



MEDIA CONTACT:
Jessica Pettit
Imagination Stage
press@imaginationstage.org
[301-280-1641](tel:301-280-1641)

For Immediate Release

A Magical Evening Honors Imagination Stage’s Theatre, Education, and Community Programs

The 2018 Imagination Stage Annual Gala: The Winter Ball will be held at the Embassy of Italy on December 7, 2018

BETHESDA, MD (November 20, 2018) On Friday, December 7, 2018, Imagination Stage will celebrate 39 years of service to the Washington, DC area at its 2018 Annual Gala: ***The Winter Ball***. This evening – complete with cocktails, a seated dinner, and a celebratory performance – will raise funds to support our theatre and education programs. The Gala also highlights the impact of our ¡**Óyeme!** program, a multi-faceted collaboration between Imagination Stage, DC area Social Service Agencies, and Hispanic Heritage Foundation to improve the lives of young refugees who have escaped violence in their home countries in Central America and are now living in the DC area. The evening culminates with the 2018 Imagine Award, which will be awarded to educator and playwright **Miriam Gonzales**.

Imagination Stage board members **Kim Barnette**, **Sara Lange**, and **Chris Taylor** will chair the gala at the Embassy of Italy. **Antonio Tijerino**, Imagination Stage Maryland board member and president and CEO of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, and **Armando Trull**, D.C. area reporter, producer, and consulting expert on media relations and public-affairs issues affecting the Latino community.

“We can’t wait to throw open the doors of the Italian Embassy to our Gala guests for *The Winter Ball*, full of sparkle and dancing, on December 7,” says Imagination Stage Founding Artistic Director, Janet Stanford. “The highpoint of our event will be presenting the Imagine Award to educator and playwright, Miriam Gonzales whose beautiful bilingual play *Óyeme, the beautiful* tours our region spreading a much needed message of empathy and empowerment to young people.”

A VIP cocktail reception, hosted by **Erika Martin Bolden** and **Scott Bolden**, kicks off the event at 6:30 p.m. A seated dinner, catered by Occasions Caterers, follows at 7:45 p.m.

After dinner, guests will enjoy a celebratory performance directed by Imagination Stage Associate Artistic Director Kathryn Chase Bryer (winner of the 2018 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Direction in a Musical), featuring cast members from Imagination Stage’s holiday production of *Cinderella*, actors from Imagination Stage’s local touring production of *Óyeme, the beautiful*, and current students from the organization’s classes and conservatories.

Awa Sal Secka (Cinderella in *Cinderella*, Lucy in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*), **Tracy Lynn Olivera** (Godmother in *Cinderella*, Lady Bird in *A Year with Frog & Toad*), **Evan Casey** (Stepmother in *Cinderella*, past roles in *Dr. Dolittle*, *Perseus Bayou*, and *Merlin and the Cave of Dreams*), and **Jay Frisby** (Prince Jason in *Cinderella*) give attendees a sneak-peek into the magical world of the royal ball. The program features themed lyrics by **Tina Martin**, music direction by **Elisa Rosman**, and choreography by **Pauline Grossman**. *Óyeme, the beautiful* cast members **Alina Collins Maldonado** (Maid Marian/Much in *Robin Hood*, Lizzie in *The Smartest Girl in the World*), **Thais Menendez**, **Cristian Linares**, and **Thony Mena** will also participate in the program.

All proceeds raised during the "Fund a Cause" portion of the evening will directly support our **¡Óyeme!** program. **¡Óyeme!** ("hear me" in Spanish) helps to build empathy, understanding, and community ties among recent refugees and their peers. The program includes four components: in-school and out-of-school educational workshops to help recently arrived refugees from Central America tell their stories and begin healing from the suffering they have undergone; a touring production of *Óyeme, the beautiful*, written by Imagine Awardee Miriam Gonzales and based on the true-life experiences of ¡Óyeme! workshop participants; post-performance workshops offered in conjunction with the production tour; and professional development training for teachers.

Sponsors of the 2018 Imagination Stage Annual Gala: **The Winter Ball** include The Annette M. and Theodore N. Lerner Foundation, The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation, Design Foundry, Pepco, and Rifkin, Weiner, Livingston LLC. Décor is provided by Design Foundry. Atmosphere, Inc. will provide the event lighting, and Creative Video will provide audio and video services.

Individual tickets are \$400, and sponsorship packages begin at \$1,000. To request more information or to purchase tickets, contact Jessica Teaford, Special Events Manager, at 301-280-1626 or jteaford@imaginationstage.org.

ABOUT MIRIAM GONZALES, RECIPIENT OF THE IMAGINE AWARD

Miriam Gonzales' works include: *The Smartest Girl in the World*; *Sunny and Licorice*; *Bertie, Maggie and the Magic Zero*; *Óyeme, the beautiful*; *The South Overlook Oaks* (adaptation). Her work has been produced at Childsplay Theater (Tempe, AZ), Imagination Stage (Bethesda, MD), Arts on the Horizon (Alexandria, VA), Atlas Theater (Washington, DC), Columbus Children's Theater (Columbus, OH - 2018), and Austin Playhouse (Austin, TX - 2018). In addition to stage productions, *The Smartest Girl in the World*, toured in schools across the state of Arizona. *Sunny and Licorice* and *Óyeme, the beautiful*, toured in DC area schools, as well. Miriam is the recipient of the 2013 Write Now Award and the Aurand Harris Memorial Playwriting Award (New England Theater Conference, 2011). *Bertie, Maggie and the Magic Zero* was selected as a semi-finalist for NYU's 2014 New Plays Young Audiences and Northwestern's PLAYground Festival. Her work has been developed and received professional readings at Write Now (Childsplay Theater), La Jolla Playhouse's DNA New Works Series, Northwestern University's PLAYground New Play Festival, AATE conference (2014), and the annual TCG conference (2016). Miriam is a former teaching artist with Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT) in Washington, D.C. and served as YPT's Board Chair. She is the co-developer and lead artist of Imagination Stage's *Óyeme* theater arts program for Central American refugee youth. Miriam is a graduate of Brown University, and received her Ph.D. in Education and M.A. in Sociology from Stanford University. She hails from Corpus Christi, Texas, and currently lives in Washington, D.C. with her husband and two daughters.

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ABOUT IMAGINATION STAGE

Founded in 1979, Imagination Stage is a 501(c)(3) organization with a mission is to inspire creativity through theatre and arts education programs that nurture, challenge, and empower young people of all abilities. The organization offers year-round professional theatre for young audiences and classes in creative drama/acting, musical theatre, dance, and filmmaking for ages 1-18.

www.imaginationstage.org

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