



## Documenting the Saga of A Play

Los Angeles based novelist, playwright and director Anthony Mora (pictured above with Monique La Barr and Melanie Mann), whose plays have been compared to Mamet, Pinter and LaBute, has a new project. However, his latest creative endeavor will be unlike any other he has previously launched. Over the course of the next year, while preparing for the upcoming production of his new play, *Modern Love*, Mora will also be simultaneously co-producing and directing a unique documentary, which follows the play's progress.

The film, which recently began production, will document every aspect of *Modern Love's* development, including: the casting process, rehearsals, rewriting, and the marketing campaign geared to promote both the play and the film. The documentary will culminate with *Modern Love's* world premiere at Toluca Lake's Sidewalk Studio Theatre in mid 2008. Adding to the uniqueness of the project, "Y", a critically acclaimed singer/songwriter, and producer/writer/director of the cult feature film, *Wandering Aquarius*, has penned a catchy dark ballad also entitled *Modern Love* that will be used in the play. Y and Mora will use film clips from the documentary for an accompanying video. As Mora puts it, "This is the only play I know of with its own music video."

*Modern Love* will be produced by the Sidewalk's owner and prolific theatrical producer Kurt Swanson. In 2006, Kurt produced two of Mora's plays, *P.O.P.*, *The Principles of Perfection* and *BANG! A Love Story*, based on the novel of the same name. "Working with Kurt has been a godsend," Mora explains, "This can be a difficult city when it comes to theatre. L.A. is about film and TV. Here theatre is a bit of a forgotten stepchild. For Kurt, the play truly is the thing. It's not a means to an end. It is the end in and of itself."

*Modern Love* tells the story of Jack, a big-budget film producer set to direct his first feature: a low-budget art house film that he also wrote. When the female lead, Hollywood star, Jillian Spears, walks, he casts an unknown

actress in the role, and she begins to impact his career and his life in ways he never imagined. It is a dark tale revolving around ideas of power and control in Hollywood; and what happens when those in power become obsessed with their own creation.

The production of the documentary necessitated that the casting process for *Modern Love's* actors begin much earlier than is typical for a theatre piece. While casting is still being finalized (and of course, documented), Mora is teaming up with some of the actors he's worked with in his previous plays and has begun working with them on specific crucial scenes. Mora emphasizes that working through the script with actors at this point in the process is more about developing the work than working with the actors on their parts. "Writing a play is the antithesis of writing a screenplay," he says. "It is not about collaboration, or consensus, or focus groups. Critics want the next *Waiting for Godot*. Producers, ironically, want the next *Producers*. But, none of that can matter."

Mora believes that although the initial creation of a play is a singular process, once the actors are in place and rehearsals begin, the work begins to shift as it comes to life. The documentary will illustrate just how the writing and characters can evolve over the course of the rehearsal process. "Although the storyline doesn't change, each time a play is produced it is reinvisioned," he explains. "Each director brings a new approach and every actor brings his or her own unique personality and artistic choices to their roles."



The documentary will provide a window into not only the development process of a new play, but also into the world of L.A. theatre as a whole. By interviewing L.A. actors, directors, writers, producers, and acting teachers, the documentary will pose the question, "What is theatre in L.A.?" In a town that has more small theatres than New York City, Mora hopes to highlight the challenges inherent in producing theatre in the film and television capital of the world.

"The play is the starting point, what everything revolves around," Mora continues. "But this is going to be a different way of working. There is going to be a non-linear aspect to the project." Mora will post video updates of the documentary on websites like MySpace and YouTube, and plans to make the rounds at film festivals once the film has been completed.

The concept of producing multiple projects simultaneously is an exciting one, and for Mora and his creative partners, the possibilities are endless. While the development of the play will follow a structured plan, the documentary is much more experimental. Early on, Mora was approached by another company interested in producing a documentary about the making of *Modern Love*, but the idea involved a structured plotline that did not appeal to him. Instead, Mora, who is also president and CEO of Anthony Mora Communications, Inc., chose to produce the film himself, embarking on the documentary process with no concrete plan of where it will end up, as he puts it, allowing the creative freedom to "let the project lead." He is also actively looking for unique L.A. theatre stories to include in the documentary.

A play about Hollywood, a documentary about the making of the play set in the context of L.A.'s theatre world, an original song, a music video, perhaps a feature film. . . all these elements have the makings of a fascinating creative journey.

— Sarah Kelly

PHOTOS BY BETH BEACHAM-BOYD

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