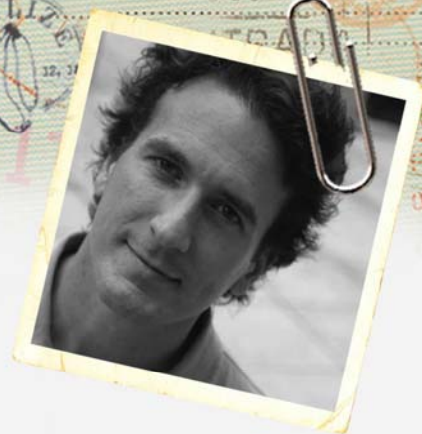


DREAMING OF Cuba

the stories
that bind
with Storyteller Antonio Sacre



BONUS STORIES

NOTE: There are differences between the transcript and the spoken versions of these bonus stories; it is preferable to listen to each story, using the transcript as a guide while listening or as a way to remember story details while working in class.

MUSIC TO TAKE ME HOME by Storyteller Antonio Sacre

My dad used to have a state-of-the-art alarm clock, and I feel old describing it to you. It would play music AND wake you up, and it had an incredible feature called the sleep button. You could hit it, music would play, and 29 minutes later, it would actually turn off! It was amazing! The problem was, you had to wait the whole 29 minutes to see it work its magic, but that wasn't too bad, because you could watch the numbers change on the clock, and I mean actually change. Each minute of the hour and every hour itself was its own little plastic tab that actually flipped down or folded over the other number, an interior dial of time perpetually flipping forward, clicking, keeping perfect rhythm, lit by a little light, just bright enough to see the numbers themselves change.

It was endlessly fascinating to watch the numbers flip, time flipping forward, and wait for the sleep button to magically shut off the music.



I loved sitting in my parents' room, listening to the music that played on the only station my dad listened to before bed, WJBR, Just Beautiful Radio. My Dad's from Cuba and my Mom's family is Irish, but they both loved classical music and this station played only classical music, 24 hours a day. My dad would hit the magic sleep button, the music would start, and I would watch the little plastic tabs click off the time until it was time for bed, but hopefully not before the sleep timer did its thing. My dad would often stand, transfixed, in front of the radio. I always thought he was looking at the numbers as well, but he would close his eyes, sway very slightly and say, "Mi'jo, can you hear that?" I strained toward the radio. "What?" I asked.

"That, right there, and there again? There, right on top of the piano, the violin?" I couldn't hear anything. "And now, the clarinets, and the drums rolling in the back, like thunder over the hills? It reminds me of Cuba, right before a storm, can you hear that?"

I could never hear anything he heard, but I loved watching him go to the place where the thunder rolled over the hills. The only time he ever talked about Cuba was when he listened to classical music, otherwise it was just too painful to talk about being forced to leave and all the family had lost. Then, the sleep button would do its thing, and he would scoop me up, and bring me to my room.

When I was about 10 years old, my dad gave me that radio. He got a new one, with a sleep button that could actually be programmed to any amount of time he wanted, from one minute to 59 minutes, and with numbers that actually glowed, floating like green fireflies, silently changing, with no click at all to tell you that time still moved, whether you saw it or not.

I asked him what I could listen to, and he said whatever I wanted. Over the course of the next few months, I listened to every radio station my hometown carried. I listened to pop and country and late night baseball broadcasts from far away – 29 minutes every night - but none seemed as mysterious and as beautiful as the classical music station that transported my dad back to Cuba.

