

Mexico's Second City: The 1971-72 Season

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Guadalajara is Mexico's second largest city, with a deep civic pride in its colonial beauty, fountains, music, women and culture. It has a good symphony orchestra, countless *mariachi* groups, art galleries and showings galore, three good theatre houses, and it is a regular stop for touring concerts and plays.

Home grown theatre, however, is in short supply. In the recent past there were at one time as many as thirty theatre groups with a range in quality that such a large number implies. Now there are closer to a half dozen, still quite uneven in quality, and with no one group which the *tapatíos* identify as "our theatre."

The State of Jalisco through its Departamento de Bellas Artes offers sporadic production support to struggling groups, but seems more interested in supporting shows that will tour the small cities of the state. As a result of this policy, there are few lavish productions, since the economy of the touring set and cast becomes an important consideration.

There are three active theatre plants in Guadalajara. The Teatro Degollado with its perpetually lighted façade resembles the Temple of Venus on the Parthenon. It is a well disguised 19th-century Italian opera house, similar on the inside to those in almost every large Latin American city. The 110-year-old Degollado seats approximately 1500 in a *luneta*, three *palcos* and a *galería*. A huge "mural" depicting a scene from the Divine Comedy adorns the rotunda. Gilt is generous on the proscenium arch and the pillared *palcos*. The *luneta* seats are less luxurious but comfortable; however, the *palcos* and *galería* contain mostly folding chairs. Admission prices are low, from 100 to 6 pesos (U.S. 8.00 to .48) for an opening Función de Gala (always well attended) and from 20 to 4 pesos for Funciones Normales (usually poorly attended). The theatre is owned by the State of Jalisco and can be booked by any group for a very low rent.

Two modern theatres face each other by the huge Parque Aqua Azul: the approximately 750-seat Teatro Guadalajara and the 500-seat Teatro Experimental de Jalisco. Teatro Guadalajara is owned by the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro

Social; it is rented to anyone for little more than the salaries of the theatre staff. When no plays or concerts are scheduled, it doubles for a movie house. The Teatro Experimental, like the Guadalajara, is a proscenium theatre with a revolving stage. It too is made available to anyone by the State of Jalisco for very modest rentals. The Experimental seems to be in constant use, and again, admission prices are quite low. The activities of these houses are supplemented by the theatre group of the University of Guadalajara. In addition to travelling to the surrounding towns and villages, this group occasionally plays on the street corners of the *barrios* or in any loft or lecture hall available.

The 1971-72 season began with some promise in September with a touring production from Mexico of *Zaratustra* adapted from Nietzsche by, and directed by, Alexandro Jodorowsky, a talented immigrant from Chile. It was advertised as "adults only," for this was Guadalajara's virgin experience with "nude theatre" (translate: G-strings and jock straps). *Zaratustra* temporarily convinces everyone to live with truth, openness and reality; ergo the ultimate frankness: everyone takes off his clothes. The somewhat apprehensive promoters closed the balcony, ostensibly avoiding "the rowdy element" which might fill the cheaper seats. The show was heavily directed to constant (and sometimes arbitrary) tension and choreography, which effectively theatricalized the heavy philosophizing and potentially static speechifying. But the acting was excellent, the music fit the word and the deed, and indeed it was the season's highpoint.

Unión Nacional de Autores brought Felipe Santander's *Luna de miel para . . . diez* from Mexico and somewhat dishonestly attempted to capitalize on *Zaratustra's* success by including in their advertising a photograph of the cast of nine crowded together in a bed, all nude except for a single strategically placed sheet. In reality, the play was a slick sex comedy with more double entendre, innuendo and risqué dialogue than flesh, although the minis achieved new heights.

In October the Goethe Institute brought Albrecht Roser to a packed Teatro Experimental, where he delighted a house of mostly adults with a puppet and marionette show. It was a series of thirteen deeply perceptive and skillful vignettes, each exploring one human characteristic or one touching moment. There was no dialogue—only a puppet pantomime to music. Roser made himself invisible and his puppets and marionettes human, particularly in his treatment of the poor, chaplinesque, little man. Truly professional.

Two nights later the inmates of the state penitentiary performed Alejandro Casona's *Farsa y justicia del Corregidor* on a double bill with Brecht's *La excepción y la regla*. It may have been good therapy for the prisoners, but unfortunately, it was the tiny audience which was penalized.

