

Plays in Performance and Review

Tres Marías y una Rosa at the University of Texas

Tres Marías y una Rosa was recently performed by the students of Miriam Balboa Echeverría's Spanish Play Production class at the University of Texas at Austin. The theater class, which Echeverría has taught each spring since 1978, previously has performed such plays as Arrabal's *Cementerio de automóviles*, Calderón's *Casa con dos puertas, mala es de guardar* and Vargas Llosa's *La señorita de Tacna*.

Material for *Tres Marías y una Rosa* was collected by the actresses in Raúl Osorio's Taller de Investigación Teatral. The women lived with and observed the work of "arpillera" collectives in Santiago, Chile. Their experiences were shaped into a dramatic format by playwright David Benavente. The play was very successful when it was first performed in Chile in 1979, in part because of publicity relating to censorship, but also because its theme of solidarity dramatized through the actions and popular art of working class women is treated in a humorous and entertaining manner.

Tres Marías takes place in the home of a leader of a tapestry collective on the outskirts of Santiago. The members of the group meet here on a weekly basis to turn in their handiwork. The women share the same hardships of poverty, an unemployed husband, violence in the home and sole responsibility for providing for the family. Making wallhangings is both a financial necessity and an emotional outlet for their feelings of injustice and frustration. Each one takes great pride in the uniqueness of her art and in the merchandise that can be bought with her earnings.

The play dramatizes the tension and conflict that the members feel from outside sources, such as family or their middleman, Rene, and that they themselves promote within the collective through their own insensitivity and competitiveness. When Rosa, the new member, joins the group, each woman indoctrinates her into a style of "arpillera" making. Each lesson reveals the great pride that the women feel for their workmanship, but when the usual outlet for that workmanship ceases to be available, the collective disintegrates.

The second act portrays a reunited collective charged with a truly collective task—to sew a mural for the new neighborhood chapel. The women manage to overcome individual differences at each stage during the preparation of the mural. Their group effort, entitled "La Cueva del Juicio Final," is not only a colorful rendering of a better life in the next world, but also a personal portrait of each woman's own unrealized dreams.

The stage setting created by Echeverría's students accented the patterns and bright colors of "arpilleras." The home for the collective meetings was constructed with one long, white wall covered with painted decorations and a narrow, flat overhang that served as a support for the large mural of the final scene. Several "arpilleras" from Chile were used in the play, but the large mural of the final scene was designed and sewn especially for the play by a mural artist from Austin.

The colloquial language of the play presented the biggest potential problem for both the actresses and the audience. However, the four women playing the members of the collective overcame the difficulties easily thanks to their own native or near-native control of Spanish and their careful attention to character development.

Tres Marías y una Rosa incorporates the hardships of marginal life and the idealism of collective endeavors into a dramatic tribute to women's popular art and to working women. The actresses of the Spanish Play Production class, directed by Echeverría, injected a great deal of enthusiasm into their roles. The result was a well-integrated performance that was both entertaining and uplifting.

Note: *Tres Marías y una Rosa* has been published in the critical collection *Teatro chileno de la crisis institucional: 1973-1980*, edited by Hernán Vidal, Carlos Ochsenius, and María de la Luz Hurtado and published by Minnesota Latin American Series (University of Minnesota) and Centro de Indagación y Expresión Cultural y Artística (Santiago, Chile).

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Tres Marías y una Rosa. University of Texas production. Foto: Fred Loa