

Raw, primal emotion fuels 'House' tragedy

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Now here's a recipe for madness, murder and more: Take three generations of women. Put them under a kind of house arrest for eight years as part of an involuntary period of mourning and moral protection. Place a single available man (or, more accurately, the illusion of one) just beyond the collective reach of these potentially marriageable women. Then stir with longing, frustration and a growing sense of suffocation.

That, in fact, is the witch's brew on tap in "Another Part of the House," contemporary playwright Migdalia Cruz's "re-imagining" of "The House of Bernarda Alba," now being produced by Teatro Vista, Chicago's leading Latino theater troupe.

One of the iconic works in the trilogy of "Andalusian tragedies" by Federico Garcia Lorca, widely considered the greatest Spanish playwright and poet of the 20th century, "House" is a supremely diffi-

cult drama to carry off with any degree of success, whether in its stark original form or in Cruz's quirky, at times oddly comic, "magic realism-infused" version. In fact, the most successful adaptations of Lorca's trilogy (which also includes "Blood Wedding" and "Yerma") tend to come in the form of flamenco ballets. Raw, primal emotion is key here, as is extreme body language.

Richly atmospheric



“Another Part of the House” stars: (front row, from left) Lily Mojekwu, Ilana Faust, Julia Neary (center), Sandra Marquez, Charin Alvarez and Tanya Saracho, and in back (from left) Laura Crotte and Rachel Cerda.

So it is a credit to director Cecilie D. Keenan and her expertly “choreographed” Teatro Vista cast that they actually manage to make

“Another Part of the House” so richly atmospheric, and so true to Lorca’s feverish spirit, which rebelled against both the repressive Catholicism of

Spain and the fascist rule of Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

Bernarda Alba (played with starchy severity by Julia Neary) is the fearsome matriarch who, following the death of her husband, declares that none of her five daughters will be permitted to leave her house for a period of eight years. Already trapped up in the attic is Bernarda’s ancient mother, Maria Josefa (a wonderfully addled Laura Crotte), who is still spinning halfmad sexual fantasies and who conspires to help in the escape of her youngest granddaughter, Adela (the small, beautiful Rachel Cerda, singing several

songs of aching loveliness). The unresolved mother-daughter tensions of one generation are clearly visited upon the next.

The five sisters sealed inside their house attempt to compensate for their fate with overactive fantasy lives, obsessive activity and incest. Wedding dresses and dowries get sewn. Seductions by phantom lovers get dreamed up. Just the picture of a man becomes a kind of fetish object.

Angustias (Sandra Marquez, full of resigned sadness and biting wit) is the oldest of the sisters, with a father different from the rest. She knows

her chances for happiness are over. Magdalena (the tart-tongued Tanya Saracho) continually deconstructs and rebuilds a sewing machine and claims she has no interest in men. She accepts and then fends off the lustful kisses of her sister Amelia (the always intriguing Charin Alvarez), who confesses to a fear of men and who in many ways is the most like her mother. As for Martirio (Ilana Faust), she is the most overtly religious and restrained, but it takes very little for the truth of her passions to emerge.

A complex relationship

Ironically, the character who often appears to be the freest

in this household is Bernarda's black slave, Poncia (fascinating work by the alluring Lily Mojekwu). She speaks her mind with great glee and holds her own with her mistress, with whom she has an exceedingly complex relationship. Playing Pepe — the elusive groom and goat — are Juan F. Villa and Adrian Gonzalez.

The show's design team has devised a truly haunted, quasi-conventlike environment, with seamlessly integrated sets (by Rick Paul), lighting (Jesse Klug), costumes (Christine Pascual), sound (Mikhail Fiksel) and the work of "invited visual artist" Luis De La Torre.

In one of the show's most gruesome (though unseen) scenes, a young woman is stoned to death for her supposed "immorality." And just when you begin to celebrate the idea that some things have changed, you think again, and remember recent headlines about "honor killings" in Africa, India and beyond.

NOTE: Next up for Teatro Vista is a collaboration with Rivendell Theatre Ensemble for the Midwest premiere of "Elliot (A Soldier's Fugue)," a work by Quiara Alegria Hudes that puts a female perspective on the legacy of war and its impact on three generations of a Puerto Rican

family.

The show, directed by Lisa Portes, will run Nov. 11–Dec. 10 in the Steppenwolf Garage Theatre as part of Steppenwolf's Visiting Company Initiative.

Steppenwolf also will feature two Teatro Vista ensemble members — Sandra Delgado and Sandra Marquez — in its mainstage production of Melinda Lopez's "Sonia Flew," about a Jewish-Latino family that truly mixes it up during the holiday season. Jessica Thebus will direct the show, set to run Nov. 30–Feb. 4.