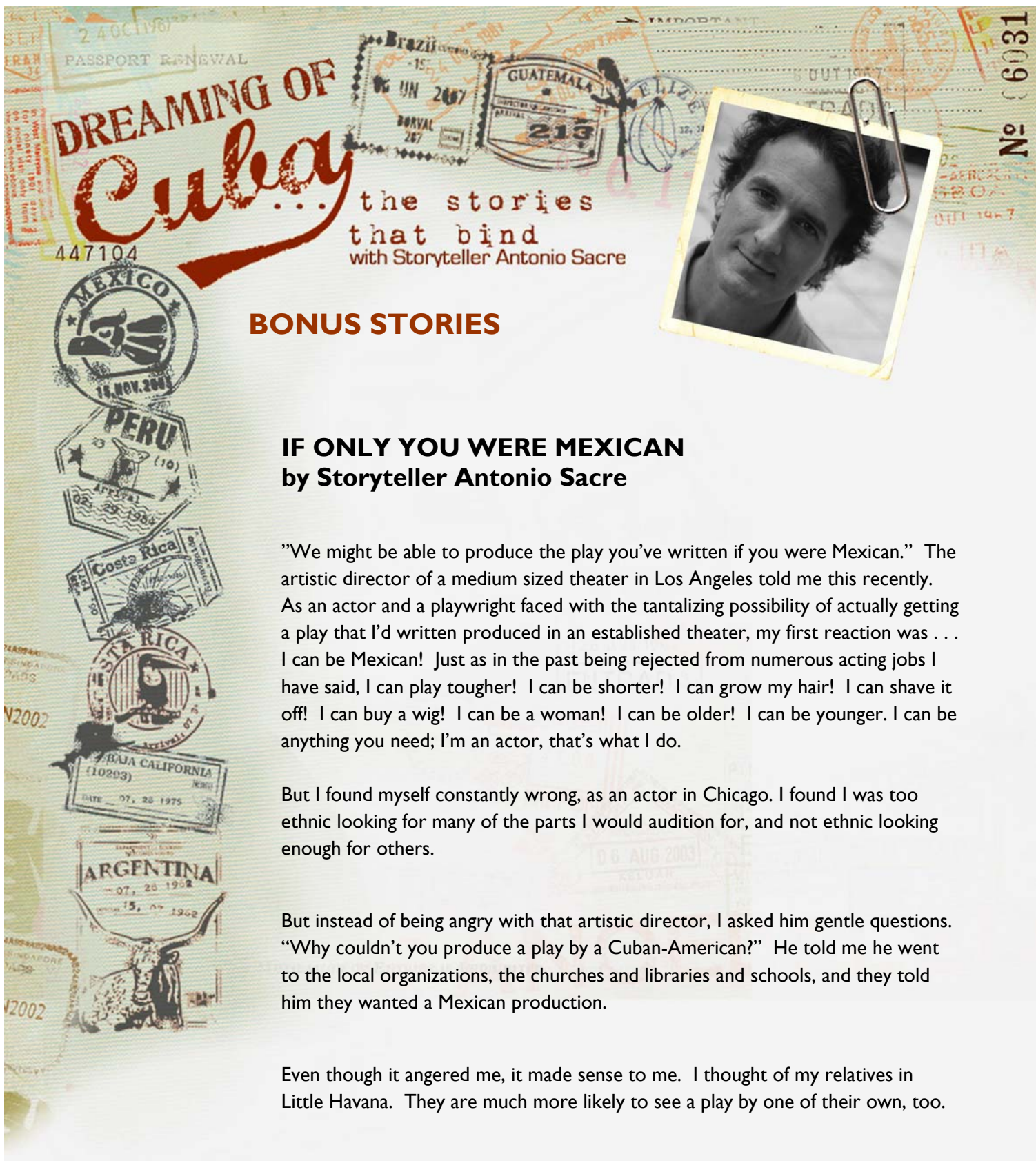
I began to listen to it, and while I never heard drums rolling like thunder over the hills, I pretended like I could, hearing something that only adults could hear, and the complexity and the beauty of the music would make me forget about time falling down, and I would fall asleep.



In my home town, WJBR doesn't play classical music anymore, but where I live now, there is one station left that still does. Now that I am older, I can hear the drums underneath the violins, and the swelling music reminds me of egrets landing in shallow water.

