

**“Astrid Hadad’s cabaret of colors  
will stop you in your tracks.”**

*—The Miami Herald*

**American Premiere**

# **Astrid Hadad Tierra Misteriosa**

**May 5 – May 6**

American Premiere  
**ASTRID HADAD**  
**TIERRA MISTERIOSA**

**LIMITED DATES**

May 5 @ 7:30 p.m.

May 6 @ 8:00 p.m.

Program Consultant:  
Isabel Soffer/Live Sounds

“My style is syncretic, aesthetic, pathetic, and diuretic, which demonstrates, without shame, the attitudes of machismo, masochism, nihilism, and ‘I-could-give-a-damn’ inherent in all cultures.”

—Astrid Hadad

**C**elebrate Cinco de Mayo with Mexican cabaret artist Astrid Hadad's *Tierra Misteriosa*, a sassy and tuneful jaunt through Mexico's tumultuous history. Carried by slaves, Hadad takes us from the ancient Mexico of Tenochtitlan, through the forgotten women of history like La Malinche, the beautiful woman who acted as Cortes's interpreter and later bore his children, to the Mexican heroine of the future. *Tierra Misteriosa* is part telenovela, part vaudeville and concert. Hadad shimmies in gorgeous, over-the-top costumes and soulfully sings us through the historical contradictions of her beloved homeland. We'll hear some of the great Mexican *banda* classics and some of Hadad's own pungent music. The colors are rich, the music is hot, and the drama is real, but it is Hadad's insightful and irreverent commentaries that really provide the oxygen.



Photo: Fernando Trejo

# Astrid Hadad

## An Aztec Priestess in the 21st Century

BY MANUEL IGREJAS



Photo: Fernando Trejo

**A**strid Hadad is a wise, sassy, and petite powerhouse who illuminated my computer's small screen with her megawatt wit and personality during our brief Skype conversation. Michèle Desfrenne, Hadad's French partner, was nearby to fill in any gaps in her forceful English. It was like watching the coming attractions of a spicy Latina blockbuster set in their art-filled Mexico City aerie.

Born in Mexico of Lebanese parents, Hadad grew up in Quintana Roo on the Yucatan Peninsula. The only Lebanese thing she retained was the food. Her first-generation background allowed her to see Mexico from a slightly different angle, past the built-in prejudice against native people. "My Lebanese roots made me love Mexico even more," she says in her strong, smoky voice.

With her long dark hair, penetrating brown eyes, striking profile, and earthy allure, Hadad resembles the Aztec goddesses she channels in her stage shows. Though the Yucatan is the home of the Mayan culture, most of Hadad's work is influenced by the Aztecs because, she says, "I live in Mexico City, and the Aztecs were the imperialists of their time."



Besides the Mexican music she heard all around her, Hadad's girlhood was influenced by the Cuban sounds coming from the radio and the glamorous divas of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, like beautiful María Félix, who thumbed her nose at Hollywood and challenged the baked-in machismo of Latin culture.

In college Hadad studied acting, but legitimate theater felt too stifling for her big personality and big ideas. She was drawn to the popular variety shows, the *Teatro de Revista*, with their blend of music, slapstick, and political comedy. Influenced by Kurt Weill, she went to Germany to observe its cabaret. She began by singing the great songs in the extensive Mexican songbook and writing some of her own. As her work evolved, the political element took hold, combining with Hadad's subversive sense of play to create her campy, over-the-top performances. As an openly gay woman in Mexico, Hadad is known for putting her own spin on traditional songs to challenge gender roles. In the lovely classic tune "Soy Virgencita," an innocent maiden laments her chaste life. Hadad flips the song on its head, wearing a costume that incorporates a billowing skirt, festooned with lilies and a watering can. Halfway through she adds a sombrero, ammunition belt, and mustache and sings the song as a macho man.

Given Hadad's politics and staunch feminism, it's no wonder that *Tierra Misteriosa* is partly a tribute to Mexico's great forgotten women. In addition to the screen actress María Félix, there is Lucha Reyes, who broke with tradition to sing the full-throated ranchera songs usually reserved for men, and the mysterious, notorious Aztec woman La Malinche. The conquering Spaniards enlisted her to translate for them. She bore Cortes a son and later married a Spanish captain. She was treated well

**Hadad designs her own insanely magnificent costumes, and Desfrenne creates them. The ornate headpieces reference Aztec culture and current events.**

**The elaborate dresses bear skeletons, skulls, pyramids, breasts, hands, and ammunition belts—a virtual garage sale of Mexican historical and pop iconography because, Hadad says,**

**“I am a baroque woman, and I am afraid of the empty.”**

by the conquerors, but until recently, history dismissed her as a traitor.

“Women of that time had no opportunities,” Hadad says. “They weren’t even allowed to talk. Because La Malinche had a talent with words, she was able to improve her circumstances and survive. When history doesn’t forget women, it treats them badly.” Though remarkably resilient, Hadad has felt a modern-day

version of the same stigma. “Until now I have been considered alternative, underground, outsider. Officials don’t like my work very much.” But audiences cheer. Her colorful extravagance and winking provocation should be a glorious finale to Peak Performances’ 2016–17 season.

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**Manuel Igrejas** is a playwright, poet, publicist, proud resident of Montclair, and all-purpose art guy.

Photo: Rodrigo Vazquez

