

VARIED MONOLOGUE FEST MORE THAN JUST TALK

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- Author/Byline: MARTA BARBER, mbarber@herald.com
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Amid cheers and tears and before a public that kept wanting more, the nine-day international Festival of Monologues, a gathering of one-person Spanish-language plays, concluded Sunday with the presentation of *La octava puerta* (The Eighth Door), by Cuba's Teatro Buendía.

As with any cultural festival - especially one featuring groups from Spain, France, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, the United States and Cuba - it was a mixed bag, but one that on at least two occasions rose to that rare level of electrifying theater. With six of the 15 monologues presented by troupes from Cuba (two more were joint presentations with Cuba), the festival also provided the opportunity to catch theater as it is being done on the island today, and for that alone the festival deserves praise.

Thursday's dual billing at the Koubek Center of Virgilio Piñeras's *El álbum* (The Album) and Abilio Estévez's *El enano en la botella* (The Dwarf in the Bottle), both world premieres by Cuban playwrights, deserves accolades for acting, direction and, in Estévez's play, for beautiful writing.

Under the direction of Raúl Martín, the plays blended perfectly to reveal the signature of this creative artist. Martín, trying to show that human conditions are interchangeable, flips the roles' genders - a man, Déxter Cápiro, plays an aging aristocratic woman who wants to stick to the past by reminiscing on those who posed for her wedding-day picture, while Grettel Trujillo, a woman, mesmerized the audience with her portrayal of the alienated and lonely male dwarf searching for the meaning of life.

On Tuesday, Cuban author Tomás González did a theatrical reading of his poetry to the rhythm of drums, as if music and poetry were one. And Saturday's *NE 2nd Ave*, by Miami author and actor Teo Castellanos, offered a reflection on the multicultural assimilation of residents on a Miami street.

But a monologue of Cuba's Omiyiero, with Trinidad Rolando taking on the role of sensual singer La Lupe, fell flat.

Organized by Grupo Teatral La Má Teodora and its director Alberto Sarraín, in collaboration with Miami Light Project, University of Miami and Florida International University, the festival proved this community hungers for good Spanish-language theater - and that it's ready to welcome quality regardless of the country of origin.

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