

BOLEROS FOR THE DISENCHANTED

ACT, SF

May 09, 2009

EN TU NOMBRE DOLORES: BOLEROS FOR THE DISENCHANTED

Took in quite spontaneously on a tip midweek the latest offering from ACT in the City, a play written by Obie-award winning playwright José Rivera. Rivera is most recently famous for the screen adaptation of *The Motorcycle Diaries*. (Production photos by Kevin Berne (www.kevinberne.com)).



Doña Milla (Rachel Ticotin) and her daughter, Flora (Lela Loren), discuss the possible infidelity of Flora's fiancé in front of their house in rural Puerto Rico.

It is good to know that the Bolero is a dance form of music in 3/4 time that originated in Spain many hundreds of years ago, but which flowered in Santiago, Cuba, from where it spread outward throughout the world. Ravel's work of that name, originally titled "Fandango" has traces of this structure.

The song which permeates the play is titled "Dolores", which can be the name of a woman or the word for "suffering." The Spanish lyrics, printed in the Programme, are roughly translated below by our own Javier:

Dolores

In your name's sorrow
the destiny is written
the destiny of a man
who was born for you
who suffers for having loved you
and who desired
only for you,
for you to live, to die for you

Boleros for the Disenchanted is a quasi-autobiographical play that features the events experienced by the author's own parents, who grew up, met each other and married in Puerto Rico. The story of their love and of their post-immigration disenchantment in America is told in two acts, the first centered in the courtyard of the little village of Miraflores, PR. The second act plays out forty years later in an Alabama apartment after many dreams have been destroyed, while the love the couple share with one another has survived sickness, penury, disappointment, infidelity, and the dispersal of the family members around the world.



National guard member Eusebio (Drew Cortese) has his eye on the beautiful Flora (Lela Loren).

A simple description of the play's plot really fails to do full justice to what the play does: a girl meets a man who breaks her heart. She goes away to heal and meets another who pursues her successfully. They marry and move to another country, suffer a great deal and come to love one another more deeply. In a nice casting touch, every actor returns to the stage from Act One to portray different characters in Act Two. Drew Cortese, who does a nicely restrained yet nuanced Eusebio politely courting the young Flora comes back in a scenery-chewing performance as a priest who so graphically describes marriage that the

Nurse Eva (Lela Loren) gasps. The actors who portray Flora's parents play the younger couple forty years later.

Staged in a simple Checkovian fourth-wall style, the play manages to erupt from regional and ethnic specificity in a number of ways, beginning, but not limited to, evocations of the current financial Recession as well as particular ham-fisted American foreign policies.

As Don Fermin shouts in the courtyard, "They have taken away all the work; now there is none for anybody! What is a man with no work to do? He is nothing!"



Flora (Lela Loren, center) comforts her drunk and frustrated father, Don Fermin (Robert Beltran), as her mother Doña Milla (Rachel Ticotin), looks on.

Indeed much of the play is concerned with just what makes a man a man, from the literal and graphic references to sexual parts to strength of commitment and honor. In the rather emotional second act, the playwright makes clear as the older Eusebio is stripped of virtually every physical attribute with Beckettian savagery that there is much more to a man than the physical.

As Flora (Lela Loren) and the other characters in Puerto Rico confront the problems and realities of what it means to commit one's life to another person, the play deeply examines marriage in a way that scatters the arguments claiming that "marriage is defined as a union between a man and a woman" to the four winds. From the perspective of the play, with the physical aspect gone, the children gone and scattered around the globe, the community dispersed and transient as an army base, even language itself removed, the question "What is left?" blows apart entirely reductive definitions.



Forty years later, Older Flora (Rachel Ticotin) and Older Eusebio (Robert Beltran) are still in love.

Indeed, on Mother's day, one does well to consider all the things that go into what makes a family beyond the physical.

The play delves consciously into the question of what constitutes marriage as Flora volunteers at her church for a program that tries to prevent couples from marrying in Alabama too early, resulting in the inevitable wreckage of divorce at age seventeen.



A young couple, Monica (Michele Vazquez) and Oskar (Dion Mucciaccito), question their decision to get married after a visit to Flora and Eusebio's tiny Alabama home.

Another aspect about the play: It is really nice to see a play featuring American Hispanic people on stage without resorting to Broadway cliches. Flora is not the hot-blooded Latin girl in the red dress or the West Side Story Maria flouncing her skirts in a mythical New York -- she is intentionally presented as

quite something else. She is presented as a deeply religious, very serious, very devoted girl who retains these characteristics as she matures into a woman and a mother. As one character notes, "Not every Puerto Rican needs to go to the Bronx."

Finally, the play is about the immigrant experience, of high hopes dashed against the realities of living in a foreign land where "Nobody wants to hire a Puerto Rican", even while the legend of the missing brother persists: "There are rumors of the handsome boy from Puerto Rico with his guitar and his flashing eyes on the streets of New York . . .".

Boleros for the Disenchanted continues at ACT until the last day of May. Opening night is May 13th. Tickets can be obtained at the box office at 405 Geary Street, by calling 415.749.2228, or via the A.C.T. website at www.act-sf.org.

CAST

Lela Loren - Flora/Eve
Rachel Ticotin - Dona Milla/Older Flora
Robert Beltran - Don Fermin/Older Eusebio
Dion Mucciaccito - Manuelo/Oskar
Drew Cortese - Eusebio/Priest

CREATIVE TEAM

José Rivera (Playwright)
Carey Perloff (Director)
Ralph Funicello (Set Designer)
Sandra Woodall (Costume Designer)
Nancy Schertler (Lighting Designer)
Fabian Obispo (Original Music/Sound Designer)
Steven Anthony Jones (Assistant Director)