

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Natasha Cohen-Carroll

My Hips (and my Postcolonialism) Don't Lie

by Mira Treatman

Spanish for Estranged Latin Kids fits squarely into the coming-of-age autobiography genre by playing on the central themes— heritage, parent-child relationships, first loves and sexuality, and finding home. *Lxs Primxs*, comprised of performers Mariadela Belle Alvarez and Carl(os) Roa with director Cat Ramirez, portray themselves. Their parallel autobiographies unfold through intertwining solos and vignettes.

Roa, a theatre artist of Colombian descent, is strikingly outgoing and self-aware while delivering punny jokes in and out of English and Spanish. Alvarez, a dance artist of Honduran descent who lived in the Philippines in her youth, generously gives of herself through her effervescent energy, bringing effortlessness to the material. Alvarez and Roa's chemistry and physical proximity make them appear exactly like their namesake, *Lxs Primxs*, "the cousins" in Spanish. They're close in age and experience but not siblings; perhaps they are chosen family.

For Roa, connecting to Colombian culture and heritage comes most naturally through food. Roa delivers pun-rich gags about loving *chicharrón*, *arepas*, and all things fried in pig fat. The audience enjoys fresh *pupusas* as the show concludes, rendering Roa's wistful love for food especially satisfying.

Alvarez embodies her Honduran-Philippine-American experiences by performing Latin dance movements. She explains the origin of polyrhythmic Latin dance steps from a mix of African, Native, and European influences, while seamlessly executing the soft, sensual footwork.

The simultaneous narration in English and Spanish and performance of the *cumbia* are emblematic of postcolonial performance art—an artist from a formerly colonized place using all of the influences of her toolbox to make something new. A peak of this scene comes when Alvarez references one of Colombia's most famous stars, Shakira, while launching into a heartily belted karaoke-style rendition of "Hips Don't Lie," an international *cumbia*-pop fusion hit from 2006.

Latin Kids feels most affecting when the performers cut through the sentimentality of their storytelling with moments of directness. Roa provides several of these sobering bits. In response to the set design, serapes draped, hung, and sculpted into a moody forest, Roa shouts that “these are not yoga blankets, they’re serapes!” Roa explains how an American yogi, who encounters the Mexican and Central American blankets in the Mexican army, brings them back to a yoga studio in San Francisco as “yoga blankets.” Roa shares this vital information authoritatively, with little editorializing or comedy—the facts stand for themselves.

Lxs Primxs expertly crafts *Latin Kids* for a particular audience—folks who can discern deeper humor from the Spanglish, who can relate to [third culture kid](#) narratives, and especially those who can muster empathy for young adults coming into their own. Like an all-consuming first love, this debut performance holds space for the makers’ imagined futures blooming from their inherited pasts.

[Spanish for Estranged Latin Kids](#), Lxs Primxs, Circle of Hope, April 4 - 6.

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April 29, 2019