

Shakespeare en Espanol



Actors from Cuba, Tuscaloosa team up to present 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in Spanish

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

After a harrowing day of traveling that kept them on the move for more than 24 hours, 10 Cuban actors, their translator and general manager finally sat down in Tuscaloosa at about 3 p.m. yesterday, visibly tired but also enthused about the upcoming three weeks.

Joining an equal number of local actors, with a local director and crew, they'll be performing Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," or "Un Sueno De Una Noche De Verano," Aug. 6-8 on the University of Alabama campus. After that, the show moves to Havana, where the American cast will be replaced with more Cuban actors.

Speaking to the combined company in the upstairs rehearsal room at UA's Rowand-Johnson Hall, director Seth Panitch said, "It is our job to make sure they feel more comfortable than during their strip search this morning."

The UA theater professor directed "The Merchant of Venice" in Havana last year, working with many of the same Cuban professionals. Most of the American cast are students of his; Panitch's fa-



Director Seth Panitch, left, speaks as William Ruiz translates for Cuban actors visiting at Rowand-Johnson Hall at UA on Monday.

miliarity with them showed as he joked, cautioned and cajoled about the hard days ahead.

"This is the first group of Cuban and American actors to work together in this country, to our knowledge," Panitch said. Although many of the Cubans speak some English,

and a few of the Americans speak a little Spanish, both sides are relying heavily on translator William Ruiz, who will also serve as assistant director and will be stage manager in the Cuban version.

"Our governments are moving closer to each other, but at the speed of glaciers," Panitch said. He expressed hope this production would ease that process, break down Americans' preconceptions of Cubans and spur similar collaborations. But the great opportunity is also a responsibility, he warned.

"If we are not better than the sum of our parts, this will be the last time this is done," Panitch said. He urged the groups to revel in the fact that, for the next three weeks, they are all international, professional actors.

Other UA theater faculty are assisting in the production, including costumer Donna Meester and set designer Rick Miller. John Virciglio of the UA dance faculty is filming a behind-the-scenes documentary, and Tom Wolfe, associate dean from the College of Arts and Sciences, is writing and performing the original, 1960s rock-influenced score.

The Cubans will have some down

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