

# Q&A

WITH *LUCHADORA!*'S DIRECTOR JOHAMY MORALES  
AND SCENIC DESIGNER ARNOLD BUESO

Tell us about the path of  
*Luchadora!* Coming to SCT.

**JOHAMY:** *Luchadora!* is a play that (SCT Artistic Director) Idris Goodwin and I have been talking about for the past year. It is a piece I first saw in 2017 that I was really inspired by and identified with. I knew one day I had to direct it. Arnold and I worked together over two years ago on *Last Stop on Market Street* (First Stage, Milwaukee).

I was the director and Arnold was the scenic and lighting designer. I fell in love working with Arnold and his approach to theatre-making through scenography (all the elements that contribute to establishing an atmosphere and mood for a theatrical presentation: lighting, sound, set, and costume design) lens. It took me back to the foundational work I studied in grad school and how to collaborate with designers. I love it because it is much more hands-on and there is more collaboration.

One of the shows Arnold and I talked about was *Luchadora!* Arnold was working on a production of it at the time, and I knew if I was ever to direct *Luchadora!* in the future I would bring Arnold in to work on the project. It is exciting to be full circle and work together on the piece.


**ARNOLD:** As soon as Johamy invited me to this project I said "Yes!" I'm there!" My path to *Luchadora!* was that I previously designed scenery and lighting for the show for CATCO (Contemporary Theatre of Ohio). When Johamy and I were working on *Last Stop on Market Street* around the same time, we connected around this title. It became destiny. It is such a beautiful show.

I want to echo what Johamy is saying about working collaboratively within scenography. I teach at Cal State LA and a lot of my students' main question is "What is scenography?" and for me, it is building a world with the creatives involved from the performer outward. It is beyond just decorating behind the performer. Scenography is how Johamy and I connected.



## ***Luchadora!* takes place in Texas in 1968 and Seattle in 2024. How is the passing of time featured within the set?**


**JOHAMY:** One of the elements that I shared at the beginning of this process is that because *Luchadora!* is this magical realism world, we need to have a malleable and flexible set because of all the locations that this play takes place in. We also have limitations of resources, which are our budget, time, and talent, so how do we maximize and support the story and not have to invest so much that it is literal? And at the same time, honoring elements of location and giving Arnold as much flexibility and freedom in those parameters for him to play with and bring his own ideas and aesthetics to. In time passage, there must be a lot of movement in the set itself.



I think specifically Arnold's approach as he wears the scenography hat, allows the scenic element to evolve and move and become almost like another character. That is the way I like to direct. I don't like to have actors in front of something beautiful. I want it to come to life and I want the actors to see it and feel it. It needs to breathe, change, and evolve just as much as the actors. When you think about spaces, they change and evolve. They don't stay stagnant. It is important to see that in our representation of artistry on stage and storytelling.

With those things in mind, I think the scenic elements are also going to have to be transitioning in time. The script asks that we root it in time passing, and how does that then inform us making decisions in the scenic elements in the play's world? It has to move. It is really important. The other element we talk about internally is being in an inside space versus being outside. It is very specific to this play and so therefore time also informs those environments.

**ARNOLD:** One of the reasons I love working with Johamy is her ability to understand space. It might sound like that is a given, but no, it isn't. Johamy comes to designers with an idea of how the movement of the passage of time physically works. So, for example, the downstage area of the Charlotte Martin Theatre represents one time period and movement towards the upstage is how we practically create a change. It is a memory play and so we are being taken through the past, through a kaleidoscope of what happened in the past.



I cannot stop singing the praises of how fulfilling it is to work with a director who understands space and always wants us to look at space. We have come up with a communal term "portals from realism into magic" and those are just words but me as the scenic designer I'm thinking "Oh wow, portals." There are so many things I can do with the image of portals. Portals within portals within portals that take us back into Nana Lupita's memory and forward into Seattle 2024. It is our geeky language we have developed.

## What advice do you have for young people who might be aspiring set designers, directors, and theatre makers?

**ARNOLD:** For aspiring designers, study scenography. I am going to be very biased. In short, in the United States, most training programs that are out there ask you to choose if you want to be a scenic, costume, lighting, or sound designer. There are many reasons for it, many good reasons. A lot of schools don't have enough funding to pay for a scenographer. I lucked out and went to a grad school where I could do all the things. That was the best decision.

In undergrad, I decided to not focus on one thing. I was defiant. Costumes is where it all started for me, and then I wanted to be on stage, I wanted to stage manage or direct, and I got that out of my system in undergrad. That's what I tell my students who are interested in becoming a designer or a director or a theatre maker is learn it all or learn a little bit about all the things so that when you do focus and if you decide to go be a director or a producer or an artistic director you know how to speak to everyone else at the table. For the future designers, directors, and theatre makers in our industry. Study all the things. Go out there and study all the things.

**JOHAMY:** Absolutely. I would agree. I did a little bit of everything. I stage managed. I performed. I did touring shows. Touring shows, if you can do touring shows, and hold the attention of 400 kids in a barn for a moment you can do anything. Do as much, explore. I would also say play. Find opportunities to play. Young people, as they start to get older, lose their sense of play. Even theatre makers! We forget to play. We are in the business of playing pretend. How do we find different ways as we get older to keep tapping into our creative self? The longer you can stay in a place where you are playing and exploring and not having to choose the better because it will make you a stronger artist in the end.

## What do you hope audiences will take away from *Luchadora!*?

**JOHAMY:** The power of storytelling, a questioning, leaving audiences with curiosity on how we engage with young people, especially adults who come see this show. How we engage or make assumptions of young people regarding gender. How do we put a gender emphasis on what specifically young identifying girls might see themselves doing? Shifting the status quo of what young girls can or cannot do. That is an important element.

I hope audiences leave with a better appreciation of the Mexican American culture especially those audiences who have not been connected to that culture or witnessed that culture. I hope that it leaves them with more understanding. Love is a grounding element in this piece. The love for your daughter, father, granddaughter, student.

**ARNOLD:** For me it is the same. I must add that there's a sense of civil disobedience in this play and mischief and not following the rules. I say civil disobedience because we use that term when you can peacefully disagree and protest. I love the sense of defiance that is rooted in bravery and fearlessness. I think what we have planned, the energy is going to be at the end. The audience will walk away with that energy. That's the goal. For the audience to disagree with everything, defy everything, question everything. Defy destiny.

