

The Stage: 'La Celestina' by Spanish Repertory: Star-Crossed Lovers

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New York Times (1923-Current file); Mar 3, 1980; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times

pg. C14

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Star-Crossed Lovers

LA CELESTINA," which is now playing splendidly at the Spanish Theater Repertory Company's house in East 27th Street, was originally written, not as a play, by Fernando de Rojas in 1499. It is a story that is at once romantic and bawdy, philosophical (a bit) and earthy and it is a credit to the company that New Yorkers may see it enacted in its native tongue with a cast headed by Ofelia González, an actress who makes herself universally understood.

"La Celestina" underwent changes, even as a novel in dialogue form and it began appearing as a play in the 19th century. The 27th Street version is the work of René Buch, who is also its director. It was first presented by this company by Mr. Buch and Gilberto Zaldivar, who heads the group, in 1974. The story smacks of Romeo and Juliet, except that it is different. It tells of the love between Calisto, a wealthy young Christian, and Melibea, the beautiful daughter of a Jewish merchant, a situation that was impermissible in that particular world. Calisto's two ser-

LA CELESTINA. by Fernando de Rojas; directed by René Buch; design production by Robert Weber Federico; assistant to Mr. Buch, Rafael Pagan. Presented by Gilberto Zaldivar's Repertorio Espanol, at the Gramercy Arts Theater, 138 East 27th Street.

La Celestina	Ofelia González
Calisto	Omar Torres
Sempronio	Mateo Gómez
Ellicia	Myrna Colón
Lucrecia	Carmen Iris Camacho
Melibea	Yolanda Arenas
Párrneno	Juan Carlos Giménez
Areosa	Carmen Gutiérrez
Crito	Rafael Pagan
Pleberio	Alfonso Manosalvas

vants persuade him to use the cunning of Celestina, an old harridan and whore with a keen wit and a knowledge of people-handling.

From here the story goes into Shakespeareanlike cul de sacs and byways, with a complexity of relationships and improbable happenings that only good theater people can make convincing as they do here. At the end, just about everyone with an important role dies. Even so, "La Celestina" is billed as a "tragicomedy," a descriptive term that is accurate in light of all the humor in the lines on the way to the fatal finish.

Ofelia González has the title role and

she plays it beautifully, a woman swathed in gray robes who wheedles, laughs, fawns, rages and conspires with such skill that one never tires of watching her gestures or hearing her voice. Should Miss González ever work in English, she would be a smash for the general public, but she is no less so in Spanish. She does not tower physically but does so in the mind of the viewer who sees a woman who knows how to bend to her superiors and manipulate her peers.

Omar Torres and Yolanda Arenas, as the star-crossed lovers, have straight roles that they perform with much passion and utter seriousness. Mateo Gómez and Juan Carlos Giménez portray the two servants with peasantlike

fidelity, displaying basic emotions such as greed and lust, playfulness and passion that kills. Myrna Colón and Carmen Gutiérrez are the loose young women and each has a talent for comedy.

Mr. Buch's hand is evident in everything, from word to gesture, and the production, even to one with imperfect understanding of Spanish, works on all levels, lofty and low. Even the set by Robert Weber Federico, dominated by two curving staircases, helps separate the romantic higher thoughts from the basic animal instincts that appear on the stage floor. "La Celestina" would probably be good theater in any language and it is good to have this production here.