

Dreaming of Cuba

THEATRE

Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams Finborough, SW10

Fiona Mountford

ANYONE who has been to Cuba will instantly recognise the transformation the tiny Finborough stage has undergone. The walls, hung with old photos and curling images of the Madonna, are peeling, and brightly painted shutters struggle to keep out the piercing Caribbean sunlight. Designer Alex Marker has done a magnificent job.

It is the sultry atmosphere of Michael Gielea's production that beguiles, with longing, passion and even a hint of magic realism offsetting the careful depiction of the daily hardships of life under an ailing Communist regime. The script from the Pulitzer Prize-winning Nilo Cruz, however, fails to match its classy treatment.

In 1961, Luca and Luciana were sent to America by their mother as part of the

controversial Operation Pedro Pan. Thirty-seven years later, and not on speaking terms, the siblings independently revisit their childhood home — Luca to stay with his uncle, and journalist Luciana to cover the Pope's groundbreaking visit.

Cruz reaches his high point at the end of the first half when, after a series of powerful, clipped scenes, Luca has taken up with beautiful local girl Delita and Luciana has begun to champion the eponymous Museum, which is actually an archive of religious miracles collated by Hortensia and her two sons. Unfortunately, Cruz is at a loss as to how to resolve these promising strands, leaving the Hortensia segment, in particular, unedifyingly overwrought.

Irini Venieri and Marcello Walton make the emotionally stunted siblings almost unreadable, which is frustrating at times, in contrast to Linda Bassett as the effusive Hortensia and Lucy Barker who brings a refreshing directness to her bright-eyed Delita.

● *Until 18 June. Box office: 0870 400 0838.*

