INTERVIEW WITH AN ALUM: YESENIA IGLESIAS ON PLAYING MRS. CRATCHIT

Submitted by Bobbin Ramsey on November 13, 2018 - 12:29pm

Yesenia Iglesias (PATP '15) has been working regularly in the Washington D.C. theatre scene since she graduated from the UW School of Drama. For the last two years she has appeared in Ford's Theatre's production of A Christmas Carol playing various roles in the ensemble. This year, Yesenia has been cast as Mrs. Cratchit, and is now the first woman of color to be playing this seminal character in Ford's Theatre's fifty year history. We talked with Yesenia about her experiences in the show, what playing Mrs. Cratchit means to her, and the importance of representation onstage.

What has your experience working with the Ford Theatre on A Christmas Carol for the last two years been?

YI: A Christmas Carol at Ford's Theatre was literally my first audition and the first gig I booked in D.C., so it holds a special place in my heart in regards to professional experiences. In the Beggar Woman/Mrs. Fred's Sister track, my original casting two years ago, it was the first time I had a musical solo on a national stage, and because I don't consider myself a performer “fit” for typical musical theater roles, I felt pressured to excel in ways I hadn't been challenged to in the past. But I was fortunate enough to be cast with some of D.C.'s finest actors who motivated me to perform as the best version of myself at all times. Through literal sickness and health, we've encouraged each other on and offstage, supported one another in our individual outside work, and have created a familial bond that keeps us coming back each year. Because of that kind of motivation and my own increasing professional self-discipline, I feel prepared to take on Mrs. Cratchit, one of the most iconic roles in literary history.

What excites you the most about playing Mrs. Cratchit?

YI: I'll answer that by describing my favorite memory to date from last year. Every year the cast collects donations for a charitable organization that reflects the values portrayed in the play, and during my scheduled collection day, as I walked into the theater's main lobby after a performance, I was nearly knocked over by three little girls who, almost knocking me over, hugged and kissed me and exclaimed how much they enjoyed the show. I later learned from their mothers that they thought I was a princess, and were so happy to see someone who looked like them that they insisted on meeting me immediately! I connected to that moment immediately. That revelation, the experience of seeing someone like you playing a positive role not necessarily tied to one's race, dancing, singing, being happy and enjoying life is truly unforgettable, and I felt that with those little girls that day. So that's what I'm most excited about -- I hopefully get to provide some children with a first glimpse of themselves onstage, playing a character they can look up to because it reflects who they are too.

What are you the most nervous about when it comes to tackling this role?

What isn't there to be nervous about? It's Mrs. Cratchit! But in all seriousness, my main concern is keeping her grounded and complex. In just about two scenes we see that she loves her children, and would do anything to make sure they have happy childhoods, but she's burdened by Tiny Tim's illness and the incessant maltreatment of her husband, whom she adores, by the unsavory Ebenezer Scrooge. Therefore, to put it
quite simply, I have to show that she's hopeful, loving, outspoken, and bit broken all at once. That's a tall order. But I'm here for it!

Do you feel like any parts of the story are illuminated or can be looked at through a new lens with a woman of color in the role of Mrs. Cratchit?

YI: What a great question! It's important to note that while I'm not the first POC to play her EVER, I am the first at Ford's Theatre, an organization that for better (or sometimes, worse) attracts people from all walks of life during the holiday season. I think it's beautiful that we get to see the Cratchit family as a better representation of our country. When they're played by actors of different ethnicities, and we get to see how deep socio-economic divides negatively impact communities when we're not all helping each other and investing in the welfare of all people. With Mrs. Cratchit, I think we get to see a woman of color living in an era where she is otherwise powerless and is yet resilient, determined to improve conditions for her family, takes spiritual comfort in her faith and is also unafraid to speak on the injustices she witnesses. As a woman of color, I 100% relate to feeling socially obligated to appear both strong and soft in the face of inequity, and that's what makes Mrs. Cratchit such a powerful role and a wonderful challenge for me.

What questions and conversations are you hoping the audience will leave with after seeing this production of A Christmas Carol?

YI: There are so many conversations I hope audiences have after seeing our production! Generally, I hope that audiences leave talking about what to do once the play is over. Seems simple, right? A Christmas Carol is a beautiful story about the power of redemption and the spirit of Christmas, but it can easily fall into a "feel-good" story that neither asks for any critical analysis or personal action. While it is sometimes okay to watch a show that makes us feel good, how great would it be to watch something that delivers plenty of ethos, as well as a call to action or some juicy themes to chew on during the ride home? Basically, I hope audiences leave feeling hopeful, and also encouraged to talk about ways to make a long-term impact in the lives of the needy, why it was amazing to see so many people of color onstage, and how this theatrical encounter changed the way they interpret a story they've seen or heard countless times.

Do you have any holiday traditions that you cherish?

YI: The holidays are for bringing the family together. For decades, immediate members of my family have been strewn across the country and globe, making regular family visitations difficult, so we cherish being able to come together during this special time of year to love on each other, worship together, cook for each other, record crazy dance videos, sing old Puerto Rican Christmas songs and just relish in the bond we value so deeply. Until the day we all live in the same state, this is all we have, and every year we make the most of it!

A CHRISTMAS CAROL RUNS NOVEMBER 15TH THROUGH DECEMBER 30TH AT FORD'S THEATRE IN WASHINGTON, D.C. MORE INFORMATION HERE.

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