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## Marga Gomez's Perfectly Improper 'Names'

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Marga Gomez does a devastating Kathleen Turner in "Los Big Names," her funny new monologue about her adventures in the family business. Her parents were Latino entertainers who never achieved crossover success. Her father, Willie, was a Cuban-born comic; her mother, Margarita, a dancer from Puerto Rico. Marga joined them onstage in New York as a child, in the zany "La Familia Comica," a weekly sketch characterized by frozen facial expressions and cringe-inducing punch lines.

When she grew up, Gomez became an actress and comedian, a lesbian comic, she says, "B.E." (Before Ellen), and eventually made the pilgrimage to Hollywood, where she was mostly up for roles as hookers and maids. In pursuit of the part of a housekeeper in a Lifetime television movie, she took a meeting with Turner, who, Gomez asserts, thought to have her do a little light cleaning as she read for the role.

"I vacuumed her entire office," Gomez declares. Whether or not the sprucing up actually happened, it's a great topper for her story about Turner, one of a number of celebrity actors who suffer deep gashes from Gomez's satiric switchblade. (Her impersonation of the husky-voiced actress as a kind of swaggering, latter-day Tallulah Bankhead is delicious.) Not even Dustin Hoffman's digestive tract is spared in "Los Big Names," receiving its world premiere from Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. The actor, she alleges, had a major problem with gas on the set of a second-rate sci-fi thriller, "Sphere," in which Gomez had a tiny role. The lesson for stars seems to be, if Gomez enters your orbit, take extra-special care to behave as if there's company in the house.

"Los Big Names" is a sweet and saucy riff on life on the outer edge of the spotlight by a woman who knows that foggy territory. Gomez's quest, it seems, whether growing up gay in a family ill-equipped to handle that, or finding her way as a Latina in an industry that views ethnicity as a kind of packaging, has been to try to figure out where -- or even how -- she fits in. Her show, staged whimsically by David Schweizer, ricochets between memories of her self-absorbed, warring parents and her quixotic efforts to take their legacy and run with it, to break through to mainstream audiences.

Gomez is among a small army of comics and authors who've sought to dramatize their La-La Land skirmishes in autobiographical evenings. The work of Gomez, who's been performing in one-woman shows for a number of years, bears some resemblance to that of another smart, potty-mouthed comedian, Margaret Cho; both chronicle their dust-ups with Hollywood, their battles against the efforts to pigeonhole them as ethnic types. Their inability to succumb comfortably to stereotype, to fit the studio mold, is precisely what makes them such compelling soloists.

Gomez, clad in a dark sailor suit, recounts in great detail her involvement in "Sphere," a movie set in the watery deep that, in the six short years since its release, has already earned the distinction of being long forgotten. Still, the film looms large here: Over Gomez's head Schweizer and designer Shannon Robert Bowen suspend a giant globe that haunts the stage like an unpleasant growth.

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"Sphere" is indeed a fat target. (Gomez's character and performance both met premature ends, one on the ocean floor, the other on the cutting-room floor.) She mocks Sharon Stone's entourage, Samuel L. Jackson's attitude, Liev Schreiber's egotism, even the bob, held in place by barrettes, given her by the movie's stylists. "The scariest thing in 'Sphere,' " she notes, "is my hair."

If any aspect of "Los Big Names" could stand a bit of fine-tuning, it is the portion dealing with the author's feelings about Willie and Margarita. Gomez conjures her parents in a gentle, clear-eyed pair of impersonations. The perplexity is that the comic herself remains out of focus; the show never adequately explores the impact of the continuing tension between her parents, their frustration at their own thwarted careers, and what that does to their bright, talented daughter.

Perhaps Gomez is too close to fully understand, either. As she observes, she had the ability to complete an acting assignment on a day of wrenching personal turmoil "because my parents had reared a professional." That instinct is a fortunate asset, now as it was then.

**Los Big Names**, written and performed by Marga Gomez. Directed by David Schweizer. Set, Shannon Robert Bowen; lighting, Lisa L. Ogonowski; sound, Robert Timothy Jarbadan. Approximately 90 minutes. Through April 18 at Kennedy Center Film Theater. Call 202-467-4600 or visit [www.kennedy-center.org](http://www.kennedy-center.org).

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