

# FACING FORWARD



I have stage fright.

That familiar, slightly sweaty feeling crept up on me last week as I sat in a bank of black metal chairs at Cleveland Public Theatre.

And it wasn't even me on the stage. It was Courtney Brown, an actress pretending to be me. I was watching rehearsals for [Johanna: Facing Forward](#), which previews on May 28th and opens May 29th.

The play, written and directed by [Tlaloc Rivas](#), is based on a 2007 Plain Dealer series I worked on with Johanna Orozco in the months after she was raped and shot in the face by her ex-boyfriend, Juan Ruiz.

The eight stories chronicled Johanna's recovery from life-altering trauma. It hinged on the wisdom and courage of an 18-year-old to choose forgiveness over hate. She chose to move forward with her life - instead of allowing it to be swallowed up by anger and resentment.

If you missed the series or want to read it again, [you can catch up with it here](#). (We've also added some new photos to the original package.)

Working on the story with photographer Gus Chan was the most intense journalistic experience I've ever had. I developed a bond with Johanna that continues to this day.

Johanna taught me lessons about resilience that I've tried to carry with me in both my personal and professional life. When I first saw her lying in bed at MetroHealth Medical Center, she was unable to speak, yet was unwilling to be silenced.

But I never expected to see her story - and our relationship - recreated under the hot stage lights.

And it still feels kind of weird.

**Rachel Dissell**

Journalist, *The Plain Dealer* reporter and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of 9-part series "Facing Forward"

To read Rachel's full article "[How a reporter became a character in a play](#)" click link.

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[\*\*Johanna: Facing Forward\*\*](#) by playwright/director Tlaloc Rivas is based on the writings of Johanna Orozco and Rachel Dissell's Pulitzer prize-winning series *Facing Forward*, originally published in the *The Plain Dealer* in 2007. [Click Here](#) to read the full 9-part series and more, and to learn how Johanna's story - and her tireless advocacy and activism - led to the approval of critical legislation aimed to protect teens in abusive relationships.

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## Johanna in *The Plain Dealer*...

### [\*\*Johanna: Facing Forward - Multimedia\*\*](#)

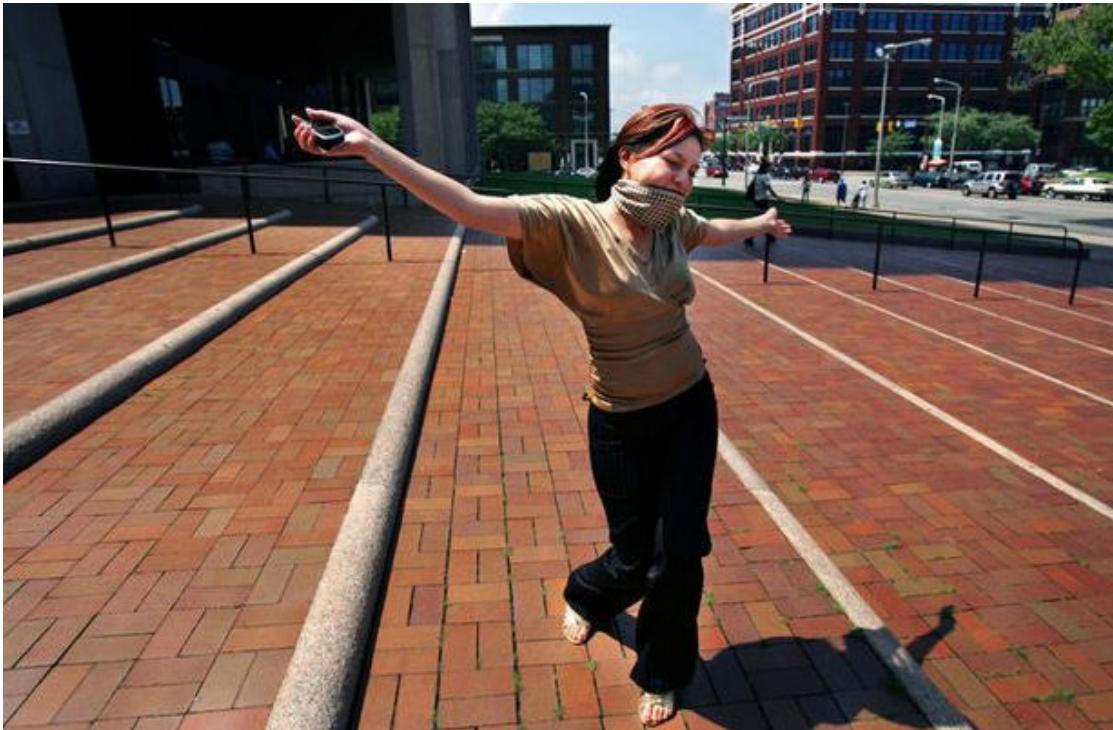
An interactive, clickable audio and photographic presentation of events, from the emergency room to the trial, narrated by Johanna Orozco and her Cleveland Clinic surgeon Dr. Michael

Fritz.



