



## Bernardo Cubria's Latest Play: 'Crabs in a Bucket'

*Topanga playwright Bernardo Cubria jokes that he's part of the One Percent... but it's not the one you're thinking.*

By Sarah Spitz

This Mexican-born, U.S.-raised Topanga homeowner and community member launches his newest play, *Crabs in a Bucket*, with The Echo Theatre Company debuts at the Atwater Village Theatre on July 15.

"There's a myth out there that you're lucky to be LatinX in Hollywood right now, but let's consider the numbers," he said in an interview.

The one percent he's referring to—actually 1.1 percent according to UCLA's 2023 Hollywood Diversity Report—is the number of LatinX film writers who worked in Hollywood in 2022. According to the 2020 US Census, Latinos in the US were 18.7% of the population; that means Hollywood is failing in every sense of proportional representation.

"If you see zero percent, and now there's 1.1%, you must be thinking it's an even playing field. But it's not," Cubria says. He knows he's blessed to have been a small part of that small percentage, but he's the lucky one.

It's partially what inspired him to write "Crabs in a Bucket."

First, an explainer. Cubria was in a play in New York written by Mando Alvarado that included a line referring to the Latino community as *crabs in a bucket*. When one crab in a bucket tries to crawl out, another steps over it and keeps it down.

"I'd heard this as a Mexican saying and in other contexts," he explains. "And I just kept thinking, what is it about oppressed people who turn on their own community?"



Playwright Bernardo Cubria had the idea to write a satirical play about actual crabs who live in a bucket. It is funny... but with a message.

As a child, he watched Salma Hayek build success in Hollywood. "But even people in my own family said negative things about her. And I wondered why? This is a Mexican woman who's insanely talented, she's opening doors and succeeding in Hollywood; she's a hero to me! I still believe there should be a statue of her in every city in Mexico. I think what she achieved, especially at a time when there was so little representation and people weren't even talking about diversity, is amazing.

"In an industry where there are limited opportunities for under-represented people, if one person from your community gets a shot, you think you'll never get yours. Although I think the

real villain is the power structure, I had the idea to write a satirical play about actual crabs who live in a bucket to explore this social phenomenon."

If that set up sounds a little bit like Samuel Beckett, you wouldn't be wrong. "It's an absurdist piece, and Beckett is one of my heroes." It also gives him the chance to use his three-month training with master Antonio Fava at the Commedia dell'Arte Clown School in Italy. "I like clowning and making fun of the social norms and rules we all just seem to accept. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett is talking about existential, large life themes in a hilarious way that's also deeply painful. I love plays where at first you're laughing, but by the end you're crying and you go, wait how did that happen?"

Cubria says Commedia dell'Arte changed his life. "It's a life philosophy I try to live by, in both performance and writing. It's all about maintaining a spirit of play and not trying to overplay or overthink things, because your brain can be a very dangerous place."

Cubria says first and foremost, *Crabs in a Bucket* is funny. "When you walk into the theater, think Tim Burton. You're going to be inside a big orange bucket and soon you'll meet these four crab characters."

Thematically, the play is about what happens when people let bitterness and resentment take over their lives. "What happens when we get older and start losing our idealism or *joie de vivre* or desire to change the systems around us is poison and dangerous.

"And then there's this other theme that for a long time, when a Latino TV show or film is made, the strongest critics come from within our community. Of course, critiques are necessary and valid, but not every movie is going to be *Citizen Kane*, and no one movie can represent everyone from Tijuana to Buenos Aires. There's been a push recently to fight against that and to say we have to stop behaving in this way. One character in the play is the voice of that, looking at these people who've always done things a certain way, and is begging them to change. Imagine what could happen if we supported each other."

Cubria is hoping to see some neighbors come out to support *Crabs in a Bucket* when it hits the stage. "I love being a member of the Topanga community and it would be super meaningful to have people from here come see the play and a cool opportunity to meet artists I don't know yet."

*Crabs in a Bucket* holds previews July 12, 13 and 14, performances run July 15–August 21. For very reasonably priced tickets call (310) 307-3753 or visit [echotheatercompany.com/crabs-in-a-bucket](http://echotheatercompany.com/crabs-in-a-bucket).

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