



Memorial Service for Acclaimed CSUH Theatre Arts Professor Edgardo de la Cruz

A memorial service for acclaimed California State University, Hayward theatre arts professor Edgardo de la Cruz will be held at 2 p.m. Wednesday, July 14 in the campus' University Theatre, 25800 Carlos Bee Blvd. De la Cruz, 71, died Sunday of a heart attack.

De la Cruz won the George and Miriam Phillips Outstanding Professor of the Year Award at Cal State Hayward in 1994, and in 1999 was unanimously selected as the Outstanding Teacher of Theatre in Higher Education by the Association for Theatre in Higher Education.

He directed six CSUH productions in Slovakia, Cyprus and Scotland during the past 12 years. Even though he officially retired last month, de la Cruz was scheduled to direct a university production of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland this August and was directing that show and a play for children this summer as part of the annual CSUH Highlands Summer Theatre.

Cal State Hayward Theatre and Dance Department Chair Tom Hird said de la Cruz had earned praise internationally "for taking the rawest of materials and fashioning theatre artists who are practicing around the world."

"Theatre refines the soul," de la Cruz once told a reporter while explaining his achievements. "It's our record, our legacy of human experience."

Hird noted that many of de la Cruz' students won awards at the American College Theatre Festival regional and national competitions. His former acting and directing students work in regional companies across the country and around the world and have been accepted for graduate study at the Royal Scottish Academy of Drama. Scott Chambliss, a former de la Cruz student, won an Emmy in 2002 for his production design on the television drama "Alias."

"I was stunned and highly honored," said de la Cruz after winning the 1999 Outstanding Teacher award from the Association for Theatre in Higher Education. "I will keep on doing what I love to do."

"And that's what he did," Hird said. "Even at the end of his career he was just as busy as always and was excited about another trip with his students to perform in Scotland."

"As soon as a person travels, his point of view changes," de la Cruz told an interviewer in 1999 while explaining why his students perform overseas. "They see different styles and approaches and they are no longer provincial."

In addition to his work with students at Cal State Hayward, de la Cruz was a guest faculty member at several universities, including the University of the Philippines, the University of Illinois, Columbia University, and California State University, Fullerton.

He directed plays for companies across the United States and in other countries, including the Philippines and the United Kingdom. His production of "Oedipus Rex" won a national award from the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival.

He was a published poet and recently finished writing a book of observations about his life in the theatre and ideas about acting and directing entitled "Directing for Theatre, A Personal Approach." It will be published in November by the University of the Philippines Press.

In 1998 Photos Photiades, an internationally known performer of classical Greek plays, invited de la Cruz to bring his student production of "The Bacchae" to Cyprus, where it was performed in open-air amphitheatres that summer.

A San Leandro resident, de la Cruz served on the executive boards of the United States International Theatre Institute and the Cal State Hayward Center for Filipino Studies. He assisted the Pilipino American Student Association with its annual Culture Night productions.

Raised in Los Banos in the Philippines, de la Cruz received his bachelor's degree from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, and his master's in fine arts from the University of Hawaii. He began teaching English literature at the University of the Philippines when he was 21 and started directing plays after becoming adviser to the campus drama club.

"I find I rely on my background as a Filipino," he told an interviewer in 1999. "I grew up in a society that was ritualistic and mystical, so I tend to gravitate toward things like that. Another thing I feel strongly about is that theatre should concern the human experience and the human heart."

After 10 years teaching at the University of the Philippines, de la Cruz joined the faculty at California State University, Northridge and, in 1981, became a professor at Cal State Hayward.

"I had to spend another 10 years getting rid of everything I was taught because it hampered the way I approached directing," de la Cruz told an Oakland Tribune reporter. "I discovered that teaching or training people in theatre arts has nothing to do with rules. It's a creative field, so the most important thing is to treat the students as co-creators or co-artists."

Donations in memory of de la Cruz may be made to the university's Department of Theatre and Dance Fund. Checks for donations in his name may be made out to the "Cal State Hayward Educational Foundation," and designated for the International Theatre in the Department of Theatre and Dance. They can be sent to the CSUH Office of University Advancement in Warren Hall, Room 908, 25800 Carlos Bee Blvd., Hayward, 94542.

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