

Passage

T H E A T R E C O M P A N Y

Postscript

Morir Sonyando

Written by Erlina Ortiz

Directed by C. Ryanne Domingues

May 2 – 19, 2019



ILLUSTRATION BY BAYRON CALDERON

Postscript by
Jennifer Nelson, Kara Jönsson, & Ryanne Domingues

Table of Contents

1. Meet the Team Page 3

- *Interview with Playwright* Page 4
- *Interview with Director* Page 6

2. NJ State Standards Page 9

- *Student Activities*
 - *Pre-Show Discussion Questions* Page 10
 - *Post-Show Discussion Questions* Page 11
 - *Linear vs. Non-Linear Timelines* Page 12
 - *Glossary* Page 14

3. Articles and Resources Page 15

- *Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Awareness*
- *Legal Defense and Prevention Awareness*

MEET THE TEAM

Erlina Ortiz

Playwright

Erlina Ortiz is a Dominican-American playwright, performer, and director from Reading, PA. Her plays on gentrification, domestic violence, and rape culture have been produced by Power Street Theatre Company where she is a resident playwright. Erlina is a member of Philadelphia's emerging playwrights' lab: The Foundry, as well as New Pages with Azuka Theatre Company. Erlina received the Amtrak Writer's Residency and the Signal Fire Outpost Residency on Mount St. Helens. Twice, she has been a finalist for the Leeway Transformation Award. Her play *She Wore Those Shoes* had a developmental reading at Theatre Exile in Philadelphia.



An Interview with Erlina Ortiz

1. How and why did you set about writing *Morir Sonyando*; a play about domestic abuse and the importance of family?

In high school I had a close friend who was in a very controlling and toxic relationship. I felt very frustrated with her; I couldn't understand why she wouldn't just leave him. Any time I heard of women in domestic violence situations I felt the same way. I had thankfully never experienced that brand of violence in my life, but it was already in my consciousness. Then in college I joined a Latina sorority that had domestic violence as our philanthropy. We held programs on campus and raised money for organizations helping women. While educating others on the topic I also gave myself a lesson in empathy and understanding. Soon after that, I saw a documentary called *Sin by Silence* about women who were in prison for killing their abusive partners and the final ingredient fell into place. Soon after, Paloma, Genesis, and Felix came to life. I wanted to go on a journey with them and see how a family can come together after surviving such a devastating experience.

2. Can you please talk about the development process of the play, including it being workshopped at Power Street Theatre in 2014? Do you anticipate making changes to the play after its premier at Passage Theatre?

I started writing *Morir Sonyando* and soon after was accepted into a women-of-color writers group. This was the best thing that could have happened. I had been writing the play in a linear way, but a fellow writer challenged to break out of what I had been taught and see what it felt like to write the play in a non-linear structure. In fact, the first scene became the last. After that, I talked with my partner at Power Street Theatre and said I think I have our next play. From there we got actors together (I was actually playing Genesis!) and an amazing director named Thais Flaitt and we 'produced' it on a very minimal budget. I think the script was constantly evolving though. Especially because I was the playwright, I could rewrite Genesis lines on stage in real time and see how it felt. I think it helped me make her more real. The script feels pretty solid to me now so I couldn't imagine going back in for rewrites, but that's how I felt five years ago so you never know.

3. Where do you hope the play moves on to after Passage?

I really hope it continues to get produced in all different kinds of communities. I know how important this story is, and how much it means to people to see their lived experiences represented. Domestic violence is insidious in its silence. So many people have experienced this yet so few talk about it. I hope this play will have a long life and that with each performance someone gets closer to healing.

4. What writing projects do you have for the future?

I'm in the middle of writing a really fun (and I think really funny) play inspired by Cardi B. I'm working on an exciting musical inspired by Cuban American artist Ana Mendieta. I'm working on my first children's show, it's going to be about capitalism, oh! And I'm actively looking to develop a play I've finished the first draft of about extinct honey bees, overpopulation, and a woman's right to choose. It's so weird and wonderful I love it.

