

Teatro Luna hits mark with look at 'being a man'

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Whatever "being a man" means, it's complex, multi-faceted and, more often than not, a matter of opinion --that much is clear from Teatro Luna's latest production in Chicago.

Told by Latina actors playing the roles of men -- mostly with convincing realism -- "Machos" is a collection of voices and points of view gathered from interviews with about 100 men from around the country.

Themes include gender roles, stereotypes and sexual preferences in the honest, humorous and sometimes raw style that characterizes Teatro Luna's productions.

There are mama's boys who lament the days when women knew how to treat a man, cheating husbands who are otherwise upstanding members of the community, and alcoholic but hard-working fathers who go on drunken tirades.

There are also men who rejoice sharing the child-rearing and housekeeping with their mates, and others who wish society allowed them to cry and better express their emotions.

The play even addresses practical know-how: Never look down and -- God forbid -- never look at your neighbor while at the urinals, according to one hysterical skit.

Among the eight actors, Wendy Vargas stands out for her uncanny portrayal of high-strung men who go ballistic over football and who rant against Latina women.



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Because Teatro Luna is an all-Latina ensemble, one assumes that the men portrayed on stage, with the exception of a self-proclaimed Native American, are all Latino.

Not so, said director Coya Paz, also co-artistic director of Teatro Luna. The script is based on 90-minute interviews conducted with both Latino and non-Latino men in Chicago, Bloomington, Ind., San Antonio, Texas, Washington, D.C., and New York, she said. Others participated in workshops and online surveys.

"Everyone (on stage) is playing different races," she said. "The challenge was to show different races without getting into caricatures."

This is among the limitations of the script, which is based almost verbatim on interview transcripts. Also off mark is the impression one has that none of the men portrayed are well-educated professionals. Again, not so, Paz said.

"There were men who came in suit and tie, and they started talking about their frat boy days and getting into fights, and that's what you see," she said. But it seems that more careful sifting through interview materials could have yielded more balance.

Overall, however, "Machos" hits the mark with an original, well-acted production that blends humor and realism while raising important questions.

"Machos"

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out of four

Location: Chicago Dramatistas, 1105 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago

Times: Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 6 p.m., through Dec. 16

Running time: under 90 minutes

Parking: street

Tickets: \$15 general, \$10 students and seniors

Box office: (773) 878-LUNA (5862) or www.brownpapertickets.com/event/21527

Rating: adults only, contains strong language