

## US Latina/o Theatre From the 60s to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: We've Come a Long Way, Baby!

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I would like to thank Stuart Day for honoring me with the opportunity to edit this special issue of the LATR. Initially, Stuart asked me if I was interested in focusing on Chicana and Chicano theatre and performance. I thought for an instant and responded that it should include research on as many US Latinas and Latinos as possible, because we now have so many scholars and theatre artists from our various Latina/o communities involved in theatre across the country and abroad. So the Call went out in the Fall of 2008 and by June of this year (2009) I had received dozens of articles and interviews. Submissions came from across the country and represented a wide range of scholarship, aesthetics and topics. But before I introduce these articles let me go back in time, the prerogative of Special Editors.

When I started researching and writing about Chicano theater in 1970 there were no plays by or about Chicana/os or Mexican-Americans written by members of that community in print. In terms of scholarly research, there were several articles and newspaper accounts about the Teatro Campesino but few references to other Teatros Chicanos. On the East Coast, similar lacunae existed in English although there were certainly articles and plays about the Puerto Rican and Cuban communities both on and off those respective islands, *en español*. But as this volume demonstrates (along with the many anthologies of plays and critical essays that have been published to date), we've come a long way, baby!

As many of our readers know, the Chicana/o/Mexican-American is the largest of the US Latino groups, followed by the (mainland) Puerto Ricans and Cuban-Americans. All three of these groups now have two or three generations of theatre artists actively expressing their realities (and fantasies) on stage and on the page since the 1960s. Dominicans and Colombians have

begun to express themselves in theatre and many of our community-based and professional theatres employ artists from across the Latino and Latin American spectrum. What I find very interesting is the fact that the majority of articles and interviews in this issue are by junior scholars. Indeed, some of the contributors were not yet born in 1970. The topics vary, as they should, and hopefully will add to the discourse and analysis of US Latina/o dramatic literature and performance.

We begin somewhat historically with Zack Whitman Gil's article on the early Teatro Campesino and Luis Valdez's anti-Vietnam War *actos* and plays, "Whose Country to Defend?: The Chicano Soldier on Stage." Unfortunately, these dramatic statements are just as relevant today as they were 40 years ago and thus merit our attention and concern, as Gil asserts. This is followed by Caroline Caballero's intriguing account of a recent play by a Cuban-born playwright, "*Una cubana* in the Borderlands: Teresa Dovalpage's *La hija de La Llorona*." Here we have a unique triad of Latina cultures represented in a family drama set in New Mexico: the Cuban daughter-in-law, her Puerto Rican best friend and her Mexican-American mother-in-law in a re-telling of the Llorona myth. I know of no other play to tackle these "culture clashes" in this manner.

The third article in this issue is Jon Rossini's apt analysis ("José Rivera, Neoliberalism, and the Outside of Politics") on *School of the Americas*, a play by one of our leading Puerto Rican playwrights. From this critical analysis of Rivera's play about the last days of Che Guevara we go to Patricia Tomé's discussion of Cuban-born Coco Fusco and Chicana Nao Bustameante's creative collaboration in "Performing el cuerpo femenino como menú gastronómico: *Stuff* de Fusco y Bustamente." Here again, we have two Latina cultures represented and analyzed in a fascinating deconstruction. This is followed by our senior scholar, David William Foster, and his intriguing discussion of *place* in a play by Chilean-born Guillermo Reyes, in "Phoenix in Guillermo Reyes' "Places to Touch Him." I like the inclusion of a play about a gay Chicano politician and the play's relationship to the geography of the desert city. The sixth article, by Anne García-Romero, looks at three distinct Latina voices, Caridad Svich, Cusi Cram and Quiara Alegría Hudes, from the perspective of transculturation, a theme that continues to occur in this volume, whether overtly or implied.

Analola Santana's discussion of two of Migdalia Cruz's most produced plays is a welcome addition to critical essays about this Nuyorican playwright's vision. Cruz's plays have received little critical attention and

we hope that this article will inspire others to investigate her very distinct poetic aesthetic. Ashley Lucas's article is about the two plays that I have argued ushered in the era of professionalism for Latina/o playwrights and theatre artists across the country. In her essay, "Prisoners on the Great White Way: *Short Eyes* and *Zoot Suit* as the First Latina/o Plays on Broadway," Lucas compares and contrasts these plays as prison dramas, offering a new perspective on both. And, of course, no special issue on US Latina/o theatre would be complete without a contribution from the ubiquitous Caridad Svich, whose musings are always stimulating, provocative and well-thought out.

I am very pleased to include the five interviews here, each one a distinct look at Latina and Latino theatre artists from the first generation, Diane Rodriguez and Carlos Morton, to the next generation, José Cruz González, and the more recent theatre artists, Olga Sanchez and Antonio O'Campo Guzmán. With the exception of Morton, who is a playwright, the others have demonstrated a wide array of theatrical talents: actor, director, producer, playwright, performer and educator. Not enough attention has been paid to these and the many other practicing theatre artists across the country and, hopefully, these interviews will inspire others to continue investigating how theatre practice relates to the history and theories surrounding US Latina and Latino theatre and performance.

Finally, we have included reports from the field (Yael Prizant's account of her latest trip to see theatre in Cuba; Jade Power's discussion of two very distinct plays and productions in Puerto Rico this summer; a report from Osvaldo Obregón on the Festival Internacional de Teatro de Almada) and — of course — book reviews.

From what we have in this special issue, to the many-conferences around the country, the Americas and Europe, US Latina and Latino theatre is alive and well, sustained by a continuing commitment to educate and entertain; to question and to offer alternatives to the status quo. Latina/os in this country are not going away and the contributions to this issue bode well for the future of the field as an academic and aesthetic enterprise.

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