### **A Look Back at Johanna Orozco**

A slideshow of the original *Plain Dealer* articles and photographs.



*Johanna Orozco raises her arms in relief as she poses outside the Justice Center after ex-boyfriend Juan Ruiz pled guilty to charges. (Gus Chan/The Plain Dealer)*

### **In Johanna's Words...**

Excerpts from Johanna Orozco's journal entries and poems.

## Poem by Johanna Orozco, 2005

My heart opened up to you  
And let you in  
I've given you everything I had  
And let you touch my skin  
I wrote your name deep in my heart  
And I promised you that  
We will never part  
You invited me in your home  
And I did the same  
We build a connection and together  
We lit a flame

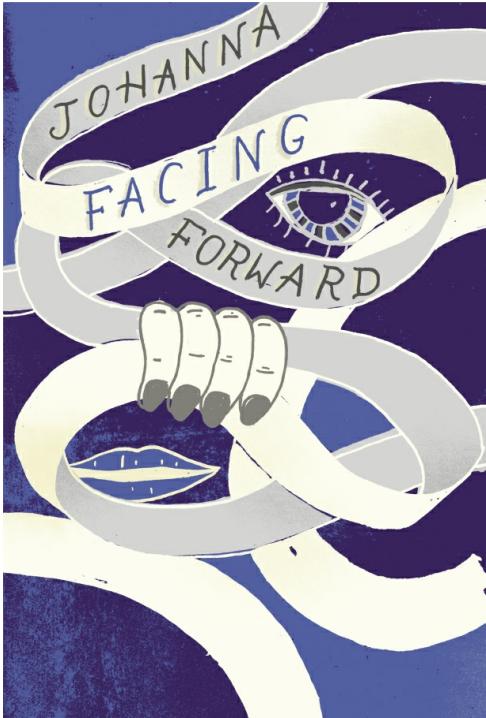
### Johanna Orozco: Where is she now?

A slideshow of Johanna and her family from July 2014.



*Johanna Orozco-Fraser smiles as she watches her son, Malcolm play in the backyard of her godparents' house July 25, 2014. (Gus Chan / The Plain Dealer)*

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# Johanna: Facing Forward

Written and Directed by Tlaloc Rivas

May 28th - June 13th

7:30pm, Gordon Square Theatre

Tickets are \$12 - \$28

Inspired by the true story of Johanna Orozco, a Cleveland teen who survived a gunshot wound to the face by her boyfriend in 2007 and whose story sparked a nation-wide movement against teen domestic violence. Based on the Pulitzer prize-winning series "Facing Forward" by *Plain Dealer* journalist Rachel Dissell, **Johanna: Facing Forward** is a vivid recount of the young woman's extraordinary journey of courage and recovery. Produced in conjunction with Teatro Publico de Cleveland. World Premiere.

**Featuring Tania Benites (as Johanna), Becky Aviles, Andrea Belser, Courtney Brown, Arthur Chu, Jason Estremera, Stuart Hoffman, Leticia Lopez, Gilberto Peñafiel, Alejandro Rivera and Blanca Salva**