5. Why did you become interested in pursuing a career in playwriting and theatre arts?

I came to this world as a performer. Like many actors turned playwrights I realized I had a lot more power writing the work I wanted to see and be in than I did waiting around to get miscast in a play I'm not right for. Thankfully, I had Gabi Sanchez and Power Street in my corner. I've seen almost every play I've written in front of an audience and that is the absolute best experience when you see an audience connecting with the work. After seeing the power the work had, I knew I had to keep writing. I'm always ready to jump into an acting role or to throw on the director's hat but there isn't a day when I don't have a play idea rolling around in my head. I just hope I have enough time to write them all.



MEET THE TEAM

C. Ryanne Domingues

Director

C. Ryanne Domingues has had the pleasure of directing plays that challenge and excite audiences for over fifteen years. Born and raised in Altoona, Pennsylvania, she received her undergraduate degree from Bloomsburg University while working on various productions with the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble. Following graduation and a yearlong directing and dramaturgy internship with Portland Stage Company, she spent six years in Philadelphia working for a variety of local theatres, including The Wilma Theater, InterAct Theatre Company, and Plays & Players Theatre. During this time, she also co-founded and served as the Producing Artistic Director of Simpatico Theatre, where she directed a variety of shows whose themes reflected the company's mission to encourage active dialogue that promotes positive social change in the community. During this time, she also participated in the 2008 Lincoln Center Director's Lab and the La MaMa Umbria International Symposium for Directors.

Ryanne received her MFA in Directing from the University of California, Irvine in 2013. While there, she had the opportunity to work at South Coast Repertory, California Shakespeare Theater, and Utah Shakespeare Festival. Having developed and directed a number of new works throughout her career, Ryanne was able to use her experience to lead a group of undergraduate students in writing and developing a new musical entitled *Over the Horizon*, which incorporated information gathered from real interviews with Iraq War veterans. She then went on to direct the world premiere of *Assistants*, a show that received various awards and accolades at the 2015 Hollywood Fringe Festival. After moving back to the East Coast, Ryanne returned to The Wilma Theater in the capacity of External Relations Director, where she spent two seasons in the field of fundraising, development, and donor relations. She is thrilled to join the team of Passage Theatre and looks forward to working with and within the Trenton community.



An Interview with C. Ryanne Domingues

1. Why did you want to direct *Morir Sonyando*?

I wanted to direct this show because I think Erlina tells the story in such a new and dynamic way. So often, plays, television shows, and movies focus on the actual abuse in these situations, but this show is focused on the HEALING that can happen afterwards. No one ever talks about the work that families need to do in order to heal after traumatic events. Additionally, I loved the way that she told the story throughout time and highlighted the fact that even though all three characters lived in the same house and witnessed the same events, they all experienced them in different ways. That rang incredibly true for me and matched situations that happened in my own family while growing up.

2. What is the main message you want audience members to take away from the play?

That healing IS possible, no matter how deep and dark things may get. Facing your past is difficult, but if you are brave and honest with yourself, it can make a world of difference. You have to approach each painful memory with honesty and ask yourself if you can re-conceptualize the event using what you know in the present moment. The good news is that no one has to do it alone, and that when they are ready to seek help, there are resources available. Even the families with the most love can still encounter domestic abuse. Abuse is not the result of a lack of love, but instead is the result of a need for power.

3. Please explain the importance of film, sets, and lighting to the play?

Because this play takes place over the course of 33 years, film, sets, and lighting are incredibly important. Furthermore, the playwright utilizes video, projection, and live action throughout the piece, which asks us to navigate all three mediums. The design team had to work really closely together in order to make sure that the concept of the piece felt cohesive and not choppy. Everyone's artistic decisions fed into the decisions of others, making for what we hope to be a fast-paced trip through the memory of our main character.

