

---

The Best Theatrical Shows of 2019 (+ PHOTOS)

01/01/2020



This has been a year of great scenic events in Cuba, so it's hard to choose ... but these are the ten best shows of the year, according to critics.

Theater and dance critics, together with several specialized journalists, all members of the Cuban Writers and Artists Association, have chosen the ten most significant shows of the year.

Obviously, regarding art every selection is subjective, but each of these proposals holds worth ??that distinguish them. We collected the opinions of the critics. And we invite you to make your own list.

### **THE BERLINER ENSEMBLE IN HAVANA**

This was, unquestionably, the greatest piece of news in the most recent Theater Festival: The German Berliner Ensemble, one of the most famous companies worldwide, presented at Martí Theater a work directed by Michael Thalheimer of Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Critic Omar Valiño said: «When Brecht opened in the 50's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was already controversial, inside and outside Germany. But this play consolidated him as a huge theatrical creator, an unavoidable reference of theater. And, if you pay attention to the script, it

is still sharp today. This staging was premiered in September 2017 and approaches so-called sacred conflicts, and not debatable, about property and its rights, in Brecht's great parallel around blood and family rights. An eternal themed landscape seen with radicalism. I'd say bitter, and somehow more perverse, in today's world, something that Berliner and Thalheimer know well and propose.

## **A LOT OF LIFE**

The Spanish Javier Aranda also appeared at the Theater Festival with his show **Vida**. The attendance of the audience made necessary to schedule a few more shows. Frank Padrón reviewed:

«The Spanish Javier Aranda (who owns his homonymous company) won enthusiastic and unstoppable applause with his **Life**, where the hands of the theatrical player are the true main character; with them, traveling through childhood, to a basket from which his mother took out her needlework, human beings, animals, diverse figures materialize that shows a unique and perfectly mastered technique thanks to which Aranda creates incredible situations and conflicts, aid by the soundtrack and the lights ».

## **A WHALE**

In the skeleton of a whale, a work of Eugenio Barba for Odin Theater was also an event. Mercedes Borges Bartutis quotes:

«In the skeleton of the whale, parable of Kafka's text Before the Law, "tells the story of a farmer who by submission and obedience doesn't dare to cross the Gate of the Law. Within this theme, the work weaves metaphysical and nihilistic cravings, alternative plots and dark apocryphal versions of sacred books. Despair disguises itself as hope, and spiritual extremism assumes the appearance of a mocking skepticism. The public space of the theater changes into the paradoxical space of a shared loneliness"».

## **LET'S SING WITH TERESITA**

Las Estaciones Theater has won many, many Critics Awards. And this year has not been the exception. Their show **Everything in Life is Singing** (directed by Rubén Darío Salazar) is a tribute to a beloved singer-songwriter, Teresita Fernández.

Sergio Jesús Martínez Villalonga wrote: «For the public it's a rebirth of beauty, of the deep singing, the discovery of what's essential which is invisible to the naked eye, to the teaching of the song. This work of the talented theater team, now expanded with the cast of guest actors and musicians, will remain in our memories as something unusual. Live music, the number of characters and musicians on stage and, above all, because it's a concert of affections for an absent and somehow forgotten singer ».

## TO THE INFINITY

With *Infinito*, Susana Pous consolidates a poetic for her group **My Company**. Yuris Nórido comments: «A solid work, filled of images and metaphorical implications, without making that "burden" obvious. However, there is clarity in the speech: anyone can feel identified with the desires that move one or the other of the dancers. And frame by frame, a story is developed that is not seeking to be Aristotelian, although it's possible to explain. The density of the speech never becomes overwhelming, because the choreographer alternates tempos and compositions, backed up by the inspired designs of scenery and lights, which are not just gears ».

## NEW OPERA

This is a truly novel show for the Cuban scene: *The Clemency of Titus*, by Mozart, staged by Carlos Díaz with the integration of singers, dancers, Choirs and Orchestra of the University of the Arts, Schola Cantorum Coralina, the Otolado Company, and orchestral direction of José Antonio Méndez Padrón, with general direction of Ulises Hernández, for the Mozart Habana Festival.

