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Family Plays

LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIA

by Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

*“As long as you give it
del corazón, it is a gift, niña.”*

LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIA

by Roxanne Schroeder-Arce was commissioned by and premiered at Plano Repertory Theatre, Plano, TX. This play reveals a varied and intimate view of the lives of a Latino family during Christmas – how they prepare for this festive holiday, cultural foods during this season, traditional values passed down through generations. Woven with Spanish and English throughout, this is a heartwarming, contemporary story about redemption and the true miracle of giving, with a dramatic ending that is touching and visually surprising.

SUMMARY: Thirteen-year-old *Estrella*, who calls herself “Star” to gain acceptance from the non-Latino students at the Catholic school she attends, is torn between her family’s cultural traditions and the exciting life she imagines exists in the homes of mainstream Americans. In trying to keep up with Sarah and Emilie, *Estrella* rejects Spanish and singing with her Latino church choir in favor of the after school choir. This causes trouble with her *mami*, who desperately wants *Estrella* to retain her Latino culture. To boost *Estrella*’s confidence, *Mami* and *Papi* give *Estrella* the responsibility of choosing and purchasing the family gift to the baby Jesus to be presented at the Christmas service at church. When faced with this task, *Estrella* succumbs to peer pressure and spends all of the money on gifts for Sarah and Emilie, leaving nothing for *El Niño*. Only a miracle can save *Estrella* and her family from disgrace. The spirit of *Estrella*’s grandmother – *Abuela* – guides her in her dreams to make the ultimate choice – to give *del corazón* – from her heart. Code: LF6.

APPROX. RUNNING TIME: 50 MINUTES

CAST: 12 (6F, 4M, 2 EITHER) PLUS CHORUS OR 5 WITH DOUBLING (3F, 2M) PLUS CHORUS.

SETTING: SIMPLE, OR ELABORATE AS DESIRED

COSTUMES: CONTEMPORARY

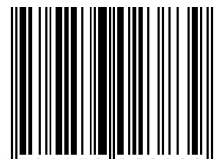
MUSIC: Songs traditional to the Christmas season and the Latino Catholic church are sung as a part of the play. (Lyrics included in the play script.)

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Legend of the Poinsettia

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By

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION CREDIT

LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIA was commissioned by and premiered at Plano Repertory Theatre in Plano, Texas on November 30, 2000. It was directed by Patti Neff, and musical direction was by Jeff Crouse.

Original Cast:

ESTRELLA	Jennifer Zapeda
MARIA/ABUELA	Annie Garza
CARLOS	Michael Javier
PABLO	Alex Gonzalez
EMILIE	Emily Walter
SARAH	Morgan Spollin
MISS ROGERS	Sherry Raymond
MR. FLOWERS	Tim Elliott
THOMAS	Matt Page
PADRE	Eduardo Gonzalez
ENSEMBLE	Noelle Fabian, Sara Mack, Sydney Jones

PRODUCTION NOTES

LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIA can be produced simply with suggestive settings or with more elaborate settings. Action takes place in two homes, a school, a church, and in a dream world. At the end of the play, weeds turn to poinsettias as the flowers fill the stage, offering an interesting challenge for designers.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ESTRELLA:	13, sings in the church and school choirs and is confused about the two cultures that are pulling at her
PABLO:	8, Estrella's younger brother, sensitive and bright
MARIA:	Estrella's mother, a singer since birth
CARLOS:	Estrella's father, a writer for a local paper, a dreamer
PADRE:	the priest at Estrella's church
SARAH:	13, Estrella's friend
EMILIE:	13, Estrella's friend
MISS ROGERS:	the school choir director; may be cast male, Mr. Rogers.
MR. FLOWERS:	Estrella's history teacher; may be cast female, Ms. Flowers.
CHOIR SINGERS/ STUDENTS:	at both the church and the school
ABUELA:	the spirit of Estrella's grandmother
THOMAS:	Young adult, Sarah's older brother
GIRL:	dancer, plays Estrella in her first dream, as well as the girl in Estrella's second dream

CASTING FOR 5 ACTORS and CHORUS

ACTOR 1:	ESTRELLA/GIRL
ACTOR 2:	PABLO/THOMAS
ACTOR 3:	MARIA/SARAH
ACTOR 4:	CARLOS/PADRE/MR. ROGERS/MR. FLOWERS
ACTOR 5:	EMILIE/ABUELA
CHORUS:	SINGERS FOR CHOIRS

Special Thanks to:

