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## False Assumptions in Latinx America 'Fade' at Moxie Theatre

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Sofia Sassone and Javier Guerrero in "Fade" at Moxie Theatre.

By Pat Launer

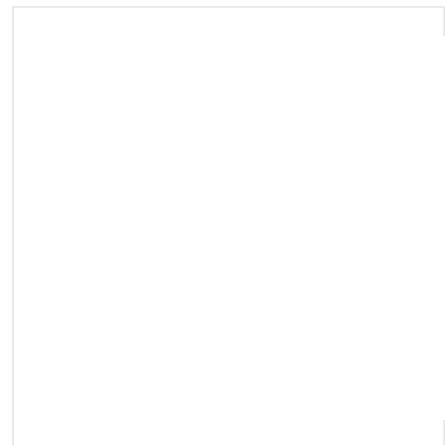
First impressions and false assumptions.

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Lucia (she insists it be pronounced lu-SEE-ya), a Mexican-born Chicago writer (with one novel to her name), is newly arrived in Hollywood to work on a TV drama centered on a Latina detective. Abel (that's ah-BEL) is the night janitor in the building.

When they meet, she speaks to him in Spanish, assuming he's monolingual. To her surprise, he responds in unaccented English, and asserts himself as American, though his grandparents were born in Mexico. Yet he identifies as Mexican.



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Abel thinks she's a "fresa" (literally, strawberry, but slang for a frivolous, materialistic woman from an upper class family). She balks at the epithet, but blithely refers to her family's maid. They both joke about stereotypes of women from various Latin American countries.

Late at night, they develop an unlikely friendship. She's lonely, knows no one in LA, and is totally overwhelmed in her new job. He doesn't have many friends either. Family comes first to him.

Lucia doesn't know the first thing about writing for TV; she doesn't even know the jargon they use (though she has a prodigious vocabulary of expletives). She's melodramatic, insecure, hypervocal, hyperactive and hyper-emotional, pin-balling around her modern but Spartan office (nicely designed, in gray, black and white, by Kristen Flores).

Stable, sensitive and sincere (though also amusingly sarcastic), Abel becomes her sounding board and cheerleader.

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At first, Lucia is condescending about her job (she's a novelist, after all); she just needs the money to pay off her debts. She has no intention of selling out. But soon, she's hungry to excel at her work — by any means necessary.

Their conversations crackle and pop, thanks to the snappy dialogue of acclaimed playwright/TV writer [Tanya Saracho](#), recently named in Elle magazine's Power List of 12 influential women making change happen in Hollywood. Clearly working from her own early experiences in the business (she has written for "How to Get Away With Murder," HBO's "Looking" and the upcoming Starz series, "VIDA").

She has Lucia rail about the way she's treated by the all-white, all-male team — as a second-class citizen, a "diversity hire," a "token."

So, the engaging 95-minute play concerns race, class, identity, authenticity — and trading ethnic solidarity for career opportunity.

Lucia's final act is disappointingly predictable, and forms the weak point in an otherwise engrossing and often funny play that presents a voice and perspective that's rarely heard in theater, TV or film.

This is a co-production of Moxie Theatre and [TuYo Theatre](#), a burgeoning new company devoted to [Latinx](#) theater productions. One of its founders, Marie Patrice Amon, directs "Fade" with sprightly energy and impressive attention to detail (she also effectively helmed Moxie's recent production of "The Madres," and serves as producer in residence at the San Diego Repertory Theatre).

There's a lot of coming and going in the short scenes and unit-set, but Amon keeps the pace lively and the actors are riveting. The lighting (Mextly Almeda) and sound (Lily Voon) provide effective support, though Lucia's costumes (Carmen Amon), which become increasingly Hollywood and corporate by the end, are form-fitting but surprisingly mismatched at the outset.

