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## Cuban-American troupe to perform in NY, Havana

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BY JAY REEVES

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Scholar Artists rehearse in the Allen Bales Theatre on the University of Alabama campus in Tuscaloosa, Ala. for Alcestis Ascending Friday, June 21, 2013.

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — It's difficult enough for actors to perform a play in two languages and make sure the audience understands, but an Alabama-based partnership of Cubans and Americans is tackling that and more with an unusual engagement in New York.

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The cast and crew of "Alcestis Ascending" are preparing for one of just a handful of joint Cuban-American plays to hit the Big Apple since the Cuban revolution and Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959.

The performance is a collaboration between the University of Alabama and the Cuban National Office of Scenic Arts. A cast of 15 Cubans and eight Americans will perform at the off-Broadway Clurman Theatre beginning July 9.

The play, an adaptation of the Greek playwright Euripides' drama "Alcestis," was written and directed by Seth Panitch, the head of acting programs at the University of Alabama. William Ruiz, from Cuba, is the co-director.

The production presents some unusual challenges, such as incorporating rock music and dance into a classical tale while not confusing the audience with dialogue in both Spanish and English.

"Half the play is in English and half the play is in Spanish, so either everyone will be able to understand what is going on or no one will be able to follow what's going on," Panitch said.

The troupe rehearsed in Tuscaloosa before an opening run in a small theater at the University of Alabama. The play is set to debut there July 1, and after wrapping in New York, it will head to Havana.

Ruiz, who is associated with El Consejo Nacional De Artes Escenicas in Havana, said the Cubans and Americans are anxious to take the play on the road, particularly to New York.

"It's very exciting to go there as a joint American-Cuban company because in the end it's going to talk about relations between people," he said. "To do it in New York, I think, is perfect."

The actors can't talk politics or cultural differences very much — language limitations prevent such discussions — but Ruiz said the barriers are gone on stage. "The play becomes the language," he said.

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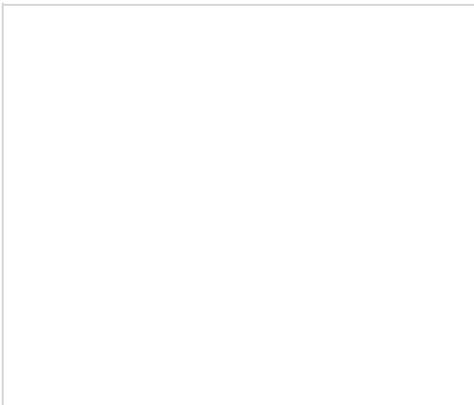
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