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NEWS

Lorca's classic still lingers in Cruz's updated 'House'

By Chris Jones and Tribune theater critic
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Great works of historic literature can irritate because they often seem unfair.

Take "The House of Bernarda Alba," that throbbing 1945 Spanish classic by Federico Garcia Lorca (the name as published has been corrected in this text). It's the tale of five frustrated, vibrant daughters kept under lock and key by a nasty mother more interested in the neighbors' opinions than her daughters' needs. Lorca surely explored the chasm between individual freedom and social convention -- but he did so in the muted fashion of his day.

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Enter Migdalia Cruz, a contemporary writer with an interest in improving -- or, at least, riffing - on Lorca. In the aptly titled "Another Part of the House," now in an uneven but interesting Chicago production from Teatro Vista, Cruz makes a couple of changes. Instead of telling the story mostly from the mother's perspective, she gives more ownership to the oppressed daughters (and Bernarda's similarly oppressed mother). And instead of muting the women's pain in that 1940s symbolist stuff, Cruz makes things more explicit. We feel the heaves of their sexual desires, the sting of the maternal physical abuse, the agonies caused by Bernarda's obsession with patriarchal norms.

This is a provocative idea -- although there's no question that the Cruz play will mean most to people already familiar with the Lorca. And when a writer spends this much time and effort deconstructing someone else's play -- and arguing that he didn't understand his own characters -- you're inclined to think she might have been better penning her own.

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Cecilie D. Keenan's earnest and nicely melodic Teatro Vista production is acted with a great deal of honesty and passion -- there are especially provocative performances from Sandra

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that these women are locked up. Rather, folks float up and down the stage with what looks like a lot more freedom than Bernarda (Julia Neary) cared to dispense.

Cruz is a smart, quirky and deeply lyrical writer, and there are pleasures to be had in seeing muted metaphors turned inside out. This is one way to bust open the canon. In this case, it's not entirely clear whose Bernarda we end up with -- and Neary doesn't seem to have her heart fully engaged in villainy.



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"Another Part of the House"

When: Through Oct. 22

Where: Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division St.

Running time: 2 hours, 10 minutes

Tickets: \$17-\$30 at 312-494-5767

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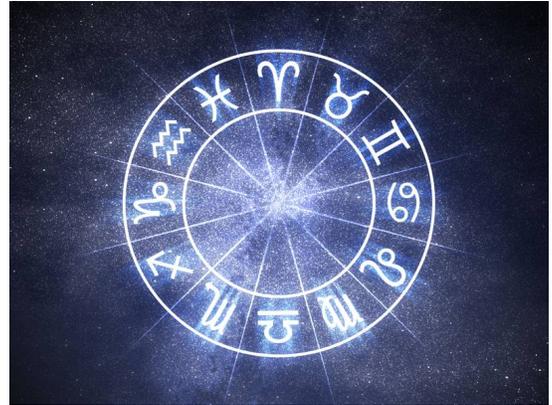
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