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## THE PLAY

On a dark and stormy night in Bellarica, Mexico, two women in labor are rushed to the hospital.

**Hortensia Del Rio**, a promising but poor woman, gives birth to a healthy baby girl. **Fabiola Castillo**, a former beauty queen and the wife of the richest man in town, gives birth to a baby girl with a weak heart. When Fabiola demands that the babies be switched secretly, their destinies become entwined.

Eighteen years later, **Pilar** and **Victoria Maria** meet one another for the first time. Is it chance, or is it destiny?

Both girls are on the brink of their futures. They are ready to try their luck, gamble and make their own fates in a world of betrayal, buried secrets and passion.

A company of actors performs this story in the style of a telenovela (see article). As the story unfolds, the lines between reality and the play being performed blur.

Who or what decides a person's fate? What happens when destinies collide?

**“DESTINY IS NOT  
DECIDED BY THE  
LIKES OF YOU.”**

– Fabiola, *Destiny of Desire*

# DESTINY OF DESIRE

BY KAREN ZACARÍAS  
DIRECTED BY JOSÉ LUIS VALENZUELA



NOW PLAYING IN THE KREEGER THEATER  
SEPTEMBER 11 - OCTOBER 18, 2015

# WHAT IS A TELENVELA?

Betrayal. Loss. Rags to Riches. Family Strife. Jealousy. Romance! Each night millions of people tune in to watch the drama of telenovelas. These shows are passionate, even **melodramatic\***, with suspense and high stakes. Their actors are huge celebrities.

Telenovelas, which translates to “television novels,” are Latin-American TV shows, often described as “Latino soap operas.”

Playwright Karen Zacarías says this is not really correct. “They’re more like mini-series. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. You know there will be resolution. It might not be the resolution you want, but these are not families you’re going to be living with for 30 years. In six months [or one year] the telenovela will be over.”

Like a soap opera, a telenovela will air almost daily. However, telenovelas are during prime time and are targeted at the whole population, not just women.

“And while it’s on,” Zacarías says, “If it’s a good one — you know not to call people because everyone’s watching it.”

In an article for the *Daily Telegraph*, writer Alex Bellos wrote, “When I lived in Rio de Janeiro, no one ever wanted to meet up for a drink before 10 in the evening ... the day’s most important telenovela started at nine and no one wanted to miss it. The telenovela schedule is such an unalterable aspect of Brazilian life, and that of all Latin America, that even the kick-off times of football matches are

delayed until after the end of each daily episode.”

Experts estimate that telenovelas have more than 1 billion viewers worldwide. According to 2011 Nielsen data, 5.7 million Americans watch telenovelas while 2.9 million watch soap operas.

Some telenovelas are escapist and help viewers forget their daily troubles. Others are inspired by current events and political themes, like corruption and class. Due to the popularity of the genre, shows like *Encrucijada: Sin Salud No Hay Nada (Crossroads: Without Health, There Is Nothing)* have been used to spread public health messages, like the importance of early cancer detection.

Regardless of theme, Zacarías says, “[Telenovelas are] a huge touchstone. And it’s a way of connecting those of us who have moved to home countries and of having a dialogue.”

**\*melodramatic – exaggeratedly emotional**



The play will have the dramatic look of a telenovela. Pictured are Elia Saldaña and Esperanza America as the girls switched at birth and the love interest, played by Nick Rodriguez.

# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



**KAREN ZACARÍAS**

“I always think of writing as an exploration, not a forgone conclusion—and it isn’t until after the piece is ‘done’ that I discover the various themes that have been nagging at my core.”

Born in Mexico, Karen Zacarías is a playwright who lives in Washington, D.C. and has her plays performed throughout the country. She is one of the most produced Latina playwrights in the United States. In 2015/16, she will have five plays make their world premiere.

Her experience in the arts started early. At age six, she spent her allowance on a plastic typewriter. At the holidays, she and her cousins would invent and put on shows.

Today, her plays include *Destiny of Desire*, *The Sins of Sor Juana*, *Mariela in the Desert*, *The Book Club Play* and *Legacy of Light*, and adaptations of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *Just Like Us*. Her Theater for Young Audiences work includes adaptations of *Ferdinand the Bull* and *Ella Enchanted*.

Zacarías was the first playwright-in-residence at Arena Stage. She is also the founder of Young Playwrights’ Theater (YPT) in Washington, D.C., which teaches playwrighting in local public schools.

# ARENA BACKSTAGE: INSPIRATION

Playwright Karen Zacarías shared why she brought the telenovela to the stage in *Destiny of Desire*.

“So often, when a Latino dramatist writes a serious play, the jargon critics use to describe certain dramatic moments is ‘telenovela’ (see article). That always seems a way of dismissing high-caliber work. *Destiny of Desire* is an act of rebellion, it is an act of heritage, an act of joy in trying to write the best telenovela I could,” she said.

