

'Cancun' at GALA Hispanic Theatre

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Last night, I attended the U.S. premiere of the play *Cancun* at GALA Hispanic Theatre. Written by internationally renowned Spanish-Catalan playwright Jordi Galceran and directed by Jose Zayas, this hilarious show features exceptional and moving performances by a fantastic cast: Luz Nicolas, Chani Martin, Carlos Castillo, and Maggie Bofill.



Maggie Bofill, Chani Martin, Luz Nicolas, and Carlos Castillo. Photo by Lonnie Tague.

Cancun features two couples who take a vacation together as a cost-saving measure which ends up costing them more than any of them could have ever imagined. A tropical resort, sandy beaches, ocean breezes, hot days, cold nights, wedding anniversaries, lifetime friends, interwoven relationships, intriguing secrets and flooding memories — la dolce vita?

Alcoholic excess and relaxed euphoria lead these four friends to reflect on their lives, loves, and intimate relationships from new perspectives – based upon what might have been if certain events had not happened as they happened. Two couples, Reme (Luz Nicolas) and Vicente (Carlos Castillo) along with their friends Laura (Maggie Bofill) and Pablo (Chani Martin) are on a twenty-fifth anniversary vacation together in Cancun. One night, after a few drinks, some dancing, some words, a few more drinks, some more dancing, and some more words, Reme reveals what to her is a seemingly harmless secret involving some car keys. This now 'not so harmless' secret sets the stage for turning two lusts into two loves and two loves into

more than two relationships. This leads to chaos, miscommunication, mistaken identity, regret, frustration, heart-wrenching soliloquies, and endless laughs – as well as some short-lived tears.

In Jose Zaya's hands, Galceran's multi-layered mystery is beautifully realized as he directs with a steady hand, as well as comedic precision, in order to allow his actors to express the subtle shadings of everyday characters to whom we can all relate.

What makes *Cancon* such a unique experience for the audience is that we are kept guessing right up to the very end just like a good Agatha Christie mystery novel complete with a jaw-dropping finale. Galceran plays with the expectations and deductions of the audience in such a way that it compels us to consider looking at life from a radically different perspective. Through his characters and their experiences the playwright explores the question of how one person's actions in the past may affect the lives of others in the future. In effect, theatrical performances become a reconstruction of reality.

Centered around Reme (Luz Nicolas), what unravels next is a comedy of errors about the individual's certainty of their own identity and the relationship between that identity, the identity of others, and the relationship between the two. Has Reme robbed the others of their identities? Have Vicente, Pablo, and Laura engaged in a conspiracy to teach Reme a lesson? The ensuing events cause Reme to wonder whether she has led a different life than the one she thought during the past twenty-five years. Maybe the car keys story never happened after all?

The entire cast is inspired and the chemistry between them is overflowing. Luz Nicolas delivers a tour de force and bravura performance as Reme. Nicolas' versatility runs the gamut of emotions from the comedic to the dramatic – including the hysterical, the delusional, and the seductive (a multi-leg-raising scene had the audience and myself in convulsions). You have to see it to believe it!

Carlos Castillo stands out as Vicente who, though conflicted, feels he must be direct in order to free himself from his dominating and manipulative wife, Reme. He received a well-deserved ovation for his major gut-spilling soliloquy in the first act.

Maggi Bofill is luminous as the passionate, humorous, and assertive Laura, and is outrageous in a scene where she refuses to go along with one of her husband's unusual 'playful' proposals. It's a hysterical 'swapping' of jokes and her facial reactions are priceless.



Actress Luz Nicolas. Photo by Lonnie Tague.

Pablo is played idiosyncratically and whimsically by Chani Martin who, similar to Castillo's Vicente, has warm feelings toward his wife, Laura, while at the same time yearning for a new way to spend his Wednesdays and to be more independent. He also has a gut-spilling soliloquy and also received an ovation from the audience.

The intimate set by Marianna Fernandez evokes a tropical paradise as it draws one into the cabana room filled with silvery shimmering lounge chair, a wet bar, a circular glass table atop a tree stump and raked white sand out in front. Though ethereal and ephemeral, Joseph R. Walls lighting is effective, yet unobtrusive. Kenny Neal's disco sound is stylistic while accurate. Robert Croghan's costumes are brightly colored and festive as befits the tropical setting.

GALA Hispanic Theatre's *Cancun* is as refreshing as a frozen strawberry margarita and as spicy as habanera-filled salsa on a hot blazing summer's day.

Running Time: Two hours, with one intermission.



Cancun plays through October 5, 2014 at GALA Hispanic Theatre-333 14th Street, NW in Washington, DC. For tickets, call (202) 234-7174, or purchase them online.

Discounted parking is available at the Giant parking lot on Park Road, NW.

Cancun is presented in Spanish with English surtitles, translated by Anne García-Romero.

There is brief male frontal nudity and mature language (what did you expect?)