

Show #1: ¡AMERICANO!

Intro music

Ernie: Oh my goodness. Welcome to Sippin' Tea In The Balcony. The only place where. You hear your reviews, Ricky, right?

Ricky: You don't gotta to read nothing you don't have to read anything.

E: So I'm Ernesto Ortiz and

R: I'm Ricky Araiza.

E: Yay. This is exciting, Ricky. Yeah, this is our first one.

R: I know. I know. Um... So we're excited to get this set up for all of you out there in Arizona and Phoenix, um, who enjoy the theater scene. We thought it was an opportunity for us to open another platform to review theater, because here in the Valley, there are reviewers and there are platforms where you can read theater reviews, but we haven't heard a podcast theater review.

E: Nope.

R: That is specifically POC centered.

E: Yes.

R: And folks that are on the margins

E: and we love podcasts. Yeah. You know, who doesn't? Right. And, uh, so who are we? I mean, why? What makes us qualified to do this?

R: Well, both of us are a veteran performers of the stage. I, I myself am, I'm a theater artist. I have my masters, um, in theater and theater, and my, my, my BA and my master's in Theatre. So we've got a whole lot of degrees, but no, but, but I've been performing for about 15 years here in the Valley. I'm also director and currently the artistic director of Teatro Bravo, a Latinx and Chicanx theater company here in the Valley. What about you?

E: I am a standup comedian. I think I'm celebrating my seventh year this year; maybe eight, I lose count. But, uh, and I'm also a storyteller. Um, and also I love theater and you've directed me in, in Teatro Bravo. Are we going to play? So, uh, yeah. I love theater.

R: So it's safe to say that theater and performance is what we do, how we move through the world. Um, a lot of times you hear feedback where people are like, why do reviewers even review shows if they're not even practicing it? Well. We are practicing it.

E: So it's close to our hearts and we know it as close to a lot of people out there listening. So we said, you know what? We have to do this. We have to review. Yeah, yeah. Okay.

R: So here we are.

E: Here we are.

R: And for our first show,

E: it's a good one.

R: We decided to review the Phoenix theater production of ¡Americano!,

E: yeah.

R: Now, ¡Americano! was written by uh, the book was written by Michael Bernard and Jonathan Rosenberg with lyrics by Carrrie Rodriguez and Michael Bernard and Jonathan Rosenberg. And then music by Carrie Rodriguez.

E: Yes.

R: And it was performed at being performed at Phoenix theater, um, until [00:03:00] February 23rd. So, Ernie do you want to give us a brief history on the show and where it kinda came from? Cause this is an original work.

E: It is an original work and I think the cool thing, um, is that it's a story about a local person. So the story is, uh, the story is about Tony Valdovinos, and he was born in Colima, Mexico. And he, uh, he grew up here in the U.S. and ended up here in Phoenix. So they spent a uh, a large part of his life here in Phoenix. And when he turned 18. Well, actually, uh, and the story, he always wanted to join the military. This is something he really wanted to do. And when he went to, uh, the recruiting, recruiting office to join, he found out he was undocumented. He was in the country illegally. So he turned his disappoint, but, well, he, he, he redirected his disappointment and said, you know what? I'm going to go to school. So he started studying and then prop 300 passed. And that was the law that, that. That forced people who are undocumented to pay uh out of state tuition. So his tuition sky rocketed. And that's when he became very politically involved. And he campaigned for, for, [00:04:00] um, democratic candidates and progressive candidates, and he, including Kate Gallego, who is now mayor and her then husband Ruben Gallegos.

In her in 2013 and his campaign in 2014 and I saw a quote online and I thought it was, it was uh, it kind of explained everything. He said, um, "I love this country," and this was, this was a Tony. "I love this country. I wanted to serve in the Marines, but I was turned away because of my status. So I have been working to get progressive people elected.

People who support dreamers, who can change the laws that open doors for dreamers who want to serve, work and give to this country." So..

R: nice.

E: Yes. So that's what the story was.

R: Yeah. Yeah. And I mean, and since it is a, yeah, uh, an auto bio or bio a bio play, um, yeah, I mean, that was the story. Um, so with this process, uh, we decided to pull from a different, from different types of, like critical processes and reviewing process to kind of make what we do on this podcast.

