

For Cuban Actress, Art Is All

By ALVIN KLEIN

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NORTH BERGEN

A GRAND DAME of the theater in her native Cuba, where she won six "best actress" awards, Ofelia Gonzalez migrated to Miami and then settled in North Bergen 14 years ago with one of her two daughters and two grandchildren.

In 1968, Repertorio Español [Spanish Theater Repertory], a Spanish-language repertory company, was formed in Manhattan. Within five years, Miss Gonzalez joined it.

Although it may violate the no-star credo upon which repertory companies are founded, Miss Gonzalez is its unofficially acknowledged prima donna, having added awards in New York City and on tour for performances that range from classical ("La Celestina," by Fernando de Rojas, a role she compares to Mother Courage, and the nurse in the Spanish version of "Romeo and Juliet") to contemporary (the mother in a Spanish version of "The Glass Menagerie").

Miss Gonzalez also has performed in musicals.

Last Friday, she opened in one of her most acclaimed roles: the mother in Federico García Lorca's tragedy "Blood Wedding" ("Bodas de Sangre").

The character is the play's focal point. With her husband and two sons killed and obsessed with the portent of continuing doom, the mother struggles to "hold on tight to save her remaining son," Miss Gonzalez said.

Of her performance in a previous production of the play, Richard F. Shepherd wrote in *The New York Times*:

"Should Ofelia Gonzalez ever work in English, she would be a smash with the general public."

Miss Gonzalez, however, does not speak English. During an interview, her words were translated by Gilberto Zaldivar, the company's producer and president, and Angel Linares, an assistant to Mr. Zaldivar.

Asked whether the language barrier was, indeed, a barrier in her life, the actress said that she had a desire to learn English but that her devotion

to her art took up too much time.

Given a Spanish-speaking population numbering "over a million" in the New York City-New Jersey area, Mr. Zaldivar referred to the need to perpetuate Hispanic arts and culture, and for the "company to serve its constituency," rather than do Spanish plays in English, which would require new actors and more financial support.

The company schedules special performances for school groups — about 40 a year — and has gone on tour in this country, as well as in Latin America, Spain and the Dominican Republic. It performs the year-round at the Gramercy Arts Theater on East 27th Street in Manhattan.

The repertory includes dance recitals, zarzuelas (romantic operettas), musical collages and children's puppet theater.

Commenting on her career, Miss Gonzalez, who has been divorced for 36 years, expressed her "disenchantment with life in Cuba" as far back as 30 years ago, when she enrolled in an acting academy there.

Regarding her technique, she said



Ofelia Gonzalez

she worked from "intuition, not method."

Referring to the actress's range, Mr. Zaldivar, who conceded that Miss Gonzalez formed "the backbone of the company," said that "she can do everything."

For ticket prices and performance schedules, call (212) 889-2850. ■