

# Review: “La Celestina” at Miracle Theatre Group/Teatro Milagro 0

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A young couple needs some help from an elder woman in the community, who was probably a bit of a bawd back in her better days, to fall in love. And, after some pretty strange and some hilarious machinations, they get it, and everything they want — only to wind up with a much more tragic fate.

Sounds like *Romeo & Juliet*, you say?

Well... maybe. Actually, it's a somewhat earlier work of the Spanish Renaissance, and the only work by its author, Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*; though, there are definitely some parallels to Shakespeare's

famous work on young romantic love, and there has even been some conjecture that *La Celestina* influenced Shakespeare's writing of *Romeo & Juliet*. However, it's not really necessary to understand all that to enjoy this fun and very fine production at [Mircale Theatre Group/Teatro Milagro](#), though having a bit of fluency in Spanish might help.

The production is done all in the original Spanish, in an adaptation by Cuban Dramaturge [Raquel Carrió](#), from de Rojas' original late 15th century piece. There even is a [“study guide” provided online](#) about the piece and its place in Renaissance literary history. But fear not, you will not need all this to enjoy the production — for the not-so-much-*Español* speakers, there are English super-titles projected at the back of the stage and most of the action is so well performed by the cast most of the action can be understood *sans* a lot of the dialogue.

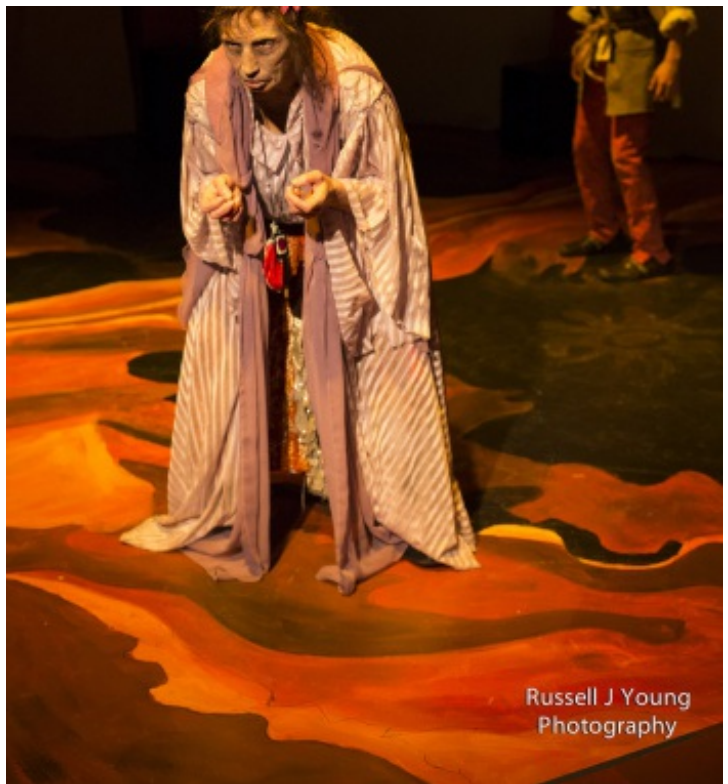
[Mircale Theatre Group/Teatro Milagro's](#) cast in *La Celestina* is in its usual fine form, again, as we have seen in other productions, embracing older theatre forms, in this case broad, traditional clowning and near *Commedia dell'arte* characterizations that still pull on you in this piece's tragedy toward the end.

And this is appropo of the style of the piece, which, as its [study guide](#) informs us, straddles the periods of Middle Ages' belief in the supernatural, superstition and the Church's restrictive moral code, especially against women, versus the broader expanse of humanism and discovery of the Renaissance. Ultimately, the older moral code wins out in the tragedy side of the conflict, so this is ultimately a standard Morality Play, but not without it's embrace of the bawdier and much funnier sides of common human existence along the way.

Each of the cast members is very strong in this style. Special kudos go to Bibiana Lorenzo Johnston in the titular character of the would-be sorceress: she revels in this character and savors in doing something that most women actors are taught to avoid — looking bad, both in appearance and as the character, on stage. Johnston, contrary to this, rips into Celestina



and can get big laughs even on the simplest, obvious lines, like, "I'm old." Carlosalexis Cruz as the interlocutor Trovador does excellent work not only as story teller but many of the fill-in roles needed. Rafael Miguel as Calisto and Siumara Samayoa as Melibea, the star-crossed lovers, both look the roles as two beautiful young people, but play off that successfully by being sort of sweetly dingy. Nurys Herrera, ever a talented staple at Milagro, does excellent duty as the even more bawdy daughter of the Celestina, and as the more prim mother of Melibea, as does Juan Antonio Martínez as Sempronio, the conniving servant of Calisto and equally lusty lover to the Celestina's daughter.



A good cast and adaptation here make for a strong production, a piece that may have been the Spanish forerunner to a Shakespeare classic and one of the first tragicomic pieces to succeed in that style as well as depict frankly the common human approach to love instead of a courtly, chivalric ideal. And all of it *en Español*. There's a lot to recommend this complex cultural adaptation at [Mircale Theatre Group/Teatro Milagro](#), so do go see for yourself.

**NOTE:** one thing that did mar the performance for me was the fact that the promised super-titles were, for those that do speak Spanish, often out of sync with the action on stage and a bit too hard to see. [Mircale Theatre Group/Teatro Milagro](#) has let Portland Stage Reviews know they were aware of the situation and have worked to rectify it for the remaining performances of the show's run.

[Mircale Theatre Group/Teatro Milagro](#) presents [La Celestina](#). Written by Raquel Carrió, based on the original novel by Fernando De Rojas, directed by Christy Drogosch. Featuring Carlosalexis Cruz, Nurys Herrera, Bibiana Lorenzo Johnston, Juan Antonio Martínez, Rafael Miguel, and Siumara Samayoa. Lighting Design by Kay Blankenship, Scenic Design by Kristeen Crosser, Costume Design by Ashley Smith, Stage Manager: Gavin Hales, Props and Sound Board by Wailana Kalama, Projectionist: Nana Nash and Artcards by Angela Bolaños-Osorio. Plays Februrary 7th through March 2nd, 2013, Thursdays through Sundays, Thursday 7:30 p.m., Friday & Saturday 8:00 p.m., Sunday Matinee 2:00 p.m. Miracle Theatre Group/Teatro Milagro is at 525 S.E, Stark Street, Portland, Oregon. Tickets are \$15 – \$30, available through [Box Office Tickets](#) or by calling the theatre at (503) 236-7253.