

# One tryout gets a bonanza of roles

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When Claudia Robinson went to a casting call at the Shakespeare Festival at Vizcaya — black and Hispanic actors were being sought for a production of "Julio César," a futuristic version of the play set in a Third World country — she found herself cast in three of the plays.



Robinson

"In 'As You Like It,' I'm Audrey, which is sort of the goatherd," Robinson explained recently, "and in 'The Comedy of Errors,' I'm the courtesan." She paused, giggling wick- edly, "Which is fun."

In "Julio César," she'll play Cinna the poet, as well as the Soothsayer, or the "santera" in this version.

"A sort of Caribbean witch-doctor lady," Robinson points out with her British inflection. "In my country, that's called an 'obeah' woman, and in the Latin Caribbean islands, they're 'santeras.' And not only do I come to warn him [Julio César], but I'm constantly working spells, you know, to protect him."

Although she has lived in Miami "five years and a bit," she said, she hasn't been able to work steadily at her profession.

"I had a film or two, and a television part in between, but there's not much theater for me to do down here. My first couple of years, I did quite a bit, the Coconut Grove Playhouse Touring Company two or three times, doing those shows for children in the summer, and the 'Oedipus Rex,' also at the playhouse. Then came the Paul Newman movie, 'Harry and Son,' and 'Cease Fire' with Don Johnson."

Robinson was a professional ac-

triss in Jamaica, where she says there were more opportunities to do theater than there are in Miami. "I never had a day off unless I screamed and yelled and demanded it," she said. "But I feel that the money is in film, and I wanted to be in the country that's the biggest in the film industry. Maybe it's not in Miami, but this was putting my foot in the water. I wasn't prepared to go straight to New York."

Robinson was trained in Jamaica after she had worked professionally there for two years. She was then sent to a special school for young actors who were already working.

She considers the Shakespeare Festival a big break for her. "I have a great respect for the directors, and I have a feeling that it could lead to other things. Just sharing the work is a good experience," she said.

She was asked whether she has more or fewer opportunities than most actresses. She laughed with great relish at the question. "No. I don't have more, and I don't have less." She bemoans the lack of opportunities in general for actors here. "Oh Lord, in Miami? That's a sad little point there. I feel that the producers and directors don't have enough faith in the local actors yet. And, of course, I'm now one of the local actors."

In the meantime, Robinson works as a fashion designer, "winding it down so that I can put all my energies into the acting career."

She said she would like to remain based in Miami. "Because I understand the speed of Miami. I can deal with the pace here. But I'm going to take the plunge and go to some auditions in New York. Who knows? A Miami company might hire me and bring me back, you know?" Robinson laughs in-

fectiously again. "They really think that the talented people are living outside of Florida, which is not true."

She thinks she got cast in the festival because "there was a need for someone slightly different. The courtesan definitely comes from another country — it doesn't say another race, but another culture, she's exotic. The Soothsayer becomes the 'santera,' surely that could be a Latin person, but it could also be a black person. And Audrey" — she ponders about the playful peasant girl in "As You Like It" — "well . . ."

"Claudia could do just about anything," said Gail Smith Deschamps, artistic director for the festival. "We auditioned 750 actors in New York and, as far as I'm concerned, she's as good as anyone we saw."

The slim, sculptured Robinson is nevertheless grand in scale and highly dramatic. One gets the feeling she was born to run the gamut of legendary queens from Cleopatra to Medea, and a role that she's most eager to play, Lady Macbeth.

"I don't allow my thoughts and my looks to limit my thinking in terms of my career," Robinson said. "I see no reason I shouldn't play Lady Macbeth and the rest of the cast be any color or race. It's called risk. And any way that we can achieve change, I'll accept it."

(Diana Montane writes about Spanish-language entertainment for The Miami News.)

COMEDY OF ERRORS 8 p.m. Friday AS YOU LIKE IT 8 p.m. Saturday JULIO CESAR 8 p.m. Feb. 28, in repertory through April 6, Vizcaya's Casino Gardens, 3251 S. Miami Ave., \$8-\$14.50: 854-1983 and at BASS Outlets