

Theater: Zorrilla's 'Don Juan Tenorio'

1844 Play Revived by Spanish Repertory

BY HOWARD THOMPSON

One way to approach "Don Juan Tenorio," a Spanish masterwork written in 1844 by the poet-playwright, José Zorrilla, is to sit down and read it in English. William I. Oliver's English translation happens to be excellent.

So is the new production by the Spanish Theater Repertory Company, now alternating with their "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" which has already rung a different kind of bell. The new company headquarters is 138 East 27th Street. Performance schedules are available by telephoning 889-2850.

From the way this "Don Juan" begins—some stately, taped chords of what sounds like Donizetti, some beautifully lighted, ghostly figures suggesting a Seville cemetery—you know the venerable play is in good hands. And there it stays.

I heard the play in Spanish, immediately after reading it in English and realized that the home language was best for this hallowed work, traditionally done throughout the Spanish-speaking world on All Soul's Day. But the legend of the formidable rake with his final come-uppance, remains fine theater.

The Program

DON JUAN TENORIO, a play by José Zorrilla, presented by the Spanish Repertory Theater Company at the Gramercy Arts Theater, 138 East 27th Street. Directed by René Buch, scenery by Robert Federico, costumes by María Ferrreira, lighting by Tony Quintavalla. The cast comprises José Rodríguez, Isabel Segovia, Esteban Chalbaud, George Dal Lago, Sadel Alamo, Idalia Díaz, María Dolores, Enrique Gomez, Lolina Gutierrez, Alfonso Manosalvas, Marco Santiago, Juan Carlos Sawage and Conchita Vargas.

The repertory company applied intelligence and talent. The story unfolds crisply and feelingly, with no reverential walking on eggs. Neither does it seem to flare into melodrama. And at the center is a striking Don Juan, a handsome actor name José Rodríguez who gives the part genuine flair and flow, from cunningly silken cruelty to a final cry of repentant anguish. This young man does wonderfully well in a tough role.

Since a good Don Juan is half the battle won, the surrounding teamwork seems only logical—the perceptive but graphic direction of René Buch, the expertly vivid use of a simple, stage scaffolding, Tony Quintavalla's lighting and the snugly meshed performances of the entire company.

Isabel Segovia projects the ethereal Dona Ines as virtue personified but with a curiously persuasive sensibility. Fine, also, among the others are Esteban Chalbaud, George Dal Lago, Alfonso Manosalvas

Jose Rodriguez Stars as Legendary Rake

vas and Lolina Gutierrez, who plays a sly, droll duenna.

Historians might notice that the company has reshuffled the play's chronology, using a graveyard as a flashback device for the entire drama. It works surprisingly well—better, for that matter, than the original, 19th-century chronology. All of it works well indeed.