

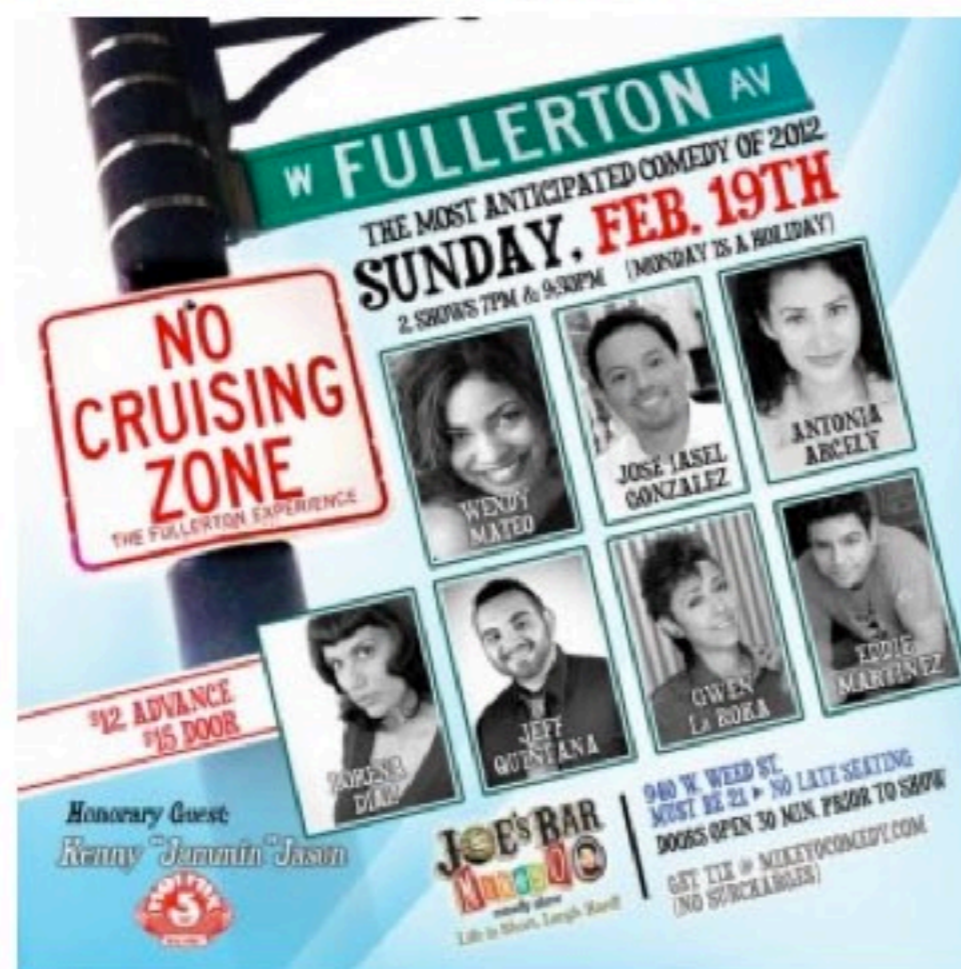
The Fullerton Experience: The Chicago Latino zone

[Mike Oquendo](#) has been putting his productions on stage at Joe's on Weed Street for the last 10 years. Last year, they celebrated 114 performances, he said Sunday night. Walking into Joe's, the front bar was packed with people, mostly all Latino talking about being there for the Fullerton Experience. The house itself was jam packed, sold out for the

second show of the evening.

"We've been putting shows on here for the last 10 years and this, mi gente, is the show that I've been waiting 10 years for," he said from the stage.

Before bringing out the players for "No Cruising Zone: The Fullerton Experience," Oquendo introduced some major players in the lives of those native Chicagoan Generation X-ers who cruised up and down Fullerton Avenue



on Chicago's north side and partied at various night clubs located on Milwaukee, Fullerton, Belmont and Pulaski.

His special guest of the night was [Kenny "Jammin" Jason](#), well-known mix master DJ who had a WBMX show called Saturday Night Live. Opening a radio space for the freestyle and house genres that hit Chicago and its Latinos hard, it was the station and radio show that allowed for people to listen to artists like Stevie B and George Lamond and hear a mix of the top songs.

In addition to Jason, Oquendo introduced [Al Cisneros](#) who was the founder of Jenal's, which had three locations around the northwest side of the city. If you talk to Latinos who just happened to know what was up at that time, [they could probably be found at one of the Jenal's spots on a Saturday night.](#)

“What happens at a Mikey O show goes on Facebook! Take that picture!” Oquendo said as Cisneros and Jason stood onstage together.

The players came out to perform short skits, mixed in with a bit of stand-up performed by Chicago natives, telling their stories about growing up. From [Antonia Arcely](#) talking about roaches in the cereal to [Gwen De La Roka](#) reminiscing about voice mail greeting recordings, the crowd was receptive and full of laughter.

In the first scene which played off of the idea of a talk show, [Wendy Mateo and Lori Diaz](#) played mothers to Arcely and De La Roka respectively. The conversation went from outfit strategies to what kind of men Latinas in Chicago find attractive, which turned out to be the paranoid jailbird, played by [Jeff Quintana](#).

My favorite of the night had to be a skit between [Jose Iasel Gonzalez](#) and Diaz. She ran in disheveled, while her brother, Gonzalez, stared at himself and flexed in the mirror. She screamed at him, asking if he had told their father that she was out at the club with her man. She said that the DJ had stopped the music and called her out, saying her father was outside. Laughs and high pitched giggles emerged from the audience. It turned out that her brother did tell on her and she left the room threatening him. Quintana walks in as their father and asks Gonzalez to demonstrate how he walks like a gangster. Needless to say, after punishing his son, the boy didn't walk like a gangster any longer.

Another skit touched on the time with the Chicago Bulls were reigning champions of the world, or so it seemed to all of us Chicagoans. Eddie Martinez plays a student stuck at home studying as Gonzalez runs in screaming that the Bulls had won the 1991 NBA Championship. Martinez couldn't watch the game because his mother wanted to watch her telenovela, Mar y Mar. He goes on to list various other telenovelas of the time like Dos Mujeres Un Camino, popular among our parents and older generation Spanish speakers. In the end, the boys decide to cruise Fullerton to celebrate.

Those who were coming out of the earlier show were being picked up by cars blasting freestyle music and making people dance the night away. Those who saw friends or relatives in line for the next show said hi and, "Oh my God, you're going to love it."

The night was sprinkled with "You know you're getting old" jokes along with references to the '80s and early '90s.

This hyper-local, Chicago-centric, Latino-driven performance gave those in attendance a reason to turn back time, reminisce about the "good times," enjoy the music and have pride in being a product of Latino Chicago; a place that many know as ghetto, gang-affiliated and negative. If anything, this space and time gave people a chance to acknowledge those aspects and embrace it because although growing up that way was hard, everyone made it through.

What we gained coming out of Humboldt Park, Logan Square and Chicago in the '90s was strength and dedication to move up and out. There are aspects of our community that you can't avoid and unfortunately, although it may be scary, gunshots and gang bangers were part of the environment. You dealt and you got through.

I give props to this show because it gave its audience a space to remember, laugh together and yell every time a Stevie B song started playing.



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