

Their Life Stories in Two One-Act Plays

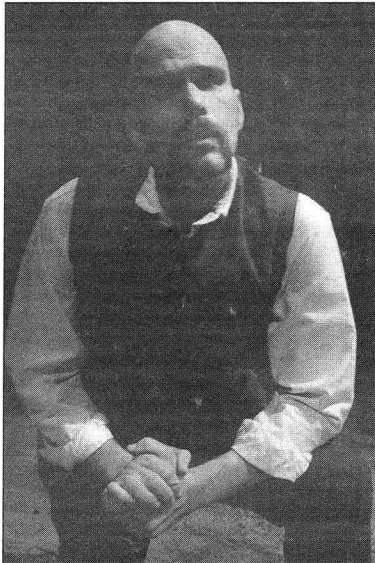
By ANDRES CHAVEZ AND
BIANCA P. GALLEGOS
Sun Staff Reporter

In Cesar Chavez y Bernardo de Galvez: Sons and Souls of California the theater audience gets a double history lesson and two examples of great theater: Two different one actor plays performed by two outstanding actors about two men who made great contributions to the history of the United States. The first play is about Bernardo de Galvez, a Spanish nobleman and military leader in Spanish America. Galvez's life, from a small boy in Spain to Governor-General American colony of New Spain, is told in a series of flashbacks. Galvez's crucial, but largely unknown, role in the Revolutionary War forms a large part of the play.

It was Galvez who sent money and supplies to George Washington's frostbitten and starving army at Valley Forge. Galvez who heeded Patrick Henry's plea for help and stopped the British from taking the Mississippi River. On a bare stage with just a table and a few props, Bruce Buonauro makes Galvez come alive. It's as if the old General is standing by the fireplace, brandy in hand, telling the stories himself. Buonauro weaves the different strands of Galvez's life into a grand tapestry that shows the man as well as the history. It is first rate acting. The second play, about Cesar E. Chavez, maintains the same high standard.

A small theater, scarcely larger than a living room, a pitch black stage and suddenly a spot light goes on, creating a pool of light illuminating a man and a table with a few objects on it including a United Farm Workers flag and a short handled hoe. "Madre? Is that you mother?" The man is speaking to La Virgen de Guadalupe. That's the opening of Sylmar resident Fred Blanco's one-man show about Cesar Chavez, which depicts periods of struggle for the famous labor leader who inspired a nation to seek justice for the poorest of America's laborers.

The play centers on Chavez at his most challenging moments as he speaks to La Virgen and relives moments of his life as he struggled to form the union. "I looked at it as a way for justice," Chavez tells La Virgen. "I saw it as a way to a better life. I need strength. I'm not so sure if I want to go on anymore. Mother, I want to go with you.



Bruce Buonauro and Sylmar resident Fred Blanco have produced Cesar E. Chavez y Bernardo de Galvez - two one man plays depicting the remarkable lives of two historic figures.



Please, Madre I'm asking you if you can help me, give me strength." During Chavez' life, he fasted for long periods drawing attention to his cause and the plight of farmworkers. The fasts were said to have taken their toll, draining him physically and mentally. In the play, La Virgen appears to Chavez during one of his fasts.

Blanco said that having the religious element in the play was in his point of view, being true to Chavez. "I thought it was very appropriate, some people have issues with religion but I felt it

was a big part of him. "Anyone who has followed the UFW movement knows that the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe was a really strong symbol, her image was present during marches and much inspiration was drawn from her," said Blanco. Once said Blanco, when Chavez was told he wasn't allowed to picket in front of a ranch, Chavez prayed to La Virgen in front of the ranch instead, making his point while avoiding the picket ban.

When Blanco's friend and co-producer, Bruce Buonauro, first

proposed the idea of producing a play about Chavez, Blanco felt a bit intimidated. "Cesar is so revered," said Blanco. "Many people who knew him are still alive and there's a lot of pressure to make sure you pay proper tribute to him." Blanco spent two years researching Chavez's life by reading books, newspaper articles and visiting the Cesar Chavez Museum. "I got as many books about Cesar as I could," said Blanco.

