

Manuel Martín, 66, Playwright On the Cuban Life in the U.S.

By ROBIN POGREBIN

Manuel Martín, a director and playwright who used theater to explore the Cuban experience in the United States, died on Sept 28 in Manhattan. He was 66 and lived in Manhattan.

The cause was a heart attack, said a friend, Arcadio Ruiz-Castellano

In the Hispanic-American theater world, Mr Martín was best known for his plays, "Swallows," which opened in New York in 1980 under police protection because of bomb threats, and "Union City Thanksgiving," produced in 1983, which portrays three generations of a Cuban-American family that escaped the revolution, settled in the United States and struggled with its own internal political rivalries

In an interview while he was putting on "Union City," Mr. Martín said that his own family was similarly divided. When he came to Manhattan in 1956 to study acting with Lee Strasberg — three years before the Castro takeover — Mr Martín left his parents, two sisters and one brother in Cuba

He said he wanted his work to be for both Latin and American audiences. "Ideally our audiences should be 50 percent American and 50 percent Latin," he said. "Each can get so much that the others don't. But I

have no party affiliations. I care about the human soul. The play is about passion, not politics."

In 1968 with Magali Alabau, Mr Martín founded the nonprofit Duo Theater, where he was the artistic director, encouraging young Hispanic-American playwrights for the next 20 years. He also coordinated the Off Broadway Intar theater's playwrights-in-residence laboratory in 1980 and taught drama at Boricua College, Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, N.Y., and the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater.

Among the shows he directed were Dolores Prida's "Botánica" in 1991, presented by Repertorio Español at the Gramercy Arts Theater, and Carmen Rivera's "Julia de Burgos. Child of the Water," presented by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater in 1999. In reviewing the 1999 production, about the young Puerto Rican poet Julia de Burgos, D. J. R. Bruckner wrote in The New York Times that Mr. Martín "keeps the action swift, evenly paced and deliberate, so that no matter how willful or even foolish de Burgos sometimes seems, the specter of inescapable doom seems to shadow her throughout."

He is survived by two sisters, Victoria Martín and Amanda Martín of Havana, and a brother, Santos Martín of San Juan, Puerto Rico.