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At Moxie Theatre, 'Fade' draws on playwright and TV writer's Hollywood experiences



Sofia Sassone and Javier Guerrero star in "Fade." (Quasi Studios)



By **James Hebert**

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A spirit of confronting clichés and upending expectations runs through Tanya Saracho's "Fade," which is about to receive its San Diego premiere at Moxie Theatre.

So who better to direct the play than an artist who has (talk about upending expectations) a law degree?

Of course, Maria Patrice Amon also holds a doctorate in theater, and deep stage experience that includes launching San Diego Rep's Latinx New Play Festival and serving as that theater's producer in residence for National New Play Network projects.

But while Amon ultimately chose theater over the legal world, she sees connections between her passion for performing arts and her initial interest in the law.

“I’m incredibly analytical — that’s kind of my skill set,” she says. (Not necessarily a bad trait in a director.) “And the projects that most call to me, and I’m most motivated by, have to do with this idea of justice.”

That last subject dovetails with “Fade,” a story of power imbalances and of how people grapple with their own perhaps unjust perceptions of others.

The work by the Mexican-born Saracho, a rising playwright and screenwriter, draws in part on her own experiences in television: She has written for HBO’s “Girls” and “Looking,” and is now show-runner for the Starz network’s “Vida,” a series she created.

In “Fade,” a young TV writer of Mexican heritage forms a friendship with the Latinx man who cleans her office. As they get to know each other, they both also must face up to assumptions they’ve made about matters of background and social status.

“It’s a play about stereotypes — (not just) stereotypes about the Latinx community, but also within it,” says Amon.

“Latinx characters are often one-trick ponies — either criminals or victims.” But the play’s Lucia (portrayed by Sofia Sassone) and Abel (Javier Guerrero) “are two incredibly complex characters.”

And while “Fade” is not exactly a comedy, Saracho’s writing voice “is so funny,” Amon says. “She’s so sharp and witty, and these characters reflect that.”

This is the second directing gig in a growing partnership between Amon and the women-centered Moxie; she previously co-directed “The Madres” with Jennifer Eve Thorn, a Moxie co-founder and, for just over a year now, the company’s executive artistic director.

Amon suggested “Fade” to Thorn, and the piece by Saracho (who identifies as queer) proved a good fit for the artistic chief’s vision for the theater.

As Thorn puts it: “I felt a really deep responsibility to plan an entire season free of plays by white, straight female playwrights. So that’s what I did.”

The production, which boasts an all-female design team, is also a milestone partnership with a brand-new company Amon is helping launch: TuYo Theatre.

“We want to become the leading professional Latinx theater company in San Diego,” Amon says. “It’s kind of absurd but there really isn’t one.”

If justice is served, that changes very soon.

“Fade”

When: In previews. Opens Saturday. 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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