“What I find interesting about telenovelas is the ambivalence you feel at first. But you watch one scene and before you know it, you’re hooked. As you stay longer you find yourself pulled in. *Destiny* plays with that

energy. It starts out as funny, heightened situations, but by the end you care deeply about the fate of these characters.”

In translating a television form for live theater, Zacarías gave herself a challenge.

“Most telenovelas last six months to a year. Could I pack a year’s worth of story into two hours? Plus add live music and original songs? I wanted to take something that’s been created for television and transport it into a wildly theatrical experience on stage. And also give work to all these talented Latino theater artists that don’t get to be on stage as often as they should...It’s been one of the most joyful experiences writing this play.”



The playwright and the director discuss a scene with the actors.

In the 1950s, telenovelas evolved from Cuban radio shows popular in the 1930s and spread to other Latin-American countries. Storylines were initially based on existing stories and literature.



Watch an episode of a telenovela.

What do you notice about the style?

What elements can you identify?

Then, watch an episode of a soap opera and compare and contrast them.



READ A FULL INTERVIEW  
WITH KAREN ZACARÍAS AT  
[BLOG.ARENASTAGE.ORG](http://BLOG.ARENASTAGE.ORG)



Telenovelas have been adapted into series in other countries. *Soy la Betty*, *La Fea*, a Columbian telenovela, became *Ugly Betty* in the U.S. and a series in 16 other countries.

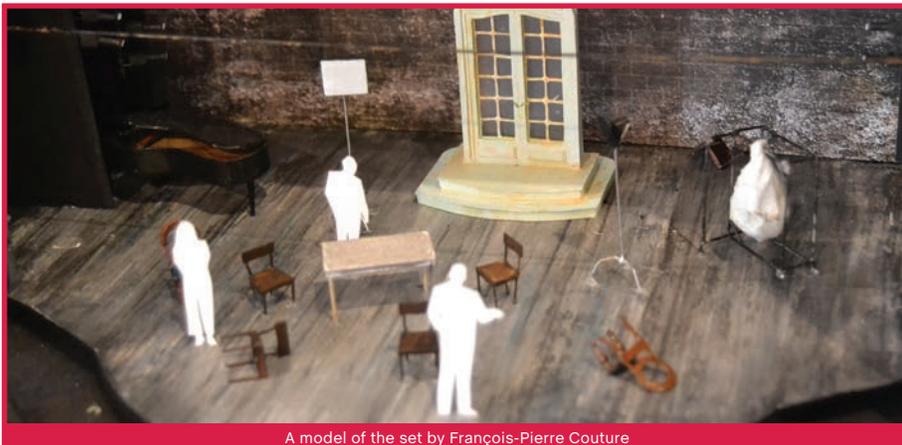
# ELEMENTS OF EPIC THEATER

*Destiny of Desire* is a play about actors putting on a sincere play in the style of a telenovela. When a playwright or director stages a show to remind an audience they are watching a play, they are following in the footsteps of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956).

Before Brecht, plays strived for “realism”, making the events on stage as realistic as possible. Brecht revolted and pioneered “epic theater.” Brecht believed theater should not imitate life,

but educate the audience. Epic theater reminds audiences that they are watching a play in order to distance them emotionally from the story. As a result, audiences analyze and evaluate what they are watching instead of getting lost in the play.

Though epic theater is not the only style in this play, as you watch, take note of what actions and technical elements (lights, sound, etc.) make it clear you are watching a play.



A model of the set by François-Pierre Couture

# THE MUSIC OF *DESIRE*

Music is central to telenovelas, underscoring action and swelling at dramatic moments. Pop artists have launched their careers by having songs featured on telenovelas. Stars like Shakira, Christina Aguilera and Beyoncé have performed theme songs. It's not surprising music is an important part of this play.

The music in *Destiny of Desire* was composed by Rosino Serrano. Serrano is from Spain, but has been part of the music scene in Mexico for over 30 years. The music in the play draws from different Latin genres, including salsa and corrido. The lyrics were written by the playwright.

# HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.

# RESOURCES

Daily Telegraph

"Telenovelas: The Story So Far"  
<http://goo.gl/g00COK>

PBS: "The Power of the Telenovela"  
[www.pbs.org/newshour/run-down/the-power-of-the-telenovela/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/run-down/the-power-of-the-telenovela/)

Arena Stage: "A Playwright's Destiny: Karen Zacarias" [blog.arenastage.org](http://blog.arenastage.org)

Theatre Communications Group: "Karen Zacarias: A Writer's Tightrope" [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org).



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Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org) for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

Do you believe in destiny? Why or why not?

2

What factors affect a person's future?

3

What role do cultural touchstones, like telenovelas, play in society?