



C-6

Date: May 4, 2010
To: Honorable Mayor and City Council
From: Councilman Dee Andrews, Chair, Housing and Neighborhoods Committee
Subject: **NAME NEW THEATER AT MACARTHUR PARK "THE MANAZAR
GAMBOA COMMUNITY THEATER"**

The Housing and Neighborhoods Committee, at its meeting held March 9, 2010, considered communications relative to the above subject.

It is the recommendation of the Housing and Neighborhoods Committee to the City Council to name the new theater at MacArthur Park, located at 1321 E. Anaheim Street, Long Beach, "The Manazar Gamboa Community Theater."

Respectfully submitted,

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS COMMITTEE

Councilman Dee Andrews, Chair

Prepared by:
Gloria Harper



Date: June 4, 2009
To: Patrick H. West, City Manager 
From: Phil t. Hester, Director of Parks, Recreation and Marine /s/
For: Dee Andrews, Councilmember, 6th District
Subject: Background Information Regarding the Naming of the New Performing Arts Theater at Homeland Cultural Center in MacArthur Park

This is in response to your recent request for background information regarding Manazar Gamboa for the purpose of considering the naming of the new Performing Arts Theater at the Homeland Cultural Center in MacArthur Park, in his honor.

Manazar Gamboa, Internationally Recognized Chicano Poet

Manazar Gamboa was born in the Chavez Ravine area of Los Angeles, now the home of Dodger Stadium, in the midst of the depression. He was a troubled youth who spent his time in and out of detention centers and prisons until he overcame his addiction to heroin and turned to poetry as a means to a life without drugs. Some people say that after a certain age, people do not change. However, Manazar transformed his life through his art in his 40s.

Manazar, a convict-turned-poet, who devoted his life after prison to writing and sharing the liberating power of literature with others from troubled backgrounds, died December 13, 2001, at 66 years old. After his 38th submission to literary journals from behind bars, his work was accepted by a journal published by a University of Colorado professor. In 1977, when he was released from prison for the second time, he worked for Beyond Baroque, where he started the first multicultural reading series and edited its magazine, *Obras*. From 1981 to 1983, he was a director of the L.A. Latino Writers Association and editor of its *ChismeArte* magazine. Later in the 1980s, he was involved in an artist movement that led to a renaissance for the area of Silver Lake. He was honored with numerous awards and grants for his work with many cultural institutions throughout Los Angeles.

In 1989, Manazar became the artistic director, and cofounder with Dixie Swift, of Homeland Cultural Center in Long Beach, where he directed theater and literary reading projects and led writing workshops for adults and children. He also directed more than 2,500 writing workshops for youth in the Los Angeles County juvenile justice system and for inmates at state prisons during 13 years with L.A. Theatre Works, a nonprofit organization in Venice. The new Performing Arts Theater at the Homeland Cultural Center in MacArthur Park is proposed to be named after Manazar Gamboa.

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If you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.

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Attachments

cc: Suzanne Frick, Assistant City Manager
Jyl Marden, City Council Liaison
Sherri Nixon-Joiner, Manager, Community Recreation Services

Manazar Gamboa; Poet Wrote About Chicano Experience

By BLAINE WOO
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Manazar Gamboa, a convict-turned-poet who devoted his life after prison to writing and sharing the liberating power of literature with others from troubled backgrounds, has died.

Gamboa died Dec. 13 at a Long Beach hospice from complications of liver and heart failure. He was 66.

An important Los Angeles poet who began writing about the urban Chicano experience before it was fashionable, Gamboa led Beyond Baroque, the Venice literary center, in the late 1970s and was published in such respected magazines as the Chicago Review.

"He was a very important figure in opening up the poetry world in Los Angeles . . . to new voices, to overlooked ethnic and racial groups and styles," said Frederick Dewey, Beyond Baroque's director. "He was a very underappreciated and under-recognized poet . . . who was dedicated to strengthening his community."

Since 1989, Gamboa had been artistic director at the Homeland Neighborhood Cultural Center in Long Beach, where he directed theater and literary reading projects and led writing workshops for adults and children.

He also directed more than 2,500 writing workshops for youths in the Los Angeles County juvenile justice system and for inmates at state prisons in Chino and Frontera during 13 years with L.A. Theatre Works, a nonprofit in Venice.

"He pioneered and revolutionized the field of arts programming for incarcerated and probationary youth," said Gale Cohen, director of the arts and children project at L.A. Theatre Works. "His true love was working with kids and the community."

At Homeland, Gamboa worked with those hardened by street life to craft stories about their experiences.

He always broke the ice by telling his own story.

