

Universality and Ingenuity in *Días Contados*

I hadn't laughed as hard as I did the night of September 8th. I took my husband to see *Días Contados*, a play that was being presented by Gente de Teatro, local company founded in 1995 by a group of Latin American intellectuals and performers who, at the time, felt the need to have good Spanish theater in a city of an ever growing Hispanic population. The play deals with very serious issues -the crumbling of parent's health, love, lack of understanding, and interfamily relationships- but it covers them with a thick shawl of comicality.

It's a play within a play – the same concept as the one used in *Don Quixote*- where Ana, a well known playwright, tells a story she's written based on her family dynamics in relation to the last months of her mother's life, and she does it addressing the audience directly. After checking her mother in the hospital Ana has to deal with other issues as well: her ex-husband is having a baby with a woman ten years younger than she is, her shaky relationship with her brother gets to an even more precarious point due to the stress caused by the mother's illness, and her daughter -an only child- decides she wants to go live with her father and his new family.

All of the characters are very archetypal: a domineering mother, a crazy psychiatrist, a 50+ man going through a midlife crisis (he's married a younger woman, drinks and seems to be very indolent) and a neurotic woman, also in her 50s, who has to deal with all the problems that are typical of that age group. Of all the characters the one who captured our heart the most was the mother, Carmen, performed superbly by Ana Scuseria. Carmen possesses qualities that are universally associated with her particular archetype: she's domineering, controlling and a busybody. She's also coquettish and very human, but most of all she's legitimately concerned with what she believes to be her children's happiness.

After narrating and showing the audience the series of events that take place before Carmen's passing Ana, who up until that point had been as used to controlling her family environment as her mother had, concludes confessing the audience that she feels her life is being manipulated as if it were a part in somebody else's play, a play created by a cruel author, and she proposes that that entity could be God. The audience has no alternative but to feel compassion for her impotence, a feeling we all experience at any given point in our lives.

In order to give emphasis to the contrasting points in the play -love-lack of, life-death, past-present- besides the use of lighting effects there's also use of certain colors. Red contrasts black, gray is used for the less defined aspect of the characters and white is used to represent the hospital, and perhaps the more human side of everybody involved in the events. The setting is extremely simple; it consists of small square tables that are moved by the actors themselves in order to recreate different shapes: a garden's bench, a couch, a hospital bed.

The talent displayed by the four actors who make up the cast of *Días Contados* -Claudia Soroka, Esteban Gago, Sergio Amsel and Ana Scuseria- moved us, but didn't take us by surprise. The fact that this is the second time this comedy of ingenious dialogues is presented at The Hobby Center in the Theater District proves the group's caliber, who under Marcela Salas's artistic direction presents high quality pieces. The group's comical abilities and the topic's universality make us want to see more, a lot more. Let the curtain rise again!

Next Production (Play TBA)

May 2013 at Hamman Hall, Rice University

September 20 and 21, 2013 at The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts

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