

# Teatro threatens to tickle fans to death

Bloody 'circus' features fun new takes on familiar motifs

By Tom Sime

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For a show whose title means "The Circus of Death"—not to mention one that holds its curtain call on a stage splattered with blood and eyeball juice—Teatro Dallas' *El Circo de la Muerte* is surprisingly effervescent.

Perhaps it's even *too* light; Friday's opening didn't have the shriek-aloud moments fans have come to expect from Teatro's annual Dia de los Muertos play. This one's too ironic and sexy to be chilling. But *Circo* is still a lot of fun, a bawdy follies where cobwebs rustle along with the petticoats.

Teatro is still without a permanent home, but has come up with another inventive interim solution: a rainproof little circus tent on the stage of the Samuel-Grand Park amphitheater, home of Shakespeare Festival of Dallas. Strings of lights lead patrons to the outpost, which is not so much spooky as romantic. Turns out that both mating and bloodletting are dominant themes.

Artistic director Cora Cardona has assembled this year's scary-season revue from the work of several directors, writers and choreographers. John Flores holds it all together as a *Rocky Horror*-style Ring-



Bobby Martinez

**Mark O'Dell as La Catrina (Death).**

master sporting gold platform boots and glitter lipstick along with a top hat. His co-host is La Catrina, a classic Day of the Dead lady played by Mark O'Dell in deathly drag patched after the skull-face drawings of José Guadalupe Posada.

Laurie Vega's *Any Tango* features the choreographer and Joe Sime as newlyweds in a multi-part dance tracing the rise and fall of a romance. It starts out sweetly, but those sharp, stabbing movements of Ms. Vega's stiletto heels prove prophetic. NOVA Dancing Company offers several atmospheric dances as well.

Mr. Flores wrote and directed *The Bear*, a short

play about an enchanted performing bear who is controlled by a cruel trainer (Mr. O'Dell in an M.C.-from-*Cabaret* getup), but befriended by an ill-fated young girl (Zamora Rodriguez).

Michael Garcia contributes an enigmatic but absorbing performance piece, *The Downward Climb*, which casts him as a masked corporate drone dancing to Middle Eastern music. In the most arresting moment, he dons a jacket with long, rigid sleeves and scuttles about like a grounded bat.

To a heavy-metal beat, magician Bizarro offers a range of fun, creepy tricks and illusions, including popping and replacing his own eye and forcing a long-stemmed rose through his hand (Does that mean "loves me not?").

Playwright Valerie Brogan resurrects that "pale pirate" and Teatro fave, *Don Juan Vampire*, for a brief comeback directed by Ms. Cardona. Marco Rodriguez plays the bloodsucker to the hilt, and we know what happens when Don Juan sinks his teeth in. See *Circo* with someone whose neck you love.

## ■ PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

*El Circo de la Muerte (The Circus of Death)* presented by Teatro Dallas in the Samuel-Grand Park amphitheater, 3501 Samuel Blvd., through Nov. 2. Various writers and directors. Set by Nick Brethauer. Lighting by Jeff Hurst. Costumes by Christie Vela. Nightly at 8:15 p.m. Tickets \$15, \$10 for students and seniors. For mature audiences. Call 214-741-1135.