

Marga Gomez Brings Latin Standards to MACLA

IN [MUSIC](#) FEBRUARY 1, 2018 by JEFFREY EDALATPOUR

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GOING SOLO: In her one-woman show, 'Latin Standards,' Marga Gomez remembers the music and cultural contributions of her father, Willy Chevalier.

Marga Gomez was out of breath when she arrived outside the Brava Theater Center on her Razor scooter. The comedian and raconteur was in the midst of a successful three-week run of *Latin Standards*, her latest, and possibly last, solo play. She was revving up for the closing weekend in San Francisco, looking forward to her three days with the show at San Jose's MACLA in February and waiting for an email to confirm a return engagement to Brava in March (she received the confirmation later that afternoon).

We sat down in the empty cabaret room where two lonely palm trees, made of green and gold tinsel, sparkled against a black backdrop. With Gomez not on stage, the trees looked like they were wilting and in need of the turgor pressure her charismatic stage presence provides. *Latin Standards* is her second solo play that attempts to reckon her personal reminiscences of her dad alongside his legacy as a songwriter of Latino hits in the 1950s and '60s.

Gomez says the difference between that first show, *A Line Around The Block* from 1996, is the wisdom she's gained after 20 years. "He was a little mythic in the first show. It was like, 'This is the man I saw,' but this show is like, 'This is the man I am.'" This Freudian slip—she doesn't say, "This is the man *he* was"—indicates not only how much she admired him and, as an adult, emulated his desire to make it as an entertainer. It's also a sign that she's learned how to inhabit his ghost. But not in a mournful way.

She learned how to use humor from her parents, who deployed levity as a shield against hardship. "Although they had glory days, their youth was pretty traumatic," Gomez says. "But they always used humor. Even my mother, who wasn't a comedian, had a very mean sense of humor."

Some of the jokes in *Latin Standards* tease out the details of her parents' turbulent 12-year marriage. One of Willy Chevalier's songs (her father's stage name) will play in the background while Gomez excavates their meaning. There's Tito Puente's recording of "De Me Para Ti" and Trio Los Condes' rendition of "En El Último Escalón," which concludes bitterly, "Porque vas a conocer a el diablo (Because you're going to meet the devil)".

[Marga Gomez in "Latin Standards" Los Angeles performances 11/17](#) from [Marga Gomez](#) on [Vimeo](#).

While the focus of this show is on her father, her mother was the subject of her very first play, *Memory Tricks*. In telling their stories Gomez approaches with respect. "They were influencers of their time in the Latino community," she says. "My perspective was to tell stories that weren't told about Latino heroes in culture and entertainment but who are still heroes."

She also wanted to make it simpler than the 1996 show. “This is really compressed, in and out of the best day ever with my father.”

That best day, when Gomez was a girl, she accompanies her father to a meeting at an advertising agency. Chevalier’s going to pitch a radio commercial campaign to a coffee maker. Because of his late nights at clubs and theaters, he never woke up before 3pm. He asks his daughter to wake him up early, at noon. She agrees on one condition—that he take her with him to the meeting. The story reveals the depths of her affection for him, especially when she speaks in his voice, adopting both his posture and affect. But she’s able to balance a child’s sentimental image of her late father with an unsentimental sense of humor about his foibles and flaws.

Gomez also teaches solo performance. She works with students who have “tapped into something, into the truth. I don’t care if someone is a polished performer, if they’re clunky. I’m more interested in the story they’re telling and if they have the ability to take notes and do rewrites. Some people are just all there and they want to just get more out of it and hone it and cut the excess.” For anyone interested in learning how to translate personal memories onto the stage, *Latin Standards* is a master class.

Latin Standards

Feb 9-11, 8pm & 2pm, \$10+

MACLA, San Jose

maclaarte.org