A South American goes home, and brings the audience with him

By Terry Byrne
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT
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ASHFIELD — In a magical adventure through time and memory, audiences at Double Edge Theatre’s “Once a Blue Moon (Cada Luna Azul)” visit a small South American village full of quirky characters, dance at a wedding, gather at a local club, back away from a threatening military presence, and endure an arrogant Englishman’s efforts to achieve “progress.” Although the enchanting story takes us to exotic locales, the journey feels surprisingly personal. That’s because our guide, played by Carlos Uriona, is returning to his hometown of Agua Santa after many years away, and the choices he made and regrets he has are familiar to everyone who has looked back on the places and people that shaped them.

“This production is very different from what we’ve done before,” says Stacy Klein, founder and co-artistic director of the theater company. Performances of “Once a Blue Moon” began this week and continue through Aug. 22 in and around a series of indoor and outdoor performance spaces on Double Edge’s farm. “We spent five years exploring our Chagall cycle” — which included “Firebird,” “The Odyssey,” “Shahrazad: A Tale of Love and Magic,” and “Grand Parade” — “but Carlos has never had an opportunity to deal with his own culture and story, and this also provided a chance to investigate Latin American music and dance.”

Uriona, who joined Double Edge in 1996 after running his own theater company for several years in Argentina, says he’s been surprised at how moved people are by the show.

“They connect with it in ways I didn’t expect,” Uriona says. “‘Once a Blue Moon’ reflects my experience of growing up in a small town outside of Buenos Aires — that feeling of community as well as the tension between the military and corporate corruption — but it uses borrowed texts to create a flow of poetic experiences.”
In addition to weaving in selections from Isabel Allende, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and others, Klein, who developed the production with Uriona and writer and performer Matthew Glassman, says water also became an important theme in the piece.

"On a personal level, our memories flow like water," Klein says, "but water, as a resource and a commodity, is a universal theme that resonates in every community."

The aspect of community is integral to Double Edge’s approach to its annual spectacles. While the farm in Ashfield offers a variety of performance spaces for the audience to experience — including a brook, a garden, a barn, and a lake — Double Edge didn’t hesitate when asked to bring "Once a Blue Moon" to Jamaica Plain this spring.

Hyde Square Task Force invited the company to perform in and around its site for a new youth center, part of its effort to create a “Latin Quarter” in the neighborhood.

“The experience in Jamaica Plain in May was just extraordinary,” says Klein. “We expected 200 people, and on the first night had 500 and the second night more than 800.”

The spectacle began with dancing outside the former Blessed Sacrament Church on Centre Street, moved inside to create the feel of the tiny village of Agua Santa, and then shifted outside again and down a few blocks to Mozart Park.

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“The teens involved in Hyde Square Task Force performed some of the singing and dancing as part of the ensemble, which added a wonderful energy,” says Klein, “but what we didn’t anticipate was how excited the bystanders and locals got. Everyone joined in the parade down the street, and afterward people hung around for a long time talking about their participation. It was a wonderful chance for people to share an experience and shows how creative a community can be.”

The success of the Jamaica Plain performances, Klein says, led to calls from other communities.

“We will perform in Springfield in September,” she says. “We have been working in the schools there for a while so the students will participate as musicians and dancers. But then we’ll see. Our next challenge is the Ashfield Town Spectacle, which will involve the history of the town, and feature the community as performers.”

In the meantime, “Once a Blue Moon” unfolds in a captivating series of visually stunning scenes, tapping into memories and emotions that resonate long after the evening ends.