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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Luna Negra Dance Theater Celebrates Cinco de Mayo with *Viajes* (Journeys) at the Athenaeum Theater, May 3-6, 2007**

Mexican-American Michelle Manzanales makes her Company Debut as Choreographer with the World Premiere of *Sugar in the Raw* (Azucar Cruda)

March 20, 2007 – Dynamic and daring, **Luna Negra Dance Theater** will return to the Athenaeum Theatre to celebrate the Cinco de Mayo holiday with "*Viajes*" (Journeys), a captivating mixed-rep program, reflecting on issues such as identity, tradition, immigration and popular culture. Headlining the program will be the World Premiere of *Sugar in the Raw* (Azucar Cruda), a new work choreographed by Mexican-American Luna Negra company member **Michelle Manzanales**. Other highlights include reprise of repertoire favorites *Luna de Miel* (The Honeymoon) by **Gustavo Ramirez Sansano**, *Amor y Dolor* (Love and Sorrow) and *Quinceañera* (Sweet Fifteen) by Luna Negra Founder and Artistic Director **Eduardo Vilaro**.

Chicago's premier Latino contemporary dance theater, **Luna Negra Dance Theater** will perform "*Viajes*" at the Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 North Southport Avenue. Performances run Thursday, May 3 through Sunday, May 6, 2007.

Cinco de Mayo commemorates the victory of Mexico against French occupation when a Mexican force of 4,500 men faced 6,000 men of a well trained French Army at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862. Eager to help, United States Union forces rushed to make sure the Mexicans received weapons and ammunition they needed to defeat the French. Since then, Mexicans and Americans have been united in their fight for freedom and liberty. Luna Negra celebrates Cinco de Mayo with "*Viajes*," showcasing works that are inspired by the Mexican/Latino iconic cultures and experiences.

Mexican American choreographer Michelle Manzanales marks her choreographic debut with Luna Negra Dance Theater with the World Premiere of *Sugar in the Raw* (Azucar Cruda), an exploration of the complexities and subtleties of identity. It is a portrait of the beautiful imperfections of humanity. As a second generation Mexican-American woman, Manzanales grew up feeling disconnected from her Mexican heritage. At an early age Manzanales realized there was a void in her life and felt suspended between her Mexican roots and American upbringing. Her immigrant grandfather's passing in 1997 ignited her choreographic voice and since then she has created work which explores identity in the shadows of her own melting pot heritage. In short, Manzanales' piece is one of deep introspection.

**Luna Negra Dance Theater** will also reprise three critically acclaimed pieces from its repertoire, *Luna de Miel* (The Honeymoon) by Gustavo Ramirez Sansano and Luna Negra Artistic Director Eduardo Vilaro's *Amor y Dolor* (Love and Sorrow) and *Quinceañera* (Sweet Fifteen). Sansano's *Luna de Miel* (2003) is a cheeky and playful look at Hispanic (including Mexican) culture and uses the Telenovela (Latino soap opera) format. A humorous postmodern look at love, this duet opens with a Telenovela-style video produced by Luna Negra, which is an interview with the dancers and presents the relationships between the two.

Highlighting the immigrant experience, Vilaro's *Amor y Dolor* (1999) is a quartet for four female dancers and features audio voice-over. This piece deconstructs the inherent anguish that comes with immigration and the struggle to preserve identity. *Quinceañera* (2005), created in collaboration with visual artist Luis De La Torre, is an exhilarating celebration of the Latino tradition of "coming of age."

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Vilaro takes an introspective look at this definitive moment that takes a girl from childhood to womanhood and explores the inner transformation that happens, through dance and movement set to a wonderfully diverse range of music from the traditional bolero to a contemporary score by Mexican composer Ana Lara.

Founded by Eduardo Vilaro in 1999, **Luna Negra Dance Theater** creates, performs and teaches contemporary dance by Latino choreographers. Luna Negra's distinctive style artfully blends ballet and contemporary dance movements strongly flavored by Latin and Afro-Caribbean dance forms. Luna Negra also collaborates with Latino artists of other disciplines, including visual, media artists, musicians and composers which fosters cross disciplinary explorations and results in richly textured and highly original, contemporary dance theater. In addition to performing, Luna Negra conducts extensive outreach and education programs, serving annually over 10,000 students in the Chicago area.

**The performance schedule for Luna Negra Dance Theater's "Viajes" is Thursday, May 3 through Saturday, May 5 at 8:00 p.m. and Sunday, May 6 at 3:00 p.m.**

Tickets range in price from \$25-\$45, with \$15 tickets for students and children (under 12). Tickets go on sale March 20. For tickets call 312-902-1500 or visit [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com). Tickets may also be purchased at the Athenaeum Theatre Box Office. The Athenaeum Theatre is located at 2936 N. Southport Avenue, Chicago. For more information about Luna Negra Dance Theater visit [www.lunanegra.org](http://www.lunanegra.org).

