

Time Out
31 May 2005

'Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams'

Finborough Theatre *Fringe*

The Cuba of Nilo Cruz's imagining is full of echoes, fragmented memories and tiny, uncharted miracles, ineffectively suppressed by a determinedly rational, atheistic Communist regime. Hortensia, a middle-aged woman who communes with spirits, illicitly presides over the remnants of religious feeling in the island, collecting the stories of ordinary Cubans who share her passion for the past and the inexplicable, convinced that the arrival of Pope John Paul II will mean that her museum will finally receive international recognition. Luciana is a Cuban-born American journalist covering the Pope's visit, who stumbles across the museum and is caught up in Hortensia's obsession. She was one of the 14,000 'Peter Pan' children, separated from her parents and sent to the US under the care of the Catholic Church during the revolution.

Alex Marker's set is richly evocative of Cuba's dilapidated glamour. Linda



Bewitching: Linda Bassett.

Bassett is a thoroughly bewitching Hortensia, impoverished and impassioned in equal measure, and Irini Venieri's Luciana sheds her American empiricism with quiet intelligence. But despite director Michael Gieleta's heartfelt interpretation, the production never quite ignites. The sense of magic slips too often into rosy sentimentalism and the menace of Castro's dictatorship seems too extreme and unreflective to be convincing. And while the atmosphere of mystery Gieleta creates is compelling, it ultimately fails to cast the seamless spell over its audience that Cruz's poetic play demands. *Lucy Powell*