

'Anna' ignites a cache of passions

BY MARGARET GRAY

Nilo Cruz's 2003 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "Anna in the Tropics," is set in 1929 at a cigar factory in Florida, but the Anna of the title is Anna Karenina. Tolstoy's adulteress never appears onstage, but her subversive passions do.

As her story is read aloud to cigars rollers on the job, the sultry air gets hotter. Blouses fall away. It seems inevitable guns will go off.

Open Fist Theatre Company's lovely revival proves Tolstoy isn't the only Russian literary giant presiding over the ruin of this Cuban American family. Like Chekhov, Cruz situates his characters on the brink of cataclysmic change.

Santiago (Steve Wilcox) and his wife, Ofelia (Jill Remez), make hand-rolled cigars. Santiago's half-brother, Cheche (Antonio Jaramillo), hopes to mechanize the factory. He even resists hiring a new lector, who reads to the workers, when the old one dies.

Ofelia overrides him, snagging Juan Julian (Byron Quiros). As soon as he steps off the boat, with his leather-bound volumes of Tolstoy, the women swoon.

Director Jon Lawrence Rivera deftly conveys their ineffable yearnings, creating an atmosphere so delirious the dialogue only occa-



DARRETT SANDERS

CONCHITA (Prescilia Esparolini) is smitten with lector Byron Quiros.

'Anna in the Tropics'

Where: Open Fist Theatre Company at Atwater Village Theatre, 3269 Casitas Ave., Los Angeles

When: 8 p.m. Saturdays, 4 p.m. Sundays, 8 p.m. Mondays, through June 8

Tickets: \$20-\$30

Info: (323) 882-6912, OpenFist.com

Running time: 2 hours, 20 minutes

sionally jars. Conchita (Prescilia Esparolini) expresses a desire to "be like a shell that shouts with the voice of the sea."

In the second half, the characters must face the consequences of their lust and openness to change.