



Mayda del Valle's poems leap from page to stage

A slammin' sensation

Her rhymes are loud, proud, and straight from the corazón. This boricua captivates Broadway nightly with her cultural tales ■ By Nancy Gavilanes

Name and age: Mayda del Valle, 24

Hometown: A Chicagooan, she now lives in New York City.

Job: She's one of the stars of the *Russell Simmons Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*—the show *The New York Times* calls “poetry for the stage, not the page.” The multicultural group of nine poets tackles topics such as romance and racism and pays tribute to hip-hop and salsa.

How she kicks it: Mayda sings, shouts, and savors her poems.

Each syllable is accompanied by tons of sass and “no te metas conmigo” attitude. Her lyrical rhymes cover everything from how proud she is to be “a Chi-town South Side Rican” to how her mami has “more flavor in her food than El Gran Combo’s horn section.”

Rhyming at the top: In 2000 Mayda took on the A-list performers at the legendary Nuyorican Poets Café, a mecca of the 1970s spoken-poetry movement. There she began “slamming,” or competing, with her poems in front of applauding critics.

Word play: She won the Nuyorican’s

Grand Slam Championship in 2001 with her poem “Tongue Tactics,” a witty defense of Spanglish. She later beat some 200 poets to become the youngest person, and the first Latina, to win the individual title at the National Poetry Slam, the World Series of the spoken word. The win earned her a spot on HBO’s *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*.

Her motivation: “Other people have been telling our stories for so long. For me, it’s really important to represent an authentic Latino voice on stage or on TV that’s not a caricature, that’s not a stereotype.”

How being Latina helps: Her *cultura* is her muse, giving Mayda an endless supply of ideas. For instance,

“In the Cocina” was inspired by the *comidas* she ate growing up—*cuchifrito*, *sofrito*, *arroz*, *pollo*, and *piraguas*. The result was a piece that tempted the taste buds, Mayda says. “Everyone in the cast said, ‘We gotta go to your mom’s house to eat.’”

Read “In the cocina” and some of Mayda’s other poems at latina.com

Sensación poética ■ Mayda del Valle, de 24 años en Chicago y hoy vive en Nueva York. Es una de las estrellas de la *Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*, una producción teatral que aborda todo tipo de temas que van del romance al racismo. No solo recita poemas sino que los canta, los grita y los disfruta. Sus versos van de lo que es ser una puertorriqueña a su mamá. Mayda llegó a Nueva York en el 2000 para perseguir su arte. Se presentó en el legendario Nuyorican Poets Café de los campeonatos de poesía en el 2001. “Para mí es una auténtica voz latina que no sea ni caricatura ni es

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