

Chamizal Siglo de Oro Festival (March 1977)

From March 15-25, the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso hosted its second Siglo de Oro Drama Festival. Academic and repertory groups from New York, North Carolina, Colorado, Texas, and Mexico presented representative works from the classical period in Spain.

The Chamizal National Memorial, even before its inauguration in 1973, had become aware of the scarcity of performances of Golden Age Drama in the United States and out of a series of colloquies grew the idea of such a festival. With co-sponsorship from the El Paso Bicentennial Commission, the first festival was held last year. Because of the wide critical acclaim and enthusiastic audiences, the gala was repeated this year.

Bellas Artes, from the Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, Chihuahua City began the competition with an elaborate production of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*. Salvador Lomeli O. designed the subtly-toned set which portrayed a 15th century Spanish courtyard. Juan Muñoz was superb as a totally malefic Fernán Gómez and Leonarda Montoya provided an effective balance as the vital and rebellious maiden-victim, Laurencia. The original music and lyrics were composed by Maestro Carlos Farfán and the gay costumes designed by José Pérez Delgado added an extra dimension of pleasure to the entire performance.

In its second visit to Chamizal, La Sociedad Hispánica Carolinesa of the University of North Carolina put on three Quiñones de Benavente *entremeses* as well as a unique program of old Spanish music. Their program, designed and directed by Alva Ebersole with lovely costumes by Carmen I. de Ebersole, was especially remarkable due to the music arrangements of the songs from 13th through 17th century Spanish composers.

Peribáñez y el comendador de Ocaña was presented by the Center for the Hispanic Performing Arts from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Very few props were used in this performance directed by Professor Donald R. Wadley.

The following evening Cervantes' *entremeses*, *Los habladores* and *El viejo celoso*, were presented by La Compañía Teatro Bilingüe from Texas A&I University, Kingsville. Carlos Garza and José Rodríguez, in the first play, along with J. Ed. Arraiza and Ruby Nelda Pérez, in the second, were outstanding among the performers. Joseph Rosenberg, director of the group, won best director in the academic category.

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The very fine Compañía de Teatro Repertorio Español de Nueva York, following up on their superb presentation of *La Celestina* the previous year, carried the day this year with a brilliantly conceived and acted interpretation of Calderón's *La dama duende*. Robert Federico designed the set which consisted of three mobile strips of mirror-like maylar. The ingenious yet simple set caught all the delicate hues of light, movement, and mystery which characterize this marvelous rendition of the play directed by René Buch. Mr. Buch deservedly won the best director award; Braulio Villar as Cosme and Virginia Rambal as Angela won best actor and best actress awards, and, as might be surmised, La Compañía de Teatro Repertorio was awarded the prize for best overall production.

Alarcón's *La verdad sospechosa* was the choice of Gracia Pasquel de Chávez Calderón of the Teatro Experimental Juárez. The opulent scenery by Roberto Salas Herrera and the beautiful costumes designed by dona Gracia herself complemented the delightful performances by the actors and actresses of this company.

The final presentation, eight burlesque interludes, *Los pasos de Lope de Rueda*, were interpreted by the Grupo Tespis of Onésimo Ramos, Ciudad Juárez. The director, Ramos, found the free and open style of the *pasos* much to his liking as he experimentally included strobe lights, synthesizer music, nudity, and, at times, high camp in his production. Rueda's servants, masters, strumpets, and pimps leaped, strutted, and postured in a setting composed only of five white, man-sized rectangular blocks.

This year's judges, Carlos Miguel Suárez Radillo, dramatist and critic from Madrid; William I. Oliver, playwright and Professor of Drama from the University of California, Berkeley; and Sergio D. Elizondo, Professor of Spanish from New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, had the difficult task of deciding winners among the performances and performers.

The excellent response from both critics and public assured that Chamizal will continue this outstanding opportunity for the presentation of Golden Age Theatre. This event, plus the El Paso-Chamizal Fiesta of the Arts and the Annual Border Folk Festival, are the highlights of a year-round program of theatre, performing and folk arts held at the Chamizal National Memorial.

Chamizal, a unit of the National Park Service, is proud of its mission: to serve as programmer, coordinator, and promoter for a host of multi-cultural programs in the arts. Both Chamizal and Monumento Conmemorativo a la Entrega de El Chamizal, its Mexican partner from Ciudad Juárez, came into being to commemorate a history of cooperation between the United States and Mexico. We hope, therefore, that these activities in the arts can, in some measure, further the cause of understanding among nations and cultures.

Walker Reid
Chamizal National Memorial