

Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos (La Habana)

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In June, 1981, a meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Artists (*Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*) took place in Havana under the sponsorship of Casa de las Américas. Participants came from Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Grenada, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and Venezuela. From the United States came representatives of Chicano, Black, and "White" theatre. Exiled theatre artists from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, El Salvador, and Uruguay attended.

After opening speeches by Salvadorean writer Roberto Armijo, now living in Paris, and poet Ntozake Shange from the United States, Manuel Galich, editor of Casa de las Américas' *Conjunto*, gave an overview of the history of Latin American popular theatre during the past 20 years. The 36 participants, joined by a number of Cuban theatre artists, divided into four groups called commissions. Each group met with a different moderator daily for the next four days to examine the role of theatre in the present-day liberation movements of the hemisphere, and to decide what actions to take in support of their findings. In this context, one group discussed the forms of theatre closest to its own interests, i.e., theatre of exile, theatre of indigenous minorities, and theatre of North American minorities.

Considering the strong presence of politically-oriented exponents of the popular theatre and new theatre movements, it is not surprising that the resulting position papers, to which all the participants contributed, urge that the theatre strengthen its efforts to influence social and political change. A dual search—for ideological clarity and for new strategies to meet the exigencies of heightened mass struggle—was documented but left open for further amplification. Initial steps to create a broad infrastructure for the new theatrical movement were announced, along with a partial agenda for the next two years.

"The Theatre of Struggle for National Liberation" notes the gradual disappearance of the last vestiges of European colonialism in the Antilles, leading



Left to right: Rodrigo Duarte Clark (Teatro de la Esperanza, USA), Julia Otero (translator, Casa de las Américas), Sergio Corrieri (Teatro Escambray, Cuba), Atahualpa del Cioppo (Teatro el Galpón, Uruguay), Manuel-Galich (Casa de las Américas, Cuba), Oscar Ciccone (Teatro 4, USA), Enrique Buenaventura (Teatro Experimental de Cali, Colombia).

to the transformation of these countries into what José Martí called “our America.” The multiplicity of races and cultures which make up the American peoples is cited. Whether predominantly original Indian, African, or European, “each one is a synthesis of all of our America. This constitutes our great identity, within our multiple variety.” The reaffirmation of this identity is extended beyond the classic geographical demarcation, “from the Río Bravo to Patagonia,” to include Latin America and Caribbean minorities, whether by birth or ancestry, on the North American continent.

“Considerations Regarding National Minorities and the Latin American Identity” points out that in several Latin American countries the populace, made up of Blacks and indigenous peoples, does not constitute a “national *minority*.” This paper recommends examination of the historical processes which created the cultures of these “majorities”; the study of these groups’ limitations and possibilities in the social and cultural fields; the search for a common language – popular and decolonized – in order to reach an “expressive and integrated cultural unity” throughout the continent.

“The Theatre in Exile” addresses a theatre whereof, during the past decade, “numerous theatre artists, individually or in groups, have had to abandon their country.” It is one which “retains and develops its thematic closeness with the social struggle of its country of origin.” Living testimony of the oligarchical use of terror against not only people but their cultural expressions as well, theatre in exile becomes one of denouncement, which interacts with other progressive and revolutionary elements. Not a melancholy theatre, although one with traces of evocation and of nostalgia, it is instead a combative theatre. Theatre in exile, it is pointed out, should not be mistaken for political discourse. Though joined in a common interest, each has its par-

ticular language—the theatre its aesthetic language which, logically, in the degree to which it is developed will best serve its social and artistic function. Further, class consciousness is construed not as an automatic determinant of artistic quality but simply as an influence on it.