4. Can you relate to any character or situation in *Morir Sonyando*? If so, which one?

Yes, I can. I also grew up in a household with abuse, so I can actually relate to both Genesis and Felix pretty well. I can relate to Genesis because I often hid in my work when things got difficult and had to go back in my later years to re-examine the memories and feelings that I pushed down deep inside. I also am the youngest of three children, so, like Felix, I also had trouble relating to the way my brother and sister remembered certain events.

5. Where and what plays will you be directing next?

Next up, I will be directing the Off-Broadway production of ASSISTANTS THE MUSICAL at the Players Theatre in NYC. I am also scheduled to direct THE WOLVES at Rider University next Spring.

6. Why did you become interested in pursuing a career in theatre arts?

I've always loved stories and been fascinated with the way we tell them. My mother used to read to me before bed every night, so I think that's where it all began. My best grades were always in reading and writing. Math was never my strong suit, despite working really hard at it. For me, theatre is just a way of telling stories, but with a REALLY big toolbox with which to do it. Theatre allows us to use not only words, but also lights, costumes, sounds, and sets. While I suppose it was always a dream to do theatre professionally, I went into college with a dual major in both Theatre Arts and Secondary English Education, figuring that I would end up as an English teacher! But I got lucky. I was working as an intern at a local theatre close to my college and had been directing my own shows late at night at local coffee shops, etc. when I got hired for my first professional directing gig in Philadelphia when I was 21 years old. One job led to another, and here I am!



Common Core Standards

In addition to seeing or reading the play, the following activities meet these NJ Common Core Educational Standards for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6

Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

THEMES

- Domestic abuse/violence
- Family
- Education
- Imprisonment
- Alcoholism

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Translate “Morir Sonyando” into English. What do you expect the play to be about based on the title? What ingredients are in this drink and where is it from? Look up images of it.
2. Watch one episode of the television program *Sabado Gigante*. Where and when was it broadcast? What is the show about? Who are El Chacal and Don Francisco?
3. A character’s name can reveal what the person is like. Find out the meanings of the name Paloma and Genesis. From their names, what do you expect these people to be like?
4. Research the country of the Dominican Republic. Where is it? What are the country’s main exports? What is the country’s religion? What are some major holidays in the country? How many people from this country immigrate to the United States annually? What traditions do they have? Compare this culture with your own in America.



POST-SHOW DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Talk about the use of Spanish throughout the play. What do we learn about the characters and their culture through their speaking Spanish?
2. Siblings: discuss differences between the brother Felix and sister Genesis. What path are they each taking in life? How do they relate to each other? What has become of each of them as they got older? Why does Felix take care of his mother more than Genesis? Where did the children live while the mother was in prison?
3. What was the role of the documentary film in getting the mother out of prison?
4. In the play, there's a Dominican faceless doll. Draw what you think this doll looks like. Why is it important to the play?
5. Genesis' cuts her hair while her mother is in prison. What's the significance of this? What is her mother's reaction to it and then at the end of the play when she's grown it back? Why do you think she changed her appearance? Have you changed your appearance? If so, how and why?
6. What do we know about the father? What type of relationship did he have with his son and daughter? Why do you think he abused his wife? How could this have been prevented?
7. What was Paloma's father like growing up? How did her father treat her mother?
8. Draw a picture of a Botanica Arte Espiritual store in Philadelphia. What is sold there? What does it look like? Why do Genesis and Felix go there? How does the priestess interact with Genesis and Felix?



LINEAR VS NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES

Sometimes a show follows a clear path from beginning to middle to end. This is called a Linear Narrative. It is easy to determine where the story begins and ends. It is also very simple to determine what age and where the characters are in the story because the playwright or author gives you clear hints to help you understand. *Morir Sonyando* is written as a Non-Linear Narrative, meaning the show begins at the end of Genesis's story and ends and the beginning of her life. To help you understand, please read the following timeline. It describes the ages you'll see throughout *Morir Sonyando*.

