



MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

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

MUSICALS

From 'Sesame Street' to the stage

BY DANIEL CHANG

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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,

'I used to watch a lot of television when I was a little kid and I used to wonder, how come there's no people who look like me?'

— SONIA MANZANO

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

•TURN TO MARIA, 4E



IF YOU GO

What: *No Dogs Allowed*, by Sonia Manzano, Stephen Lawrence and Billy Aronson

Where: Actors' Playhouse at Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, through July 29

When: 2 p.m. Saturdays

Cost: \$12

Info: 305-444-9293 or www.actorsplayhouse.org