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Choco Orta to Perform Tribute to Puerto Rican Singer at Hostos Nov. 14

“Homenaje a Ruth Fernández” Part of Puerto Rican Heritage Month

"I heard her (Orta) in Miami and she was the real thing, a strong improviser with a big, big old-fashioned voice..." Peter Watrous, The New York Times

Bronx, N.Y. (Oct. 22, 2015) – The critically acclaimed salsa singer Choco Orta, who now lives in her native Puerto Rico, returns to New York to perform a tribute to the legendary Puerto Rican contralto and stateswoman Ruth Fernández at the Hostos Center on Saturday, November 14, 7:30 PM as part of Puerto Rican Heritage Month. Heralded as “the Soul of Puerto Rico made into Song” Fernández, who died in 2012 at the age of 92, broke many gender and racial barriers including performing at Carnegie Hall, recording with Machito, touring Scandinavia, and many other firsts for an Afro-Latino woman. She also served in the Puerto Rican Senate, representing Ponce, for nearly a decade, advocating for better conditions for artists. Orta, who will be joined by an octet of some of New York’s leading Latin Jazz musicians led by pianist Dr. Willie Rodríguez, has put together a very special program of Fernández favorite songs composed by beloved Puerto Rican composers including Rafael Hernández, Bobby Capó, Myrta Silva and Lito Peña.

Tickets for the “Choco Orta: Homenaje a Ruth Fernández” in the Hostos Center’s Main Theater are \$20 to \$25 with discounted student tickets at \$10, and are available through www.hostoscenter.org or by calling 718-518-4455. The Box Office window is open Monday through Friday, 1 pm to 4 pm, and two hours prior to events. The Center is located on the campus of Hostos Community College at 450 Grand Concourse in the Bronx, just steps from the 149th/Grand Concourse subway station.

“This concert is a journey that aims to document and share Ruth Fernández’ career and legacy -- to Puerto Rico’s music, in particular, and to Puerto Rico’s history, in general,” said Orta. “Throughout her career, she cultivated Puerto Rico’s music in its various traditions: bomba, plena, boleros, danzas and ballads.” Orta continued, “ as a social leader, she was a pioneer in denouncing racism, challenging the norms at the time, and becoming the first black woman with an orchestra to enter through the front door entrance to the Hotel La Concha (in San Juan), forbidden in 1945, at a time when black people were forced to enter through the kitchen door.”

A native of Santurce, Puerto Rico, singer, percussionist and actress **Virgen Milagros Orta Rodríguez**, known as “**Choco**” graduated with honors from the University of Puerto Rico, earning a Bachelor’s Degree in theater education. Orta started her career in show business in 1979, by performing comedy and singing acts with renowned Puerto Rican actor Antonio Pantojas. She continued her career with theatrical presentations, which included “The True Story of Pedro Navaja, Vejigantes” and “Las Bohemias,” a play with a cast of seven women. As a dancer, Orta studied with several well-known Puerto Rican dance instructors including José “Junito” Betancourt, Sarita Ayala and Ita Medina. Her vocal skills and training were perfected under the private supervision of professors Fonseca and Darisabel Isales. Her knowledge of music theory and solfeggio she accredits to her years of study at the Puerto Rican Conservatory of Music.

In 1996, Choco Orta made her debut recording “Sentimiento y Sabor,” which was followed by additional critically-acclaimed recordings including “Ahora Mismo” and “Choco Swing.” After living in Cuba for a short time, she came to New York in 2004 where she performed frequently at the Tropicana Night Club. Among the many artists that Orta has worked with over the years include Tito Puente, Gilberto Santa Rosa, El Gran Combo and many more. A long-time friend of Ruth Fernández, which Orca describes herself as “the daughter she never had,” Orta premiered “Homenaje a Ruth Fernández” at Teatro Tapia in San Juan Puerto Rico in July of this year.

For the New York debut of this program, pianist Dr. Willie Rodríguez will serve as musical director, along with Peter Nater, trumpet; Hommy Ramos; trombone; Daniel “Gato” Arbolena, baritone saxophone, John Benítez, bass; Frances Benítez, drums; Wilson “Chembo” Corniel, congas; and Chuito De Jesús, choro and percussion. “Choco Orta: Homenaje a Ruth Fernández” at Hostos is co-presented as part of the 9th Annual BORIMIX: Puerto Rico Fest celebrating Puerto Rican heritage, arts and culture during the month of November and organized by the Society of Educational Arts (SEA).

Hostos Center events are sponsored by the Hostos Community College Foundation with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Office of New York City Councilwoman María del Carmen Arroyo, the Office for New York State Assemblyman José Rivera, and the Office of New York State Assemblywoman Carmen Arroyo.

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What: Choco Orta: Homenaje a Ruth Fernández
with Dr. Willie Rodríguez, Pete Nater, Hommy Ramos, Daniel “Gato” Arbolena, John Benítez, Frances Benítez, Wilson “Chembo” Corniel, Chuito De Jesús

When: Saturday, November 14 at 7:30 pm

Where: Main Theater
Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture
Hostos Community College
450 Grand Concourse
Bronx, NY 10451

Pricing: \$25, \$20 (\$10 for students and under 18)

Box Office: 718-518-4455

Website: www.hostoscenter.org

Subway/Bus: IRT Trains 2, 4, 5 and Buses BX1, BX2, BX19 to 149th Street/Grand Concourse.

About the Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture

The Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture consists of a museum-grade art gallery, a 367-seat Repertory Theater, and a 900-seat Main Theater, presenting artists of national and international renown. It is easily accessible from Manhattan, Queens and New Jersey and is a mere 15 minutes by subway from midtown Manhattan

About Hostos Community College

Hostos Community College is an educational agent for change, transforming and improving the quality of life in the South Bronx and neighboring communities since 1968. Hostos serves as a gateway to intellectual growth and socioeconomic mobility, and a point of departure for lifelong learning, success in professional careers, and transfer to advanced higher education programs. The College’s unique "student success coach" program, which partners students with individualized guidance, is emblematic of the premier emphasis on student support and services.

Hostos offers 29 associate degree programs and 5 certificate programs that facilitate easy transfer to The City University of New York (CUNY) four-year colleges or baccalaureate studies at other institutions. The College has an award-winning Division of Continuing Education & Workforce Development that offers professional development courses and certificate-bearing workforce training programs. Hostos Community College is part of CUNY, the nation’s leading urban public university serving more than 480,000 students at 24 colleges.

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