

Inform. Inspire. Involve.

Always free. Subscribe



Arts & Culture

Critics' Picks

Affordability

Cultural Commentary

Food & Drink

THE DO LIST

In the Mission, Performers Marga Gomez and Campo Santo Stay Resilient

By [Nicole Gluckstern](#) Jul 22



Campo Santo's Ethos de Masquerade with Rashad Pridgen and ensemble. *(Destiny Evans)*

In challenging times, it's tales of resilience that resonate most. And the tellers of those tales shine all the brighter, as inspiring beacons against the gloom.

In San Francisco, some of our most consistently resilient performers are those who built their reputations not in the “traditional” performance spaces downtown, but in their own neighborhoods, creating work by, for, and of the communities that inspired them and called them their own. One neighborhood that's long been a bastion for these community-rooted artists is the Mission District, and two of its long-term survivors—Marga Gomez and Campo Santo—are not letting the pandemic slow them down.

One part comedian, one part solo performer, one part consummate host and all parts wholly original, Marga Gomez is resilience personified. Holding it down in a liminal space straddling the Castro and the Mission District since the early 1980s, her resume is a wild ride through some of San Francisco's most memorable cultural highlights. From taking the stage at the first-ever Folsom Street Fair (then called “Megahood”) to working with the long-running San Francisco Mime Troupe, and then being pulled into the first incarnation of Latinx comedy supergroup Culture Clash by Rene Yanez, Gomez has continued to make her mark by always evolving her craft to fit the circumstances.

“A lot of my career has been accidents...opportunities...that I adapted to,” she admits with her signature, gap-toothed smile.



Marga Gomez performs in her 12th solo show, 'Latin Standards.' (Fabian Echevarria)

Even being shut down on opening night for her 13th solo show—*The Spanking Machine*, at Brava Theater Center—couldn't dim Gomez' creative spark. Within two weeks of the shutdown, Gomez had already launched the first of many virtual comedy shows, the format of which she's tweaked with each subsequent edition. First there were midday comedy brunches, then afternoon “high tea,” a Cinco de Mayo bash, a birthday party doubling as a political fundraiser, and, most recently, 30-minute “queer quickies” with co-host, the fabulous Jesús U. BettaWork. And finally, at long last, live-streamed performances of *The Spanking Machine*, running through July 25.



Marga Gomez and her signature smile. *(Courtesy of Marga Gomez)*

Reminiscing about her truncated run at Brava, Gomez ruefully recalls wishing that she wouldn't "have to perform on Friday the 13th," a wish that came all too true with the shutdown. Now scheduled as part of Dixon Place's long-running LGBTQ+ HOT! Festival, Gomez takes the virtual stage from home. Combining clips from her invited dress rehearsal at Brava with live performance, telling a story of a long-lost friend, and a dark secret from the past. Like her other solo shows, it's intensely personal, often hilarious, and paints a vivid picture of Gomez' particular experience: an out-gay, Latinx comic, living a life brimming with equal measures of serendipity and struggle. And though she longs to perform in public spaces again, for the moment, Gomez is glad to be able to innovate from home.

"These projects are keeping me sane! I'll do the show, and if the camera

freezes for a minute, guess what? This is a pleasure, this is a *respite*,” she emphasizes. Resilience.

Sponsored

Far from a solo act, the incomparable Campo Santo, a company prioritizing Bay Area-born voices and people of color, has created work as a tight-knit ensemble since 1996. More than a “writers” theater, Campo Santo has nonetheless cultivated a pantheon of great writers, from Luís Saguar to Luis Alfaro, Chinaka Hodge to Star Finch. More than an “actors” theater, Campo Santo has embraced the plurality of its community, and created opportunities for first-time performers and professionals alike. To be a member of Campo Santo might take years of exploring where you fit in, the ability to transform and grow in new directions. A journey embodied by ten-year veteran of the company A.M. Smiley, whose artistic evolution from production manager to featured playwright can be tied specifically to the support offered by the Campo Santo *familia*.

While the company experiments with ways to create on digital platforms—promising more information on new shows soon—they’ve programmed a series of screenings of past shows for an enthusiastic online audience. At a recent showing of *Ethos de Masquerade*—a work that combined powerful text mourning black lives lost to violence with the ceremonial power of a modern-day Masquerade dance ritual—the audience participation via chat was hundreds of messages long by the end of the

show.



Ricky Saenz, Britney Frazier and Delina Patrice Brooks in 'Superheroes,' by Sean San Jose. (Joan Osato)

Even in a Zoom interview with several core members of the company, the chat box continued to light up throughout with affirmations, such as when resident playwright Star Finch spoke to the ongoing reckoning at many theater institutions in regards to distribution of power, and pervasive racial inequities encoded in policy and practice.

“BOOM!” wrote Margo Hall, followed immediately by a “say that shit!” from Sean San Jose, who also punctuated the interview with snaps and hand signals whenever someone landed a particularly powerful point.

What comes through most indelibly is each member’s passion for their artistic home, and their recognition of its significance in their own practice.

“A big shock for me...is when I started doing shows outside of Campo

Santo and I didn't know that actors could do shows that they didn't love," actor and DJ (as Wonway Posibul) Juan Amador interjected at one point.

"Campo Santo gave me foundation that I would never be able to get anywhere else," reflected co-founder Margo Hall. "Everything I learned in Campo Santo fueled me to be able to be the best and be myself at these other theaters. I learned to be able to walk in the door with myself, 100% authentic."



Jasmine Milan Williams (foreground) and Michael Wayne Turner III in Star Finch's 'H.O.M.E.' (*D'wana Stewart*)

Still writing new chapters in their decades-long saga, Campo Santo has been long accustomed to making do with limited resources. For them, the shift from physical space to a digital one has been no more abrupt than their earlier shifts from Valencia Street to the Chronicle Building downtown to traveling, unrooted, from space to space. Times are hard and the current conditions are challenging, but when all is said and done, the fact that they have each other's backs is a blessing and a boon.

Resilience.



Marga Gomez' [The Spanking Machine](#) runs through July 25. [Details here](#). Campo Santo's virtual throwback series and show announcements are [available here](#).


SPONSORED

**Care about what's
happening in Bay
Area arts? Stay
informed with one
email every other
week—right to
your inbox.**

Enter your email

**Sign
Up**

Copyright © 2020 KQED Inc. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Service](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Inside the Reporting Process](#) [Contact Us](#)



TV

Radio

Podcasts

Events

News

Science




Arts & Culture

Donate

Help Center

About

Careers



Copyright © 2020 KQED Inc.
All Rights Reserved.

We use cookies to recognize your preferences and to analyze traffic on our website. To learn more about cookies, including how to disable them, please view our [Privacy Policy](#). By clicking “I Accept” or using our site, you are consenting to the use of cookies unless you disable them.

I Accept