

Cultural Daily

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A Theatre Isn't a Building, But It Needs One

Adam Leipzig · Thursday, January 26th, 2012

In Los Angeles, we have a downtown four-theatre performing arts complex called the Los Angeles Theatre Center. Last week the City Council sent an [eviction notice](#) to the Latino Theatre Company, which has operated LATC for the past six years. The company has a short window to work things out with the City.

Let's be clear: I'm a partisan in this fight. I was on hand when the building was built and opened in 1985; some people called me "the kid." I left a few years before our original theatre company sputtered to a halt. Then I watched as the City took over the building and occasionally booked lackluster shows while the structure became dowdy and forlorn. During those years I could barely walk into the lobby – it had grown sad, old, dull and lifeless. Its torn carpet got more ragged with each visit; its burnt-out lights went un-replaced.

Then, in 2006, the Latino Theatre Company became tenants, and brought the place back to life. Through unique partnerships with diverse theatre companies, LTC created an umbrella under which new work began to thrive. The four theatres, which under the City's stewardship had been dark most of the time, once again filled up. The lobby grew vibrant with audience, actors and playwrights.

I mentioned I'm a partisan, and I happily count Jose-Luis Valenzuela and Evelina Fernandez, LTC's artistic director and leading playwright, as friends. My wife also worked as their general manager for two years, so let's say we're family. Yet the most important partisanship I feel is to theatre itself – to the ideal of stage and community, and to those people, everywhere, who do grueling work every day, at low pay and against high odds, to craft meaning and delight on stages around the world.

In the past six years, LTC, and the theatre companies they've partnered with, have brought us vital, vibrant shows that reflect the truths and multiplicity of Los Angeles. I know of no theatre in any American city that does a better job of reflecting the diversity of people and artistic approach.

I've been moved by their productions of Evelina Fernandez's *Mexican Trilogy*; thrilled by their avant-garde work in *The Vault*; reveled in Roger Guenveur Smith's tour de force in *Juan and John*; and elevated by their annual miracle play *La Virgen de Guadalupe, Dios Inanztin*, which they present free as a gift to the city, and which is, for much its audience, the only theatre they experience all year.

While it's all about good theatre and what theatre can mean to a community, of course a theatre company needs a place to do its work. LTC spent more than \$4 million restoring the Theatre Center building, and replacing its sagging technical infrastructure. They've poured an additional \$6 million into the local economy by providing jobs to actors, playwrights, directors, and technical staff, and they've been responsible, in large part, to the economic revitalization of Spring St.

I'm hoping the City and LTC work things out. Whoever saves a life, it's said, saves an entire

world. And whoever does not save a theatre destroys an entire world. Every city deserves a theatre that provides as much vitality, dignity and truth as Latino Theatre Company. Los Angeles certainly does.

Want to do something? [Here's how you contact LA City Council.](#)

Image from La Virgen.

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