

# Puerto Rican theater group brings drama to park

By **MYRA YELLIN OUTWATER**  
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From March through June, El Teatro Rodante Puertorriqueno performs in a traditional theater on New York's West Side, but come summer, the group takes to the road, piling its costumes, sets and instruments on a flat-bed truck and visiting parks, playgrounds, storefronts and even jails.

On Saturday, this traveling troupe of Spanish-speaking actors, in conjunction with the Teatro Circulo, will stop in Allentown to perform a new musical comedy, "Los Titingos de Juan Bobo," at 5 p.m. in Jordan Park. The performance is free.

The troupe agreed to perform at Jordan Park because of the friendship between its community outreach director, Lissette Montelio, and Isa Pereyra, head of the Dominican Cultural Association of the Lehigh Valley. This will be one of only 23 performances of the play, which will be staged mostly at New York and New Jersey venues.

"The idea of theater in the parks or streets is very old," says Miriam Colon, who founded the group 33 years ago in New York City under a grant from the then-Mayor John Lindsay. It was the city's first publicly sponsored bilingual theater group

and was part of Lindsay's Summer Task Force, an outreach program to the city's minorities.

Colon first saw a traveling street theater as a student in Puerto Rico. "The University of Puerto Rico had a traveling theater," recalls Colon. "When I saw it in operation as a young student, the magic of it, the excitement, it drew the townspeople. I instantly fell in love with the idea. I never dreamed that it would sprout in my mind years later in a city like New York."

For years the company had no home, but rented spaces and traveled from storefront to storefront, park to park. In 1974 Colon noticed an abandoned firehouse on West 47th Street. Today it has been converted into a theater.

"I see this firehouse standing there alone, sad and wasting away. Ideas began to overwhelm me, plans and plays, and I just stood there in front of this firehouse. I was numbed, filled with dreams." It took her seven years to see her dream come true.

The company has survived and flourished through grants from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Cultural Affairs Commission of New York and companies such as Chase Manhattan Bank, Goya Foods and Con Edison.

Saturday's performance is based on a popular Puerto Rican folk hero, Los Titingos de Juan Bobo (The Mischievous Juan Bobo), an honest but not very bright scamp who is always involved in misadventures. The story begins when Juan Bobo accidentally kills his father by scaring him to death in an attempt to cure him of his hiccups. When his mother remarries, the plot thickens as the young Bobo gets into more trouble as his mother's new husband tries to get him out of the picture by marrying him off to his own daughter. Juan Bobo innocently escapes this scheme, as well as two other attempts at arranged marriages, and at the same time manages to involve the entire village in his foolishness.

"This story is such fun and so physical," says Montelio. "There is dancing and music, but so much of the story is based on traditional Puerto Rican stories that it is difficult to translate. But it will be easy to follow and understand even if you don't understand Spanish."

"Los Titingos de Juan Bobo" will be performed at 5 p.m. Saturday at Jordan Park, Sixth Street and Sumner Avenue, Allentown. Admission: free. 610-433-9666.

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