself that was left behind, her void.

Scene 11: When we were young | Cuando eramos niñas

Milena and Yusmelda remember how much they used to laugh when they were young.

Scene 12: Yusmelda y Hortencia

Hortencia reminds Yusmelda that for more than 500 years, the family has worked the land and the cacao will not fail us; its knowledge and strength is their veins.

Scene 13: Dear Sun | Querido Sol

A song to honour the Sun and the cacao crops.

Scene 14: Washing San Juan | Lavando San Juan

The town's San Juaneras (matriarchal devotees to San Juan) journey to the river to wash their San Juan deities in preparation for next day's San Juan Celebrations.

Scene 15: Grandma would always say... | Miabuela siempre decia...

Milena and Yusmelda reconnect and play the Quitiplas together after thirteen years of not being able to do so together.

Scene 16: An offering for San Juan | Una promesa a San Juan

We invite you to join us as we bring the euphoric San Juan Celebration to life right here in Mel Lastman Square.

PERFORMERS



Irma Villafuerte | Milena

Salvadorian-Canadian dance artist in Tkaronto. She graduated from George Brown Dance and is trained in Latin American, Caribbean and Cuban Contemporary techniques. She's performed in festivals and events in Canada, Cuba and the United States. She's also participated in projects with Jaberi Dance Theatre and Kahawi Dance Theatre, as well as collaborated on projects with other leading choreographers. She has developed her choreographic practice through residencies with Dancemakers, Emerging Voices with TDT and George Brown Dance Ensemble. She currently sits on the board of Adelheid Dance Projects and is a TDSB Creates Resident Artist, as well as a faculty member for Casa Maiz' Semillas Maiz summer camp for Latin American children and Randolph College for the Performing Arts.



Misset Parata | Yusmelda

Born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, where she was immersed in a rich culture of Afro-Venezuelan traditions. Her love for music opened the doors to perform for local Venezuelan dance groups. In 2006, after meeting Victoria Mata, MataDanZe founder, she joined the dance collective. This new endeavour is where she was first introduced to theatre performance, and also had the opportunity to train and perform contemporary dance throughout Canada and Latin American countries. For the last 5 years, Misset has studied Afro Venezuelan and Latin American Caribbean percussion which landed her a role as a Percussionist and Actor for the piece *The Mente* by Paula Carreño (2019). Eager to keep exploring the performance world and to share her roots with wider audiences, we find her here now, as part of Cacao, offering us a deep dive into her upbringing through a character "written for her"-Victoria Mata.



Victoria Henriquez | Hortencia

Dominican actor with a background of street theater. Victoria theater passion was born by her community activit work in the Dominican Republic, as a way to speak and educate the community about local issues. Since living in Canada it has been harnessed to share her love to her Afro latinidad.



Nico Solarte | Centeno

is a Colombian-Canadian multi-disciplinary queer artist, healer, activist and vocal producer with a passion for community and the expansion of consciousness through creativity. He first began studying music at age 8 at the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Colombia (in his hometown of Bogota), before pursuing further training in voice and classical piano. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Musical Theatre performance from Sheridan College and is also the founder of Existt Soul Centre, an artist wellness collective dedicated to the curation of experiential healing events fostering creativity and liberation.



Nickeshia Garrick | Ensemble

Settler on the stolen land of Tkaronto and has performed on this land for over 25 years. They are unapologetically a Black, Queer Artist, who believes in the healing power of breath through raw emotion and movement and teaches this breathwork at the Toronto Film School. Along with teaching at TFS, Nickeshia is a Certified Personal Trainer and Pilates Instructor and often offers free and discounted sessions to the IBPOC LGBTQ2S+ community in Tkaronto. Nickeshia holds their BFA in Dance from Simon Fraser University (Vancouver) and is a Dora Mavor Moore, winning and multi-nominated artist.

PERFORMERS



Roshanak Jaber | Ensemble

Iranian-born Canadian artist, producer, director, and a Dora nominated choreographer and performer with a career that spans over 20 years. She is also the founding artistic director of Jaber Dance Theatre, based in Toronto. Described as a “force to reckon with,” she has created and co-created over 30 works in dance, visual arts, film and music, has performed in numerous dance works, and has presented her work in Canada and Internationally. Roshanak is the recipient of the ISPA-International Society of Performing Arts Global Fellowship (2020, 2021) and the Chalmers Arts Fellowship (2019), and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours from York University. She has been a guest speaker and lecturer in various forums, and her work has been referenced in adult education courses and in critical pedagogy at the University of Toronto.