Blanco, who studied drama at Cal State University Northridge,

recently toured with the theater company, Traveling Lantern, an educational theater based in San Diego. Driving from town to town, he toured all over the United States, performing at many elementary and high schools. He sees the play fulfilling an educational gap. He spoke to several Los Angeles area teachers

who told him that in high school textbooks a maximum of "a couple paragraphs" are devoted to Chavez. "Chavez is very downplayed in the history books, and when books talk about him they portray him as very cold and stale," Blanco said, "I want it [the play] to be educational for children and inspire them to think big."

Blanco would like to also raise enough money to be able to rent a bigger theater and tour the play to elementary and high school kids. He would like to make the play an annual event.

"I would like to tour it on a bigger scale so more adults can enjoy it," he said.

The play is gathering momentum said Blanco. A woman working for a juvenile hall asked him if he would perform for their kids. He is scheduled to perform the play for 4th, 5th and 6th graders in Petaluma in Northern California. For this audience, Blanco will include a session to answer any questions the children might have on Chavez. In addition, Blanco is planning to perform at The Art Share in Los Angeles. There will be refreshments, art displays and live music.

see ONE-ACT PLAYS on page 10

Their Life Stories in Two One-Act Plays

continued from page 9

A Rhythm & Blues band will be performing after the play.

Blanco intends to make the play longer. He said common feedback he receives is that the 20 minute play is too short. "The audience is hungry to see more and that is always good. This means the play didn't drag too long and people enjoyed it," he said. Blanco said working on this play has been very satisfying, "I had a lady who approached me crying and told me 'it was truthful and very inspiring,' this was very fulfilling, she gave me hug. It almost brought me to tears."

Cesar Chavez y Bernardo de Galvez: Sons and Souls of California March 31 & April 1st will be performed at The Sierra Bonita Stage 1444 N. Sierra Bonita Avenue Los Angeles. On April 14 & 15 at The Arts Share 801 E. Fourth Place Los Angeles, CA Entrance on Hewitt Street between 4th & Traciton. For reservations call (818) 337-9267. General admission \$15. Students & Seniors \$12. For more information call (818) 337-9267

'Sons and Souls of California' Performs at the El Portal Theatre

NORTH HOLLYWOOD – *Sons and Souls of California* features solo performances depicting the lives of two great Latino men from American history: Cesar E. Chavez and Bernardo de Galvez. A joint production taking two very different men, from two different centuries and highlighting the vital contributions they made to our country. One is Cesar Chavez, a man of recent memory who was co-founder of the United Farm Workers and revered as one of the most inspirational civil rights

leaders of our time. The other is Bernardo de Galvez, a man whose name is not as familiar but contributed greatly to our country's success during the American Revolution. The production has spent the last year touring Southern California venues large and small and looks forward to ending its first year on the road, at the historic El Portal Theatre.

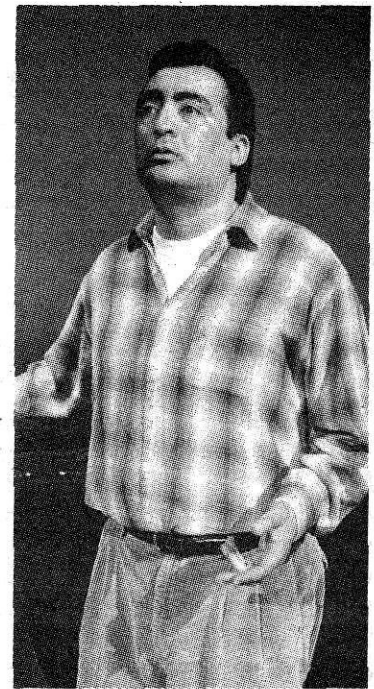
Running the last week in March, to coincide with the upcoming Chavez holiday, the show will play in the evenings for

general audiences, with special matinee performances adapted for schools. In the *Stories of Bernardo de Galvez*, the Spanish governor and general narrates the story of his life while recounting his involvement with the events that shaped the world.

In the *Stories of Cesar Chavez*, we follow the Mexican-American civil rights leader during his first fast in 1968. Led on a spiritual journey by the Virgen de Guadalupe, he finds new strength during one of the most turbulent

times of his life. Here we meet not only Cesar, but also the influential, delightful and sometimes provocative characters from his past.

Both pieces are minimal in style while the Chavez piece does contain some strong language. The production has already blazed quite a trail and has proven to be both enlightening and rewarding for everyone involved. For more information, go to www.storiesofcesarchavez.com.



Fred Blanco in "Sons and Souls of California."

