

EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS

A new play by Caridad Svich
Based on the novel by Julia Álvarez
Directed by José Zayas

STUDY GUIDE

by Alberto S. Galindo

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS at Repertorio Español
- II. The Novel that Inspired the Play: In the Time of the Butterflies
- III. The Historical Context of the Novel and the Play: El Trujillato
 - A. The Dominican Republic
 - B. Rafael Leónidas Trujillo
- IV. Synopsis of the Play
- V. Scene by Scene Summary and Discussion Questions
- VI. Further Discussion and Possible Research Topics: The Play
 - A. Historical Narratives within the Play
 - B. The Historical Context
 - C. The Landscape and Setting
 - D. Uses of Written Texts within the Play
- VII. Further Questions and Possible Research Topics: Repertorio's Production
 - A. The Actors in the Play
 - B. Music and Multimedia in the Play
 - C. The Adaptation of the Novel into a Play
- VIII. Profile: Julia Álvarez, the Novelist
- IX. Profile: Caridad Svich, the Playwright
- X. Profile: José Zayas, the Director
- XI. Further Nonfiction Reading about the Dominican Republic
- XII. Scholarly Approaches to IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES by Julia Álvarez
- XIII. Other Literary Texts and Films about Trujillo and the Dominican Republic
- XIV. Further Reading by Julia Álvarez
- XV. Selected Plays by Caridad Svich

EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS

at Repertorio Español
www.repertorio.org

IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES is a new play based on the 1994 homonymous novel by Julia Álvarez. Both texts use fiction to recreate the historical account of four sisters under the regime of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, also known as “El Jefe” [The Boss], through decades of violence in the Dominican Republic. The play premiered in January of 2011 and has been been part of the Repertorio’s rotating productions ever since.

The four Mirabal sisters lead the cast of the play: Dedé (young and old), Minerva, Patria, and María Teresa “Mate;” they are joined by an American woman and a DJ, who also portrays Trujillo, Lio, and Rufino. **EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS** starts in 1938 and its timespan reaches the present historical moment. The play incorporates onstage video projections by Alex Koch as part of the play’s narrative. These projections add a new dimension to the set design on the stage, making the Mirabal home garden bloom digitally.

In this way, the stage becomes alive in order to tell the story of the Mirabal sisters under the Trujillo dictatorship.

Caridad Svich, the writer behind the play, did not seek to adapt the genre of the novel into a different genre, but rather to create a play that would use the novel as its starting point. It is important to keep in mind that Repertorio’s production is a re-imagination of Álvarez’s novel and not an adaptation of her text.



Caridad Svich, Julia Álvarez & José Zayas at Repertorio Español. 2/21/2010
Photo Michael Palma

Repertorio Español has a longstanding tradition of creating theater from novels. Starting with *La cándida Eréndira y su abuela desalmada* in 1991, Repertorio established itself as a theater company that is interested in the intersection between different literary genres. More recently, Repertorio has commissioned theater adaptations from novels such as *La casa de los espíritus* by Isabel Allende, *La fiesta del Chivo* by Mario Vargas Llosa, as well as two novels by Gabriel García Márquez, *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* and *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*.

This study guide discusses Álvarez’s novel and the historical context in which it takes place. The guide also includes a general synopsis of the play as well as a scene-by-scene summary; both sections include discussion and study questions that seek to foster a larger debate about the play, its plot and its cultural significance. Repertorio Español presents this study guide as part of its ongoing mission to present the best of Spanish-language theater in the United States since 1968.



THE NOVEL THAT INSPIRED THE PLAY: IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES

Julia Álvarez published her second novel, **IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES**, in 1994, and a Spanish translation immediately followed under the title **EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS**. The novel is dedicated to three of the four Mirabal sisters—Patricia “Patria” Mercedes, Minerva, and María Teresa—as well as Rufino de la Cruz; they all perished under the Trujillo regime on November 25, 1960.

