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For Immediate Release

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***Spring on Fire: A Guatemalan Story, a new play by senior Edwin Rosales,
in a workshop presentation at Lewis Center for the Arts
New play inspired by a violent moment during the Guatemalan Civil War***

What: A workshop presentation of a new play that follows a Maya family living in the highlands of Guatemala, the soldiers who occupy their village, and the spirits that guide and haunt them all during the most violent moment from the civil war.

Who: Written by Princeton senior Edwin Rosales and directed by faculty member Suzanne Agins with a cast of Princeton undergraduates, presented by the Lewis Center for the Arts' Program in Theater

When: April 28, 29, May 3, 4, and 5 at 8 p.m. Audience talkbacks follows April 29 and May 3 performances.

Where: Marie and Edward Matthews '53 Acting Studio at 185 Nassau St., Princeton

Tickets: Free and open to the public; tickets can be reserved in advance through University Ticketing by visiting or calling the Frist Campus Center Box Office at 609-258-9220 or online at tickets.princeton.edu

(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts' Program in Theater offers a workshop presentation of a new play, *Spring on Fire: A Guatemalan Story*, written by senior Edwin Rosales and directed by faculty member Suzanne Agins, on April 28, 29 and May 3, 4 and 5 at 8:00 p.m. in the Marie and Edward Matthews '53 Acting Studio at 185 Nassau Street. The new

work follows a Maya family living in the highlands of Guatemala, the soldiers who occupy their village, and the spirits that guide and haunt them all during the most violent moment from the Guatemalan civil war. Audience talkbacks follow the April 29 and May 3 shows. The performances are free and open to the public, and advance tickets can be reserved through University Ticketing by visiting or calling the Frist Campus Center Box Office at 609-258-9220 or online at tickets.princeton.edu.

The play is set in 1982 during the Guatemalan civil war, which spanned from the 1960s through the 1990s. During this particularly violent period of the conflict, the national army carried out a genocide against the Mayan people, who were believed to be supporting the guerrilla army in the mountains. The play focuses on a family in one rural village and begins with the invasion of the army, ending with the eventual massacre of its residents. In the play the two worlds of this civil conflict converge, a Mayan indigenous rural world contrasted with the military and Christian world from Guatemala City.

Rosales, a first-generation college student who emigrated from Guatemala with his parents when he was a child, drew on family stories and extensive research in writing the play.

“This period in Guatemalan history is part of my history, but I felt removed from it,” explains Rosales. “I wanted to write this play to better understand my history and culture, to tell the story of where I came from, and to tell a story that has not necessarily been heard on the Princeton campus.”

Rosales’ father grew up in a small village of indigenous people outside Guatemala City and witnessed violent events similar to those depicted in the play. He saw some of his community leave the village to join both the national army and the guerrilla army. His mother grew up in Guatemala City, where Rosales was born, and saw the protests of the civil war firsthand in the city.

In addition to the stories told by his family, Rosales read historical accounts and ethnographies, accounts that described the brutality of a violent genocide. In January, through funding provided by the University, he traveled to Guatemala to talk with indigenous people who lived through the civil war and those who left during war and came back. He spoke with people practicing the traditional Mayan religion that is now in conversation with Christianity. The Mayan religion relates strongly to the earth and the seasons, and the play features a spiritual character named Grandmother Moon, inspired by this tradition. He also learned about the country's customs, how people dress, what they eat, and how they live in order to write an authentic world for the play. The play does not depict one actual village but is intended to create a window into that time in the country's history. Rosales was also partly inspired by the film *Ixcanul*, which is set in a rural Guatemalan world post-civil war; the 2016 film was made in Guatemala in Kaqchikel, an indigenous Mayan language, which Rosales also implements in his play.

Rosales, an English major pursuing certificates in theater, creative writing and Latin American studies, has always been interested in writing. He took his first creative writing class at Princeton in the spring of his sophomore year and then saw a production of a new play written by a theater senior, Annika Bennett's *Eyes Up High in the Redwood Tree*, and wanted to try writing for the stage. He took a playwriting class in fall of his junior year and then an intermediate course with playwright Anne Washburn. He loved the craft of writing a play and being in a room with theater makers. He then took more theater classes including "Restaging the Greeks," which included a trip to Greece to study the Greek classics and visit the ancient sites where those plays were first performed, and a directing course with professional director Laurie Woolery. The play represents his senior thesis for both theater and Latin American studies.

