

Pagao at Hartbeat

By Bernie Michel

By the time you see this article, the first week of performances will be history, so those of you who also saw it will likely know what I'm talking about.

Pagao is the story of a Puerto Rican family that takes place in Puerto Rico. The four characters include Dona Lina, a mother and grandmother to the other characters, Issa, her daughter, and Negri & Wiggy, grandchildren of Dona Lina

and cousins. Issa has found a job in New York, but has come home before embarking on the next phase of her life. The play takes place largely in the kitchen of Dona Lina.

Pagao is the first Hartbeat production almost completely in Spanish. For those of us in the audience who are non-Spanish speakers, this is a very rare occurrence. It's also equally rare especially for those whose first language is Spanish to be able to experience a play in their mother tongue. The difficulty in understanding what people around you are saying is a daily experience for most Spanish speaking immigrants especially the older ones for whom English is a struggle, so this play can serve as a two-hour immersion into their world.

But the other part of the experience is that as the play unfolded I gradually stopped trying to understand the meaning of the words by reading the super titles and instead focused on all the things I could pull meaning from. The tempo, tone of voice, facial expressions and the actions and reactions of the actors all held my attention.

Living in Hartford and especially in the last few years, Puerto Rico has been in the news a lot. The challenges of living on the island as well as its relationship to the 50 states and the relationship of Puerto Ricans here to their home are full of complex feelings. I'm pretty sure the play did a lot to explore those feelings for anyone fluent in Spanish and even more so for anyone who has lived parts of their life in both places. I recommend this play to anyone no matter you're familiarity with Spanish. It's a provocative experience. The photos are by Ray Shaw, are copyrighted and a few more can be seen at:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/xyvgYoqkmbCUVLaA8> . The remaining performances are on Thursday through Saturday June 6th - 8th at 7:30 pm, and Sunday June 9th at 2:00pm.