The novel consists of three main sections of four chapters each, followed by an epilogue and a postscript by the novelist. Each of the four sisters has a chapter in each of the three sections. With the exception of chronological jumps between 1994 and the past in all of Dedé’s chapters, the novel follows a linear order starting in 1938. The novel opens with an interview between a Dominican-American writer and Dedé, as the sole survivor of the Mirabal siblings. Dedé uses the interview to tell the writer about her three sisters, their family life in the town of Salcedo, and the strong anti-Trujillo sentiment that was part of their collective coming-of-age. Eventually Dedé’s sisters get married and the three of them join a revolutionary, underground movement called 14 de junio [June 14th]. The movement’s presence becomes stronger in the Dominican Republic and Trujillo orders the incarceration of the men married to Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa. On November 25, 1960, the sisters were returning from a visit to their respective husbands in jail; emissaries of Trujillo’s regime intercepted the sisters, raped them and killed them, along with their driver, Rufino.

This is the story that Dedé narrates to the writer. She explains that the murder of her sisters and the driver was presented as a mere accident and not an act ordered by Trujillo.

In the postscript, Álvarez describes the journey of her own family. They arrived from the Dominican Republic in New York in 1960 after fleeing the Trujillo regime. Álvarez explains in a few paragraphs that the novel is an exercise in creative writing and not a historical document.

IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES is inspired by historical events, but does not seek to document the historical facts of the Mirabal sisters. It is under this inspiration that Repertorio Español commissioned the adapted play from the playwright Caridad Svich.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL AND THE PLAY: EL TRUJILLATO

A The Dominican Republic

The novel and the play span the thirty-one years of Trujillo's dictatorship, also known as El Trujillato or the era of Trujillo. The following are essential moments to the history recreated in both texts.



The American Occupation

1916–1924 The United States occupied the Dominican Republic and established a new, military government.

1924 Horacio Vásquez, supported by the United States, is elected President.



General Trujillo

1928 Trujillo is named Chief of Staff of the Dominican Army.

1930 Insurrection and coup d'état against President Vásquez. Trujillo runs for the Dominican Presidency; the opposing candidate resigns from the race and Trujillo is elected unopposed. El Trujillato begins.

1934 Trujillo runs unopposed for a second term and is reelected.

1937 Massacre of thousands of Haitians at the hands of Trujillo's regime.



The Massacre

1938 Jacinto Bienvenido Peynado is named new president of the country, under Trujillo's rule.

1940 Peynado's death leads to the presidency of Manuel de Jesús Troncoso, another puppet president until the 1942 election.

1942 Trujillo is reelected as President.

1947 Under international pressure, Trujillo allows for a democratic presidential election. Trujillo ran against two other candidates and won the election.

1952 Trujillo's brother, Héctor Bienvenido, is named President of the country, on paper only.

1957 Presidential elections are held; Trujillo asks his brother to resign. Vice-President Joaquín Balaguer is named President in order to maintain the illusion of a democracy at the international level.

1959 The Cuban revolution begins. Fidel Castro assumes power.

June 14th, 1959 A rebellion against the Trujillo regime is defeated.

1960 John F. Kennedy is elected President of the United States.

1961 Assassination of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, "El Jefe."



President Joaquín Balaguer

B Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (1891-1961)

After plotting the rebellion that overthrew Horacio Vásquez, President of the Dominican Republic, Trujillo became the only candidate and winner of the 1930 presidential election. The motto “Dios y Trujillo” [God and Trujillo] showed the position that the newly elected president assigned himself. His first term as President of the Dominican Republic concluded in 1934, when he ran unopposed for a second term until 1938. His first years in power were marked by a strong sentiment against Haiti, which concluded in a massacre of thousands of Haitians near the Haiti-Dominican border, known historically as la Masacre del Perejil [the Parsley Massacre] or El corte [the cutting].

In 1938, Vice President Jacinto Peynado was installed as new president of the country, but only in paper. Trujillo remained as sovereign of the country. Peynado’s death in 1940 led to the presidency of Manuel de Jesús Troncoso, who also served as puppet President of the Dominican Republic until the elections of 1942. At that time, Trujillo ran unopposed again, recuperating the official presidential title until 1947. This year marked his reelection and a fourth term as President. Beginning in 1952, Trujillo is no longer the official president, naming his brother, Héctor Bienvenido, and Joaquín Balaguer, as Presidents of the country while still maintaining sole power.