"A lot of my writing has to do with my barrio, the people who live

there, the effect of the loss on myself and trying to keep it alive," he said in a documentary on his life, "Poetic License."

Gamboa, whose ancestry was Apache, was the youngest of 12 children. He traveled the San Fernando and Central valleys as a youth, picking crops with his family.

The family lived in Chavez Ravine, a poor, hilly area north of downtown Los Angeles. As one of the first Latino students at Nightingale Junior High in Cypress Park, he rebelled against the prejudice he encountered by speaking only in Spanish and consequently spent much time in the principal's office. He also began to sell marijuana and steal cars.

In 1954, when he was 20, he faced his first prison term. He would spend 17 of the next 23 years in prison.

When his neighborhood was destroyed in the late 1950s to make way for Dodger Stadium, it left Gamboa with an anger about being uprooted that never faded.

He became a heroin addict. In the early 1970s the woman he loved died of an overdose in his arms. After her death, he went on an armed robbery spree and wound up in prison again.

While at Soledad State Prison, he quit heroin, and he started to read anything he could get his hands on, from biographies to ancient history.

Intrigued by Classics

What most fascinated him was poetry. He read Keats, Shelley, Coleridge and Blake because that was what was available in the prison library.

At first other inmates teased him. Then, realizing his seriousness, they started sneaking poetry books through a crack in his cell.

"I'm not saying I went to a higher level and I'm a good guy," he once said. "There was just a change."



Los Angeles Times

Manazar Gamboa, in a 1988 photo, also led writing workshops.

One day someone gave him the complete works of Shakespeare. He was stymied by the bard's Elizabethan English until luck brought him a copy of the Oxford Universal Dictionary. It was the key he needed to unlock the plays, and he guarded it like gold.

"I would have fought King Kong for that book," he told the Times in 1998. "It was like a miracle that it came to me."

He began to write and send his poems out for publication. On the 38th try, his work was accepted by a journal run by a University of Colorado professor.

In 1977, he was released from prison and entered the Los Angeles poetry scene. From 1977 to 1981 he worked for Beyond Baroque, where he started the first multicultural reading series and edited its magazine, Obras. From 1981 to 1983 he was a director of the L.A. Latino Writers Assn. and editor of its ChismeArte magazine.

He began to hold writers workshops for recovering substance abusers and founded a performance

group called AMA.

In the early 1980s he began to teach writing and literacy in prisons and court schools, always telling his students to write from the heart. "You need to tell your own story because if somebody else tells it, they'll tell it wrong," he said.

He would drive as much as 120 miles a day to teach creative writing to children in juvenile halls across the county. In 1988 he won a \$2,500 Brody Arts Fund grant and replaced his aged 1963 Dodge.

When he lay dying, former students came to his aid. One, who worked in a hospital emergency room, volunteered to tend him at night. Another, who worked for the mortuary, took care of his body.

Among Gamboa's most notable works was "Memories Around a Bulldozed Barrio," an epic poem he turned into performance art.

"He wrote some of the most important poems of Chicano writers in California," said Victor Valle, a former colleague of Gamboa in the L.A. Latino Writers Assn. who now teaches ethnic studies at Cal Poly.

San Luis Obispo.

Valle remembered Gamboa as taskmaster of language who rejected the notion that barrio lacked craft. That is one reason Valle considers Gamboa's "Chicano Tank in the Old County Jail" an important poem.

It takes place in the segregated cells at the old Los Angeles jail in 1953. He described a makeshift jam session among prisoners with names like Chuta and Meño. He produced a poem about transformation and faith.

*"Sing it, Chuta, sing it!"
someone yells out.*

*"Ah say,
did you ever have a woman,
catch her*

running-a-round?"

and on, and on

we sing and jam

into "Kansas City,"

"Pink Champagne,"

"All That Wine Is Gone,"

and more, and more,

until:

LOCK-UP TIME

**ALL PRISONERS TO THEIR
CELLS**

Iron doors clang shut.

*We settle into our bedding
with heavy, heavy sighs.*

After a while—

inside the silence—

a toilet is being flushed,

*a truck is rumbling down temple
street*

someone is softly singing,

"Did you ever have a woman..."

Last year, in a project sponsored by Beyond Baroque, a fragment from a Gamboa poem was engraved in the Venice boardwalk.

Gamboa is survived by two sons, Manuel and Frank, of Los Angeles; and a daughter, Olmeca Sol, of Santa Cruz.

Manazar Gamboa, a respected poet and guiding light to a vast number of local youth, was a leading figure in the field of arts programming for incarcerated and probationary youth. His personal experiences with drugs, crime and prison, and his subsequent rebirth through poetry gave him a great measure of respect with those whom he shared his unique and gentle brand of mentoring.

