

The Star-Ledger

Two River's new play 'Women of Padilla' is an all-female affair



"The Women of Padilla," at Two River Theater in Red Bank through April 30, tells the story of eight women married to eight brothers who are away fighting a war (Photo by T. Charles Erickson) (T. Charles Erickson)

By [Natalie Pompilio](#) | For [NJ Advance Media](#)

In an unknown land, eight women married to eight brothers await their husbands' return from an unknown war. Their vigil -- as they age, grow and change together -- are at the heart of "The Women of Padilla," which is having its premiere run at Two River Theater through April 30.

"The play asks what it means to be a family." said actor Helen Cespedes, who plays Lucha, the one with poetry. "How do you build a community beyond blood relations? What do you do when an extreme situation throws you together with people you wouldn't expect to connect with?"

This is the second work playwright Tony Meneses premiering at Two River. The first, "Guadalupe in the Guest Room," opened in 2015. The Star-Ledger review called the play a "sensitive, evocative production" and credited the Mexican-born writer had "a distinctive voice worthy of such attention."

"The Women of Padilla"-- the title refers to the family last name, not a location -- runs 90 minutes without intermission and features an all-female, all-Latina cast. The lyrical, dramatic writing was inspired by Spanish poet/playwright Federico Garcia Lorca, who was only 38 when he was killed during the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

The writing is sparse, Cespedes said, and gives the play an almost episodic feel.

"Each scene is quick," she said, "but packed with humanity and change and growth."

Each character has a given name and then a descriptor. There's Mari, the one who quietly leads and Marta, the one with faith. Not all of descriptors are thoughtful assessments of character or complimentary. There's also Cristina, the one who's young and Carmen, the one who drinks.

The descriptors are playwright Meneses's way of playing up magical realism, which often uses archetypes, Cespedes said.

"One of the things we see in this play is how each archetype gets turned on its head and complicated," she said. "Whether you like it or not, your family may see you in a certain role -- the caretaker, the troublemaker."

Just like real life, the play is a drama with comedic moments.

"It's human that way," Cespedes said. "There are situations where you wouldn't think of laughing, like at a funeral, and you do. Life takes over in ways that are funny and uncomfortable."

The Women of Padilla

Two River Theater

21 Bridge Ave., Red Bank

Tickets: \$20-70, available online at www.tworivertheater.org. Through April 30.

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