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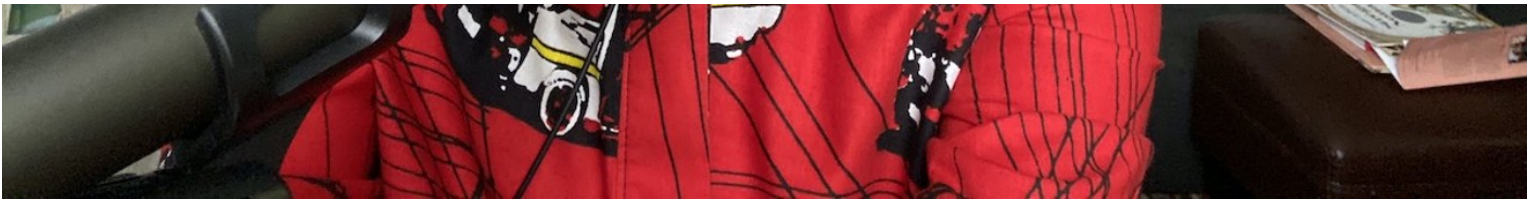
# Playwright Vanessa Garcia's Audio Drama Weaves Together the Fall of the Berlin Wall and Cuba

**CAROLINA DEL BUSTO | APRIL 8, 2021 | 8:00AM**



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Playwright Vanessa Garcia records her latest audio play, *Ich Bin Ein Berliner*. Photo courtesy of the Tropical Agency



Wearing her signature black-rimmed glasses, bold gold earrings, and a deep red lip, playwright Vanessa Garcia beams over Zoom. The 42-year-old is preparing for the launch of her latest audio play, *Ich Bin Ein Berliner*.

Although the Miamian (and **occasional *New Times* contributor**) wrote the play during the height of the pandemic in 2020, she'd been workshopping the idea in her head for a handful of years.

“I’ve had this idea in my brain for ages,” she says with obvious excitement. “This play about the moment when the Berlin Wall falls and everybody, including the audience, is in this fifth-grade classroom. And even though it’s happening to this one character, everybody is involved.”

The moment is personal for Garcia and is inspired by her own experiences. She remembers crying while watching the news of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when she was 11 years old. The moment – and her reaction to it – is etched in her memory.

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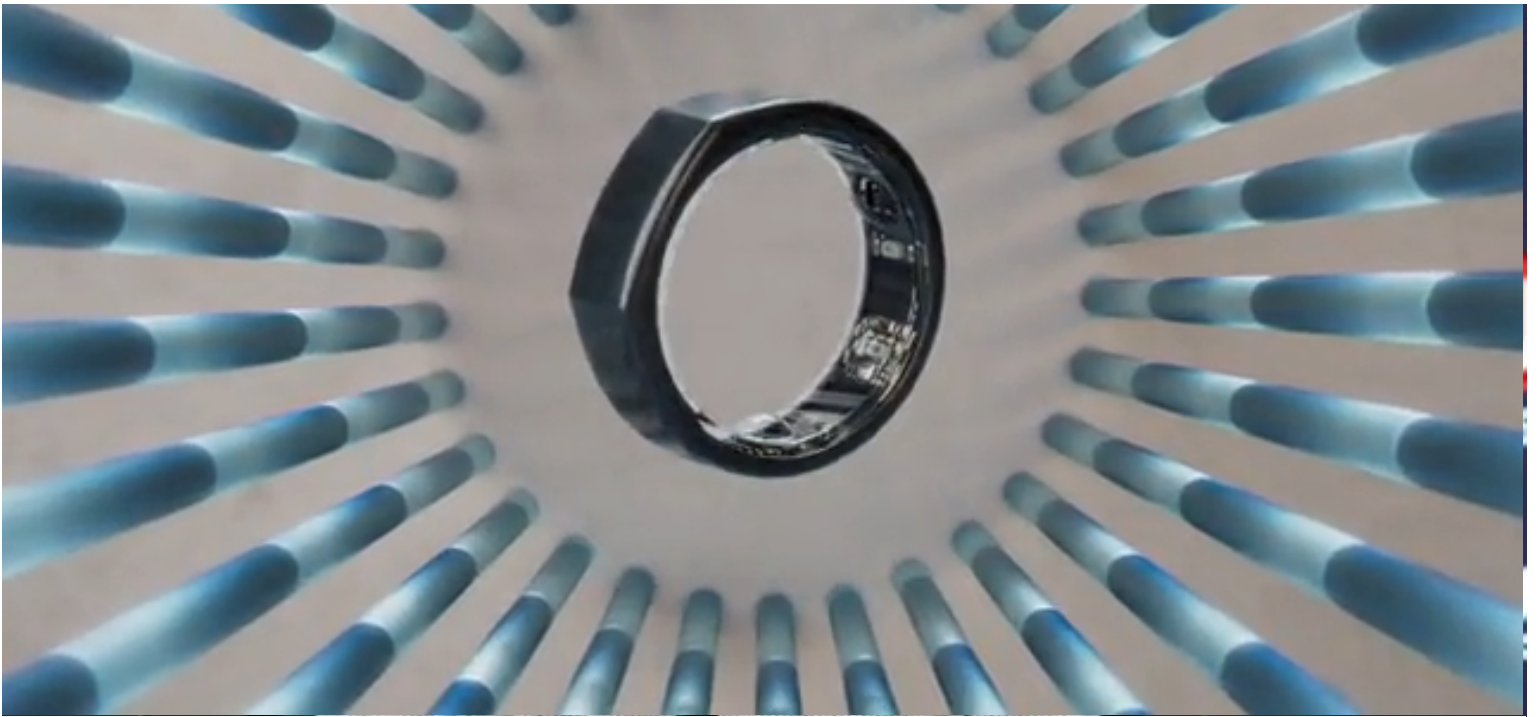
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She recalls the moment her teacher switched on the television to show the wall that once divided East and West Berlin fall to pieces. Seconds before, a prepubescent Garcia was writing notes to her classmates and passing scraps of paper to her friends. She had this unexplainable urge to pull a prank and have her entire class break out into rhythmic humming to the tune of Willie Nelson’s “On the Road Again.”

