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Seeing double Hudson Exploited Theatre Company packs two productions in one night of theatre

Kicking off its 2005 season at Union City's Park Performing Arts Center's 32nd Street Playhouse, The Hudson Exploited Theatre Company proudly presents "Living in Exile...An Evening of Contemporary Cuban Theatre" featuring a collective of two one-act plays exploring the different faces of exile for Cuban immigrants.

Where Are You?

The first feature will be "Union City, NJ, Where are you?" by Cuban playwright Rogelio Martinez.

"It's wonderful to have this play performed in the community that became my second home," said Martinez. "In this play, I try to remember what it was like back then, but most of it is dead on. I can't wait to see the play with the audience who raised me."

Born in Sancti-Spiritus, Cuba, Martinez came to the states as a young boy, and was first introduced to the world of theatre in his teens. Since then he has gained much critical success as a playwright, including winning the Princess Grace Award for his play "I Regret She Was Made of Sugar."

In 2002 he appeared on the cover of American Theatre magazine, and recently won the prestigious NEA/TCG (National Endowment for the Arts) Residency Grant and is in residence at INTAR writing a new play. He is also currently a professor of playwriting at New York's City College.

"Where Are You?" was first produced two summers ago by the Ensemble Studio Theater as part of the 25th Annual Marathon of One Act Plays, and starred renowned Latin actress Rosie Perez.

The story centers on the memories of a young man as he remembers growing up in Union City in the 1980s. The audience witnesses this young man's journey at the age 12, when he is going to meet with his estranged father. Among the large population of recent Cuban exiles, the boy's parents went separate ways, and he was raised by an overprotective mother while his father was never really around.

“He’s an intelligent and sensitive young kid, but is very complex and has this [estranged relationship] with his father,” said Eduardo Rimada, who plays the son. “The boy is longing to be with his father, but doesn’t want to disappoint his mother.”

The play brings into account the personal exile that can occur between families after arriving to the states, and not just the actual immigration.

“If you grew up in a single-family household [you understand] it’s very emotional, feeling inside,” said Rimada. “It’s a [common occurrence], and no matter who you are, I feel you can relate to this. It’s a great piece.”

‘Martinez’

The second feature is titled “Martinez” by the renowned late playwright Leopoldo M. Hernandez.

“Martinez” first made its stage debut in 1981. It was produced by the L.A.-based group Bilingual Foundation of the Arts, and has since made appearances on stages throughout the country.

Leopoldo M. Hernandez, who is now deceased, was born in 1921 in Havana, Cuba. He began his career as a playwright in Cuba, but by 1961 he had fled to the United States and lost over 20 plays which were confiscated by the Cuban government before he left. Still, he continued his career as a playwright starting from scratch, and developed a body of work that includes over 50 productions in both English and Spanish. Some of Hernandez’s more recognized works included “El Mudo and Los Huesos” (1961) as part of the Festival Obrero y Campesino, and “Do Not Negotiate, Mr. President” (1983) at the Bilingual Foundation of the Arts. In this play, the protagonist (Martinez) explores the difficulties he has faced in this country due to his accent.

“It’s like all of us when we come to this country and we have a lot of insecurities, but this play focuses more on our accent,” said Liche Ariza, who plays Martinez.

Miscommunications and plain prejudice place him in at times the most farcical and outlandish scenarios in his daily encounters with his landlord, a priest, a bouncer, and even a prostitute. He strives to become an American citizen, all the while trying to figure out his place and identity in as a newcomer to this country.

“It’s a very inclusive production; it’s a message that relates to people from all over the world [in regards to immigration],” he said.

An evening of Contemporary Cuban Theatre will run from April 21 until the 30, with 8 p.m. showings Thursday through Saturday, and one Sunday showing at 4 p.m.

The 32nd Street Playhouse is located at the Park Theatre, 560 32nd St., Union City. Tickets will be \$10. Call (877) 571-3797 for reservations.

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