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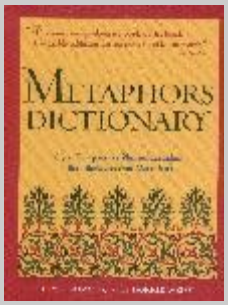
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A *CurtainUp* Review
The Romance Of Magno Rubio
by Macey Levin

An exciting theatrical experience entitled *The Romance of Magno Rubio* written by Lonnie Carter is the offering at the new DR2 Theater. Adapted from a short story by the formerly blacklisted Filipino author Carlos Bulosan, who died in 1956, the play focuses on five Filipino migrant laborers in the farms of 1930's California. This world premiere is produced by the Ma-Yi Theater Company, an organization devoted to the nurturing of Asian-American writers, directors and actors.

The affable Magno Rubio has fallen in love with an Arkansas woman through a personal ad in a movie magazine. With the assistance of Claro, who charges Magno by the word for writing his love letters, and Nick, the narrator of the play, the illiterate and lonely Magno courts Clarabelle, who implores him to send money to help her family overcome Depression era problems. Being naïve, he continues to finance her over a period of years on the promise that she will soon join him. As the day of Clarabelle's arrival approaches, his four friends are in disbelief while Magno anticipates happiness.

In addition to the romance, the play illustrates the frustrations and degradations suffered by the migrant workers who still populate the southwest and other areas of the country. They work long, hard hours while nurturing aspirations they know will not be attained. We feel the tedium of their labor and the darkness of their lives, mitigated only by their camaraderie and their pretensions for the



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future.

As involving as the plot may be, it is the theatricality of the production and the acting of the cast that drives the play. With Carter's words and minimal props, director Loy Arcenas creates a firmly identifiable location and atmosphere. Rattan batons are used for various tools. The men accompany themselves through several work songs and ballads using improvised instruments, guitars and a mandolin. The staging is imaginative and economical utilizing a restricted but flexible playing space.

Carter's script is tightly constructed. Without being bombastic, he depicts the hard life of the migrant worker while unfolding the sentimental story of Magno and his Clarabelle. Interspersing moments of dialogue in Filipino, he recreates the world of the itinerant immigrant who has come to America to build a life beyond his reach. The men receive our empathy without cloying conversations or self-pitying diatribes.

Orlando Pabotoy is the sweet and simple Magno Rubio. He eschews caricatured behavior for touching naivete and unbridled expectations of a better life with his soon-to-be bride. As his friends serenade him, he dances with a chair in lieu of Clarabelle. . . a very touching scene. Nick, who has had some college experience and is hoping against hope to return to school, tells the story of his mates with affection. Art Acuna is strong, sensitive and cynical as he guides us through the story.

Ramon de Ocampo, who plays Atoy and delivers Clarabelle's lines, draws distinct characterizations exaggerating the woman's role to contrast her self-centeredness with the hard life of the workers. It is an amusing and ugly performance. Prudencio, performed by Ron Domingo, is the empathetic friend who, along with Nick, cheers Rubio at times of



conflict or pain.

There are several moments early in the play when Jojo Gonzalez as Claro speaks very rapidly making it difficult to understand him. His character, however, is the darkest and most dangerous of the five, which he convincingly projects.

The set, also by director Arcenas, is constructed of corrugated tin, often used to construct workers' shacks, and aged plywood. The playing area is separated from the audience by wire creating a physical and psychological confinement. James Vermeulen's lighting effectively complements the theatricality of the production creating the heat of the day and the darkness of the men's lives.

The Romance of Magno Rubio is delightful and painful. The production charms and challenges its audience.

THE ROMANCE OF MAGNO RUBIO
Adapted by Lonnie Carter from a story by Carlos Bulosan.
Directed by Loy Arcenas

Cast: Art Acuna, Ron Domingo, Ramon de Ocampo, Jojo Gonzalez, Orlando Pabotoy
Set Design: LoyArcenas
Costume Design: Myunghee Choo
Lighting Design: James Vermeulen
Original Music: Fabian Obispo. Musical Director: Dominick Amendum
Movement Coach: Kristin Jackson Sound Design:
Running time: 1 hour, 10 minutes with no intermission.
MA-Yi Theatre Company at DR@ Theatre, 103 East 15th St. 212/ 581-8869.
From 10/18/02.
Tues-Sat at 8pm, Sat and Sun at 3pm-- $15-$35.

Reviewed by Macey Levin based on October 31st performance.

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