

The Picaresque Adventures of La Mancha Man and Sancho Panza

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New York Times (1923-Current file); Mar 2, 2006; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
pg. E9

THEATER REVIEW

The Picaresque Adventures of La Mancha Man and Sancho Panza

By GEORGE HUNKA

Impossible dreamers seeking windmills at which to tilt will need to look elsewhere than "El Quijote," Repertorio Español's cheerful but uneven Spanish-language dramatization of the Cervantes classic. (A simultaneous English translation is available.) This "Quijote," adapted by the renowned Colombian director Santiago Garcia, omits the book's most familiar image, but there is an attack on a flour mill, not to mention the search for Dulcinea and the capture of Don Quixote, all staged with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Staged by Jorge Ali Triana (also from Colombia), the bare-stage media-style theatrics allow for a

"El Quijote" plays in repertory through May 12 at the Gramercy Arts Theater, 138 East 27th Street, Manhattan; (212) 225-9920.

El Quijote

Repertorio Español

lovely opening sequence — a billowing white sheet standing in for a boat atop perilous waves — as well as some broad clowning. But these scenes, along with a hyperactive smoke machine, sometimes disguise a lack of purpose and wholeness.

"El Quijote" borrows the novel's loose structure. The defense of Dulcinea's honor provides the hook upon which the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are hung as they meet a duke and duchess, traveling players, hucksters and others on the road in Spain. The pleasure of picaresque novels is in their variety of incident, and in written form the less interesting anecdotes may be skipped. Not so in the theater, unfortunately, where they must be endured.

Many of the best scenes here are the quiet dialogues of Don Quixote, played with requisite delusion and dignity by Ricardo Barber, and his sidekick, Sancho Panza. Panza, rollickingly embodied by Emyliano Santa Cruz, is onstage for the entire length of the intermission-less two-hour show and its real star.

The highlight is a sequence in which Panza, installed as the governor of a peculiar state, dispenses justice to a variety of scheming disputants when all he wants is a decent meal.

Francisco Reyes, Raúl Durán and Ofelia Marin are standouts in an ensemble cast that takes on multiple roles with aplomb, and Silvia Sierra and Yanko Bakulic's choreography at its best reaches a height of frenetic grace. But audience members who do not speak Spanish be warned: the simultaneous translation through wireless headphones is fast, but never graceful.

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Ricardo Barber, left, and Emyliano Santa Cruz in "El Quijote."