

Fourth walls fall: 'Life Sucks,' 'Every Brilliant Thing,' 'Measure STILL.' 'Tacos' tops LATC's trio.

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'Tacos,' anyone? With a grant on the side?

Downtown's Latino Theatre Company is glowing these days since the public announcement that it will initially administer the new National Latinx Theater Initiative, funded by \$9 million so far from various foundations, to support Latinx theaters companies across the country. The directors during the initiative's first three years (which actually started last December) will be LTC artistic director José Luis Valenzuela and Olga Garay-English, a former director of LA city's Department of Cultural Affairs.

LTC's city-owned home at Los Angeles Theatre Center is also bustling these days, with productions opening on successive weekends on the building's larger stages. LTC developed and produced one of the three, the premiere of "Tacos La Brooklyn," by Joel Ulloa, doing it "in association with East West Players." Located in LATC's downstairs space, it's also the best of the three.



Jesus "Chuy" Perez, Gavin K. Lee and Xavi Moreno in "Tacos La Brooklyn" from Latino Theater Company at LATC. Photo: Grettel Cortes Photography

The heart of Ulloa's play is a story about a mid-30s once-abused Korean-American man, nicknamed "Chino" (Gavin K. Lee), who has learned the trade of running a *barbacoa* stand in LA and has now taken it over from his late mentor. He sells his tacos at a downtown LA night market (no, the "Brooklyn" in the title isn't the NYC borough) with the aid of the old man's widow, who makes the tortillas. They're flanked by two stands with Chicano proprietors, but the competition is generally friendly.

However, trouble arises when Yesenia (Esperanza América), a Chicana social influencer, notices Chino. She resents that this Korean guy makes his tacos with such expensive ingredients as heirloom corn. Chino is selling a lot of tacos, until Yesenia alerts her followers to request Chino to "appreciate, not appropriate."

It's a lively script, reflecting more than one point of view about its themes. Fidel Gomez's staging is charged with energy, with swirling lights indicating the hyper-active phones in the night air, accompanied by thumping musical beats, but also featuring the more soulful sounds of an older singer (Jesus 'Chuy' Perez) and occasional English supertitles of Spanish dialogue.

The script could be organized more efficiently. The first nine pages are a bit confusing, as they focus on a real-life cross-cultural phenomenon in which young Japanese people have been influenced by cholo/chola fashion in clothes and cars. Complete with the use of Japanese supertitles, it's an odd way to open such a hyper-local East LA play.