

## THEATER REVIEW: Reality meets fantasy in bold, relevant 'Dreamlandia'

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By DAN BENNETT - For the North County Times North County Times - The Californian | Posted: Wednesday, April 20, 2011 10:06 am | No Comments Posted | Print

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[Buy this photo](#) Eva David as Dolores and Myra Zamora, kneeling, as Blanca in Palomar College's "Dreamlandia," opening April 15. Photo courtesy of Randy Hoffman

Prophecy and nightmare, brutal truths and distant possibilities of hope all merge in the electric, free-flowing "Dreamlandia."

The new production on a black-box stage inside the Howard Brubeck Theater at Palomar College is daring, also socially and geographically relevant to our times and locale. Based on the 1636 Spanish play "Life Is a Dream" by Pedro Calderon de la Barca ---- a staple of Spain's golden age of drama ---- "Dreamlandia" is updated by playwright Octavio Solis.

The play transports the story to the year 2000 and the border area between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, where crossings are brutal and dangerous, drug trafficking is rampant and young women working in factories are disappearing.

The multi-character story concerns how lives are affected by the realities of this time and place. A powerful father, seeing what he interprets as a prophecy that his son may not be a proper ruler, locks him away as he grows up. Once grown, the son is tested for the qualities it takes to become a king, of sorts, but the lack of love he has known and his imprisoned existence play inevitable roles in the outcome.

Intersecting is the story of the midwife Dolores, who accepts a promise from a drug dealer, only to see that promise broken. A curse she lays upon those who wronged her has clear implications. The daughter she left behind becomes obsessed with a journey to a new life, and easing her late mother's pain from beyond. She and her brother ---- simple on the outside, but in many ways the conscience of the piece ---- become both helpful tools and pawns in the quest.

Dividing the characters metaphorically and literally is a small group of women who writhe on the floor slowly, representing the border divide that is the river, and the ghosts of the young women who have disappeared. All forces collide ---- the supernatural and the painfully real ---- as an inevitable reckoning beckons.

"Dreamlandia" is a complex but smooth-flowing work, alternately tough and sympathetic in its approach. The mythology of the piece evokes classic themes, and Solis does well tying them together. Likewise, a strong ensemble cast makes those words eloquent, and you can feel the synergy, a natural rhythm, as the play progresses.

The set involves the audience from the start, with viewers seated on the main stage of the theater, atop the action for maximum impact. Though there were a few problems with amplified sound on this night, the technology of "Dreamlandia" is among its most inviting and mysterious elements, with projected video and music adding to the atmosphere. Michael Mufson has staged the piece with considerable creativity.

"Dreamlandia" is tough going in that its characters suffer and its themes are harsh; but there is also an inherent, low-key beauty in the work, suggesting peace might be found in our surroundings if we can somehow first find it in ourselves.

"Dreamlandia"

When: 4 p.m. Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 2 p.m. Sunday

Where: Howard Brubeck Theatre, Palomar College, 1140 W. Mission Road, San Marcos

Tickets: \$12, general; \$10, seniors; \$8, students; for mature audiences

Info: 760-744-1150, Ext. 2453

Web: palomarperforms.com

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