Rosales has been writing the play since the fall under the mentorship of faculty member and playwright R.N. Sandberg. There was a workshop reading of the first draft in January by professional Latinx actors from New York City funded by Princeton's Program in Latin American Studies and the Program in Theater, a rare opportunity for an undergraduate to have their new play-in-progress workshopped by professional actors. The script continued to evolve through the rehearsal process under the direction of Agins. The upcoming workshop presentation

with Princeton student actors is another step in the play development process as the full play is seen onstage with a full company of actors. “The process of mounting a production is making me think through and more clearly articulate ideas, and consider what will make the story clear to an audience,” explains Rosales. He is also being advised by faculty member Brian Herrera, whose creative and scholarly work focus on the history of gender, sexuality, and race within and through U.S. popular performance.

For his English and creative writing thesis, Rosales wrote a collection of short stories inspired by his own personal and family experiences, as well as historical research on Guatemala during the civil war. His faculty advisor is Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Jhumpa Lahiri. The stories witness the pressures of a family who recently emigrated to the U.S. trying to make a life in a new country, learning a new language, as well as battling the internal pressures many people face including substance abuse and mental health.

Rosales also wrote a song for the play with freshman Thomas Jankovic from the Princeton University Orchestra.

In addition to his studies, Rosales works with Princeton High School students as an academic tutor and is a Lewis Center Peer Mentor. He has also worked as a college mentor and ESL tutor in Trenton. Next year, Rosales will be a fifth-grade English and language arts teacher in Huntington Park, California through Teach For America.

Agins, who is directing the new play, teaches acting courses in the Program in Theater and has directed a number of new plays and new adaptations of musicals at Princeton. She is a professional freelance director who specializes in new work. Her recent work includes the regional premiere of *In the Heights* at the Hangar Theater (five Syracuse Area Live Theater Awards), and *The Club* by Amy Fox at Ensemble Studio Theater. Her off-Broadway credits include the world premiere of *Radiance* by Cusi Cram for the LAByrinth Theater Company and the critically acclaimed world premiere of *Jailbait* by Deirdre O’Connor for the Cherry Lane Theatre. Her other recent directing projects include: *Alligator* by Hilary Bettis (Eugene O’Neill

National Playwrights Conference); *Fuente Ovejuna: A Disloyal Adaptation* by Cusi Cram, inspired by Lope de Vega's play, at Princeton (developed with LAByrinth Theater Company); *The Burden of Not Having a Tail* by Carrie Barrett (Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference); Noel Coward's *Fallen Angels* (Dorset Theater Festival); *Wing It*, a new musical inspired by Aristophanes' *The Birds*, by Gordon Cox and Kris Kukul (world premiere at Williamstown Theatre Festival); and *Lascivious Something* by Sheila Callaghan (Cherry Lane Mentor Project). Agins holds an M.F.A. in Directing from the University of California, San Diego, is the recipient of a 2006 Princess Grace Directing Fellowship, and is a member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab.

In a surprising coincidence Agins and Rosales found themselves in Guatemala at the same time last January as he was doing research for the play and she was nearby visiting family.

The all-student cast includes Sergio Cruz '18, Ugonna Nwabueze '18, India Rogers-Shepp '18, Feyisola Soetan '19, Jasmine Wang '18, Jay Wilson '17. Alumnus Wesley Cornwell is serving as costume consultant, Maria Cristina Fuste is lighting designer, with students Miles Carey serving as assistant director and Delaney Carlson as stage manager.

Audiences will have an opportunity to ask questions and hear about the process of developing a new play with Rosales and Agins following the April 29 performance. A second audience talkback on May 3 will be led by Assistant Professor of Theater Brian Herrera and Lecturer in the Humanities Council and English Department and Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows Monica Huerta, in a conversation about the play and the wider Latino/Latin American literary and drama canon.

For more information on this event, the Program in Theater and the more than 100 other performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings, concerts and lectures offered each year by the Lewis Center for the Arts, most of them free, visit arts.princeton.edu.

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