

Spring 2019

## Lady Alhambra

Gabriela Castillo

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LADY ALHAMBRA

by

Gabriela Castillo

Bachelor of Arts  
Northern Kentucky University, 2014

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in

Theatre

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2019

Accepted by:

Steve Pearson, Director of Thesis

Robyn Hunt, Reader

Stan Brown, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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## DEDICATION

To my parents and my brother. Thank you for curating the wings of my sail.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I must thank Stan Brown, Robyn Hunt, and Steve Pearson for their desire to reveal and nurture artistry and helping me grow into the artist that realized and performed this play. Next, I thank Joe Bowie-Brown for giving me the courage to display the Afro-Cuban dancer within me. Thanks to Cody Unkart for building the main stage prop of my performance. Thanks to Silvio Nicholas Walters Fashion for designing and customizing the costume that enabled my smooth transformations. Thanks to my classmates in the Professional Actor Training Program for their feedback in the fruition of this play. Thanks to director and playwright Selene Perdomo Chacón for making me a part of Cuban Theatre of the diaspora, and whose work indisputably has influenced this piece. Thanks to Dr. Amy Lehman for supporting my interest in Newyorican Theatre in Text Analysis class, facilitating my introduction to Latinx playwrights and directors of American Theatre. I must thank faculty and staff in the department of Theatre and Dance at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, who went out of their way to provide to give me encouragement and maintain a high expectations from me, notably David Britt, Kevin Bush, Charlotte Denniston (retired), Kristy Hall, Andy Mills, Gabrielle Peterson, Valerie Pruet, Robert Richmond, and Erica Tobolski. I cannot go without saying that I am deeply thankful to the undergraduate theatre students who shared with me their energy and love for theatre.

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I make a retrospective analysis of the creative process through which I conceived my original solo performance piece, *Lady Alhambra*: a 15-minute one-person comedy that tells the story of Nila, a Cuban-American vedette and autodidactic spiritualist working at a cabaret called the House of Mambo. I define my creative process in three stages, each classified and described in chapters one through three. Chapter one describes the initial stage of exploration. Chapter two describes the intermediate stage of evolution. Then chapter three describes the final stage which is the performance. Lastly, I contemplate on the future of the play. For reference, I have included a copy of *Lady Alhambra*.

After reading this thesis, the reader will know the origins and resources that inspired the play; learn how the writing and choreography developed in unison; and how I plan to continue evolving the play. Included here, is a copy of *Lady Alhambra* as it was performed on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> of 2018, at the Center for Performance Experiment, University of South Carolina (Columbia).

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## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I make a retrospective analysis of the creative process through which I conceived my original solo performance piece, *Lady Alhambra*: a 15-minute one-person comedy that tells the story of Nila, a Cuban-American vedette and autodidactic spiritualist working at a cabaret called the House of Mambo. The realization process of *Lady Alhambra* came in three stages including the stage of performance.

This thesis is composed of this introduction, four chapters, and a copy of the script. The first three chapters are dedicated to the analysis of my creative process, while the last chapter speculates on the future of my solo performance. Chapter one describes the initial stage of exploration. Chapter two describes the intermediate stage of evolution. Chapter three describes the final stage which is the performance. Chapter four briefly describes a plan for the creative expansion of *Lady Alhambra*.



## CHAPTER 1

### EXPLORATION: VEDETTES AND POSSESSIONS

In this chapter I will describe the initial stage of exploration by presenting my research in a vignette of narrative stories. My whole life was the research that inspired *Lady Alhambra*, drawn from sporadic ideas, memories, and reflections I have collected over a lifetime. I knew that I wanted to write a play about a Cuban vedette because it would give me a chance to sing and dance on stage while representing my heritage, and I also wanted to include a spiritual experience in the play because witnessing the interactions of others with their perception of the spiritual world shaped my spiritual identity. Here I present a consolidated collection of memories that inspired my solo show.

