

# On Fourth Street, classic meets contemporary

## Fifteen seasons strong, TC's future is 416 year-old play

### THEATER

#### TEATRO CÍRCULO

At 64 East 4th Street

For tickets and information: 212-505-1808

or visit [www.teatrocirculo.org](http://www.teatrocirculo.org)

BY BONNIE ROSENSTOCK

Teatro Círculo has been on the go ever since it was born fifteen years ago as a traveling company. It was the brainchild of a group of CUNY graduate students of Spanish literature, who mounted their first production (based on three interludes by Cervantes), as a homage to one of their retiring professors — a Cervantes specialist. As a result of the show's success, they were asked to tour it around to the other CUNY colleges.

"We had ten to twelve gigs based on that night," recalls TC's artistic director José Cheo Oliveras. "We realized that as artists, we needed to do it. It was related to Spanish classical theater. We had all trained with Dean Zayas, the head of the Theater



Photo courtesy of Teatro Círculo

From the upcoming "El Caballero del Milagro"

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Department at the University of Puerto Rico, and wanted to continue that in New York."

To celebrate their fifteenth anniversary season — which coincides with the 400th anniversary of Lope de Vega's seminal 1609 "Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias" — Zayas and Oliveras have selected his picaresque 1593 "El Caballero del Milagro" (aka, "El Arrogante Español") to present for three weeks, Wednesday to Sunday, October 28 to November 15. There will be subtitles in English for non Spanish-speakers.

Zayas, a specialist in the Spanish Golden Age (ca. 1492-1681), has come from Puerto Rico to direct; and Gloria Zayas, costume teacher at the university and the top designer on the island, has agreed to do the costumes. "We decided to go back to our roots, back to the people who inspired us," says Oliveras.

At least five or six generations of acting students here in New York have been taught by Zayas, declared Oliveras, 45; born in Santurce, raised in Carolina (the birthplace of salsa) and a 1987 graduate of the University of Puerto Rico. He also credits Zayas with having a tremendous impact on the revival of the classics. "He continued doing this when no one else was putting energy into it. The vocabulary is archaic and it's difficult to understand the idiomatic expressions of the time, but you can ask him anything and he knows exactly what it is and how to approach it," emphasized Oliveras.

Zayas, 70, loves this play for the language and the rhythm, which reminds him of the zanies and other intriguing characters of the Italian Commedia dell'arte. It takes place in



Photo courtesy of Teatro Círculo

Taking a bite out of de Vega

occupied Italy, when the Spanish Empire controlled most of the country. It is atypical of Lope's almost 500 surviving works of manners and decorum — the cape and sword plays of gentlemen and ladies of high society. This is a world of frank unbridled sensuality, humor that borders on the grotesque and a repudiation of honor. The lower class, rife with French, Spanish and Italian prostitutes, mingles freely with the upper class. "It is another phase of Spanish society of the time in which people will do anything to make a living," said Zayas.

The main character is a kind of Don Juan Tenorio, not a typical caballero of the Golden Age. "Lope said a lot of things that he wouldn't be able to write about later as he became more a part of the establishment, which included the monarchy. It is a very agile and fast play that basically speaks about morality and the situation of people in a big city. The conflicts are not that different from today," said Oliveras.

While TC was originally conceived to perform the classics, early on they realized they also needed to do some Latin American theater; hence, the "círculo." "Traditionally, Spain and Latin America have been kept apart, and we wanted to be inclusive," says Oliveras, who's lived in New York for twenty-two years. So each year they introduce one contemporary and one classical piece. As a bridge with artists from the island (from Wednesday, October 21 to Sunday, October 25), in collaboration with the Puerto Rican theater group Palanganas, Inc., TC is presenting "7 Veces 7" ("7 Times 7") — seven short plays by seven different contemporary Puerto Rican writers, based on the seven capital sins, as directed by Iliana García. Oliveras describes the plays