Some scholars consider **IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES** as a feminist text, where the female characters are challenging the patriarchal society established and maintained by Trujillo.

The murder of the Mirabal sisters, on November 25, 1960, precedes the assassination of Trujillo by a few months. He was ambushed, shot, and killed on May 30, 1961.



General Trujillo

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Patria, Minerva and María Teresa Mirabal

EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS, as a play, closely follows the plot of the Álvarez's novel. The audience meets the four Mirabal sisters from the very beginning. Their individual stories and points of view are introduced while simultaneously being interwoven with a second line in the plot. In this second narrative line, an older Dedé narrates the stories of her sisters to an unnamed Dominican-American writer, who is writing a novel about the significance of the sisters in Dominican history.

The interaction between Dedé's present life and her past with her sisters constantly changes throughout the play, suggesting that a story is not necessarily remembered in a linear, cohesive way, but rather in smaller snippets that we then piece together. This structure is clearly inspired by the non-linear chronology of the novel.

As the story moves forward, the audience meets Trujillo, the dictator of the Dominican Republic. The sisters become part of a revolutionary movement looking to overthrow Trujillo and his excessive power. They start calling each other mariposas [butterflies] and their rebellion is eventually stifled by the regime. María Teresa and Minerva are imprisoned and eventually released, while their husbands are kept in jail. One day, while returning from the prison, María Teresa and Minerva as well as Patria and their driver Rufino, are attacked by members of the regime's secret service. The four of them are murdered, and it is left to Dedé to organize and tell their story.

Consider the following ten discussion questions after attending a performance of *En el tiempo de las mariposas* at Repertorio Español. A detailed scene-by-scene synopsis follows this section along with additional study questions.

1. Consider that the words for history and story are the same in Spanish—*historia*. What does the use of the word *historia*, in its double meaning, entail for the rest of the play?
2. What are the effects of having the DJ introduce the story of the Mirabal sisters?
3. From this first scene, how are the four sisters presented? Describe them based on the first impression from this scene.
4. What does it mean when Minerva states that Trujillo is like a god in the Dominican Republic?
5. Why does Dedé object to the official statement about her sisters, which states they "suffered an accident"?
6. Why does the American woman insist on separating her fictional stories from Dedé's historical accounts of her sisters' death?
7. Both the DJ and the American woman mention mariposas [butterflies]. What significance does the butterfly have for the story and plight of the Mirabal sisters?
8. Why does Dedé resist being part of the revolutionary movement?
9. What happens to the three sisters? What happens to Rufino?
10. What is the meaning of the final butterfly onstage?

SCENE-BY-SCENE SUMMARY AND ADDITIONAL STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a detailed summary of the play. Consider the following additional questions to further your understanding of *EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS*.



Scene 1 The play opens with a DJ and the reggaetón he is playing. He introduces the story that is about to take place, with the hopes that a new audience will learn the history of the Mirabal sisters in the Dominican Republic. The four sisters enter a garden onstage following his introduction. Minerva catches a butterfly. Trujillo's name is mentioned for the first time.

11. How do the sisters describe Trujillo?

12. The scene closes with a media projection of butterflies on the screen. What are the effects of incorporating this projection into the play?

Scene 2 The play jumps forward in time, from the 1940s to the present. An older Dedé talks to another woman about the Dominican Republic and the United States.

13. The name of the character besides Dedé in this scene is the American woman yet she claims to be Dominican. What is at stake in this scene by using these two ethnic categories?

Scene 3 The play goes back to 1938 and shows Minerva writing in her diary. She speaks the contents of her diary out loud.

14. Minerva mentions that she would like to be a lawyer in the future in order to obtain justice. Within the play, what is the relationship between law and justice?

Scene 4 The play returns to a conversation between Dedé and the American woman in the present. They talk about writing and history.