#### VEDETTE

Cuban summers are unbearably hot, add the intermittent power outages blocking fans from swinging their blades, and people are forced to stake out for breezes the rest of the evening. It was common for neighbors to join my parents on our front porch with their cigarettes and guitars to kill time musically – an iconic post-revolutionary night in Havana. When I was too tired to wait for the electricity to make its reappearance, my mother would spread me across her lap on the old rocking chair that cluttered the porch, flattened a thin bedsheet over my skin to discourage mosquitos from biting, and sang tunes from my all-time favorite musical film, *La Bella del Alhambra*, which follows the

rise to stardom of Rachel, a chorus girl who perseveres in achieving her dream to become the most loved vedette at the Alhambra Theatre in 1920s Havana. I can say with certainty that it was this film that carved my soul with the desire to become a performing artist and it was only natural I incorporated elements of it in my creation.

It is easy to draw parallels between *La Bella del Alhambra* (The Beautiful Girl of Alhambra) and *Lady Alhambra*: both titles allude to the majesty associated with the Alhambra Palace of Andalusia, Spain; both take place at the turn of the century; and in both stories the protagonist is a vedette<sup>1</sup>. One significant difference in referencing the Alhambra in the film and the play is that in the film, Alhambra is the name of a physical space – the Alhambra Theatre – while in the play it is the protagonist’s stage name, characterizing her as a larger than life performer. Vedettes were women performers celebrated and admired for their stage presence and versatile talents. In Cuba, a vedette is admired and highly esteemed for her versatility and charismatic beauty, made an icon of Cuban entertainment, as in the case of household names like Rita Montaner, Amalia Aguilar, María de los Ángeles along with others. The first time I watched the film, *La Bella del Alhambra*, I felt a deep desire to be a woman performer who could sing, dance and act, just like a vedette. I was too young to grasp the film’s commentary on the early days of capitalism, poverty, female objectification, sexuality, and corruption of a 1920s and 1930s Cuba, but I could understand the happiness and power felt by a passionate actress who got to sing and dance, perform sketches, and interact with an audience that loved her. I wanted to be her! While performing *Lady*, I rediscovered footprints of my childhood that laid dormant in my spine and quickly came to life through performance.

## POSSESSION

The presence of mysticism and music was common to my neighborhood in Havana, which was home to numerous Santería<sup>ii</sup> priests who organized drumming ceremonies all year round. Children were encouraged to attend these ceremonies and I rarely missed one. During these ceremonies, food, dance, rum, and songs were treated as offerings to honor the dead and the gods, while a small ensemble of ceremonial drum players slammed their hands tirelessly through a series of religious rhythms and chants. I remember feeling my ribcage vibrate with the resonance of each melodic slap that bounced off the drums and into the people who became possessed. Possessions were my favorite part of ceremonies; although sometimes they made me a little nervous. Regardless of what spectators believed was happening, it was difficult not to stand in awe at the sight of a simple old lady lifting someone twice her size over her head and shake them like a ragdoll several times before lowering them down. I attended numerous santería ceremonies in my childhood and I remember thinking possessions were the coolest thing ever. When I got the idea for *Lady Alhambra*, I knew it wouldn't be complete without supernatural intervention.

In *Lady*, the main character, Nila, becomes possessed by a series of supernatural beings during a self-imposed trance while conjuring her mother's spirit. The possession scene in *Lady* is meant to mimic the sequence, dynamic and intensity of a "real" possession with an artistic license, and respect for Santería. To serve the story, Nila performs a short ritual to establish her dressing room as a sacred space by performing (an edited version of) a prayer in Yoruban language; as would be the case in a real ceremony. Then, she performs an Afro-Cuban inspired dance that puts her in a state of trance; a

practical substitute for ceremonial drumming. Finally, when she is possessed, she takes on three separate physical forms and voices to portray the existence of supernatural beings channeling through her body; as would be the case in a “real” possession. Performing the elements of a possession was an intense experience for me because, in many ways Nila is the child-soul I left in Cuba, incubating inside a mythical realm where I grow up to become a woman very much like my childhood idea of her, if my family had not immigrated to the United States in 1998. Each time I performed *Lady* I enacted my version of a self-imposed possession.

