



Joining a Larger Community

FCCMT Volunteers Attend the Central American Theatre Festival

by Frances Wilson

In October 2012, Costa Rica's capital city came alive with the spirit of theatre as the Encuentro Nacional de Teatro y Muestra Centroamericana (Central American Theatre Festival) came to San Jose.

For the past eight years, every Central American country from Mexico to Panama has sent theatre troupes to this month-long celebration of professional and community theatre, where participants perform for awards and engage in intercultural dialogue. Hosting the festival brings a high concentration of intellectual and creative capital, not to mention tourist revenue, and is a sought-after honor awarded on a rotating basis. San Jose hosted the 2012 festival in conjunction with its own annual theatrical event, the Costa Rican National Theatre Festival.

“This is the pinnacle of theatre in Costa Rica,” says Luis Dario Villalobos, a Far Corners Community Musical Theatre alum and volunteer who has been involved with FCCMT in Monteverde since its inception. Through Ronal Chumi, a friend and mentor at the University of Costa Rica, Luis Dario and fellow FCCMT veteran Alvaro Garcia were able to attend the festival.

The festival is not just about performance; indeed, daily workshops address all aspects of community and professional theatre. From set and lighting design to makeup and costumes, from acting to directing to production management, theatre as an intellectual idea and cultural phenomenon in Central America take shape at the festival. The discussion is mindful and the direction deliberate: those involved in the festival are keenly aware of how they can further their artistic goals, and how they can shape their individual and national identities using theatrical expression.





We sat down with both Alvaro and Luis Dario to talk about their experiences at the Festival. Alvaro spoke from the perspective of a theater technician.

What kinds of theatre exist in Costa Rica now? Could you discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the theatre scene?

We actually talked about that a lot at the workshop. I noticed that most plays are historical and traditional, with a lot of politics and social issues emphasized. Musical theatre and improv comedy as genres are almost nonexistent. Most of the lighting designers, actors and stage crew I talked to spoke about musical theatre as something they don't know very much about. Musical theatre is a new, unique concept for Costa Rica.

Was this lack of musical theatre, and other criticisms, part of the public discussion at the festival?

The lighting designer I went to hear speak was the producer of Costa Rica's national theatre. He discussed the history of Costa Rican theatre, and said very bluntly that it was behind the United Kingdom and the USA in development by at least several hundred years. He said that our professional productions are on par with high school production standards in the US, and community-wise, Costa Rican theatre is very low-quality. I was pretty interested by that, because that means that Monteverde, where Far Corners puts on their productions, is quite different from the rest of Costa Rica!

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Can you see FCCMT being involved in this festival in the future? If so, how?

I definitely see Far Corners participating with a musical production in this festival. I know that if we do it, we would get an overwhelming amount of positive feedback from the festival, just because it would be so incredibly new and exciting.

What was your favorite part of the festival?

My favorite part was definitely going to the theatre... but not to see the plays. I was most excited to see the work that people were putting in backstage. We were able to go on a tour of a local professional blackbox theater. Being able to see the kind of instruments and tools that they use in their productions was truly awesome.

"My favorite part was definitely going to the theatre... but not to see the plays."



As an actor, Luis Dario had some different experiences at the festival.

About how many people are involved in the festival?

Thousands of people know about the festival and attend it. I could not believe how many people were there! It's a massive celebration of everything that Central American theatre offers.

What do you consider the strengths of Costa Rica's theatre scene, as well as its weaknesses?

Alvaro and I actually attended a conversatorio, or quorum, discussing this very thing on the last day. We talked about how by and large theatre isn't a common art form here, and how that, in itself, is a weakness. We want to engage the community in theatre. Hearing all these other companies talk about how that's important to them was pretty great... it was good to know that there are people out doing what Far Corners does in the summer in Monteverde all year round. Of course, what Far Corners is doing is on a whole different level.

"The people in my acting workshops were of every nationality and age, from as young as 15 to some older veterans, maybe 60 years old. It was amazing."



