CHOICES/DECISIÓNES

Conceived & Directed by
Susan Franklin Tanner

Produced by
Travis Miller, Andy Garcia
Technical Director
Tom Goller

Original music by
Marco Calva
Visual Artist
David Herrarte
Written by
Louis Ayala, Alicia Brichaux, Marco Calva, Alberto Cervantes, Maria Fajardo, Andy Galvez, Maria Gaspar, Jenny Guevara, Cynthia Martinez, Ileana Morales, Wendy Morfin, Karen Pena, Reyna Pena, Fernando Sanchez, Teresa Serrano, Nancy Ventura, and Susan Franklin Tanner

The Cast

Singer          Marco Calva
Mario           Fernando Sanchez, Marco Calva
Samantha        Maria Gaspar, Jenny Guevara, Cynthia Martinez,
                Teresa Serrano, Alicia Brichaux
Elena           Ileana Morales, Wendy Morfin, Karen Pena,
                Reyna Pena, Nancy Ventura

This project was funded in part by grants from Mentor LA and The Diane Middleton Foundation

DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS

Choices/Decisiónes was created through a collaboration between Susie Tanner, Producing/Artistic Director of TheatreWorkers’ Project, a group of 9th - 12th grade students, and Travis Miller & Andy Garcia, English teachers from the School of Communication & Global Awareness, Manual Arts High in So Central Los Angeles. The goal was to create a performance piece about Healthcare as seen from both a personal and global perspective. We met 3 times a week for 5 weeks during an Intersession class and then after school once a week for several
months. With the exception of two students, none had ever done anything like this before. The majority of the students were English Language Learners. Miller & Garcia introduced factual, primary source material and the students were given presentations about HIV/AIDS by a social worker. They also learned to use a video camera with the help of video artist. Tanner alternated with the academic teachers by running improvisational theatre and writing workshops that yielded the students’ poetry and prose. Their creative work, combined with their research, dictated the monologue format of the piece, which Tanner structured.

The students created three characters whose lives intertwine: Mario, a rich boy who is drawn to the low life; Samantha, a sheltered, Costa Rican immigrant from a good family; and Elena, a doctor who worked in Namibia at a pediatric AIDS clinic. Mario engages in unsafe sex in risky environments and contracts HIV; he and Samantha fall in love, and in a moment of passion, have unprotected sex; she becomes pregnant and HIV positive. They tell their parents about the pregnancy, but not about the HIV. That is too frightening to reveal. They find a support group, run by Elena, who became HIV positive from a needle stick. The play offers no solutions, but rather asks a question: what would you do? The cast engaged in a Second Act discussion with the audience after each performance with the goal of raising consciousness, creating dialogue and debunking myths. The play was performed for three large audiences of students at Manual Arts and in a theatre space before an audience of parents, educators, teens and theatre professionals.

As the students took the stage, they joined centuries of theatre artists and playwrights who have grappled with the questions of “choice”, “consequence” and “mortality”. This integrated curriculum project, that seamlessly combined Theatre with academic studies, brought these large questions to life through students’ powerful creativity and both the audience and the participants were moved by the experience.

**EXCERPT FROM “CHOICES/DECISIONES”**

**MARIO**
We used to go to the same school. We fell in love with each other and decided to have a relationship. I wasn’t brave enough to tell Samantha about my health conditions. I was afraid to have sex with her because I didn’t want to pass the virus to her. But we both couldn’t resist the temptation of passion and one night we had sex without protection.

*MARCO sings a love song in Spanish*

**SAMANTHA**
After a month, I found out that I was pregnant. The doctor at the clinic asked me to have a routine AIDS test. I wasn’t afraid and I took it.
ALL ACTORS
The test was positive.
(all actors sit on floor or chairs to watch video clip of discussion about HIV & pregnancy)

SAMANTHA
HIV. AIDS. When I hear those words my heart breaks in two—knowing that I'm infected.

ALL
A fear surrounds me. Fear consumes me.

MARIO
It’s like I’m lost in the darkness and I can’t find a way to get out.

SAMANTHA
I couldn’t believe it and I wondered how it could have happened. I called Mario and asked him to meet me. I told him I had something important to tell him. I didn’t know how I would tell him or how he would react. But I knew he was the only one I had ever been with.

MARIO
I didn’t know yet that Samantha was pregnant. When she told me about the test and her pregnancy, we had a fight. I felt breathless. At first, I didn’t believe her. We fought and we blamed each other. We needed to make someone responsible for our misery.

SAMANTHA
Why did you do this to me?

MARIO
You knew about my past and you told me it didn’t matter.

SAMANTHA
Yes, but this is the worst thing that could happen.

MARIO
I was the one who wanted to wait because I knew about my situation.

SAMANTHA
If you want to blame me, I’ll take the responsibility….by myself…

MARIO
No! this can be solved but we have to go through this together.

ALL ACTORS
After awhile, they forgave each other and decided to stay together.

MARIO & SAMAMTHA
But we had no idea how we would live. Or what we would do. Or how we would tell our parents.

ALL ELENAS
After the fight between Mario and Samantha, each went home in different directions. Mario felt guilty—he knew he could have prevented this. He did not sleep that night.
ALL MARIOS
I could just walk away.

ACTOR (MARIA)
What a night like this
Walking in the dark
hidden from the light
A young woman passes by
Untold by the risk of
danger, she feels brave enough
to face her disgrace
She only walks at
night because at noon
She feels doom
Her own self-imagination
makes her a woman from
nowhere
Death and life lives
within her
Knowing that she may
not be here soon.

ALL ELENAS
Samantha felt like the world was on her shoulders. She couldn’t walk away. All she could think about was the life inside of her.

JENNY (holding a doll)
I don’t want to have you.
I don’t want to kill you.
You were just a mistake.
I don’t want to love you.
The pain and fear get into
My soul, making me think:
What will it be like to be
A young lady trying to be a mother?
I remember just yesterday when
I used to play with my Barbies.
And now I have you
And with my weariness, I hurt you.

ALL SAMANTHAS
That night, I had a dream.

ILEANA
We are humans
We are wonderful. We are women
We are not monsters
We have the capacity to keep our babies
Is the pain of giving birth worth the
Smiles of our child?
Now these words are too late
I already aborted. I apologize
For that my sweet
I'm sorry even though this sorrow doesn’t make sense
I was too young. I couldn’t
Understand what I was doing.
Now I understand that you
Were part of me
The blood that passed through
Your veins was the same
That passed through mine.

MARIÁ
Giving life is painful, but giving it away is worse.
Making it happen is easy, but
Taking care of it is not.

ALL ACTORS
Choices. Decisiones. What would you do?

TheatreWorkers’ Project
Conceived in 1983 by Susan Franklin Tanner with funding from the California Arts Council and the Steelworkers Oldtimers Foundation, TheatreWorkers’ Project is dedicated to providing opportunities for working people, the unemployed and underserved youth to give voice to their feelings, stories and aspirations through the medium of Theatre. Our nationally recognized work has included creating and producing documentary performance pieces with unemployed steelworkers, striking meatpackers, local shipbuilders and Longshoremen. Most recently, TheatreWorkers’ has created performance pieces about the Patriot Act with students from Cal State LA EOP and “A PLACE AT THE TABLE/UN LUGAR EN LA MESA” about Immigration with students from The School of Communication and Global Awareness at Manual Arts High School in South Central Los Angeles.