

Author Yael Prizant at Crossing Borders festival last year giving a lecture on Cuban history and theater.



MORE CULTURAL POWER FROM RED BANK

Crossing Borders Festival at Two River Theater August 3-7

RED BANK — Ah, this newspaper's work is never done.

In the case of Red Bank, it's to dispel the bullshit — particularly among the snarky set in our region — that the town is nowhere land. Ironically, their ignorance is up there with the ignorant suburbanites of Monmouth County who used to look down on Asbury Park.

So here's the deal. Red Bank is destined to become a center for the arts and culture in the region. And by that we mean the whole Northeast. The place punches way above its weight for a town its size. Meanwhile, its creative class is getting larger and larger.

Probably because there's a well-known shopping district in the town with — gasp! — some high end retailers, the too-cool-for-thou around here can't believe there's significant arts or culture in Red Bank. They're wrong. And those in Red Bank see exactly what we see, as do so many others.

Not only is a large creative class expanding rapidly in Red Bank, but the number of people employed there in creative, tech or artistic jobs and organizations easily exceeds the number in Asbury Park. That's because there's much more of such businesses and non-profits in Red Bank. Asbury may have more creatives living here, but Red Bank has more working there in such jobs. Don't ever forget that. It's a big reason we see the two towns working equally in tandem to transform the triCity region of eastern Monmouth into a suburban area like no other.

Much of the arts action in Red Bank comes out of the two large non-profit cultural venues up there — the Count Basie Theatre and the Two River Theater. This newspaper always gives big play to their various programming and special projects, not just to let readers know what's happening — but also to show the leadership role they play in building Red Bank into

such a cultural magnet.

Thus this article takes note of the upcoming Crossing Borders festival on August 3-7 at the Two River Theater. The Crossing Borders festival is so typical of what's going on up in Red Bank — a quality and diversity of arts programming that you'd get in the most vibrant cities in this country. Programs like Crossing Borders are high-level stuff brought to you by accomplished arts figures, who increasingly split their time between Red Bank and New York, which are so easily accessible to each other by rail. Hell, the Two River Theater is about five steps from the train station.

The Two River Theater launched the Crossing Borders festival in 2011 to create opportunities for Latino theater artists and to foster a stronger relationship between the theater and Red Bank's Latino community. Each year the festival attracts more than 500 audience members, artists, businesses, and civic leaders. All programming is free to the public. [For more information on the festival programming this year, visit tworivertheater.org.]

In addition to developing new plays that have gone on to full productions at Two River and elsewhere, the festival has helped spark other audience engagement initiatives. One of those is Nosotros, an artistic outreach program dedicated to fostering a closer relationship between the theater and its Latino neighbors, building demand for theater among Latino audiences and engaging Red Bank's Latino community in a dialogue where they feel their stories are heard. As part of Nosotros, Two River has commissioned Tanya Saracho to write a play that will speak directly to the concerns of Red Bank's Latino community — drawn from the experiences and challenges specific to this community in this particular place — which will be developed at the theater under the direction of Jerry Ruiz.

This year's Crossing Borders festival will include play readings, audience

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discussions, a keynote address from a leader within the Latino arts community and a neighborhood kickoff party with food and live music. A company of actors, writers, directors and other artists will be in residence throughout the festival.

Over the past five years, Crossing Borders has become a mainstay within the Latino artistic community. This season the festival will feature a broad range of voices and experiences that reflect the diversity of stories being told by Latino playwrights. Works to be read at the festival include plays by Matt Barbot, Bernardo Cubria, Melinda Lopez, and Tanya Saracho. [Reservations are encouraged. Contact the Two River Theater Box Office at 732.345.1400 or visit tworivertheater.org.]

Crossing Borders is curated by Stephanie Ybarra, who currently serves as the Director of Special Artistic Projects at The Public Theater in New York, where she leads the Mobile Shakespeare Unit and produces the Public Forum series. She also serves as Producer's Lab Liaison for the Women's Project and Casting Director for Crossing Borders.

"This year, Crossing Borders is bringing together writers and stories from all over the country to explore questions of individual and national identity, and what it means to be a part of the Latino diaspora," says Ybarra. "Melinda, Matt, Bernardo, and Tanya couldn't be more different artistically, and it's thrilling to have them all in the same space wrestling with some of the biggest questions we face today."

So there you go, again visit tworivertheater.org for the specific programming. Much like our articles leading up to the first annual Indie Street Film Festival at the Count Basie theatre a couple weeks ago, this one about Crossing Borders is just another way to further our agenda. In this case, destroying all ignorance about Red Bank — and recognizing its rightful place among the most powerful centers for the arts among communities its size.

For this aspect of Red Bank is hugely important for our region, as much as anything else you read about in these pages.

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