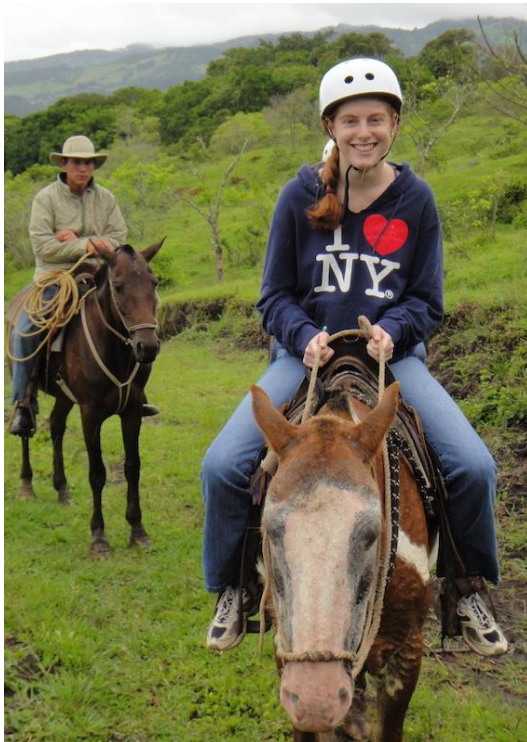
What was your favorite part of the festival?

Oh, definitely getting to see the performances. It was amazing to be able to just sit and watch and soak it in. I don't get very many chances to be a spectator, since Far Corners is literally the only theatre company where I'm from, and I'm always involved. It was just fantastic. I loved thinking about what was going on onstage behind the scenes and all coming together to create these beautiful shows.

International Student Essay

My Trip to Monteverde

by Hannah Colonnese



My name is Hannah Colonnese. I had the amazing opportunity to travel to Monteverde, Costa Rica last summer with Far Corners Community Musical Theater. For one month, I stayed with a host family while rehearsing for a musical with about 20 other kids at the local Centro Commercial as a teen volunteer. I was excited to be able to live in an entirely different culture and improve my Spanish skills, especially to perform a musical in a different language! We usually had rehearsals six days a week from around 9 AM to 6 PM, but for me, mornings during the first week instead consisted of Spanish immersion classes. Sundays were our days off, and there were opportunities for group recreational activities like horseback riding and canopy tours in the rain forest.

Although the local activities were wonderful and allowed us to visit some beautiful places, my favorite days were just the ordinary rehearsal days, learning the amazing songs and choreography for the musical *Once On This Island*, or *En Este Isla*.

The instructors had modified the script so that everyone had lines and solos. Each participant got their own chance to shine. In addition to rehearsals, there were weekly improvisation nights and movie nights that allowed everyone to just have fun and spend time together.

*"My life is in the United States, but now my heart is in Monteverde!"
- Hannah Colonnese, teen participant*



One thing about the trip that really surprised me was how fast I made connections. After my first day of Spanish class and rehearsal, I felt like I already had about five new best friends, and the number only grew as time passed. By the third day, I felt like I'd known these people all my life. Everything about being with them felt so natural. My "mama Tica"—my host mother—and I quickly became like sisters, and I loved having her 7-year-old daughter show me everything from her many pets, to where to pick fruits in her grandfather's farm, to a "secret" shortcut from the house to rehearsal.

We did crafts, read books, and she even helped me write a card (or five!) when one of the cast members had a birthday during the trip. And the food... it was wonderful! I know it may sound clichéd, but my favorite dish was the classic gallo pinto, a simple rice and bean dish—or, as I liked to call it, "rice and beans and magic!"



On the last night of the trip, the entire cast had a party, and afterward we went to a nearby field to just sit and look up at the stars (another thing I loved about Monteverde—just how many stars were visible!). One of the younger girls asked me which I loved better, the US or Monteverde. In a moment of extreme sentimentality, I answered: "Monteverde." When some of the other kids gave me a questioning look, I added, "Mi vida es en los Estados Unidos, pero ahora mi corazon es en Monteverde!" [Translation: "My life is in the United States, but now my heart is in Monteverde!"]

"I was amazed at the set they were able to create from a small budget. They relied on the generosity of the town, borrowing power tools and other items too expensive to purchase, and ingeniously used the natural resources surrounding them, creating a beautiful tree that was to be the focal point of the show. Each time we introduced ourselves to locals and mentioned our connection to FCCMT, we heard how they look forward to the staff's arrival and anticipate the show each year. Walking through the town, we noticed several times that local businesses not only had posters from this year's show prominently displayed, but also had more permanent "proud supporters of FCCMT" written on menus."

- Patti Lafferty, FCCMT Board Treasurer, on her first trip to Monteverde



Volunteer Profile: Kyle Martin

Dancing Around The World

by Christine Gordon



How does a pre-med major from a small New England college end up choreographing a musical in Costa Rica? When I ask Far Corners Community Musical Theater volunteer Kyle Martin, the answer surprises me: “I was a wrestler in high school,” Kyle says. Although not a typical beginning for a choreographer, wrestling provided Kyle with an appreciation for and understanding of movement that would eventually take his life in unexpected directions, and as far as Costa Rica.

