



United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO

Founded by César E. Chávez

October 10, 2001

Dear Myla,

I wanted to thank you for inviting me to join you last week. I had a great time and had a chance to meet some really interesting people. Everyone was so kind and very interested in the treatment of our nations farm workers. It is my hope that the students will now realize what it takes to bring food to their tables. And that immigrants will be looked at in a different light.

The play was very moving and well written. I would love for more of the UFW leadership to see it. If you ever plan on doing it again please keep us in mind. I hope that we can keep in touch. Also, thank your husband and son (who is an amazing kid) for their hospitality.

Sincerely,

Christine Chavez-Espinoza

Christine Chavez-Espinoza

Blue Sphere Alliance and L'Chaim Theater Ensemble of USC
presents

the WORLD PREMIERE of

The WETBACK

Written by
Myla Lichtman-Fields

Directed by
Anthony Barnao

For the first time in Los Angeles a professional theater company and a university based theater company combine their talents as BLUE SPHERE ALLIANCE and L'CHAIM THEATER ENSEMBLE of USC present the WORLD PREMIERE of The WETBACK. The story of Ernesto Sanchez, a 16 year old illegal migrant farm worker accused of murdering his employer's son.

April 24th through April 29th

Tuesday through Sunday evenings at 8pm

Sat and Sun Matinees at 3pm

RESERVATIONS
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Ticket Prices: \$15
Students, Seniors, Matinees: \$12

(A portion of the proceeds is being donated to the United Farm Workers)



BLUE SPHERE ALLIANCE at the Lex Theater
6760 Lexington Avenue, Hollywood

(One block East of Highland and one block North of Santa Monica)

'The Wetback' brings timely issue of tolerance to Irvine High on Friday

By PEGGY BLIZZARD
IRVINE WORLD NEWS

How cross-cultural misunderstandings lead to tragedy and the need for tolerance are the timely themes of "The Wetback," a play by Myla Lichtman-Fields of Irvine. Irvine High School's Students for Social Responsibility will present the play Friday, Oct. 5, at 8 p.m. at the Irvine High School Theater.

"The Wetback" is the story of Ernesto Sanchez, a 16-year-old illegal migrant farm worker accused of murdering his employer's son. The story is presented as a juvenile hearing. The

VITAL STATISTICS

- ◆ **What:** "The Wetback," a play by Myla Lichtman-Fields of Irvine presented by Students for Social Responsibility at Irvine High School and featuring actors from Blue Sphere Alliance and L'Chaim Theater Ensemble of USC.
- ◆ **When:** Friday, Oct. 5, at 8 p.m.
- ◆ **Where:** Irvine High School Theater, 4321 Walnut, between Culver and Yale.
- ◆ **Tickets:** \$10 adults, \$7 students. Funds will go to the actors.
- ◆ **Information and Reservations:** (949) 552-4690 or (949) 387-3052.

play is set against the backdrop of the U.S. Bicentennial in July of 1976. As the hearing proceeds members of the United Farm Workers march outside the courtroom, demanding that farm workers be treated as human beings.

Actors from Blue Sphere Alliance and L'Chaim Theater Ensemble of USC will perform the two-act play Friday night after performing the first act three times earlier in the day for students in drama and the performing arts, English and so-

cial science and the foreign language departments.

"So during the day over 1,000 students will see the first act," said Jim Antenore, social sciences and comparative religions teacher and sponsor for Students for Social Responsibility.

"We hope students come back and see both acts that night and that we will fill the theater."

Following each of the four performances will be a panel discussion. Participating will be Lichtman-Fields; granddaughter of Cesar Chavez, Christine Delgado

representing the United Farm Workers; director Anthony Barnao, who has served as casting director for Steven Spielberg and was an assistant to Jose Quintero in New York; and Cindy Gross, founder of L'Chaim Theater Ensemble of USC. Irvine High students and cast members will also take part.

Brian Burnett plays Ernesto and Cynthia Michelle plays the farm owner's daughter Renesio who befriends Ernesto.

Lichtman-Fields, whose son, Irvine High

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Play: 'The Wetback' looks at tolerance and other social issues

junior, Aaron, is a member of Students for Social Responsibility, invited Antenor to see the show last spring when it had an eight-performance run at the Lex Theatre in Hollywood where Bar-nao's own Equity acting company is based.

Antenore and his mother, Beatrice, attended and afterwards he asked if the company could perform the play at Irvine High.

"I was touched by the poignancy of the story because it is emblematic of what can go wrong," said Antenore.

"Mrs. Fields wrote the play in hopes of educating people that a lot of these injustices are still being committed against migrant workers," said Students for Social Responsibility member Brent Godfrey.

