

## Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano

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The Lower East Side of New York: flooded sidewalks, steamy pavements, loud music, wonderful smells, reminding many of home, another time, another home. But right now, the volatile, noisy Lower East Side, an abandoned corner building, 4 Street and Avenue C, looking just like the other dilapidated buildings in the neighborhood, old and young sitting together on the stoop, talking quickly, laughing, even shouting, but inside this particular building—Theatre—Theatre with a capital “T”—ten days of workshops, films, juerga, theory and practice of the Latin American popular theatre as defined by ten theatre groups and some of the most exciting participants and critics of the Latin American theatre, all following a rigorous schedule of day seminars and evening performances, and late night entertainment by the artists themselves.

This Primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano was sponsored by Aspira of New York, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Friends of Puerto Rico, El Grupo Guazabara, Teatro 4 and Teatro Jurutungo, with support from the New York State Council of the Arts and in cooperation with Joseph Papp and the New York Shakespeare Festival’s Public Theatre. William Nieves, one of the coordinators of the Festival, pointed out that it grew out of the sense of isolation that Hispanic theatre people in New York felt vis-à-vis the rest of Latin America and Puerto Rico. The plan was to provide the opportunity for interchange among representative groups from Latin America and the United States. The definite point of view expressed in choosing the groups that eventually did participate in the Festival, was the theatre group’s commitment to the community it worked in.

The genesis of the Festival is a story of perseverance, ingenuity and community cooperation in the face of some \$12,000 in debts, including plane fare for many of the groups, and a mere \$5,000 grant from the New York State Council of the Arts. An important stroke of luck was finding the four story, abandoned half-way house for drug addicts and transforming it into a habitable building where the theatre groups, more than 80 people all together, lived, ate and attended workshops. The members of Teatro 4, located on 4 Street in the Lower East Side, as well as numerous volunteers from the community, worked for weeks to clean the premises and provide electricity and water. Community stores donated towels, blankets and food, and the mother of one young Teatro 4 member cooked three meals a day, for ten days for everyone!

The popular theatre movement is political. Essentially these groups explored questions of national liberation, with their messages alternately suggested and foisted upon the audience. The quality of the performances was as varied as the backgrounds of each group, from La Candelaria, one of the most respected Latin American theatre groups, in existence for 10 years, to Teatro 4, together for little more than a year, and composed of amateurs, young people from the streets of New York. The groups ranged from the technically sophisticated Rueda Roja (Puerto Rico) and La Candelaria (Colombia), to Zumbón (México), which attempted an ambitious and diffuse interpretation of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s

*Misterio Bufo*, to the Trashumantes, weak and deadly historical theatre from Panamá, to the Dominican group, Antillas, intense dramatic reading of the poet, Pedro Mir's "El huracán Neruda," to New York based Mass Transit, and Teatro 4, both using standard Brechtian devices: songs, placards and direct address to the public, to communicate the frustration, anguish, anger and protest inherent in the New York experience.

Their performing space was the Anspacher Playhouse, which seats 200, at Joseph Papp's New York Public Theatre complex, donated for the occasion. The theatre was filled every night; all 4 performances by La Candelaria and Rueda Roja had people sitting and standing in the aisles. Very exciting for a city which has about 20 Latin theatre groups, often playing to half-filled houses.

For most of the 80 theatre people participating in the Festival, the daily workshops were every bit as important as the evening performances. The program, in addition to Latin American films and music, included the following workshops: "Método colectivo" by Enrique Buenaventura; "Técnica de improvisación" and "Creación colectiva" by Santiago García; "El movimiento de teatro popular en Puerto Rico" by José Luis Ramos; "El teatro latinoamericano en Nueva York" by William Nieves; "Experiencia con el movimiento teatral latinoamericano" by José Monleón; "Teatro periódico" by Augusto Boal; a round table on "El desarrollo de una estética popular; el teatro y la organización de masas"; Evaluaciones de los trabajos presentados.

This writer was singularly impressed with the intensity and excitement generated at these sessions by two of the most serious exponents of Latin American theatre, Enrique Buenaventura and José Monleón. Buenaventura was in attendance daily, living among the actors and actresses, as was Santiago García, director and actor with La Candelaria. José Monleón, Spanish critic of the Latin American theatre, was also available every day. The Brazilian playwright and critic, Augusto Boal, arrived later in the week.

Both Buenaventura and Monleón were vitally concerned with transmitting their seriousness about "la práctica artística"; they constantly reiterated the fact that the artistic metier must be above the political message. They organically drew their criticisms from the actual performances that had been presented. The strengths and weaknesses of a particular performance were incisively commented

The actual theatre program included:

Aug. 5	La Candelaria	<i>Guadalupe, años sin cuenta</i>	Colombia
Aug. 6	Teatro Urbano	<i>Anti-bicentennial special</i>	Chicanos
Aug. 7	Informe	<i>Introducción a la historia II</i>	México
Aug. 8	Rueda Roja	<i>La pulga</i>	Puerto Rico
Aug. 9	Mass Transit	<i>What Makes Daddy Run?</i> <i>Ursula Underdog vs. Money Grabbers</i>	U.S.A.
Aug. 10	Trashumantes	<i>Philippe y la revolución</i>	Panamá
Aug. 11	Teatro 4	<i>¿Qué encontré en Nueva York?</i>	New York
Aug. 12	Zumbón	<i>Tropicópera</i>	México
Aug. 13	La Candelaria	<i>Guadalupe, años sin cuenta</i>	Colombia
Aug. 14	Rueda Roja	<i>La pulga</i>	Puerto Rico

upon and eventually assimilated not only by the group being discussed, but by the other groups as well. To this end Buenaventura was the consummate teacher, directing himself to each group and suggesting the questions that they should ask themselves to improve their skills. He brought the whole world into those workshops, as he drew upon comparative literature, history, art and music to illustrate his points.

