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'Promise' works to break down cultural walls

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"Promise of a Love Song" is a story about love, but more significantly, it is a musical theater piece that brought together three different cultures from three separate parts of the United States.

Therein lies the importance of this work.

At the Johnny Carson Theater Friday night, in front of a sold-out crowd (estimated at 250), African-Americans, Puerto Ricans and Appalachian Caucasians worked together admirably in presenting the production.

The project was ambitious, and, for the most part, succeeded on all levels.

"Promise" featured three stories from three cultures tied together with the theme of love. The pieces were told in segments and anchored by a six-piece band.

Roadside Theater's "Charming Billy," written by Ron Short, told the tale of a mother's unconditional love for a mentally handicapped child. The work featured extraordinary performances by Short and Kim Neal, who brought tremendous emotion and depth to her character.

Pregones Theater's "Silent Dancing," written by Rosalba Rolon, weaved the stories of a Puerto Rican father and daughter newly arrived in New York City. Here we see a father, played compassionately by Jorge Merced, trying to find acceptance and an identity for himself and his family in a new world. Soldanela Rivera, as daughter Angela, tells a similar story through a child's eyes.

Finally, Junebug Productions' "Star-Crossed Lovers," written by Junebug, found John O'Neal, treading some familiar tired ground — a black activist who is more loyal to his cause than to his wife (Adella Gautier) and son (Donald Harrison Jr.) It was the weakest of the three.

Interestingly, "Promise" could work together or separately. But as written, it was at times riveting, other times humorous and for the most part enjoyable.

The most important thing was the collaboration, the breaking down of walls. It was refreshing to see something like this on stage.