

# A mix of emotions

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(Granma International staff writer)

• THE Repertorio Español theater group from New York has been traveling to Hispanic communities all over the United States for 20 years and has toured 30 countries, but its first visit to Cuba has unquestionably been one of great emotion and professionalism.

It's not hard to understand why. The company is made up of actors, playwrights and directors from the multinational Latino community in New York, but most of them are Cubans who have lived there for over 30 years and some are from the second generation of Cuban-Americans.

For that reason, actress Ana Margarita Martínez Casado explained to this weekly, although **Revoltillo**, the play they presented here, has been in their repertoire for about 10 years, they had to fight back their feelings during the performances.

The production at the Hubert de Blanck Theater has been surrounded by all the excitement of a premiere, according to Carlos Padrón, president of the Performing Artists Association affiliated with the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) and who in 1995 signed an exchange agreement between that institution and Repertorio Español.

A lot has happened since the signing of that agreement and this visit by the company. Nicolás Dorr, one of Cuba's most important playwrights, went to New York for a reading of one of his works, and as Gilberto Zaldivar, the company's executive producer noted, that trip was a revelation. The company began its relationship with Cuba by producing **Las Pericas** (The Parakeets), Dorr's exceptional work which has become a classic of Cuban theater.

After that came the visits by Cuban singer-actress Rosita Fornés (whom recalcitrant groups in Miami kept from performing in that city), Miriam Learra, Padrón, playwright Héctor Quintero. Prestigious playwright Abelardo Estorino and actress Adria Santana paved the road to success on the New York stage with **Vagos Rumores** (Vague Rumors), bagging a whole set of the prizes awarded by the New York Critics Association.

Repertorio Español was also quite successful with its version of **Fresa y Chocolate** (Strawberry and Chocolate), based on the story by Senel Paz and performed by brothers Jorge and Omar Ali.

Zaldivar explained that they have created the Cuba Teatro group to guarantee the continuance of these exchanges. For example, Estorino plans to premiere his new work, **El Balle** (The Dance), in New York and to stage **Parece Blanca** (She Looks White) with a cast combining actors from the two countries. Other actresses such as Vivian Acosta will also be making visits.

The company's stay in Havana has been a marvelous personal and professional experience, stated one of the other actors, Ricardo Barber. He explained that for its performances on the island the company chose the piece **Revoltillo**, by Eduardo Machado, one of the most outstanding Cuban-American playwrights. Machado was sent from the island by his parents in the early 1960s as part of what was called Operation Peter Pan.

Robert Weber, the company's artistic director, commented that Machado is very interested in his roots, and most of his works deal with the changes that have taken place among Cuban families in the United States over the years, the conflicts they face, the

REPERTORIO  
ESPAÑOL

## REVOLTILLO

de Eduardo Machado

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uprootedness and the second generation which - like Machado himself - express themselves and write their works in English.

**Revoltillo** was translated into Spanish to be presented in Cuba, and that may have weighed down the dialogues a bit. The play has a universal theme, divorce, while dealing specifically with family conflicts and touching on "details which are relevant to the Cuban-American community."

Barber, meanwhile, expressed special interest in the Cuban audiences. "I had forgotten how people here express themselves, spontaneously, wholeheartedly, warmly, and people received us wonderfully, with tolerance, unlike the sectors in Miami that have criticized this trip."

Zaldivar added that this visit has been indispensable. "There are exchanges among athletes, scientists, musicians, so why not theater people? I think we're the last ones to establish this formal communication."

Ana Margarita Martínez Casado comes from a distinguished family of Cuban stage, radio and television. Her father was the well-known actor Luis Manuel Martínez Casado, who died a few years ago on the island. "In New York we are a cosmopolitan community of Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Cubans, and we have a clear definition of art and politics. Others see the trip as political [in reference to criticism of the company's and her presence on the island], but the arts are timeless."

The company's cosmopolitan character is attested to by the presence of the great Puerto Rican actress Miriam Colón, who has studied at the famous Artist's Studio and has performed in U.S. films such as John Sayles' **Lone Star** and Sydney Pollack's remake of **Sabrina** (both of which have been shown at the Havana film festival) and Colombian Jorge Ali Triana's **Eplido Alcalde** (Oedipus the Mayor).

Repertorio Español, Colón noted, enriches New York's theatrical life, and it is in the theater where the Hispanic community sees its problems and aspirations reflected. "We are the voice of our community, which has such a poor presence in films and television."

The company's repertoire includes the great works of Spain's "golden century," including pieces by Tirso de Molina, Calderón de la Barca, Federico García Lorca and contemporary U.S. and Latino authors.

Thus, in order to the Latino community in the United States to see its history reflected, it must go to the theater, and Repertorio Español is committed to that proposition. That is why the company also performs in California, Texas and wherever Hispanic groups live. "We also do tours of other countries, like this one to Cuba which has been so long in the making, where the emotion of being here should not overwhelm the performance," Zaldivar stressed.

Zaldivar and Padrón remarked that theater has reopened a path that they will not fail to travel down. They emphasized that there will be new exchanges of playwrights, actors and companies.