presents

ONCE UPON EL BARRIO,
A Dance Drama

Written, conceived, choreographed, and directed by
Enrique Cruz DeJesus
ONCE UPON EL BARRIO, A Dance Drama

Written, Conceived, Choreographed, and Directed by Enrique Cruz DeJesus

Lighting Design by Anna Carhart
Set Design by Richard Hoover
Visual Design by Ridley Walker
Stage Manager: Natalie Marmol
Sound Engineer: Craig Wehringer
Costume Execution by Gregory Williams
Live Percussion: David Fernandez

Cast of Performers:
Efosa D. Agbontaen, Donna Clark,
Leann Gioia, Siobhan Harvey,
Misaki Hayama, Robert Hooks II,
Antone Pagan, Sabrina Petrelli,
Rick Reid, William Roberson,
Roberto Sanabria, Jr., Deon Sass, Ezra Swift

Running time 55 minutes with no intermission
The work is inspired by the writings of Piri Thomas, author of *Down These Mean Streets*, *Seven Long Times*, and *Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand*. During his years of incarceration, a man reflects on his young life in the streets, in gangs, and getting caught up with drugs and crime. Nearly becoming yet another statistic of society in the Dance Drama 1940's, he rehabilitates his life. He discovers love for himself through reflections of time with family, friends, and loved ones, and relives the beauty of the movements, sounds, and rhythms of his beloved neighborhood, Spanish Harlem. A story of resilience, redemption, transformation, and love for community.

**ALPHA OMEGA THEATRICAL DANCE COMPANY** was formed in 1972 by Ronn Pratt, Dolores Vanison-Blakely, and Miriam Greaves to provide a platform for dancers and choreographers of color. A creative venue for artists and a haven for inner city youth, Alpha Omega has served thousands for five decades.

Under the artistic direction of Enrique Cruz DeJesus, Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company continues to build audiences through delivering performances that are energetic, uplifting, cultural, passionate, and all-around entertaining experiences. The company serves local communities through outreach programs and performances and educates youth with programs that provide a positive social outlet as well as a forum for those interested in a professional career. The main techniques employed are modern, but the richness in background is such that the audience is treated to many different styles and influences. The dances range from urban life to that of tribal influence and from the abstract to the dramatic.

Alpha Omega's performance history includes local, national, and international engagements at venues such as Lincoln Center's Out of Doors Series and Alice Tully Hall, Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, the Smithsonian Institute, Jacob's Pillow Inside/Out, Kaatsbaan International Dance Center, Queens Theater on the Park, City Parks SummerStage, Harlem Stage, Riverside Church Theatre, United Nations, Marymount Manhattan College, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Ailey Citigroup Theater, the Interchurch Center, 92nd Street Y, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Here Arts Center, WOW Café, Lehman College, SUNY Sullivan, Florida A&M University, Art and Culture Center for Hollywood Florida, King Arts Complex in Columbus Ohio, a tour of southern Italy under the auspice of dance mobile, and Zagreb, Croatia.

Alpha Omega has also participated in various festivals including Dancer's Responding to Aids, Women in Dance at DTW, Fiorello Festival Dance Now at LaGuardia Concert Hall, Charlotte Dance Festival, Piccolo Spoleto Festival, Dance Theater of Harlem's street festival and open house series, Fourth Arts Block street festival, DCA's Midday Series, Nu Dance Now festival and the NY Family Arts Festival at the Theatre of Riverside Church, Brooklyn Dance Festival, Jamaica Dance Festival, Dance Harlem, and the winter and summer dance mobile series.
ENRIQUE CRUZ DEJESUS (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR) trained at Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company under the artistic direction of co-founder Ronn Pratt and Andy Torres while simultaneously studying at the Darvash School of Ballet and Dance Theater of Harlem. As a dancer he worked with several modern dance companies and notable choreographers such as Eleo Pomare, Talley Beatty, Gary DeLoatch, Martial Roumain and George Faison. During this time, he began what became an active career as a choreographer, singer, actor and teacher in theater, film, and concert dance and in 1995 became the artistic director of Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company.

