A dramatic journey to Chavez Ravine, where a community lost to baseball

By Anne Brice, Berkeley News | MARCH 4, 2016

n the latest production presented by UC Berkeley's Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies, student actors perform Chavez Ravine, bringing to life a small, 1950s Mexican-American community whose residents were forced from their homes and their land used to build a new stadium for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Based on real events and people, the play explores themes of gentrification, urban growth and divisions in race and class — themes that director Sean San José says are especially relevant to the Bay Area today. “Loss of lineage, loss of neighborhood, loss of stories, loss of actual land — this is a reality,” he says.

Chavez Ravine opens in 1981 at Dodger Stadium, where rookie Fernando Valenzuela is pitching the season opener. As he steps to the mound, ghosts from the bulldozed neighborhood appear, taking Valenzuela and the audience on a journey through time, telling the stories of the people who once lived in the poor, but vibrant, immigrant community.

Julian Marenco, a double-major in theater and performance studies and history, plays Valenzuela. Marenco says the pitching sensation, who didn't speak English when he first arrived in L.A. from Mexico, had to work especially hard to become the celebrated baseball star that he was.

“When he got signed, his father told him, 'You have a gift. It won't be easy — you'll need twice as much discipline — but you can do it,'” says Marenco. “I try to embody the grit and determination he had.”

Written by the Chicano performance trio Culture Clash, the high-energy play features dozens of characters who make up the tight-knit community of Chavez Ravine. For this production, the first time the play is being performed by a group other than Culture Clash, the script was reworked to feature a cast of 18, each of whom plays numerous characters.

Katherine Garcia, a double-major in theater and performance studies and Chicano studies, plays a hot dog vendor at Dodger Stadium, among other characters. She says director San José encouraged cast members to get to know one another. “We spent the first part of rehearsals talking, learning about each other's lives,” she says. “We became a community ourselves before we played a community on stage.”

Garcia grew up in Richmond and says that over the years she's seen more students moving to Richmond for its affordable rent. She says that although there have been positive changes from new people moving into her community — grocery stores carry a wider variety of produce, the city built a new park — not all of the changes benefit the community.

“Improvement is a double-edged sword,” she says. “When new businesses start moving in, what does it mean for the small, iconic places that the community has relied on and supported for generations?”

Chavez Ravine opens Friday, March 4, and continues through Sunday, March 13, at the Zellerbach Playhouse on campus. Tickets are $13-$20, and can be purchased online or at the door. The show runs two hours with one intermission.

To learn more about Chavez Ravine, visit the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies website.

http://news.berkeley.edu/2016/03/04/theater-dance-and-performance-studies-chavez-ravine/
A dramatic journey to Chavez Ravine, where a community lost to baseball | Berkeley News

http://news.berkeley.edu/2016/03/04/theater-dance-and-performance-studies-chavez-ravine/