

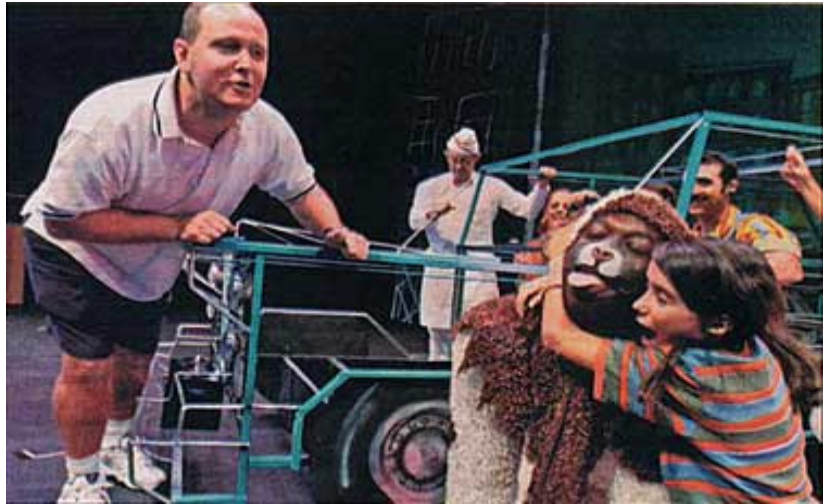
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Sonia Manzano:

She will continue in the role of Maria when *Sesame Street* starts its 37th season in August.



'No Dogs Allowed': Director Earl Maulding goes over a scene with Jeremy Hawkins as El Exigente the dog and Fiorella Bianchi as Iris during rehearsals at the Miracle Theatre in Coral Gables.

EVENT: No Dogs Allowed, the Musical!! had its World Premiere at the Miracle Theatre in July 2006 and is returning by popular demand returns to the Miracle Theatre in October 4-28, 2006 after its world premiere in July. October 4th through the 28th. Written by Sesame star Sonia Manzano based on her popular children's book No Dogs Allowed! with music by Sesame Street composer Stephen Lawrence and lyrics by Broadway composer Billy Aronson, this musical adventure thrills children of all ages celebrating family life through the antics of a zany household and their dog. Study guides for No Dogs Allowed, the Musical are available on line at Actors' Playhouse's web site. When Iris, her family, her neighbors and her dog head out on a road trip to the Enchanted Lake, it seems like it will be a perfect day, then the car breaks down, they get lost, and when they finally arrive at a lake, they observe a sign that reads NO DOGS ALLOWED! What on earth will they do now?

The musical, like the book, draws on Manzano's memories of weekend family outings to the lake and all the ritual preparation that went into them: the women waking predawn to cook food for the picnic; the men making last-minute car repairs to ready for the 100-mile roundtrip -- only to have the cars routinely break down; the children feeling giddy in anticipation . . . then growing impatient on the long drive. But the musical has a slight plot twist that, Manzano says, lends the story enough tension to carry the audience through the hour-long production. The plot twist involves the family dog, but you'll have to see it to learn the rest.

Icon veteran actor Sonia Manzano has thrilled the world as Maria on Sesame Street for 34 years. Big Bird confides in her. Elmo cuddles up to her. Oscar the Grouch can't seem to stay angry around her.

As the patient and motherly Maria Figueroa Rodriguez on the famous children's television series Sesame Street, Sonia Manzano has inspired the imaginations of countless preschoolers. But when she sought inspiration for her first book, No Dogs Allowed! (Simon & Schuster, late 1950s and '60s.) she drew from her own family experiences. As part of a Puerto Rican clan that grew whenever a new family member arrived from the island, Manzano says she often felt different from her peers.

She never saw people who looked like her on television programs like Leave It to Beaver and Father

Knows Best. And even the food her family packed for picnics differed from the other kids' meals: They ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches; she had rice, beans and roast pork.

Manzano came to appreciate the differences, though, and she looks back fondly now on the childhood that informed *No Dogs Allowed!* a book that should be familiar to South Florida readers. It was the 2004 selection for "One Picture Book, One Community," a community-wide literacy initiative for children and their families.

No Dogs Allowed, the Musical! will be presented by Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre October 4-28, 2006 in the Arthur F. and Alice E. Adams Mainstage Auditorium. Performances will be held Saturdays at 2 pm for the general public. Admission is \$12 a person with special rates for Birthday parties for show only and cake and pizza receptions. Weekday performances are available through pre-arranged booking through our education department at school group rates. Tickets are available through our box office at 305.444.9293 or on line at www.actorsplayhouse.org.