## CHAPTER 2

### EVOLUTION: WRITING AND EDITING

The memories I compiled and presented in Chapter 1 are testament to how much of *Lady Alhambra*, was processing inside me since my childhood. This marked the end of my initial explorative process. Then, figuring out how all of these ideas would come together started the next stage of my process, which is the evolutionary stage I will be discussing in this chapter. During this stage, the script and the staging of *Lady Alhambra* developed organically through a process of writing, creating backstories and acting out characters.

#### WRITING

Writing helped me discover new characters and relationships in *Lady Alhambra*. I developed the Nila-Rachelle binate relationship, and their relationship to the antagonist, Joan, from a couple of writing prompts intended to help develop dialogue. When I started writing the first draft for *Lady*, I struggled greatly because I only had one character, a Cuban vedette with the stage name Lady Alhambra. Then, when I looked back at my class notes, I found two short dialogues I'd written from a couple of prompts I had done in class that inspired having two female characters defiant of their male counterpart.

Once I had the main characters of the play, I began to shape the plot by drawing from the backstories I imagined for each character, but I drew most heavily from one character's backstory most and that was Joan. My reasoning for this is that Joan's

grudgeful feelings towards Nila is what causes Rachelle to further aid her brother in his senseless plan, and what triggers the spirit of Nila's mother to reveal the truth about Nila's true identity I think that once I developed a backstory for the antagonist, it was easier to define his motivation against the protagonist, and based on that motivation, I was able to develop the backstories and relationships of all the characters in the play.

## EDITING

My strongest tool is movement, and when I started editing *Lady Alhambra*, I did it using movement. A lot of the editing took place at the Center for Performance Experiment (CPE), after hours, and conveniently, it would also be the stage for the final performance of my solo show. The things I was looking to edit were basic. I needed to identify differential qualities between the main characters of the play, Nila, Rachelle, Joan, and Mother, shave off some time from my draft and tightened how much singing and dancing I would be doing as vedette persona, Lady Alhambra. This process began about a week before opening night and didn't stop until hours before my first performance.

To identify differences between the characters, I walked around the space as the character, then added sounds in the range where I thought their voice lived, then started speaking the lines from the script. During this exercise, movement informed the language the characters would actually use, which I based on my demeanor while acting out as them, and I kept going back to the script for edits to polish the language to match how the characters moved through space. The most distinct characters were Joan and Mother.

For Joan, I acquired masculine mannerism and a deep vocal range, combined with what I knew about his intentions, this helped me edit his speech to be more sharp and

grotesque, even vulgar. But, when I walked through Joan's opening monologue as the nightclub's MC, I was inclined to keep his language clean, and added a few jokes here and there to show create a contrasting shift when he changes out of being an MC to talk to his sister Rachelle and later Nila, being his truly cynical and abusive self.

Another character whose language separated from the rest and I continued editing well into opening night was Mother. The reason being that her speech was inspired by the Ghost in *Hamlet* and it included a short section in iambic pentameter. At this point in the process I'd already structured the body of Mother's speech similarly to the Ghost in Act 1, scene 4 in *Hamlet*, in prose with a short introduction in iambic pentameter. But I had to shave some time off the play, and I considered this to be a good spot because I was a couple of days away from opening and I was still not memorized. I edited Mother's speech based on how much time it took me to travel a slope in a diagonal going from downstage right (east) to upstage left (west) and back to downstage right, a trajectory I chose because it mimics the earth's rotation around the Sun causing the effect of sunrise and sunset – the connection here is that both Ghost, *Hamlet*, and Mother, *Lady*, appear after sunset and disappear at sunrise. Using *Hamlet* as a source for structure helped frame Mother language, message and movement.

It was getting close to opening and editing and rehearsal were starting to merge as one. What I had left for last in my solo show was all of the singing and dancing. For this, I played the tracks of the songs I had thought about signing during Lady Alhambra's performance. They felt long and I was so close to opening night that I didn't want to spend too much time expanding my performance choreography. For editing purposes, I freestyled some dances to the songs I had chosen to sing and decided to only keep the

areas of the songs where a choreography came easy to me. This not only cut down how much I would be singing, but it also helped me decide what parts to sing from the different songs I wanted to perform.



