

A Conversation with Director Raymond O. Caldwell: "Fly Me to the Sun," The Fountain Theatre, by James Scarborough



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A late-night talk show seems an odd way to explore immigration, family bonds and inherited dreams. Yet Brian Quijada's "Fly Me to the Sun" transforms this familiar American format into something both intimate and broad. The playwright's semi-autobiographical tale puts young BQ (Gerardo Navarro) center stage as both grandson and television host, with his Salvadoran grandmother Julia appearing as a hand puppet on his imagined program.

This device does more than surprise audiences. By making Julia a puppet, Quijada shows how easily the elderly lose their voice in American culture yet gives her the strongest presence on stage.

Director Raymond O. Caldwell, the new artistic director at the Fountain Theatre, brings this West Coast premiere to Los Angeles with a clear grasp of its family dynamics. His earlier Washington production showed how the talk show format creates both humor and pathos. Marvin Quijada's live musical composition builds a soundscape that bridges the characters' cultural worlds.

As BQ teaches his grandmother about American life while seeing his country through her immigrant eyes, the play rises above simple assimilation stories. Instead, it shows how wisdom flows both ways across generations, especially in households where survival depends on mutual understanding rather than cultural dominance. Meanwhile, older brother Marvin (Noe Cervantes) provides live music that bridges their cultural worlds.

Below follows an email conversation with Raymond O. Caldwell.

JS: Why did you choose "Fly Me to the Sun" as artistic director? What made you want to direct it yourself?

ROC: Two years ago, I began developing this play with Brian Quijada about his relationship with his grandmother, and in the process began to think more deeply about my relationship with my grandmothers and intergenerational relationships in general. We know these relationships are vital to society because they foster social cohesion, promote learning and understanding across generational divides, and contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities by sharing wisdom, experiences, and traditions. I'm thrilled to produce and direct FLY ME TO THE SUN at The Fountain Theatre because I hope to inspire vital conversations across generational lines about love, forgiveness, immigration, and the American dream.

JS: Julia appears only as a puppet, yet she's the play's most vivid character. How do you make that work?

ROC: Theatre magic! The puppetry work that Gerardo is doing in this production is utterly brilliant and mesmerizing. There are so many moments that audience completely forgets that Julia is a puppet – and that's very much the point. We've spent a lot of time thinking about her voice, gestures, and personality, and we've inserted all kinds of gags and bits that are uproariously hilarious and utterly endearing.

JS: BQ starts as this confident talk show host, but Julia changes him. How do you show that transformation?

ROC: We watch BQ grow up throughout the show. He wrestles with what it is to “fit in” as he simultaneously plays pretend with his Salvadoran grandmother. She’s set on rooting him in his culture by forcing him to grapple with his American privilege. There are so many beautiful moments we’ve crafted throughout the show where we celebrate those moments of discovery and growth. The play is a nostalgia machine. Audiences tap into their own childhoods reminding them of those colossal moments that grow us up.

JS: Marvin Quijada creates live beats and remixes throughout the show. How does that change your approach to staging?

ROC: One of our producers said it best: “This is a concert!” Marvin’s beats really add another layer of theatricality to the experience of the show. His music, along with the compositions of our sound designer Andrea “Slim” Allmond really immerse the audience in BQ’s show, the music of the ’90s, and the soundscape of childhood.

JS: You’ve said intergenerational relationships reduce loneliness. Does this play speak to how isolated people feel today?

ROC: Yes, this is exactly why I wanted to produce this play. I think the unspoken epidemic of our time that we’re not talking about societally is the epidemic of loneliness. We never fully came back from covid because we never really had the time, space, or emotional capacity to process our collective global loss. This is particularly true of the most vulnerable of our society: the elderly and young people. In the play, BQ plays pretend with his grandmother and brother (the only people who understand him). Much like BQ, Abuela Julia is experiencing her own loneliness in a new country very far away from her homeland.

JS: The talk show format could easily become gimmicky. How do you keep it real?

ROC: The talk show format is through the lens of imaginative play between two young brothers. As the brothers film “The BQ Show” with their imagined grandmother, they break beats and make commercials, all while exploring their childhood memories and experiences. They take us on the road as they travel from their home studio in Highwood, Illinois to Disneyland, Universal Studios, and even The Fountain Theatre! It’s an unexpected journey that will keep audiences on the edge of their seats.

JS: What did you and designer Michael Navarro do to make the space work for both family scenes and talk show moments?

ROC: The scenic design is so clever and immersive! We are in BQ’s living & dining room. Michael and I have worked with the full design team to design a series of moments that are highly theatrical transporting us to lots of places – including BQ’s imagination. The design is really driven and rooted in the media/video design that is a staple of my aesthetic and work.

JS: The Fountain is staging this in both English and Spanish. Why does that matter for this particular play?

ROC: I wanted to be sure that the Latiné community here in Los Angeles would be able to join us for this beautiful play in BOTH Spanish and English. At a moment when many within the Latiné community are being targeted and otherized, I wanted to present work of a universal human experience. To remind us that we’re all someone’s grandchild. As an organization that celebrates the diversity of LA, it’s important that our productions (particularly when culturally specific) be accessible to everyone within the community. We are serving pupusas after each show with the hope that audience will join us upstairs, eat the national dish of El Salvador, and share a memory about their grandmother/abuela with one another.

Performances are Friday, Saturday and Monday at 8pm, and Sunday at 2pm, with an additional Saturday matinee on October 11th at 2pm. There are no performances on September 8th and 29th. Three preview performances run September 3rd, 4th, and 5th at 8pm. Spanish performances are September 14th, 28th and October 5th at 7pm, plus October 4th at 2pm. Tickets cost \$25-\$45. The Fountain Theatre is at 5060 Fountain Avenue, Los Angeles. For more information, click [here](#).



Noe Cervantes and Gerardo Navarro. Photo by Areon Media

