

Flaco Navaja Pays Tribute to Human Resilience at L.A. Theatre Center

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Hip-Hop meets Salsa as Flaco Navaja, a prominent voice of the Puerto Rican diaspora, brings his love letter to the Bronx to Los Angeles. Backed by a live, five-piece salsa band, Navaja creates a love letter to his native Bronx, imbuing it with the charm, rhythm, soul, and improvisational spirit of a true Sonero.

The show, titled *Evolution of a Sonero*, is directed by Miranda González and features a libretto arranged by Carlos Cuevas. The production pays tribute to human resilience in a spirited concert theater performance.

According to Navaja, the entire show is structured like a salsa song, with salsa serving as a metaphor for his life. Born and raised in the Bronx, NY, Navaja has established himself as a prominent voice of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. He has performed nationally and internationally and has graced acclaimed theater stages such as The Public Theater and Pregones/PRTT.

As a poet/spoken word artist, he has hosted the legendary open mic showcase All That! Hip Hop Poetry & Jazz at the famous Nuyorican Poets' Cafe. He has appeared on four episodes of the HBO series Russell

Simmons' Def Poetry Jam and had the honor of being a part of the Tony Award-



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winning international tour.

His voice can be heard singing the theme song for the PBS kids' animated show *Alma's Way* and, along with legend Marc Anthony, on the Grammy-nominated movie soundtrack of *In The Heights*.

Evolution of a Sonero was originally developed in 2017 at Pregones/PRTT in New York City as part of their Step Up artist-in-residence program. With direc-

tion and dramaturgy by Jorge B. Merced, it had its world premiere run at the

and Spanish cultures, came to be known as salsa. The word salsa, meaning "sauce" in Spanish, was used to describe the spicy blend of different rhythms, styles, and cultures that make up the genre. Over time, salsa has become an international phenomenon, loved by people from all corners of the globe.

"I be the son of hardcore South Bronx Puerto Rican nationalists. An aguinaldo, bomba y plena, salsa, rumba singing actor-activist." This self-declaration opens Flaco Navaja's first full-length play.

The Latino Theater Company is dedicated to providing a world-class arts center for those pursuing artistic excellence, a laboratory where both tradition and innovation are honored and honed, and a place where the convergence of people, cultures, and ideas contribute to the future. Now in its 38th year, LTC has operated The Los Angeles Theatre Center, a landmark building in Downtown's Historic Core, since 2006.

Evolution of a Sonero opens on May 13 at the Los Angeles Theatre Center with performances through May 28. Two low-priced previews take place on May 11 and May 12. Tickets range from \$22-\$48, except for opening night which is \$58 and includes pre- and post-performance

receptions, and previews, which are \$10.

With *Evolution of a Sonero*, Flaco Navaja pays homage to the rich cultural history of Puerto Rican music and celebrates the spirit of improvisation that defines salsa. The show promises to be a testament to human resilience and a lively tribute to the unique rhythms, sounds, and traditions of the Puerto Rican Diaspora.

Here's what *Evolution of a Sonero*, Flaco Navaja had to share about stepping back into Los Angeles with his award-winning show.

Los Angeles Sentinel: Is Tinseltown ready for the Bronx to roll in with all that Puerto Rican power, baby?!

Flaco Navaja: Tinseltown is definitely ready. While my show is a South Bronx Puerto Rican story with a Salsa soundtrack, it is also a very relatable one of a young(ish) person trying to navigate an artistic life.

LAS: Are you getting butterflies about bringing the funk to L.A.'s Latino audiences and beyond? Or are you cool as a cucumber?

FN: I'm super excited to be working with two theater companies I have a lot of love for. I'm also excited about reuniting with my amazing director Miranda Gonzalez and working with some great musicians.

LAS: As we head into 2023, what's making you tick? Is it age, experience, or just a whole lot of caffeine?

FN: God's Grace, my kids' embrace, my partner's face, and this undying need to share the stories that live in and around me.

LAS: How do you feel about bringing your show to L.A., a city known for its vibrant cultural scene?

FN: I lived in the area for two years and loved it! Bringing my show here is a dream come true.

LAS: As we push further into 2023, what drives and inspires you as an artist?

FN: I feel like we are in a time where we are making big strides in terms of representation and inclusivity. I'm inspired by the great work being produced around me and by opportunities to contribute to the counter-narrative.