## CHAPTER 3

### PERFORMANCE: STAGING AND REHEARSAL

My editing, staging and rehearsal process for *Lady Alhambra*, started to merge as I got closer to opening night. A lot of my editing continued well into the rehearsal process as did the staging. For the purpose of this thesis, I am going to make the beginning of my rehearsal process start on the day I performed a sketch version of *Lady* for my professor because the feedback I got from my professor on that day propelled other decisions regarding the staging and final performance of the show.

#### STAGING AND REHEARSAL

When I performed *Lady*, for class, my professor asked me to move a scene between Joan and Rachelle to another place on the stage that would be in full view of the audience. I was intrigued, and after some consideration I took it as a stimulating challenge and was curious to see where it would lead. That night I called the designer that was making my *Lady Alhambra* costume – inspired by the *rumbera*<sup>iii</sup> costumes of the 30's and 40's – and asked him to customize all parts of the outfit to easily slide on and off. Now that the audience would be witnessing my transformation from Joan's MC costume into Nila's *rumbera* costume during a discussion between Joan and Rachelle later joined by Nila, I had an idea of how I was going to do it, and I needed to put it to the test. That night I went back to the CPE with clothing items that would represent different parts of my costumes. I kept my computer set on a table nearby on stage just in case I would need to make more edits, which I did. My goal was to rephrase my lines to match

the amount of time it took for me to undress out of my MC costume and into my rumbera costume. Once the real costume arrived in the mail, I had to do it all over again, but luckily, I only had to make subtle adjustments.

With each rehearsal I grew more confident of my improvisational skills as a dancer. I was nervous about the singing and dancing part of the play where Nila performs as Lady Alhambra because I barely spent any time doing it. However, every time I rehearsed it I was able to choreograph something on the spot. With that, I came to the conclusion that I could better invest my energy on other parts of the play where my memory was still shaky.

Performing the solo show in its entirety was enlightening because I was able to measure how much energy I was going to need in order to execute everything the play demanded. After rehearsing the play from beginning to end around five or six times, I only focused on the sections with the latest edits and the Afro-Cuban dance I had only fully developed a few days before opening with the guidance of a professional dancer and friend. The Afro-Cuban dance is what benefitted most from repetitive rehearsal.

## PERFORMANCE

In my program notes I expressed my intention to approach each performance like an experiment. In retrospect, I believe I achieved that in each performance. I made some notes about how my body changed with each performance, modifying itself a little bit more each night. Every night, before performing, I would stretch and warm up my body, then my voice, but prior to entering the stage, I'd sit alone in contemplation of what was coming. I wanted to condition it into a state of elasticity that would allow the characters

to mold it to serve their purpose. The last two performances were the most fulfilling because I was able to feel flow throughout the performance.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXPANSION: TWO HOUR *LADY*

*Lady Alhambra*, the 15-minutes play, was a huge challenge for me. I would like to invest more time in it and clean up the language as well as the specifics of the story. After that, I'd like to submit it to short play festivals.

I'd like to translate the play to Castilian Spanish and perform it in both, English and Spanish back to back. If I were doing that, then I think I would like to explore the language of Cervantes to replace the English section that is inspired by Shakespeare. I think a lot of the poetry in Shakespeare is lost in translation. It would make sense to me that if I were to translate *Lady*, every translation of the final monologue, would be inspired by the conventions of recognized writers of the language that it's translated to. In my case, Miguel de Cervantes.

If I were to expand *Lady*, to a 90 minute or 2-hour play I would collaborate with a professional playwright to make sure the play can reach a higher potential than if I were writing it alone. This longer version would be performed by an ensemble and not be a one-person show. I'd like to expand *Lady*'s take on the spiritual world. I would like it if during the ritual, due to Nila's lack of experience, she accidentally facilitates the trespassing of one or two other spirits into the physical world. I am not sure what I would like for them to do, but I would like to see a secondary storyline take place through them, and somehow be connected to Nila. Another thing I would like to expand on is on Joan's relationship to Nila and his sister. I am not so sure if Joan is the biological son of his

father, which would make all three main characters half siblings, except for Joan and Nila, who would later find out they are not related at all. There may be room to explore a romantic twist in future drafts.

