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“Alcestis Ascending”: The ultimate spousal support [theatre review]

Posted by [Mark Dundas Wood](#) on July 11, 2013 [Leave a Comment](#)



Billed as “A Rock Myth in English and Spanish,” *Alcestis Ascending* (at the **Clurman Theatre** in Manhattan through July 21) is a collaborative presentation from the **Cuban**

In Review



Sociables



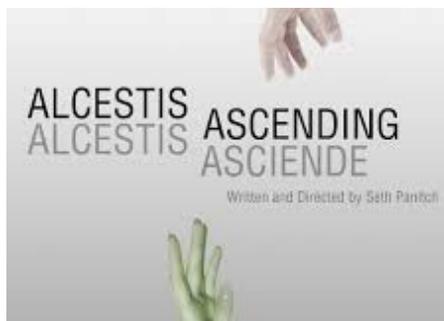
National Office of Scenic Arts, The University of Alabama, and Company HavanaBama, featuring performers from The Cuban National Council of

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from two countries to brew this ancient Greek broth, and I imagine that more than a little red tape was involved in making it all happen. But *Alcestis Ascending* proves to be worth the effort.

The 86-minute play – written and directed by **Seth Panitch** – features an impressively large cast of actors and dancers providing a bilingual take on **Euripides'** ancient tragedy about a wife who makes the ultimate sacrifice for her husband/king. The play is truly a bilingual experience. One actor will make a speech in English and another will answer in Spanish. I think most audiences will be able to keep up, as long as they read the synopsis in the program ahead of time. (After all, when it comes to the plot, it's all Greek to both the Americans and the Cubans.)

According to the myth, King Admetus (**Jeff Horger**) is slated by the Fates to die. But there's a loophole: If he finds someone to willingly go to the not-so-great beyond in his stead, he's home free. There are some amusing scenes in which Admetus' gung-ho subjects stand firmly by their ruler—right up until the point at which he requests a volunteer to embark on a one-way ticket to Hades. Then, suddenly, the royal pep rally is over.





The king’s steadfast wife Alcestis (**Alianne Portuondo**), however, is more than willing to make the big leap to the other side, and quickly does so. This sends Admetus plummeting into depths of grief and regret, until who else but Hercules (**Rayssel Cruz**) – who’s halfway through his famous labors – shows up to take Admetus on a journey to the netherworld in an attempt to find and perhaps rescue his loyal bride.

Throughout much of the play, the cast performs modern dance movements (choreographed by **Osnel Delgado**) to a rock-tinged musical score by **Tom Wolfe** (there’s no live singing in the show). The dancers are not all equally accomplished, but nobody embarrasses himself or herself in a big way. Delgado also works as a lead dancer, and he’s a haunting presence both as the god Death and as one third of the hell hound Cerberus (along with **Randy Civico** and **Alexei Aguilar**).

Horger plays Admetus as an introspective monarch whose tendencies toward self-examination call to mind a certain Shakespearean prince of the Danish persuasion. As Alcestis, Portuondo has a winning combination of grace and passion. Best of all, perhaps, is Cruz, whose Hercules is a he-man with a capital “He”: vain, hot-tempered, and with considerably more brawn than brain. Cruz punctuates the role with comic eruptions, but he’s also able to pull back and play things straight, according to the dictates of Panitch’s script.

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