E: Right.

R: So one of the things that we really, [00:05:00] uh, are, is really important to us, um, is, uh, pulling from the Critical Response Process by Liz Lerman, who is a choreographer and a dancer. And if you want to learn more about her critical responses.

visit her website at lizlerman.com but in the process, there's a series of steps to critique a work. And the first step that she approaches is called statements of meanings. So basically, what did we find meaningful about the piece? Um, what were things that were good, were positive, and things that be like, so we want to start a call there.

So, yeah. So, so statements of meaning, where were some statements? So Ernie and I saw it on opening night. Um. Got a, an early glimpse of it. Um, so yeah. What were some statements, some meaning for you?

E: Uh, what are the things I liked?

R: Yeah, I think that stood out that you liked.

E: I have, I have a dance background, so automatically what's going to, uh, to stand out as a choreography. And I thought it was beautiful. Uh, Sergio Mejia, who has, who has done a lot of work with Disney, I believe I'm in Japan, but period, Disney period, you [00:06:00] could tell he was uh, he specialized in like big, big numbers. Our group group choreography and what I loved, I mean for me, a choreographer who can make a non dancer look like a dancer is wonderful and he did all of that. I don't, I don't think I ever noticed any of the, any of the dancers falling out of choreography or any, any awkward situations there. So, um, yeah, that, that was a big thing that stood out to me. Yeah. Yeah.

R: Um, yeah. No, I agree with you. Definitely on that. Uh, also for me, I think I really appreciated the music.

E: Yeah.

R: Um, I really appreciated, uh, Carrie Rodriguez's work and really, I've always been a really big fan of Sergio Mendoza who was one of the arrangers of the music also with Marco Rosano. I thought, I mean, yeah, like I said, a big fan of Sergio's work. I just thought it was like, like the, yeah, I mean, it was just well crafted work, um, musically

E: and can, and can we talk about the voices and the talent?

R: Absolutely. So, yeah, that was my next thing. Like the talent on [00:07:00] stage was wonderful. I thought the harmonies sounded beautiful. Um, I particularly liked the leads of the leads voice. I thought, yeah, a really, really, really, really strong voice. Uh, I think it was, uh, another great, another statement of meaning for me is a lot of brown talent in that stage.

Some local, some not from here, but a lot of brown bodies on that stage. It's really great. I mean, to, to be able to have opportunities for a Latinx and Chicanx folks in the city is always a positive thing. I also really appreciated that it was a local story. Um, it was really great to see the settings being familiar spots, you know, uh, Camelback high.

E: Yeah.

R: And all that. And, and, and, and, yeah. And just, just, just the local feel is always good. Right. Cause cause we have a lot of stories that exist here in the city. So that was very positive.

E: Right.

R: For me.

E: Right.

R: What about you?

E: yeah, equally me. Yeah. Yeah. I loved seeing uh, a lot of the brown talent on stage. The diverse talent.

Um, the lead I loved and, and the girlfriend, I forget her name,

R: Alyssa Gomez was [00:08:00] the, the, the character's name was Ceci, but the actress is a Alyssa Gomez.

E: Oh, she was wonderful. Oh, I couldn't get enough of her. Yeah, she was, she was beautiful. She sang beautiful, like she was great. She was great actress. I loved it.

R: And then Sean Ewing played Tony Valdivinos. Yeah. I, I, I was, I was crushing on him. I thought he had a great voice. I, yeah, I think, I thought he just had great personality. I thought, yeah. I thought he, he carried the, he carried the show well.

E: Yeah. And that, that cast really, they really worked their butt off. They weren't, they were doing. Yeah. Cause you could see it.

R: Yeah. And then, I mean, always a fan of Connie Furr's costumes. I worked with Connie for many years. She tells a beautiful story through costume and, and yeah seeing these costume changes are. You know, I've always, I still get amazed. Like how, how do you do this? Cause I know what goes into to, to some of those design processes. Yeah. Yeah. Um, great. So those were some, you know, there's some really great things that stood out to us. Now. What were things that we had questions about? Where were things that we were unsure of?

