

Theater

Zesty 'Marigolds' Given by Spanish Company

By HOWARD THOMPSON

Bless the Spanish Theater Repertory Company on three counts, starting with that blasted title, "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds." The program reads simply, "Las Calendulas" ("The Marigolds"), the rest is in smaller, preface type. Gracias.

In every respect, this Spanish-language production of Paul Zindel's intimate, curious little play is excellent. The treatment exudes such quiet, sure professionalism that the play itself, with a cast of five women and a living-room set, seems built into the snug, company playhouse, the Gramercy Arts. And a superb performance by Carmen Montejo, a prominent Mexican actress, floats the play above the boards, higher than the work deserves.

Watching Mr. Zindel's charming but slender play, after a careful English re-reading, this viewer again wondered how it ever won a Pulitzer Prize, unless the jury was taken with that title.

Miss Montejo, looking like a larger version of Simone Signoret, evokes the rough-hewn, crumbling mother with an intelligence you can almost hear ticking and with stunning restraint. Shedding funny sparks, she never slides into caricature (a second-act pitfall). As the daughters, shy and spirited, Iris Diaz and Ilka Tanya Payan are exceptionally good. Effective, too, are Irene de Bari and Fini Moreno as the student and the grandmother.

Nancy Cardenas's sensitive, expert direction suggests the flow of a chamber ensemble, which indeed the play demands, with apt lighting and soft splashes of music. Miss Montejo gives "Marigolds" real roots.