SONS & SOULS
of California

BRUCE BUONAURO as BERNARDO DE GALVEZ FRED BLANCO as CESAR CHAVEZ

— TWO SOLO PERFORMANCES —

MARCH 28 - 31, 2007 EL PORTAL THEATRE N. HOLLYWOOD
www.elportaltheatre.com or (818) 811-4111



Los Angeles Marathon XXII

The 26.2-mile run goes straight through the heart of L.A. and draws more than 20,000 participants. At 8 a.m. Visit www.lamarathon.com for race and route information. Mar. 4

01 THURSDAY

Lila Downs

The bluesy songstress, who was raised in Oaxaca and the United States, performs cuts from her latest album, *La Cantina*. At 8. Tickets, \$15-\$50. Royce Hall, UCLA campus, Westwood, 310-825-2101, www.uclalive.org.

02 FRIDAY

Shark Lagoon Night

Get up close and personal with the ocean's ultimate predators. 6-9. Free with admission. Aquarium of the Pacific, 100 Aquarium Way, Long Beach, 562-590-3100. For complete schedule: www.aquariumofthepacific.org.

03 SATURDAY

Winter Blues

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee Mavis Staples brings her gospel and R&B sound to this annual concert series. At 8. Tickets, \$40-\$45. Luckman Theatre, Cal State L.A. campus, L.A., 323-343-6600, www.luckmanarts.org.

Saints & Sinners XX

This annual exhibit features religious artifacts from Mexico that represent both the sacred and the profane, including *milagros*, *santos*, and *retablos*. *The Folk Tree*, 217 S. Fair Oaks Ave., Pasadena, 626-795-8733, www.folktree.com. Through Apr. 7.

04 SUNDAY

The Modern West: American Landscapes, 1890-1950

The first major exhibit to explore the role of the American West in the development of modernism in the U.S. features work by Georgia O'Keeffe, Ansel Adams, and Jackson Pollock. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., L.A., 323-857-6000, www.lacma.org. Through June 3.

06 TUESDAY

Christina Aguilera

The petite diva's "Back to Basics" tour is sure to wow crowds with Roberto Cavalli-designed costumes and the Pussycat Dolls and Danity Kane as opening acts. At 7:30. Tickets, \$55-\$95. Staples Center, 1111 S. Figueroa St., L.A., 213-742-7340, www.staplescenter.com.

Zoopsia: New Works by Tim Hawkinson

The internationally recognized L.A.-based artist exhibits four new works that use different household and industrial items to emit sound, evoke breath, and record the passage of time. Free, but reservations are required. Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Dr., L.A., 310-440-7300, www.getty.edu. Through Sept. 9.

08 THURSDAY

BatUCLaDa

UCLA's award-winning Brazilian drum ensemble invites you to this outdoor performance, where you'll experience a blend of samba, reggae, *maracatu*, and more. At 6. Fowler Museum, UCLA campus, Westwood, 310-825-4361, www.fowler.ucla.edu.

09 FRIDAY

Eartlart

The L.A. rockers share hauntingly elegant songs from their latest album, which has been described as "end-of-the-movie-music-melancholy." At 7:30. Harold M. Williams Auditorium, Getty Center, 1200 Getty Center Dr., L.A., 310-440-7300, www.getty.edu.

10 SATURDAY

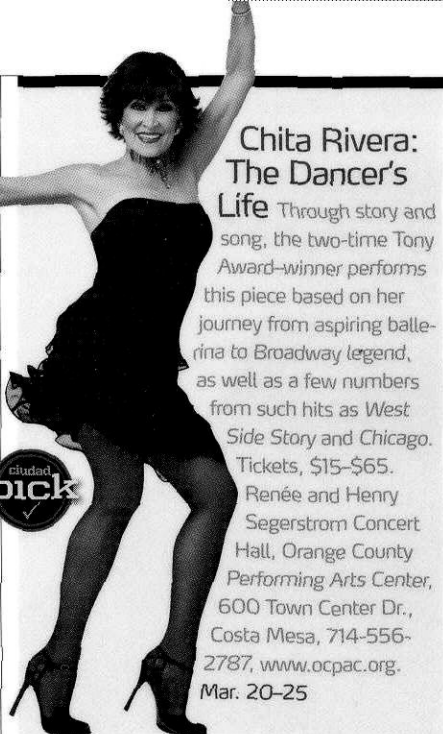
The Tree Show

Be one with nature and check out local talent Mark Ryden's latest exhibit, which includes paintings and sculptures of trees, nymphs, and creatures of the forest. Michael Kohn Gallery, 8071 Beverly Blvd., L.A., 323-658-8088, www.kohngallery.com. Through Apr. 29.