E: Yeah. [00:09:00] Um, I don't know how to explain this. I. It was, there was some awkwardness for me when I watched that play on stage. There was an awkward feeling, a disconnect almost for me. And I don't know if you even know if that's the right word. And I speak in this, um, as a Mexican American man, whose family is, uh, well, my parents family are from Mexico, so it makes it, I grew up Mexican and it felt a little odd.

I guess the word is the authenticity. Yeah. Yeah. And that was just a little disappointing for me.

R: Yeah.

E: Um, and I don't, I don't, I don't know if I'm explaining it. I don't know if you felt like that.

R: No, I know. I mean, I, I have to agree with you. I feel that, um, the weaker point of the show, and I think the, the thing that made us all kind of feel cringy is, for lack of a better way of putting it, is, is I think the book, I think the, the, the script, I think, um.

I [00:10:00] think that it was very clear to me also being a, you know, a brown man, a person who's grown up, uh, it didn't feel authentic and it because it was told through a white lens. The book writers um Micheal Bernard and Jonathan Rosenberg are not Latino, LatinX. They don't define as that. And I feel like it, it came across that way and I think it, if it added this layer to the show, that just felt off. Right?

E: Yeah.

R: Like I felt like everything else felt in sync. I, eh, for the most part, I feel like the, like you said, the choreography and I felt like the music and I felt that um like the bodies on stage doing the, the, the, the, the singing and the, in the movement, like was right, but then the words that were coming out of them, their mouth and like this, the, the dramatic situations just didn't match.

E: Yeah.

R: And it felt really uncomfortable because it felt like, I think I turned to at one point that I'm like, this feels just [00:11:00] like, this feels like we're at like a Mexican restaurant and like, you know, the food is like authentic you know, it's Mexican food.

E: Yeah.

R: But like the decor of the place is like really cliché and really, um, I kept saying like, it feels like a Macayos. Like if I'm like but it just felt, because like, like I felt like. The guide of this process just wasn't in tune with the culture specifically. You know, and this isn't to talk about Tony's story, like Tony's story. We're talking like I think the facts and, and like, uh, everything came across, but it was just the representation of the people didn't feel authentic.

E: Yeah. And you know it. There was a point where I said, I think I turned to you. I was like, why does everyone have Speedy Gonzalez accents?

R: Well, I mean, you know, and that's another, another thing that I think was a huge oversight and a misstep with this production is when you have a show that's going to have dialects, you gotta have a dialect coach. It became, it was very clear. [00:12:00] Um, that there wasn't, because it was inconsistent across the board. And then there were the actors who you could feel were trying to overcompensate, trying to like really perform.

E: Right.

R: And just had no, like, control of their tool, like had no, and it felt off and like...

E: And the disappointing thing for me there was, um, I know that the, it was very talented people on stage, but that, that took away from the work that they were doing.

R: Right.

E: So it turned into like a distraction to me.

R: I mean, ultimately it felt that the script is not finished or it felt like it was rushed. There was a lot of info we needed to get in. There were, there were certain moments in the play that kind of came out of nowhere. Uh. I felt like, yeah, there was a certain relationship that didn't have the depth, like we didn't see the depth of the relationships happening. Um, but we were expected to believe that the relationships were, were [00:13:00]

E: there, was that one that was, I know what you're talking about.

R: There's the lead. And then it's his, it's his friend. It's Joaquin, the Joaquin character. And it was just. At first, the walking character was the, who was a gay character in the show. It was like played up for laughs and almost like a throwaway kind of like laugh. And it was, it was, it was a funny performance,

but it was like script wise, it felt like, um. I didn't see their friendship get deep enough to like, at the point, like when Joaquin is trying to give like really deep advice. I just felt like it was as it was a throwaway. It didn't feel,

E: yeah. You know, I feel like it, I mean, as, as a comedian, I, I feel like some performers do that or they're just telling the jokes for the joke, for the laugh.

R: Right.

E: And I thought that's what I got out of that. That character was in there just for the laugh, right? Yeah. But I wasn't sure. Yeah. Like it wasn't so who said. Someone said that he just didn't feel earned or, yeah.