Among issues addressed in the play are trying juveniles as adults and the need for migrants to have green cards. The production also looks at the intolerable conditions of migrant workers, including crops being sprayed and crop-dusted while workers are still in the fields, no work breaks, no toilets for the workers, and other unsanitary conditions.

Lichtman-Fields noted that many of these conditions have been changed for the better in California through the work of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers but such conditions still exist in the south, especially in Florida.



MIKE SCHWARTZ/IRVINE WORLD NEWS

Sally O'Keefe and public defender **Willie Sethcomb** (Erin Anderson, Harry Calboom) comfort **Reenie Judson** (Cynthia Michelle) during her testimony in the trial of **Ernesto Sanchez** (Brian Burnett, at upper right) in a rehearsal of "The Wetback."

The first draft of "The Wetback" was written in 1978 in Norman Corwin's Writing Seminar at USC, said Lichtman-Fields. The play was one of

five finalists in the first Forest Roberts/Panowski Playwriting Contest at the University of Michigan. It also was a finalist in the 1999 Mill Mountain Playwriting Contest.

Prior to the run at the Lex, "The Wetback" had a reading in 1998 at Southwest College near San Ysidro where they play is set.

Lichtman-Fields recalled visiting her mother who was an art teacher at the YMCA in San Diego and going with her to march for several miles with Cesar Chavez on his march from San Diego to Sacramento during the 1970s. She was shocked by the conditions she saw.

In her play, said Lichtman-Fields, "I don't give any answers. All you can do is to put the situation out there and let the story tell itself and make people aware. This is a great country and I think when people are aware they will do something to change the situation."

Students for Social Responsibility member Sarah Woodfield, a senior, said of the play, "This is a lesser known subject because it is hidden. This is native to California and not out there as much as it should be."

By presenting the play, Godfrey hopes that students and others in the audience "will have a better understanding of what's going on in the

See PLAY / A29

Oct. 4, 2001

Play: Students

FROM / A28

world and that there are still injustices being committed against minority groups."

Club member Anna Lee, a senior, noted that the play can serve as motivation for students to get involved. "There are so many students who want to help the world, but do not know where to start. We are here to help them."

According to Godfrey, Students for Social Responsibility members have been active in getting the word out to teachers and the media about the play, supervising the dissemination of printed material including fliers and posters and selling tickets. Students are also actively working on the set.

Lichtman-Fields particularly pointed out the work of Nora Keenan on lighting and Kimmie Scharf on supervising and building the sets. They have been working with the actors and director during rehearsals for the last three weeks.

Although the play is set in 1976, Antenore commented on how it particularly speaks to today.

"This play is so timely, because the United States must struggle with how it will deal with members of our own community who are Arab and Muslims and must resolve that they will be treated with civility, justice and decency," said Antenore. "This play is one way to think about this particular issue. This play is timely in so many ways."

SOCIAL ISSUES

These high school students are committed to community service

By PEGGY BLIZZARD
IRVINE WORLD NEWS

Presenting the play, "The Wetback," is just one of many ways Irvine High's Students for Social Responsibility has worked to make people socially aware in its 18 years of existence.

"Students for Social Responsibility is a service-based club," said member and Irvine High senior Sarah Woodfield. We do a lot of different projects. These include, among other things, recycling.

"You might not think of that as being hugely important, but it is an important part of what needs to be done in our society," said Woodfield.

"Our main goal is to raise social awareness of prevalent issues and spend quality time making the world a better place than it was when we became freshmen here."

Jim Antenore, social studies teacher at Irvine High and sponsor for the group, noted that Students for Social Responsibility gets involved in three major issues: Environment, human rights, and hunger and homelessness.

Antenore noted that the group raised \$8,000 in one evening at a benefit concert for Children's Hospital of Orange County and for Free the Children to end child labor.

One of its most successful events which drew an audience of 450 people

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over 600 people and raised \$4,000 to help free slaves.

Fun activities are also included such as a kayak trip in Newport Back Bay, said Antenore.

Speaking about the structure of Students for Social Responsibility Woodfield said,

"Instead of having officers we are all equal." She said there might be someone coordinating a project but that person is not given a title.

"There is no head person," interjected Anna Lee, a senior. "We are all on the same team."

At the recent club fair, 105 students signed up, but the group has an active core of about 30 to 50 members, said Antenore.

The next event following "The Wetback" is a Togetherness Luncheon on Thursday, Nov. 8, where the club gets together with other groups on campus and takes part in a service project such as putting together Thanksgiving baskets, said Lee.

"I'm impressed with these kids because they don't have to do this," said Antenore.

