

THEATER REVIEW

# *The Murder Is One Mystery In a Tale of Cuba Revisited*

By D. J. R. BRUCKNER

A woman is murdered on the Havana waterfront just before the action of "They Still Mambo in Havana" begins. The search for the killer provides a loose framework for a series of encounters between Cubans and Cuban exiles visiting from Miami and New York that allow the playwright, Rogelio Martinez, to direct some pointed ridicule at the attitudes of both groups. But the search follows false leads and turns up no credible suspect, and that outcome is a telling comment on the play itself.

Mr. Martinez, who came to this country in 1980 in the Mariel boatlift, certainly knows the weaknesses of his characters. His denizens of Havana will do anything for dollars, and their various forms of often amusing prostitution give the writer many opportunities to satirize the consuming mental and moral laziness they wallow in. If anything, he is even sharper about the self-deceiving guilt of the returning exiles; their language reveals that these people are a good deal coarser and more corrupt than any of them would admit.

The fatal flaw here is the story line, which, if it exists, is impossible to follow. No matter how engaging some of the episodes are, the narrative incoherence of the play gets seriously annoying before its 90 minutes are out. Perhaps the play is still being written. In fact, a couple of scenes about a British tourist in Havana look suspiciously as if they were inserted just to provide a role for Philip Courtney. He is probably funny enough to justify the addition, but it would be nice if his character had an integral part in the story.

In fact, the cast as a whole is fairly strong, with especially memorable comic contributions from Marc Ardito as a historian with an uncertain grasp of the present, Vanessa Aspillaga as an actress whose whole per-

## THEY STILL MAMBO IN HAVANA

By Rogelio Martinez; directed by Eduardo Machado; assistant director, Lucy Thurber; production assistant, Miriam Eusebio; lighting by Andrew Hill; technical director, Michael Kimmel; sets by Tom Soper; costumes by Katherine B. Roth. Presented by the Bat Theater Company and Uku Productions. At the Flea Theater, 41 White Street, between Church Street and Broadway, TriBeCa.

WITH: Marc Ardito (Historian), Vanessa Aspillaga (Actress), Philip Courtney (British tourist) and David Zayas (Violinist).

## Satirizing the denizens of Havana and the exiles who return.

sonality has been swallowed up by her profession and David Zayas as a violinist for whom music has become a distraction from his pursuit of men. And the performance gets some welcome help from Eduardo Machado, the popular playwright, who is the director here; he cannot mask the discontinuities, but he keeps things moving so rapidly that the viewer does not get entirely lost in the voids of the script.

Nonetheless, "They Still Mambo" ends with the audience left to wonder what the murdered woman had to do with it, and even more puzzled, perhaps, about why in the last scene all the men in the cast lose their pants. This is a dangerous gambit; a viewer might take the loss as a metaphor for the play.