

## PLAYREVIEW

### 'Frida Kahlo'

Sept. 22 at Playhouse in the Park

You don't have to speak Spanish to take to "Frida Kahlo," Teatro Bravo's Spanish-language season opener at Playhouse in the Park.

It will help, however, to know a bit about Frida Kahlo. She's the Mexican artist who lived large and lustily in her 40-plus years. But playwright Ruben Amavizca isn't so much focused on the facts as on the tone of Kahlo's fascinating life. To that end, he's written more of a poetic ode to Kahlo than a year-by-year look at Latin America's most famous female artist.

I know just enough Spanish to find my way around a Dos Molinos menu. But Cecilia Rosales is so impassioned as Frida, there's no question when the title character is bewitched, bothered or bewildered.

Within minutes of Rosales taking Playhouse's cozy stage, I felt linguistically at ease, as if watching a foreign-language opera. Rosales is not only breathtaking in her delivery, she's breathtakingly beautiful, too. Salma Hayek, who will play the artist in an upcoming film, has nothing on this petite ASU professor.

Kahlo never had it easy. She had polio as a child. At 18, she was in a bus wreck in which a pole pierced her body, breaking her back and leaving

her barren. She married, divorced and remarried renowned muralist and womanizer Diego Rivera. The couple's public life was as volatile as their private one, running around as they did with the likes of communist Leon Trotsky and artist Pablo Picasso.

Helping director Zarco Guerrero pinpoint Kahlo's complexities is **Grant Bashore** as Judas. As a combination mime, Greek chorus and clown, Bashore makes sure no turning point in Kahlo's life goes unnoticed.

Curiously, Rafael Fontes has little to do as Rivera. I suspect this is because Amavizca wanted Kahlo to get her just due. As Kahlo's sis, Carmen Lares is subdued to a fault, as if to offer a low-key counterpoint to the overpowering Kahlo. Valeria Fernandez is even less effective as one of Kahlo's lady lovers. Part of the problem is that she seems to be giving a speech to playgoers instead of engaging her castmates in conversation.

Amavizca wrote "Frida Kahlo" a decade ago, so it's not as if he's cashing in on Kahlo's recent popularity. Clearly, he wanted to express Kahlo's tormented spirit in a manner as frank and concise as Kahlo's art. In that he succeeds, with a candid style that's easily understood in any language. **B**

*See theater listings for remaining show times and dates.*

— by Max McQuinn