Scene 5 Now is María Teresa's turn at her diary, in 1945.

15. What do Minerva and María Teresa do with their respective diaries?

Scene 6 Patria's diary entry from 1946. Patria discusses her interest in becoming a nun as well as her interest and life with Pedrito González.

16. Vocabulary note: guayabera. What is a guayabera? What is its importance in this scene?

Scene 7 1948. The DJ talks about Trujillo and Ciudad Trujillo.



Scene 8 The Mirabal sisters are sitting in the garden; it is 1948 and they talk about Dedé and Minerva's respective love interests. Lio, short for Virglio, gives Dedé a letter for Minerva.

17. Why do the sisters discuss exile as one of the options for anyone opposed to Trujillo's government?

18. Who is Zsa Zsa Gabor? Who is Radhamés Trujillo? What is the importance behind their relationship?

Scene 9 Time moves forward again to the present, where Dedé and the American woman talk about Dedé's past.

19. Why does Dedé insist in telling her side of the story?



Scene 10 It is 1949; Trujillo has invited the sisters and their father to one of his parties. Minerva and her sisters discuss the possible reasons behind Trujillo's invitation. It is also revealed that Minerva wants to attend college, but she is not allowed to enroll.

20. What are the different explanations that the sisters provide to justify Trujillo's invitation?



Scene 11 1949. Minerva, Patria, and Dedé attend Trujillo's party. Trujillo asks Minerva to dance a bolero.

21. How is Trujillo represented in the play?

Scene 12 1940. Dedé, Patria, and Minerva discuss Minerva's actions at the party and their possible repercussions.

22. Where is Minerva's purse? Why is the purse so important in this scene?



Scene 13 The play skips forward to Dedé and the American woman in the present.

23. What happens to the Mirabal patriarch after the party?

Scene 14 Minerva meets Trujillo three weeks after the party, in 1949. They negotiate an outcome for her father.

24. How does Minerva negotiate with Trujillo?

Scene 15 The American woman and Dedé talk through time.

25. Who wins the negotiation?

WATCH VIDEO ▶ youtu.be/r9oNekh-mnE

Scene 16. Time oscillates between Dedé's narration in the present and 1957. Minerva has graduated from law school, but she is not allowed to practice law.

26. To Minerva, her law degree and practicing license have a larger, symbolic meaning. What does this meaning entail?



Scene 17 The DJ and the American woman tell separate stories over a merengue.

WATCH VIDEO ▶ youtu.be/EhD95xyKuBs

Scene 18 Back in 1957, María Teresa receives a box full of weapons. María Teresa insists in being part of the growing movement against Trujillo.

27. Why does María Teresa want to participate in the movement? What is her justification?

Scene 19 It is 1959 and the revolutionary movement in the Dominican Republic has begun. María Teresa mentions the ongoing changes in Cuba.

28. Why does María Teresa compare the Dominican Republic to Cuba?

29. Why does Patria use Raúl as the name for her newborn?



Scene 20 Time moves between 1960 and the present. The sisters want to have a meeting for their movement in Patria's house, but she is unwilling to do so. Eventually, they convince Patria, but the meeting has unfortunate results for all the sisters involved.

30. A week after the meeting at Patria's house, what happens to María Teresa and Minerva?



Scene 21 María Teresa and Minerva are in prison during 1960. Minerva prays; María Teresa draws in her diary.

Scene 22 The present and the past meet again. Old Dedé tells the American woman the story behind Minerva and Dedé's release from prison.

31. Why are the sisters released? What are the conditions of their newfound freedom?



Scene 23 1960. The sisters talk about their husbands as well as Minerva's poor health.

32. Minerva utters the phrase, "history will absolve us," which is taken from a speech by Fidel Castro in 1953. Find the phrase and Castro's speech. Why does Minerva invoke it in this scene?

Scene 24 Old Dedé and the American woman look back at November 25, 1960. María Teresa, Minerva, and Patria are on their way to visit their husbands at the Puerto Plata prison.

Scene 25 Later on the same day, the three sisters are ordered to step out of the vehicle.