Megan Monaghan Rivas- Dramaturg

Aaron Benson- Scenic Designer

Inda Blatch-Geib- Costume Designer

T. Paul Lowry- Video Designer

Sam Fisher- Sound Designer

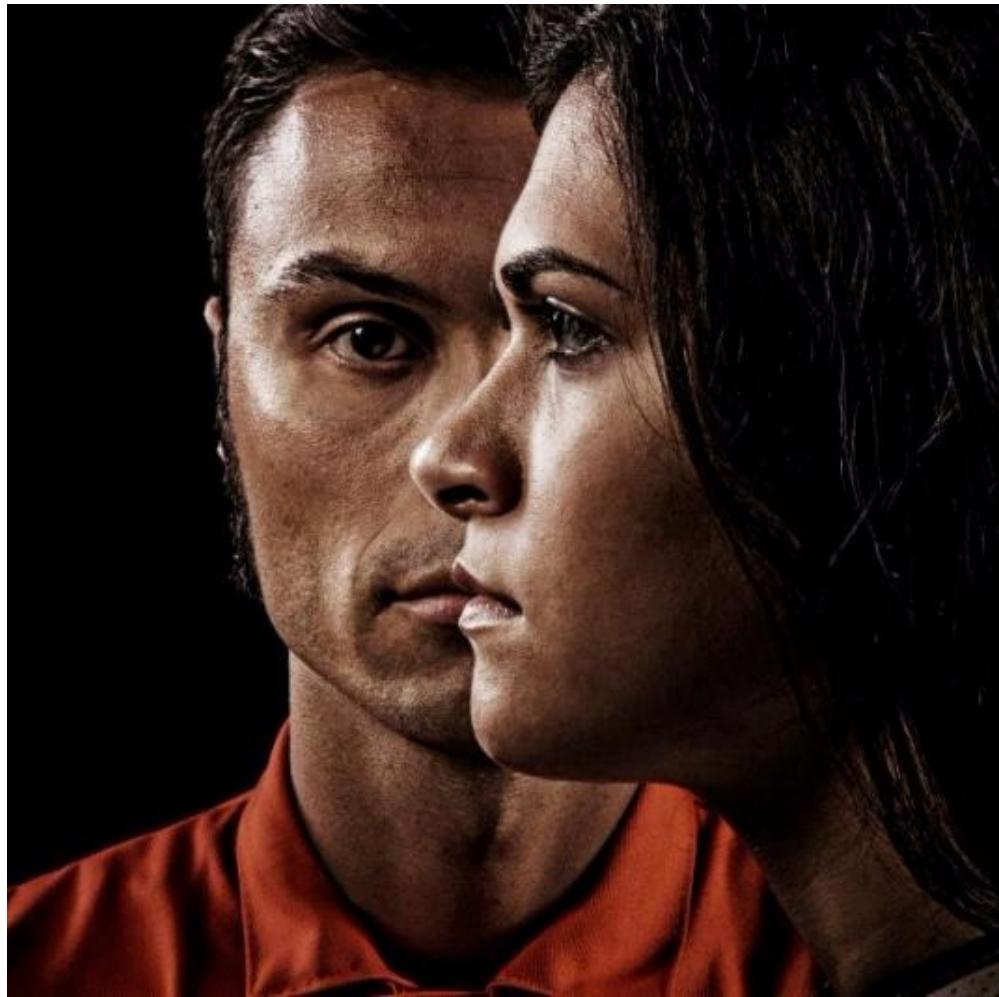
Michael Cunningham- Lighting Designer

Kevin Orozco- Board Operator

Sarah Lynne Nicholas- Stage Manager

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**A World Premiere...**



*Actors Jason Estremera (as Juan Ruiz), Tania Benites (as Johanna Orozco). Photo by Steve Wagner.*



*Actors Tania Benites (as Johanna), Courtney Brown (as Rachel Dissell). Photo by Steve Wagner.*



Actors Tania Benites (as Johanna), Alejandro Rivera (as Alberto Orozco). Photo by Steve Wagner.

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**Johanna Orozco-Fraser and  
Johanna: Facing Forward actress Tania Benites  
meet for the first time**



*Tania Benites, Johanna Orozco-Fraser and Tlaloc Rivas (Playwright and Director).*

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Thank you to our [\*\*Johanna: Facing Forward\*\*](#) partner...



## Show and ticket info:

All performances take place at [\*\*Cleveland Public Theatre\*\*](#), Gordon Square Theatre  
6415 Detroit Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44102.

**Johanna: Facing Forward** runs May 28 - June 13. Tickets are \$12-\$28 .

Shows are Thurs/Fri/Sat/Mon at 7:30pm. Thursday and Monday shows are just \$12!

For tickets and show information, call the CPT Box Office at **216-631-2727 x501** or visit [\*\*www.cptonline.org\*\*](#) .

**FREE BEER FRIDAY** is every Friday at CPT. Audience members are invited to mingle with artists after the show and enjoy a drink on CPT!

**Want to see the complete 14/15 season at-a-glance?**

**Visit [www.cptonline.org](#) for up-to-date information on all of our upcoming productions!**

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**Cleveland Public Theatre**  
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