No Dogs Allowed, the Musical! is the first of Actors' Playhouse's five-show Children's Musical Theatre series for 2006-2007. *Madeline's Christmas* with book by Jennifer Kirkeby and music by Shirley Mier, based on the popular book series by Ludwig Bemelmans, will play November 28- December 23, 2006, followed by *Charlotte's Web* with book by Joseph Robinette and music and lyrics by Charles Strouse January 31-March 31, 2007, then the winning musical of our 12th Annual National Children's Theatre Festival competition, *Understood Betsey*, will be presented April 25-May 26 with book by and music by, based on the novel by, and closing the season June 19-July 28 is *The Fabulous Fable Factory* with book by Joseph Robinette, music by Thomas Tierney. Flexible/Anytime Subscriptions to all five Children's Theatre shows is \$60 offering best reserved seats and best savings. Subscriptions may be ordered through the box office at 305.444.9293 ext.1, or on line at www.actorsplayhouse.org

Actors' Playhouse is a 501c3 non-profit organization and managing agent of the historic Miracle Theatre in Coral Gables. Under the leadership of executive producing director Barbara S. Stein, artistic director David Arisco, and Children's Theatre/Education Director Earl Maulding. Actors' Playhouse is one of Florida's eight major regional professional theatre companies, a Florida Cultural Presenting Organization, and one of 22 major cultural institutions in Miami-Dade County.

From 'Sesame Street' to the stage

BY DANIEL CHANG THE MIAMI HERALD Posted on Sat, Jun. 24, 2006

Big Bird confides in her. Elmo cuddles up to her. Oscar the Grouch can't seem to stay angry around her.

As the patient and motherly Maria Figueroa Rodriguez on the iconic children's television series *Sesame Street* for the past 34 years, Sonia Manzano has inspired the imaginations of countless preschoolers.

But when she sought inspiration for her first book, *No Dogs Allowed* (Simon & Schuster, \$15.95), Manzano reached into her own childhood growing up in the South Bronx during the late 1950s and '60s.

As part of a Puerto Rican clan that grew whenever a new family member arrived from the island, Manzano says she often felt different from her peers.

She never saw people who looked like her on television programs like *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. And even the food her family packed for picnics differed from the other kids' meals: They ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches; she had rice, beans and roast pork.

Manzano came to appreciate the differences, though, and she looks back fondly now on the childhood that informed *No Dogs Allowed*, a book that should be familiar to South Florida readers. It was the 2004 selection for "One Picture Book, One Community," a community-wide literacy initiative for children and their families.

Now Manzano has adapted *No Dogs Allowed* into a children's musical that premiered June 17 in the Actors' Playhouse at Miracle Theatre in Coral Gables. The musical runs through July 29.

Writing a musical was a first for Manzano -- and a reluctant one at that.

"There's a million people in New York with a musical in their back pocket," she says, "and I wasn't about to join them looking for a theater."

But Manzano's production had a better shot at the stage than the average musical -- not just because of her celebrity but also because of a series of serendipitous events that began last summer.

Bob Holtzman, a Miami publicist who represented the Actors' Playhouse, had run into Manzano, an old college friend, at a Miami Children's Hospital Pediatric Hall of Fame function.

As the pair caught up, Holtzman asked if she had ever thought of turning the book into a musical and Manzano said she had not.

So Holtzman arranged a lunch for Manzano with Barbara Stein, executive producing director of the Actors' Playhouse, and Earl Maulding, children's theater director.

The meeting went well enough, Stein says, and "we asked her if we could commission her work. . . . Her celebrity adds a lot of recognition and credibility to what we're doing here."

Manzano agreed and partnered on the project with composer Stephen Lawrence, who writes music for Sesame Street, and lyricist Billy Aronson, who worked on the Broadway musical, Rent.

The musical, like the book, draws on Manzano's memories of weekend family outings to the lake and all the ritual preparation that went into them: the women waking predawn to cook food for the picnic; the men making last-minute car repairs to ready for the 100-mile roundtrip -- only to have the cars routinely break down; the children feeling giddy in anticipation . . . then growing impatient on the long drive.

But the musical has a slight plot twist that, Manzano says, lends the story enough tension to carry the audience through the hour-long production.

The plot twist involves the family dog, but you'll have to see it to learn the rest.

Manzano, who will continue in the role of Maria when Sesame Street starts its 37th season in August, does not appear in the play. Maybe it's just as well.

She says children don't recognize her as much as they used to anymore. Part of the reason is that the children's television landscape is much more crowded today than when Sesame Street debuted in 1969.

"I'm competing with . . . 50 billion puppets and Dora [the Explorer, of cable TV children's network Nickelodeon]," she says.

But the adults who grew up watching Sesame Street still get emotional when they encounter Manzano, who is a youthful 56.

"When I appear at various places at events," she says, "people, usually in their 30s, will come up to me and go, 'Oh!' more than their kids. They'll say, 'I feel so emotional. I had no idea I was going to feel so emotional when I met you.' It's because they watched Sesame Street when we were the only show."

Despite Sesame Street's waning influence on young minds, Manzano has not tired of playing the part of Maria.

In fact, she relishes the role for allowing her to bring to television something that was lacking during her childhood: ethnic diversity.

"I used to watch a lot of television when I was a little kid," she says, "and I used to wonder, how come there's no people who look like me? Or who live in a neighborhood like the one I live in?"

"As an adult I can tell you that if a kid doesn't see themselves represented in society, they don't know what they're going to grow up to be. . . . And so I had to satisfy myself going to Mexican movies that my

mother used to take me to. . . . I used to try to be Mexican because those were the beautiful girls I saw in the movies.

'I think it's wonderful that I ended up being on a show to remedy what used to bother me as a little girl. Because when they hired me they said, 'We want you. We want all the Spanish kids to relate to you and see you as one of them.' "

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