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The Everlasting Intimacy of the Theater

Cuban and US artists share the stage in Havana.



Sage Lewis, promoter of the Cuban-American cultural project Por Amor. Photo Adriana Toural.

Mildrey Ponce

"It's very important to attend the world premiere of the play here and as part of the International Film Festival, since half of the artists and producers are from Havana. Being it a joint project, we have the possibility of being all together to present the play for the first time. Also present will be the delegation of professionals from the world of art and culture in the United States, who arrived to the island to see the performance here, among them the people from the International Theater Union", said Sage Lewis, a promoter of the project Por Amor (For Love).

Invited by the organizers of Havana's International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema, Cuban and US artists premiered, with the warmest of the public's reception, the theater piece La entrañable lejanía (The Closest Farthest Away), a play born from cooperation between creators from the two countries, united in the project Por Amor (For Love).

The play, the only one of its kind, is the first to be written, produced and interpreted jointly by creators from the two nations. The piece combines cinema and theater, taking the use of high definition technology as a starting point, which allows artists to share the same space: on the stage, US actors interact with video images of their Cuban colleagues recorded on the island.

The resort of presenting Cuban actors by way of the screen responds to the very concept of the piece, which tackles problems like division, distance and the difficulty of being in the same space, in the same place.

With the purpose of trying to know the main interest of a group of US youngsters in defying the barriers existing on both sides of the Florida Strait to establish, by way of culture, links of cooperation and exchange between the two nations, Cubanow spoke with Sage Lewis, one of the main promoters

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of this project and also the author of its sound track, minutes before the premiere of the piece.

CN. - Why the interest of having exchanges with Cuban artists?

SL. - Cuba is very special to us, a country that has great artistic talents. At present, Cuban and US cultures are quite distanced, not because of geography, but because of other problems. This initiative emerges mainly to make it possible to bring us much closer, understand each other more, communicate, cooperate, and also face the difficulties arising from those things that separate us, not only from the cultural point of view, like language, but also from distance and politics.

There's a great desire on both sides to premiere this piece, which combines cinema and theater to create a situation, an almost impossible one, in which Cuban and US actors share the same stage, especially in the United States.

CN.- How do Cuban and US actors combine and relate in the piece?

SL. - Cuban actors appear on stage by way of a projection screen, but they speak and interact with US actors who're live. The production was conceived mainly for the US public, being this resource a variant in order for Cuban actors to link and transcend the problems of the blockade and other restrictions, which don't allow them to travel easily to our country.

CN. - Your presence in the 31st Film Festival in Havana?

SL. - The Film Festival invited us to premiere the piece in Havana and financing came from the Department of Culture of the city of Los Angeles. They supported us so we could premiere the piece here and also to do some shooting that we carried out two weeks ago.

The first shooting took place two years before, when a group of Cubans who graduated from the International Cinema and Television School organized a somewhat big filming, of 22 days, with the best cameraman Cuba possibly has, Raúl Pérez, along with other great talents of this island. After that shooting, we went to California and worked with many people to materialize the dream of managing to share the same stage in the United States, although it's obvious that the Cuban side has to appear by way of a projection screen, and that people on the other side will be live, in their true colors -a quite complex metaphor.

CN. - What are the characteristics of this presentation in Havana?

SL. - It's very important to attend the world premiere of the play here and as part of the International Film Festival, since half of the artists and producers are from Havana. Being it a joint project, we have the possibility of being all together to present the play for the first time. Also present will be the delegation of professionals from the world of art and culture in the United States, who arrived to the island to see the performance here, among them the people from the International Theater Union.

We have the support, for Cuba, of the Festival, but also of the National Theater Council; El Público, the host theater group; and the National Video Movement. For the United States, we also have a lot of institutions supporting this project, although the main one is the city of Los Angeles.

CN. - What's the play's story line?

SL. - La entrañable lejanía is a love story between a Cuban doctor (Ana) and a US marine biologist (Amante) who fall in love but go through many difficulties to maintain their relation. Then, by way of some magic characters and a rare coin, the two of them meet in an ocean theater, the only place where they can relate with each other. It will be in that Theater at the Bottom of the Sea where they will realize that they're actors of a play impossible to be performed.

CN. - What will be the play's destination after its presentation in Havana?

SL. - The play will be presented next year in Miami, Los Angeles, and let's hope also in New York and other US cities.

CN. - With regard to the Por Amor project, what are your main objectives?

SL. - The main objective is to develop cooperation projects between Cuba and the United States and to achieve that two such close cultures can share with and learn from each other and have good relations.

Translated by Brenda Sheehan

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