

## MICHELLE ALZOLA

**Idahon jaio zen, familia euskaldun batean, eta azken hamar urteotan Algortan bizi da, senarrarekin eta bi seme-alabekin. Ondorengoei bi kulturak transmititzen saiatzen da, bakoitzetik onena aukera dezaten.**

Daughter of Basques born in the United States, Michelle Alzola was raised in Idaho and has lived in Algorta, the town of her paternal grandmother, for the past 10 years with her husband, Jose Luis Egiluz. Her children, Ander and Ane, were born here but she still feels a sense of uprootedness from time to time the same way that her grandparents did in the United States. So that history doesn't repeat itself, Michelle has hopes that her kids will never have to choose between two cultures but rather to simply enjoy the best from each of them.

An Idahoan, Michelle was born in Gooding and raised in Mountain Home. She feels fortunate having been surrounded by horses and cattle and getting to grow up on the Alzola Brothers' Ranch in Owyhee County. Accustomed to wide open spaces, her first impression of the Basque Country was of surprise about "how close by everything felt: the ocean, the mountains ... and being able to walk just about everywhere." In her family, English was the dominant language although Basque and Spanish could be heard. She admits that she typically answered everything in English and would later make up for it by studying languages at the University of Idaho and in the Basque Country.

Basque was her maternal grandparents' common language. Her Grandfather was from Irurita, Navarra and her Grandmother, although born in Nevada, came from an Aldudes family, on the French side. Her father's family, both sides from Bizkaia, came from Ispaster and Algorta.

Two generations ago, gatherings and celebrations in the large U.S. Basque community made a perfect setting for strengthening ties and getting together to remember the homeland. "My grandparents had to have missed their old way of life but never made it back to stay," Michelle remembers. She began contact with Basque cultural events through the Basque Center in Boise, where she joined the Oinkari Basque Dancers expanding her activities until serving on the Euskaldunak board of directors. She



## «Enjoying two cultures is a privilege»

stays active with the Boise Basque community and collaborates all that she can on projects. "I met my husband, José Luis, there when he was sent to help the Biotzetik Basque Choir in its formative years." She studied Telecommunications and Spanish at the University of Idaho and enjoyed her job as a training specialist with Ore-Ida Foods, Inc. in Boise. "Our team developed training programs on topics like quality and safety and delivered them companywide, requiring contact with a diverse mix of people." She had to give up her job to move to the Basque Country.

In Bilbao, Michelle taught business English in companies and furthered her studies in Spanish and Basque. "From my first experiences in the Basque Country I remember how the street life and the spontaneous social life caught my attention, going out for a walk and running into friends without having to set it up. That and the attention of the small specialty shops and fish markets are all simple luxuries that make daily life natural and easy." Many things made an impact on Michelle, especially finally being able to put into context the sketches that she had heard and imagined during her childhood: songs, stories, gestures, expressions and mannerisms which when she landed in the Basque Country, gained their true meaning. But what left the biggest impression on her was when she met her family from the Baztan Valley for the first time. The Zelayetas, her Mother's

cousins, shared an astonishing resemblance to her family both physically and amazingly in personalities and character traits as well although they were born on different continents. "Knowing where my grandparents were born and lived when they were young and trying to imagine how tough the times were when they were brave enough to leave their country, families and friends behind to begin a new life, knowing that they might never make it back home all forms a part of me now. I have an immense appreciation for what they did."

Now that her son, Ander, is approaching adolescence, what worries Michelle the most is the couldn't-care-less attitude of many young people. "I really try to avoid making comparisons but I think that here young people lack a little creative spirit and energy. It may be because there are less work possibilities than in the U.S., but I notice that many young people stay at home with their families for an extended time and they don't pitch in and help out like you would expect."

Michelle is convinced that in order for her kids to avoid adopting these kinds of attitudes they'll need to receive other stimuli. "I try to expose them to as much of both cultures as possible and hope that they will take the best of each." Each year at the end of the school year the whole family heads to Boise for the summer. "There they get to spend time with all kinds of different kids and learn from new experiences."

## RUTH GUIMERÀ

Bilbon jaio zen duela 26 urte eta, artisten familiakoa ez izan arren, txikitatik erakarri zuten arte eszenikoek. Gaur New Yorken bizi da, ametsak gauzatzeko ahaleginetan, eta esan behar da, neurri batean behintzat, lortu duela amets horiek egia bihurtzea, John Strasbergen alboan ari baita lanean, hain zuzen ere, Actor's Studio sortu zuen gizonaren semearekin. Ikastegi ezagun hartan hainbat izar ospetsuk ikasi zuten: Marilyn Monroek, Robert De Nirok, Al Pacinok...



## «The work with Strasberg is unique, hard and exciting»

I have grown up voluntarily connected to art," confesses Ruth Guimerà. After a few appearances as a child, whilst she was studying drama in the now closed Basauriko Antzerki Eskola, she was lucky enough to work for ABAO on three opera seasons and participate actively in performances and meetings with Mina Espazio. "I was very lucky because it is exceptional to have the chance to get on the stage so young. A combination of intense desire, work and luck caused it to happen," the same qualities which led her to be awarded a grant by the Basque Government to choreograph and interpret a dance solo called "The corset ... this second skin."

Then she was offered the role of Marejada in "Feromona Feroz", a pseudo-musical with a taste of the Rocky Horror Picture Show created and directed by Asier Etxeandia: "It was a revelation, the confirmation that the actress I'd been dreaming of was living somewhere inside me." But dreams don't last forever and when they don't come true, as Ruth herself says, "they become nightmares; I was dying to know if

my dreams would come true, whatever happened." Moments of crisis were overcome thanks to a grant from the Provincial Government of Bizkaia sending her to New York where she was selected as a student by John Strasberg, who she speaks of with boundless enthusiasm: "Working with Strasberg is unique. It's difficult to describe. Looking for truth on stage, dreaming about the character's world and being in contact with their real life are strong concepts in the creative process. With Strasberg, each actor starts out on an individual path and he guides us, sharing his life and stage experience with us. It is very hard and emotional but the results are surprising."

They say that anything is possible in New York and Ruth confirms this: "It has a special energy. It's a city for doing things. They work hard in all aspects. Its lights blind you and its roughness makes you strong. It's a place to learn everything you want."

She lived in the Bronx, in Harlem, she was left with nowhere to live ... and she also felt a moment of romanticism and missed her own

country. "I went to a dinner in the Eusko Etxea in Brooklyn and it was very emotional. It was almost a trip back through time. The Basque-Americans gave me a very warm welcome. From that day we have not lost touch. It's in my heart."

When she returned to Bilbao last Christmas, Fran Lasuen offered her the role of "Ipuin Iberiarrak" alongside the actor Kandido Uranga, a play based on five short stories by José Saramago, Quim Monzó, Manuel Rivas, Julio Llamazares and Bernardo Atxaga with folk music composed especially for the occasion. "It's an attempt to give a voice to the peculiarities of the different corners of the Iberian Peninsula." It played in Zornotza and Durango, but Ruth will come back in the summer because there are more shows awaiting her.

Meanwhile, she can see that her dreams are progressing little by little: "Everyday I feel that anything is possible and that the distance separating Bilbao and New York is nothing more than an idea. I'm happy with the path I've chosen. It's like it's always springtime."