

## GALA, Inc.

### *Children's Theatre*

The impetus for forming an Hispanic theatre organization came from the experience of GALA's organizers while working in the bilingual children's program which was begun at The Back Alley Theatre in 1973. After working with this program (Teatro Doble) for more than two years, and witnessing the tremendous turnover of actors (due to lack of funds), we realized that there was a need to establish an organization whose principal purpose was to promote Spanish language theatre and to train Hispanic artists by working together as a collective.

During the summer of 1975 two of GALA's founders developed an original bilingual puppet show for children and were contracted (through Back Alley Theatre) to perform for the Baltimore Title II schools and for the National Capital Park Service, Summer in the Parks program. This play, called *The Donkey's Tale (El cuento del burro)*, was performed in parks throughout the city with great success. The show is designed to be understood by both Spanish speaking and English speaking children and incorporates the learning of Spanish words and phrases with songs, mime, and audience participation. Since the set is portable, the show can be easily taken to neighborhoods where children might not otherwise be exposed to theatre. GALA will continue to present these shows as part of its regular activities.

### *Adult Theatre and other ongoing activities*

At the same time the children's shows were being developed, members of GALA organized a workshop which met at the Back Alley Studio during April, May, and June of 1976. The purpose of this workshop was to develop skills in acting technique, voice, and body movement. As a result of the workshop, the group produced a play entitled *La fiaca*, by the Argentinian playwright, Ricardo Talesnik. The play was presented in August, 1976 as part of the Hispanic American Festival Week, with the technical assistance of the D.C. Department of Recreation. The production was very well received and drew an audience of over 1,200 with only four performances.

Since this first production, members of GALA have been collecting scripts from Latin American playwrights, working on translations, and developing original material relating to the social, economic and political problems of Latinos in Washington, D.C. (i.e., housing, immigration, education, etc.). One of our ongoing projects is to develop dramatic skits around these issues using puppets and

actors. We have also continued the workshop program. Over the last summer approximately twenty individuals took classes in acting, improvisation, and movement on a regular basis. These classes were held in a space we rented from the Foundation for Multilingualism and Polyculturalism, located on G Street, N.W.

In August of this year, GALA finally moved into its own space—a building at 2319 18th Street, N.W., in the heart of the Spanish speaking community. Now that we are finally situated in a permanent location, we have planned a full season of plays, concerts by local Latino folk groups, and guest performances by Latino theatre groups from Boston and New York. We will also be exhibiting paintings and photographs by Latino artists living in the area.

### *Community Involvement*

One of our objectives is to encourage better communication among isolated Hispanic artists and the community at large. The Hispanic community in the metropolitan area is dispersed among Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. Furthermore it is composed of peoples of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds (unlike the more homogeneous Puerto Rican community of New York or Cuban community of Miami). In the past the Hispanics here who are associated with Embassies or international agencies have rarely participated in the cultural activities of the “barrio” (Adams-Morgan area). In the same way, the “barrio” has not been exposed to the numerous exhibits, concerts and other events sponsored by the Organization of American States and other similar organizations. Our aim is to reach all of the various elements of the Hispanic population by working towards the recognition of a common identity and thus a more meaningful understanding of our Hispanic heritage.

Since its inception GALA has worked closely with all agencies serving the Spanish speaking population of Washington. Mr. Medrano served on the Cultural Committee of the Hispanic Heritage Week in 1976 and was recently elected the Chairman of that program for the summer of 1978. GALA is also represented on the newly formed Council of Hispanic Agencies, which serves as an umbrella organization for various community groups.

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*Washington, D.C.*