

Luna Loba: El Azufre

On January 29, if you were to arrive late at Luna Loba: El Azufre [The Sulfur Moon] at AS220 Black Box Theater, you would have walked into a packed house, standing room only, to a completely silent moment on stage. In other venues, walking into that environment would cause a stir. But Shey Rivera, artistic director at AS220 and curator of the Luna Loba series, oversees spectacles that are not interrupted by a fourth wall. Because at AS220, no walls exist.

Unlike other Luna Loba events, which feature female and gender neutral artists, El Azufre had an all-star roster of male and male-identified artists. If a woman artist who frequented Luna Loba events as a performer and spectator was there, she might have felt a tinge of competition. The men stepped up.

Each performer uniquely demonstrated the elements that always dwell on, soar from and ignite Luna Loba stages. There was courage. There was innovation. There was spirit. And if you lost this opportunity to witness Umberto Crenca (whose visual art installation, Pain and Such, can be seen on Weybosset Street), there was every reason to think that his work set the standard for greatness on this night. Saul Ramos (whose show will perform February 11 at Southside Community Culture Center) is a performer who surprises and delights audiences with acute grace.

Benjamin Lundberg's onstage persona devours a large plate of delicious food while speaking bilingually and directly in the room. When he said, "No puedo terminar," one could imagine that he meant his piece. The entire audience was willing him to never finish performing. Or he may have meant the plate of food. He was allowed to do whatever he needed. He had given so much. The only manner in which to repay him for his truth was to accept his next steps thereafter. Then applaud them.

Yon Tande offered an homage to resistance with music and dance. He was the driver of story movement, guiding the audience through the plight, flight and fight that we must ride together, while Kufa Castro took us on what could have been a more conventional ride — in an Uber, not directly related to the utter demise of Uber. Rather, Kufa Castro's account of one ride on one day with one man called We was abstract and literal. It was on fire and gave goose-bumps. Masterful storytelling, and we didn't have to tip.

Orlando Hernandez's intriguing film was set in a beautiful spot in the show. It offered reprieve for the audience without letting it off the hook. Ronald Lewis was eloquent and respectful in his crisp delivery of truth.

Vatic Kuumba presented a short, one-man show in which he nourished, purged and profiled himself. With the audience in the palm of his hand, he tricked everyone into leaning in for the laugh and getting blessed with the lesson. Then he challenged us to comprehend what we had only just experienced as it was juxtaposed with what was actually presented.

Jason Curzake generously educated the audience with a PSA on how suntan lotion is culpable for all of the world's problems. His crisp, clear writing in the voice-over coincided swimmingly with his irreverent application of thick lotion.

When Christopher Johnson asked the audience if we wished to see his resume, the many people there chuckled, perhaps wondering if we were going to learn more about the poet himself. Rather, he crafted

a reference to the God of the Sulfur Moon. With his cigar and liquor passed around the huddled spectators, Christopher's poem left the page and took to the stage. He wooed everyone into understanding that he was emulating a less-than-perfect god, and one who profoundly respects women.

And then there was Sokeo Ros. Thousands have experienced "From Refugee Camp to Project: A Cambodian Lullaby," which has toured the United States. Anyone who has seen this show is better for it. This excerpt shown at AS220 Black Box Theater on the day of the Rhode Island Protest Against Muslim Ban & Anti-Immigration Order, was disturbingly as timely as the era it depicts. The story begins when Sokeo was born in a Cambodian refugee camp in Thailand. Yet there is hope in the arteries and veins of Sokeo's determined body. Each nuanced movement jetted from muscle to skin and shot out as high-beam lasers of strength. And we know much of the story as Sokeo personifies it because he is telling it himself. In the United States of America.

Luna Loba: El Azufre (The Sulfur Moon), as performed at AS220 Black Box Theater, manifested much like the Sulfur Moon itself. "It is reactive; it is both weapon and medicine," as described by the organizers. Let that experience be exactly that so that it may equip us for 2017. Armed and ready, prepared to be cured.