

Tales from the *palomar*: The Manhattan Premiere of Fernando Ferrer's *La intención de las palomas*

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In December 2015, the “real” birdmen of Argentina flew up to Manhattan’s Flamboyant Theater for the premiere of Fernando Ferrer’s *La intención de las palomas*. This heart-rending, enigmatic monologue played out in Fran’s pigeon coop, a cluttered avian menagerie, to which the protagonist has retreated in response to the loneliness, cruelty, and ostracism that he has suffered since he was a child due to an unidentified disability that is simply referred to throughout the play as his “flaw.” The only hints of this defect are

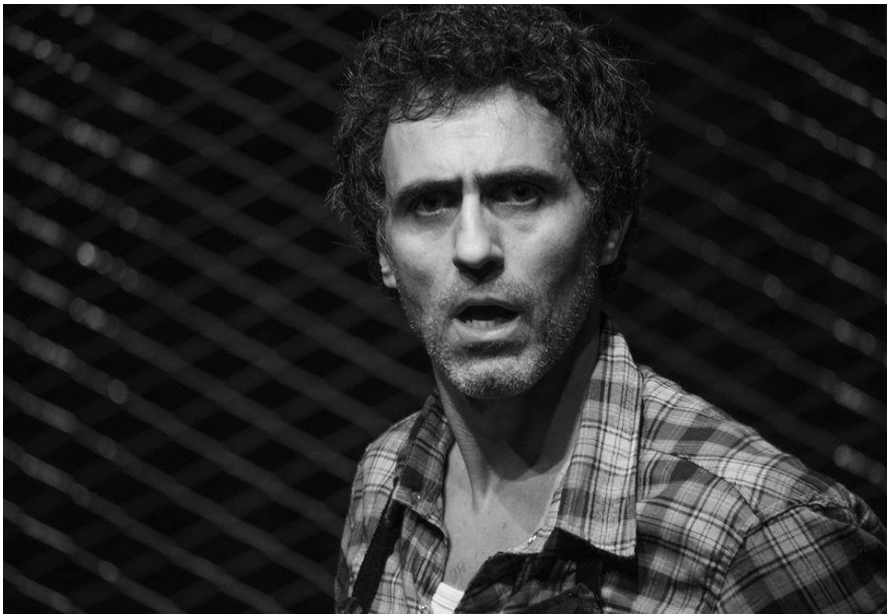


Photo by Daniela Patane



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Fran's constant twitching and quirky behavior, which suggest that he is lost on some spectrum due to a condition that was never effectively addressed by his family. As a result of numerous disappointing and hurtful relationships that are narrated by Fran throughout the play, he withdrew into the solace of his pigeons, his dear feathered friends that have provided him unconditional companionship throughout his life as he gradually slipped into the abyss of loneliness.

The role of Fran was adeptly interpreted by Federico Buso, a seasoned actor who has been performing this monologue with notable success for the past year in Buenos Aires. Buso delivered a captivating, moving performance that gradually drew spectators into Fran's world. We were invited to spend a delightful hour with Fran in his pigeon coop, during which he shared his knowledge of the birds while dramatizing key episodes of his life. It became quickly apparent that Fran had become a sort of pigeon whisperer; not only did he tend lovingly to his birds, but he also communicated with them. Buso aced his performance of this role; the lines of his monologue were peppered with very realistic bird sounds that only a talented actor could execute. The various coos emitted by Buso served at times to complete the ambience of the pigeon coop, yet at other moments it was clear that he was interacting with

his feathered companions in their language. Buso's convincing bird sounds also enhanced the tone of agitation, anger, and upset during the flashback scenes in which he reenacted the arguments of his parents and the culminating emotional trauma that resulted when a vindictive male companion, whose romantic advances were spurned by Fran, turned his dog loose in the coop to maul the protagonist's beloved birds.

Ferrer offers a well-developed, tender story that underscores the painful consequences suffered by those who don't fit the mold of "normal." As director of the play, Ferrer's staging was creative, effective, and excellent overall. The use of stacked crates and bird cages of various sizes created a realistic pigeon coop that served as the set for the entire monologue. Furthermore, the cages offered a constant visual metaphor that highlighted Fran's emotional isolation. Surely one of the most effective elements of the staging was the use of a live dove for several of the key moments. The presence of a beautiful white dove nurtured the spectators' emotional connection to Fran and added an additional layer of realism to the play. Furthermore, the dove's symbolic association with peace, goodness, and purity accentuated the joy that Fran found in his menagerie.

Fernando Ferrer and Federico Buso will surely soar to great heights with *La intención de las palomas*. Evidently, three performances were not enough in Manhattan, as spectators continued to flock to Fran's coop on the night of the final show to hear what he had to say. Even the featured dove, after its release at a city park, returned to the theater and caused a ruckus as it tried to get back in, no doubt in search of Fran and the magic of this play.

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