

Teruel Takes To The Stage Again In 'Sex Talk'

March 22, 1996|By Achy Obejas

Encarnacion Teruel cuts quite a figure. A dark, handsome man, Teruel dresses in black, wears his charcoal tresses long and exudes a mischievous pansexuality.

Which makes him a perfect performer for Prop Theatre's late-night series, "Sex Talk." Running through April, "Sex Talk" spotlights a different performer each weekend. "Vampiras Look Toward You" is Teruel's contribution.

"We're going to be doing a sound piece, a dance, and then tell little short stories, which are embellished autobiography," says Teruel, who'll be joined onstage by Pablo Helguera. "These are real-life stories, but embellished to be a little more [entertaining](#)," he says with a laugh. "I don't want to go into them too much; I want to let the audience decide how much is real and what's not."

Although probably best known as the director of the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum's spring and fall performing-arts festivals, Teruel, 42, has a [performance](#) career of his own that dates to the early 1980s, when he produced a show called "Sex" at various local venues.

A graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Teruel was first introduced to performance art there. He got an internship in [New York](#) and ended up at the New Museum and the Whitney.

"It was a great time to be in New York," he recalls. "It was the time of that whole punk/new-wave scene."

Among other things, Teruel worked on Laurie Anderson's "O Superman" long before it became a radio hit. He curated performances for Art on the Beach, a performance-art series in New York; among the performers he brought in was a young Bill T. Jones.

When he came [home](#) in 1981, he got involved with "Sex" at the Smart Bar, and helped David Shelton develop performances for the first incarnation of Medusa's, up on Sheffield and School.

"Actually, I loved to perform in clubs instead of in front of art (art-educated) audiences, where there were certain givens," he says. "But eventually, the clubs became art audiences, too; it was preaching to the converted."

So Teruel stopped performing. In many ways, he went mainstream, joining the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum staff and working on specific museum projects. Then, about a year ago, his younger brothers, Hugo and Paul, pulled him into a project called "Latinos on the Edge."

"I wrote and directed that, but I wasn't in it," explains Teruel. "The concept was of a pirate TV station, so it involved a lot of people."

That experience rekindled his passion for performance. He and his brothers were thinking of restaging "Latinos on the Edge" when Prop Theatre called and offered him a slot in the late-night series.

"It's over at the new Mercury Theater, which is a real labor of love by Mike Cuolen, and I wanted to help out," he says. The Mercury, which used to be a carpet-cleaning [business](#), has been renovated into a 200-seat performance space.

"Vampiras Look Toward You" is a long, one-act performance piece, composed of eight vignettes. It's funny and dark and not especially sexual in many ways. Teruel says that although it has been nearly four years since he has been on stage, he's not nervous.

"No, no, I'm really excited about performing," he says. "I think performance and interdisciplinary work is coming of age. I think people understand the language, the work in general is starting to mature -- I think it's not so much because of artists but because the audience has become used to it and can make decisions about what values it carries or doesn't carry."

Many of us mourn Tony Adler's absence from the review pages of the Reader and this newspaper, but he's doing such good work up at the Actors Gymnasium (a school that teaches traditional and non-traditional performance arts), we can't blame him for leaving.

Some of Adler's faculty are taking the stage this weekend to raise money for the Actors Gymnasium. Donna Blue Lachman, former Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus clown Nathan Carver, dancer Martha Donovan, and Rick Kubes of the Jellyeye performance drum corps are just a few of the performers helping out. "The Actors Gymnasium Performs" is scheduled for Saturday night at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center in Evanston.

The After Hours date book

Friday, 11 p.m., Saturday, midnight, "Vampiras Look Toward You," by Encarnacion Teruel, Mercury Theater, 3745 N. Southport Ave. Call 312-486-7767. The Mercury is wheelchair accessible.

Saturday, 8 p.m., "The Actors Gymnasium Performs," Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St., Evanston. \$7. Call 847-328-2795. The Noyes center is wheelchair accessible.