I have a son now and, someday, when he is older, I will stand in front of the radio, or whatever new music playing device we'll have then, and say, "Mi'jo, can you hear that? The piccolo over the strings? Like butterflies landing on flowers? No? Can you hear that? The piccolo over the strings? Like butterflies landing on flowers? Can you hear the strength of your grandparents and great grandparents coming from Cuba and Ireland to start a new life here in America? Can you hear that? Don't worry. When you get older, you will."





BONUS STORIES

IF ONLY YOU WERE MEXICAN by Storyteller Antonio Sacre

"We might be able to produce the play you've written if you were Mexican." The artistic director of a medium sized theater in Los Angeles told me this recently. As an actor and a playwright faced with the tantalizing possibility of actually getting a play that I'd written produced in an established theater, my first reaction was . . . I can be Mexican! Just as in the past being rejected from numerous acting jobs I have said, I can play tougher! I can be shorter! I can grow my hair! I can shave it off! I can buy a wig! I can be a woman! I can be older! I can be younger. I can be anything you need; I'm an actor, that's what I do.

But I found myself constantly wrong, as an actor in Chicago. I found I was too ethnic looking for many of the parts I would audition for, and not ethnic looking enough for others.

But instead of being angry with that artistic director, I asked him gentle questions. "Why couldn't you produce a play by a Cuban-American?" He told me he went to the local organizations, the churches and libraries and schools, and they told him they wanted a Mexican production.

Even though it angered me, it made sense to me. I thought of my relatives in Little Havana. They are much more likely to see a play by one of their own, too.



© 2009 RaceBridges For Schools. This lesson plan is part of an initiative for educators called RaceBridges For Schools, which seeks to provide tools for teachers and students to motivate them to build stronger and more inclusive communities. This lesson plan may be freely used, reproduced and distributed for educational purposes as long as this copyright information is displayed intact. The story excerpts may be used ONLY in educational settings. Story excerpts: copyright Antonio Sacre 2009, used with permission. Info: www.racebridgesforschools.com

I thought, good for the community, to state what they want, to finally say, your theater's been in our neighborhood for 10 years, and you've rarely presented what we want to see. We can fill a house, we can make you some money, we can sell you some tickets, just listen to what we want right now.

And good for the director, to listen to them. It's not so common yet for artistic directors of English-speaking theaters to reach out to their Spanish-speaking audiences unless they are after some grant. For all their talk of outreach, theater in the places I see theater in (Chicago, New York, LA and San Francisco) and the size of theater I usually see (small) remains as segregated as many of the Churches I've been to across the country.

So I said, "If you are going to work in a community, it seems that you should listen to what they want."

But I thought, "How does anybody learn anything? How can these walls be broken down, or at least scaled for a moment to view the other side?" The only small answer that I have found is learning and listening and sharing each other's stories.

As a storyteller, I listened, I read, I learned, I traveled to Mexico, I learned the amazing stories they grow up with there. The *Nautl* creation and war stories, *La Malinche* and her daughter, *La Llorona*, *La Mano peluda* and the *Alacrán de Durango*, *Callejón del Beso* and the Snake girl from the hills of Guanajuato, *las mummies*, *Perfecto luna*, tales of wonder in Oaxaca, I walked the pyramids of Teotihuacán.

I travel between these worlds, Cuban and American, Mexican and American, Spanish and English, and report what I hear, what I see.

So, instead, I offered to the director my talents as a bilingual storyteller, offering to do community outreach for him, to serve as a bridge between the cultures.



I said, I'll go to their churches, their schools, libraries and meeting places, and share their stories with them, and then listen. Listen to them tell me, "no, that's not how *La Llorona* sounds, she sounds like this, AAAIIIIIEEEEEEE." Here they tell me, I heard that one too, but it goes like this . . . watch them tell their children and each other old *Pepito* jokes, thankful that they listened, grateful to be included, to be trusted with their story.

The director got excited. He went back to the community, and they got excited. So, I'll probably have to wait a little longer to get my play produced out here, but I'm patient. But in the meantime, did you here the one about the Cuban-American who tried to be Mexican?

He asked for *conгри y picadillo* with his burrito, and they just haven't stopped laughing.

