

## Bay Area native Robert Karimi stars in 'Love, Food, Love' at San Jose's MACLA

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On Valentine's Day weekend there's going to be a sweetheart of an event at MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana in downtown San Jose. Love, Food, Love is billed as equal parts cooking show and theater performance. Its star, Robert Karimi, an Iranian-Guatemalan interdisciplinary playwright, activist and poet--what a mouthful!--says the program was created "specifically for San Jose and for this holiday weekend."

Audience members should know that they won't be mere passive witnesses. They'll be expected to help prep a secret (for now) menu and eat while they're cooking. Karimi, who figuratively will don the toque of alter ego Mero Cocinero, will be joined by fellow performance poets Leticia Hernández-Linares and Tomas Riley. There will be laughs, recipes, stories and tips on eating better.

"We'll also have surprises. Together, we'll see if we can create an environment of love," Karimi says.

The show runs 8 p.m. Feb. 14-15, and 2 p.m. Feb. 16 at MACLA, 510 S. First St., San Jose. It's presented in conjunction with the Peoples Cook, a Minneapolis-St. Paul-based touring company that brings "the funny to foodie." Karimi is its artistic director. A core message of the group is about eating healthy, one Karimi learned when his father was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes years ago.

The character of Mero, he says, is "really idealistic. He wants to change the world through food. He feels people can do no wrong and is the ultimate community positivity person. He sees the act of cooking and eating together as revolutionary."

Karimi was born in Hayward and grew up in Union City, thus making him a "pure Bay Area boy." He has performed here often and calls MACLA, site of his first one-man show, done around 2000, one of his artistic homes.

The UCLA grad finds inspiration for his act by being an anthropologist of sorts. "Just asking the right questions leads to a gold mine of stories. I say chisme (Spanish for gossip) is where a lot of my work comes from. You can listen to chisme on a bus, hanging out at a barbecue or at the flea market at Capitol Expressway."

Although Love seeks to spur participants into thinking more critically about what they put into their bodies, "What we're doing is not about wagging a finger," Karimi says. "It's about having a good time with food again, about finding inspiration in the past of the people, looking back at your roots. We want to make that connection and have a good time doing that."

Tickets at the door are \$25, \$10 for students with valid ID; \$20 in advance at [macla.vbotickets.com](http://macla.vbotickets.com). Information: 408.998.2783, ext. 28 or [maclaarte.org](http://maclaarte.org).