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June 15-20, 2011

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# 'Solitude': Waxing Philosophical, Waning Into Tedium

June 18, 2011 By [Kerry Lengel](#)

RADAR L.A. entry "Solitude." Photo: Latino Theater Company

A stiff but stylish drama inspired by the philosophical musings of Octavio Paz, the [Latino Theater Company's](#) *Solitude* attempts to imagine a Mexican-American existentialism but achieves only everyday, generalized angst.

The action, such as it is, begins at a funeral where Gabriel (Geoffrey Rivas) mourns the loss of both his mother and the 20 years he spent estranged from her after he left the barrio to find a lucrative career and a trophy wife.

When a childhood friend asks where the "party" after the service is, Gabriel ends up hosting an impromptu reunion that includes an old flame, her bookish son, a black-robed cellist and a character called The Man, "a limo driver who speaks at funerals ... among other things" (played by [Robert Beltran](#) of *Star Trek: Voyager* fame). In between ruminations, revelations and recriminations, the entire cast takes regular timeouts to dance abstractedly to blaring Latin horns.

The dances, choreographed by Urbanie Lucero, are stately and psychedelic, somehow serious and kitschy at the same time. They are almost as lovely as [Semyon Kobialka's](#) moaning cello work and Francois-Pierre Couture's slick modernist set, dominated by a giant, slightly tilted frame standing in for a proscenium arch.

But the script by Evelina Fernandez (who also plays Ramona, the old flame) is just plain tedious.

"It's a feeling of longing that has been a part of me for as long as I became aware of myself, of my existence," young Angel tells Gabriel. "I can't find (my purpose) and it can't find me. It can't find me in this city full of people and cars and buildings and smog and violence and tragedy and sorrow and joy and celebration and tears and laughter and ignorance and knowledge and liquor and drugs and prayers and promises. How can it? It's out there, though. I know it is."

You could give Fernandez the benefit of the doubt and assume she is breaking the first rule of narrative – show, don't say – on purpose, to imitate the abstract psychocultural diagnosis in Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, which is liberally quoted throughout. But watching the play is like conversing with people who have spent their entire lives in therapy and have no sense of social filter: *This is the way I am, and this is what happened in my childhood that made the way I am. Oh, how I wish I could be someone else!* The playwright may think she has dramatized her ideas, but she's merely turned them into dialogue.

## RADAR L.A.: IT'S A WRAP

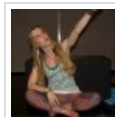


**RADAR L.A.:**  
**Experimental Mardi Gras**  
June 19, 2011 By [Julie Potter](#)

Remixing New York's Under the Radar Festival for the West Coast, the RADAR L.A. Festival reflects a shift in contemporary theater, colliding international work with the Los Angeles theater scene. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)



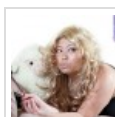
## Q&A



### Spilling Your Guts in the Spotlight: A Podcast

June 19, 2011 By [Nancy Fowler](#)

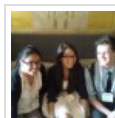
You know that dream where you're standing naked in front of an audience? For author/actor Summer "Rain" Sinclair, it's a reality that's happened three times this week. Sinclair strips herself ... [\[Read More...\]](#)



### It's Not Over Yet: Asian-American Festival Keeps the Drama Going in LA

June 19, 2011 By [Nancy Fowler](#)

Just when you thought Los Angeles' June theater festivals were wrapping up, it turns out the fat lady has a lot more to see before she sings. As RADAR L.A. and the Theatre Communications Group ... [\[Read More...\]](#)



### Speaking Youth to Power: The Next Theater Generation

June 18, 2011 By [Ben Fulton](#)

Hallie Gordon, a Chicago theater professional who helped found and now oversees Steppenwolf Theatre Company's program promoting theater among youth, delivered what might become the most ... [\[Read More...\]](#)





The actors, directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela, make a valiant effort to bring the turgid text to life. Sal Lopez displays an easygoing charm as Johnny, the one who refers to a funeral reception as a party. Beltran, on the other hand, seems to be playing a parody of the Most Interesting Man in the World from those Dos Equis ads, with an exaggerated accent and cloying romanticism. Maybe he is trying to out-suave another *Star Trek* alum, [Ricardo Montalban](#).

Ironically, some of the finest acting in the production is done by the cellist. Kobialka has no lines, but he maintains an intense focus on his fellow performers and reflects their emotions in his playing and in his eyes.