Kris G. Andrews, Suzan Zeder, Coleman A. Jennings, Joan Lazarus, Tamara Goldbogen, Emilie Shields, Maria F. Rocha, Victor Saenz, Frank Garza, G'ann Boyd, Stacy Austin, Patti Neff, Mark Fleischer, Shane Moreman, Robert Colby, Erika Cesar, Sara Simons, Miguel Septien, Rianna Villemaire, Carlos Schroeder-Arce

LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIA

By Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

SCENE ONE

(Lights rise on stage right where Estrella is on couch dreaming. In the dream, Girl plays Dream Estrella. Dream Estrella rises near Estrella and dances to where Estrella's family has congregated stage right. Dream Estrella dances and sings in Spanish with her family and others at their church. They sing a traditional Mexican hymn, NOCHE DE PAZ. [See Spanish and English lyrics on pages 50-51.] The song is full of life, and Dream Estrella and her family are enjoying the singing. Dream Estrella has pigtails and a traditional Mexican skirt over her other skirt. The group keeps singing, softer and softer as Dream Estrella moves center stage with no one noticing, and removes her top skirt. She takes down her hair, placing the hair ties in her pocket, now appearing a few years older. Lights begin to rise on stage left, where students on risers sing. Dream Estrella walks to stage left as lights rise to full and students sing SILENT NIGHT. Dream Estrella is late, and everyone notices. She gets on risers and sings with the others, gaining more confidence as she continues to sing. Dream Estrella dances between both groups and seems to be pulled by both. She finally moves back to couch where Estrella sleeps. Then Dream Estrella exits with everyone. Papi walks to Estrella. She wakes up to her papi's voice.)

CARLOS: *Niña, Estrella, wake up, mi angelita.* (She rolls over to face the audience.) *Bebita, you can go to your own bed, now.*

ESTRELLA: Okay.

CARLOS: *Ya, you okay?*

ESTRELLA: I'm fine.

CARLOS: It was a tiring day, huh?

ESTRELLA: Yes, *Papi*. Did everybody leave?

CARLOS: *Sí, a long time ago. You slept como dos horas. I have something for you.*

ESTRELLA: You do?

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CARLOS: *Sí*. Something very important that I thought you might like.

ESTRELLA: I can't believe you found time to get it, with everything going on.

CARLOS: *Mande?*

ESTRELLA: The CD burner; that's what you are talking about, right?

CARLOS: No, *angelita*, I was talking about *Abuela's* manger. *Mira*, she put it out here (*Points it out on the table*) even though she was so sick, she still had that Christmas spirit. (*Referring to Abuela*) *¡Qué mujer!* (*Noticing that Estrella is disappointed*) What, *Estrella*? Don't you like it? I thought you would be honored. She put this out every Christmas, since I was a child, since I can remember.

ESTRELLA: It's great, *Papi*. I am just wondering what I am going to do with a manger. (*Pause*) Well, good night, *Papi*.

CARLOS: *Sabes*, I was about your age when mi *abuelo* murió.

ESTRELLA: You told me that already.

CARLOS: No *es fácil*. *Pero nunca es fácil*. Not even now.

ESTRELLA: I know. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, *Papi*, I just really want that CD burner, you know?

CARLOS: *Sí, yo sé*. I'll get it as soon as I can. *Tú sabes*, you were talking in your sleep?

ESTRELLA: Really?

CARLOS: And singing, too.

ESTRELLA: I guess I was dreaming.

CARLOS: About *Abuela*?

ESTRELLA: Just about stuff. I'm going to go to bed now.

CARLOS: *Duerme bien*. *Estrella* – (*She turns.*) you don't have to go to school tomorrow *si no quieres*.

ESTRELLA: I know, but I want to go.

CARLOS: *'Ta bueno. Te quiero, Estrella.*

MARIA: *(Entering) Ya, Pablo is finally asleep.*

ESTRELLA: I'm going.

MARIA: *(Surprised, thinking she is leaving the house) ¿A dónde?*

ESTRELLA: I'm going to sleep, too. Geez.

CARLOS: *Buenas noches, Estrella. Te quiero.*

ESTRELLA: Good night. *(She turns back to the table and picks up a piece of the manger, unseen by her parents, and takes it to her room.)*

MARIA: It was a long day. You okay?

CARLOS: I wouldn't worry about me, *Maria.*

MARIA: *Mande?*

CARLOS: *Los niños, Estrella, ¿qué vamos hacer?*

MARIA: *Estrella?* She seems fine, *Carlos. Ella es bien fuerte.*

CARLOS: *Sí, ¿verdad? Pero ese es el problema.* She is not facing the fact that *Abuela* is gone. She asked me about a CD player, in the middle of all of this.

