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Media Contact: Anna Ables, Director of Marketing and Public Relations
(773) 325-7938, aables@depaul.edu, <http://theatre.depaul.edu>

Augusta and Noble Addresses Immigration for Young Audiences

The Theatre School Production Opens October 5 at DePaul University's Merle Reskin Theatre

CHICAGO — Carlos Murillo's play about the child of undocumented immigrants seems to have uncanny timing.

Immigration reform was at the forefront of the White House administration five years ago when Murillo began writing *Augusta & Noble*, a children's play commissioned by Adventure Stage Chicago.

At the time, the passage of the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) was stalled in Congress and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) was being introduced.

Now, as The Theatre School at DePaul University prepares to perform the award-winning play, immigration is back in the spotlight as President Donald Trump directs lawmakers to reform DACA.

"It's the only play I've written that I hoped would be obsolete, but sadly, it's become more urgent," said Murillo, head of playwriting at DePaul's Theatre School. The play won the 2017 distinguished play award given by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education.

Augusta & Noble strikes a familiar chord among families of undocumented immigrants, including those living in Chicago, he said. It centers on West Town teenager Gabi Castillo who is admitted to a selective enrollment high school. Her parents fear the crosstown journey will expose their undocumented status and expose Gabi to unforeseen dangers. The play tackles family secrets and immigration from both sides.

"I chose this piece because I'm always looking for what speaks to the Chicago audience," said Lisa Portes, who planned the 2017-18 season for the Chicago Playworks for Families and Young Audiences. "It's a Chicago story. I know there are a number of children in the Chicago Public School system and in Chicago whose parents are undocumented."

Portes, head of directing at The Theatre School, is also directing this production of *Augusta & Noble*. She wanted children of undocumented immigrants to feel represented and for audiences who are not undocumented immigrants to feel empathetic.

"I wanted to open the eyes of other kids and see what someone else's life might be like," Portes said.

Augusta & Noble is Murillo's first play for young audiences and a marked shift from his typical dark and difficult subject matter. His *dark play or stories for boys* features a teenage boy impersonating a girl in a chat room and the fallout that ensues when another boy falls for "her." Murillo's 2005 play *Mimesophobia or before and after* revolves around the brutal murder-suicide of an apparently perfect couple.

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Murillo modeled the *Augusta & Noble* family after one he met while researching the play for Adventure Stage Chicago, an arts program at the Northwestern Settlement community center in the West Town neighborhood. And, while the family has roots in Mexico, Murillo said he believed their story is universal.

“I don’t think you have to be Mexican-American to understand this play,” he said. “Regardless of your background, there is some point of relatability to this story.”

About the production

Augusta & Noble is recommended for ages 8 and older. It opens Oct. 5 and runs through Nov. 11 at DePaul’s historic Merle Reskin Theatre in downtown Chicago, 60 E. Balbo Drive. Performances are 10 a.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and 2 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. The 10 a.m. Nov. 3 and 2 p.m. Nov. 4 performances will be interpreted in American Sign Language. Tickets are \$10 with ticketed seating for weekend performances and open seating for weekday shows.

Subscriptions and group rates for 15 or more people are available. Tickets are available online or by calling the box office at 312-922-1999.

The cast features **Mariana Castro Florez** (Gabi Castillo), **Gregory Fields** (Ricardo Wojciekowski), **Thalis Karatsolis-Chanikan** (Reymundo Castillo/Husband), **Dre Marquis** (Jesus Castillo), **Maria Teresa Matheus** (La Mujer Azul), **Juan Pablo Ocasio** (El Coyote) and **Claudia Quesada** (Delores Castillo/Pregnant Wife).

The production team includes **Alyssa Mohn** (scenic design), **Tia Nicole Lui** (costume design), **Mattias Lange-McPherson** (lighting design), **Alyssa Kerr** (sound design), Hannah Greenspan (dramaturgy) and **Jonathan S. Campbell** (stage management).

For more information visit <https://theatre.depaul.edu/> or contact the box office at 312-922-1999.

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