



# unChín Magazine

Sept 29, 2005

Written by Edwin Pagán (NALIP Board Member)

Billed as “a comedy about life in America ,” LATINOLOGUES is an adult comedy show that is more of a magnified look at the varied idiosyncrasies ingrained in Latin culture and how we have learned to live with countless adversity, retained our sanity (almost), and managed to look good in the process. Told through a series of poignant monologues — a sort of absurd state-of-the-Latino-union address — the show provides a satirical reflection on our time (dis)honored traditions and cultural and (mis)conceptions. In short: LATINOLOGUES is warped fun.

Even before the 90-minute laugh-fest began, a series of parodies flashed on a rear-projection screen providing a small but telltale look at the zany antics that would engulf the stage momentarily: “Brown Man Group” reads one slide, as three bald-headed, chocolate-skinned Mexicans with piercing eyes peer out onto the audience, a direct statement of contrasts to their Anglo counterparts who literarily reside on the opposite end of the color spectrum. Or, if you prefer to read more into it – across the border. Another dissolve reveals a banner ad for the never-to-be-produced “CHICANO: A New Driveby Musical.” A third, “Mariachi on the Roof,” lampoons Sholom Aleichem’s world renowned work and replaces the title character, and his traditional instrument, as if to say, *‘It’s our turn to play on the old virtual ethnic jukebox.’*

After slowly snaking its way across the US and playing in nearly a dozen major cities, LATINOLOGUES has finally landed on Broadway for an extended engagement (it played at The Town Hall Theatre in February for one performance only). The many spices provided by the Latin groups lambasted in the show has allowed it to marinate and reduced into a thick comedic *asopón* guaranteed to satisfy the tastes buds of any lover of this kind of humor. These genuinely entertaining tableaus manage to turn the clichés and stereotypes associated with the Latin community on their heads by laying them bare before us. The piece also challenges Latin patrons to reconsider how we look at our

selves while also holding up a mirror that reveals how eccentric we appear to non-Latinos; all while treating us to a tear- and bellyache-inducing good time. To date, the rotating cast of LATINOLOGUES has been performed by more than 70 actors including Edward James Olmos, Yareli Arizmendi, Jacob Vargas, and Christian De La Fuente. The current performance troupe includes Eugenio Derbez, Rick Najera, Rene Lavan and native-New Yorker, Shirley A. Rumierk.

Created and written by “MAD TV” and “In Living Color” spoofer, Rick Najera, and aptly directed by veteran comedian/actor, Cheech Marin (of “Up In Smoke” fame), LATINOLOGUES is uncontrollably hilarious to Latino audiences because it is peppered with those ironic peculiarities that make up our collective culture. It is also a breath of fresh air since it brings into the open the various labels that we pin on other fellow Latin groups but normally only whisper within our own segment of the Diaspora. When one of the performers pokes fun at the Puerto Ricans, for example, by dropping the line that they are merely “Mexicans with passports,” Mexicans, Dominicans and other Latinos from south and central America who must frequently suffer the indifferences of customs find a common kinship in the roast, and the Puerto Rican patrons, in turn, explode into laughter because they recognize the ironic truth in the joke. And if any ethnic group thinks they will be held harmless, think again. Even when seemingly holding back from making any disparaging remarks about the Columbians, out of fear of loss of life or limb, as is subtly suggested, the show is in itself taking a tongue-in-cheek jab at that country’s ties to organized crime. Since the pun is floated as a sarcastic insider’s reference, the result is, of course, more gut-wrenching laughter. BUT judging from the crowd’s roar, the number one maxim shared across the vast Latino spectrum (except among Argentine nationals) is - “Argentines, you are NOT Europeans.”

And that is precisely the genius behind Rick Najera’s sardonic LATINOLOGUES: provide a sense of familiarity without alienating anyone while offending as many as possible. As one patron seated in front of me shouted in jest as his country’s nationality was assailed: “Those are fighting words!” But in LATINOLOGUES, antagonistic wordplay is just part of the comedic glue that binds us together as a people, even if for only one brief fun-filled moment under one collective roof.

LATINOLOGUES is worth the price of admission. Catch it before it moves on.