

Stage: 'Swallows' Depicts Families' Ties to Cuba

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Rafael Llerena

In a scene from "Swallows," are, from the left, Virginia Arrea, Gil Pacheco, Gloria Zelaya and Richard Adan.

By RICHARD F. SHEPARD

Bittersweet Homeland

THE Cuban revolution raised hopes for many and dashed hopes for some, and the tragic separation of Cubans who didn't stay from those who did is dramatically explored in "Swallows," a documentary play by Manuel Martin Jr. being staged by Max Ferra's Intar, the Hispanic-American Theater on West 42d Street.

SWALLOWS, written and directed by Manuel Martin Jr.; music by Paul Radelat; lyrics by Mr. Martin; choreographed movement by Walter Raines; design consultant, Randy Barcelo; scenery and media, Donald Eastman; costume design, Karen Barbo; light design, Larry Steckman; stage manager, Raul Sentenat. Presented by Intar, under the direction of Max Ferra, 420 West 42d Street.
WITH: Richard Adan, Magaly Alabau, Virginia Arrea; Christofer De Oni; Felipe Gorostiza, Gil Pacheco, Carmen Rosario and Gloria Zelaya.

Mr. Martin based his theater piece, which is in English, on interviews he had with Cubans in the United States and Cubans in Cuba. It is imaginatively staged by the author, who is also its director and wrote the lyrics for its several songs by Paul Radelat. "Swallows" has an unusual continuity. It is not an integrated play, but a work in which many comments and attitudes have been solidly integrated in such a way that you are eager to learn what happened to the people who are speaking.

A most attractive cast of eight, each with a number of different roles, traces what happened, speaking, it seems, out of the mouths of people who were interviewed. It has a genuine sound to it in its flow of speech and thought. One group of four stands stage rear, the Cubans who stayed, separated by an imaginary barrier from the other four, stage front, each with a suitcase, the group that emigrated.

We hear the enthusiasm with which most greeted the overthrow of Batista and the advent of Fidel Castro. Then comes the disenchantment of some and their flight, the bitterness that their departure causes within families. As the years go by, from 1959 to present, there are tales of repression and successive defections, and they are balanced by the words of others who found happiness and hope in the new system.

Essentially, it is words, but it is so

well done that it is more than words. The sense of separation is effectively preserved with neither group stepping over the border into the other, and yet interacting closely. It is stark, as in the account of an escape by fishing boat and another of imprisonment and Kafka-esque trial told by a poet who is a homosexual. There is humor, as in the news story of a the lavish Sweet Sixteen party given in Union City, N.J., by a Cuban refugee who has struck it rich here; it is the age-old nouveau riche story known to other immigrants, and here it is being read by the relatives still in Cuba.

Most of all it is indecisive, and that is how it must be to mirror the reality. At the end, the stories are told by Cubans who return from the States for visits to their home and their mixed sentiments, of pride in how their homeland has developed and yet their satisfaction at having gotten away. The cast is expertly moved about the stage in choreographed movement by Walter Raines. Films, sound effects and just downright ingenuity help make "Swallows" come alive on a simple, almost bare stage.

One would like to single out the performers, but each carries off the parts assigned with such conviction and skill that they deserve a group commendation. They are Richard Adan, Virginia Arrea, Gil Pacheco, Gloria Zelaya, Magaly Alabau, Christofer De Oni, Felipe Gorostiza and Carmen Rosario. They work beautifully together and alone.