*Exelon Corporation, Proud Parent of ComEd, is the 2007 Season Lighting Sponsor. In addition, this concert is made possible thanks to the generous support of LaSalle Bank. Additional support is provided by The Chicago Community Trust, Illinois Arts Council, an agency of the state of Illinois; City of Chicago, City Arts Program.*

### **Choreographer Biographies:**

**Michelle Manzanales** (Choreographer) has received dance scholarships from the American Dance Festival, the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and Dance Masters of America. She began her professional career with the Houston Metropolitan Dance Company and has studied and worked with respected choreographers and teachers including Sean Curran, Randy Duncan, Liz Lerman, Donald McKayle, Celeste Miller, Kevin Wynn and Mario Zambrano. A choreographer as well, Manzanales has created works for Impetus Dance Theater (Chicago), Houston Metropolitan Dance Company, the University of Houston and Rice University, and has been recognized by the American College Dance Festival for four of her choreographic works. This past year, she had the great honor of having her piece, entitled *Pour Me Out*, presented at the Kennedy Center, as part of the American College Dance Festival National Gala. Her work has also been presented by Festival de Danza Cordoba (Veracruz, Mexico), Fort Worth Dance Festival (Fort Worth, TX), and DC Arts Center (Washington, DC). Manzanales joined Luna Negra in 2003 as a dancer and became Rehearsal Director in 2006. *Sugar in the Raw* is her first choreographed piece for the company.

**Gustavo Ramirez Sansano** (Choreographer) was born in San Fulgencio, Spain. He trained at the Instituto del Teatro of Barcelona and studied with Joseeta Garcia, Karemia Moreno, Guillermina Coll and Jose Maria Escudero. In 1997, Sansano was the recipient of the first prize for Choreography at the Ricardo Moragas Barcelona Competition, and in 2001 he received the first prize of the Dom Perignon choreographic competition in Hamburg with *Un Peso en la Espalda*. He also received the Best Choreography and Best Show Award of Las Artes Escenicas de la Comunidad Valenciana. He has premiered works for Luna Negra Dance Theater, BalletMet, and Dominic Walsh Dance Theater in the United States, as well as for Hamburg Ballet (Germany), Ballet Carmen Roche (Spain), Passerelles (Belgium), Abcdance Company (Austria), IT Dansa (Spain), Patas Arriba (Spain), and Nederlands Dans Theatre 2 (Holland). As a dancer, Sansano has performed with Ballet Joven de Alicante, Ballet Contemporaneo de Barcelona, Ballet de la Comunidad de Madrid, Nederlands Dans Theater 2, and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. He was featured in works by Margarite Donlon, Victor Ullate, Rui Horta, Jacopo Godani, Hans Van Manen, Jiri Kylian, Lionel Hoche, Nacho Duato, Ohad Naharin, Johan Inger, Paul Lightfoot, Philippe Trehet, Shusaku Takeuchi, David Parsons, Ramón Oller, and Jim Vincent among others. Sansano has created three works for Luna Negra: *Vamos a Contra Mentiras* (Let's Tell Tall Tales), *Luna de Miel* (2004), and *Flabbergast* (2002).

**Eduardo Vilaro** (Luna Negra Founder and Artistic Director) was born in Havana, Cuba, and immigrated to New York City where he grew up in the Bronx. He received his dance training at the Alvin Ailey American Dance School and the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and then received a BFA in Dance from Adelphi University in 1988. Vilaro was a principle dancer with Ballet Hispanico of New York where he taught and performed until 1996. He has taught and toured throughout the United States, Europe, Central and South America, and the Middle East. In 1999 after receiving a Masters degree from Columbia College, his passion for his heritage and dance led him to establish the Luna Negra Dance Theater. Vilaro's work with Luna Negra is devoted to capturing the spiritual, sensual and historical essence of the Latino culture. He creates work that explores the Latino culture's racially and ethnic diverse movements through contemporary dance, as well as through music of Latin and Caribbean countries, in fresh ways that speak to modern audiences. The result "is something rich and irresistible, with choreography that is exceptionally fluid, dramatic and revealing," according to the Chicago Sun Times. His work often includes collaborating with artists of other disciplines and he has created works with artists such as Afro-Peruvian singer Susana Baca, visual artist Luis De La Torre and soprano Harolyn Blackwell. Vilaro has also received commissions to create works for other arts organizations such as the Ravinia Festival, Chicago Sinfonietta, the Lexington Ballet, New Jersey Dance Theater Ensemble, the Civic Ballet, and Same Planet, Different World. In 2001 he was a recipient of the Ruth Page Award in choreography and in 2003 was honored at Panama's II International Festival of Ballet for his choreographic work. Mr. Vilaro has been on the faculty of the Dance Center of Columbia College and the Chicago Academy of the Arts and currently serves on the board directors of Dance/USA.