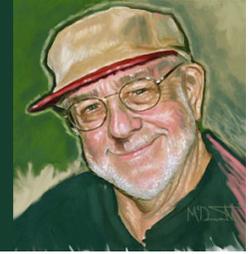


# THE THEATER MIRROR

## NEW ENGLAND THEATER GUIDE



## Boston Playwrights' Theatre has you Laughing in Spanish

[February 27, 2019](#) [michaelhoban](#)



(Ireon Roach, Jackie Davis, Adrian Abel Amador – Photograph credit: Kalman Zabarsky)

### Review by James Wilkinson

*'Laughs in Spanish' – Written by Alexis Scheer. Directed by Sara Katzoff. Scenic Design: Sean Perreira. Lighting Design: Hannah Solomon. Sound Design: Stephanie Lynn Yackovetsky. Costume Design: Chloe Chafet. Produced by Boston Playwrights' Theatre at Boston Playwrights' Theatre 949 Commonwealth Ave. Boston through March 3*

I've only visited Florida a handful of times and have never been to Miami. Each trip was to Orlando and if I had to venture a guess, true Floridians probably don't view the world of Walt Disney as "real" Florida. I'll have to take it on faith that the Miami invoked in Boston Playwrights' Theatre's *Laughs in Spanish* is true to the real place, but given that playwright Alexis Scheer calls the city her home, I'm willing to make that leap. There's an energy at play in *Laughs in Spanish*, a kind of beat that you start bobbing your head to as you enter the theater. You don't realize how easily you've slipped into the world of the play. It's a world of rhythm and color and once you're on its wavelength, the production hooks you with its many charms and keeps you in a state of frothy fun.

The art has gone missing from the gallery run by Mari (Krystal Hernandez). Overnight, dozens of pieces were stolen with few to no leads as to where they could have gone. The gallery receptionist, Caro (Ireon Roach) swears that she locked up the previous night and her cop boyfriend, Juan (Adrian Abel Amador) backs her up. It would be a disaster under any circumstances, but this robbery happened in the run up to Art Basel, an art festival where connoisseurs descend on the city, on the hunt for new work. Mari is now hours away from an opening gala with no art to present to buyers. On its own, it's a solid premise for an art-world-based farce, but *Laughs in Spanish* manages to drop one more element into the mix, Mari's movie star mother, Estella (Jackie Davis), who picks this exact moment to pay her daughter a surprise visit. We'll soon learn that the visit is anything but casual, as Estella has ulterior motives for wanting to get in her daughter's good graces. In the meantime though, she decides to do all she can to help her daughter in her hour of need.



(Davis, Krystal Hernandez)

Although *Laughs in Spanish* opens with a mystery, it dispenses with that storyline pretty quickly. When we find out the answer, it's not all that surprising, but it's also not all that important. In this case, the heist is just a convenient McGuffin, an excuse to get all of these characters in a room together. What really matters, and what Scheer is interested in, are the relationships that develop between the characters when they begin talking. Oddly enough, as I sat watching *Laughs in Spanish*, the playwright that kept popping into my head as a possible influence was Neil Simon. There are some obvious differences. Here, you won't find Simon's string of one-liners or the influence of Jewish identity so elemental to his work. But I'd argue that in *Laughs* best moments, you'll find a gentle comedic approach to character that pops up in Simon's later "mature" work. The characters radiate a warmth. You're on their side. The humor of the piece comes from the way they try and fail and try again to do what's best for those around them.

Director Sara Katzoff carries over that gentle approach into her staging choices. The city of Miami is so integral to the character of the production and together with her design team, Katzoff picks just the right moments to pull that identity to the forefront and zap the play with a dose of energy. The all-white set design by Sean Perreira doesn't immediately give you a lot to look at (the play, after all, does take place in an art gallery. It's supposed to be blank), but it acts as a canvas for Hannah Solomon's candy colored neon lights to pop against. Stephanie Lynn Yackovetsky's sound design brings in the flavor of the city's music scene.

It also helps that you have five performances that embrace the warmth the piece is going for. So much of the fun of the production can be traced back to Jackie Davis' performance as Estella. She's wonderfully electric in the role. Krystal Hernandez is quite good as the show's lead, although strangely the script really doesn't give its heroine much to do. For the bulk of the play she's either fretting about the missing paintings or trying to shut down her mother in what feels like an extended, stunted version of the improv game "Yes, and..." ("Do this." "No." "How about this?" "No." "Why not this?" "No." "We could try this." "No."). I can understand that this is partly due to the contentious relationship with her mother, but you can't help but wish for a character that was a bit more active in her own story.

I realize that when I call *Laughs in Spanish* 'frothy fun' it might sound as though I'm calling the play trivial. That's not my intention. There are definitely moments and plotlines that logically I couldn't buy into, (Estella's demeanor, for example, is way too positive for me to believe that she's facing serious felony charges in court the next day and Mari's connection to her mother's personal assistant is a bit too convenient), but I think to get caught up in those elements is to miss the pleasures that the production can offer. In its best moments, the moments when the pieces of the production pull together, lets us see the humor in being human. For tickets and more information, visit their website: [www.bostonplaywrights.org](http://www.bostonplaywrights.org)

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