## CHAPTER 5

### SCRIPT

*Lady Alhambra*, last updated on February 17, 2018.

*Three fourth of the stage is clear, except for a coat hanger with a manikin head attached to the top. A showgirl/rumbera costume is arranged on the coat hanger with a corresponding feather crown on the manikin's head, as a result it looks like a make-believe person. There are two small circular mirrors glued on the space where the eyes would be. All scenes except for the ritual happen on this space.*

*One fourth of the stage, (extreme) stage left center, has a small table downstage, on it are a bell, a bowl (with water), and a candle. There is sofa-chair upstage on the same plane of the table, and on it lays a long yellow skirt (folkloric).*

*Music starts to play, [Recording #1 Plays: A lo Cubano by Orishas] and after a beat the MC enters sprinting from downstage right (anywhere else in the theatre) and attempts to excite audience – he is stalling because the young woman who performs the closing number is running behind.*

MC:

*[direct address]*

And the night is still young! Are you having a good time? I can't hear you. *[Recording #1*

*fades out]* Are you having a good time? *(beat)* THAT'S what I thought! *[turns to face*

*backstage to make a hand signal for the music director to play]* Chino! *[Recording #2*

*Plays: Perez Prado mambo No. 5]* Muchísimas gracias, Damas y Caballeros, for spending your evening here with us at the House of Mambo. Now, I know what you're waiting for: the beautiful, electrifying, versatile Lady Alhambra. But, before we go on with the evening, I've got a little housekeeping to take care of. *[pulls a guest list out of*

*vest pocket and finds a name on the list before calling it out]* ¿Dónde está Rogelio? *[spots*

*someone in the audience]* Rogelio, my man! I know Las Chicas del Mambo are *[hand*

*signs for curvy and hot*] ... I picked them myself, but -- and this is a reminder to all the gentlemen in the house -- you can look, but you cannot touch.

On that note, please enjoy your evening with music from our Maestro Chino Gonzalez! [*Recording plays #3: Holiday Mambo by Machito and his Afro-Cuban*

*Orchestra*]

*MC signals the audience to applaud as he walks with the intention of leave the stage. Still applauding, he goes to the upstage right wing to check if the next performer is ready and becomes enraged when he sees that there's no one there.*

*[Recording #3] continues to play lightly in the background to keep the nightclub atmosphere.*

*From this point on, the scene is taking place backstage, and the space is represented by the placement of the manikin stage right near center. From this point on the actor will be switching between characters. At the same time, the actor will be undressing, hanging the MC clothes on manikin coat-hanger, after taking off all MC clothes, then starts putting on the showgirl/rumbera costume, one item at a time. The idea is that each item a character takes off gets hang on the coat hanger by the other character. Then, when it's time to put on the showgirl/rumbera costume, one character hands it out for the other character to put it on – one item at a time. The last piece of the costume to be worn is the feather hat, which signals a new character.*

MC:

Donde coño está Nila!?! [*blazer off*]

Rachelle:

Lower your voice Joan. The whole club can hear your. [*hang*]

MC:

Ay por favor! Are you hearing them? You'd think it's the opening ceremony for the world cup! El Chino is getting deafer than a rug [*vest buttons + vest*]

Rachelle:

He's nearly 90. Nila is in the dressing room getting ready. [*hangs*]

MC:

I'm gonna need a new music director before the year ends. Mierda. How fucking long did it take to bury that old hag? [*shirt buttons + shirt*]

Rachelle:

I hate it when you get like this. You have no respect for the dead. [*hangs*]

MC:

The dead? Respect for the dead? [*slides pants down*] The living... It's the living I watch for, sis. Those are the fuckers that'll screw you over. [*pants*]

Rachelle:

I couldn't agree more. [*hangs*]

MC:

If I disgust you, get a bucket and throw up. [*open ring velcro*]

