

# THE EXCHANGE PROJECT

presents

**Junebug Productions,  
Pregones Theater and  
Roadside Theater**

in

## *PROMISE OF A LOVE SONG*

Three theater companies

Three cultures

Three stories of love

Written by:

John O'Neal, Rosalba Rolón, and Ron Short

Directed by:

Steven Kent and Rosalba Rolón

**The Exchange Project** is a collaborative project of Junebug Productions, of New Orleans, Louisiana; Pregones Theater, of Bronx, New York; and Roadside Theater, of Whitesburg, Kentucky. *Promise of a Love Song* was developed out of a four-year exchange among the artists of the three companies and their home communities.

*Promise of a Love Song* is a play about love. It is a tapestry of stories told from very specific realities and cultural worlds. From the Appalachian mountains to the southern African American communities to the Puerto Rican neighborhoods in New York City, these stories of love have been created by artists with these distinct perspectives. The stories are: *Charming Billy* (Roadside), *Star Crossed Lovers* (Junebug) and *Silent Dancing* (Pregones). Each story is told in segments throughout the play, with poignant, fun and dramatic music -- mountain music, jazz, boleros and salsa -- sustaining each story and connecting them. These elements make *Promise of a Love Song* a much larger, universal story, while preserving each company's distinct perspective and style.

**The Setting:** Tonight's play is set here, in this theater, on this very night. Actors and musicians from three theater companies from different parts of the country come together on this stage to tell stories of love, staged with Appalachian, Puerto Rican/Latin American and African American music.

**The Characters:** We meet MOTHER and her son, BILLY, from the Appalachian mountains; FATHER and his daughter ANGELA, newly arrived in New York from Puerto Rico; and two southern, African American activists and lovers, DONNA and NELSON, and their son, DONALD.

There will be one fifteen minute intermission.

# THE COLLABORATORS

Executive Producer	Theresa R. Holden
Dramaturg	Rosalba Rolón
Writers	John O'Neal of Junebug Productions Ron Short of Roadside Theater Rosalba Rolón of Pregones Theater(as dramaturg to "Silent Dancing" by Judith Ortiz Cofer)
Directed by	Steven Kent and Rosalba Rolón
Composers	Ricardo Pons of Pregones Donald Harrison, Jr. of Junebug Productions Ron Short of Roadside Theater Desmar Guevara of Pregones
Song Lyrics & Music by	Ron Short
Musical Director	Desmar Guevara
Lighting & Set Designer	Douglas D. Smith
Costume Designer	Theresa R. Holden
Production Manager	Selena Anguiano
Sound Engineer	Gary Slempe
Actors	<i>Star-Crossed Lovers</i> - Junebug Productions: Donna: Troi Bechet Nelson: John O'Neal Donald: Andrew Baham <i>Silent Dancing</i> -Pregones Theater: Father: José Joaquín García Angela: Soldanela Rivera <i>Charming Billy</i> -Roadside Theater: Mother: Kim Neal Billy: Ron Short



<p>Musicians</p> <p>Documentor</p> <p>The Exchange Board</p> <p>Project Consultant</p> <p>Booking Contact</p>	<p>Junebug Productions Andrew Baham, Trumpet Pregones Theater Waldo Chavez, Bass Desmar Guevara, Keyboard, Congas Roadside Theater Ron Short, Banjo, Guitar, Fiddle Guest Musicians Ricky Sebastian, Drums Luis Disla, Flute, Saxophone</p> <p>Arnaldo Jose Lopez</p> <p>Dudley Cocke, Roadside Theater John O'Neal, Junebug Productions Rosalba Rolón, Pregones Theater</p> <p>Alvan Colón Lespier of Pregones Theater</p> <p><b>Holden &amp; Arts Associates</b> <b>PO Box 50120/ Austin, TX 78763</b> <b>(512) 477-1859/ email: mh4arts@aol.com</b></p>
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Exchange Project wishes to acknowledge and thank the following presenters who co-commissioned this new play. Without their support this play could not have been developed.

**The Flynn Theater for the Performing Arts of Burlington, Vermont**  
**The Lied Center of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln**  
**The Wagon Train Project of Lincoln, Nebraska**

The Exchange Project has received generous support from:

**The National Endowment for the Arts**  
**The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**  
**The National Performance Network**

The original production of the play was made possible in part by a grant from the **Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds**.

