

# There's sadism aplenty in *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*

Aguijón Theater gives Federico García Lorca's masterpiece a dreamlike staging that's worth the trek.

By Chloe Riley



Andrea Ojeda and Ana Santos-Sánchez

COURTESY AGUIJÓN THEATER

**T**imeless is the tale of sex and suppression. And this drama from Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca offers no shortage of players looking to put the kibosh on lust. There's a mother, snuffing out promises of marriage and passion for her five daughters following their father's sudden death. There are the sisters, who progressively warp into sex-starved monsters, drooling and jealous. And finally, the great male manipulators, unseen perhaps because they represent more than just themselves—a whole patriarchal system, stifling in its detached greed.

**La Casa de Bernarda Alba**

Through 6/7: Fri-Sat 8 PM,  
Sun 6 PM

Aguijón Theater

2707 N. Laramie

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[aguijontheater.org](http://aguijontheater.org)

\$25, \$15 students and seniors

García Lorca, a gay poet and playwright, knew a thing or two about tightly wound societies. Much of his work was written during the first part of the 20th century, prior to his murder by Franco's Nationalists at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. *The House of Bernarda Alba* is his final play, completed in June 1936, just months before García Lorca was executed and his work banned. He was just 38, and never saw the play staged.

Repression, as anyone watching PBS's *Wolf Hall* lately can attest, breeds sadism. After the death of her husband, Bernarda Alba places her five daughters on mourning lockdown: no one will be allowed to marry for eight years. As the venomous matriarch, Rosario Vargas chokes down her rage more often than she spits it up—a choice that sets the tone for Aguijón Theater's eerily subdued production. Bernarda Alba even physically restrains her own mother (the unfettered Andrea Ojeda). But caged things tend to gnaw, and soon grandma's out, soothsaying and foreshadowing darker business ahead.

García Lorca hung with notable surrealists Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, and here director Marcela Muñoz (who also plays the fervent youngest daughter, Adela) stages dreamlike scenes around the play's poetic, highly visual language. In Muñoz's world, sex breathes deep, layers pee back slowly. A green dress and red fan are exotic in the midst of the black-clad women and bleached-white set.

In order to see this production, you'll have to find a way to get out to Belmont Cragin, a Chicago neighborhood that lies shockingly west of Logan Square, hipsters be warned. If you don't speak Spanish, you'll also have to read subtitles, not necessarily an easy task, as there are moments of rapid dialogue where the text lags behind significantly. But if you didn't know, listening to uninterrupted Spanish for 90 minutes is a damned beautiful experience.

So jump on the Diversey bus, shell out for a Lyft, travel *à pied*. Do what you have to, but do it. Aguijón Theater is currently celebrating its 25th season and this show is good, as good as anything you'd see at Steppenwolf, the Goodman, or somewhere else with more name recognition but fewer brown faces. **■**