Sons & Souls of California

These one-man performances highlight the lives of two pivotal Latino figures in American history: Cesar Chávez and Bernardo de Galvez. Tickets, \$22; \$17 students, groups, seniors. El Portal Theatre, 5269 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, 866-811-4111; www.storiesofcesarchavez.com. Matinee performances through Mar. 30; evening performances Mar. 29-31. Mar. 26



Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life

Through story and song, the two-time Tony Award-winner performs this piece based on her journey from aspiring ballerina to Broadway legend, as well as a few numbers from such hits as *West Side Story* and *Chicago*. Tickets, \$15-\$65. Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, Orange County Performing Arts Center, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa, 714-556-2787, www.ocpac.org. Mar. 20-25

Little Richard

The self-proclaimed originator of rock 'n' roll is still goin' strong, and he'll be rockin' in the O.C. tonight. At 7. Tickets, \$43. House of Blues Anaheim, 1530 S. Disneyland Dr., Anaheim, 714-778-2583, www.hob.com.

12 MONDAY

Jorge Drexler

His song "Al Otro Lado del Río," from *The Motorcycle Diaries*, won him an Oscar and instant fame here. At 8. Tickets, \$25-\$42. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., L.A., 323-850-2000, <http://wdch.laphil.com>.

15 THURSDAY

13th Annual Recent Spanish Cinema

The American Cinematheque's popular Spanish cinema series features a week of wild and uncompromising new films. At 7:30. Tickets, \$10; \$8 students and seniors; \$7 children and members. Egyptian Theatre, 6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, 323-466-3456, www.americancinematheque.com. Through Mar. 24.

Distracted

Written by Lisa Loomer, this production navigates the hilarious path a mother takes to get to the bottom of her son's recently diagnosed attention deficit disorder. At 8. Tickets, \$20-\$55. Mark Taper Forum at the Music Center, 135 N. Grand Ave., L.A., 213-628-2772, www.centertheatregroup.org. Through Apr. 29.

18 SUNDAY

The Birds

Culture Clash takes on this classic Greek comedy with the help of local musicians, designers, and actors who have appeared in *Chavez Ravine*, *Water & Power*, and *Nacho Libre*. At 3. Free with reservation. Getty Villa, 17985 Pacific Coast Hwy., Pacific Palisades, 310-440-7300, www.getty.edu. Through Mar. 18.

20 TUESDAY

1984

Based on George Orwell's timeless novel and directed by Tim Robbins, this Actors' Gang adaptation trans-

'Souls of California'

Playwrights Fred Blanco and Bruce Buonaro created one-man shows around the lives of Cesar Chavez and Bernardo de Galvez

