

House and Home

Another Part of the House

By Migdalia Cruz
Classic Stage Company
136 East 13th Street
677-4210

BY ALISA SOLOMON

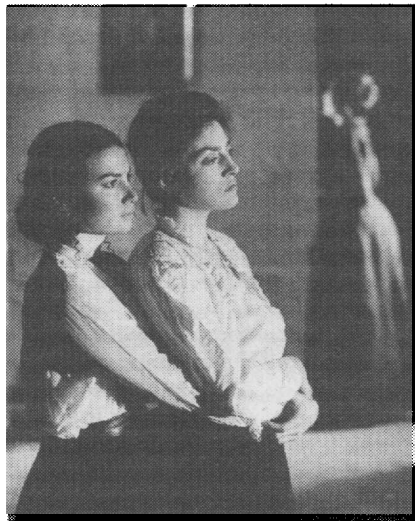
The program for Migdalia Cruz's *Another Part of the House* notes that it was "inspired by" Federico García Lorca's *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. That is true in the deepest sense of "inspired": Lorca's play breathes through Cruz's poetic drama, panting with life like the five sisters shut up in their house by their repressive mother. Both more and less than an adaptation, Cruz's magic-tinged tragedy extends Lorca while also sounding a voice that is wholly original.

While following the contours of Lorca's most plot-driven play, Cruz has shifted the action from a rural village in Spain to provincial Cuba at the turn of the century, adding a subtle political layer that parallels the domestic action. As Bernarda Alba's daughters, and her own locked-in mother, respond to the grip of her control—some succumbing, some dreaming of freedom, some plotting escape—Cuba is trying to break away from Spain's domination. Evoked without being imposed, the Cuban context flows into the play naturally, like one of the compelling forces that reverberate beyond the walls of the house—the whinnying of tethered horses, the pelting of driving rain, the cries of a woman being stoned for

killing her illegitimate baby. Cruz has transplanted Lorca's house without disturbing any of its ghosts.

Cruz strikes the analogy between women's repression and colonialism most sharply through the yearnings of one daughter, Magdalena, who worships José Martí. But even this most forthright and politically conscious of the Alba daughters is circumscribed by a worldview that leaves women at the mercy of men: like her sisters who dream of being whisked away by a lover, Magdalena fantasizes about the revolutionary poet sweeping her out of her suffocating environment. When Martí is reported killed, Magdalena's hopes wither; we can imagine her growing bitter, like an older sister whose suitor had been sent away.

But it is still erotic force that rumbles most powerfully with the promise of release underneath *Another Part of the House*. Cruz, in fact, heightens that force by spelling out some of the sexual intrigue only hinted at in Lorca. The servant lustily recalls her long-term



Another Part of the House: the Alba family revisited

affair with Bernarda Alba's husband, whose funeral opens the play, plunging the household into eight years of mourning. The youngest daughter, Adela, bursts with pleasure over her furtive liaison with Pepe el Romano, the man betrothed to her oldest sister; periodically he crosses the stage, intoxicating everyone with his insistent guitar. Magdalena carries on a cloying but

heated sexual relationship with a dotting sister. Most of all, it's the girls' grandmother, 80-year-old Maria Josefa, who revels in the promise of erotic release, encouraging Adela's affair even though she can foresee its fatal outcome.

Played with alluring vigor by Irma St. Paule, chained-in Maria Josefa is carried past her symbolic function in Lorca's play to become the life force of Cruz's drama. Though Cruz is careful not to make her sentimental—after all, Maria Josefa's own affair with her daughter's first husband is suggested as a source of Bernarda Alba's hardness—making the oldest woman as sexy as the youngest lends the play its daring glimmer of hope.

The rest of the cast is uneven, not always able to glide on the poetic undulations of Cruz's language. As director, David Esbjornson composes one gorgeous stage picture after another, but lapses into some clumsy situations, allowing a couple of scenes to be heard from the wings while actors onstage freeze. Still, Cruz's desperate world seethes to life in this production, enticing us as irresistibly as Pepe el Romano beckons the daughters of Bernarda Alba. **V**

Snake Bit

I was enthralled by "Supper for the Dead," the first of three one-acts (*La MaMa*) by Paul Green, a Pulitzer-winning playwright of the '20s who specialized in regional theater. Soon after the play opens on a Carolina swamp cabin, bullying, blustering Jess is demanding where his wife Vonie has been. But Vonie, though forced to defend herself, has arranged for guests—the conjure woman Queenie (majestically played by Sarallen) and her two children (fathered, it is hinted, by a snake), who are her eyes into the other world. They enter in a break-dancing, snaky fashion that makes the atmosphere onstage fairly tingle, and sit down to their conjure dinner. The two older women are a lesson in dignity and in the power to use the human imagination (and understanding of psychology) to reveal truth. By comparison, though "White Dresses" treats racial problems, the two subsequent one-acts rely too much on melodramatic stereotypes, and are diminished by slight performances from older male actors.

—MARTIN WASHBURN

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