

### **Advisor's note on *Kan Balaam***

In January 2009 a group of Cornell students traveled to Chiapas, Mexico with the course "Experience Latin America: Chiapas edition". During this time abroad *Teatrotaller* students and staff experienced the Mayan culture and to live in today's Mayan world. The students learned about the problems faced by indigenous communities as big companies vie for natural resources and land. They also learned about the continuing magic of Mayan belief through a visit to San Juan Chamula, a church where past and present blend with sacred rituals and religious ceremonies. The students and staff, including director Carolina Osorio, were so moved by this trip that we decided to portray our *living experience* impressions in this semester's play: *Kan Balaam*.

The script for *Kan Balaam*, written and staged by students through collective effort, underwent an extensive process of writing, editing, rewriting and composing assisted by the Mexican-American playwright Carlos Morton, a long-time friend of *Teatrotaller*. *Kan Balaam* integrates Mayan myths and cosmology from the *Popol Vuh* with contemporary conflicts in indigenous communities, especially as the so-called "modernization" invades their culture, traditions and territories.

Furthermore, *Kan Balaam* is an attempt to elicit awareness about a far away world that is yet so close to our students, academics and people with Hispanic interests and heritage.

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