Scene 26 Dedé and the American woman talk again in the present. They discuss their respective roles in the current historical narrative of the sisters and the Dominican Republic.

33. What does Dedé and the American woman conclude, once they have shared their stories?





FURTHER DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS: THE PLAY

A HISTORICAL NARRATIVES WITHIN THE PLAY

34. Consider the title of the novel and the play. In the Time of the Butterflies. Now that you have seen the play, what is implied by the use of the word time in the title?

35. There is a time shift between the first and second scene, from the 1940s to the current historical moment. Throughout the rest of the play, the chronology of events will continue to be altered. How are these changes in time signaled in the play?

B THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel is marked by the omnipresence of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, President of the Dominican Republic (1930-1938; 1942-1952) as well as the country's military dictator until 1961.

36. What is Ciudad Trujillo? Investigate this name change and its importance in the Dominican Republic.

37. How are the Mirabal sisters remembered today in the Dominican Republic?

C THE LANDSCAPE AND SETTING

38. The garden of the Mirabal household is at the center of many scenes. How is the garden set up in the play?

39. What are some of the transformations of the garden throughout the play?

D USES OF WRITTEN TEXTS WITHIN THE PLAY

IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES presents the audience with several writers and their texts. The diaries of Minerva and María Teresa introduce vital information throughout the play and the importance of writing is highlighted by the American woman, a writer interested in pinning down the story of the Mirabal sisters.

40. What are the effects of reading diary entries out loud?

41. Why is Dedé supportive of the book that the American woman would like to write?



FURTHER QUESTIONS AND POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS: REPERTORIO'S PRODUCTION

A THE ACTORS IN THE PLAY

- 42. How many characters does the sole male actor play? What are the effects of this decision?
- 43. As an anachronistic character, what are the responsibilities of the DJ onstage?

B MUSIC AND MULTIMEDIA IN THE PLAY

- 44. Think of the uses of different styles of music throughout the play. Why does the play rely on music?
- 45. Complete some research on the following Latin American musical genres used in the play: reggaetón (scene 1); bolero (scene 11); merengue (scene 17).

C THE ADAPTATION OF THE NOVEL INTO A PLAY

After reading Julia Álvarez's novel, *IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES*, consider the following questions.

- 46. How is time organized in the novel? What are the results of that type of chronology?
- 47. What notions of history-telling and storytelling does the novel present?



JULIA ÁLVAREZ, THE NOVELIST



The novelist behind *In the Time of the Butterflies* was born in New York. Her parents decided to move their family to the Dominican Republic when Álvarez was three months old due to her father's political actions against the Trujillo regime. They returned to New York in 1960. Álvarez later obtained a B.A. from Middlebury College and a M.F.A. from Syracuse University. She is writer in residence at Middlebury College.

Consult Section XIV of this guide for further reading by Julia Álvarez.

www.juliaalvarez.com



CARIDAD SVICH, THE PLAYWRIGHT



Caridad Svich, the playwright who penned *En el tiempo de las mariposas*, is also a translator, lyricist, and editor. She is an alumna of New Dramatists and also holds an M.F.A. from the University of California, San Diego. Her plays have been presented across the United States and internationally; she has also translated plays by Federico García Lorca, Lope de Vega, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca. She is a founder of NoPassport Theater Alliance and Press.

Consult Section XV of this guide for additional works by Caridad Svich.

www.caridadsvich.com



JOSÉ ZAYAS, THE DIRECTOR



José Zayas is a Puerto Rican theater director with degrees from Harvard and Carnegie Mellon Universities. This is his fifth production with Repertorio Español. His previous three productions for Repertorio include *Letters to a Mother*, *Madre, el drama padre*, and *Nowhere on the Border*, which received numerous ACE & HOLA Awards. His fourth production for Repertorio, *La casa de los espíritus*, is another collaboration with Caridad Svich, like **EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS**. Zayas is co-Founder and Artistic Director of The Immediate Theater Company. He held a residency at the Ensemble Studio Theater and was selected as one of *nytheater.com*'s 2007 People of the Year.