Falciony Patiño | Ensemble

From Funza, Colombia and began training in Colombian folk dance at the age of seven with the group Zaquesazipa. He has since experimented with folk dance, ballet, contemporary dance, afro dance traditions, urban dance, and capoeira, in addition to parkour. He studied dance at the Academy of Arts of Bogota, during which he joined the folk group Orkeseos. In 2009 he moved to Toronto to join Ballet Creole. In 2015 he was part of Amalgama in the Pan American Games and in 2016 danced for Kaha:Wi Dance Theatre as a part of The Honoring. Since 2017, he has been performing in Mistatim with Red Sky Performance.



Diana C. Reyes | Ensemble

Also known as Fly Lady Di (she/her) is a multi-disciplinary artist, recognized for her work as a street dance artist, and DJ. Born and raised in Toronto, her current explorations combine her ancestral Filipino heritage with contemporary concepts - through dance choreography, performance making and joke writing. Most notably, her work includes Honey (Universal), Fall Out Boy's 'Dance Dance', and performances with artists like Ciara, Jason Derulo, the Clipse feat. Pharrell, MC Lyte and BlackSTREET to name just a few. She's been featured on etalk, Toronto Life, Toronto Star, Dance Current and countless publications in North America and abroad. Her work has also brought her all over Europe, Asia and South America and she's been supported by federal, provincial and city granting bodies. She plans to further investigate pre-colonial Filipino culture and incorporate that into her work as a performance maker. www.flyladydi.com



Y Josephine | Singer

Venezuelan-Canadian whose contagious passion for percussion has propelled her to travel far and wide to share her epic fusion of sounds of the South. She is one of the founders of Baobá, a trio formed by Toronto's top female percussionists that takes traditional beats to the next level. Empowered by the natural musicality that flows from South American bodies, this trio-and-sometimes-quartet featuring fellow Jamphitheatre-er Anita Graciano, alongside Mari Palhares and Carla Dias, represents an ideal balance of voice, melody, and instrumentation. They bring new life to and transcend Venezuelan, Colombian, and Brazilian traditions. She also is part of the Amao Kuda Et les Bois crue.



Victoria Mata | Creator | Choreographer | Director | Artistic Producer
Venezuelan-Canadian settler in T’Koronto. She is a poly-lingual choreographer, dance artist and activist with a background in expressive arts therapy. Mata’s career was first sculpted by pedagogic, self-directed training, which proceeded with training under internationally renowned choreographers. Mata’s sensibility to inclusion and Victorborder stories are due to her eclectic upbringing across three continents before the age of fifteen. Community arts and the abolishment of violence against women are some of Mata’s passions, passions that are intricately weaved into all of her work. She received an MFA in Contemporary Choreography from York University and has been a beneficiary of the Metcalf Foundation, a finalist of the Toronto Arts Foundation Emerging Artist Award and the recipient of 7 Dora nominations. After 12 years of research, Mata is now working to share a story about the resilience of cacao farmers, which is part of her heritage and that of many families across Venezuela. Cacao | A Venezuelan Lament is Mata’s second self-produced, full-length production and through it she aims to share an expression of the stories that course through her veins.



Alison Wong | Creative Producer

Director, performer and producer based in Toronto. Recent directing credits include Stormy Weather (IN Series, Washington DC), La fedeltà premiata (Royal Opera House, Mumbai, India), Joshua (Ars Musica, Toronto), The Bremen Town Musicians (Canadian Opera Company), and Béatrice et Bénédic (MYOpera, Toronto). Alison’s directing work has taken her to productions in the United States, Italy, India, and the Netherlands. In 2015/2016, she was part of Factory Theatre’s inaugural Factory Foremen Program for early-career directors of color. In 2017, she also concluded a five-season term as Artistic Producer with b current, a Toronto-based company with over 25 years of supporting the development of new Canadian plays by artists of color. Over the last two years, she was the Creative Producer for the world premieres of The Empire, a trilogy of modern epics by award-winning playwright Susanna Fournier. These premieres were part of the New Chapter program celebrating Canada’s 150-year anniversary, which culminated at the international LuminaTO Festival.



Nahiti Ortega | Associate Choreographer | Master Teacher of Afro-Venezuelan Traditional Dance

is the Artistic Director and Choreographer of the music and dance ensemble Los Vasallos de Venezuela. She began her dance studies in traditional Afro-Venezuelan and Popular dance at the prestigious Bigott Foundation in Caracas, Venezuela. Her specializations include: West African, Colombian, Cuban, Argentinian, Dominican, Bolivian, Brazilian, Chilean and numerous genres of traditional Afro-Venezuelan dance. Nahiti has been internationally trained in body expression, polyrhythmic body percussion, dance analysis, theory of popular culture, singing, theatrical makeup and scenic costume design. Her parallel passions in costume design, make-up art and corporate event planning keep her travelling across the country for festivals, celebration and large-scale events. With more than 30 years of experience as a performer of traditional Venezuelan dance genres and other Latin American dance forms, Nahiti brings an incredible richness and mentorship to Cacao | A Venezuelan Lament as Associate Choreographer.