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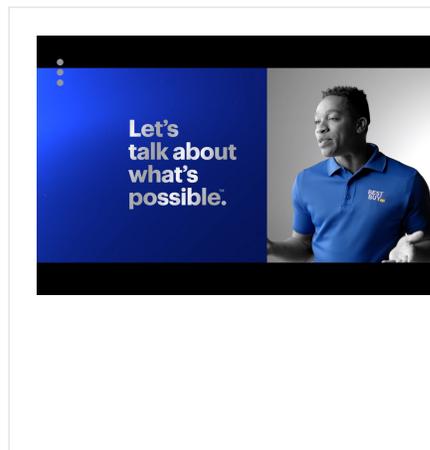
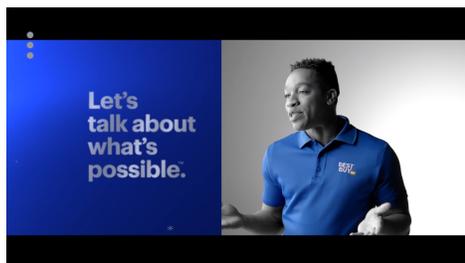
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Buenos Aires-born Sofia Sassone is superb as the manic, self-involved Lucia. She makes what could be a grating, grasping character into a woman trying, however ineffectually, to balance her culture, identity, empowerment and ambition — which evolves into overreach.

Javier Guerrero is marvelously genuine and credible as Abel. There's not a false note in his solid, finely nuanced performance. Abel is a survivor; he's known trauma and grief, and he's struggling to maintain balance and stability. We believe his every word — except his strong, out-of-character encouragement of Lucia to do anything, absolutely anything, to get ahead.

The characters complement each other well, and represent different points along the continuum of enculturation and assimilation, and paint a fascinating snapshot of what it's like to be Latin (especially Mexican) in present-day America.

There's plenty of humor and pathos here, and just as much about morality and the cost of upward mobility.



- “**Fade**” continues through Nov. 11, at [Moxie Theatre](#), 6663 El Cajon Boulevard in the Rolando area near San Diego State University
- Performances are Thursday at 7 p.m., Friday-Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m.
- Tickets (\$25-\$30) are available at 858-598-7620 or [www.moxietheatre.com](http://www.moxietheatre.com)
- Running time: 95 min.

*Pat Launer, a member of the American Theatre Critics Association, is a long-time San Diego arts writer and an Emmy Award-winning theater critic. An archive of her previews and reviews can be found at [patlauner.com](http://patlauner.com).*

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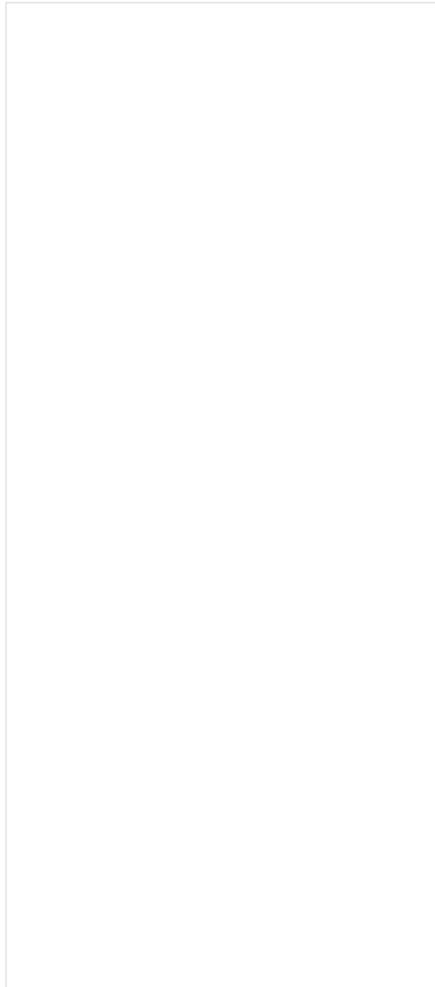


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