

viva NEW YORK

GUZMAN'S 'PARIS' OCCUPATION: PRODUCER

The hardest working actor in show business has recently been busy behind the scenes, too.

Veteran character actor Luis Guzman, who is seemingly in every movie and TV show ever made, donned a producer's hat for the first time for his latest project, "Puerto Ricans in Paris."

The charming buddy movie, which co-stars Guzman and his boyhood pal Edgar Garcia, is a fish out of water tale about a pair of NYPD detectives — who happen to be brothers-in-law — traveling to France to work on a case.

The comedy opens June 10; Guzman will ride the Daily News float at the Puerto Rican Day Parade two days later.

VIVA: What was it like to be the lead as well as having to be the boss on the set?

Usually when you do a movie you get a script, then you get the actors, then you go and try to get the money. In this case we had the money before any of that happened, so it gave us an incredible opportunity to make this film the way we wanted to.

We had an incredible team and made it in just 17 days, filming in New York and Paris and Prague, and to me it looks like a movie with a \$30 million budget. The experience was amazing.

It's a buddy-cop comedy and yet it never got raunchy or silly or even included cliched action scenes. Was that by design?



When the opportunity came to develop this I was adamant that I didn't want cheesy slapstick comedy or a movie full of cliches. I wanted a situational comedy and I said let's keep it real like that.

Rosario Dawson and Rosie Perez have small roles as the women in the cops' lives. Considering it was a low budget film, I have to assume you called in some favors from friends.

Oh, yeah. I got Rosario and Rosie, and the rest of the cast was phenomenal, too. Everybody showed up to work even though it was low budget, and it came across. I'm really proud.

So as a producer, did you spend your time off-camera counting pennies?

One day I asked a producing partner how we were doing with the budget, and it was the one and last time I asked.

We didn't get paid — this was a labor of love, and we put everything in front of the lens. Even Pit Bull was gracious enough to lend us a song.

Everyone always says, "When is Hollywood going to support Latino filmmakers?" Well, the real question should be: "When are Latinos gonna back each other up?"

Everybody on this film supported it, and it worked.

Robert Dominguez

COURTESY OF FOCUS WORLD

Magical look at murals

Raquel M. Ortiz is an accomplished educator with a passion for Puerto Rican studies and art.

She combines them in her first-ever picture book, "Sofi and the Magical Musical Mural," a vibrant children's book that follows a girl named Sofi through a world of imagination and Puerto Rican cultural references. The book is currently being used in 27 public schools as a way of teaching children about culture and diversity and is a finalist for the International Latino Book Awards

"I want to share aspects of Puerto Rican culture, music, plena, vejigantes, and the carnival celebration, with children in a fun way," Ortiz says.

Ortiz has dedicated much of her professional life to studying Puerto Rican culture. She is a professor at Boricua college and a former museum educator at the Brooklyn Museum and El Museo del Barrio. She is

also an advocate for public art, and specifically chose to include murals because of their beauty and cultural reference.

"Murals are a wonderful way to educate, to celebrate and to document our histories and our achievements," she says.

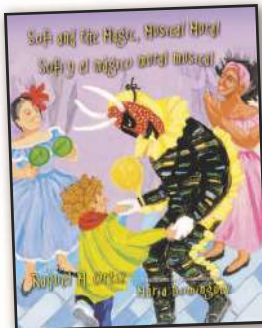
"They visually remind us of all the great things we have done and encourage us to continue to create."

Ortiz will be honored at this year's National Puerto Rican Day parade for her efforts to educate others about Puerto Rican culture and history, as well as for her work with New York's public schools.

"I can't wait to march down Fifth Ave. with my daughter, Sofia, all the characters of my book, and the

staff and students from P.S. 257 in Brooklyn," she says.

Erica Y. Lopez



THIS "WAR" IS ESCALATING

Nelson A. Denis' "War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America's Colony," a historical and controversial look at Puerto Rico's struggle for independence from U.S. control in the first half of the 20th century, is still making waves a year after its publication.

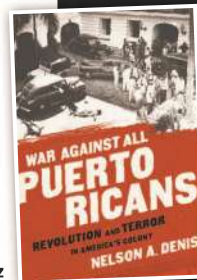
The book, which has topped the bestseller list in Puerto Rico for the past year, now has its recently-published Spanish translation, "Guerra Contra Los Puertorriqueños" sitting atop the Amazon bestseller list.

A screenplay based on the book is being shopped around Hollywood, with stars including Luis Guzman having expressed strong interest in the project.

"I knew the book would cause a great stir, and it needed to, because the full, shocking history of Puerto Rico is only beginning to emerge," Denis tells Viva.

"And now when the film comes out, the whole world will understand the heroism of Pedro Albizu Campos, the empire that executed him, and the island he tried to save."

Viva Staff



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