

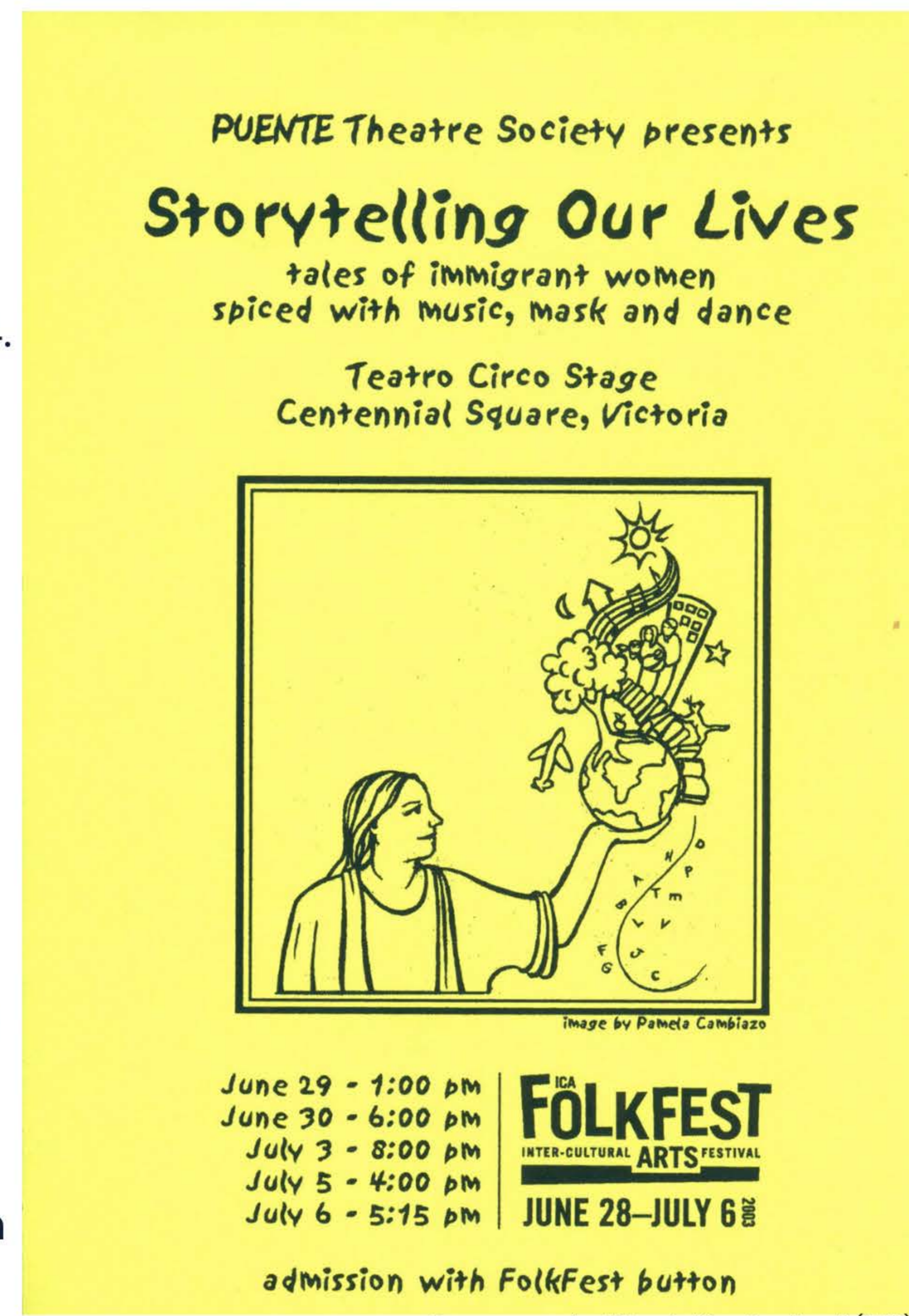
# Performing the Intercultural Archive: Lina de Guevara's Puente Theatre in Special Collections

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## Introduction

I explored the Lina de Guevara fonds in UVic Special Collections. Through this research, I asked 1) What dramaturgical processes have placed intercultural encounter on stage in Victoria since the turn of this century? 2) To what effects? 3) Where does the archive fit into these questions?

