



THEATER REVIEW

Reviews/Theater; A Pair of Brief Musicals

By WILBORN HAMPTON
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LEAD: The program notes for "Welcome Back to Salamanca," the second of a pair of new one-act musicals at Intar, describes cuchifrito as a dish made with "the inexpensive but savory parts of a pig such as the snout, the ears, the large intestine, the stomach and the skin." The show uses a lot of the same ingredients, although there is nothing very tasteful about it.

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The title notwithstanding, "Salamanca" takes place in New York City at the turn of the next century. There is a meat shortage and the action takes place in a "meateasy," a setting upon which there are a lot of unfortunate double-entendres. The story, such as it is, involves three men, one of whom is an other-world magician, who try to barter steaks in return for the sexual favors of Maria, the proprietor. By the end, all three cads are boiled in oil and Maria achieves a sort of revelation. It's all rather too silly for words.

The 13 songs are used to introduce characters ("Just call me Rondo/I'm the meat man"), set the action ("It's 1999 and nothing ever changes/boobs are still better than brains") and praise the heroine's charms ("Sweet China eyes/and a mouth like a boomerang"). Migdalia Cruz wrote the book and lyrics and Fernando Rivas composed the repetitious music. George Ferencz directed.

Sheila Dabney portrays Maria as though she were auditioning for a Tina Turner look-alike contest. John Steber strives hard as the meat inspector. Steven Bland, as the magician, is at his best pulling a live chicken out of a pot. The chicken performed admirably. The sow's ears of this cuchifrito recipe will never make the handbag department at Bloomingdale's.

"Alma," the warm-up for "Salamanca," takes place, for reasons not even vaguely apparent, on Sept. 1, 1939 in a tenement near Union Square in New York City. A woman and her teen-age lover are surprised by the woman's husband who has come home early owing to a sudden strike at the tuna factory. The young lover quickly dresses in the woman's clothes and tries to pass himself off as her cousin from Havana. The husband, of course, falls in love with him/her.

Ana Maria Simo wrote the book and lyrics, which versify such details as the date, the time, the weather, the news headlines, job descriptions ("My uncle drives a truck to Chicago on Mondays"), the bliss of unemployment ("The happiest thing for a working man/Is to be on strike") and the enigmatic joys of transsexuality ("He was handsome as a man/But as a woman so mysterious"). Mr. Rivas, weaving more variations on his themes, wrote the music. Paul Zimet directed.

The cast tries gamely, especially Al DeCristo as the husband, and all three have pleasant singing voices. But even clocking in at 35 minutes, the show begins to drag about a third of the way through.

The two musicals, which are being presented as part of the First New York International Festival of the Arts, are really no more than classroom exercises and even at that it would take an act of generosity to give them a passing grade. Futuristic Fable ALMA and WELCOME BACK TO SALAMANCA, one-act musicals composed by Fernando Rivas. Book and lyrics for "Alma" by Ana Maria Simo; directed by Paul Zimet. Book and lyrics for "Salamanca" by Migdalia Cruz; directed by George Ferencz. Set design by Loy Arcenas; lighting by Beverly Emmons; costumes by Sally J. Lesser; musical direction by Jeremy Kahn; magic design by Peter Samelson. Presented by Intar Hispanic American Arts Center, Max Ferrera, artistic director; Dennis Ferguson-Acosta, managing director. At 420 West 42d Street. ALMA ...

Elena ... Irma-Estel LaGuerre

Rolando/Alma ... Nancy Sorel

Diego ... Al DeCristo WELCOME BACK TO SALAMANCA ...

Maria ... Sheila Dabney

Lorenzo ... Alexis Reyes

Rondo ... John Steber

Cuchi ... Steven Bland

With Willie C. Barnes, Carlos Arevalo and Humberto Alabado.

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