Mr. Cruz DeJesus’ artistic goal is to bring his directing and choreographing styles to concert dance with a liberal take on popular and urban movement along with traditional and theatrical forms. The blend creates contemporary modern dance works that are equally accessible and entertaining to all audiences.

Mr. Cruz DeJesus teaches master classes and workshops locally and nationally and served as choreographer and teacher at Howard University, George Washington University, North Carolina Central State, Durham University, Florida A&M University, DC Arts, and the NYC ArtsConnection. His work as a teaching artist has been recognized by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council for his dance education work with inner city youth. He was awarded a SPARC grant and Manhattan Borough President’s grant for his work with seniors 65+ and has been further acknowledged by the New York State Council on the Arts where he served as a grantmaking panelist.

He choreographed and staged The James Merrit production From Africa to America starring Award winning actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee and was the assistant director and choreographer for the workshop musical Collapsing Universe at Theater for the New City. He has choreographed productions of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night, Linnea, Jeremiah, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream off-Broadway at the Storm Theater in addition to Satin Slipper at the Theater of Notre Dame in NYC. Additionally, he choreographed a production of Carmen for Teatro Circulo also in NYC. His work has been seen locally in the industrial marketing campaign for Wise snack products throughout NYC and nationally featured on the PBS documentary Mi Mambo based on the Harbor Conservatory in East Harlem, NY.

Mr. Cruz DeJesus continues to work in theater, film, and concert dance with theater credits that include national tours of Dreamgirls and Jesus Christ Superstar; the original production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Requiem Variations performed at the Opera Omaha Theater, NE; the New York City Shakespeare Festival’s Measure for Measure, produced by Tony Award winner George C. Wolfe; the European tour of Evita; the original NYC workshop production of the Tony Award winning musical The Life, in which he was written as himself; Man of La Mancha at Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey and the Engeman Theater on Long Island; Guys and Dolls performed at the DallasTheater Center, TX; The Who’s Tommy at Cherry County Playhouse in Michigan; South Pacific at Barrington Stage Theater in Massachusetts; Camila, Miss Saigon [Barrymore Nomination] and Evita at the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia, PA; Ragtime and the King and I at Fulton Opera House also in PA; Two Gentlemen of Verona the musical at Centerstage in Baltimore, MD; Aida at Artpark, NY; Black Nativity [Drama Desk Nomination] at the Duke Theater in NYC; Miss Saigon and Smokey Joe’s Café at the Virginia Musical Theatre; and Evita at Arvada Arts Center in Colorado.
DONNA CLARK (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR) is a native New Yorker, born and raised in East Harlem, also known as El Barrio. She became interested in dance by first exploring all forms of the arts including music and theater. She developed as an artist as a member of the Alpha Omega Young Adult Workshop under the direction of Ronn Pratt and later Andy Torres. Simultaneously, Ms. Clark studied at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance on full scholarship for five years. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Education from Baruch College, City University of New York.

Ms. Clark’s organizational skills as a consultant and administrator for various industries have served her well in the arts. Coordinating and implementing structure to the arts environment proves invaluable to the endurance of the organization. She has been instrumental in driving major projects such as the building acquisition and renovations that now provide a permanent home for the company. Ms. Clark has also served as a grantmaking panelist for city and state funding agencies and has introduced useful applications to manage daily organizational activities and programs.

Prior to becoming executive director of Alpha Omega in 2018, Ms. Clark had a long association with the organization. First as a student, followed by positions in various capacities including principal dancer, rehearsal director, administrator, and associate director.

Ms. Clark is an acclaimed artist who has worked as a soloist, guest artist and featured dancer with several modern dance companies in New York and New Jersey including Joan Miller’s Dance Players, Eleo Pomare Dance Co. and Gallman’s Newark Dance Theater. Her theater credits include European productions of Black and Blue and Porgy and Bess, a national tour of The Wiz, as well as regional productions of Children of Eden, Play On!, and Latin Fever.

She choreographed Café Society at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center in NYC and is assistant choreographer, with an AUDELCO nomination for best choreography, and win for Best Musical for On Kentucky Avenue, an ongoing musical production. Ms. Clark is grateful to those, past and present, who have helped to shape her as an artist and administrator. Discovering Alpha Omega as a young dancer and working with the teachers, choreographers, and directors throughout the years has been an honor.