Halloween is making significant inroads on Day of the Dead in Guadalajara. Thus, the annual ritual of José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* becomes even more appropriate to the holiday. Presented each year at this time by the Rotary Club and Los Chicos de la Prensa, Act IV contains a surfeit of ghosts, goblins, apotheoses and special effects which tax the barely adequate lighting facilities of the Teatro Degollado. The advertisements for the show emphasized *lujoso vestuario*, and except for Francisco Ramírez in the title role, the costumes were indeed the best thing to look at. The play was poorly attended, but since it is an annual affair, it can be generously supposed that most have seen it.

In November, Teatro del Seguro Social brought a Mexican company headed by comedian Emilio Brillas in two "bedroom farces of manners": *Señorito Casadero* by Juan José Alonso Millán and *El señor es una dama* by Felicien Morceau, both adapted by Jorge Landeta, a member of the company. Both were enjoyable romps through the standard farce format, although *Dama* tended to run away with gimmicks, such as an action-confusion scene "movied" by a lobster scope and accompanied by the Lone Ranger theme played at fast r.p.m.s.

November also brought a road show from Mexico with a competent production of Gazzo's *Un sombrero lleno de lluvia*. The play was updated a bit, at least to the degree that the drug addiction occurred in Vietnam. Public discussion after the performance was advertised, and since the drug problem in Mexico is rather new and most Mexicans have strong opinions on the Vietnam debacle, there was some spirited debate.

In January, a young group of university students performed Sergio Magaña's *Los signos del zodiaco* in a loft over a coffee shop which was occasionally used for declamations. Perhaps due to the cramped seating and uncomfortable chairs this popular play seemed long, but it was nevertheless impressive. Some uneven performances were more noticeable due to the intimacy of the theatre.

Dario Niccodemi's *La enemiga*, billed as a *comedia* but dealing with heavy passion and incest, played a four-day tour in the Teatro Degollado. Amparo Rivelles and Enrique Alvarez Félix in the leading roles drew large audiences. The production was smooth and professional, but the declamatory acting style and the melodrama bordering on soap opera left this northern eye undampened.

Hermán o la vuelta del cruzado by the nineteenth century *tapatío*, Fernando Calderón, was brought from Mexico by Teatro Espacio 15 de la UNAM, which is the official theatre group of the University of Mexico. It was directed in extremely high style (especially since the Mexican audience is still hooked on realism) by Hector Azar, director of the University's Department of Theatre. The characters were all costumed in white, with gestures and poses extremely formalized. The color convention enabled the characters and the action to move easily from the Middle Ages in the first act through the Renaissance in the second act to 1972 in the third act. The costumes, of course, became mod in the final act. The introduction of any color piece, veil, kerchief, etc. thus became an easily recognizable symbol convention. Adalberto Parra, in the role of Hermán, was easily the most accomplished actor seen this season. His performance ran the gamut from simple, quiet truth through declamation to high style. The highlight of Parra's performance was his portrayal of young Hermán disguising himself as an old man, moving his character back and forth from old to young with fine control.

English theatre is rare in Guadalajara. One group, the TapaTeatro, spent its whole energy on the production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Essentially, this is a community theatre made up of North Americans and Englishmen living in Guadalajara. Surprising talent surfaced through all the major roles, and a surprisingly large audience appeared. The group imported a professional actor for the lead role, and the various other production aspects were of high quality.

Somewhat disappointing was the appearance of the film and TV actor David Reynosa in another road show . . . *y la mujer hizo al hombre* by Alejandro

Galindo. The play was a treatment of the Galatea/Pygmalion legend, with the crude revolutionary, who cannot read, advancing through military and social ranks with the aid of his cultured but always secondary lady love, who constantly reads to him from Napoleon. The play was advertised as "blanca saturada de amor para toda la familia," but the revolutionary's main love is war. The lavish set was designed by Julio Prieto, but there were a number of technical difficulties: e.g., one could not determine if one of the "specials" was lighting the virgin on the couch or the virgin on the wall—or both. Soap opera.

