



Full text



Ricky J. Martínez Playwright, Director, Actor, Choreographer

Deitz, Roger. **The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education** 17.12 (Mar 26, 2007): 46-47.

Abstract (summary)

As associate director, director, or choreographer, Martínez has been associated with numerous productions, including the world premieres of *Bump* by Justin Swain, *Retch* by Ivonne Azurdia, *Barrio Hollywood* by Elaine Romero, and *Beauty of the Father* by Nilo Cruz. Martínez's plays have been invited for inclusion in the Cuban Arts Festival in New York City. Here Martínez focuses on his work as a playwright, in particular the present production of *Sin Full Heaven* at the New Theatre.

"My mother, Juana Martínez, was a famous ballerina in Cuba. That helped as well." Martínez laughs, "Secretly, without my father knowing, she helped push my career because my father did not want me to go into the arts. ... He wanted me to be a doctor. I minored in physical therapy so that he would be happy, and I could still escape through the arts."

"The first time I knew that I was writing the trilogy. I was amidst the second play, and I still had not combined them together. Then I read Matthew McDonagh's trilogy of plays. He's an islander. That kind of struck me. I said, 'My God, here's this guy speaking directly about his ancestors, and yet I know he is not of that generation.' At the same time, I was reading Nilo Cruz, my colleague. I had two plays published, and I saw - here is a guy writing magical realism. My Lord, it was more like realism with magic, folklore! Telling a story - but one from the islands. I thought, OK, this guy's doing it; I think there is a venue for me. Someone needs this out there in the world."

Full Text

Shakespeare wrote, "The play's the thing," and those words mean so much to Ricky J. Martínez, artistic director of South Florida's New Theatre in Coral Gables.

The Cuban-American playwright, at the time of our discussion, is at work in rehearsals for the world premiere of his new play, *Sin Full Heaven*, which he will also direct in the New Theatre production. The play is characterized as "a gothic drama of an overbearing tyrant and his adult daughter, whom he confines to his vast sugarcane plantation. The unexpected appearance of the housemaid's mariner son sets into motion events that profoundly change each of their lives."

Sin Full Heaven is made possible with the support of Citizens Interested in the Arts, the Dramatists Guild, and the Miami Salon Group. It is the third play of a Martínez trilogy that examines island society and addresses Hispanic issues that are universal in nature.

As a Miami-born Cuban-American residing and working in South Florida, Martínez says he has a unique view of the world, one he can share in his plays. Educated at the New World School for the Arts, he has a growing list of credits, here somewhat abbreviated. He studied with Jorge C. Guerra, Richard Armstrong, Lee Michael Cohen, Richard Janaro, Carol Cadby, Clay James, and Kimberly Daniel.

Acting credits include such productions as *West Side Story*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *A Chorus Line*, *J&J's Wedding*, *Lenin's Omelet*, *4 Guys Named José*, *The King and I*, *Steel Pier*, *Don Quixote* in Miami, and *Isadora Libre*.

Martínez has appeared at Creative Arts, Broward Stage Door, Miami Light Company, Dreamers Theatre, Actor's Playhouse, Cuban-American Rep, and Juggerknot, as well as Off-Broadway at HERE, Horizon's Rep, Akropolis Acting Company, and Acme. He has also appeared in a number of productions at New Theatre, including *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Othello*.

An accomplished dancer and choreographer, Martínez toured nationally as *Don Quixote* with the Boston Flamenco Ballet and worked with leading choreographers, including Heidi Duckler, Piper Pikerell, Heather Maloney, Rosita Segovia, María Torres, Antonio Alvarez, Octavio Campos, and Chrissi Alavaez. He has worked with directors Tina Landau and Ann Bogart.

As associate director, director, or choreographer, Martínez has been associated with numerous productions, including the world premieres of *Bump* by Justin Swain, *Retch* by Ivonne Azurdia, *Barrio Hollywood* by Elaine Romero, and *Beauty of the Father* by Nilo Cruz. Martínez's plays have been invited for inclusion in the Cuban Arts Festival in New York City. Here Martínez focuses on his work as a playwright, in particular the present production of *Sin Full Heaven* at the New Theatre.

Martínez explains his passion for writing plays: "It's interesting, because from when I was very young, I was writing small plays for all my friends. In elementary school, if we had to do a Christopher Columbus project, I would write an entire little play about the Santa María and the Pinta."

"I think that is the earliest way I found I could communicate with people. This was how I gave my opinion, how I saw the world, or how I was applying

myself. I also got into poetry after that. I find that much more egotistical because it is more about me and what's happening to me.

"Writing plays is for me a sharing thing, much more about connecting to people and showing them a different facet of circumstances that we can be placed in. I think that is the reason I chose playwriting to facilitate what I need to say. It is much quicker than poetry or writing a novel.

"Because of my theater background, it incorporates everything that I've learned from every single other art. In the theater, you get an immediate response as opposed to waiting for someone to read the book. It is a collective experience.