## STORY BEHIND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Promise of a Love Song is born out of ambition: To connect otherwise isolated cultures and bring them face-to-face in the making of art; to encourage artists with very different experiences and aesthetics to compare notes and pool their creative resources; to then stage and tour a play relevant to each community and of vital interest to the nation at large. Conceived back in 1995, the Exchange Project initially saw Junebug, Roadside, and Pregones theaters traveling in a round-robin fashion to introduce themselves and their works to each other's world. Artists met with the community in workshops, story circles and music jam sessions; they were presented at local arts centers and schools; they joined their audiences in informal discussion and celebration. Each time, they were greeted in home-style, enjoying the best home cooking and the stories that are best heard around it. The performance stage was clearly but one of many spaces where the Exchange Project would develop.

Following the excitement of the initial two-year exchange, a joint production was proposed in 1997. At first, the artists entertained disparate ideas of what their play could be--folk music revue, history lesson, multicultural cabaret.... But, within the year, one proposal, said to have come to an ensemble member in a dream, won everyone over: Love stories, a musical play. Everyone agreed that love and music would best capture their exchange, all about cultures and styles and the ties that bind.

The three companies started playing off each other's ideas: Talking about family, about politics, about food, about what's funny and what's not; arguing over right and wrong, on and off the page. The dialogue extended to the stage, with each company playing their music, dancing along, or else, engaged in debate over what's Blue about the Blues, whether Delta, Bluegrass and Bolero have anything in common. Oh, they fought sometimes, and disagreed, and sometimes agreed to disagree. They quarreled like lovers. Mostly, they worked, each and everyone, overtime and without losing track of that one promise of a promise.

It's a fitting reminder to say that collaborations are trials of the soul. And if that's what it takes to build community, then there's no greater challenge than to keep the *Promise of a Love Song*.



## THE EXCHANGE PROJECT COMPANIES

**JUNEBUG PRODUCTIONS** is a professional African American arts organization located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Its mission is to create, produce, and present high quality theater, dance and music that inspire and support people who work for justice in the African American community and in the world-at-large. Junebug Productions currently has 11 plays in its repertoire, three of them intercultural collaborations. For the past 22 years, the company has toured the U.S. and performed internationally. John O'Neal, Junebug's artistic director, co-founded the Free Southern Theater in 1963 as a cultural arm of the southern Civil Rights Movement. In the post-segregation era, Junebug Productions remains conscious of those bloody, difficult integration struggles that have now created a new set of equally challenging conditions. A vital legacy of the Movement is the recognition that the greatest subsidies required for the development of culture usually come from the artists themselves. Therefore, Junebug Productions has evolved a working style based on collaboration among creative artists, managers, and community organizations who share a commitment to similar goals and a desire to maximize scarce resources.

**PREGONES THEATER**, founded in 1979 and based in the Bronx, is a professional theater ensemble creating innovative and challenging theater rooted in Puerto Rican traditions and popular artistic expressions. Pregones also presents performing artists from diverse cultures with the aim of offering Latino and other communities an artistic means to question, reaffirm and enhance their roles in society. To date, Pregones has staged over 40 new works, has performed in more than 100 cities, has presented nearly 300 artists to audiences in the South Bronx, has trained more than 1,000 children through free theater workshops, and has performed to tens of thousands of residents throughout the Northeast region. Pregones is involved in local, national and international producing and presenting networks, and participates in festivals and conferences around the world. Throughout the years, experienced Pregones artists have served as mentors to many younger, newer Latino artists who have worked with the Company. This mentoring relationship has produced some of the strongest voices in contemporary Latino theater.

**ROADSIDE THEATER** is a part of Appalshop, the multi-disciplinary cultural center which produces and presents work that celebrates the culture and voices the concerns of the people living in the thirteen state Appalachian Mountain region. Founded in 1975 as a professional Appalachian theater, Roadside has grown to include an array of innovative programs. For the past 26 years it has toured its original productions nationally and internationally. Its contribution to the American theater includes the development of a unique dramatic form drawn from the musical and storytelling traditions of central Appalachia; the creation of a rich body of Appalachian dramatic literature where none existed before; the co-creation, with theater companies of color, of plays that explore issues of culture, race, class, and place; the elaboration and documentation of a community cultural residency methodology that builds community cohesion and diversifies American theater audiences; and the advancement of new talent for the professional theater by mentoring new theaters dedicated to creating new American plays and by teaching play writing in universities. Roadside currently has nine plays in its national touring repertory.