R: Yeah. I think there were moments like that that didn't feel earned for sure.

E: Yeah.

R: Um. [00:14:00] I mean, I don't know. And I feel like a lot of that the book writing did bleed into, uh, the lyrics. I think the lyrics and a lot of the songs were, uh, I mean, for lack of a better word they felt corny. They didn't feel pulled together. And for me personally, I don't know how, if you felt this way, but I felt some of the lyrics were problematic.

I think there was a lot of, there was a big, a big issue I had in, in the storytelling and in the lyrics where there were songs about, um. Um, about not seeing color, right. And about seeing and about all kind of like, we're all dreamers, we're all, and it's like, like your struggle is like my struggle because there's particularly one a song.

E: There's an entire, there's like a scene

R: is an entire scene in song about like immigration and it's, and it's told through, it's sung by the, the boss, the white boss in this story, Irish immigrants talking about his grandfather and comparing it to the Mexican immigrants, and I'm like, this is not even the same experience at all.

There's not [00:15:00] even the same. Nothing about their, their experiences are the same. Like you're still a white immigrant who's coming in, right? Like it's just, it was such a disconnect and I felt like there was this constant reiteration of like, you know, we're all the same, we're all the same, and we're really not.

And I think we really need to talk about that. I think it was, it was so much about, it felt like all lives matter right. Where it's like we're gonna say, yeah, this thing and like, not really talk about the, the real issue, the real statement that's being made, right. Yeah. It just, and I think it missed a mark and I think that was rather unfortunate.

And, um, I think, um. For me. Set. Set was confusing for me. I think it was a very cluttered,

E: yeah, I think, I agree.

R: I don't think the set served the cast. I mean, we've got such a big cast that it felt crowded.

E: Yeah. And I felt that times I saw the cast struggle. Yeah. With that set. So yeah. So [00:16:00]

R: I just, I didn't quite understand the metaphor. And I mean, in the end, if I am looking at the metaphor of like, Hey, you know, this is like something that's under construction. Like. I don't know if that's the

metaphor I would want to use for the, for the world of the play. I don't know. I see. I, I, I mean, granted, I'm not in the room with the designer, so I don't know. But. It. I don't, I don't feel that it served the show and just felt too cluttered to me. Um, is there any, anything else you wanted that you want to, I feel like I've dominated as, and

E: I was going to ask you how to make you feel, but,

R: uh, and it's not, it's not trying to throw, to throw shade, but it's like, you know, it, it made me feel uncomfortable. It made me feel, um. Hmm. It made me feel sad because one thing that came that was brought up in their curtain speech, or not the current speech, but like they have like a video pre show that kind of like gives you a [00:17:00] background of being excited and it kind of just catches audience up. And there's something that, that I think had popping up there were like how they want to position themselves to be a regional theater, like major regional theatre. And I don't see this. I feel like when you're in this part of the country, right. That is dealing and in this state that is specifically dealing with these complex border issues and these complex relationships with Mexico, and you have just knowing people in the know like this company is doing well financially, right? Like I don't feel like you're right. I mean, I mean it could be making a big assumption, but they have a good budget and they have a good following. And I would think, I was disappointed that this could have been a really bad ass amazing show because it looked like the talent behind the scenes were there. bl just don't, know if the formula like, or like how they put it together, like I don't think it works.

E: And. As far as, I mean, it's the [00:18:00] big major theater company in town right there. It has a name in it. Uh, it's Phoenix theater. Yeah. Yeah. So I mean, people look. It's a, it's a big organization and, and I think the responsibility is there to get whatever story you're telling correct. Yeah. Yeah. And you're right. Yeah. I had the thing, kind of an feeling.

R: And I kind of felt like there's a moment to like there's this thing that we, that we, in movement work, we talk about when to step up and when to step back.

E: Right.