EFOSA AGBONATAEN (performer) Born in Brooklyn NY, raised in Edo State, Nigeria where he first studied African dance, Efosa moved back to NY at age 11. Efosa attended Humanities and the Arts High School majoring in vocals and theatre and majored in dance at Queensborough Community College and Marymount Manhattan College. Efosa is an alumni student of the Alpha Omega Young Adult Workshop where he trained with Enrique Cruz DeJesus. He also trained at Edge School of the Arts, Creative Outlet, and Obediah Wright’s Balance Dance Theatre. Efosa has worked with Seewe African Dance Company, Forces of Nature, Purelements: An Evolution in Dance, and Ballet International African Dance Company. A teaching artist for 16 years, he recently became a site director at Purelements arts program. Efosa began performing with Alpha Omega in 2007, and now back from a hiatus, is happy to join the company for its 50th anniversary celebration.
LEANN GIOIA (Performer) has been pursuing her professional dance career in NYC since 2014, after receiving her BFA in Dance at the University of Iowa. She has been a member of the Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company since 2014 and is a founding member of Variety Pack Collective. Since her time in NYC, she has performed with a multitude of artists including Jennifer Muller/The Works, Te Perez Ceccon, Ughetta Pratesi, Matheta Dance, and American Liberty Ballet. As a dance educator, she is certified in teaching Simonson Technique. Leann intends to continue performing, choreographing, and educating widely in NYC and beyond.

SIOBHAN HARVEY (Performer) is a native of Queens, New York where she developed a love of dance at Innervisions Theatre Arts Center. She then went on to complete her early training at the Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH). While there for 10 years she was a scholarship student in the Pre-Professional Program and performed at City Center and the Apollo. Siobhan was also selected to be a part of the inaugural cohort of the Van Lier Fellowship at DTH. She then received an artistic scholarship to attend the Conservatory of Performing Arts at Point Park University in Pittsburgh, PA as a dance major with a ballet concentration. Siobhan has performed works by George Balanchine, Paul Taylor, Geoffrey Holder, and Robert Garland. Siobhan is thrilled to be a part of this performance with Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company as she embarks on her professional career.

MISAKI HAYAMA (Performer) was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan. She graduated from Saitama Prefecture’s High School of Arts and attended Japan University College of Art Dancing Course. During her school career, she won many dance competitions including 9th place at the Kanagawa Prefecture Dance Arts Festival and First Place in Hip Hop of Citigym Anniversary Competition in the Philippines. Misaki performed in The Lion King and A Chorus Line in Japan for four years. In 2015, she moved to New York and began training at Alvin Ailey School as a fellowship student. She has performed at the Apollo Theater and worked with Obediah Wright, Joyce King, Leslie Dockery, Lamont Joseph, Luis Salgado, Brinda Guha, Amit Shah, and George William Faison. In 2022, she works with Amanda Selwyn Dance Theater, Vashti Dance Theater, Matthew Westerby Dance Company, BodyStories, and Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company.

ROBERT HOOKS II (Performer) a.k.a. RJ is a young upcoming artist born and raised in East New York. RJ has trained with artists such as Jamel Gaines, Obediah Wright, Earl Mosley, Thera Ward, Michelle Smith, Ian J. DaSilva, and many more. He started performing professionally with Jamel Gaines’ Creative Outlet and currently performing with TORCH Dance Theatre directed by Kenya Joy Gibson. This is RJ’s first season with Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company.

ANTONE PAGÁN (Performer) is a member of Actors Studio AnTONE “ActorMusoMan” is celebrating his 40th Anniversary as a La MaMa alumni. Credits @theAO studio theater include excerpt workshops of Felix Rojas’ one man show Growing Up Gonzalez and his own original work as writer/actor SOULSancocho zOnE Bodega Café. Other theater credits include seven productions as Bernardo
of “West Side Story” and “Short Eyes” among others. Film/TV appearances include The Warriors, Dirty Dancing, STRIPES, El Cantante, The New York Ripper, The Killing Hour, Monsters, Miami Vice, The Sopranos, and all Law & Order franchises among others. Thanks to Piri for inspiration and Raina & Family for support. For Angel MAMA.