Frank Padrón wrote: «The result has been more than satisfactory, from that orchestra which belongs to such institution under the baton of Jose A. Méndez: a solid soundtrack that brought cohesion in all its sections, with the strings designing the atmospheres and twists of the story; dressed by the original Celia Ledón, the musicians wear the tunics and wigs of the Mozartian court in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (with a Yoruba wink in the case of the orchestral director) while the rest of the characters, some transvestites according to Díaz's poetics, they bring the allusive target to the virtues of the protagonist who at the same time metaphorize the aesthetic conception of the speech».

## THE ISLAND FROM THE ISLAND

*Oficio de Isla*, work of Osvaldo Doimeadiós, produced by the National Council of Scenic Arts and the Humor Promotion Center, had a unique summoning at one of the docks in Havana. Marilyn Garbey affirms: «Venturing into a large-scale creative project, where artists from different specialties and in large numbers participate, in an unusual space for doing theater, is great achievement. Doimeadiós, the director, was able to summon so many people from different ages and backgrounds to come together in a creative act. His performance here corroborates his acting maturity and his responsibility as director of the megaproject that proposes to reflect on who we are and where we are going, as human beings, as a country, as planet Earth; deserves every possible praise ».

## A CLASSIC PRINCIPLE

Abel González Melo, critic and playwright, assumed the direction of *The beginning of Archimedes*, by Josep Maria Miró, for Argos Theater and Los Impertinentes. Omar Valiño says: «A too suspicious symmetry looking at a mirror between one side and the other, and highlights with small changes every time the "repetitions" of the story, a brilliant resource with which the author spirals back in the story as if he wanted to explain it better. Several resources, in the end, of script and staging, to relativize in a minimalist fashion, as in the unavoidable and achieved acting, how events could have happened or how we can recognize them. Without skipping, of course the Archimedes principle: A **floating** object displaces **a weight of fluid equal to its own weight**.

## EVERYTHING CAN HAPPEN A SUNDAY

It takes place on Sunday, staged by Raúl Martín for De La Luna Theater from the text of Anna Burzynska, premiered in 2018, but with a long season in 2019. Frank Padrón comments:

«In the reading of Raúl Martín and his De la Luna Theater, the cyclic structure of the story is privileged, the dialogues that seem to represent the snake biting its own tail and the suffocating atmosphere of a world closed and with no ways out. Hence the great spider web on the stage, in a house that is no longer a house, however, a home, is deeply involved with the essence of the script. This is definitely another outstanding point in the career of De la Luna Theater».

## Intimate MARTÍ

And the list closes with a show that has moved many by the immensity of the reference: *Iron*, script and direction of Carlos Celdrán for Argos Theater. Norge Espinosa said:

«With **Iron**, is José Martí who occupies the central discussion. And I mean discussion because that is what this show proposes, of almost cinematographic tempo, elaborated with minimal and key resources. Deconstructing Martí, freeing him from the weight of badges and coined phrases, to bring him closer to his humanity, and to the contrasted vision that his personality could stir among his contemporaries, like an echo that still challenges us and encourages us. Through scenes of his life in the United States, we see the author of **Our America** put his body in crisis, his high sense of self-sacrifice, his ideal about a Cuba that he glimpsed through the clouds and lights of his flaming speech; while clashing over and over with the routine of the everyday life and the duties of his role as father, and political man, before the ostracism of men».

The Villanueva Awards for the best Cuban and foreign shows presented during year 2019 in our country were chosen by vote of the members of UNEAC's Theater Critic and Research Section, the representatives from **Tablas** magazine and the Cuban branch of the International

Association of Theater Critics.

The awards will be delivered at Villena Ward of UNEAC, next January 22<sup>nd</sup>, on the Cuban Theater Day.

---