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# Movies, Music & Stage

## Review: The Yellow Brick Road

Theatreworks USA puts a spicy new twist on *The Wizard of Oz* in this summer's free production. *By Gwynne Watkins*



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In this *muy caliente* weather, what New Yorker wouldn't want to be whisked away to a magical land for an hour? Luckily, [Theatreworks USA](#) is offering free family vacations to Oz—with a spicy modern twist.

*The Yellow Brick Road* tells the story of Dora (Virginia Cavaliere), a sassy Latina teen who worries that her traditional *quinceañera* will be social suicide. Embarrassed by her ethnic roots, Dora won't speak Spanish to her mother (Lexi Rhoades) and prefers to be called "D." Bratty? Sure. But like any teen, she's only trying to figure out who she is. Enter the mysterious neighborhood healer (Natalie Toro): The uninvited party guest casts a spell on Dora, transporting her to an Oz filled with mariachi munchkins and wicked *brujas* (witches). As the teen journeys down *el camino amarillo*, she befriends a bilingual scarecrow (Ryan Duncan) who struggles with his English, a tin "Iron Chef" (Frank Viveros) whose Latin cooking lacks heart, and a runt-of-the-litter mountain lion (Cedric Leiba, Jr.) who's afraid to be himself. By journey's end, Dora learns the power of her cultural heritage—and finds that clicking her heels three times is less effective than a good *cha-cha-cha*.

Bookwriters Mando Alvarado and Tommy Newman give the familiar tale a quick, free-flowing pace, blessing all of their characters with a fresh sense of humor. ("No way!" Dora exclaims when first offered the ruby slippers. "They were on a dead witch's nasty feet!") Newman and Jaime Lozano's songs encompass an impressive range of Latin sounds while keeping up a theatrical feel; "Vamos a bailar y canta" is just as catchy as "Ding Dong, the Witch Is Dead." (Unfortunately, though, the production uses a prerecorded score instead of musicians. Budget constraints notwithstanding, the maracas and flamenco riffs would be fabulous live.) The minimal set is complemented by Sydney Maresca's fabulous costumes—notably the wicked *bruja*'s Dia De Los Muertos-inspired gown—and Jeff Croiter's colorful lighting.

The six actors in *The Yellow Brick Road*'s ensemble are on their feet for the full 60 minutes, creating more than 20 characters and performing 15 songs over the course of the show. They're all top-notch, particularly the wonderfully physical Leiba and the appropriately silver-voiced Viveros. But it's Cavaliere, as Dora, who really carries the show. The actor brings an irresistible smile and a winning unself-consciousness to her Off Broadway debut. Every little girl in the audience will want to be her, and hopefully they'll all take the lesson she learns to heart: We all have our own unique rhythm, but we'll never find it if we don't start dancing.

*The Yellow Brick Road* plays at the [Lucille Lortel Theatre](#) through Aug 19.