- **Lina de Guevara:** Born in Chile in 1934. She trained under Augusto Boal in Forum Theatre, Image and Playback Theatre, and applied theatre approaches to community work (Puente). Moved to Victoria in 1976. She has written, directed, and produced more than 20 plays since immigrating to Victoria.
- **Puente Theatre:** Founded by de Guevara in 1988. The word *puente* means “bridge” in Spanish. Puente Theatre intends to be a “bridge between cultures” (Puente).
- **Storytelling Our Lives:** First produced by Puente Theatre in 1998. Reproduced in 2003 and 2006. This version of the script is from 2003, written for five women of colour, each of whom recount their experiences leaving their homes, their cultures, and immigrating to Canada.



Programme for “Storytelling Our lives” (5.18).

## Methodology

My research method is informed by archival theory, as well as intersections of performance studies and interculturalism. I consider both Kershaw’s definition of *performance ecology*, as well as Knowles’ too: “the complex ecosystem that is constituted by a city’s shifting network of ‘actors’” (5). I also deploy Holledge and Tompkins’ definition of theatrical interculturalism: “the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions” (7). I intend to contribute more broadly to studies of unlikely archives, and performance as research.

## Analysis

### Processes of intercultural performance in the archive:

“Through the internet and doing promotion in immigrant and cultural organisations, we made a ‘Call for Stories.’ We received 25 written submissions. Of these, we chose three that were included in the play.”

- Puente surveys a wide variety of lived experiences and ephemera in a way similar to archival accessioning.

“A script was written, workshopped, and rehearsed for three weeks, and performed by five professional female actors. A chorus of 20 women and men from the immigrant community was added.”

- Integrating a large cast of community members into the rehearsal process might be a democratisation of this ephemeral curation of information.

“Everything (the actors, the dancers, the stories, the music, the costumes, the masks, etc.) was absolutely exquisite, and it really brought us closer together with our neighbours. We are grateful for your devoted efforts to bridge the gaps in our society” (John and Simone Kendall).

- Audience members describing the show as an effort to “bridge the gaps in our society” signals Puente’s success in embodying its name.
- We can infer from these names that these folks were not of the minorities on stage, though they were moved, thus suggesting the intercultural reach of the performance.

“I felt like I was watching my own life by watching the immigrant women in the story” (Anonymous).

- We can infer that this audience member was of the minorities on stage, thus intimating the success of the performance in translating lived experience.

