

Fowler event Diga Me! celebrates Chicano literature

Fowler event Diga Me! is a series of short stories, representing aspects of the culture and history

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Nearly 40 years after the 1973 Festival de Flor y Canto, the first Chicano literary festival, the spirit of the genre remains very much alive in Southern California.

On Saturday afternoon, the New Short Fiction Series, the longest running spoken word series in Los Angeles, will present Diga Me! – a series of short readings by Chicano authors Ron Arias, Vibiana Aparicio-Chamberlin and Alejandro Murguía at the Fowler Museum.

These three authors, who were among the original presenters at the 1973 festival, will have their short fiction pieces performed by actors Matt Ferrucci, Marina Gonzalez Palmier and Holger Moncado.

Sally Shore, host, producer and founder of the New Short Fiction Series, said that these writers are living embodiments of where Chicano literature has gone in the last 40 years.

“The three pieces that we are going to present each represent a different aspect of Chicano literature and culture,” Shore said. “I started looking at who was writing at that time, in terms of Los Angeles Chicano literature and narrowed down who was doing short fiction and came across the Flor y Canto festival.”

According to Shore, the spoken word portion of the event will be followed by a Q&A panel with the three authors.

Michael Sedano, co-founder of the literary blog “La Bloga,” will serve as moderator of the discussion about L.A.’s Chicano literary movement.

This spoken word event is also being put on in conjunction with the Fowler exhibit “Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement,” which traces the ways in which art has been used as a means of speaking out about social concerns pertaining to the Chicano community in Los Angeles.

Aparicio-Chamberlin said that her piece of short fiction, “El Diablo Bailarín” (“The Dancing Devil”), is a traditional folktale that was passed down by generations of women in her family.

“That’s how we Mexicans know our culture, through the stories. Even if they are folktales that are highly imaginative or scary, there is a bit of wisdom, history and morals,” Aparicio-Chamberlin said. “In this story, my mother is really giving us the moral of how precious girls are and wanting girls to beware of the dangers of the world.”

According to Murguía, his short story, “A Long Walk,” takes place during the early 1970s and addresses the turmoil that surrounded the barring of students of color from access to schools.

“A lot of students went on strike over accessibility to the campuses by students of color. The story is about a student strike at a college campus, specifically at Los Angeles City College, but it could have been at UCLA, UC Berkeley (or) San Francisco State. It could have been anywhere,” Murguía said.

These and other topics regarding the Chicano community will be part of the event’s panel discussion. According to Aparicio-Chamberlin, her tale shows that these issues are taken up in various forms of Chicano literature.

“As Mexicans, the struggle we deal with is very real. My story may appear as a traditional form, but it shows that we as Chicanos have many literary forms at our fingertips, which tell about the current situation,” Aparicio-Chamberlin said.

Murguía said that this event is important for college students to gain greater exposure to the living Chicano history.

“Our struggle goes back for centuries, and it is a struggle that we are still deeply involved with,” he said. “I think that students are emerging intellectuals and one of their responsibilities is to be curious about the past and recover the memories that have been forgotten.”
