

Theater: Calderon's 'Life Is Dream': A Prince Imprisoned

By MEL GUSSOW

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LA Vida es Sueño" by Pedro Calderón de la Barca is a 17th-century Spanish classic with modern overtones. The play's hero, trapped between reality and illusion, is a man who cheats fate, asserts his individual will and learns to control his own destiny. As its contribution to a festival of Hispanic arts, the Intar theater is presenting Maria Irene Fornes's new adaptation of the play under the title "Life Is Dream."

As adapter and director, Miss Fornes has taken certain artistic liberties. She has rewritten the ending so that it is more in keeping with a contemporary sensibility and she has modernized some of the more archaic flights of language. Unfortunately, largely though insufficient casting, the production is

unable to realize her vision.

At birth, Prince Segismund was imprisoned in a tower by his father as a safeguard against a prediction of patricide. In so doing, the king has in fact guaranteed the nurturing of the son's violent nature. When Segismund is temporarily released and learns of his identity, he responds with vengeance. Eventually, however, he awakens to his sense of decency and responsibility.

In a powerful production of the play some seasons ago at the Yale Repertory Theater, Segismund was seen as a sleeping prince about to be released from his enchantment. Miss Fornes goes several steps further into Goyaesque nightmare. She views him as a caged beast, a chained savage in captivity. We first see him hanging upside down as if he were about to be drawn and quartered.

As played by Dain Chandler, Segismund is animalistic to the point of unin-

telligibility. When freed, he becomes a vengeful golem. He lashes out against his captors with the willfulness of a monster turning on his creator. Although Mr. Chandler somewhat overdoes the prince's stupor and his subsequent brutality — he throws Abe Wald around the stage as if he were a beanbag — he has an ominous presence and he manages to communicate the character's metamorphosis into monarch. By the end of the evening, the actor assumes an air of regality, and he even speaks clearly.

Margaret Harrington offers an acceptable performance as Rosaura, a woman who has also been cheated of her birthright and temporarily pretends to be a man. However, the other performers range from the insecure to the amateurish. The most unconvincing is Cliff Seidman's attempt at playing the king. Rolling his eyes and stroking his false whiskers, he is all too obvi-

A Prince Imprisoned

LIFE IS A DREAM, by Pedro Calderon de La Barca; adapted by Maria Irene Fornes; music by George Quincy; directed by Miss Fornes; scenic designer, Christina Weppner; costume designer, Molly Maginnis; lighting designer, Joe Ray. Presented by Intar, Max Ferré, artistic director, and Francine de St-Amant, managing director. At 420 West 42d Street. WITH: Margaret Harrington, Manuel Martinez; Dain Chandler; Shirley Lemmon, Abe Wald, Christofer de Oni, Ellen Black and Cliff Seidman.

ously a young actor trying to put on the airs of an old man.

On Intar's small stage, Miss Fornes offers the early scenes in slow motion and in dim light, which makes the characters seem like somnambulists. The evening somewhat improves as it progresses, and at least one addition is an asset. George Quincy has interpolated occasional songs, most of them sung by Shirley Lemmon as a symbolic angel on a parapet, underscoring Calderón's intensity with operatic bursts of melody.