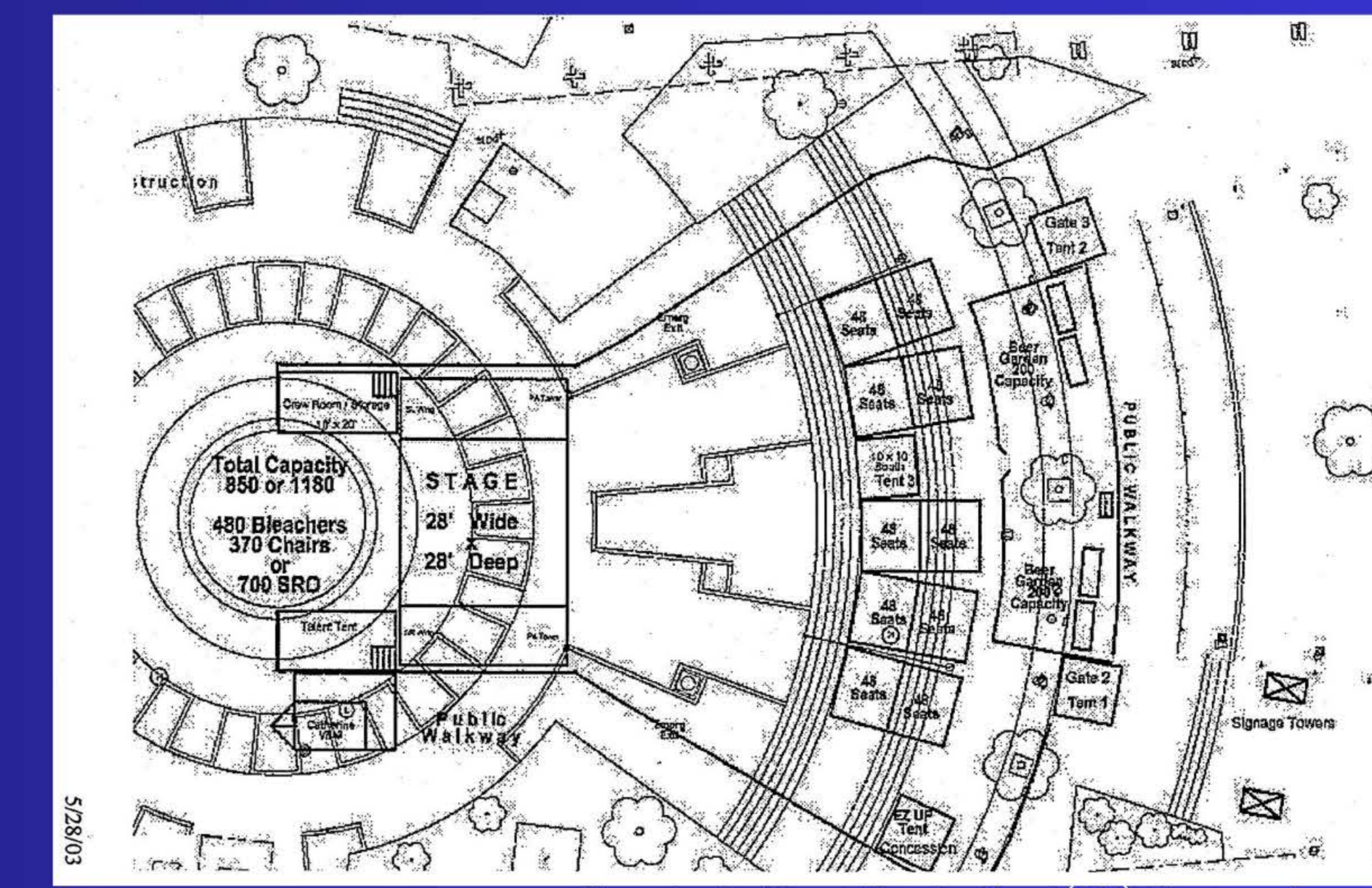
“‘Storytelling Our Lives’ has truly been a remarkable journey through my life, my experiences as an immigrant coming from Europe to Canada. It has been wonderful to see the reaction of the public, they loved to watch as much as we liked to perform.” (Haydee Mosveen-Oord).

- This quotation is from a community member in the chorus, and suggests that the nature of live performance is integral to generating a sense of social unity between the dislocated, and their new location.

## Conclusion

Puente Theatre’s dramaturgical process for “Storytelling Our Lives” functions similarly to those of archival research, accessioning and curating the primary sources of lived experiences for specifically cultural preservation in memory via performance.

The archivist might learn from this research to understand intercultural dramaturgy and performance as an unlikely archive of marginalised lived experiences and cultures, and how the efficacy of this unlikely archive depends on its ephemerality. The practitioner might learn how placing community members on stage distinctly bridges cultural gaps in diverse audiences.



Floor plan for “Storytelling Our Lives” (5.18). Theatre unknown.

## Works Cited

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