

# Performing Arts JULY 31, 2015

## Nilo Cruz is back with an exquisite 'Beauty of the Father,' this time in Spanish



< 1 of 5 >



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Nilo Cruz's play *Beauty of the Father* had its world premiere at New Theatre in Coral Gables in 2004, less than a year after *Anna in the Tropics* (another New Theatre premiere) won the Miami playwright the Pulitzer Prize in drama. It went on to have a life in regional theater, also getting a New York production by Manhattan Theater Club in 2006, and its busy author moved on to other projects.

The play has now come back to South Florida, but in another form.

*Beauty of the Father* was written and previously performed in English. *Belleza del padre* is a new Spanish-language version of the play (the translation is by Cruz and his first mentor, Teatro Prometeo founder Teresa María Rojas). It's playing just through Aug. 8 at the On.Stage Black Box at Miami-Dade County Auditorium. And it's exquisite.

Cruz has shaped the production in several ways, as playwright and co-translator, co-designing the sound with Otis Hooper and, in his ongoing collaboration with producer Alexa Kuve of Arca Images, as director. His vision, realized by set designer Fernando Teijeiro, lighting designer Carlos Repilado and costume designer Gema Valdés, is simple, powerful and emotionally deep.

It's also accessible even if you have little or no knowledge of Spanish. The theater provides assisted listening devices with simultaneous translation into English by Irene Benítez and Luis Martínez. The two don't attempt to replicate the actors' performance choices, but you can watch those unfold without the distraction of trying to read supertitles, and you can still hear the Spanish dialogue and inflections.

The cast features four well-known actors with extensive credits in *telenovelas*, TV, film and Spanish-language theater, as well as a recent Academy of Arts & Minds grad on her way to study at New York Conservatory for the Dramatic Arts. Cruz blends his company beautifully, emphasizing the sensuality that is as much a part of life as the sea-salt air in the little Spanish town of Salobreña.

*Belleza del padre* centers on a complicated father-and-child reunion, one watched over by the ghost of the murdered poet and playwright Federico García Lorca (Ariel Texidó).

Painter Emiliano (Francisco Gattorno) is living in Salobreña in a sort of *ménage à trois* with Paquita (Anna Silvetti), an earthy woman who adores him but describes sex as “a summerhouse I closed up for the winter,” and Karim (Roberto San Martín), a young Moroccan man who makes Emiliano’s blood run hot. So that Karim can stay in the country, Paquita has married him, but her heart belongs to Emiliano.

Another triangle forms when Marina (Camila Duarte), the daughter Emiliano left behind when she was still a little girl, arrives still deeply mourning her mother’s death. Emiliano wants to forge a new relationship with his resentful, now-grown daughter, but the pain of his long-ago abandonment and her fresh loss stings. Emotionally raw and vulnerable, she too falls for Karim, who returns her passion. Papá isn’t happy.

Lorca, a deeply influential figure for Cruz (*Lorca in a Green Dress* is another of his plays), is for Emiliano a ghostly, playful fellow artist who offers advice and observations, confiding, “Love has always been a thick forest that I’ve never been able to enter, and all I’ve known is the promise of the trees.”

Cruz’s writing is full of symbolism and imagery, and so is his production of *Belleza del padre*. Twice, rose petals fall gently from the heavens like a kind of scarlet, fragrant snow. Lorca, briefly visible to everyone, gambols by the sea, hanging onto a white balloon that he sees as “the moon on a leash.” Emiliano’s “paintings” are empty golden rectangles that frame the actors.

Duarte, the youngest of the performers, crafts an alluring, empathetic child-woman who journeys emotionally from anger to lust to compassion. Silvetti’s Paquita is a kind of earth mother whose attraction to Emiliano, sexual or not, is palpable. As Karim, San Martín is mysterious, seductive, hard to pin down. Texidó powerfully evokes the artistic exhilaration and tragedy of Lorca’s life, and Gattorno’s alluring Emiliano is both lustily charismatic and frustrated.

Cruz, whose play *Tsunami* (a collaboration with Michiko Kitayama) will have its world premiere at the South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center in September, is a playwright with a singular, intoxicating voice. It’s grand to luxuriate in it, and in his vision, again — in Spanish or English — in *Belleza del padre*.

#### IF YOU GO

What: ‘Belleza del padre’ (‘Beauty of the Father’) by Nilo Cruz.

Where: Arca Images production at the On.Stage Black Box at Miami-Dade County Auditorium, 2901 W. Flagler St., Miami.

When: 8:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, through Aug. 8.

Cost: \$30 (\$25 for students and seniors).

Information: 786-327-4539 or visit [www.arcaimages.org](http://www.arcaimages.org).



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