

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Alert for Theatre Editors, Reviewers, and Calendar Listings

**Chance Theater presents
The Orange County Premiere of...
“Alma”**

**Benjamin Benne’s searing drama about a mother, a daughter
and the thread of an American dream starts May 3.**

ANAHEIM, CA: Chance Theater, Anaheim’s official resident theater company, is thrilled to present the Orange County Premiere of **“Alma”** written by the powerfully fresh voice of playwright Benjamin Benne, winner of the ATC National Latine Playwrights Award. With direction by Sara Guerrero (Founding Artist at Breath of Fire Latina Theater Ensemble), **“Alma”** will begin previews on May 3, 2024 with the production officially opening on May 11. This 90-minute Latine mother-daughter love story explores the American dream for immigrants and Dreamers and will be running thru May 26 at the Bette Aitken Theater Arts Center on the Fyda-Mar Stage.

“Universally relatable mother-daughter drama...poignant and relevant. A family drama full of tenderness and hope” – *Chicago Tribune*

“Benne knows how to serve up the sweet, the savory and the bitter, blending the flavors of real family life well to give us a full meal, depicting the bond of love under duress” – *New Haven Review*

“Powerful! This is a love story between a mother and her daughter, and that works in any language.”
– *Chicago Onstage*

Benne’s award-winning play is about Alma and her daughter, Angel, who made sixteen wishes long ago: good health, love, carne asada every day, perfect SAT scores, and a spot at UC Davis, to name a few. But now that Angel is 17, she’s got a different vision for her future than her immigrant single mom. Featuring the powerfully fresh voice of playwright Benjamin Benne, winner of the National Latine Playwriting Award, **“Alma”** is a poetic,

funny, and timely play filled with lots of amor and a touch of symbolism. It begs the question: what does the American Dream mean today—and who does it belong to?

“Alma” Playwright Benjamin Benne wrote his play about his own mother. Or at least that’s what he set out to do when he began writing it. “My mother was an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala who came to the United States in the late ’70s,” said Benne, who was born and raised in Los Angeles County. He shared a story from his youth that, at first, seems cloaked in the dread of an inevitably awful end. “I was in elementary school, and one morning, my mother said to me, ‘I can’t drop you off at school today’ — which is something she did every day. Instead, she said, ‘My friend Maria is going to drop you off because I have something really important I have to do.’” When Benne saw his mother again that afternoon, she told him, “I’m a United States citizen now.”

As Benne looks back on that memory, he thinks it was both remarkable and a bit arbitrary that his mother went from not being a citizen in the morning to suddenly that afternoon — she was. “That got me thinking about the history of immigration and immigration law in the United States, and how it’s been constantly shifting,” said Benne, whose mother qualified for amnesty under President Reagan in the 1980s. In recent years, the issue of immigration is cloaked in the imperiled legal status of DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals — a federal program created in 2012 that provides lawful presence, employment authorization, and safety from deportation to 660,000 people who entered the U.S. as children. But recent court challenges have left 1.5 million Dreamers unable to apply for the same protections.

Benne soon realized that his burgeoning idea for a play about his mother — who crossed the border at the age of 18 in the 1970s — was no longer his mother’s story “because my mother’s pathway to citizenship no longer exists for someone who is currently in the same situation my mother was then,” he said.

“When these immigration stories become headlines, we don’t get to feel the heartbeat and the pulse of what it means for two people who love each other so intensely to be separated.”

– Benjamin Benne

In 2019, **“Alma”** was named the winner of the ATC National Latine Playwrights Award. “Our judges fell in love with the poetically distilled language of **‘Alma,’**” said judge and playwright Elaine Romero. “This is a covertly socially relevant play that asks us to look at the impact of the swing of the political pendulum on the lives of everyday people who have come to this country to dream.”

“Alma” was chosen for further development at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts Theatre Company’s 2020 Colorado New Play Summit, where it was introduced as a staged reading just a month before the shut

down. The show then had its world premiere in March 2022 when it helped re-open the pandemic doors at Center Theatre Group's Kirk Douglas Theater.

For the Orange County Premiere, joining director Guerrero on the design team are scenic designer **Christopher Scott Murillo** ("Ragtime"), costume designer **Jeanette Godoy** (Chance Debut), lighting designer **Kara Ramlow** ("Colonialism is Terrible, But Phở is Delicious"), sound designer **Melanie Falcón** (Chance Debut), stage manager **Cynthia C. Espinoza** ("Rent"), and dramaturg **Karli Jean Lonquist** (Chance Debut).

The cast of "Alma" features **Marta Portillo** (Chance Debut) as Alma and **Heather Lee Echeverria** (Chance Debut) as Angel.

Steven & Louise Koch are the Executive Producers for this production. Bette & Wylie Aitken are Executive Season Producers for the entire 2024 schedule. Laurie Smits Staude is Associate Producer, and The Family of Mary Kay Fyda-Mar is this year's Associate Season Producers. Our community partner is **Breath of Fire Latina Theater Ensemble, who will be co-hosting a Latinx Community Night at Chance Theater on Friday, May 17 starting at 7pm.**

To schedule press interviews, arrange for press comps, request press photos, or any additional information regarding this production, please contact Shinshin Tsai at (888) 455-4212 or stsai@chancetheater.com.

ABOUT CHANCE THEATER

Proud to be one of the leading ensemble-driven theatre companies in Southern California, CHANCE THEATER has received the National Theatre Company grant from American Theatre Wing for "nurturing a community of artists in ways that strengthen and demonstrate the quality, diversity, and dynamism of American theatre." The Chance won 22 OCTG Theatre Awards, including two for Outstanding Production of a Musical ("Next to Normal" and "Fun Home") and one for Outstanding Production of a Play ("Cry It Out"). Previously, Chance Theater won eight Ovation Awards, including four for Best Production of a Musical (Intimate Theatre), and four LADCC Awards, including the Polly Warfield Award for Outstanding Season. The Anaheim City Council named Chance Theater "the Official Resident Theater Company of Anaheim" in 2014, and Arts Orange County has twice named the Chance as "Outstanding Arts Organization." Known for using bold and personal storytelling to promote dialogue and connection within the Southern California theatrical landscape, the Chance is committed to contributing to a more compassionate, connected, and creative community. As a constituent member of Theatre Communications Group, The Theatrical Producers League of Los Angeles, and OC Theatre

Guild, Chance Theater continues to bring national attention to the Southern California and Orange County theater scenes.

CALENDAR LISTING

WHAT: “Alma”

Alma and her daughter, Angel, made sixteen wishes long ago: good health, love, carne asada every day, perfect SAT scores, and a spot at UC Davis, to name a few. But now that Angel is 17, she’s got a different vision for her future than her immigrant single mom. Featuring the powerfully fresh voice of playwright Benjamin Benne, winner of the National Latine Playwrights Award, *Alma* is a poetic, funny, and timely play filled with lots of amor and a touch of symbolism. It begs the question: what does the American Dream mean today—and who does it belong to?

WHEN:

Previews: May 6-10, 2024; Fridays and Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 7 p.m.

Performances: May 11-26, 2024; Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 3 p.m. & 8 p.m., Sundays at 3 p.m.

REVIEWERS AND OTHER PRESS are encouraged to come to Press Preview on Fri, May 10th at 8 p.m.

RUNNING TIME: 1 hour, 30 minutes, with no intermission

WHERE: Chance Theater @ Bette Aitken Theater Arts Center on the Fyda-Mar Stage

5522 E. La Palma Ave., Anaheim, CA 92807

TICKETS: \$8-\$44

MORE INFO: www.ChanceTheater.com or call (888) 455-4212

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