

# AMPARO

BY LAUREN COHEN IN ARTS & CULTURE

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Immersive theater has been making small waves in Miami for a while now, but The “AMPARO” Experience, which had its South Florida Premiere earlier this month, may very well be the greatest foray into interactive theater that our city has seen yet.

“AMPARO,” written by Vanessa Garcia and directed by Victoria Collado, transports you to 1957 Havana, on the cusp of the Cuban Revolution. As soon as you enter the private villa in Downtown Miami, music and ambiance take over, with bartenders who are ready to get you liquored up with delicious complimentary drinks during the extended pre-show portion of the evening. (Our personal favorites: the Airmail, a Caribbean version of a classic champagne cocktail, and the Guayabita, a Daiquiri that adds guava marmalade to the rum and lime juice mix).

It’s fitting that cocktails play such a prominent role in this theatrical experience. After all, “AMPARO” is about the Arechabala family, the founders behind the Real Havana Club Rum. This is the story of how they built their company into an iconic brand, how it was confiscated from them by the communist government during the Cuban Revolution, and how the company was reborn years after their exile, thanks to Bacardi. Created in partnership with Havana Rum by Bacardi, “AMPARO” seeks to tell a story not just of the struggles of one family, but a story of triumph and perseverance in the face of adversity.



“AMPARO is more than a show,” commented Roberto Ramirez Laverde, VP BACARDÍ North America. “It is about digging up the truth and unveiling the history that some have tried to erase. It is also about making bridges. Ultimately, it is a story about two Cuban families coming together to honor the legacy of a legendary brand with an authentic product.”



And the drinks don't stop at the cocktail hour. Once it was time for the show to start, we were led up a narrow flight of stairs and were instantly transported to a different world. When you arrive, it's New Year's Eve in 1957 Havana. You'll be offered a shot as you're quickly thrust into a party atmosphere. A live band plays Cuban music to the packed room of actors and spectators. Handsome men may ask you to dance. You may get caught up in a game of cards. Or, if you're like this writer, may be chased by a jealous girlfriend.

It's all lighthearted fun until the timeline jumps one year forward to New Year's Eve 1958, when an announcement is made that President Batista has fled. The festivities quickly end. It's here that the line between reality and art blurs; you're personally brought into the heightened action of the show. Actors address you directly. Choices must be made. You'll be running up and down stairs. And when being asked to choose between being on the side of the revolutionaries or not, your fate is in your hands.

When booking your tickets, you must choose between 5 different characters to serve as your guide, each providing a unique perspective on the central story being told. This is a journey, and who you choose will affect what you see and experience. And with a show as detailed and impressive as “AMPARO,” there are no bad choices. The show's website breaks down the different tracks: “If you seek a fiery journey, choose Celia”; “If you want an experience that promises legacy, choose Jorge”; “If you desire a route that is rooted in justice, choose Javier”; “If you wish to start your experience at the core, choose Antonio”; and lastly, “If you long for the nostalgic route, choose Miguel”. The choice is yours.

Some tracks, such as Celia's, will throw you headfirst into the chaos and trauma

of the time period. Our group, deemed “against the Revolution,” got thrown into jail. Craning our necks to see the action happening between the bars of our prison while one of the characters trapped with us prayed for all of our lives, there was a blinding flash of light as the sound of gunshots suddenly went off. It’s an incredibly intense experience, one that is sure to be particularly emotional for those who lived through the pain of the Revolution.

A chance to go back in time, this is a show that’ll engage all of your senses. It’s a slice of forgotten history, one that’ll stir up emotion after emotion as you follow one family who went through so much. One thing is for certain though: “AMPARO” is something that every Miamian, no matter their background, should experience firsthand.

*“AMPARO” is in town for a limited two-month run, ending on May 31st. Ticket prices begin at \$79 and include a pre-show cocktail hour with a series of imaginatively crafted, premium Havana Club cocktails, followed by a 90-minute guided immersive theater experience. After the show, guests are invited to lounge in the Havana Club rum garden and enjoy cocktails and small bites for purchase. For tickets, [click here](#).*

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR



### Lauren Cohen

Lauren Cohen was born and raised in Miami Beach and graduated from the University of Miami with a bachelor’s degree in Motion Pictures. She has been writing about film since 2009, with her movie reviews and features appearing regularly in Examiner.com and Miami Beach News, among others. She’s interviewed some of the most recognizable faces in the film industry, including Daniel Craig, Emma Stone, Channing Tatum, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Javier Bardem. An avid supporter of the arts, Lauren also works with the Miami Film Festival to promote the best of world cinema to the Miami community.

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