And why exactly is there a cellist onstage? It's not just for mood music, because there's plenty more of that being piped in over the speakers. He seems to be part of the show for the same reason as the Latin-dance interludes: to give the play an arty or "experimental" air.

The best things in *Solitude* are superfluous.

**Solitude. RADAR L.A.** Through Sunday, June 19, at Los Angeles Theatre Center.  
<http://www.redcat.org/event/radar-la-festival>

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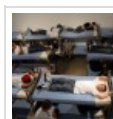
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## DOUGLAS MCLENNAN'S JUNE 16 TALK AT THE TCG CONFERENCE

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## FRIDAY, JUNE 17



**'State of Incarceration': Locked Up, and a Little Locked Out**

June 17, 2011 By [Laura Spencer](#)



**'Titus Redux' Review and Impressions**

June 17, 2011 By [Walter Ryce](#)



**Stehlin on 'Titus': Finding Narrative in Abstraction**

June 17, 2011 By [Ben Fulton](#)

**Backseat Drivers: How Moving Arts Ignites 'The Car Plays'**

June 17, 2011 By [Maura Judkis](#)

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# LA STAGE TIMES

## FIRST PERSON

### RADAR L.A.: *SOLITUDE* (It's in English"mostly)

by Evelina Fernandez | June 9, 2011

It began in 1998 when I read Octavio Paz's obituary in the LA Times. A Nobel Prize recipient in literature, a poet and intellectual, his vast accomplishments were amazing – and he was Mexican!

Just to be clear, I am *not* Mexican; I'm a second generation Mexican-American, a Chicana. My parents were born in Arizona and my grandparents were from the Mexican state of Jalisco. My parents speak Spanglish and I grew up speaking English"mostly. I mean, I like mariachi music, but I really love soul and funk, which is what I grew up listening to. Vicente Fernandez is cool, but give me Marvin Gaye any day. My Spanish is just okay, but when I visit my husband's family in Mexico, I hardly speak because I'm insecure about it.

Anyway, when I read the Paz obituary, I felt a surprising sense of pride and ownership bubble up and, at the same time, a profound sense of loss and regret for not having known more about him.

His obit ran in newspapers around the world.

He was hailed as one of the great intellectuals of our time – and he was Mexican! I could've kicked myself "How could I have read Neruda and never read Paz? I promised myself I would pick up a copy of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, his series of essays about Mexican thought and culture. Then, I shoved that thought somewhere deep as I worked on other projects and didn't come back to it.

A few years later, I was exploring the idea of writing about alcoholism (can't go into why, due to the limited word count of this article, ahem") and was talking to a friend about it. He (mis)quoted Octavio Paz: "Mexicans drink to confess, Americans drink to forget." I asked where Paz had written that and he said in *Labyrinth*. And there it was. As I read the essays, it became clear to me that my ancestry (and all of its issues) runs deep within me and my community. Paz's juxtaposition of Mexican and American cultures was both insightful and mind-boggling – because I am both.

Evelina Fernandez



We are both. Our ensemble, the Latino Theater Company, has worked together for 25 years and our body of work comes from a Mexican-American perspective.Â The stories we tell are about U.S. Latinos as they are, in English"mostly.Â And after so many years, we know our audience.Â They like humor, music and drama.Â They like to laugh and they *love* to cry.Â Oh, and a few tequila shots and a Mexican *corrido* thrown in never hurts. This formula has worked well for us over the years.

But, this process was different.Â Taking Paz's text and themes, we began with the music "" '50s mambo, six monologues, six actors, a cellist, a choreographer, a director, and no story "" yet.

Latino Theater Company'sÂ "Solitude"

We had a table read of the monologues and we discussed *Labyrinth*, which wasn't easy.Â We all had different interpretations of what Paz meant in different essays.Â Some of us disagreed with his views and some of us were overwhelmed by how dense it is.Â So, we decided to dance!Â A very "Mexican" thing to do, according to Paz.

We worked for 10 days, experimented with movement and mambo.Â The dramatic brass riffs and big band sounds together with the haunting sounds of the cello continue to be core elements of the production today. Â We presented a workshop production of movement and the six monologues:Â a man haunted by regret, a woman in love with a man who doesn't love her, a lost young man looking for a purpose, a single mother devoted to her only son, a working-class everyman, and a limo driver who is a "love" expert.Â The audience response was positive!Â But, didn't we need a story?

