

Excelente 'Wizard'

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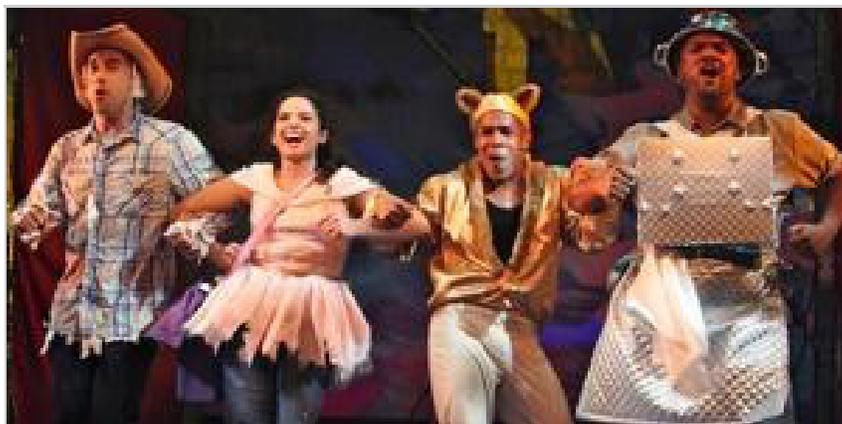
Frank Scheck

THEATER REVIEW

THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD Lucille Lortel Theatre, 121 Christopher St.; 212-627-7373. Free. Through Aug. 19.



Cavaliere) -- her name's a joint bow to Dorothy and the Latina cartoon heroine Dora the Explorer -- cares little about her Mexican heritage. She speaks hardly any Spanish, and she's openly unhappy about her mother's desire to throw her a traditional *quinceañera* celebration: "Why can't I have a sweet 16 like everybody else?"



BEN HIDER/AP

Putting a Latin American spin on "The Wizard of Oz" are (from left) Ryan Duncan as Scarecrow, Virginia Cavaliere as Dora, Cedric Leiba Jr. as Mountain Lion and Frank Viveros as Tino.

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Imagine "The Wizard of Oz" spiked with a little salsa and merengue. *Que divertido!* You've pretty much summed up "The Yellow Brick Road," a fun new riff on L. Frank Baum's classic.

It's getting a world premiere during the 23rd season of Theatreworks USA's free summer theater program, the previous launching pad of "Seussical," "We the People" and "Junie B. Jones."

Fifteen-year-old Dora (Virginia Cavaliere) -- her name's a joint bow to Dorothy and the Latina cartoon heroine Dora the Explorer -- cares little about her Mexican heritage. She speaks hardly any Spanish, and she's openly unhappy about her mother's desire to throw her a traditional *quinceañera* celebration: "Why can't I have a sweet 16 like everybody else?"

A *curandera*, or folk healer, sends Dora and her Chihuahua, Gypsy -- in this case, a hand puppet -- on a journey to Oz, where she encounters a scarecrow, an "iron chef" made out of pots and pans and a cowardly mountain lion.

Naturally, she also runs afoul of a wicked *bruja* desperate to reclaim her magical ruby slippers.

This hourlong musical created by Mando Alvarado, Tommy Newman and Jaime Lozano isn't exactly "The Wiz," but its bouncy musical score and Devanand Janki's broad comic staging will definitely entertain younger audiences, who gleefully ate it up at a recent matinee.

With a healthy sprinkling of Spanish words and phrases thrown into the mix, it also makes a handy language guide. Kids and their adult chaperones alike will have no trouble easing down this *camino amarillo*.