His connection to Long Beach began in 1988 while working with the California Youth Homes. A young man in the community, whose story closely paralleled that of the Chicano poet, had been moved by Manazar's work and asked the staff of the newly founded Homeland to find this inspiring artist.

For the next 11 years, Manazar became the heart and soul of Homeland while nurturing a host of local youth. During his tenure he oversaw the writing and production of thirty-two plays which toured throughout Southern California -- two of which made their way to Off Broadway. One of Manazar's works dealt with his sense of personal loss when his home and neighborhood were demolished to make room for the then new Dodger Stadium. This story and other writings made up a significant portion of a Culture Clash Theater production at the prestigious Mark Taper Theater.

Manazar was an important figure in chronicling the Chicano experience long before it became fashionable. He led the Venice literary center, Beyond Baroque, in the late 1970s and was published in such respected magazines as the Chicago Review. His work received numerous honors including a 1988 Brody Arts Fund grant.

His love of the written word and his strong belief in its transformational ability drove him to help youth who like himself needed to be shown a way out of their often tragic lives. Manazar often drove as much as 120 miles a day to teach creative writing to

children in juvenile halls across the country. He constantly encouraged his students to write and continually preached that, "You need to tell your own story because if somebody else tells it, they'll tell it wrong."

Manazar's passing in December, 2000 was a great loss for Homeland and the community it serves, but his legacy remains strong. The voice he helped speak lives on through the Homeland Players whose theatrical productions have become a Homeland institution. The naming of the building in his honor is a fitting tribute to a man who gave so much to the lives of so many.



CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION & MARINE



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November 19, 2009

MEMBERS OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend to the Housing and Neighborhoods Committee and the full City Council that "The Manazar Gamboa Community Theater" is an appropriate name for the new theater at Homeland/MacArthur Park.

DISCUSSION

The action before the Parks and Recreation Commission is to recommend the name "The Manazar Gamboa Community Theater" for the new theater at Homeland/MacArthur Park.

On November 3, 2009, Sixth District Council Member Dee Andrews sent a memo (Attachment A) to the Mayor and members of the City Council requesting that the new theater at Homeland/MacArthur Park be named "The Manazar Gamboa Community Theater." Also attached is background information sent in a memo dated June 4, 2009, to Councilmember Andrews (Attachment B).

Pursuant to Administrative Regulation AR 8-7, the City Council has referred the request to the Parks and Recreation Commission for consideration of the proposed name. The Parks and Recreation Commission recommendation will be transmitted to the City Council.

AR 8-7 applies to the naming of all public land, buildings and facilities. AR 8-7 provides several policies to guide the consideration of a naming request. The following are those policies:

- The name should incorporate Long Beach whenever important for civic recognition or identification;
- A name in honor of a recognized geographic area, a topographic feature or a historically significant event may be appropriate;
- A name in honor of persons or families who have donated the land or a substantial portion of the improvement costs may be appropriate when applicable;

MEMBERS OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

November 19, 2009

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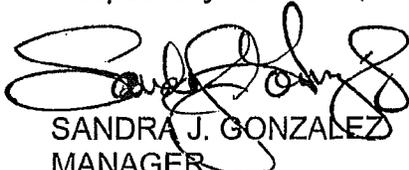
- A name in honor of a person or persons who have served the nation, the State of California, and/or the City of Long Beach in an exceptional or distinguished manner may be appropriate if warranted by service of major significance;
- A name in honor of a living person, or of a deceased person within one year of their death, is not appropriate unless the significance of that person's contribution is worthy of an exception to the policy;
- A name in honor of a person is not appropriate when a name in honor of another person has been given to the same site, building or facility in the past;
- A name in honor of a person is not appropriate if that person has been overly recognized in the past; and,
- A name may be selected through a competition or a contest.

Naming the theater "The Manazar Gamboa Community Theater" is appropriate under the category of honoring a person of exceptional contribution. Mr. Gamboa was the co-founder of the Homeland Neighborhood Cultural Center, where he directed theater and literacy reading projects, and led writing workshops for adults and children. He was the artistic director of the center for 11 years, beginning in 1989. A convict-turned-poet devoted his life after prison to writing and sharing the liberating power of literature with others from troubled backgrounds. He was an important Los Angeles-based poet who began writing about the urban Chicano experience well before it was fashionable. His legacy at Homeland remains strong through the voices of the Homeland Players whose theatrical productions have become a Homeland institution.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Approve recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,



SANDRA J. GONZALEZ
MANAGER
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

APPROVED:



PHIL T. HESTER
DIRECTOR

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Attachments