

## El Medico de su honra/ The Surgeon of his Honor

### Repertorio Espanol.

To give English speakers a comparison; the pitfalls of attacking the Spanish classics are much the same as the pitfalls in attacking Shakespeare. It's all about making a modern audience understand the gorgeous and dense language.

Actors need to understand the nuances of what they are saying and be so specific in action that in combination with the directing, the story makes complete and clear sense.

This was not the case all of the time with El Medico de Su Honra, the new production of the classic Calderon the la Barca play at Repertorio Espanol. It is a bold and brave production that nevertheless fails to coalesce into a satisfying evening.

The play is a masochistic dark comedy if there ever was one. It begins with the arrival of Prince Enrique, who after being in military duty, returns to find the woman he loves Mencia, married to a Don Gutierre, a doctor. Don Gutierre himself abandoned a previous engagement to a woman named Leonor, when he comes to believe that she was having an affair.

Enrique wants Mencia to have an affair with, which she refuses to do. However, Don Guittiere has a character flaw. In these plays, as in the work of Moliere, it is this flaw that leads you to your doom. Don Guitierre is extremely jealous, and he concocts an affair out of a series of assumptions and miscommunications. Ultimately, Don Guitierre has his wife killed by having her bled to death by a blood-letter and therefore becoming the "Surgeon of his Honor", as this is a comedy, he is pardoned by the king and married to the woman he accused of infidelity the first time around, Leonor. Yes! A million laughs.

I often hear actresses and directors complain that they can never quite get a handle on how to act the final scene in "Taming of a Shrew," because the character of Kate gives in to her husband and times have changed so much it's hard to believe the transformation. I have to say the same thought went through my head during this entire play. I am sure for Latin men of that time period, doing away with a wife suspected of cheating was a knee-slapping rip-roaring good time. I however, had a hard time reconciling the drama, from the comedy, from the tragedy of the play. And believe me, it was all three.

Visually director JavierAntonio Gonzales has a beautiful eye for staging. He is creative and daring, his entrances alone, especially when the characters that enter are supposed to be in bed, are handled in a unique and graceful manner. However it was the emotional beat changes that were not clear, and they hurt our ability to follow the story. The moments in between the beautiful scene changes were not directly specifically and so the story was left up to the actor's ability with the language. Sometimes you followed. Sometimes you did not.

Classic plays I believe need to start off slow, because you have to give the audience's ear and brains a chance to shift from our crazy 21<sup>st</sup> century lingo to elevated language. However, after a brilliantly staged opening sequence, the actors set in at racing through the first act; not letting the audience either enjoy the language or get a gist of the story. Granted, a synopsis was provided. It just felt like they were trying to bring the play in on time without adding an intermission, and it was a disservice to the play and themselves.

The first act of the play, was a tornado of information, some of which I got, most of which I didn't. The play didn't settle into its actual rhythm until the second act began. As the play grew darker in tone, the stage also became darker, and darker, and darker, until I could hardly see the actors lips move. I thought this was also because as an audience member, trying to follow a difficult play and straining to see was not what my brain needed,

Throughout however, Javier Antonio did several things absolutely right, exhibiting a real knack for visually striking images, and adding several comedic touches that I won't soon forget and that Spanish version of Total Eclipse of the Heart was to die for.

The ensemble was enthusiastic if a bit uneven, with the strongest performance of the night given by Yaremis Felix as Leonor and also as Jacinta the maid. Here was an actor who was not daunted by the language and played all her intentions with a clarity that was easy to follow. Because of it, I could always count on her character to catch me up on the play when I got lost along the way. Her entrances were always a welcomed sight.

Ricardo Hinoa as Gutierre and Jorge Luna as Enrique, also showcased themselves well. Adding physicality to their acting that sometimes made up for lack of clarity.

I find the undertaking of this difficult work to be daunting, brave and exhilarating. Everyone involved must have learned so much from the experience, not only as actors but also as director and as producers. For that alone, I think the endeavor is worth a visit.

El Medico de Su Honra

By Pedro Calderon De La Barca

Directed by JavierAntonio Gonzales

Cast: Ricardo J. Hinoa, Tania Molina, Jorge Luna, Marcos Toledo, Yaremis Felix,

Predro Leopold Sanchez-Tormes.

Lighting Design: Tim Cryan

Sound Design: Marcelo Anez

Costume Design: Jian Jung

Produced by: Repertorio Espanol.