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Review | Moxie Theatre's 'Fade' lasers in on characters confronting biases and barriers



Sofia Sassone and Javier Guerrero in Moxie Theatre's "Fade." (Quasi Studios)



By **James Hebert**

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Assimilation, discrimination, the hazards of navigating dual cultural identities: Those are big, potentially daunting concepts that are skillfully distilled into an intimate story made both personal and powerful in Tanya Saracho's "Fade."

The play, now getting its San Diego premiere at Moxie Theatre, puts together two people who, try as they might, often find themselves speaking different languages.

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San-born television writer Lucia (Sofia Sassone) is in her L.A. office, she unthinkingly speaks to him in

Spanish, learning only later that he's American-born and prefers English.

Abel makes assumptions of his own, calling her a *fresa* (Mexican slang for an overprivileged young woman) even though she has had to work to get by, and scoffing at the idea that the light-skinned, Americanized Lucia might face the same kinds of obstacles he does.

Their interplay points up the kinds of biases and misunderstandings that can pop up even among people who share (at least nominally) a heritage, and Saracho — herself an accomplished TV writer and show-runner (“Vida”) who was inspired by her own experiences to write “Fade” — also has plenty to say about the perils of cultural appropriation.

It's the kind of material that could come off as a little preachy or didactic if the relationship between Lucia and Abel didn't feel totally real.

At Moxie, though, under the assured direction of Maria Patrice Amon, the two actors make the pair's give-and-take pop with a complex mix of mutual affection and suspicion as well as a latent romantic tension.

Keeping things alive and vibrant for the full, fast-moving 90 minutes of “Fade” takes commitment, but these two never let up, bringing wit and zip and a sense of authenticity even when the writing occasionally shades into contrivance.

The kinetic and funny Sassone is a real find, owning the role of this passionate but insecure and disaffected writer from the moment Lucia bops onstage to the beat of Spanish-language hip-hop. (Lily Voon's sound design is full of fantastic and well-placed music.)

Guerrero proves an excellent foil as the friendly but more reserved Abel, an ex-Marine with a fierce devotion to family and a growing skepticism of Lucia's ambitions.

There are real stakes here, as Lucia's rise coincides with revelations about Abel's past, which ultimately may prove less harmful to him than Lucia's selfish determination to capitalize on them.

Amon keeps the production humming with sharp scene transitions, aided by lighting designer Mextly Almeda's fine work on Kristen Flores' smartly conceived office-building set, whose back hallway forms a tenuous connection between the characters' disparate worlds. Carmen Amon's costumes also track Lucia's evolution from artsy to Establishment.

And while the play's conclusion may startle (and even seem a bit out of character), it is gratifyingly anything but pat.

The women-centered Moxie staged “Fade” in association with TuYo Theatre, a company co-created by director [redacted] (a preferred gender-neutral term) theater company

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If this show is an indication, there's promising work to come.

“Fade”

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursdays; 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays; 2 p.m. Sundays. Through Nov. 11.

Where: Moxie Theatre, 6663 El Cajon Blvd., Rolando District.

Tickets: \$18-\$43

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