

# Los Angeles Times

May 30, 2003

THEATER BEAT

## 'Latinologues' reduces indignities to laughter

■ Rick Najera's play takes some of the sting out of illegal immigration.

Let's apply Newton's third law to emotions for a moment. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. So despair propels us toward hope, frustration toward accomplishment, tears toward laughter.

Comedy often works on this principle, turning something that ordinarily would prick our anger into something that tickles the ribs. Examples of this can be seen in "Latinologues," in which writer-director Rick Najera takes some of the sting out of illegal immigration, menial labor and prejudice by getting people to laugh at them. His ever-expanding repertoire of monologues and sketches keeps turning up in Southern California, this time in the small Studio space at the Coronet Theatre.



[Poignant](#)  
(Alan Mercer)

A highlight of this edition is Najera's portrayal of an effusive movie executive whose hilariously awful ideas for the Latino market include "My Big Fat Mexican Quinceañera" and "Titanico" -- Cubans on a raft with a slow leak."

More poignant is the tale of a hyper-macho busboy (Fernando Carrillo) whose ego gets bruised by the blond of his American dreams, and the story of a pregnant young woman of Dominican descent (Monica Ortiz) who calls herself "the virgin of the Bronx" and insists the guy who impregnated her must be an angel "because he just vanished."

The most powerful monologue focuses on an earnest, affable janitor (Joseph Perez Bertot) who takes great pride in his work and thinks he's found a perfect life working in New York high-rise office buildings until a certain day in September 2001.

As with any comedy show, this one lapses at times. Signs of desperation emerge when Najera must duplicate a gag - a second banana mindlessly echoing the words of his superior -- to try to pump up sketches about a drug lord (Carrillo) and a Chicano student group (with Paul Saucido).

Still, the hip, young audience at a recent performance kept the room filled with laughter.

--Daryl H. Miller

"Latinologues," [Coronet Studio Theatre](#), 366 N. La Cienega Blvd., L.A. Thursdays-Saturdays, 8 p.m. Ends Aug. 30. Cast and monologues may vary. \$20. (310) 657-7377. Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes.