

GOLONDRINAS (Swallows)

By Aminta De Lara

Translation by Francine Jacome

Presented by La MaMa E.T.C.

74A East Fourth Street

**Thursdays through Saturdays at 7:30 PM, Sundays at 2:00 PM
Until April 26**

Box office (646) 430-5374, www.lamama.org

Play's website, <http://swallowgolondrina.com>

Running time 1:20.

Review by Ronald Gross

New York Theater Buying Guide

BOTTOM LINE: Our highest recommendation. A modern classic about tyranny in the family and in the state, performed by a duo of actors with enormous energy and talent, and directed masterfully by the author.

Only two or three times in a season of theater-going in New York, does a production take us into souls struggling with the most serious issues of life – and thus enrich our appreciation of our own humanity. That's what's achieved here by the Venezuelan expatriate playwright Aminta De Lara and her superlative troupe. It's the kind of politically potent work that we associate with La MaMa, a treasured alternative playhouse. Attention must be paid.

"Golondrinas" means Swallows, a species of bird who always return home and cry to go back. The author sees this as emblematic of the longing for home that affects all Venezuelans who are separated from their mother country. (The play was written in 2003, but the political tensions in Venezuela are just as fraught today.)

In an apartment in Caracas, two abused daughters discover their father slumped half-dead in an armchair, a liquor bottle

frozen in his hand, while anti-government protests, counter-demonstrations and government retaliations rage outside.

With traffic outside at a stand-still because of the demonstrations, there is nothing to be done – a situation that evokes Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. But while nothing can be done, everything is at stake, it soon becomes apparent.

As the sisters begin to review their tragic shared lives, the sound, images and text references make us clearly understand that in this play, domestic abuse in a patriarchal family is a metaphor for suppression and domination by a patriarchal government.

One of the sisters, Carmen, has spent a good part of her life placating men who abuse her, and she is a supporter of the dictator. *"What we need here," she declares, "is someone with balls. Someone with an iron fist who can put an end to all this nonsense."* Her older sister Claudia, a stiff-necked doctor, retorts, *"Just the way Father did?!"*

The sisters are played by two male actors, to make the point that gender is not the issue, and while I found this choice problematical, the performances are so exquisite that the piece works magnificently.

Howard Collado as Claudia gives a career-making performance that plumbs terrifyingly deep depths of contradictory feelings and compulsions.

Robby Ramos as Carmen bestrides the stage both physically and emotionally, as he enacts a trajectory from self-possession to uncontrollable rage.

A third cast member, Marion Elaine, eloquently delivers a poem at the start, then beautifully weaves silently through the performance as a feminine presence that is assistive given the gender-bending casting.

There's soul-work going on at La MaMa. If you want to experience theater as an enactment of spiritual exploration, be here.