

Stage: 'Café con Leche,' a Comedy

By RICHARD F. SHEPARD

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Foreign-language theater in New York has always had one great theme to draw from its own audience: The way they and their Yankee offspring make their way in the New World. An amusing and happy addition to this repertory in Italian, Yiddish, German, Chinese and other tongues is the Spanish-language "Café con Leche," a new comedy by Gloria González presented by Repertorio Español, the Spanish company ensconced at the Gramercy Arts Theater on East 27th Street.

In this case, the Lower East Side setting is home to a working-class Cuban family, a good-natured, sentimental clan that is not impoverished but is still somewhere on the wrong side of those graphs that show median incomes.

The story has to do with going to jail for minor misdoings and emerging full of hope and opportunity. In the play, there are funny lines that constantly comment on family life in trying circumstances. Although thin in substance, it is somehow solid enough in its lighthearted family portrait of three generations, from grandma to grandsons.

The real power in this family is Abuela, the crusty, outspoken grandmother, who sits puffing cigars and inflicting her strong views and her considerable intelligence on the family. She is played by the company's wonderful Ofelia González, an actress who always commands the stage in whatever she is appearing, classical or contemporary. Miss González evinces a regal presence and runs through a range of strong emotions in one telephone call that

The Cast

CAFÉ CON LECHE, by Gloria González, directed by René Buch; stage design, Robert Weber Federico. Presented by Repertorio Español, Gilberto Zaldivar, producer; René Buch, artistic director. At the Gramercy Arts Theater, 138 East 27th Street.

Abuela	Ofelia González
Mayito	Felipe Gorostiza
Carmen	Ana Margarita Martínez-Casado
Enrique	Ricardo Barber
Manolo	René Sánchez
Tito	Mateo Gómez
Heather	Millie Santiago

would be a challenge for another to deal with in an entire scene.

Ricardo Barber, as the father, has a comic flair, enhanced by a plastic face, a malleable body and far-ranging voice. Millie Santiago, in an English-speaking part as a policewoman who is one son's friend, has a brief but hysterically comic appearance as the

caricature of a brash, bracelet-jangling woman injected into this traditional family's home. René Sánchez, as a flashy cousin who deals on the edge of the law, and Ana Margarita Martínez-Casado, as the mother, reflect family members trying to walk the wire between two worlds. Felipe Gorostiza and Mateo Gómez are believable images of American-born kids setting a new American pace for the family.

René Buch's direction carries the comedy over the many soft spots in the script. The sets by Robert Weber Federico illustrate admirably the décors that symbolize the generation gaps. "Café con Leche" is part of the company's repertory for the season. If you speak Spanish, it is certainly worth a visit.

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Gerry Goodstein
Ofelia González in scene from
"Café con Leche."