

The Innocent Eréndira And a Ghastly Grandma

By D.J.R. BRUCKNER

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Review/Theater

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By D. J. R. BRUCKNER

Gabriel García Márquez's fiction is notoriously difficult to dramatize in any form, including film, but the Colombian director Jorge Ali Triana has transformed a novella by Mr. García Márquez into sumptuous magic realism on the stage.

His production of "La Candida Eréndira" ("Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother") at the Repertorio Español tends — as the best Latin American theater often does — toward opera, combining drama, a memorable original score by Germán Arrieta and spectacular scenic and lighting design by Liliana Villegas and Robert Weber Federico. Virtually everything about this production, including the simultaneous translation from Spanish, is pristine.

García Márquez's sardonic study of life and truth.

At times the elegant Gramercy Arts Theater seems about to burst from the sweeping grandeur and exciting energy of this play; its successful compression into such a small space is testimony to the skills of everyone involved, especially the 16 members of the Repertorio Español who make all of the gritty, sometimes spectral, characters in this hallucinatory tale vivid, harsh and strangely beautiful.

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Mr. Triana, the founder of Teatro Popular in Bogotá, has worked with Mr. García Márquez in the past, mostly on films. Here, without consulting the writer, he has molded the famous story of a young woman forced into prostitution by her grandmother into a black comedy that reveals possibilities in the original novella we may never have imagined. Not a line of that story goes untransformed in this swift, shocking and intelligent play, and very few of our ordinary moral assumptions about life and truth escape its mocking examination.

On the stage a great gray angel hovers over and swoops past the filthy soldiers, politicians, mountebanks, smugglers and lovers who

spin around the nightmare landscape of a notorious Colombian desert region. And when the play ends, a viewer might well feel that the beating wings of a spirit fallen from heaven will awaken him in the night for many years and return him to this bleak, shining place of wonder.

La Candida Eréndira

Based on a novella by Gabriel García Márquez; adapted by Jorge Ali Triana and Carlos José Reyes; directed by Mr. Triana; English translation by René Buch and Felipe Gorostiza; original music by Germán Arrieta; scene design, Liliana Villegas; costume design, Rosario Lozano; lighting design, Robert Weber Federico; production manager/assistant director, Virginia Rambal. Presented by Repertorio Español, Gilberto Zaldivar, producer; Mr. Buch, artistic director. At the Gramercy Arts Theater, 138 East 27th Street, Manhattan.

WITH: Anthony Alvarez, Martín Balmaceda, Ricardo Barber, Irma Bello, Josie Chávez, Rolando Gómez, Ofelia González, Carlos Linares, Florencia Lozano, Jimmy Navarro, José Cheo Oliveras, Carlos Osorio, René Sánchez, Bersaida Vega, Lizandra Vega and Braulio Villar.

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Gerry Goodstein/Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother
Josie Chávez, left, and Ofelia González, in "La Candida Eréndira."