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FIGHTING FOR LIFE NEW THEATRE TALE OF BOXER'S DESPERATE FAMILY DELIVERS PUNCH.: [Broward Metro Edition]

Jack Zink Theater Writer. **South Florida Sun - Sentinel** [Fort Lauderdale, Fla] 20 Oct 2004: 3E.

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Abstract (summary)

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Full Text

Informational box at end of text.

The timely debut of Barrio Hollywood at the New Theatre coincides with renewed debate in Florida's judicial and political halls over the lives of comatose victims in our hospitals.

In that context, playwright Elaine Romero's drama about a poor, tight-knit Mexican family in Tucson seems about as close as, well, Coral Gables. Romero and New Theatre director Rafael de Acha deal achingly and romantically with a family and especially its daughter, struggling with choices of what to let go, to keep or to pursue when the youngest child lies corpse-like in the next room.

The issues aren't all clearly defined, but the murky waters of Romero's script simmer with romance as well as heartache in its world premiere. Barrio Hollywood is a tale worth telling, and worth watching as it develops from its beginnings here.

Euriamis Losada portrays Alex, an aspiring boxer who slips into northern Mexico to pick up some extra money in an illegal match, and is nearly killed by an unlucky punch. He's whisked back across the border to a hospital and saved, but with his spirit "trapped inside his body."

The role is depicted largely via symbolic artifice, which serves Romero's plot and themes adequately but remains underdeveloped. Flashbacks chronicle Alex's deep, abiding relationships with his mother **Ama** (Marta Velasco) and sister Graciela (Beatriz Montanez), a dancer.

When given the news of Alex's condition by emergency room doctor Michael (John Baldwin), Graciela breaks down in his arms.

Thus begins a tortuous journey of hope and hopelessness that tears at the women who become Alex's round-the-clock caregivers. The now-motionless brother's frame also comes between a budding romance involving his sister and the doctor.

Velasco navigates a freakish emotional road as the mother, refusing to acknowledge her son's permanent condition and trying to block her daughter's interest in the gawky Anglo doctor. But it's a role whose stark definition at the outset dissolves as the story explores other characters and issues.

Montanez is engaging in her professional debut, and Baldwin offers a complementary appeal as the suitor who feels like a fish out of water.

Romero sets the Barrio Hollywood story across the cultural gulf that separates the two, and depicts the barrio culture in warm, passionate tones. The moods are enhanced somewhat by several dance interludes (choreographed by Ricky J. Martinez) for the sister Graciela, which also unfortunately cause the story's momentum to evaporate.

Not the atmosphere, though. Michael McKeever's simple set design keeps the story nicely framed, with mostly evening-shade lighting by Pedro A. Ramirez, and sound by Ozzie Quintana that gives zest to the dance and clout to the boxing matches.

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THEATER REVIEW

Barrio Hollywood

Drama (world premiere), through Nov. 14 at the New Theatre, 4120 Laguna St., Coral Gables. Shows 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 and 5:30 p.m. Sunday. Tickets \$20-\$55. Call 305-443-5909.

Illustration

PHOTO; Caption: CORNERED: John Baldwin and Beatriz Montanez are torn by love and sorrow in Barrio Hollywood. Photo/Eileen Suarez

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Indexing (details)