My name is Rafael Tez García, and yes I’ve worked here, like 11-12 years, more or less. I’ve always worked here and in the surrounding area: in the Milton Court school, Sundial Court, NCP [Barbican Car Park], up the front at the Girls’ School. I also work in the mornings at 6am and leave at midnight. Like around 4pm - my contract is 8 hours, from 2pm to 10pm but now it has been adapted because people go on holiday, others are sick, so I cover them.

*What part do you work in the most? Where?*

I always work on the ground floor or 1st floor, but I also go to many other floors. We go to lots of parts because we don’t have an area, as such. People come in and out. I like this because I like to welcome people and guide them [around the Centre]. As much as I don’t know English, I try to explain to them how to move around, where the bathrooms are, if they’re lost and can’t find the exit. Even though I don’t know English, I make an effort to explain. I like this area with the public, I’ve listened to various languages and I’ve learnt bit by bit.

*Where are you from?*

I am Colombian.

*When did you come here?*

I went to Spain in 2000, to Lanzarote in the Canary Islands. I stayed until 2008 and in June I came here to London and started working at a restaurant. When I arrived I started working in a British restaurant and I didn’t know anything. I didn’t study much, in my country I studied until the 4th year.

*What is that?*

For 4 years, and I didn't even finish that, but nonetheless I’m here. I like living here because of the work and the security. I’ve managed working here because I’ve been here for 12 years and I’ve seen a lot of people coming and going but I am still here.

*For you, what is it like working long hours?*

I like doing a lot of hours, I’m not on benefits and this helps me make money for my family and travelling. I have a son in Spain and when Spain was going through a rough time, I had to send him money and also my family in Colombia, as well as saving up for myself. It’s a waste not to use the time you have. You have to work. In my country the work that I had was really hard because it was hard, physical labour. Here it’s not that hard. I mean I don’t really sleep, I finish at midnight and by the time I arrive home it’s 1am, and then my alarm wakes me up at 5am and I start working again at 6am. I’ve been doing this since December.

*What do you like to do at home when you are relaxed?*

I like listening to music.

*Which music?*

For us it’s like music that is ours, meaning Colombian music. It’s quite diverse, there is salsa, and cumbia. We say it’s music for drinking, drinking spirits and then eating as well!

[Part of *Chinito Rulo* by Ranil y Su Conjunto Tropical plays]

*In Colombia what kind of spirits did you drink?*

Over there, the one that we would mostly have we call ‘aguardiente’ (hot water) the white one is the basic one. It comes from the sugar cane, which is then mixed and then becomes a bit stronger. Because, have you tried tequila?

*Yes, I have.*

Well, it kind of is like that, because tequila also comes from sugar cane; peppers; and then beer as well. Then there’s also other stuff like whiskey.

*Then…*

[Music]

I like to clean. I like cleaning the carpets with a machine, I really like doing that job.

*Why do you like it?*

I like it because I hadn’t seen that before, I hadn’t been able to use the machines and I like how clean it gets and also keeping the main areas clean. It’s where everyone comes in and then I think, it’s the area that we have to maintain always. It’s like one’s home, the entrance has to be clean. So I always like doing this area. I always do this area, everyone can always find me here. I also move around, I’ve just been doing a job on Level -2, the green room where there is a restaurant [for staff]. I know everything, I’ve been here for 14 years and I like doing all kinds of work. I clean the bathrooms and do all kinds of work. But because my schedule is from 2pm to 10pm I don’t really clean that much because the in-depth cleaning happens with the people that come in the morning. My role is to maintain, be aware if something drops and if so, I pick it up. That’s my job right now.

*How do you manage to clean all of this?… There’s a lot!*

Well because for example, this carpet is new, this has changed a lot because, as I was saying, previously there was a lot more eatingand there were many more people about, so there were more spillages on the floor. So there used to be a machine, like a cart which you could drive and that would clean a spilt coffee really fast. Now, you go to the spillage and clean by hand. That is what I do.

And for the floors that don’t have a carpet, I also do the same thing. I’ll clean the spill, I’ll make it shiny, and, if it’s a stain, rub until it comes back to its natural colour. There are different types of cleaning cloths or machines. For instance, for cleaning the carpet we would use one thing and for ceramic we would use a different one.

*When you were young, when you cleaned your home, did your Mum do it?*

Well, it’s very different here than it is back home, not from the big cities, but I come from a small town near the countryside. I was in the countryside until I was 20 years old, where there wasn’t any TV. By the time I was 20, I left to a small town where there was already a TV, but in the 80s there weren’t TVs in the countryside. There weren’t roads. You would arrive by walking 2 hours to get home from the fields or to go to the town. It would be a 2 hour walk, or by horse. So it was very different. In the fields, you would use something like a wooden mop with branches like a bush, so you put it on a long stick and you would sweep with it. In the fields, the only thing that would exist is wooden floors. In some other houses they had ground, so you would only sweep and sweep to keep it clean.

*So it’s very different from here…*

Yes, because here a kid wakes up and takes for granted the floor under his feet and how you clean it, so yes it’s very different.

*If you could be any part of the building, which one would you be?*

Here, this place, this place right here. I really like it and take care of it.

*Is there a funny moment from working here?*

Yes, I really like seeing lots of people arrive. They come in, and they go in one direction and they get lost because they don’t know where the exit is because they came in another way so they come to me and they ask me and I explain to them how they got lost and where the exit is and they giggle a bit and that gives me joy, being able to help people and the fact that they understand me even though I can’t speak English or use my Spanish. So that brings me joy, being here when there are events and it’s full of people.

*When I am here I think I see people do these turns and it’s funny.*

Yes, because there are sometimes events in the Theatre in the Concert Hall, on the 3rd floor in the Gallery. So people, someone asks for one thing, another for another, they ask for the toilets, the exit. So that keeps me going.

Sometimes people don’t find things, like the toilets, the lettering of the signs is really small. I always think that if the signs were bigger maybe it would be easier. But then I think not.

*Then it’s much easier? (laughing)*

In the beginning, when I went to Colombia I would leave via Heathrow and the first time I didn’t know how to read and I didn’t understand anything so I had to ask, ask and ask. Now I understand a bit and I read so I don’t ask anymore, I look at the signs and I find my way, so then I think if the signs were bigger here, it would be better. [giggles]

*Bigger letters please!*