"As to this piece I am working on now, *Sin Full Heaven*, I had directed five pieces myself before, and I was adamant about not directing this one. At first, I had hired a director from New York, a good colleague called Alex Dinelaris, who is a playwright himself, and he was all set to come down. All of a sudden, he got horrible news and had to cancel. So I called two other directors to see if they could fill. They couldn't. ... By that time, the set was constructed, and I realized there was nobody else to jump in and take over, know what's going on, and feel comfortable with having a full cast and a set. So I said I just have to do this.

"What I did to balance that, to balance myself - the playwright and the director - was to hire an assistant director, Tara Vodihn. That has worked wonders. When we got to the first reading, it was wonderful. For the first week, I was the playwright, then I became the objective director ... and pushed Mr. Playwright out of my head, got in there and directed just as any other show I ever directed.

"It is an awakening, to be this objective about one's own work."

Martínez says there are unique things a Hispanic playwright can do to promote diversity. He continues: "First and foremost, this trilogy that I wrote, for me, was an exercise in trying to unite being born American yet having a heritage that is Cuban, and trying to find a bridge for myself that meant I didn't feel odd ... completely one or the other. I kind of put them together. That is the reason I wrote the trilogy, to see if I could merge both of these languages, both of these cultures. Also, living in Miami, which is the melting pot, we have such a mixture of people in this community - so amazing. I kept finding more and more people just like me, people of my generation that were suffering a similar thing. Hopefully the piece will be a bridge for them as well. From here it goes to New York and off-Broadway, so it will get to touch other people in a different region with a similar situation, share the experience with other ethnic people.

"All the plays have had a reading in New York. The trilogy is called *In God's Land: The Island Trilogy*. It is made up of three plays: first, *A Road through Heaven*; the second one is *Heavenly Hand*; and the third is *Sin Full Heaven*.

"Hopefully this piece, when it travels nationally and internationally and in the various languages it is spoken, will still tell the story. I have written in my playwriting notes that all the Spanish words can be translated into whatever language any islander around the world wants to speak. Because I find that is exactly what will bond us. That will be the bridge for everybody else, of all those people everywhere of my generation that feel they are immigrants and don't necessarily feel comfortable in one skin or the other skin but are in fact both skins.

"I specifically note that anything that is Spanish or a reference to any specific islands in the Caribbean can be changed to any islands anywhere around the world." Martínez says the plays address the diversity of the characters as well as those that choose to adapt the play to their own performance situation, so that the message is universal.

"These plays don't have to go in a certain order. They can be presented individually. The only thing that unites them is that all the stories take place on an island. And it's the same town. The differences are that the first play represents the lowest status ... the bohemians. In the second one, since in an island there is no real middle class, it is more a case of the lower and the upper classes mixing. And this third play is solely the upper class. There is a dramatic line that connects all three plays. In every play, two of the characters from the other plays are mentioned as kind of affecting them, or they saw an occurrence that happened. They relate, they are combined in the same town, but each play can stand alone."

There is further diversity in Martínez's life as well as in his art. Beyond the point he makes about being both Hispanic and American, he draws on his training, life experiences, and family history.

"I studied at the New World School of Performing Arts; that's where I got my official training. I started really at the age of 8, going to castings, doing the whole film industry thing. I got into photography, and I got to dance ... just every aspect of the industry.

"My mother, Juana Martínez, was a famous ballerina in Cuba. That helped as well." Martínez laughs, "Secretly, without my father knowing, she helped push my career because my father did not want me to go into the arts. ... He wanted me to be a doctor. I minored in physical therapy so that he would be happy, and I could still escape through the arts."

Martínez recalls other encouragement.

"The first time I knew that I was writing the trilogy. I was amidst the second play, and I still had not combined them together. Then I read Matthew McDonagh's trilogy of plays. He's an islander. That kind of struck me. I said, 'My God, here's this guy speaking directly about his ancestors, and yet I know he is not of that generation.' At the same time, I was reading Nilo Cruz, my colleague. I had two plays published, and I saw - here is a guy writing magical realism. My Lord, it was more like realism with magic, folklore! Telling a story - but one from the islands. I thought, OK, this guy's doing it; I think there is a venue for me. Someone needs this out there in the world.

"These last two years, I was highly encouraged by my two mentors, Arthur Kopit and Tina Howell. They have been inspiring me, helping my voice to come out. You need things like this to come together.

Those four people and of course my mom and my dad - all the stories they told me about Cuba and Russia (my mother's side of the family comes from Russia; and my father's, from Spain). They immigrated to Cuba and were actually the first generation in Cuba, through my grandparents. It all came together."

Martínez's work now touches a diverse audience.

"We are not all from islands," he concludes, "but we understand the universal theme that we are islands within ourselves. People can see the soul of the plays without being islanders. I am writing a place, but it could be any place."

Copyright The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education Mar 26, 2007

Indexing (details) [Cite](#)

Tags [About tags](#) | [Go to My Tags](#)

Be the first to add a shared tag to this document.

Add tags

[Sign in](#) to My Research to add tags.

[Back to top](#)

[Contact Us](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Cookie Policy](#) [Accessibility](#) [Sitemap](#)

Copyright © 2014 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved. [Terms and Conditions](#)