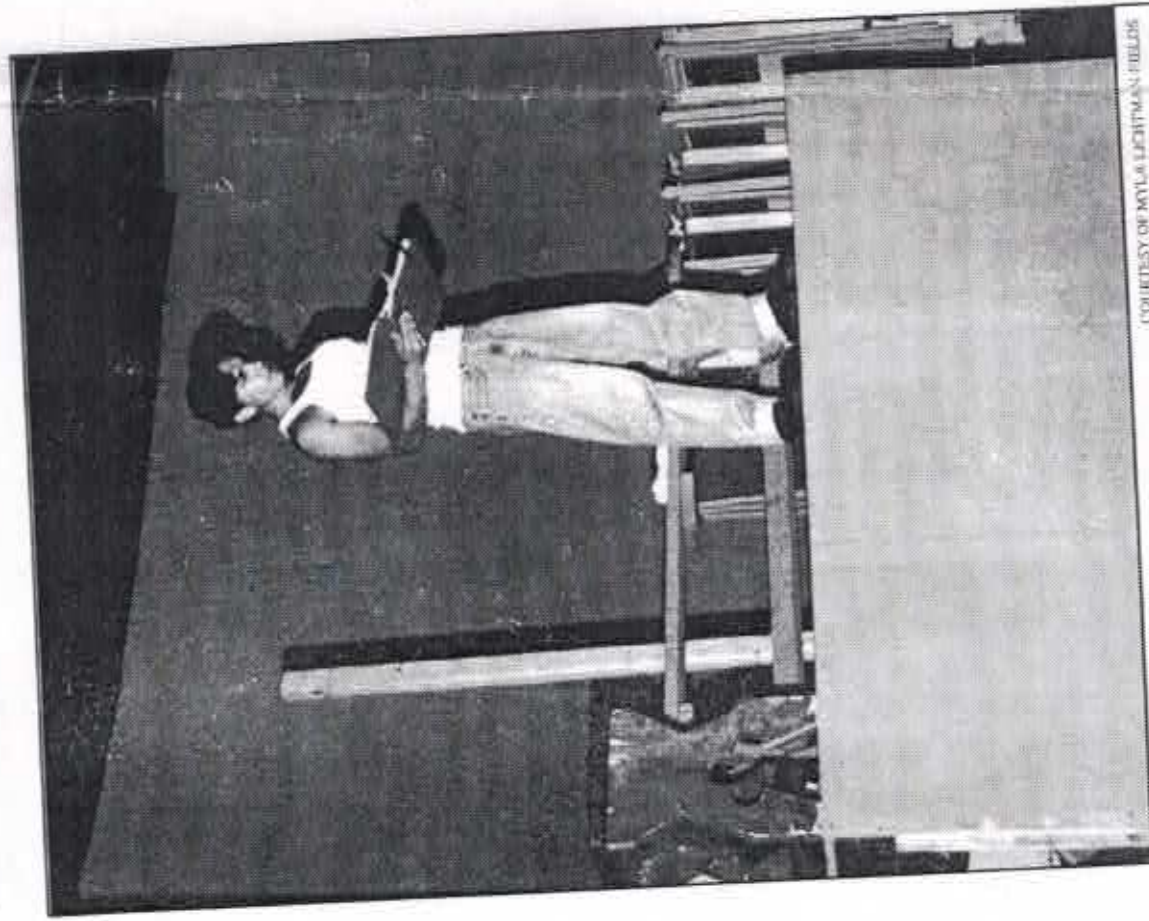
"They don't get anything out of this except for the satisfaction of learning and doing something good. I'm really proud to work with them. My hope is the students

Irvine High senior Sarah Woodfield

said Antenore, was a program featuring the Mitsubishi Corp. and the Mexican government's plans to build a salt flats near a whale spawning area in Baja. Speakers included a representative from Mitsubishi, an official from the Mexican government, the founder of the Whaleman Foundation and an attorney from the National Resources Defense Council. Warren Olney of PBS served as moderator. Over a period of two years the club has raised \$2,000 for the Whaleman Foundation and the Natural Resources Defense Council, said Antenore.

Last year the club hosted

The Wetback: L'Chaim Theatre, SSR sponsor stage presentation to raise student awareness



USC student Brian Burnett rehearses his lines for the opening night of "The Wetback," presented in the IHS theater on Friday, Oct. 5.

MENGMENG HUANG
Staff Writer

Audience members enthusiastically cheered as a buff young Mexican criminal sits shirtless and forlorn in a jail cell in Ysidro, Calif.