LINEAR TIMELINE

*Let's focus on the main character, Genesis. Throughout the show you will see Genesis grow up from a newborn to a full-grown adult.
Check it out!*

- Newborn:
 - The last scene of the show takes place in 1991 when Genesis is a newborn baby.
- Childhood:
 - We also see Genesis at age twelve, playing with her brother Felix. We see her at this age in Scene Six and Scene Eleven.
- Teenager:
 - In many of the scenes, Genesis is a teenager trying to figure out how to survive in her world. We can see this in Scene Four, Scene Ten, and Scene Fifteen.
- College Student:
 - Almost ten years pass by the next time we see Genesis. In Scenes two through three, five, seven through nine, and eleven; we see Genesis as a college student at age twenty-three.
- Adult:
 - Finally, we meet Genesis as a full-grown adult. She is age thirty-three in scenes one, twelve, and fourteen.

NON-LINEAR TIMELINE

Morir Sonyando actually ends up looking like the timeline below. Feel free to follow along if it helps you to understand the story!

- **Scene 1:** Present: Genesis is an adult
- **Scene 2:** 2014: Genesis is a college student
- **Scene 3:** 2014: Genesis is a college student
- **Scene 4:** 2007: Genesis is a teenager
- **Scene 5:** 2014: Genesis is a college student
- **Scene 6:** 2003: Genesis is a kid
- **Scene 7:** 2014: Genesis is a college student
- **Scene 8:** 2014: Genesis is a college student
- **Scene 9:** 2014: Genesis is a college student
- **Scene 10:** 2007: Genesis is a teenager
- **Scene 11:** 2003: Genesis is a kid
- **Scene 12:** 2003: Genesis is a kid
- **Scene 14:** Present: Genesis is an adult
- **Scene 15:** Scene 4: 2007: Genesis is a teenager
- **Scene 16:** 1991: Genesis is a baby

GLOSSARY

1. **Cansada:** (Spanish) tired
2. **Chamaco:** (Spanish) little boy
3. **Chismando:** (Spanish) gossiping
4. **Detrimental:** causing extreme harm
5. **Dramatized:** something's importance that has been exaggerated
6. **Dulce:** (Spanish) sweet
7. **Enojada:** (Spanish) angry
8. **Fuera:** (Spanish) outside
9. **Maldita:** (Spanish) damn
10. **Manipulated:** someone who has been controlled or influenced
11. **Matriculating:** enrolling
12. **Metiendoselo:** (Spanish) flirting or making advances
13. **Morir:** (Spanish) to die
14. **Morir Soñando:** A popular Dominican beverage
15. **Muchacha:** (Spanish) girl
16. **Muñeca:** (Spanish) doll
17. **Naive:** innocent and unsuspecting
18. **Paloma:** (Spanish) dove
19. **Sober up:** To minimize the effects of intoxicating substances
20. **Relic:** a sentimental or historical object surviving from an earlier time
21. **Thick skull:** An expression used to describe a person as stubborn and unable to receive ideas that stray from his or her own
22. **Tigere:** Slang term that some Dominican people use for "thugs"



Additional Links and Resources



<https://preventionlinks.org>

Headquarters: Roselle Park, NJ

is a private, not-for-profit organization, which takes a leadership role in the prevention of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and related issues.



<https://womanspace.org/>

Headquarters: Lawrenceville, NJ

Our mission is to prevent abuse, protect families and change lives through empowerment and a safety net of supportive services.



<https://laldef.org/>

Headquarters: Trenton, NJ

Our organizational mission is to defend the rights of the Latin American community, facilitate its access to health care and education, and advance cross-cultural understanding within the Mercer County region.



The NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence

<https://www.njcedv.org/>

The New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence (NJCEDV) is a statewide coalition of domestic violence service programs and concerned individuals whose purpose and mission is to end domestic violence in New Jersey

