

Underworld a samba away

Black Orpheus

Directed by Marcel Camus
Starring Breno Mello, Marpessa Dawn
and Lourdes de Oliveira
22-25 September
Metro Cinema

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Arts & Entertainment Writer

Transplanting myth into a contemporary milieu is a familiar device for filmmakers, and by no means is it a recent development. *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*), a 1959 Technicolor extravaganza that won the Palme d'Or at Cannes and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, is a representative work of that format. It claims to be an adaptation of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, but it would be more fitting to describe it as a loose and playful homage.

Orpheus (Breno Mello) is a street-car conductor in Rio de Janeiro who plays the guitar and, as far as the local children can tell, makes the sun rise with his gift of song. He's betrothed to Mira (Lourdes de Oliveira), a fiery woman who takes offence to an early quip about how Orpheus is destined to love a lass named Eurydice, before being reassured that it's just an old story.

As it so happens, Mira's jealous prognostications are quite well founded: Orpheus does meet a Eurydice (Marpessa Dawn), and they immediately fall in love, presumably because Ovid told them so.

The story never advances beyond the basic love-triangle formula, apart from the tragic bits that concern the usual quotient of death and attempted voodoo resurrection. But that expressly is not the focal point of the film. The vibrant fashions of the Rio Carnival, flung into the unrestrained ecstasy of dance, command the majority of the available screen time.



The annual Brazilian festival serves as a backdrop that permits a swift exit from reality. Every scene is laced with infectious energy: even the quiet, romantic moments between the leads are set against the distant pulsation of samba drums. As they whisper sweet nothings, one feels that the true dialogue is in the deft choreography of their actions.

It's easy to see why *Orpheus*—directed by Marcel Camus and spoken entirely in Portuguese—is a film that Brazilians consider French, and the French consider Brazilian. Camus portrays the Rio *favela*, or slum, as a rustic heartland of song and dance, its inhabitants oblivious to their poverty for the one day of the year when they can parade down the streets of Rio and dance the samba.

If the film is dated in any way, it's in its capacity to generate suspense. Eurydice spends much of her onscreen lifetime fleeing an acrobatic

gentleman in a skeletal disguise who purports to represent death. She fears for her life, but it's difficult to empathize with her plight. For one thing, we know she's doomed anyway, and for another, it all looks rather silly.

And, as easy as it is to grant the film a special license to dwell in its carnival unreality, there are moments—like Orpheus' re-enacted descent into the underworld—when the film's supernatural conceits are almost too ecstatic to bear.

None of this precludes *Black Orpheus* from being an unabashedly exotic romp that's not afraid to wear its thumping heart on its sleeve. Today the film is best known for the influence of its musical score, a colourful tapestry by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Luiz Bonfá that became a prime mover of the Latin music craze. And it's not hard to see why. Driving rhythms and whirling skirts can make Greek tragedy a whole lot of fun.

Margarida gets a good grade

Miss Margarida's Way

Starring Linda Grass
Directed By Trevor Schmidt
15 September to 1 October at 8pm
The Third Space

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Arts & Entertainment Staff

For a small, residentially located theatre that's attempting something a bit more "sharp, hip and urban," class is definitely in session with Northern Lights Theatre's inaugural production of *Miss Margarida's Way*.

Miss Margarida's Way, a one-woman show starring Linda Grass as the eighth-grade biology teacher Miss Margarida, is more than just a simple play—it's an interactive, immersive and literally an in-your-face experience.

Upon entering the doors of Northern Light Theatre's Third Playing Space, unassuming audience members get a glimpse of the stage setting: a typical classroom with the teacher's desk at the front and nine student desks arranged in a simple three-by-three formation.

At first, the audience will be looking for a place to sit, scouting the rows of black chairs that line the left, the center, and the right sides of the stage. But, before class starts, the more observant and daring audience members can talk to the theatre's staff and choose to forego the general seating, instead enduring the uncomfortable confines of one of the

onstage student desks.

Yours truly decided to get one of the best seats in the house, even if it made him look like keener in front of the rest of the audience. The experience made the play more real and more enjoyable than watching a movie on a high-definition television. It's a theatrical experience that's only rivaled by real life itself, or the futuristic holodeck of the USS Enterprise.

Minutes later, during geography class, Miss Margarida even draws an erect penis on the blackboard and refers to it as the "Cape of Good Hope."

The bell rings, and Miss Margarida enters the classroom. With her black-rimmed pseudo-intellectual glasses, her decorated, red stiletto pumps, red vest, red handbag, black skirt and black stockings, the older—yet attractive—schoolteacher is ready to teach and seduce the audience.

"Is there a Messiah in the class? A Messiah?" questions Miss Margarida as she reads out the prank class list—a list that also includes the names "Holy Father" and "Holy Ghost." But after

quickly learning that it's all a prank, Miss Margarida erupts in anger—and her entertaining dialogue about life, society, politics, masturbation and sex education begins.

Minutes later, during geography class, Miss Margarida even draws an erect penis on the blackboard and refers to it as the "Cape of Good Hope." Soon after, Miss Margarida rants about the truth of life, education, the real world, the birds and the bees, and childhood lesbian encounters.

While her spouting may seem repetitive, at least Miss Margarida engages her pupils—the audience—as she confides in, seduces, and tries to teach them with yelling, swearing and vulgar language: dialogue fit for a crazy, charismatic, manic-depressive totalitarian dictator. Even if a wannabe-student raises his/her hand or makes a comment, Miss Margarida delivers convincing improvisation and comments that definitely satisfies one of her many blackboard settings: "there's no good teacher without a good class."

Even though *Miss Margarida's Way* is a revival of playwright Roberto Athayde's 1970's production, the play will appeal to today's audiences—especially those with short attention spans. Like her expression, "school is a second home," theatre-goers looking for a unique live-theatre performance will definitely enjoy attending class at Northern Light Theatre's A-plus performance of *Miss Margarida's Way*.

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