

## THEATER REVIEW

# 'ICE': How we came to this place on immigration

By Dany Margolies

The simple but extraordinarily effective stage designs for 24th Street Theatre's latest offering, "ICE," immediately inform us of time and place.

A dilapidated truck, a cathedral's stained-glass window, a quintessentially local street lamp — all these say Los Angeles. A Dodgers announcer excitedly narrating Fernando Valenzuela's every move via two large television sets with display dials proclaims the 1980s.

What was the rest of our nation like then?

This play by Leon Martell, currently in its world premiere run, was commissioned by 24th Street Theatre, which has opened its doors and heart to the residents surrounding it, offering remarkably bilingual theater fluidly combining Spanish and English dialogue. The play pointedly reminds each of us, whatever our language, of the best and worst in our behavior.

Chepo (Jesús Castañós-Chima) owns that 1971 GMC truck. In its earlier days, it served as an ice cream truck, as the writing on its side insists when it periodically and strategically peeps out from under the newly painted word "tacos."

Chepo, apparently stricken with a need to bring "gourmet tacos" to super-sophisticated customers, phones his cousin Nacho (Tony Duran) in Mexico and asks him to o'erleap the border, with Nacho's mother's super-secret salsa recipe in hand, and repair the truck gratis.

The soulful Nacho bonds with the truck, understanding it would better serve the neighborhood children. So, too, does the newly arrived, Irish-accented Roman Catholic priest (Davitt Felder), who can't surmount his monsignor's intransigence.

The other people affecting their presence here (all played by Felder) include a Russian-accented car-wash manager and a Southerner agent for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Martell's use of magical realism couldn't be better. There are indeed angels in the City of Angels. Best of all, that truck charmingly has a mind of its own and a few means of speaking it.

However, the script could use better dramatic shaping. Our emotional response rises quickly but then remains steady throughout. Chepe starts out as a sympathetic character, fighting the juggernaut of the ugliest side of capitalism. But he turns ugly, too, though that's not his story arc. He now is willing to cheat to fulfill his needs.

Debbie Devine directs, setting up a clearly visible world with minimal fuss. Castañós-Chima seems to dance his role, acting with highly expressive physicality. Duran provides all the

## 'ICE'

★★★★

**When:** 3 and 7:30 p.m. Saturdays, 3 p.m. Sundays through June 10

**Where:** 24th Street Theatre, 1117 W. 24th St., Los Angeles (Secure parking is available for \$5 in the lot on the southwest corner of 24th and Hoover.)

**Tickets:** \$10-\$24

**Length:** 80 minutes, no intermission

**Suitability:** Ages 10 and up

**Information:** 213-745-6516, 24thstreet.org

emotionality needed on this stage, letting us see through to the core of the angelic Nacho.

Another character here is the sound, from ambient street noise to paper crumpling and landing on the ground, designed by Christopher Moscatiello to seem to come from the source and not from speakers, and precisely timed by the sound booth.

From the start of the play, we hear bits of Cat Stevens' song "The Wind" sung and played on guitar. It sounds like Stevens. Later in the play, we watch as Felder takes the stage with guitar in hands to play and sing the song, live, in this remarkably accurate cover.

At the play's end, we see a montage of our cultural and political mistakes of the past 30 years. And then we see a montage of figures who rose far above to inform and inspire: Mother Teresa, Malala Yousafzai, Martin Luther King Jr., Jane Goodall, Fred Rogers.

After the play, 24th Street Theatre hopes, the conversation will continue. It's likely many of us will arrive back home, listen to the full album of "Teaser and the Firecat," wonder where all the flowers have gone, and ponder the hornet's nest that immigration has become.

*Dany Margolies is a Los Angeles-based writer.*