

## Brazilian Theatre in Lawrence, Kansas

In late April and early May, a handful of U.S. audiences had the opportunity to witness one of the most interesting theatrical productions to come from Latin America in memory. Under the auspices of the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture, the Brazilian Dramatic Company (sponsored by the Serviço Nacional do Teatro) performed in two big-city theatres (Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and La Mama in New York) and three campuses (University of Kansas, University of Arizona, and Stanford University). The vehicle was "Dreams of a Naughty Heart Drowned in Illusions," by the Pernambucan Ernesto Albuquerque.

The play, despite, or perhaps because of, its strange name, was the 1977 winner of a national first prize for texts for puppet theatre. It has been performed in Uruguay and in several Brazilian cities.

Humberto Braga, Director of the Puppet Theatre Section of the SNT, and Beatriz Veiga, Production Manager, accompanied the group. There were ten members of the cast, including the Director, the Argentine-born Ilo Krugli, plus a technical specialist.

Having seen the show myself, and having spent three fascinating and enervating days with the group, it is not easy for me to provide appropriately objective views of its impact. The production is based on *mamulengo* puppet theatre from the Northeast of Brazil, a type of public spectacle normally performed in markets and public squares, with stock characters and formula motifs enlivened by the options of improvisation and audience participation. The plot, which at any rate is of secondary importance, involves a Professor Constantino, the local con-man/healer and his assistant Epaminondas, and their relationship with the general populace. The mayor's daughter seeks Constantino's help and falls in love with the assistant, whereupon the devil gobbles up the hapless Epaminondas and transforms him into a rebel. The only remedy for his plight is love, which materializes as a result of deceit and magic. And in the end, all fails save the play.

It is impossible to give a plot summary of this piece and harder to try to convey what it is really like as theatre. Music, dance, and dialogue are interwoven into a sort of folk multi-media show which defies generic description. Even the theatricality of the puppets is exploited, since the manipulators often appear openly as the action progresses. It is beautifully staged and finely executed, and the performers are all accomplished professionals (though not all professional theatre folk). What we saw was a visually and sensorially opulent production, designed to reproduce as faithfully as possible aspects of real folk theatre and to transcend the linguistically bound features of ordinary theatre. Nice people, too.

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