By John Farrell

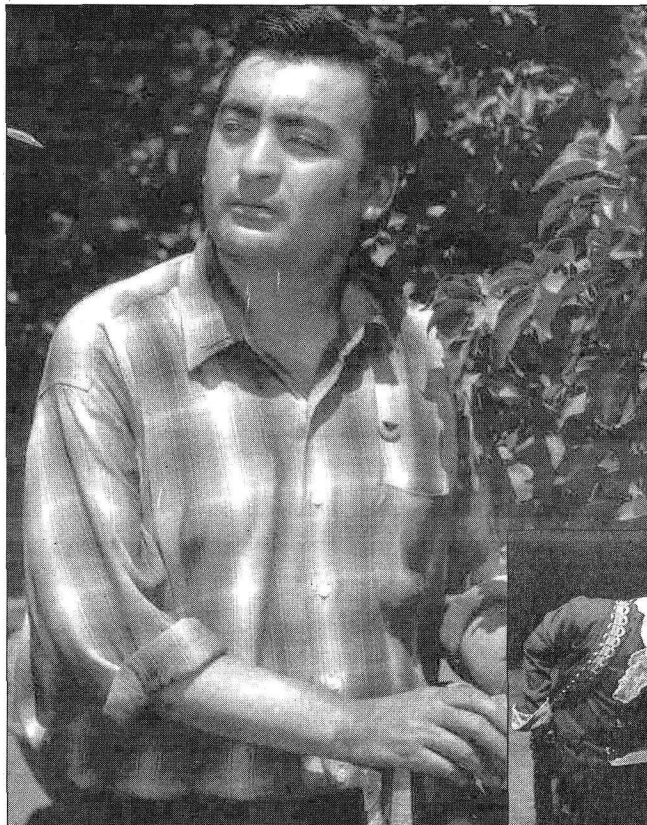
Special to the Press-Telegram

TWO MEN. Two very different centuries. But each, one a governor for King Carlos III of Spain, the other an American of Mexican ancestry born near Yuma, Ariz., made vital contributions to the creation of the country we live in today.

One is Cesar Chavez, a man of recent memory (he died in 1993) who was co-organizer of the United Farm Workers, remembered in a California state holiday and in the memory of the thousands still living whose lives were touched by his thoughts and deeds.

The other is Bernardo de Galvez, a man whose name is much less familiar. Galvez, Spanish governor of Louisiana during the American Revolution, backed the Americans against the British, channeled money and supplies to George Washington's army and, when Spain declared war on Great Britain in support of the Americans, won several important battles in Florida and Alabama that denied the British bases in the Caribbean.

The two never met, of course, and their lives only recently came together when playwright/actors Fred Blanco and Bruce Buonaro decided to pool their talents. The one-man shows they created around the lives of these two men, called "Cesar E. Chavez y Bernardo de Galvez: Sons and Souls of California," premiered at a theater in West Hollywood earlier this year and is now making its Long Beach debut in three performances this weekend at the Found Theatre in downtown Long Beach.



Fred Blanco is farm labor organizer Cesar Chavez and Bruce Buonaro, right, is Spanish governor of Louisiana Bernardo de Galvez in "Cesar E. Chavez y Bernardo de Galvez: Sons and Souls of California."

The two one-act plays (Chavez is played by Blanco and Galvez by Buonaro) were created independently, the two authors said during a recent phone conversation that interrupted a rehearsal at Buonaro's home. The play about Galvez was commissioned by the Galvez Project from Buonaro, and in a different version it has become part of Knott's Berry Farm's regular program of historical drama. Blanco's play about Chavez was a bit more problematic.

"Doing a play about Cesar Chavez was a bit intimidating because he is so revered and so many people still living knew him," Blanco said. Buonaro talked him into it, though. "Eventually I gave in. I said, 'It's a brilliant idea and I'll go for it.'"

"The idea behind these shows is to present these two men in a very human way," Blanco said. "Many people know of Chavez but not about him. I wanted to make my play very moving, to



encourage people to go and learn more about him. I've had people who were involved in the movement come up to me after a performance and tell me how grateful they were."

The California connection in the title doesn't mean that Galvez ever made it to California, Spain's most distant and sparsely populated settlement in the Americas. But he did put California to use, routing money collected from the missions in the state to the Americans. Galvez had been in

"GALVEZ AND CHAVEZ"

What: "Cesar E. Chavez y Bernardo de Galvez: Sons and Souls of California," two one-act plays making their Long Beach debut

Where: Found Theatre, 599 Long Beach Blvd., Long Beach

When: 8 tonight and Saturday, 5 p.m. Sunday

Tickets: \$10

Information: (562) 433-3363

touch with Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry as early as 1776, and used income from California (and cattle, some 10,000 of them from Texas) to support the Americans and his own army, which drove the British from Florida and Alabama.

"A direct envoy of George Washington, named Oliver Pollock, collected money from Galvez for the Continental Army," Buonaro said. "Guns and supplies also came from Galvez. At Valley Forge, many Americans were dressed in Spanish uniforms, which were very much like the American uniforms."

