

¡PULSO PULSE!

The Beat Of A Latino In The Entertainment Industry.

By Marco Antonio Rodriguez (Latino Leaders Columnist)

DUBBING DUB DUB...

Invasion Of The Voice Snatchers!

It was bound to happen. My Lebanese friend who always passes for Latino in print work is summoned to an on-camera, rice product, Spanish-speaking commercial audition that I am also called in for. The commercial has several lines spoken in Spanish. I have great admiration for my friend as an actor, but the man can't even pronounce the word SALSA much less attempt to speak Spanish lines in front of a camera. And yet, because he has Latino features that allow him to "pass" (an olive complexion and dark features usually to do the trick), he's still invited to audition: "It's only a few words!" "This is a national commercial and he has the look we're looking for!" He rings me up for tips, and being a good little amigo that's always in desperate need of good karma, I hold back the urge to express my disturbed feelings at what is transpiring and assist him. After a few, hardcore lessons of: "No! It's pronounced GRACIAS not GRASSY ASS!" off he goes to study his lines. Needless to say Google translate becomes his new BFF.

The auditions arrive. Our appointments are minutes apart and he goes in first. A very thin wall reveals the happenings within the audition room. Repeated cuts and constant correction of lines are heard: "IT'S ARROZ, NOT ARROWS!" "COCINA! NOT CASINO!" Well... so long my dear, Lebanese friend. You may look the part, but I'm pretty sure they are realizing this just won't do. What self-respecting Latino would buy: "Arrows kay casino in el kitcheno?"

I'm put on hold for the part (hooray!) but Lebanese man books it (booo!). The argument? He looks more Latino than I do, and in advertising, that seems to be the bottom line. What specific look is going to make the targeted audience most identify with the product being sold? This has become a common occurrence. Spanish-speaking Latino actors being overlooked in on-camera commercial auditions for what advertising agencies see as a prettier, more generic Latino look. No matter if this isn't the country of origin for the actor hired. With print work and non-speaking commercials (also known in the industry as MOS spots), this is now a frequent practice. But this is a spoken commercial, and what is about to unfold is quite disturbing...

The day before the shoot, my friend's incessant phone calls to my cell go unanswered. So much for good karma... Bitter? Perhaps. Intrigued is probably more like it. Intuition and experience tell me this poor actor will probably be tortured on set and in the end will still end up sounding like a drunk Lebanese with a massive hernia. But the dialogue is short. Surely he can nail it by the day of the shoot.

Two days and many hours of deep meditation and chanting later, I give in and take his call. Mostly out of desperate curiosity. Apparently the commercial shot without a hitch. Indeed he had problems with the Spanish but was assured it was of no concern. An ominous feeling takes over my already unpredictable pansa. Time for more chanting!

I nearly choke on my cold glass of orange Tampico when one evening I catch the spot during a primetime show on a well-known Spanish network. It's my Lebanese friend, all right. But wait. His face... His reactions... Not his voice! And they're cutting away from his face so fast and so often I've developed motion sickness! The few words he was to utter have now been dubbed by an anonymous Spanish speaker! ¿Cómo se dice... HUH? What is this, a karate movie from the 70's? They've made this strapping, 6'4", Lebanese man sound like a Latino with a bad helium addiction.

This is the current trend, amigos. Advertising agencies can cast whomever they wish as long as they look the part or, rather, their idea of the part. The latest theory goes even further in that if lines are spoken, they can always cut away from the actor and dub dub dub! ¿Cómo se dice... Yeah, right? Like we won't notice the lips don't match the words? It just makes the product and all those involved in promoting it come across as insensitive and rather oblivious to our needs.

Hopefully this trend will come to an end pronto. The only way that can happen is by not turning a blind eye when these kinds of spots air. Look deep into its false, deceptive eyes, then hurl your orange Tampico and take action by writing the product directly demanding we be represented authentically and by our very own. Especially when it comes to those who are fluent in our beautiful language. In the meantime, being as I am constantly confused for being Middle-Eastern, maybe now I can finally have that longed for career in Turkish telenovelas. Just speak the lines in English and encourage plenty of cuts away from my face in the editing room. Then use a real Turkish person to dub my lines. Except, I'd choose the Barry White of Turks to dub my voice. ¿Cómo se dice "hey, foxy momma" in Turkish? A stack of bills piling up on the computer desk, I find myself suddenly extra hungry for this new and potentially lucrative career... Quick, pass the ARROWS!