R: And I feel like there were moments where. There were folks who stepped up in this. It's like, yeah, let's do it. But then there were folks who did step up that really needed to step back and let someone else let other voices take the helm. Um. And that, I mean, for me it was really with the book. Like I feel the book should have been in different hands, even with the dramaturg it should have been different folks. Yeah. In, in, you know, steering that ship. And narratively,

E: you know, I don't know this, I don't know this. And if anyone's out there too, they can please get in contact with us. We'll put our information on the, in the show notes, but, uh, a is this, um, [00:19:00] is this a work in progress that are they workshopping this? Is this, is this a done deal?

R: I'm not sure.

E: Yeah. I don't know. Um, because it could,

R: it could still be, and there could be, like, we could call this a workshop, run something that could grow into something, something better than than, than where it's at right now.

E: Right.

R: I'm, I'm disappointed because when there's, cause there's so many of us that are struggling financially to tell these stories. We're getting crafty and we're doing them, which are forcing us to be like, you know, you know, just to be crafty and creative with it. But I feel like when you got this, this kind of budget, and this kind of power, right? To be able to make real change. And it's just like, girl, that's, I mean, yeah, it was just, it was unfortunate.

E: Well, now, I mean, but again, again, I mean, I, I've been to Phoenix [00:20:00] theater a number of times and I love their productions and, and I, I, we were gunning, hoping this was going to be a great story. Um, it is a good story, but like I said, it has, there's some issues. There are issues. Yeah. I mean, yeah. Yeah. Okay. So, um.

R: How, how about you? How overall, how did, how did you end up feeling?

E: Yeah. I Eve, I felt a little, um, like I said, there was a, I didn't know what it was, but right from the beginning, from the opening number, I was like, Oh, no. Everything I thought I didn't want to happen is happening.

R: Right.

E: Yeah. Like, like, yeah. Um.

R: But it brings up this interesting thing that we were talking about this earlier this week, just kind of as we were decompressing about this, it's, and I think this is happening in with, with the release of the book, American Dirt and the conversations that are happening about, I think it's this notion of is this story and his, like that book for example. I don't think either of those that or this are meant for Brown folk. Yeah, too. It's not for us. [00:21:00] It's for, it's for white folk.

E: Yeah. And then w yeah. And when that was mentioned, I said, Oh, okay, well then I feel like that makes more,

R: which doesn't mean that like, Oh, well let's be frivolous about how we presented. No, we're going to do this. We need to do it. Right.

E: Yeah.

R: And if you're going to do the work, do the work. And I think they like did a lot of the work. But there was a big chunk of the work that need, needed some

E: very important work.

R: Very important work. Very important work. Yeah. When it doesn't feel right listen to that.

E: Yeah.

R: Your gut and our guts are like, I shouldn't have eaten that. Maybe. Yeah. All of it.

E: Not all of it.

R: Now, would you, um, in the end, would you recommend this?

E: I don't know. You know, in my heart that I can. Um, number one, I don't know of any of my friends can afford to go to the, to the,

R: that's true.

E: I mean, I have this thing all the time where I say a lot of my friends are artists and we have this joke that we create the art that we can't see, cause we can't [00:22:00] afford to see it. Um, but, but if they could. Like I said, there was those beautiful things that I saw that they had talent, there's a lot of beautiful voices on stage, uh, the choreography was beautiful, but, um, it's just what we talked about, I don't know if I'd be able to recommend it to anyone.

R: Right. Yeah. Yeah. I feel the same. Like, I don't think I went in, I mean, another set, I mean, we, there are a lot of people who can get the art card to see Phoenix theater work and card makes it, uh, financially affordable to see shows that you guys need for like 15 bucks or something.

E: Right.

R: But like, just give you an idea. Those of you who don't, who aren't artists and, but want to see a show at Phoenix theater, or if you want to see this show, um, you're looking at a ticket price range, uh, starting at \$41, which I haven't seen many that are left around that range to the highest about there is about \$205 for a ticket.

And right now I think what I saw average price for a ticket is about 130, which is. . I paid less to see some shows on Broadway. Um Hmm. That's, that's [00:23:00] something to be addressed, right. As far as we talk about accessibility, but then also like. Who's it meant for? As a question

E: Its theater and general. I have to, it's very expensive to see theater in this town.

R: It is. It can be.