MARIA: Then she's just being herself. That's a good sign. *Ella es bien chiflada.*

CARLOS: *Como su madre. (They laugh.)*

MARIA: You will get a Christmas tree tomorrow?

CARLOS: Don't you think it's early?

MARIA: Christmas is in less than two weeks.

CARLOS: *Pues, no, I mean after...*

MARIA: *¿Abuela?* *Carlos,* she started to put up the decorations. She would want us to have a normal Christmas, *¿no? (Pause) Yo sé, Carlos. Es muy difícil.*

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CARLOS: *No, está bien.*

MARIA: *Sabes, es por los niños.*

CARLOS: *Sí, mi amor. Yo sé. (Lights cross fade to Estrella walking quietly in the dimly lit room.)*

PABLO: It's okay, *Estrella*. I'm not really asleep.

ESTRELLA: *Amá* said you were.

PABLO: I knew she wouldn't leave until I was asleep, so I sort of pretended – only a little.

ESTRELLA: Isn't that a sin, oh perfect one?

PABLO: No, because I was really helping her.

ESTRELLA: Whatever. Well, good night.

PABLO: *Estrella?*

ESTRELLA: *Yah.*

PABLO: Are you going to school tomorrow?

ESTRELLA: Yes.

PABLO: *Mami* and *Papi* said we didn't have to.

ESTRELLA: I know.

PABLO: I thought you wouldn't.

ESTRELLA: Why?

PABLO: Just 'cause, I guess. I'm going to go, too.

ESTRELLA: Oh.

PABLO: *Estrella?*

ESTRELLA: *Sí.*

PABLO: Are you sad?

ESTRELLA: Of course I'm sad, *Pablo*. Why do you ask such dumb questions?

PABLO: Sorry. It's just – I thought you might be kind of happy.

ESTRELLA: What?

PABLO: Well, nobody will make you speak Spanish any more and maybe now you can have your friends over again.

ESTRELLA: What are you talking about?

PABLO: It seems like ever since *Abuela* moved in, you never had your friends over anymore.

ESTRELLA: I moved schools, Dork! I don't have those friends anymore.

PABLO: What about your new friends? I see you with those two girls all the time. How come you don't introduce me?

ESTRELLA: You promised that if we went to the same school, you would pretend not to see me and I would pretend not to see you.

PABLO: I don't remember that.

ESTRELLA: Well, we did.

PABLO: Your friends pretend not to see anybody.

ESTRELLA: Shut up, *Pablo*. At least I have friends.

PABLO: I didn't mean to make you mad. (*Pause*) *Estrella*?

ESTRELLA: ¿*Qué*?

PABLO: Aren't you going to say your prayers?

ESTRELLA: Why is that so important to you?

PABLO: Well, I am sure that *Abuela* can see us now. So, you better say them or she's going to feel bad.

ESTRELLA: (*She gets on her knees, with little feeling*) Dear God, bless *Amá* and *Papi*.

PABLO: *Y Pablo*.

ESTRELLA: And *Pablo*.

PABLO: *Y Abuela*.

ESTRELLA: She doesn't need to be blessed anymore, *Pablo*. She's already in heaven.

PABLO: How do you know? She could be waiting – you know how they say...

ESTRELLA: And please bless *Abuela*. Amen. Good night, *Pablo*.

PABLO: I love you.

ESTRELLA: (*An obligatory response*) Me too.

SCENE TWO

(*Abuela enters slowly as Estrella dreams of her singing FELIZ NAVIDAD. May be sung with or without accompaniment as desired.*)

ABUELA: (*Sings*) *Feliz Navidad, Feliz Navidad
Feliz Navidad prospero año y felicidad.*

Feliz Navidad...

(*As she sings, lights come down on Estrella. She moves to the platform with the other students in choir class. As Abuela's voice fades, lights come up on the choir at school, and Estrella realizes that she is daydreaming. The school buzzer ends the class.*)

[*Sound Cue: school buzzer*]

MISS ROGERS: That sounded pretty good, but something is missing. Maybe we need more from the sopranos. We'll figure it out on Monday. (*Students begin to leave the risers.*) Remember, we will be drawing names for our gift swap next week, and our Christmas recital is coming up soon. I will also let you know where we will perform this year. I have some exciting prospects. Have a great weekend. (*Students file out.*) Star, please stay for a moment.