Kyle fell into musical theatre by accident. Although he had always loved the arts, especially dancing (though he never had formal training), he also dreamed of becoming a doctor and began college as a pre-med student. After some time, however, Kyle made what he believes to be the most important decision of his college career—he changed his major to art history. This new focus gave Kyle the freedom to seek outlets for his artistic side. He began working with film as his medium and dance as his subject, submitting entries to film festivals. While searching a Williams College forum, he came upon a notice for FCCMT placed by Michelle Rodriguez, the puppeteer from FCCMT’s Little Shop of Horrors and a fellow Williams student. Not long afterward, Kyle found himself in Monteverde, choreographing FCCMT’s production of *En Esta Isla*.

Being in Monteverde has had a profound effect on Kyle. “You should go!” he insists, when I tell him I have not been to Costa Rica. He mentions both the amazing views and the surprisingly cosmopolitan character of



the city: “People from all over the world come to Monteverde.” Some of the major attractions include many waterfalls, zip-lining, a cheese factory—even snake and bat farms! KyleHe was also deeply impressed with the town’s sense of community and pride that he witnessed during his time in Costa Rica. He, describing in great detail the Quaker culture and tourist economy of Monteverde. “I was excited to see this ecological, artistic haven founded on pacifism,” he saidys. Kyle found the community to be particularly welcoming and felt well integrated, working with FCCMT kids and their parents, the local business owners.

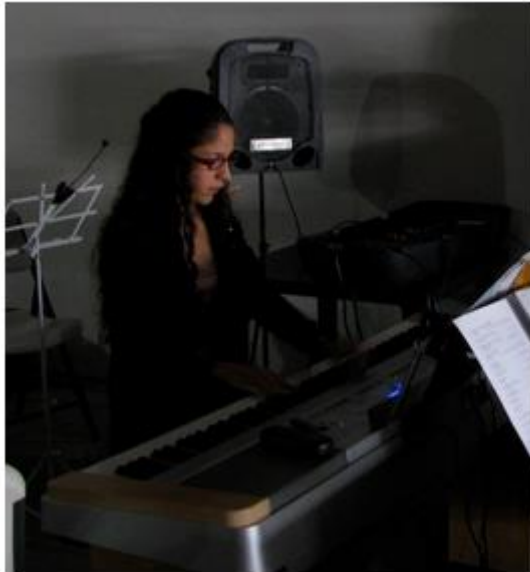


Indeed, despite the wealth of distractions, most of Kyle’s time in Costa Rica has been spent with the community and the kids of FCCMT. Although there was lots of fun to be had in Costa Rica, there was also a lot of hard work to be done—long hours teaching choreography and, then cleaning up afterward, all while learning to live in another culture. The amount of work required for a non-profit to put on a production like En Este Isla is astounding. But FCCMT staffers have a very “do-anything attitude,” according to Kyle. “The staff was amazing,” he says. Everyone had their role, but they also pitched in whenever others needed a hand. “They were so dedicated to putting this show on in any way. I will never forget it.”



Meet the New Board Members

Joining President Juliet Lamb, Treasurer Patti Lafferty, Michelle Boesch and Lisa Burns are...



Jeanina Cordero

"When I was in Monteverde I could see the actors and musicians on the verge of tears after the last performance (and some did cry!) because they love making music, singing, and dancing, and now it was ending; they would have to wait a whole year to enjoy this again. At that moment I knew how important this was to them, and I felt the same. I want to remain a part of that feeling."

Jeanina Cordero is pianist and music education student from Heredia, Costa Rica. She played in the pit orchestras for *En Esta Isla* and *In The Heights*, and helps recruit young professional musicians and artists within Costa Rica to volunteer for FCCMT.

Zeke Blackwell

"I'm interested in broadening the exposure of the program. I would love to help increase the social media presence of Far Corners, and find other ways of increasing the base of supporters and interested followers. The more that people know about Far Corners, the easier it will be to help fulfill all of our goals."

A recent graduate of Yale University, Zeke Blackwell directed FCCMT's production of *En Esta Isla*. Zeke is originally from Fort Worth, Texas, and is currently working on an organic farm in western Massachusetts





Erin Lafferty

"FCCMT has become something I can never let go of, particularly because I love the Monteverde community so much. In fact, I feel most at home when I am in Monteverde. It is a community bursting at the seams with creativity and searching for an outlet for it."

A long-time volunteer for FCCMT, Erin choreographed *Oliver!* and *Little Shop of Horrors* and served as the Program Coordinator for *En Esta Isla*. Erin is a recent graduate of Santa Clara University with a B.A. in Theatre Arts, Emphasis in Dance, and Spanish Studies.



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