E: Yeah. So I mean, it's, yeah, it's a, that's the thing that frustrates me a lot, and I understand that productions cost a lot of money but there's ways, there's ways to make it accessible people. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah. How about you? What'd you recommend it?

R: No, I think, yeah. No, I would, I wouldn't, I wouldn't, I think for the same exact thing as you said. Um, I mean, if I, I mean, I'm sure a lot of us have friends. That might be an end. If you can get a hookup. I say, go support your support, your boos. But I don't, I don't think, yeah.

E: Cause we had, we had some friends in the, in the production

R: we went and that was really why we went and that's how actually we were able to afford to go.

Yeah. Uh, but. I don't, I'd have story-wise where it's at right now in the, in the, in the structure that it's in right now. I don't think I could recommend it. It's, yeah.

E: Okay. [00:24:00] All right.

R: That was the first one. The first one that's traumatic. It's a little like, it's like anxious feedback.

E: It is.

R: You're giving feedback, right?

E: And, yeah, and you're getting feedback, and you know, I have to say this, that, eh. I feel like the, the, uh, the art community in general here, in, in, in Phoenix is pretty close. It's not a big community.

R: No.

E: Um, and so it's hard. It's hard to, it's hard to be critical or give feedback to, to, to your friends.

R: And I feel that, you know, I feel like there's some folks who follow her other podcasts ¡Uy, Cucuy! Podcast, check us out, give us stars, but I think that they expect cattiness, and you know, just to like on, that's not what we're doing here and that's not what, that's not productive. I mean, if anything, we want to build a stronger theater community out here. We want to build more partnerships and, and collaborations and feedback and you know, where we feel so strongly about that, that we're throwing that out to you.

Also, this doesn't mean that like my theater company [00:25:00] Teatro Bravo is not going to be on this chopping block sometimes. We're going to be and we won't be reviewing it. We want to invite folks to come out. I even can openly, I will openly say right now, anyone from Phoenix theater, if you would like to come and review the next Teatro Bravo show Fade, happening April 10th to April 26 at Space 55 you let me know and I will have two comps for you.

We want to open this up, and it's not just going to be Ernie and I reviewing, we know from the community. You want.

E: Yeah, we'll bring people in front of the community. You know, the, the big point of this, uh, this podcast is, um, is of course we wanted to review the work and get it, give our opinions on the work, but we also wanted to give voice to people that usually don't have voices.

Um, there's people that are, are involved in theater productions. A big part of it, but an example would be the stage managers or, or the ushers or you know, all of those people that are involved in putting on a production, um, those people should have voices and, uh, yeah. And we want to hear from them. Yeah, definitely a different perspective.

R: Absolutely.

E; Yeah. [00:26:00]

R: So well. Cool.

E: Well, cool. Yeah. Hey, you know, um, if you like the show or even if you hate this show, um, please make sure to subscribe on iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you download, your pocket podcast. I'm tongue tied, but, um, but also, um. Please, please, please, please rate us five stars.

If you have a comment, especially on iTunes or Stitcher, please, please, uh, put a comment in there. We'd love to hear from you, whatever, whatever you want to say. Uh, but we really, we also want that feedback, so please, please go on there. Rate us five stars,

R: five stars,

E: five stars. Yeah. Yeah, it helps us. All right, so how do you feel?

R: I feel. All right. We'll see ya. We'll see you. I'll see what everyone else says.

E: All right, so, um, if you went like again, should we give Phoenix Theatre's website?

R: Yes. I'm sorry, I don't have it pulled up, but yes, if you want to check it out, go to Phoenix Theater's website at... sorry it's probably super [00:27:00] phoenixtheater.com I just wanted to be sure, cause sometimes people have like PHX something.

So Phoenixtheater.com if you want to find out more about this show and any other shows that they're doing this season. Um, I think that's all I have.

E: Yeah. And if you want to find out about us sippinteaainthebalcony.com Is where you'll find this podcast. And of course, you can check out Teatros' work there.

And, um, I was going to say one more thing. I forgot.

E: You can also check out Sippin Tea In the Balony's instagram @SippinTeainTheBalcony. Yeah. More stuff's coming up. So thank you very much for listening and

R:see you at the theater

E: see you at the theater.

Outro music