

Puzzling details derail 'Compadre!'

BY ANN L. RYAN
For the Journal

La Casa Teatro's production of Rudolfo Anaya's "Ay, Compadre!" was well-acted and well-directed, with strong production values to boot. But the script? As one person who saw the play said, "It didn't track."

"Ay, Compadre!," which made it's New Mexico premiere at the South Broadway Cultural Center last weekend, is the story of two middle-aged couples: Daniel (Carlos Villegas) and Linda (Lenore Armijo), and Iggy (Vic Silva) and Helen (Reyna Luna). They're comadres and compadres (Iggy and Helen are godparents to Daniel and Linda's son Steven) who eat together, drink together and vacation together.

Daniel's a hard-working plumber who writes poetry. Linda volunteers at the library. Iggy sells insurance, and Helen owns a beauty shop.

They've all got trouble. It seems that Daniel has lost interest in sex. Iggy makes it clear he's interested, but can he still perform? How do their wives deal with the situation? And there's a subplot about Steven (James R. Chavez) and his gringa girlfriend Ashley (K. Bartlit).

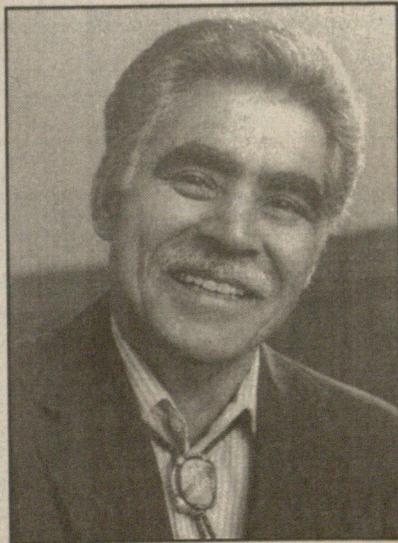
Anaya seems to fit his character's

emotions to the situation rather than the other way around. For example, at the end of act one, Daniel's strangling Iggy because he has confessed to having an affair with Linda. But in the very next scene, they're calmly drinking together, although nothing has been resolved.

There are also some puzzling smaller details: Everybody keeps talking about Helen putting on weight, but Luna is rail-thin. And everybody talks about Iggy's dyed and receding hair, but Silva has a thick, healthy silver mane. Rewrites to accommodate casting could've taken care of these details.

It's too bad that the script doesn't hold together better, because Anaya has come up with four very engaging characters who are well-played by Armijo, Luna, Silva and Villegas. Armijo and Luna share a really lovely scene at the beginning of act two, talking about their lives, desires and dreams — and Helen's dream is a doozy.

Chavez and Bartlit do some nice work, too, but their parts are underwritten — Steven and Ashley feel more like devices than characters.



CALLING FOR REWRITE: New Mexico author Rudolfo Anaya tries his hand at playwriting with "Ay, Compadre!"

Technically, the show looks great. Duane Humeyestewa's set and lighting designs are bold and professional, and the uncredited costumes suit the characters well.

It's a shame "Ay, Compadre!" only had a four-night run, because Aragón and her cast and crew put up a good-looking, smooth-running show. But Ay, Rudolfo!, your script doesn't do justice to the complexities of romance and sex in middle age.

La Casa Teatro is a new company founded by Cecelia Aragón. Aragón, who also directed the offering, is planning one production a year with the group.