March brought a local effort, Alfonso Paso's *Preguntan por Julio César*, presented by the Grupo Actores Unidos. The play was hampered by the director's anachronisms (a spray can of perfume in Rome?), and an unconvincing Cleopatra, but contained enough good portrayals and cute bits to be enjoyable. The nicest moment was José Orozco in a minor role, becoming drunk with Cleopatra's booze and beauty, becoming more the macho than the sultan, and playing the advice of Macbeth's porter to the hilt. But Paso's Cleopatra was unliberated and unbright and one wondered why Antony and Caesar came on like stallions to her charms.

April brought two more local productions. Actores Unidos presented Jean Paul Sartre's *Muertos sin sepultura* under the direction of Roberto Vázquez. The turntable made the scene changes fast and effective, but one setting bothered the eye; a fantastic shallow box set with walls apparently executed by 12 abstract artists with 120 tubes of oils—symbolic of war's chaos perhaps, but making theatrical focus difficult. The acting style was histrionic and declamatory again, thus making the verbal and physical conflict more important than the conflict of ideas.

The season ended with a whimper—Alfonso Paso's *Estos jóvenes de ahora*, presented by the Theatre group of the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social. Considering that *tapatio* youth are as "with it" as our own, it might be more properly titled *Estos jóvenes de ayer*. There was no admission charge and the theatre was packed. But this "cute" comedy was distinguished only by the natural, energetic and believable acting of Adriana Judith.

In summary, theatre is alive in Guadalajara, but is not well. There is an audience, but not a tradition. Theatre is sometimes socially fashionable, or sometimes the reinforcement of radical politics. But it has not reached the long lines of people waiting to buy movie tickets at almost every cinema in Guadalajara each Saturday and Sunday. Theatre in the U.S.A. has a similar problem in defining and reaching an audience. Perhaps the cynics are right: the *telenovela* is for the masses, with theatre catering either to the elitist audience or the revolutionaries.

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FECHA OBRA	AUTOR	DIRECCIÓN	GRUPO
1 jul <i>Evasión</i>	Paul Vandenberghe	Roberto Neri	Actores Internacionales
2 jul <i>El túnel que se come por la boca</i>	Alexandro Jodorowsky	Francisco Pérez Velázquez	Grupo "3° 'G' del C.N.R." de Ciudad Guzmán, Jal.
3 jul <i>Los albañiles</i>	Vicente Leñero	Mario Pérez Olvera	Grupo "Octavio Paz" de Ciudad Guzmán, Jal.
4 jul <i>Yocasta o casi</i>	Salvador Novo	Vicente Rodríguez	Grupo "Nueva Expresión"
5 jul <i>Las cosas simples</i>	Héctor Mendoza	Alexandro Barba	Sociedad Cuauhtémoc y Famosa
6 jul <i>Los prodigiosos</i>	Hugo Argüelles	Roberto Vázquez	Grupo Actores Unidos
7 jul <i>El juego de Zuzanka</i>	Milos Macaurek	Dolly de Velasco	Grupo "Cataris"
8 jul <i>Los desarraigados</i>	Humberto Robles	Mario Pérez Zermeño	Grupo del Centro Cultural Tepatlense
9 jul <i>Antígona</i>	Jean Anouilh	Guillermo Aldrete	Grupo Teatral de Guillermo Aldrete
10 jul <i>Delito en la isla de las cabras</i>	Hugo Betti	Gabriela Araujo	Grupo Netzahualcoyotl
11 jul <i>Escuadra hacia la muerte</i>	Alfonso Sastre	Rafael Sandoval	Grupo de Teatro de la Penitenciaría del Estado
12 jul <i>El grito de las almas muertas</i>	Javier Lupercio Medina	Javier Lupercio Medina	Grupo La Hermandad
13 jul <i>El retabullo de don Cristóbal La doncella, el marinero y el estudiante Requiem</i>	Federico García Lorca Federico García Lorca Guillermo Lares	Guillermo Lares	Los Trepanadores
14 jul <i>Canto del coco lustrano</i>	Peter Weiss	Wernes Ruzicka	Grupo de Teatro del Instituto Alemán
15 jul <i>El ajedrez del diablo</i>	Joaquín Calvo Sotelo	Luis Gamiz Landeros	Centro de SS para el bienestar familiar del IMSS de Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco
16 jul <i>El cielo prometido</i>	Jorge A. Villaseñor	José Luis Moreno	Centro de SS para el bienestar familiar del IMSS