Rachelle:

I don't know Joan. Maybe we should tell Nila the truth. It's what daddy wanted. [*wears*]

MC:

He's dead. What a joy! Now he can rejoice his whore in hell. [*open ring velcro*]

Rachelle:

You have a serious case of mamitis. You can't believe everything mother says She's not right in the head. [*wears*]

MC:

I will make sure Nila pays back for everything mother suffered. And you're gonna keep helping me. [*unzip skirt*]



Rachelle:

I've been thinking, and I think we should reconsider. She's our sister, Joan. We were supposed to find her to tell her the truth and split daddy's will, not destroy her. Nila's mother raised us while our mother was off spending daddy's money doing God knows what. She's insane because she couldn't bear seeing dad happy. And if you keep this up, you'll end up just like her. *[wears]*

MC:

*[Slaps her]*

*Actor falls to the floor as Rachelle and lands giving her back to the audience, MC has just slapped her very hard. Deliver MC lines from the ground position avoiding the audience from seeing the actor's mouth.*

MC:

*[on ground as Rachelle, speaking in the voice of MC]*

Don't make me do that again.

*(beat) Actor as Rachelle sits up with her back still to the audience, then swiftly turns her head to stare in the direction MC is standing. (beat) Then swiftly stretches out one arm as if handing to MC to help her stand back up. As soon as actor establishes that Rachelle is standing, the actor can go back to the same rhythm of switching from moments before the slap.*

MC:

*[actor removes pins that hold showgirl/rumbera feather crown on manikin]*

You're gonna do exactly as I say. *(beat)* Just keep playing your role of "girl's best friend", feel free to make all those feelings your motivation. I'll take care of the rest. You just keep your mouth shut, or I'll scoop out your salivary glands and serve them over your tongue for a dish *[rumbera crown and pins]* Am I being clear? *[lipstick out]*

Rachelle:

Crystal. [*applies lipstick while starring the mirrors the manikin has for eyes*]

MC:

Good to hear [*put lipstick away*]

*When actor bends to put away lipstick into the MC pants that are hanging somewhere on the coat-hanger, actor remains in a somewhat bent position so that when the actor stand in a straight position again, can use the change in level to signal the complete transformation from MC into showgirl/rumbera/vedette that performs under the stage name, Lady Alhambra.*

Lady:

I'm sorry I'm so late! What's up with the music?

Rachelle:

El Chino is directing.

Lady:

Oh...

MC:

I'll go warn the musicians. Get ready.

Rachelle:

I hope he trips himself unconscious.

Lady:

[*laughs*]

Then who'll warn the musicians?

Rachelle:

Did you ... ?

Lady:

No. Tico is in some spiritual conference in Miami. *(beat)* I think i can do it myself. I

only got till sunrise and it's not like I don't know how.

Rachelle:

But that's dangerous. I thought only a priest could do it.

Lady:

You're right.

Rachelle:

I went to confession this morning ... let's not make anything of it. But I did bring you some Holy Water. It's on your table. To brighten things up. I'm sorry for your loss.

Lady:

Thank you.

Rachelle:

Nila... *(was going to say something but changed her mind)*

Lady:

Yes...?

Rachelle:

They're ready for you!

*Nila, as her stage persona Lady Alhambra, walks out from the space that was established as backstage, and now walks out to perform for the nightclub's audience, by covering the downstage center area of the stage. Also can go and interact with the audience directly while performing. Music starts playing as soon as Lady Alhambra acknowledges what Rachelle just told her. The music should be edited so that one song immediately starts after the other.*

*[Recording #4 MIX (instrumental versions): "Mambo Inn" by Machito and his Afro-Cuban Orchestra/ "Conga" by Gloria Estefan / "Rie y Lloro" by Celia Cruz]*

Lady Alhambra:

*[sings and dances in the style of a 1920's vedette]*

“I know a place built like a bongo drum  
when you're inside you're sure to have some fun.”