“The Theatre of National Minorities” rejects as invalid the “melting pot” concept of nationality which was prevalent for many years in the United States. The culture of North American Blacks which evolved from slavery through to the present is termed a form of resistance, at times appropriating elements of the dominant culture for this end. Examples are given of the cultural strength and resistance of other Third World minorities who live in the United States—Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Latin Americans in general, and Pacific-Asian peoples. The lack of national identification on the part of the youth of these groups, “the frontal attack on bilingual education,” and “the official rejection of cultural pluralism” are scored as problems to be overcome.

“The Relation of Present-Day Latin American Theatre With Its Public” states that, in the historical development of Latin America and the Caribbean, the public was conceived of in terms of either a cultured “elite” or a consumer mass. The creation of a new public is considered of primary importance. Noting that new relationships with the audience have been developing since the 60’s, it is proposed that this progress can be enhanced, and different and varied publics can be found through 1) the treatment of themes drawn from the reality of the public being served, and 2) the investigation of new forms of theatrical function which convert the spectator from passive object into active participant. Other suggested means of strengthening the Latin American and Caribbean theatre are: improving the technical and theoretical skills of the theatre artists; forming a closer link between artistic practice and its theoretical analysis; promoting the concept of the group as the essential unit of theatrical involvement; developing bonds and the exchange of experiences among the theatre groups in each country and among those in different countries; promulgating theatre among children and young people through the schools, universities, etc.; working for the multiplication of theatre groups; and stimulating and aiding the emergence of community theatrical activity which results from interactions between professional theatre groups and the social bases where they perform. This methodology represents a process of integration of theatre with the masses of the people who, indeed, constitute the ultimate judges of theatrical work.

A final document details organizational plans for the establishment of the Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Movement (*Movimiento Teatral Latinoamericano y del Caribe*). An Interim Commission (*Instancia Coordinadora*) was named, with members from six countries: Brazil (member designated by the Federation of Independent Theatres); Colombia (member designated by the Corporation of Colombian Theatres); Cuba; Ecuador (member designated by the Association of Theatre Workers); Grenada; Nicaragua; Venezuela (member designated by mutual agreement among the *Ateneo* of Caracas, CELCIT, and the Venezuelan Center of ITI). The Latin minorities in the United States are represented on the West Coast by Adrian Vargas (*Teatro de la Gente*) for T.E.N.A.Z., and on the East Coast by Oscar

Ciccione (*Teatro 4*). (They share one vote on the Commission.) The Commission will direct the preparations for the II Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Artists in Nicaragua in two years, meeting every six months for this purpose. The Commission will also make studies of the theatre movements in each country and of the Latin American theatres in exile; will compile a list of possible participants in the II Meeting; will issue a monthly bulletin; and will initiate and/or support activities in each country represented which further the development of Latin American and Caribbean culture, as, for example, the Meeting of Intellectuals for the Sovereignty of the Peoples of Our America, held in Havana in September.

Casa de las Américas offered its facility and the services of several staff members for the establishment of a center for research and the exchange of information among the participating groups. *Conjunto* magazine will feature augmented issues to enlarge the scope of print media coverage of the Latin American and Caribbean theatre movement. The role of Cuba's Casa de las Américas in the formation of this theatrical popular front underscores the desire of artists both in and outside of that country to end the isolation of Cuba which was brought about by the United States blockade and by political rejection on the part of a number of Latin American and Caribbean governments. Previous sporadic cultural exchanges between Cuba and other countries now give way to a concerted effort to make known the stature in the arts that Cuba has achieved in the Americas, and to remove remaining barriers to her full participation in the cultural mainstream.

Though not a formal component of the *Movimiento Teatral*, its aims were reinforced by the three-week visit to Cuba in August of over thirty North American theatre artists, who participated in workshops with Cuban theatre groups. A projected college tour of Teatro Escambray in the spring of 1982 could break important ground, for it would give North Americans their first look at Cuban *teatro nuevo*, performed by its outstanding exponents. As the dialectics of the June Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Theatre Artists turn to action in the arena of increasingly intense political, economic, social, and cultural contest, they promise to yield insightful models for the popular theatre and other cultural movements.

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