They are at the performance of "The Wetback," a courtroom drama set in 1976 that addresses the issues of inhumane labor conditions and pesticide poisoning. The play aims to make people more aware of the life of a migrant farm worker through the perspective of wrongfully accused Ernesto Sanchez.

"I enjoyed sitting there and watching this conflict unravel," sophomore Linda Wang said. "It made me more aware of an important issue, but I wish they could have suggested more ways I could personally help."

Written by local playwright Myla Lichtman-Fields and directed by Anthony Barnea, "The Wetback" revolves around the trial of a young field-hand, wrongfully accused with the murder of his employer's son.

Lichtman-Fields believes several elements of the play are as relevant to modern society as they were 30 years ago. "The Wetback" raises questions about the wisdom, effectiveness and justice of trying adolescents as adults, as Proposition 21, a recently passed law that forces juveniles 14 or older to be tried as an adult in cases of homicide, made possible.



COURTESY OF MYLA LICHTMAN-FIELDS
Actors, with director Anthony Barnea go over the script for further review.

"This play is very universal in its themes," screenwriter Lichtman-Fields said. "Prejudice and intolerance interest me as a writer. This play doesn't give answers. It just explores the issue."

Sponsored by Students for Social Responsibility (SSR), L'Chaim Theatre, in conjunction with Blue Sphere Alliance, staged the performance last Friday at 8 p.m.

Prior to the evening performance, Act I of the two-part production was presented to select second, third and fourth period classes. Approximately 150 students were turned away, when all 300 seats were filled.

A panel discussion which included Lichtman-Fields, Barnea, Cindy Gross, actor and coordinator of L'Chaim Theatre Ensemble and former activist and farmer's rights advocate, César Chavez's granddaughter, Christine Delgado, followed

Please see Spotlight 8

Comedy Sportz to hold annual student-teacher competition

Laura Appleby
Page Editor

Most students have a difficult time envisioning their teachers with even a half-way-decent sense of humor, but Comedy Sportz (CSz) decided to give the poor folks a chance. That's where the teacher-student match comes in.

"It's great because you seldom get to see your teachers be funny and ridiculous. How often do you get to see your teachers pretend to give each other sponge baths with chicken heads in Alaska?" junior and vice exuberance master (player) James Black said. "It's good, wholesome fun."

The annual student-teacher Comedy Sportz match will be held Thursday, Oct. 25 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in the theater. Faculty in the match include science teachers Jeff Wada and Craig and Joan Elliott. Also participating are drama instructor Bob King, social studies teacher

on programs, uniforms and paying the referee to the Red Cross for disaster relief.

"The most enlightening element of being involved with Comedy Sportz is the uplifting feeling received when making people laugh and feel happy," Sussman said. "It really is the best feeling in the world."

CSz matches are composed of two halves. In each half, four of the eight team members compete in various improvisational games. They include interrogation, where burglars have to guess their crimes, 185, which is a pun game and replay, where actors have to act out a scene three times in three different styles. Both teams compete in the opening and closing games, but only one team play in the others.

"I've made a lot of friends through Comedy Sportz, ones I would've missed out on if I hadn't participated in CSz," junior and co-manager Brittany Walloch said. "It gives me the opportunity to do something on stage that I never would have dreamed possible."

Auditions for this year's CSz team will be

SSR: play focuses on juvenile justice

Continued from Page 4

all performances. Select members of SSR, including juniors Aaron Fields, Courtney Bearns, Shanna Blinderman, Mindy McBride, and Anna Chang, also appeared on stage to present further information on Cesar Chavez, the actors, and Proposition 21.

"I was really amazed at how much these students know. They asked very good questions," Delgado said. "My hope is they go home and talk about this with their parents so the information will spread further."

Jim Antenore, SSR club adviser and Honors World Studies teacher said: the recent terrorist attacks resulting in increased awareness of intolerance, further emphasize

humanity and add additional relevance to the theme.

"The story is really about a tragedy that unfolds because of cross-cultural misunderstanding, stereotypes and racism," Antenore said. "It seems that the Arab and Muslim community could easily be targeted by ignorant, fearful people, who are looking to blame for a national tragedy."

The United Farm Workers of America, a non-profit organization dedicated to perpetuate Chavez's demand for adequate pay and working conditions among migrant farm workers, set up a booth at the evening showing in the theater, offering more information for interested attendees.

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Photos this page: Mary Pat Hill, OSMA

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ounded by César E. Chávez

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Present

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and
L'Chaim Theater Ensemble of USC
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The WETBACK

(...and justice for all?)

Written by
Myla Lichtman-Fields
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Irvine High School Theater
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Irvine, CA
October 5, 2001
8 p.m.



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