

XI Encuentro Estatal de Teatro Nuevo León 2001

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During the first ten days of June 2001, Mexico's state of Nuevo León held its annual theatre Encuentro. Fifteen plays were performed during the celebration, each of which had originally been performed in the state between May 2000 and May 2001. Groups performed their plays hoping to be chosen to be staged in the Festival de Teatro Nuevo León 2001, which took place in August and included the performances of 27 of the prior year's best plays from many parts of Mexico. The Encuentro, sponsored by the Consejo para la Cultura de Nuevo León and organized by Roberto Villarreal Sepúlveda, also included three presentations about theatre in Mexico, and Jaime Chabaud read his most recent play, *Unipersonal de Divino Pastor Góngora*. Performances occurred in seven different theatres, of which all but two were in close proximity to Monterrey's spectacular downtown Macroplaza.

Five plays were chosen to represent Nuevo León at the Festival: *Prometeo y el fuego*, a play with a cast of 12 directed by Gerardo Dávila, was based primarily on texts by Aeschylus and Goethe, with supporting texts from André Gide, José Ramón Enríquez, Karel Kapek, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Gerardo Nevárez; *Sexo para todos*, a monologue performed by Morena González, was written by Franca Rame, Jacopo Fo and Darío Fo, and was adapted and directed by Fernando de Ita; *Alice & Lewis/los primeros 102 años sin Lewis Carroll*, a play with a cast of 11 based on Alice's adventures, directed by Jorge Lobo; *La historia de la oca*, by Michel-Marc Bouchard, was directed by Sergio García and performed by a cast of two; *Jugando con Shakespeare*, a condensation and adaptation of Shakespeare plays by Jess Williams, Adam Long, and Daniel Singer, was directed by Marcelo González, and its 34 characters were performed by a cast of four.

Even a cursory glance at the list of plays selected for the festival reveals that the texts were not homegrown. In fact, nine of the Encuentro's plays were written outside of Mexico, and one of the six remaining plays was penned by Coral Aguirre, a playwright/director from Argentina who moved to Monterrey some years ago and is on the faculty of the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. Her play, *Sistema de ausencias*, focused on the lives and memories of a group of eight women in a small town. As the title implies, the stories they told and relived in the play were dominated by absences. Their lovers and husbands sauntered in and out of their lives and the women were left to wonder if and when their men would ever return. Several aspects of the play were lovely. It featured beautiful choreography, reflecting the way the characters' lives wove emotionally to each other. Evocative imagery showed the complex symbolism of water in a dry, hot climate – in one scene it provided refreshment and sustenance of life, in another it represented spirituality and ties to church through baptism, and as the women washed their clothes it became associated with the drudgery of poor women's lives. Lights very effectively set tones for the different moods represented in the play. Also the language was often poetic, filled with imagery from feminine discourse. The production suffered from a lack of delineation between characters, some weak singing, and a poorly equipped venue (a cultural center miles from downtown Monterrey). Although this was not a glitzy, high budget production, *Sistema de ausencias* was a moving look into the lives and souls of rural women and the challenges they face.

G/X (Una ópera alternativa) provided a marked contrast to the rural, traditional feel of *Sistema*. Directed by Vicente Galindo, it was billed as "Obra no lineal presentada en 10 módulos sobre textos de Oscar Liera, José Eugenio Sánchez y Mónica Borrego, adaptados por los mismos integrantes del grupo." The title abbreviates "Generación X," and the play showed that many aspects of the United States' Generation X exist in Mexico as well. The play consisted largely of a series of monologues delivered by two male and two female actors who represented young, affluent characters from urban environments fashionably dressed in leather, plastic, and sunglasses, surrounded by computers, personal stereos and cell phones, and heavily influenced by loud hiphop music from north of the border. They lived on fast food, walked and preened very chicly, shopped at will, and spouted modernity in their expression. Yet the outer shell could not completely hide serious inner problems. Their troubles included drug and alcohol abuse, lack of morals and values, lack of connections to family and society, lack of role models beyond

Bart Simpson and Marilyn Manson, lack of ability to truly communicate in significant ways, self-centeredness leading to ruptures in relationships, concerns about Aids, alienation, and a general lack of purpose to life. Performed in the black box Sala Experimental del Teatro de la Ciudad, the theatre lent itself to attractive choreography as characters took advantage of entrances at the corners of the stage, often criss-crossing and spelling out the symbol of their generation. In one of the striking final scenes, characters mirrored each other on separate sides of the stage, but the monologue only came from one side of the stage at a time, thus symbolizing the cookie-cutter and iterative aspect to the generation. The language was fascinating, which included terms like “estoy todo freakiado” and “mi ex,” and showing people very comfortable in the lingo of technology and contact with the United States. Yet they were also bitter and despondent. Three television sets intermittently showed footage of people speaking about Generation X, which could have added depth to the overall concept, but poor sound quality marred this aspect of the play. *G/X* and *Sistema de ausencias* both succeeded in featuring characters steeped in alienation, suffering and a fair amount of self destruction, even though the settings differed vastly. They offered compassionate insights into two of Mexico’s groups at risk.

Although quality varied from play to play, the Encuentro included a number of superb performances delivered to enthusiastic and good-sized audiences. One commonly hears the claim in Mexico City that all of Mexico’s theatre takes place exclusively in the capital. This Encuentro debunked that adage, and the August Festival further disproved the idea, featuring six outstanding plays from Mexico City, as well as representatives of the best from Baja California, Coahuila, Colima, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Puebla, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, not to mention the winners of Nuevo León’s Encuentro. Judging by the line up of plays for the last three years, I believe Nuevo León’s Festival is consistently one of Mexico’s finest, and one that has few rivals.

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