TRACK CHANGE

*[sings and dances in the style of a Miami Sound Machine]*

“It's the rhythm, of the island and like sugarcane, so sweet  
Come on, shake your body baby do the conga I know you can't control yourself any  
longer Feel the rhythm of the music getting stronger Don't you fight it 'till you've tried it  
Do the conga beat.”

TRACK CHANGE

*[sings and dances in the style of a contemporary Latinx, mingles with audience]*

*[improvise lyrics to fill music between these parts of the chorus]*

“Ríe, llora,  
que a cada cual le llega su hora.”

*At some point, actor walks as Lady Alhambra towards the manikin coat hanger, grabs it, and drags it in a cool way downstage center, as she makes her way to a false exit stage left. Just before leaving on the false exit, stop dead center and delivers following lines spoken.*

*[spoken to audience flirtatiously]*

You have to laugh

You have to cry

Because you never know

When's gonna be your time!

*Lights go to black, music fades as Lady Alhambra exist downstage left to make way to the space set for the ritual.*

*The following actions should be carried out as Nila in a contemplative state, but with energy at the same time moves with urgency:*

*Nila enters new space still dragging manikin | sets manikin somewhere in the room where it will be out of the way but remains visible to the audience | removes feather crown and pins it back on manikin's head | removes all parts of the rumbera costume and hangs it on manakin, except for the bra and bottoms | crosses to sofa-chair, where she will sit so she can remove her shoes | before sitting, acknowledges the large folkloric skirt that drapes draped over it {this was her recently deceased mother's favorite chair, and the skirt belonged to her mother in her own youth as a folkloric dance} | Nila sits on sofa and removes shoes | while removing shows, turns to face the (ritual) table and notices the bell, bowl with holy water, and a lit candle | (shoes are off) Nila crosses to the table and kneels facing the table, her body profile to the audience (beat). She performs the actions of the ritual simultaneously with a prayer. In parenthesis is a translation of the Yoruba words for meaning. The actions are indicated with bars. Actor is free to invent their own ritualistic tasks.*

*This marks the beginning of the ritual to establish the entire stage as a sacred space.*

Nilá:

omi tuto, (*fresh water*) [rings bell over the table on a single point/

ona tuto, (*fresh path*) [rings bell over the table in circular motion/

ile tuto, (*fresh soil*) [lowers bell to ring directly over the floor]

owo tuto, (*fresh reason*) [rings bell directly over and around head]

[replace bell on table]

tuto nini, (*fresh hands*) [dip fingers inside bowl and rub hands like washing]

*Raise to standing position and walk towards the sofa-chair, the water bowl in one hand and using the other to dip fingers in it and spray the sofa-chair/skirt while making a rotation around it.*

omi fun egun, (*water for the deceased*) [spray]

omi fun ile, (*water for the soil*) [spray]

omi fun gbogbo, (*water for the sun*) [spray]

*At the end of one rotation, Nila walks back to the table and sets the bowl back on the table. [Recording #5: (mix) Oya by Ibeyi] Music starts playing exactly when the bowl touches the table. Nila makes her way back to the sofa-chair | sits on her knees and stays close to the sofa-chair as if to cuddle like a tired child, while feeling the skirt's fabric with her hand.*

*Nila asks her deceased mother the following question in song.*

Nilá:

[sings][Recording #5 00:23 – 00:47]

How will i know if your fate is ill or well now that your soul soils God's land?  
How will i know right from wrong now that i don't have your glare of correction?

*Actor performs an original choreography that represents the next stage of the ritual, including a form of conjuring and possession. The choreography integrates the folkloric skirt that drapes over the sofa-chair. The path of the choreography cycles in and nearby a diagonal light path marked by the lights downstage right/upstage left. This path represents the line of transition Nila has to cross in order to conjure her mother's spirit. It will remain lit until the end of the possession.*

#### CHOREOGRAPHIES:

[Recording #5 [00:47 - 01:15]

*(Start upstage left) Nila does Supplication choreography*

*The choreography integrates the folkloric yellow skirt, manipulated in different ways (wings, rain, blanket, skirt, wind, etc.), by the end of this choreography the skirt lands downstage right.*