Cast of "Solitude"

I read a passage in *Labyrinth* called, "The Day of the Dead," where Paz talks about the Mexican *fiesta*, the ritual of it as an escape from the daily grind, an escape from our solitude: "This is the night when friends who have not exchanged more than the prescribed courtesies for months get drunk together, trade confidences, weep over the same troubles, discover that they are brothers, and sometimes, to prove it, kill each other."Â And there it was"the story.

The characters stuck, their relationships were developed, and the play evolved into a stylized theater piece based on text and told through movement, music, humor, drama "" a few tequila shots and a Mexican *corrido*, played on the cello. The mainstage production opened in September 2009 at LATC, and now we are taking it on tour through 2012.



We are extremely excited to be part of RADAR L.A. and we hope to see you all there!Â It's in English "mostly.

**Solitude** is presented as part of RADAR L.A., an international festival of contemporary theater, June 14-19.Â For tickets and more information, visit [www.radarla.org](http://www.radarla.org)

**DATES & TIMES:** Wed.-Sun. 8:00 pm, June 15-19

**TICKETS:** \$20 (\$10 w/ festival flex pass)

**RUN TIME:** 90 minutes

**LOCATION:** LATC: Theater 3, Los Angeles Theatre Center, 514 South Spring Street, LA

**PARKING:** \$5"6 event parking at several locations off Main and 6th Streets.

"Solitude"

Evelina Fernandez is a playwright/actor born and raised in East Los Angeles.Â She is the resident playwright for the Latino Theater Company. They've been together for more than 25 years (longer than most marriages).Â Her other plays include *Dementia*, *Luminarias*, *L.A. Carmen*, *Liz Estrada in the City of Angels*.Â She is currently writing a trilogy following the diaspora of Mexicans in the United States.



# PDF Editor



## Culture Monster

(<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/>)

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

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# Theater review: 'Solitude' at the Latino Theater Company

JUNE 17, 2011 | 3:30 PM



(<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/.a/6a00d8341c630a53ef015433146dba970c-pi>)

The Latino Theater Company's contribution to Radar L.A. is "Solitude," by Evelina Fernández, a stylishly directed, charmingly acted but melodramatic and drawn-out portrait of Gabriel (Geoffrey Rivas), who reunites with his former best friend, Johnny (Sal López), and his first love, Ramona (playwright Fernández), at his mother's funeral.



Twenty years earlier, Gabriel abandoned the warmth and poverty of his childhood for financial success and emotional isolation in a childless marriage to beautiful, lonely Sonia (Lucy Rodríguez). It's apparent early on that Ramona's son, the confused and moody 25-year-old Angel (Fidel Gomez), is Gabriel's son too, and that this revelation will emotionally tax both the characters and the audience. I found myself glancing at my neighbor's watch as the climax loomed, wondering how much time and how many tears I would have to invest in it. (More than enough.)

The real angel of the story is Manolo or "The Man" (Robert Beltran), the uncommonly romantic limo driver who conveys the guests from the cemetery to a reception at Gabriel's fancy penthouse (a gorgeous spare set by François-Pierre Couture made up of an off-kilter proscenium arch, a piano, a few chairs and lots of wine glasses). The Man is a self-styled expert on lovemaking, although he claims never to have been in love. A devotee of the famous Mexican writer, he punctuates his ruminations with the attribution "Octavio Paz!" Beltran's presence and eloquence are absorbing. Fernández's Ramona has an earthy, hysterical laugh that conveys both pluck and despair, and she's gorgeous in a blowzy and downtrodden way in her tight dress and high heels (one of costume designer Nikki Delhomme's nice ensembles).

All of the actors, in fact, appeal. Director José Luis Valenzuela (the LTC's artistic director) imparts his customary, ineffable tongue-in-cheek charm. And the dance sequences that intersperse the action—each performer playfully interpreting Mexican styles—are lighthearted and entertaining. Semyon Kobialka provides lovely accompaniment on the cello. The text has plenty of strengths—whimsy and insight, tenderness and cruelty—but it's dragged down by excessive length and the eagerness to explain itself to an audience it evidently expects to be composed of dolts. Give us some credit! As Sonia rebukes The Man, who can be a little condescending, "I may be miserable but I'm not slow."

--Margaret Gray

**"Solitude,"** Los Angeles Theatre Center, 514 S. Spring St., Los Angeles. 8 p.m. Friday through Sunday. Ends June 19. \$20. Contact: [www.redcat.org](http://www.redcat.org) (<http://www.redcat.org/radar-la/latino-theater-company>) or (213) 237-2800. Running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes.

*Photo: The cast of "Solitude."*