

## FAMILY'S TRAGEDY LEADS TO LOVE AND HOPE

Miami Herald, The (FL) - Monday, October 18, 2004

Author: CHRISTINE DOLEN, [cdolen@herald.com](mailto:cdolen@herald.com)

Love and tragedy ripple through Barrio Hollywood like a boxer's violent grace and a dancer's alluring ferocity.

In its world premiere at New Theatre, Elaine Romero's script glimmers and flares like the candles that flicker at the front of the stage, bathing the iconic religious images of designer Michael McKeever's set in an undulating light.

If the production itself doesn't always plumb every possibility of the Arizona playwright's vision, that's to be expected: New plays evolve, and first-time perfection is elusive.

Even so, director Rafael de Acha and his creative team have realized much of the magic conjured by Romero's words. And the two women in the cast - seasoned Marta Velasco as the Mexican-American matriarch, Amá, and young actress Beatriz Montañez, making a spectacular New Theatre debut as her daughter Graciela - vividly bring their characters to life.

In scenes that drift back and forth in time, Romero spins the story of a tight-knit family trying to cope with disaster. All are dreamers trying to escape their tough Tucson neighborhood: Graciela is a folkloric dancer who longs for her own studio; Amá, forever faithful to the alcoholic husband who abandoned her, longs to travel; Alex (Euriamis Losada) believes his boxing can lead them to a better life.

When Alex is left comatose after a fight, Michael (John Baldwin) enters their lives. A Midwesterner and singularly focused doc-in-training, Michael falls hard for Graciela. As Barrio Hollywood plays out, it touches on faith in the face of hopelessness, the wariness and openness of differing cultures, whether murder can be merciful (there's also some artful nudity, plus a few hits of vulgar language).

Romero blends passion and playfulness, imbuing imagery with both magic and lyricism. Graciela, in the context of Alex's injury, says, "When I get a scratch on my skin, my skin knows to grow back."

Though the women in the play connect on the deepest level, the men have a tougher time. As Alex is wordless for much of the play, Losada doesn't have much to work with, yet he communicates both strength and affection in his familial interactions. Baldwin gives a strikingly awkward performance as Michael, seeming not so much culturally different as personally damaged. It's amazing, then, that the luminous Montañez can make her part of their scenes seem so subtle, so vibrant, so real.

### IF YOU GO

Barrio Hollywood is at New Theatre, 4120 Laguna St., Coral Gables, through Nov. 14. Performances are 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 and 5:30 p.m. Sunday (no 5:30 p.m. show Nov. 14). Tickets are \$30-\$40 (students \$7 at door). Call 305-443-5373 or visit [www.new-theatre.org](http://www.new-theatre.org).

**Caption:** photo: Rafael de Acha with cast Beatriz Montañez and Euriamis Losada and Marta Velasco and John Baldwin (a)

CHUCK FADELY/HERALD STAFF DREAMERS: Barrio Hollywood, the work of Elaine Romero, center, is directed by Rafael de Acha, upper right. The cast, clockwise from bottom left, includes Beatriz Montañez, Euriamis Losada, Marta Velasco and John Baldwin, bottom right.

**Memo:** THEATER REVIEW

**Edition:** Final

**Section:** Tropical Life

**Page:** 5E

**Record Number:** 0410190242

Copyright (c) 2004 The Miami Herald