ESTRELLA: (*Walks down risers and waits*) Sure. (*To Sarah and Emilie*) Hey, I'll meet you guys right outside. Wait for me, okay?

(They leave with others.)

MISS ROGERS: Star, are you feeling better today?

ESTRELLA: What do you mean?

MISS ROGERS: You weren't in school yesterday, and I assume you were sick.

ESTRELLA: Yes, yes, I was sick, but I'm better today.

MISS ROGERS: Are you sure? You weren't paying attention at all today.

ESTRELLA: I'm sorry. I'll try to do better.

MISS ROGERS: I think you know that I really need your voice. I miss it when you are not giving it your all. When you came, about a year ago? Maybe less? I remember seeing a lot of promise in you. You seemed to love the music.

ESTRELLA: I do love the music.

MISS ROGERS: There is something I can't teach, Star, and that is that you have to sing from your heart.

ABUELA: *(A dim light on her across the stage)* *Mi niña, la canción necesita venir de tu corazón.*

MISS ROGERS: I have your name down for a possible solo for the Christmas concert. You want that, right? Star?

ESTRELLA: Yah, I do. I promise I'll be better tomorrow.

MISS ROGERS: I wrote your name down before all of this started. And then you were barely singing today, and you haven't even joined the after school choir.

ESTRELLA: I know, it's just that – *(Stalling)*

MISS ROGERS: Just that –?

ESTRELLA: Well, I usually go somewhere else after school.

MISS ROGERS: If you're looking for a solo, I'll need to see more of a commitment from you. But I believe that you can – I really do.

ESTRELLA: Okay, I can do more. I can do better.

MISS ROGERS: And you have to focus more when we rehearse. I am choosing some new selections and we'll see if something suits you, but I'll need to see a lot more interest and effort.

ESTRELLA: I can do that.

(Sarah and Emilie poke their heads in.)

SARAH: You coming, Star?

MISS ROGERS: So, you'll be at after school choir, today?

ESTRELLA: Ummmm – yes. If not today, definitely tomorrow. I just have to work something out. Thanks!

SARAH: *(As they walk downstage)* What'd you thank her for?

ESTRELLA: I think I'm finally going to get to do a solo.

EMILIE: You? That's weird.

SARAH: How rude, Emilie.

EMILIE: No, I only mean you don't even come to after school choir, and even then Miss Rogers never gives solos to anyone but Diane Thomas.

SARAH: Did you see her outfit today?

EMILIE: I swear she shops at K-Mart.

ESTRELLA: You had a solo, Sarah, in that first concert I went to here.

SARAH: Two lines – two words, probably – barely a solo. *(She sings)* I am – *(Emilie and Estrella clap.)* Hey, there has got to be a way to rig that gift swap thing. I mean, what if I spend like a bunch of money on somebody again, and then the person who gets my name gets me something really stupid?

EMILIE: Yah, like you got last year. Remember – oh, you came after that, Star. Sarah got this Kool-Aid sun visor and flip-flops...

SARAH: ...that would fit my dad and my brother's feet in them at the same time. I still need to figure out whose dad works at Kool-Aid. You know they didn't pay anything for them.

EMILIE: Remember that sun catcher that Suzie Mitchell made?

SARAH: Yah, it looked like she was in kindergarten.

EMILIE: Did you do the gift swap at your old school, Star?

ESTRELLA: No, they wouldn't let you talk about holidays in school. I think it sounds kind of fun.

SARAH: Well, I think it is kind of stupid. Giving gifts to people you don't even know. Last year I got Tom Wood's name, right, and I gave him this really nice sweater – I mean, way nicer than he deserves. I paid like fifty bucks for that thing, and I have seen him wear it like once.

EMILIE: It's been cold enough to wear it like once.

SARAH: Thanks, Emilie. Whose side are you on, anyway?

ESTRELLA: I thought there was a limit to how much you can spend?

SARAH: Only the cheap-os listen to that. What's bad is you can never be sure of who's going to get YOUR name, and if it will be one of those cheap-os.

ESTRELLA: Maybe we can trade, and make sure we get each other.

SARAH: Brilliant, Einstein. The problem is, Miss Rogers will tell everyone not to switch, and most people will listen.

EMILIE: We should just give each other stuff anyways, and then if any of us gets a dud gift, it won't feel so bad.

SARAH: Great idea, Em. *(To Estrella)* You think?

EMILIE: Oh, man, I know what I am going to get you, Star. *(She whispers to Sarah.)*

SARAH: Great idea, Em. That'll be tough to beat. Hey, let's hang out this weekend.