## *Promise of a Love Song*

### **THE STORIES**

#### ***Charming Billy***

is the loving relationship between MOTHER and BILLY. The old woman has dedicated her life to raise her eight children and to work the land. Everyone has gone away or died, except Billy, whose mental problems have kept him close to his mother. "They found a streak in his brain", she tells the audience, as she also sings a song about a mother that kills her children. As they tell their story Billy plays his banjo, Mother dances, they go out into the world, he fantasizes and she works incessantly. She does not regret having spent her life taking care of Billy, even as people urged her to put him away so she could be free. "Free of love, free of caring? Without Billy I'd just be another old woman". "This one and that one, that's all there is," Billy sums up at the end of the story.

#### ***Star Crossed Lovers***

DONNA, a young lawyer, and NELSON, a young activist from New Orleans meet when she is assigned to his case after being jailed for his political activism during the height of the civil right movement. Donna is successful in getting Nelson free. They fall in love and from then on they will share a life of love and struggle. Through their life together, they confront the highs and lows of the movement, he is jailed again, she raises their son, DONALD, on her own, and now that he is free again, they have to face life amidst new political realities. Donald grows up to be a musician, much to Nelson's dislike. "Without music there wouldn't be much of a movement", Donald claims, while his mother supports his decision. Finally, Donald does become a successful jazz musician, and returns home with the fruits of his labor--the royalties from his first album, as a gift to his parents. he also brings some other news: he is getting married to a Puerto Rican young woman. His mother won't hear of it, while Nelson, for the first time, sees his son as a grown man who has made a decision that they must respect. Throughout their life together, Donna has felt Nelson's absence, and at this stage of their life, he reassures her "we are not finished yet".

#### ***Silent Dancing***

The story shows ANGELA as she reminisces about her childhood through letters that she finds tied up with a red ribbon. In reading these letters, she brings back the memories of her father, now dead. In the letters she goes back to her childhood, as a young Puerto Rican girl that has come to New York in the 60's with her parents. FATHER is in the Navy and he is seeking a better life for his family. For now, they live in El Barrio, a Puerto Rican neighborhood that provides comfort to Angela and her mother. But Father's objective is to move away from it. "Papi's wish is Mami's greatest fear...to live away from el barrio." Her father comes to life as she tells the story. Together, they recreate the family parties, the conflicts, the New York adventures -- funny, vivacious and dramatic adventures as they adjust to their life as immigrants. And as they adjust and become part of the city, she remembers her father's poignant words: "to forget is a terrible thing".

JUST RELEASED BY ROADSIDE!

*Journeys Home: Revealing a Zuni -  
Appalachia Collaboration* (\$19.95)  
and  
*Wings to Fly*, (\$13)

*Journeys Home* is a 112-page book with accompanying compact disc that documents and probes the sixteen-year collaboration between artists from two of our nation's most traditional cultures—Zuni Native American and Appalachian. Edited by Dudley Cocke and Donna Porterfield of Roadside Theater and Edward Wemytewa of Idiwanan An Chawe (Zuni), *Journeys Home* is available from your local bookseller or from:  
**University of New Mexico Press**  
1720 Lomas Blvd., NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106  
phone: 1-800-249-7737  
web: [www.unmpress.com](http://www.unmpress.com)

With eleven new songs by Roadside composer and playwright, Ron Short, *Wings to Fly* (\$13) tells a story about Appalachia, sung by those who grew-up here. Both the CD's original and traditional songs are performed in the rich Appalachian harmony singing tradition, and are part of Roadside's stage production, *Singing on the Mountain*, an original musical play written and performed in collaboration with the Mullins Family Singers of Clintwood, Virginia. *Wings to Fly* is available from your local music store or from:  
**Copper Creek Records**  
P.O. Box 3161  
Roanoke, VA 24015  
phone: 1-888-438-2448  
email: [CopCrk@aol.com](mailto:CopCrk@aol.com)  
web: [www.coppercreekrec.com](http://www.coppercreekrec.com)