Her plan was quickly forgotten when she looked up at the TV.

“I just felt this inexplicable wave of emotion start to rise in me, and I started crying in my seat,” she recounts. “As I got older and started to understand it, I realized [I reacted that way] because of Cuba. We don’t think of it this way, but Cuba is a satellite of the Soviet Union. So, it is, in essence, an Eastern Bloc country



work through the indescribable emotions she has carried with her for three decades.

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When she was commissioned by Matt Stabile, artistic director of Florida Atlantic University's resident professional company, Theater Lab, to write an audio drama, she knew instantly what story she wanted to tell.

One of Garcia's first jobs after college was assistant to a British writer who wrote radio plays for the BBC.

"I've always been attracted to that [format]," says Garcia, who has written audio plays herself in the past. "It's a very different way of approaching production. I am extremely visual, but as I write audio plays, my brain switches into sound whenever I want to go visual."

As she speaks, it's clear how stories flow out of her almost effortlessly, like a quiet stream in the woods – and yet, as powerful as a storm. Garcia's words resonate with her audience. When she writes, it's almost as if she's revealing a piece of herself with the world, and it's that tender authenticity that moves viewers to tears, to laughter, to reflection.

Garcia, who recently wrote an essay for *New Times* about the plight of Elián González, works as a journalist, novelist, and playwright. She holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of California Irvine and has worked as an adjunct professor at Barry University and the Savannah College of Art and Design.

The topic that fascinates her the most? Cuba.

Her 2015 debut novel, *White Light*, features a Cuban-American protagonist. Her successful 2018 production, *The Amparo Experience*, told the origin story of Cuba's famous Havana Club rum. Her Carbonell-nominated play, *The Cuban*



Florida coast.

In simple terms, *Ich Bin Ein Berliner* is about a young girl who goes on a journey

to discover what the fall of the Berlin Wall means to her and how her Cuban-exile roots influence her discovery. (The title, which translates from the German as *I Am a Berliner*, is a nod to John F. Kennedy's **famous words** – "As a free man, I take pride in the words *Ich bin ein Berliner!*" – uttered during a speech he delivered in West Berlin on June 26, 1963.

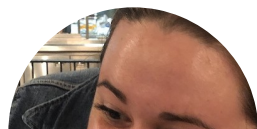
“Abstractly,” says Garcia, moving her hands habitually as if trying to illustrate a clearer picture, “it’s about what it means to be Cuban right now. It’s about what connects all of us across borders, how borders are torn apart and created. I think it’s extremely relevant right now in terms of all the borders we’ve been talking about building and all the borders that we’re breaking.”

Presented by Theater Lab, *Ich Bin Ein Berliner* is available online through May 23. Audiences have the option to purchase the **simple audio drama for a cost of \$5** or spring for an **enhanced experience that includes accompanying visuals for \$15**.

**Ich Bin Berliner.** Available to stream through Sunday, May 23; [fauevents.com](http://fauevents.com). Tickets cost \$5 to \$15.

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