Jackeline Rago | Composer

Multi-instrumentalist, composer, arranger, producer, and educator who specializes in her native Venezuelan folk-music and other Latin American and Caribbean folk musical genres. She holds a BA in music and is an Orff-certified music teacher from the San Francisco School and the Dominican College. Jackeline is the musical director of two Bay Area bands, the “Venezuelan Music Project” (Folk-Venezuelan Music) and the “VNote Ensemble” (Fusion of Venezuelan music and Jazz). She’s also the Lower School music teacher at Park Day School in Oakland, California, as well as faculty member at the California Jazz Conservatory in Berkeley, California. She has performed and led workshops for over 25 years in the USA, Canada, Costa Rica, Japan, Spain, Finland, Thailand, Venezuela, Brazil, St Croix, Barbados, and Ghana.



Trevor Schwellnus | Environmental Designer | Set Consultant

Interdisciplinary artist and Scenographer who designs sets, lights, and video for performances with independent artists and companies since 2002. He was born on unceded Algonquin land, helped to found Aluna Theatre, and has been its Artistic Producer since 2002. One of his chief obsessions is the intersection of design, dramaturgy, and cross-cultural art-making. Recent work includes: White Girls in Moccassins (Buddies in Bad Times), The House of Bernarda Alba (Modern Times), Our Fathers...(Tarragon), Here are the Fragments (Theatre Centre), Out the Window (Luminato), Nohayquiensepa (No one knows) (Aluna Theatre), Alien Creature (Theatre Passe Muraille), and dozens more. He redesigned Toronto's Dora Award statuette in 2019, and has 6 Dora Awards.



Alexandra Gelis | Multimedia Artistic Director, Field Work Camera

Colombian-Venezuelan media artist, curator and researcher. She is currently working towards a Ph.D. in Environmental Studies. Her studio practice combines data capture techniques, video, film, sound, and spatial and electronic media to create non-fiction-based immersive installations, single and multi-channel films, and videos. Her projects incorporate personal field research as a tool to investigate the ecologies of landscapes by examining the traces left by various socio-political interventions. She has expanded her practice to work with youth and marginalized communities on the American continent. She has exhibited internationally in North and South America, Europe and Africa, and has curated several shows across Canada and South America over the last few years.



César el Hayeck | Costume Designer

is a production designer recently re-established in Toronto, after a successful career in Dubai and the MENA region.



Alejandra Higuera | Visual & Projection Designer

Colombian-Canadian artist based in Toronto. She currently works in the fields of video art, projection, photography, animation, sound and installation. She holds a BA in Integrated Media from OCAD University and since 2007 has been a community-engaged artist in Canada, Colombia and Mexico. She strongly believes in the power of art to create social change and healing. Her work explores issues of migration, feminism, and memory, as well as the many ways in which artists are able to create healing spaces for their communities.



Thomas Ryder Payne | Sound Designer

Thomas Ryder Payne is a composer and sound designer for theatre, dance and film. Selected past theatre work includes designs for Stratford, Shaw, Mirvish, Soulpepper, CanStage, Tarragon, Factory, TPM, YPT, Crows, Modern Times, Aluna, BIBT, Nightwood, Toronto Dance Theatre, NAC, Theatre Calgary, GCTC, RMTTC and many others. Thomas has received 4 Dora awards and 25 nominations.



Gabriel Cropley | Lighting Designer

Toronto based lighting designer and three-time Dora Mavor Moore award nominee. Gabriel has had the privilege of collaborating with Bouchardanse, pounds per square inch performance, Alias Dance Projects, Ballet Creole, Coal Mine Theatre, Expect Theatre, Bicycle Opera, Julia Sasso Dances, CanAsian Dance, dreamwalker dance, Angela Blumberg, Dancemakers, Simcoe Contemporary Dancers, Avinoam Silverman Dance, Little Pear Garden Dance Company, Toronto Heritage Dance, Korean Dance Studies Society of Canada, Capitol Theatre Port Hope, Festival of the Sound, Newton Moraes Dance Theatre, York Dance Ensemble, Danny Grossman, Sook-Yin Lee & Jennifer Goodwin, Ontario School of Ballet, Theatre Gargantua, Peggy Baker Dance Projects, Martha Hicks School of Ballet, Sampradaya Dance Creations, Hamilton Children's Choir, Tracey Norman, Sabina Perry, Forcier StageWorks, Soulpepper Global Cabaret, Ritmo Flamenco, Teatron Theatre, JDdance, Tribal Crackling Wind, Toronto Dance Theatre, Art of Time Ensemble, and the School of Toronto Dance Theatre.

Thank You

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