Both critics agreed that theatre must illuminate the known for us, but in a new way; if theatre merely reinforces what we already know, it has not succeeded. For Monleón the theatre experience must not reinforce his own self-definition as a "radical," but rather must bring to the fore new questions and doubts; it must assume a dialectical approach to Latin American reality. The Primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano successfully brought together actors, actresses, playwrights, directors, critics, all involved in creating the Latin American theatre experience, all acutely aware of their dual roles as artists and revolutionaries, all passionately grappling with what is essentially their whole life—their art.

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The following document was drafted and unanimously approved at the Festival.

For further information as well as the publication containing descriptive and graphic material about the Festival, contact: William Nieves, Aspira of New York, 296 Fifth Ave., New York, 10001.

#### DECLARACIÓN DE NUEVA YORK

El primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano de Nueva York celebrado del 5 al 15 de agosto de 1976 presenta a las organizaciones y grupos teatrales de América Latina la siguiente declaración:

1. El objeto fundamental de este Festival ha sido romper el aislamiento en que se encuentran los grupos latinoamericanos que funcionan en Nueva York con relación al movimiento de Teatro Popular de Latinoamérica.
2. Desarrollar el Movimiento Latinoamericano de Teatro Popular como un movimiento unido a la problemática de los países latinoamericanos, a la lucha por la liberación nacional así como la plena autonomía de estos países y a cambios radicales en los mismos hacia una sociedad más justa.
3. Desarrollar y fortalecer las organizaciones de grupos de Teatro Popular donde existan y propender a la creación de los mismos donde no existan.
4. Desarrollar una relación dinámica entre la práctica artística y la práctica socio-política, intercambiando, enriqueciendo los medios técnicos y de expresión que permitan una nueva y cada vez más elevada calidad estética de los espectáculos. Esta calidad estética la entendemos ligada indisolublemente a un más claro planteamiento de los problemas sociales, a la elaboración de imágenes de nuestras sociedades útiles para la transformación de estas mismas sociedades por las fuerzas sociales progresistas.
5. Desarrollar el contacto entre el Nuevo Teatro Popular Norteamericano (los teatros negros y los teatros de minorías nacionales incluidos) y el Movimiento de Teatro Popular latinoamericano.
6. Estabilizar el Festival como un Festival periódico y ampliarlo a otros centros de los Estados Unidos.

7. El primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano de Nueva York acepta la organización denominada "Confederación de Teatro de Nuestra América," creada en México en 1974 durante el 5º Festival de Teatro Chicano y Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano y se compromete a llevar adelante esta organización y las tareas que la misma plantea.
8. El primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano de Nueva York ha organizado el Comité Coordinador de Festivales Internacionales de la Confederación de Teatro de Nuestra América, organismo encargado de coordinar los Festivales en los cuales participan las organizaciones y grupos afiliados a nuestra organización.
9. Tanto la Confederación de Teatro de Nuestra América como el Comité Coordinador de Festivales Internacionales estarán encargados de desarrollar inmediatamente la publicación y distribución de materiales teatrales y concretamente decidimos la creación de un órgano de la Confederación que se compromete a realizar el Comité Coordinador del primer Festival de Nueva York.
10. El primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano de Nueva York eleva su más enérgica protesta por la represión que ejercen las oligarquías nacionales, sometidas al imperialismo, contra los pueblos y contra el derecho de libre expresión, especialmente en los países del Cono Sur del continente. El Festival invita, también, a los grupos a intensificar la lucha contra el fascismo cuya amenaza crece día a día en América Latina.

## Luis Rafael Sánchez's *The Passion of Antígona Pérez*: Puerto Rican Drama in North American Performance<sup>1</sup>

LOWELL A. FIET

In *The Passion of Antígona Pérez* by Puerto Rican playwright Luis Rafael Sánchez, a contemporary Antigone addresses her "Homeland, America," exhorting: "America, don't yield; America, don't wait; America, don't lose; America, don't die; America, awake; America, be calm; America, watch out." (Act II, sc. 2)<sup>2</sup> When the play was performed at Michigan State University as part of the Department of Theatre's 1975 Summer Circle Free Festival,<sup>3</sup> the plea of the protagonist, Antígona Pérez, received uneven responses from confused audience members. Was Antígona sending a message to the United States (the audience's America) to intervene in her Latin American homeland? Was she boldly rejecting the assumed right of the United States to characterize itself as America? Or, was she warning U.S. citizens that what was happening in the fictional country of Molina was possible in their own nation?

Held captive in the palace of Generalísimo Creón Molina, Antígona Pérez is a political prisoner awaiting death. She stole and buried the bodies of two friends who attempted to assassinate Creón and accepts her sentence by refusing to disclose their location. But the conflict involves more than Antígona's defiance of Creón, for both characters symbolize contrasting elements of Latin American political life. Antígona expresses the desire for self-determination and freedom