FURTHER NONFICTION READING ABOUT THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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SCHOLARLY APPROACHES TO IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES BY JULIA ÁLVAREZ

Gómez Vega, Ibis. "Radicalizing Good Catholic Girls: Shattering the "Old World" Order in Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*." *Confluencia*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 94-108.

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Ink, Lynn Chun. "Remaking Identity, Unmaking Nation: Historical Recovery and the Reconstruction of Community in *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Farming of Bones*." *Callaloo*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer, 2004), pp. 788-807.

Larsen, Neil. "¿Cómo narrar el trujillato?" *Revista Iberoamericana* 142 (1988): pp. 89-98.

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Rich, Charlotte. "Talking Back to El Jefe: Genre, Polyphony, and Dialogic Resistance in Julia Álvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*." *MELUS*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Winter, 2002), pp. 165-182.

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OTHER LITERARY TEXTS AND FILMS ABOUT TRUJILLO AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Díaz, Junot, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 2007

Dir. Mariano Barroso, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, 2001

Dir. Luis Llosa, *La fiesta del Chivo*, 2006

Dir. Juan Delancer, *Trópico de sangre*, 2010

Vargas Llosa, Mario, *The Feast of the Goat*, 2001, *La fiesta del Chivo*, 2000



FURTHER READING BY JULIA ÁLVAREZ

SPANISH AND ENGLISH TITLES, WWW.JULIAÁLVAREZ.COM

NOVELS

How the García Girls Lost Their Accent (1991)

In the Name of Salomé (2000)

In the Time of the Butterflies (1994)

Return to Sender (2009)

Saving the World (2006)

¡Yo! (1997)

NONFICTION

Había una vez una quinceañera: De niña a mujer en EE.UU.

Once Upon a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the USA (2007)

Something to Declare (1998)

A Wedding in Haiti: The Story of a Friendship (2012)

POETRY

Homecoming (1996)

The Other Side / El otro lado (1995)

The Woman I Kept to Myself (2004)

How the García Girls Lost Their Accent (1991)

YOUNG READERS

Before We Were Free (2002)

The Best Gift of All: The Legend of La Vieja Belen (2008)

A Cafecito Story / El cuento del cafecito (2001)

Finding Miracles (2004)

A Gift of Gracias: The Legend of Altagracia (2005)

How Tía Lola Came to Stay (2001)

How Tía Lola Ended Up Starting Over (2011)

How Tía Lola Learned to Teach (2010)

How Tía Lola Saved the Summer (2011)

The Secret Footprints (2000)

Tía Lola Keeps Going (2011)

Tía Lola's B&B (2011)



SELECTED PLAYS BY CARIDAD SVICH

WWW.CARIDADSVICH.COM

Alchemy of Desire/Dead-Man's Blues
Any Place But Here
The Booth Variations
Brazo Gitano
Fugitive Pieces
Iphigenia Crash Land Falls on the Neon Shell That Was
Once Her Heart (a rave fable)
The Labyrinth of Desire
Lucinda Caval
Luna Park
Magnificent Waste
Murieta, Tales of El Dorado
Prodigal Kiss
Thrush
The Tropic of X
Twelve Ophelias

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ORIGINAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

EN EL TIEMPO DE LAS MARIPOSAS

A new play by Caridad Svich based on
Julia Álvarez's novel

Original Songs & Lyrics & English Translation
Caridad Svich

Additional Translation
Marco Antonio Rodríguez & Yolanny Rodríguez

Digital 'Butterflies' Animation
Lucia J. Lee

Video Design
Alex Koch

Original Music & Soundscape
Jane Shaw

Set, Costumes & Lighting Design
Robert Weber Federico

Production Manager & Assistant to the Director
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Director
José Zayas

ORIGINAL CAST

Teresa Pérez Frangie Older Dedé

Zulema Clares Younger Dedé

Dalia Davi Minerva

Rosie Berrido Patria

María Helán María Teresa

Flor De Liz Pérez American Woman

Fermín Suárez DJ, Virgilio Morales,
General Trujillo & Rufino De La Cruz



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