

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Leguizamo Does America

Elisa Leonelli · Sunday, July 30th, 2023

It was great for me to watch the MSNBC documentary series *Leguizamo Does America*, because I had followed the career of this incredibly talented comedian from the beginning, and to see him as a vocal activist promoting Latinx culture and representation was inspiring. [Watch here](#) an extended trailer for the episode about Los Angeles, where he meets with talent like actor George Lopez and director Robert Rodriguez. He conducts the same type of interviews in Miami, New York, Chicago, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico.

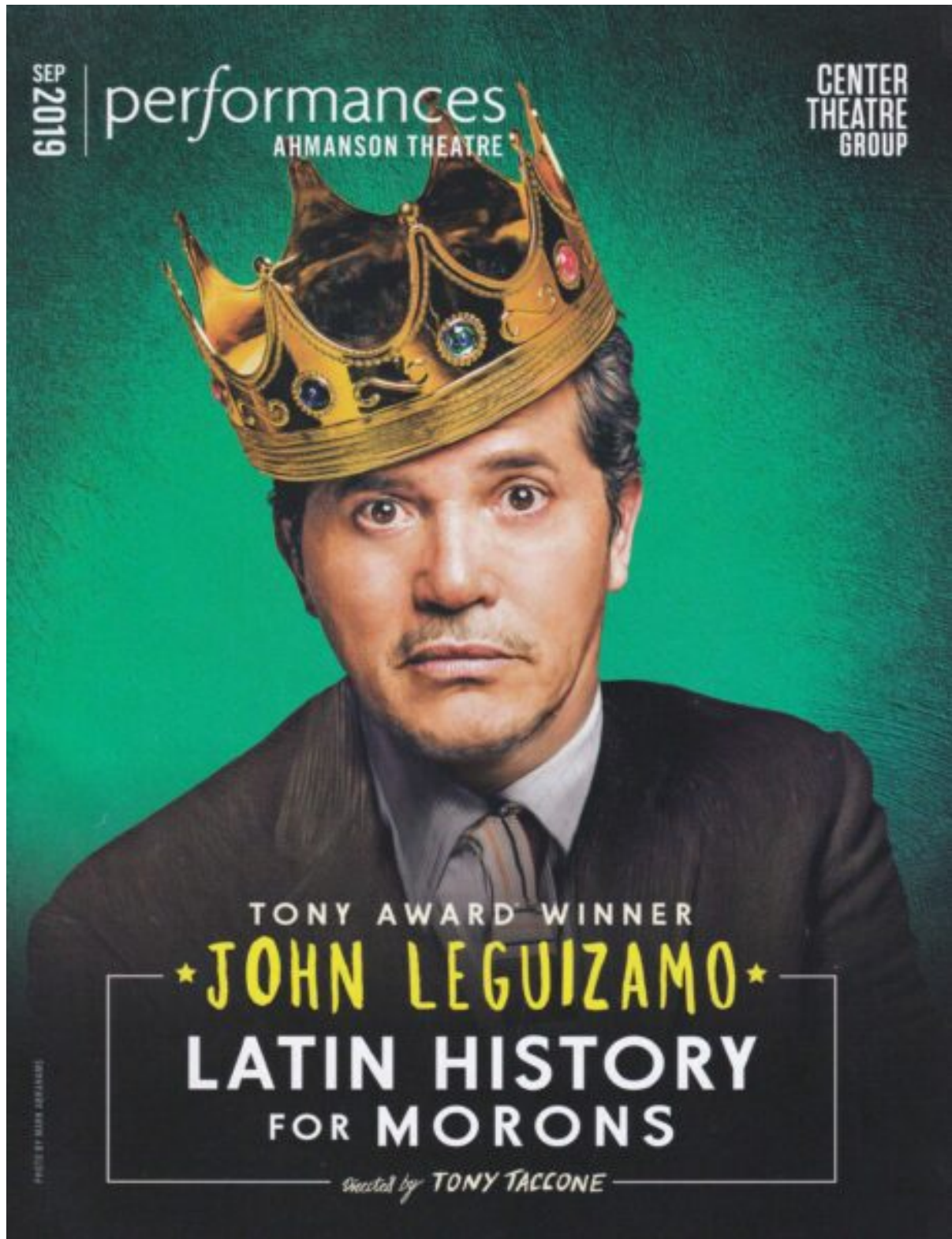


After meeting John Leguizamo in person in 1995 to talk about *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* directed by Beeban Kidron, I did a one-on-one interview for the cover story of *Latin Style*, sister publication of *Venice*, the Los Angeles Arts and Entertainment Magazine where I served as film editor from 1990 to 1999. At the photo session in the studio of Blake Little, Leguizamo proved that he was game for everything when he agreed to pose inside a bathtub filled with liquid chocolate. He was equally open to answer all my questions.



I saw Leguizamo in his numerous movie roles, from Tybalt Capulet in *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec in *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) both directed by Baz Lurhmann, *Love in the Time of Cholera* (2007) directed by Mike Newell from the 1985 novel by Gabriel Garcia Márquez, *Chef* (2014) by Jon Favreau, to *The Menu* (2022) where he played a movie star. And let's not forget that he voiced Bruno in the animated *Encanto* (2021), which is about a Colombian family, and Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote a rap song for his character.

Leguizamo was born in Bogotá on July 22, 1964, emigrated with his family to New York at the age of four, grew up in the multicultural neighborhood of Jackson Heights in Queens among Colombians, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Ecuadoreans, Argentineans.



In 2019 I saw Leguizamo perform live at the Ahmanson the one man play *Latin History for Morons*, and was amazed by his physical energy and ability to impersonate different characters.

I went back to watch all of his stage shows, that were filmed for HBO but are not currently available on MAX, and you may find on YouTube and Amazon: *Mambo Mouth* (1991), *Spic-o-Rama* (1993), *Freak* (1998) directed by Spike Lee, *Sexaholix... A Love Story* (2001), *Ghetto Clown* (2011).

Leguizamo cited as his inspiration Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, Richard Pryor, Jonathan Winters, Lily Tomlin, Whoopi Goldberg and Eric Bogosian.



John Leguizamo © Armando Gallo

In 2020 I met Leguizamo via zoom to talk about directing *Critical Thinking*, where he played a Cuban chess teacher in Miami. He stressed the importance of education, that actors like Marlon Brando and James Dean, Al Pacino and Robert De Niro, all went to acting classes. He revealed that he was working with Dolores Huerta and other activists to get out the Latino vote in the 2020 presidential elections.

And I spoke with him again in 2021, about the musical he wrote, *Kiss My Aztec!*, a 2019 La Jolla Playhouse production staged at the Hartford in Connecticut in 2022.

[Watch here](#) Leguizamo interviewed for the TV series *Seen* (2022) about Latinx artists.

Catch him in the Amazon series *The Power* (2023) playing a Latin doctor married to the mayor of Seattle (Toni Collette).

I encourage you to click on the links underlined in orange for more info and go on a voyage of rediscovery of this amazing performer.

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