

# CHOICES/DECISIONES

## **Conceived & Directed by**

Susan Franklin Tanner

## **Produced by**

Travis Miller, Andy Garcia

## **Technical Director**

Tom Goller

## **Original music by**

Marco Calva

## **Visual Artist**

David Herrarte

## **Written by**

Louis Ayala, Alicia Brichaux, Marco Calva, Alberto Cervantes, Maria Fajardo, Andy Galvez, Maria Gaspar, Jenny Guevara, Cynthia Martinez, Ileana Morales, Wendy Morfin, Karen Pena, Reyna Pena, Fernando Sanchez, Teresa Serrano, Nancy Ventura, and Susan Franklin Tanner

## **The Cast**

Singer	Marco Calva
Mario	Fernando Sanchez, Marco Calva
Samantha	Maria Gaspar, Jenny Guevara, Cynthia Martinez, Teresa Serrano, Alicia Brichaux
Elena	Ileana Morales, Wendy Morfin, Karen Pena, Reyna Pena, Nancy Ventura

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## DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS

**Choices/Decisiones** was created through a collaboration between Susie Tanner, Producing/Artistic Director of TheatreWorkers' Project, a group of 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, and Travis Miller & Andy Garcia, English teachers from the School of Communication & Global Awareness, Manual Arts High in So Central Los Angeles. The goal was to create a performance piece about Healthcare as seen from both a personal and global perspective. We met 3 times a week for 5 weeks during an Intersession class and then after school once a week for several

months. With the exception of two students, none had ever done anything like this before. The majority of the students were English Language Learners. Miller & Garcia introduced factual, primary source material and the students were given presentations about HIV/AIDS by a social worker. They also learned to use a video camera with the help of video artist. Tanner alternated with the academic teachers by running improvisational theatre and writing workshops that yielded the students' poetry and prose. Their creative work, combined with their research, dictated the monologue format of the piece, which Tanner structured.

The students created three characters whose lives intertwine: Mario, a rich boy who is drawn to the low life; Samantha, a sheltered, Costa Rican immigrant from a good family; and Elena, a doctor who worked in Namibia at a pediatric AIDS clinic. Mario engages in unsafe sex in risky environments and contracts HIV; he and Samantha fall in love, and in a moment of passion, have unprotected sex; she becomes pregnant and HIV positive. They tell their parents about the pregnancy, but not about the HIV. That is too frightening to reveal. They find a support group, run by Elena, who became HIV positive from a needle stick. The play offers no solutions, but rather asks a question: what would you do? The cast engaged in a Second Act discussion with the audience after each performance with the goal of raising consciousness, creating dialogue and debunking myths. The play was performed for three large audiences of students at Manual Arts and in a theatre space before an audience of parents, educators, teens and theatre professionals.

As the students took the stage, they joined centuries of theatre artists and playwrights who have grappled with the questions of "choice", "consequence" and "mortality". This integrated curriculum project, that seamlessly combined Theatre with academic studies, brought these large questions to life through students' powerful creativity and both the audience and the participants were moved by the experience.

## **EXCERPT FROM "CHOICES/DECISIONES"**

MARIO

We used to go to the same school. We fell in love with each other and decided to have a relationship. I wasn't brave enough to tell Samantha about my health conditions. I was afraid to have sex with her because I didn't want to pass the virus to her. But we both couldn't resist the temptation of passion and one night we had sex without protection.

*MARCO sings a love song in Spanish*

SAMANTHA

After a month, I found out that I was pregnant. The doctor at the clinic asked me to have a routine AIDS test. I wasn't afraid and I took it.

ALL ACTORS

The test was positive.

*(all actors sit on floor or chairs to watch video clip of discussion about HIV & pregnancy)*

SAMANTHA

HIV. AIDS. When I hear those words my heart breaks in two—knowing that I'm infected.

ALL

A fear surrounds me. Fear consumes me.

MARIO

It's like I'm lost in the darkness and I can't find a way to get out.

SAMANTHA

I couldn't believe it and I wondered how it could have happened. I called Mario and asked him to meet me. I told him I had something important to tell him. I didn't know how I would tell him or how he would react. But I knew he was the only one I had ever been with.

MARIO

I didn't know yet that Samantha was pregnant. When she told me about the test and her pregnancy, we had a fight. I felt breathless. At first, I didn't believe her. We fought and we blamed each other. We needed to make someone responsible for our misery.

SAMANTHA

Why did you do this to me?

MARIO

You knew about my past and you told me it didn't matter.

SAMANTHA

Yes, but this is the worst thing that could happen.

MARIO

I was the one who wanted to wait because I knew about my situation.

SAMANTHA

If you want to blame me, I'll take the responsibility....by myself...

MARIO

No! this can be solved but we have to go through this together.

ALL ACTORS

After awhile, they forgave each other and decided to stay together.

MARIO & SAMAMTHA

But we had no idea how we would live. Or what we would do. Or how we would tell our parents.

ALL ELENAS

After the fight between Mario and Samantha, each went home in different directions. Mario felt guilty—he knew he could have prevented this. He did not sleep that night.

ALL MARIOS

I could just walk away.

ACTOR (MARIA)

What a night like this

Walking in the dark

hidden from the light

A young woman passes by

Untold by the risk of

danger, she feels brave enough

to face her disgrace

She only walks at

night because at noon

She feels doom

Her own self-imagination

makes her a woman from

nowhere

Death and life lives

within her

Knowing that she may

not be here soon.

ALL ELENAS

Samantha felt like the world was on her shoulders. She couldn't walk away. All she could think about was the life inside of her.

JENNY (holding a doll)

I don't want to have you.

I don't want to kill you.

You were just a mistake.

I don't want to love you.

The pain and fear get into

My soul, making me think:

What will it be like to be

A young lady trying to be a mother?

I remember just yesterday when

I used to play with my Barbies.

And now I have you

And with my weariness, I hurt you.

ALL SAMANTHAS

That night, I had a dream.

ILEANA

We are humans

We are wonderful. We are women

We are not monsters

We have the capacity to keep our babies

Is the pain of giving birth worth the

Smiles of our child?

Now these words are too late  
I already aborted. I apologize  
For that my sweet  
I'm sorry even though this sorrow doesn't make sense  
I was too young. I couldn't  
Understand what I was doing.  
Now I understand that you  
Were part of me  
The blood that passed through  
Your veins was the same  
That passed through mine.

MARIA

Giving life is painful, but giving it away is worse.  
Making it happen is easy, but  
Taking care of it is not.

ALL ACTORS

Choices. Decisiones. What would you do?

### **TheatreWorkers' Project**

Conceived in 1983 by Susan Franklin Tanner with funding from the California Arts Council and the Steelworkers Oldtimers Foundation, TheatreWorkers' Project is dedicated to providing opportunities for working people, the unemployed and underserved youth to give voice to their feelings, stories and aspirations through the medium of Theatre. Our nationally recognized work has included creating and producing documentary performance pieces with unemployed steelworkers, striking meatpackers, local shipbuilders and Longshoremen. Most recently, TheatreWorkers' has created performance pieces about the Patriot Act with students from Cal State LA EOP and "A PLACE AT THE TABLE/UN LUGAR EN LA MESA" about Immigration with students from The School of Communication and Global Awareness at Manual Arts High School in South Central Los Angeles.