[Recording #5 [01:15 - 02:42]

*(End downstage right) Nila does Commanding choreography*

*This choreography combines movements that visibly indicates moments of disassociation between Nila (the movements in the first part of choreography) and the entities that now assume her spirit's form. By the end of this choreography, Nila should be completely possessed by the spirits of her ancestors.*

*Somber music starts plays [Recording #6: extended African Drumming for Meditation]*

*The entities now in Nila's body take in the senses made now available through Nila's body, while making its way towards the skirt downstage right with the intention of wearing it. Once the skirt is over the body like a skirt, even if still not secured, Nila's body makes its way back to upstage left.*

Ancestors:

*[Nila's body speaks the chorus of her ancestors, while walking upstage left in the style of*

*slow-tempo. She gravitates towards the sofa-chair]*

Dissolve your grief and senseless tendencies,  
They quickly lead to mocked dispiritedness.  
If you entrust your guts to feeble pulse,  
Your flesh will knit with holes of oozing wounds  
That stink of rotting bait, disposed to feed, The wicked pecking vultures.

Burly Spirit:

*(Interrupts, speaks with screechy voice)*

Oh! Easy prey with shattered armor! Let us peek inside...

Ancestors:

A thinning heart commands with clouded reason: Fails to stitch, nurse, and heal the soul.

Burly Spirit:

*[Interrupts]*

This shrine will do! This shrine will do!

*[violent fall on ground]*

*Nila's body elevates in a swift move back up from the ground as Nila's mother. From this point on Nila and her mother dialogue. Nila's mother journeys back on the lit path to downstage right. Her entire monologue should be delivered while moving in the style of slow tempo to downstage right, the last part delivered once she's arrived to downstage right and melts her body to the ground in the style of slow tempo. [Site Specific Note: CPE Cardinal Direction East is stage right, 90 degrees from audience]*

Mother:

It's time. My feet are facing east. The soil of souls awaits/expects me.

Nila:

*[sings like before, acapella]*

How will i know if your fate is ill or well now that your soul soils God's land?

How will i know right from wrong if I don't have your glare of correction?

Mother:

Now my fate is raw; detached from shifting poles that compass your world. Alkaline and immune to fabricated truths. Where i am going you cannot follow, but you can be certain of this: There is a garden that stretches eternally, sown with manifestations meant to humble the living. I will tend to the sprouts consecrated to you, to ensure they ramify.

But parasites gorge on them. I've come to warn you.

I raised a son — I fed that child no evil in my womb; less so in his life. But there are weak souls — unscrupulous beings who wear their spines like bullwhips they uncoil to flog the virtuous dry. And now that he's found you, he plans to sooth his aching boils with rags dipped in a puddle of your pain. Do not trust his sympathies or gifts. They are bait in a mousetrap. The East is flooding with light, absolving the sins of the living. That's what spirits are: a reflection of guilt. That's why the guiltless and remorseful can never be haunted. I have to be quick.

A messenger will reveal herself to you. Believe her and keep her secret. To vindicate your father's will, you must declare war on an empire that has no principles. Seek the truth but never fortune.

*From the melting position, actor takes a beat, before becoming Nila. Light and Sound CUE happen at the same time.*

*Light path disappears, and entire stage is light [Recording #7: "River" by Ibeyi] Nila abruptly awakens from the trance of the possession and looks out to the horizon (audience) trying to make sense of everything. Dim to blackout and allow the music to run for a few more second after the stage is completely black.*

END



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<sup>i</sup> Generally, a vedette is a woman with physical presence, personality and charisma that captivates the public. In addition to singing, dancing and acting, vedettes often included groups of dancers, flashy and revealing costumes, magicians, comedians, jugglers, and even performing animals.

<sup>ii</sup> Santería is the most common name given to a religious tradition of African origin that was developed in Cuba and then spread throughout Latin America and the United States.

<sup>iii</sup> Rumba is an Afro-Cuban musical genre and style of dance. A female dancer of rumba is called a rumbera. Famous vedettes and rumba dancers often performed wearing revealing costumes with bright colors and feathers.