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Barceloneta, de noche

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nytheatre.com review

Montserrat Mendez · July 9, 2009

When I go to the theatre, I go as two people. One is an audience member who wants nothing more than to be whisked into rapture. And the other is a playwright, who expects to be whisked into rapture and still keep at bay any pangs of jealousy. Jealousy to me is the ultimate compliment. If I leave the theatre thinking, "Wow, I wish I had written that!" Then I know I saw something truly awesome.

Very few of the contemporaries with whom I share New York's dark and often unforgiving off-off Broadway houses have made me jealous. To that short list, I am happy to add playwright Javierantonio Gonzales, a gifted writer with an exhilarating voice!

How to describe *Barceloneta, de noche* in a way theatre going "gringos" can understand? It's 30 Rock bred with *Ugly Betty*...no, not good enough. It's as if Tom Stoppard had a one night stand with Yasmina Reza that produced a Puerto Rican baby. Even this praise is not enough, because this play is daringly original and it is absolutely fantastic! With a plot that contains sex, scandal, sex, jealousy, sex, Nazi secrets, and a good dollop of sex.

It takes place in a small town in Puerto Rico. I was born and raised in Cruces, Rincon in Puerto Rico (I don't think you get any smaller than that) so I had no difficulty imagining what was outside the windows. Maybe an avocado and *guayaba* trees, some *coquis* doing their mating singing, and lots of ghosts from the past trying to tell you their secrets before the hurricane arrived. Yes, that's what I grew up with and the playwright brought it all back from the moment the play began.

The plotline is simple; it involves Hans the Nazi who has an illegitimate daughter, Brina, who has a crush on Camilo, the smoldering town doctor who is having an affair with Federico, the Nazi's caretaker who wants to find the Nazi's will before he dies while his lover prefers to scare him to death with a statue of Marlene Dietrich which comes to life while the Nazi is being serviced by his gardener. On the other side of the island, at the Universidad de Puerto Rico, a professor of German gets a hunch and he sets off to find Camilo, whom he met at a gay bar. He decides to roller skate there and give the audience a historic tour of lesser known places in the island, which

VENUE

Teatro Circulo

OPENED

July 9, 2009

CLOSED

July 12, 2009

RUNNING TIME

1 hour, 30 minutes
No Intermission

CREATORS & ARTISTS

Cast

David Skeist, Ricardo J. Hinoa, Tania Molina, Jorge Luna, Marcos Toledo, Yaremis Felix, Luis Alberto Gonzales

Written & Directed By
Javierantonio Gonzalez

Lighting

Erin Koster

Stage Manager

Erin Koster

Producer

Teatro IATI and Caborca

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the very least learn the language. Did I say the plotline was simple? No, I meant it was sublime! And I only briefly sketched it, without mention of the baby monitor which is the best use of a baby monitor I have ever, ever...I repeat it again... EVER SEEN on stage. This is difficult stuff to pull off. And yet the writer/director pulled it off brilliantly, with a gifted cast who play every ridiculous moment so seriously it, well, whisked me into rapture.

In an ensemble like this, it's hard to pick one or two performances without seeming to slight the others, since every single actor is given a moment to shine, and all of them take it and run with it. But I think, without a doubt, the play belongs to both Ricardo J. Hinoja as Federico and Tania Molina as Brina.

Hinoja gives a carefully nuanced performance that mixes machismo with the character's homosexual tendencies. It could have been a caricature in the hands of a lesser actor, but this is one of those actors who has that quality, that ability to dig deep into a character, and who can instantly make you care for him. He's pretty amazing to watch. In a more balanced theatre community, this actor would be playing leads at the Public. And I really hope he gets there. He's definitely an actor to keep an eye on.

Molina who plays Brina, the Nazi's illegitimate daughter, begins the play by trying to make the Nazi chew his meat but ends up chewing every single piece of scenery that is on stage (there's not a lot of scenery, but she sure chews on it) to hysterical effect. Her comic timing is impeccable, and my favorite moment of the play belonged to her. A moment in which she's so joyously relishing her brilliant monologue; which she spews out at one hundred miles an hour, only to then make the cast wait while the subtitles catch up the English-speaking audience. It was a perfectly theatrical moment that spoke volumes about the love that went into making this production happen.

There's a certain amount of pride that swells up in your heart, when you see your own do really well. Maybe because it's in my original language so it goes straight to the soul, maybe it's because I live in a bubble where my successes have come in a language that is not my own. But I am proud of this playwright, who I have never heard of until tonight, I am proud of these actors who are terrific and should all move to successful careers, and I am proud of this production, which totally inspired me, and made me jealous in the best sense of the word.

There is nothing I love more than leaving a theatre and thinking, "Wow! That was AWESOME!" *Barceloneta, de noche* is a gift, and this critic, audience member, and playwright is thankful for it.

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