

Getting Better: Perú

In the *suplemento dominical* of Lima's *El Comercio* (12/28/80), one of the better Peruvian theatre critics, Jorge Chiarella Krüger, has written an overview of the Peruvian theatrical activities in 1980. In what follows I reproduce (in my translation) excerpts from his text: "In contrast to previous years, there has been observable a tendency on the part of the vanguard of the theatrical family to acquire theoretical knowledge and to try to make diagnoses of our stage-work. In this sense, the VII Muestra de Teatro Peruano in September in Iquitos represents the most significant effort to contrast experiences among groups, actors, authors and directors attempting to find a theatre of their own, to exercise criticism in a constructive yet frank manner, and to form a movement of greater extension in order to consolidate earlier meetings."

Chiarella K. then goes on to list further events that reinforced the above-mentioned tendencies, such as the VI Congreso and Festival Latinoamericano de Mimo in October in Lima organized by the Grupo Piqueras; the roundtables initiated by the ENAD (Escuela Nacional de Arte Dramático) in Lima for the first time, "which culminated in a *tesis de grado* presented by Raúl Atencio, which comprises all aspects of our theatre-work"; the public discussions organized by the group Histrión; the courses in acting, stage-craft, and lighting offered by the Argentinian Ernesto Suárez and the North Americans Atkin Pace and Nancarrow.

"Special mention deserves the presence in our country of Peter Brook in July, who, by expounding his . . . theory of 'the empty space,' allowed us to appreciate new points of view concerning the playwright, the role of the actor, the importance of the scenic conventions, the use of the stage, and, fundamentally, the role the theatre of today plays for a public of today: alive, communicative, artistic, questioning and profoundly creative."

Other than this, Chiarella K. considers of great value for the Peruvian theatre the visits by the Teatro San Martín (Argentina), Teatro de Repertorio Español (New York), Guy's Puppet Theater (Japanese marionettes), the mime groups participating in the above-mentioned Congreso, and that of the Argentinian actors Pablo Ariel and Juan Vitali and of the Venezuelan playwright Rodolfo Santana.

"As a counterpart to these visits, 1980 was good for the Peruvian presence abroad: Cuatrotablas is still in Europe, Teatro El Sol, too, is on tour, in Latin America, and hopes to end up in Madrid with Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña*. The group Yuyachkani, *teatro popular*, went to the United States and the Central American states. Osvaldo Cattone's ensemble is the first Peruvian commercial theater-group to obtain a 3 months contract in the United States, over five years, to present plays in Spanish there. The Peruvian

drama *Ollantay* was premiered in Japan in a co-production, which permitted the participation of Peruvian musicians and theatre-people in Tokyo. The Teatro Associação de Empregados de Serpco in Rio de Janeiro produced Sara Joffré's *Se consigue madera*. Guillermo Ugarte Chamorro represented the country at the Encuentro Teatral España-América Latina and more recently at the Congreso Internacional sobre 'Bello y Chile' in Caracas. The puppeteer Felipe Rivas Mendo was invited to Germany as member of the jury in a theatre-festival for children. Finally, the Compañía de Elva Alcandré participated in the Primer Festival de Teatro Cómico in Ecuador."

Of really great importance is that the "entertainment tax" on theatrical performances was abolished after strong protests from the artists and the newspapers and through the help of Haydée Florez de Franco, Inspectora de Espectáculos de la Municipalidad de Lima. The Grand Lady of the Peruvian theatre, Elvira Travestí was awarded, by the government, the Medalla de la Cultura. Travestí appeared in two productions: *Las Troyanas* and *El efecto de los rayos gamma sobre las caléndulas*. The excellent director Ricardo Roca Rey was made Head of the Instituto Nacional de Cultura, the first time that in Perú a theatre-man occupies this position. Finally, the no less excellent actor and director Ricardo Blume (Teatro de la Universidad Católica, a group that over the years has distinguished itself by putting on shows high above the median Lima standard) has returned to Perú definitely, after nine years in México where in 1979 he was named the best actor of that year. The first part he took in Lima was the principal in *¿De quién diablos es la vida?*, which brought him and the group rave-reviews. He has, moreover, announced the founding of a Theatrical School.

In *La Prensa* (12/16/80), Jean Rottmann put together "Las menciones de 1980," a list that is too long to reproduce here in its entirety. In his opinion, the best plays were: *Doña Rosita, la soltera*, *La pensión* by astoundingly fertile playwright Juan Rivera Saavedra, *Opera de 2 centavos* (Cuatrotablas), *Historia del zoológico* (Cattone), *Como Hobby no* (TUC, dir.: Chiarella K.), *Las Troyanas*, *Ubu Presidente* by Peruvian Juan Larco, a production which moved Mario Vargas Llosa to write one of the most enthusiastic texts ever (*El Comercio*, 1/3/81), and *Reina por un día* (with Lola Vilar and directed by Cattone).

The best actors were: Luis la Roca, Regina Alcover and Noemí del Castillo, Lola Vilar, Osvaldo Cattone and Tito Salas (in *Historia del zoológico*), Ricardo Blume, Elvira Travesí, et al. As the most original productions, Rottmann names *Opera de 2 centavos*, *Historia del zoológico*, and *Ubu Presidente*. The longest-playing production was *Coqueluche*, a musical.

Plays by Peruvian authors were one by Segura, one by Alfonso de Silva; from among the more modern ones: *Los cachorros* by Mario Vargas Llosa, *Flora Tristán* and the monologue *Frente al espejo*, both by Salazar Bondy, and *El uso de la palabra* by Julio Ramón Ribeyro. Here it should be mentioned that at this writing the Folger's Theater Group in Washington, D.C., is putting on, in English, Alonso Alegría's *Crossing the Niagara*.

All in all, a good year; according to the press.

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