



File Photo

Larry Leon Hamlin (from right), Cruz Aristizabal and John Sundell at a news conference last August to kick off the Hispanic/Latino Theatre Division.

Bridging the divide

N.C. Black Repertory Company helping to nurture Hispanic talent

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD
THE CHRONICLE

The N.C. Black Repertory Company (NCBRC) unveiled its new Hispanic/Latino Theatre Division last August. The project, which is partly funded by the Winston-Salem Foundation Echo Grant, is part of NCBRC's effort to provide cultural programs to the rapidly growing Hispanic community in the Piedmont Triad.

John Sundell, head of the Forsyth County Public Library service to Spanish-speaking people, is the brainchild behind the project and thought it would be a wonderful opportunity for the NCBRC to take it on as opposed to the library.

"I think it will help stimulate the cultural life of the community and in many ways it will have real direct bearing on what the library does in terms of providing resources," said Sundell.

Larry Leon Hamlin announced Fernando Cruz Aristizabal as co-coordinator of the Hispanic/Latino project. Hamlin is the founder and artistic director of the NCBRC. Aristizabal brings more than 30 years of experience in theater and puppetry, having acted, directed and performed in numerous theatrical shows over the years as well as having produced and written for Colombian radio.

Aristizabal will conduct acting and puppetry workshops around the community, coordinate live theatrical productions for children and families as well as develop Que Pasa radio programs.

Sundell, who doubled as translator for

Aristizabal, was instrumental in connecting him with Hamlin at the NCBRC for this new project. Aristizabal, who hails from Columbia, has yet to learn to speak English fluently. After meeting Aristizabal more than a year ago, Sundell immediately knew Aristizabal could bring his theatrical expertise and experiences to Winston-Salem.

"We in the communities of Latin America as well as the Latino people here in the United States have many wonderful things to contribute, not just violence and beer," translated Sundell (for Aristizabal), whose comments were received with laughter. "We're also dreamers and creators, and we want a better world."

Aristizabal went on to say that the Latin community is looking forward to "integrating themselves, communicating and exchanging love" with native North Carolinians.

Hamlin explained that several Spanish-language plays have been produced in the past as part of the National Black Theatre Festival. The new Hispanic/Latino Division will allow NCBRC to produce such shows "on a continuous basis" throughout the regular season.

"We're really reaching out and trying to build a bridge. This has to be a project of trust. We're trying to create and build from and partnership within the Spanish-speaking community as well as the African-American community and Caucasian community," said Hamlin, who mentioned that he was very thankful to The Winston-Salem Foundation for funding a large portion of the project.

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