

EACH DAY DIES WITH SLEEP

Orange Tree, Richmond

MAGIC realism is a literary term that implies, among other things, a heightened, almost surreal actuality. It is ideally suited to fiction and cinema; less so to theatre, if you except Shakespeare's late plays. And watching Jose Rivera's *Each Day Dies With Sleep* — a classic specimen of the genre — I was fitfully intrigued but kept thinking that its natural home was on the movie screen.

Rivera, a Hispanic-American playwright who studied screenwriting under Marquez, certainly throws caution, and even probability, to the winds. Set on America's east and west coasts, the play is built around three characters. Augie is an overweening and prodigiously fertile Puerto Rican patriarch. Nelly is the eleventh of his 21 children and a linguistically limited but prophetic Cinderella-figure. And Johnny is an Adonis-like garage mechanic and would-be model, who whisks her off to LA where she blossoms until her tyrant-father comes to live under their roof.

In an eloquent programme note Rivera assures us the characters all have a basis in fact. And one can rec-

ognise the psychological truth of the father and lover's battle for Nelly's body and soul and of her struggle to survive in a phallogocentric world. The situation is archetypal and the dialogue is often witty.

But Rivera's suspension of natural logic eventually runs away with him. How are we to take the scene where Nelly puts on a bulletproof vest to go and shoot all the jealous husbands who have been tormenting her errant lover? Or the disfiguration of Johnny's own once-beautiful features in a freak fire that leads him to don a Phantom-type mask? Any of these things may be possible; but, theatrically, they seem cumulatively improbable as if one of Tennessee Williams's more lurid works had been done over by Pedro Almodovar.

But, even if my own suspension of disbelief became less willing as the play proceeded, Dominic Hill's production and Nick Sargent's design are impeccable: the socks and oranges suspended from the ceiling precisely convey Nelly's extremes of poverty and wealth. And, as Nelly herself, Rakie Ayola gives a stunning performance filled with passion, sensuality and the joy of self-discovery through language. Vincenzo Nicoli as the father and Jonathan Wrather as the lover, both symbolically crippled or

disfigured, are no less impressive. But, although Rivera's play has bags of magic, it rarely grows organically out of the fertile soil of realism.

□ Until August 5 (0181-940 3633).

Michael Billington

LOOT

Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh

JOE ORTON'S *Loot* is a masterpiece of black humour and savage social satire, superbly executed here by this Lyceum production. Focus, integration and concentration are supplied by Irish director Robert Ballagh's starkly simple but brilliant design. A naturalistic approach bogs the play down: Ballagh liberates it by providing a simple platform, slightly elevated and tilted, adorned only by a coffin and a huge wardrobe at the back with coffin-shaped portals and a platform above, so it can double as an imposing altar, atop which beams the Madonna. And, in a clever, modernist touch, there is a little display of books and tiny religious icons. The screen to hide the nefarious things done to poor Mrs McLeavy's body is a hospital curtain flown down at the snap of Nurse McMahon's fingers. Kenny Glanaan's direction is in-

Billington on Rivera

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