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Walking Together: The Art of Celebrating Community with Little Amal & Chicax  
Teatro Ensemble

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### Author

Ortega, Karina

### Publication Date

2024

### Supplemental Material

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Walking Together: The Art of Celebrating Community with *Little Amal & Chicax Teatro*

*Ensemble*

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

by

Karina Ortega

Committee in charge:

Professor Lisa J Porter, Co-Chair  
Professor Lora Powell, Co-Chair  
Professor Robert J Castro  
Professor Edwin Cruz

2024

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The Thesis of Karina Ortega is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2024

## DEDICATION

To the inner children in search of a space to feel seen and heard.

No matter the challenge or how loud the voices of the oppressors may be,  
May you continue to wander courageously to find the community that celebrates  
you.

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File 1. Ortega *CO-LAB* Info and Questions, Ortega\_CO\_LAB\_Info\_and\_Questions.pdf

File 2. Ortega *Take a Message For Me* Calendar,  
Ortega\_TAKE\_A\_MESSAGE\_FOR\_ME\_Calendar.pdf

File 3. Ortega *Take a Message For Me* Schedule,  
Ortega\_TAKE\_A\_MESSAGE\_FOR\_ME\_Schedule.pdf

File 4. Ortega *Take a Message For Me* Photo 01,  
Ortega\_TAKE\_A\_MESSAGE\_FOR\_ME\_Photo1.jpg

File 5. Ortega *Take a Message For Me* Photo 02,  
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File 6. Ortega *Take a Message For Me* Photo 03,  
Ortega\_TAKE\_A\_MESSAGE\_FOR\_ME\_Photo3.jpg

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am carried through my journey by the endless support of my Mom and Nina, the strongest women I know. I love you more.

Thank you to my mentors and life-long teachers, Lisa Porter and Lora Powell, for guiding me through a battle within myself and leading me to find the spark I thought I once lost. Your encouragement, support, compassion, and love contributed to finding my authentic self - one that I am most proud of.

Thank you to Robert Castro, Teddy Cruz, and Paul Moscoso for helping me discover my passion for community engagement and entrusting me to orchestrate memorable projects.

Thank you to the stage management cohort. Katie Davis, Lily Fitzsimmons, Alina Novotny, and Huai Huang, I am honored to have friends like you in my life. To Stephanie Carrizales and Caleb Cook, I am beyond grateful to have navigated grad school with you. From our first quarter to our final bows, I embrace every valley journeyed and triumphant mountaintop we scaled.

Thank you to Cambria Herrera and Alex Levin for your unwavering love, support, and encouragement that empowered me to conquer fears I once thought were impossible to face. Our friendship blossomed into a beautiful family; no matter where we roam, when you are around, I feel at home.

Lastly, to Julio C. Salcido, I extend my greatest gratitude. I share this accomplishment with you. Through every new, challenging, joyful, bittersweet, heartbreaking, uplifting moment I experienced throughout this journey, you were right beside me. You instill the inspiration to find the light even in the darkest of times.

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Walking Together: The Art of Celebrating Community with *Little Amal & Chicax Teatro Ensemble*

by

Karina Ortega

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Lisa Porter, Co-Chair  
Professor Lora Powell, Co-Chair

On November 4th, 2023, in a large celebration at Casa Familiar Station San Ysidro, a 12-foot puppet named Little Amal united a diverse group of individuals hailing from all areas of San Diego, Southern California, and Mexico. In July 2021, Amal, a beacon of hope, love, curiosity, and human rights, embarked on a journey around the world to spread awareness about displacement and community building across cultures, nationalities, and politics.

I participated as a member of the UC San Diego Chicana Teatro Ensemble, a collective of artists dedicated to using theater as a means of activism and cultural expression<sup>1</sup>. An hour-long event titled *Take a Message For Me* connected the San Ysidro neighborhood and Teatro students across various disciplines, including design, dance, and acting, to curate a ceremony in honor of Amal's last day in the United States. Amal and the Handspring Puppet Company<sup>2</sup> had been traveling across the country from September to November, where she made multiple appearances and eventually landed in San Ysidro. On the day of her celebration, she danced with us, received a blessing from Kumeyaay elders, and took our messages to share with those at a migrant facility in Tijuana, Mexico. My role included establishing connections and liaising between the institutional entity of UC San Diego and the San Ysidro community.

In traditional theatre, where the performance occurs on a stage, and the audience enjoys the show from a seated area, a Stage Manager coordinates when technical elements such as lights, sound, scenery, and video cues are executed. However, in site-specific events, such as *Take a Message For Me*, where the performance occurs in an alleyway surrounded by residential backyards and driveways, I originated and reshaped the role of the traditional Stage Manager into one that responds to the troupe's dynamics and a non-traditional environment.

The values I carry as an artist were transferred into my role as the Production Coordinator, modeling compassion, trust, and authenticity, allowing myself to remain fluid yet responsive to the needs of this production while highlighting my strengths as a collaborative leader. I flagged and addressed logistical challenges, such as ensuring safety and accessibility for all in attendance, managing crowd control, and addressing potential environmental concerns. I

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<sup>1</sup> Teatro Ensemble is influenced by the work of Luis Valdez, an American Playwright known for his musical “Zoot Suit” the first Chicano play on Broadway and the first Chicano major feature film.” Luis Valdez. El Teatro Campesino. (n.d.). <https://elteatrocampesino.com/about-luis/>

<sup>2</sup> Handspring puppet company. Handspring Puppet Company. (n.d.). <https://www.handspringpuppet.com/>

utilized my organizational skills from traditional stage management settings, creating reports and schedules the team referred to throughout the process. In our final collective gathering, I was honored with music and special messages, a moment reminiscent of that day when Amal celebrated with us. As a Latina artist who aspires to uplift voices, I learned through my work with Little Amal that I am committed to building community by integrating three essential ingredients: collaboration, curiosity, and celebration.