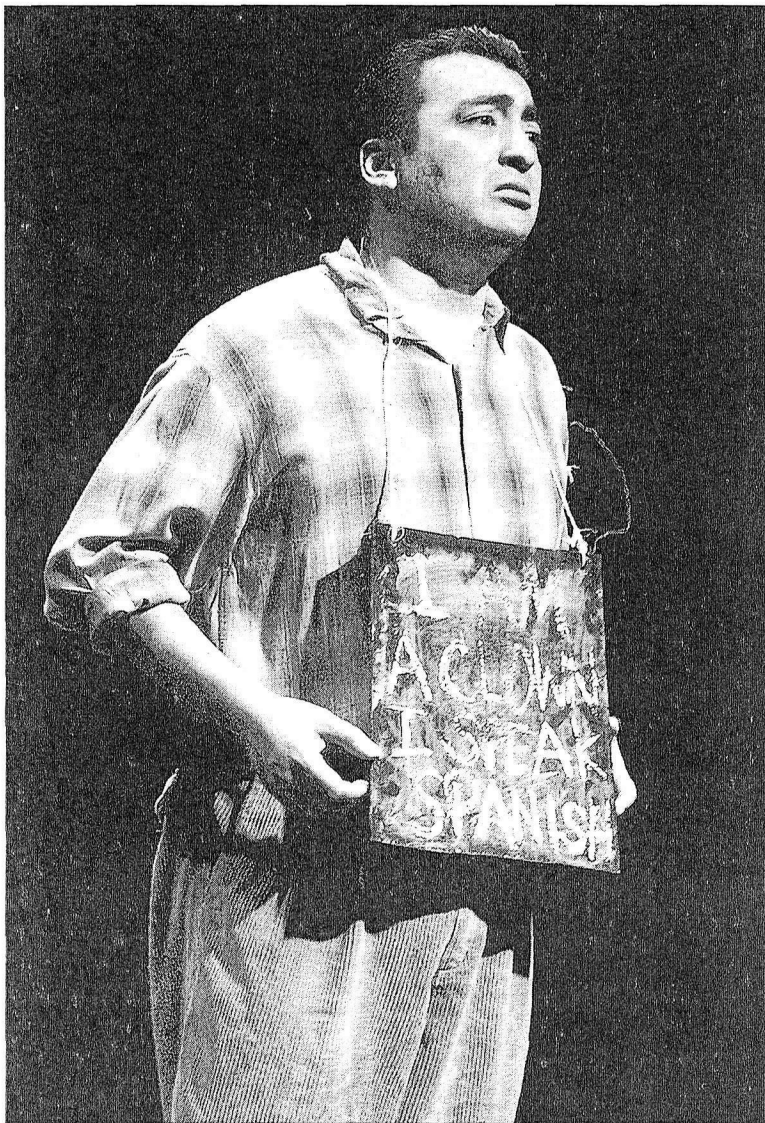
Altogether some \$8 million was given to the fledgling United States, and, after the war, the Spanish government wrote off the loans without requiring repayment.

Chavez's life is much better known. He grew up in Arizona during the Great Depression and became a farm worker not by choice but by necessity. In the 1960s he helped organize migrant workers into unions, notably the United Farm Workers, using a philosophy based partly on the non-violent precepts of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Chavez successfully focused public attention on workers who had long been ignored and exploited.

Both actors did extensive research on the characters they portray. Buonaro was able to see an unpublished manuscript of Galvez's letters to his father, amongst other sources. Blanco spent two years reading and researching Chavez's life story.

John Farrell is a Long Beach

Gira de un solo hombre recuerda a César Chávez



Especial para Vida en el Valle
 Fred Blanco ha montado una obra como solista sobre la vida del líder campesino César E. Chávez.
 Fred Blanco has launched a one-man presentation about the life of farmworker leader César E. Chávez.

Por RAY ESTRADA
 Vida en el Valle

Fred Blanco tendrá un mes muy ocupado.

El actor con base en Los Ángeles sin tener auspicio o el respaldo de grupos no lucrativos, aun así continuará con sus planes de llevar en su programa las palabras de César Chávez a varios lugares.

Blanco tiene planes de presentar su autoproducido programa bilingüe en el Teatro El Portal en Los Ángeles del 29 al 31 de marzo, muy a tiempo para el día de fiesta estatal en honor del líder y fundador de la Unión de Campesinos.

"El show que presenta a estudiantes es diferente que el de los adultos," dijo Blanco, quien presentará 'Las historias de César Chávez.' Recientemente, Blanco se ha presentado en las bibliotecas de Whittier y Burbank y en la conferencia de la Asociación de Educadores Bilingües de California, celebrada en Long Beach. También presentó una versión de 40 minutos en escuelas en varias ciudades incluyendo a Wasco.

