

## *Orinoco* in New York

“Two women adrift in a boat . . . their destination is uncertain. An allegory of Latin America itself!!!”; or so says the program for the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre’s production of Emilio Carballido’s *Orinoco*. I quote the program not to throw a brickbat but because it seems to underline the central problem with both play and production—an insistence on giving large import to small situations.

Carballido’s technique of fusing poetry with quotidian existence is well known. From the early *Un pequeño día de ira* on, that fusion has frequently resulted in plays that raise the mundane to the level of political significance. A minor life is imbued with major significance. With *Orinoco* Carballido attempts a continuation of this pattern. A pair of cabaret *artistes* are discovered on a pilotless boat carried along by the Orinoco’s current. A first act consisting largely of exposition makes it apparent that the two women are essentially alone on the boat. The only other passenger is a laborer who lies behind the cabin door in a drunken stupor, never appearing on stage. The mysterious disappearance of captain and crew is never explained and the presence of blood on the ship’s wheel seems to stand for random acts of violence. It is in this context that the two women rehearse their tawdry act.

The two actresses in PRTT’s production, Ivon Coll and Miriam Colón, handle well the demands of the songs and the bump and grind routines. Their professional partnership is evident and prepares for the sexual relationship which is revealed in the second act. Ivon Coll, as the more vulgar of the two, gives credence to Mina’s pessimism, her motivation for signing a contract that will require them to perform—in the nude—for brothel patrons in a jungle town. Mina’s bitter humor is expressed in Coll’s performance, in spite of a tendency to pause before delivering a line, to bring forth the motivation behind it. This sort of labored acting, at least in the Spanish version I saw, interrupted the flow of the action. By contrast Miriam Colón as Fifi, the artistic leader of the team and the more optimistic of the pair, gave a fluid performance, equally adept at song, dance and recitation of the Liscano poem Carballido interpolates into the second act. Carl A. Baldasso’s set was quite realistic but its size tended to overpower PRTT’s small theatre space, creating obstacles for the actors rather than aiding the performance. In addition, its detailed realism often seemed at odds with Carballido’s metaphoric writing style. Julio Gutiérrez’s music, while for the most part adding to the flavor of  
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