

Two languages, one interesting and funny tale

by Mark Lord, qboro contributor | Posted: Thursday, September 29, 2016 10:30 am

The venerable Thalia Spanish Theatre, in Sunnyside, which has presented over 200 productions in its 38 years of serving the community, is the only bilingual Hispanic theater in the borough. Its latest offering — in alternating English and Spanish versions — is a return engagement of the American premiere of “Apartment for Sale (Tenant Included),” by renowned Spanish playwright Juan Carlos Rubio, with an English version by Roger Pettitt.

The play is described as a “comedy about human relations, living space and quality time.” And its title suggests a light-hearted romp, perhaps leading to an “Odd Couple”-type situation.

But the show, which does have some laughs, is alternately a sad, surprising and, ultimately, life-affirming look at some difficult situations to which most people can easily relate.

At its core, the play, which runs about 90 intermissionless minutes, is about the relationship that develops between a lonely old woman and the young woman who purchases the apartment in which she lives. The twist is that (as suggested by the title) the older woman continues to live in the place, where she is visited with increasing frequency by its new owner.

Once one overlooks the basic implausibility of the situation (who, after all, would buy an apartment and let a complete stranger continue to live in it?), the play develops into an interesting look at diverse individuals, each of whom is needy and in search of something.

The old woman, Lola, who often speaks in axioms and employs some unexpectedly salty language, is brought to memorable life by Soledad Lopez, a Spanish actress with a hefty resume who has become a mainstay at the Thalia. She totally immerses herself in the role, being expressive both vocally and physically, and always commanding the stage.

Opposite her as Sara, a businesswoman who finds herself in an unpleasant marital situation as well as in a medical crisis that comes off as soap opera-ish, is another talented actress, Basilica Bliachas.

Also featured prominently is a third character (played by Jesus Martinez) who goes through multiple career changes throughout the course of the proceedings, in search of fulfillment. Martinez is sometimes over the top, but he provides some needed comic relief on various occasions.



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Basilica Bliachas, left, Soledad Lopez and Jesus Martinez ham it up a bit in “Apartment for Sale (Tenant Included).”

The detailed set, realistically depicting the title location, is the design of the play's producer and director, Angel Gil Orrios, who elicits committed performances from his trio of actors. The lighting and sound effects, along with the colorful costumes, add to the ambience.

At the first preview performance, in English, on Sept. 23, the actors were already seemingly comfortable in their respective roles, playing off each other with ease. The same actors perform in the Spanish version, as well, providing an interesting opportunity for bilingual speakers to see the play in both languages for comparison.

'Apartment for Sale (Tenant Included)'

When: Through Oct. 23.

In English: Fri., 8 p.m.; Sat., 3 p.m.

In Spanish: Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 4 p.m.

Where: Thalia Spanish Theatre, 41-17 Greenpoint Ave., Sunnyside

Tickets: \$25. (718) 729-3880,

thaliatheatre.org