

Review/Theater

A Religious Gamble

By D. J. R. BRUCKNER

An unworldly monk from a Puerto Rican monastery gets a fast big-city education in "Padre Gómez y Santa Cecilia" by Gloria González at the Repertorio Español theater and, when his superiors threaten to punish him for what he has learned, he has a few things to teach them.

When Father Gómez is assigned to take over St. Cecilia's parish in Manhattan, he finds a dilapidated church attended by almost no one, in a city he is utterly unprepared for. But he finds a few willing tutors — the aging Carmen Fuentes, who lords it over the church as if it were her kitchen; a streetwise teen-ager named José, and Manolo, a numbers runner who tricks him into changing his monk's robe for a flashy white suit and going on a double date.

But women and the high life don't really tempt Father Gómez; zeal is his weakness. The only interest uniting the neighborhood, he discovers, is the numbers game, so he cooks up a deal with Manolo. Only those who attend Sunday Mass can bet, and they have to put their money down while going to confession.

Overnight, St. Cecilia's is packed to the rafters, Mrs. Fuentes becomes a tough executive running vast parish enterprises and José becomes the fastest-counting altar boy in town. But archdiocesan authorities find out what is behind it all and a Monsignor Dorgan turns up to banish the gamblers; only caution and the monk's friends prevent him from banishing Father Gómez.

But even as he agrees to stop the gambling, Father Gómez dreams up another scheme to keep St. Cecilia's a

A Monk in Manhattan

PADRE GÓMEZ Y SANTA CECILIA, by Gloria González; directed by René Buch; technical director, Rigoberto Obando; assistant to Mr. Buch, Jorge Cacheiro; music by Pablo Zinger; production design, Robert Weber Federico. Presented by Repertorio Español, Gilberto Zaldivar, producer; Mr. Buch, artistic director. At the Gramercy Arts Theater, 138 East 27th Street.

Padre Bigatti	Juan Villarreal
Carmen Fuentes	Ofelia González
Manolo	René Sánchez
Dolores	Tatiana Vecinas
José	José Cheo Oliveras
Padre Gómez	Ricardo Barber
Juanita	Maria Alvarez
Chi-Chi	Adriana Sananes
Orlando	Alfonso Manosalvas
Monseñor Dorgan	George Bass

hot spot, and confides it to no one but God and the audience.

Under René Buch's direction, the cast is gleeful as it races through this good-natured comedy. George Bass, as Monsignor Dorgan, is an old fox, who admits that if his bosses found out the secret of St. Cecilia's, he would be rusticated to Kansas City, which he thinks is Outer Mongolia, and who delivers a hilarious injunction against betting in a mishmash of English and crash-course Spanish.

Ricardo Barber as Father Gómez is such a mixture of simplicity, cunning, trust, calculation and blind faith that you can never guess what he will do next and that nothing he does seems out of character. He gets some heavy competition from Ofelia González, who often makes you think of the play as "Carmen Fuentes y Santa Cecilia." She can speak volumes in silence with an eye or a brow and her voice always suggests there is no such thing as an innocent remark.