**SABRINA PETRELLI (Performer)** attended the Professional Performing Arts High School under the Alvin Ailey School. Upon graduating as a BFA Dance Major at Montclair State University, she joined Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company, and Bodystories: Teresa Fellion Dance. She has performed works of artists such as Alvin Ailey, Martha Graham, as well as appearances on the Wendy Williams Show and 94th Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. Sabrina is honored to be a part of Alpha Omega’s 50th Anniversary before she begins her 8-month European tour dancing for Azamara Cruise Line and would like to give a special thanks to her mentor Nathan Trice.

**RICK REID (Performer)** is a longstanding NYC stage actor and one of the original members of Marvin Felix Camillo’s La Familia Repertory Company. Working with Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company brings him back to this neighborhood where he first began acting in the 1970’s, across the street, with Clay Stevenson as his first acting teacher. Rick’s most recent works include A Mouth Full of Flies by Victor Vauban, An Evening of Five Plays by Julia Genoveva, and Late Night by Karen Brown. It is Rick’s pleasure to be working with this talented cast and director in this production of Once Upon El Barrio.

**WILLIAM ROBERSON (Performer)** is a native of Tennessee, graduated with a B.F.A in Dance from Howard University in 2013. After graduating, he was fortunate to work with Ronald K. Brown, Hope Boykin, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, and as a guest artist for Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and Dallas Black Dance Theater: Encore!. William began working with Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company in 2021 and currently dances with Camille A. Brown. He is featured in productions of Porgy and Bess at the Metropolitan Opera, and in Billy Porter’s Children music video.

**DÉON SASS (Performer)** is a native New Yorker with a passion for music and the arts. While growing part of the music department at church, he started his formal dance training with Creative Outlet Dance Theatre of Brooklyn, under the direction of Jamel Gaines. Déon also trained at the Ailey School, Joffrey Ballet and Dance Theatre of Harlem in NY, and has performed for festivals like IABD, and Dance This in Seattle, Washington. Déon has performed on many stages including the Russian section of the Nutcracker with DTH, under the direction of Virginia Johnson, and co-choreographed Tribal Truth on Creative Outlet Dance Theatre of Brooklyn. Jack of All Trades, you can find Déon, running the hottest bars in NY, curating beverage menus for his own company or helping to create generational wealth by selling life insurance and securities. Fortunately, he still finds time to devote to his first love, the arts.
ROBERTO J. SANABRIA, JR. (Performer) has been acting since he can remember appearing in Cheap Colors by Rome Neal at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe as a child. He studied theater at Westtown School and later at Eugene Lang College where he was able to meet Ellen Stewart herself through his acting professor Zishan Urgulu. Recently, he starred in the short film Calamity (2019) by Alejandro Carbajal. Roberto loves to perform on stage and in film and is honored to be working with the AO and this incredible cast and crew at La MaMa.

EZRA SWIFT (Performer) dance background includes ballet, modern, jazz, and West African. He trained at Alonzo King’s Lines Ballet where he had the opportunity to dance for Lines Ballet, Gregory Dawson, Lee Wei Chow, Nathan Trice, and many more during his two-year pre-professional program. Shortly after, Ezra attended Alvin Ailey independent study program primarily studying Ballet, West African, and modern. He has worked with Steven Stivel, Christopher Rudd, Alonzo King & Mathew Rushing to name a few. Ezra is happy to announce his first season with Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company.

Special thanks to Gregory Williams, Richard Hoover, Migdalia Rodriguez, Shauntée Henry, and the entire AO cast & creative team, and to La MaMa, ETC.

Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company is supported in part by New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Manhattan Borough President’s Office, and the Mosaic Network & Fund in the New York Community Trust.
A full program with information on this production can be found on the ONCE UPON EL BARRIO page of the La MaMa website.

In addition you can scan the QR code Poster located in the theatre lobby for access to the digital program.
La MaMa's historic, landmark building at 74 East 4th Street is undergoing an urgently needed complete renovation and restoration to preserve the historic façade, create building-wide ADA accessibility, and provide much needed performance, exhibition and community space for decades to come.

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