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The Amparo Experience, an Interactive Play Telling the True Story of Exiled Cuban Rum Makers, Is Miami's Hottest Ticket

The Amparo Experience is an immersive play that tells the story of the Arechabala family, the makers of the original Havana Club rum, who were forced into exile after the Cuban Revolution.

Por [Lena Hansen](#)

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The Amparo Experience is a heartfelt and creative **theater production** that has taken Miami by storm, having VIP guests in the audience such as Gloria Estefan. “I was so nervous knowing the Estefans were in the audience! They're the closest thing we have to Cuban royalty,” jokes lead actress Bertha Leal, who plays Amparo Arechabala, now 83, in her youth. The real Amparo also sat first row on opening night, reliving her own memories as she watched the actors reenact her love story with her late husband Ramón (played by René Granado).

The play paints a vivid picture of Cuban exiles and the diaspora by telling the story of the Arechabala family, the makers of the legendary Havana Club rum, who were forced out of their business and their beloved island when Fidel Castro and his *guerrilleros* took power in 1959.

The AMPARO Experience



When you go see this immersive play, you are not just sitting and watching the actors on stage, you are part of the story, interacting with the protagonists on their journey. So you follow Ramón and Amparo in their youth as they celebrate New Year's Eve at a party at the exclusive Club Nautico (where audience members can dance to a live band and enjoy a Havana Club cocktail as if they had traveled back in time to the Cuba of the 1950s). Then the party is interrupted by uniformed *guerilleros* fresh out of Sierra Maestra (who point fake rifles at shocked viewers) announcing the desertion of dictator Batista and the emergence of Fidel Castro as Cuba's new leader.



Audience members are also imprisoned in a tiny cell, treated as traitors of their homeland and then taken on a mythical sea voyage (complete with sounds of the ocean and nostalgic songs of exile), recreating what many Cuban families experienced decades ago. Another interesting aspect is having different tracks to the play, where audience members are divided into various groups that each follow one of the characters in his or her journey, seeing the story from a specific lens, although they all merge at various points where the entire cast — and all audience members — reunite. “*The Amparo Experience* is special because it has heart,” adds Leal. “The tracks are different because of the different characters that spin the story. All the characters are ultimately interwoven, but they all have a different point of view.”



Executive creative director Paul Ramírez, adds about the play: “We knew we had something really powerful with the Arechabala's story, because it's a story that so many share, not only in Miami, but all over the world where people are currently being displaced and forced to leave their homes. As specific as this story is, the theme is very universal. However, for Cuban-Americans of all generations, we knew we would be triggering a deep, collective memory that is full of both pride and pain. Moreover, *Amparo* was written and brought to life by Cuban-Americans who are all channeling their individual families' stories. The passion and artistry that they all put into this experience is palpable and undeniable. It's almost impossible not to be impacted by *Amparo*.”



Granados says he is also honored to play the late Ramón Arechabala, whose heart was broken when Castro's government took his prosperous family business from him, forcing him to rebuild from zero on American soil and earn a living as a mechanic for many years before joining forces with Bacardi and sharing their secret rum recipe. “Playing Ramón has been one of the most rewarding parts I've had in my acting career,” he says. “To portray the true life story of someone who is so different from myself not only socio-economically but also how unapologetically honest and ambitious he was. When I read the script for the first time, I was immediately drawn to him.”



Besides being a fun night out that includes live dancing, singing and amazing cocktails, *The Amparo Experience* is a unique history lesson for many.



“As a Cuban-born immigrant, there are many things even I learned about my own history. More specifically, the real origin of a rum I knew, or rather thought I knew, since birth. People who come see it will learn about the atrocities and the breaches of human rights committed by a totalitarian regime that is still in effect 50-plus years later,” concludes Leal. “I hope *The Amparo Experience* can bring some understanding to Cuban-Americans who have never been to Cuba but have grown up with their families' stories.... It brings healing to those who have experienced exile first-hand, and it brings awareness to those who don't know much about the true history of Cuba.”



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