



POLAR OPPOSITES DARE TO LOVE IN **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN**

Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was written in 1976. He adapted the novel into a play in 1983, which inspired a film released in 1985, with the screenplay written by Leonard Schrader. The film starring William Hurt and Raul Julia was nominated for four Academy Awards, and Hurt won the Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of Louis Molina. The novel was again reimagined into a musical directed by Harold Prince, and despite a rocky start, eventually won four Tony Awards in 1993, including Best Musical. The drama version of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* takes place in a prison in a fascist country in South America.

It is a two-actor script that catapults two men with vastly different demeanors and ideologies, into the same cell in a brutal prison. Louis Molina is a flamboyant gay window dresser who is imprisoned for corrupting a minor. His cellmate is Valentin Arregui, a journalist jailed for his leftist political activities. To alleviate the day-to-day drudgery, Molina entertains Valentin by retelling the stories of his favorite movies, and the two men develop a colorful and unique bond.

Michael Michetti steps into the director's chair to tackle this confrontational production. He is no stranger to A Noise Within and has previously directed several productions. Michetti is a former Founding Artistic Director of Boston Court Pasadena. He is the recipient of two Ovation Awards and five L.A. Drama Critics Circle Awards for his direction as well as a special LADCC Award for Distinguished Achievement in Direction.

You are originally from San Diego, so what compelled you to relocate to Los Angeles?

I moved to LA to study theatre at USC, and I never left! I really love Los Angeles. It's still Southern California and close to family in San Diego, but it has a more urban feeling and rhythm. I'm a city boy at heart. And while I don't anticipate ever leaving LA, during COVID I was able to fulfil a lifelong dream: I got an apartment in New York City, so I'm now bicoastal!

When did you first realize that you had an aptitude for directing?

Honestly, from the time I was a kid, it was all I wanted to do. I used to collect neighborhood kids and family, and put together shows in our backyard. I also convinced the head of my high school drama program to let me direct productions there. And then I had a directing emphasis in my theatre education at USC. I did some acting through school but never had any intention of pursuing it as a career. I'm not that good at it and it's not my passion. What I really love is the collaborative nature of directing, of assembling artists and helping to guide them all toward telling a single story. I'm lucky to be able to do what I love, and I'm so grateful for the career I've had directing.

You have directed several shows at A Noise Within and beyond. Which has been your all-time favorite, and why?

I couldn't possibly pick an all-time favorite. There are, of course, many that have been highlights, in terms of the process and/or the final results, but they're all my children. I also have very eclectic tastes, so I've directed new plays, classic plays, comedies, dramas and musicals. And I wouldn't want to give up any of them. I guess if forced to name a production, I'd say I was very grateful to come back after the pandemic with a production of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* last summer at the Pasadena Playhouse, which was a joyous experience, and a production I was very proud of. I will also say that the process of working on *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, a beautiful play with an amazing cast and production team, has been exhilarating. I suspect this one will end up being one of my all-time favorites!

How would you best describe *Kiss of the Spider Woman* to someone who has never seen it?

Kiss of the Spider Woman is a two-person play set in a prison in Argentina in 1975. Two prisoners who have nothing in common — Valentin, a Marxist revolutionary, and Molina, a queer window dresser — are locked together in a cell. Through the course of the play, they come to understand, respect and even love one another. It's a beautiful story of human connection in the most difficult of circumstances.

I have read that the writer of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Manuel Puig, has a very high bar on adaptations of his script. What sort of unique twists are you putting into the production to set it apart from the film and previous productions?

Well, we have the advantage of doing a stage adaptation that Manuel Puig wrote himself based on his novel. So, his play adaptation is much truer to the novel than either the film or the Broadway musical. If you're familiar with the movie or the musical, you know that they both regularly escape the prison cell to depict the classic movies that Molina is telling to pass the time. In the play we never leave the cell. We escape to the fantasy world of the movies only to the degree that we're able to use our imaginations, like Molina and Valentin do.

What message do you hope audiences take away from this provocative show?

I hope that the play will encourage us to have more empathy and consideration for people who are different than we are. That, in this polarized world, we may remember that with compassionate listening and willingness to communicate with kindness and understanding, we can build bridges we thought were impossible. Wouldn't that be nice?

***Kiss of the Spider Woman* runs through Sunday, April 23 at A Noise Within at 3352 East Foothill Boulevard in Pasadena. anoisewithin.org / 626.356.3100**