Entre sus planes cuenta con una presentación en el Centro Chávez en Keane, en mayo. Ese

mes, Blanco llevará su show al este del país, a los colegios universitarios de Maryland.

Blanco dice que inició su gira con el Show de Chávez el año pasado a insistencia de un amigo, Bruce Buonauro, quien representa a figuras históricas como el Padre Junípero Serra, fundador de las misiones de California, el General Bernardo de Gálvez, quien ayudó al novato gobierno de los Estados Unidos, durante los tiempos revolucionarios. Buonauro planea presentarse con Blanco en la mayoría de los Shows de Chávez.

"Mi show se inicia cuando César Chávez, principia su huelga de hambre en 1966 y fuera visitado por la Virgen de Guadalupe," dice Blanco. "Ella lo lleva hacia su pasado."

Blanco recrea los problemas y dudas que tubo Chávez mientras que iniciaba la sindicalización en su primera gran escala, la organización de los trabajadores campesinos desafiando a la poderosa industria agrícola en California y eventualmente otros estados occidentales.

"También hago el papel de un campesino, un miembro de los estibadores y un zoot suiter," dijo

Blanco de los otros personajes incluidos en su show que dan luz a la vida de Chávez.

De acuerdo con su recuento histórico, dijo Blanco, Chávez fue un zoot suiter (pachuco) en su juventud y relata en caló, lo que sufrió la juventud mexicanoamericana de ese tiempo. El show explica mucho en lo que se convirtió Chávez, según Blanco.

Los muchachos se identifican con el lenguaje que hablo," dijo Blanco, en una presentación ante grupos escolares. "Porque ellos han escuchado hablar así a sus abuelos y tíos.

Blanco es un ex estudiante de teatro de la Universidad Estatal de California en Northridge y espera poder llevar su presentación a todo el país. Por lo pronto ha participado en obras de teatro en el sur de California por más de 10 años y se ha presentado en programas educativos como Los Angeles County Tobacco Awareness 'Tobacco Players' y con el grupo bilingüe Avance. Dice que también se ha presentado con la Compañía de Teatro Viajero Lantern con base en San Diego.

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César Chávez's life, contributions remembered in one-man show

Fred Blanco is having a busy month.

The Los Angeles-based actor does not yet have any sponsors or even the backing of any non-profit groups, but he still plans to carry the words of César Chavez to a growing number of venues.

Blanco plans to present his self-produced bilingual show at El Portal Theatre in Los Angeles March 29-31, just in time for the state holiday to honor the late United Farm Workers union founder.

"The show for students is a little different than the one for adults," said Blanco who also plans to perform 'The Stories of César Chávez.'

Lately, Blanco has performed at libraries in Whittier and Burbank and at the California Association of Bilingual Educators conference in Long Beach. He also has performed a 40-minute version of the show at schools at various locations including Wasco.

Blanco also plans to perform at the Chávez Center in Keane in May. That month, Blanco is taking

his act back east to college campuses in Maryland.

Blanco said he started touring the Chávez show early last year at the urging of a friend, Bruce Buonauro, who portrays historical figures such as Father Junípero Serra, founder of the California missions, and Gen. Bernardo de Gálvez, who aided the fledgling U.S. government during revolutionary times. Buonauro plans to appear with Blanco at most performances of the Chávez show.

"My show starts out with César Chávez at the start of his 1966 hunger strike when he is visited by the Virgin of Guadalupe," Blanco said. "She takes him into the past."

Blanco recreates the hardships and doubts Chávez had as he led the unionization of the first large scale farmworkers' organization that successfully challenged the might of agribusiness in California and eventually other Western states.

"I also play a migrant worker, a teamster and a zoot suiter," Blanco said of the other characters in

his show that shed light on the life of Chávez. According to historical accounts, Blanco said, Chávez was a zoot suiter in his youth and spoke in the patois of the Mexican-American youth at that time. The show explains a great of what made Chávez the person he became, Blanco said.

"The kids really can relate to the slang he spoke," Blanco said of his appearances before student groups at schools. "They've heard their grandparents and uncles speak like that."

A former theater major at California State University, Northridge, Blanco said he hopes to take the show all over the country. He has been involved in Southern California theater for more than 10 years and has performed educational programs such as the Los Angeles County Tobacco Awareness Program 'Tobacco Players' and the bilingual troupe Avance. He also performs with the San Diego-based Traveling Lantern Theatre Company.

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