

II Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe (Nicaragua, 1983)

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In June of 1983 the II Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanos y del Caribe was held in Nicaragua. In attendance were representatives from Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador and Mexico; the theatres in exile of Chile, Argentina, Guatemala and Uruguay; and Hispanic communities in the United States and Canada, as well as over 40 observers from Latin America, Canada and Europe.

Three days of meetings in Granada were preceded by four days devoted to cultural events which had been either planned specifically for the participants in the Encuentro, or were part of extensive celebrations around the fourth anniversary of the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution. These meetings offered an opportunity to witness the new Nicaragua in action on the cultural level, and to experience the profoundly political essence of her popular theatre. With counterrevolutionary activity being reported and broad, determined resistance to it clearly evidenced (ex.: the Saturday afternoon people's militia practice in the town square and streets of Granada), one could not fail to grasp the urgency and the necessity of enlisting the arts as a means of survival.

The main thrust of Nicaragua's popular theatre movement is the investigation of traditional forms and their investment with contemporary elements—"rescatándolas, historizándolas, contextualizándolas, conservándolas," as Alan Bolt expressed it in his opening ceremony address for the II Encuentro. Numerous theatre groups have come into being under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, the ASTC (Asociación de Trabajadores de la Cultura), Juventud Sandinista 19 de julio and other organizations whose networks throughout the country supply the personnel to help groups get started, train them in basic theatre skills, assess their work and promote their rapid appearance before audiences in their community and elsewhere.

Leaders of MECATE (Movimiento de Expresión Campesina Artística y Teatral), had organized clandestine theatre groups before the revolution in the department of Rivas. Here (in Cantimplora) the II Encuentro was inaugu-



El Ballet Folklórico Nicaragüense de Diriamba performs an indigenous epic theatre/dance piece, *Güegüense, o Macho-Ratón*, on the steps of the Cathedral in Granada. Photo: Nina Miller



Grupo FANICA in *Testimonios de Guatemala*. Photo: Nina Miller

rated. A long flat truck, otherwise used for the transportation of cotton, served as a stage in a large field. Another huge truck brought dozens of agricultural workers for the event and returned them at day's end. In improvisational skits, folk music and dance, local groups spelled out with skill and humor the people's resistance under Somoza; the consciousness-raising of backward or vicious foremen in the fields; mobilization against the *contra*—the audience

relishing it all as the broiling sun turned to twilight. The same hunger for culture and entertainment was evident when adults and children jammed into a workers' center near Granada for the exiled Guatemalan theatre group FANICA's performance of *Testimonios de Guatamala*, a long and serious play about that country's political struggles.

In a community center in León, the university group Xilonen effectively used *fantoques* in a play which addressed the subject of male chauvinism. Centuries ago these carnivalesque figures ridiculed upperclass manners; later the bourgeoisie used them to mock the common people ("as hicks," for instance); their role during the Somoza era was to satirize the party politicians of that time; and, finally, they have become endowed with more complex emotions and the ability to solve problems.

In Matagalpa, a high school audience watched Teatro Nixtayolero perform on the school patio. In *Ojo al Cristo*, a collective work based on a mountain legend, the players wore whiteface half-masks reminiscent of the traditional Indian masks which were a familiar Sandinista face cover in revolutionary battles. Founded in 1979, Nixtayolero counts many members who came to theatre as a result of the literacy program.

In the Fernando Gordillo community center in Granada, vibrant theatre work came from the Taller Justo Rufino Garay, an ensemble of young, professionally-trained actors who work in television, film and theatre. *La virgen que suda*, a diverting original play based on an actual case of religious cult deception which had been uncovered and written about by a newspaper reporter, used cabaret and circus elements and displayed the polish gained from a year's tour around the country.

The working sessions of the II Encuentro produced a condemnation of the U.S. underwriting of counterrevolutionary actions against Nicaragua, decla-



Teatro Nixtayolero in *Ojo al Cristo*. Photo: Sandra Rodríguez

rations of support for liberation struggles in various Latin American and Caribbean countries, and a resolution calling for activities which will enhance the role of women in our present-day theatre and the promotion of their participation in the organizational work of theatre movements.

Also put forth were proposals to deepen and extend the bonds among theatrical movements across America; to develop plans for the creation of a "Continental Front of Theatre Workers"; to strengthen existing theatrical organizations and to initiate new ones. The formation in New York of an information center on popular theatre was projected (to supplement the documentation role played by Casa de las Américas in Havana), with input coming from practitioners throughout the continent. The commonality of Latin American and Caribbean peoples, by reason of cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as the denominator of colonial dependency and their battles against it, was deeply stressed.

The Encuentro proposed the aiding of the Festival of Theatres in Exile, organized by ITI (Sweden, October, 1983) and the organizing by CELCIT (Venezuela) of a Festival of Caribbean Theatre, as well as support of, among others, The New Theatre Festival (Havana, 1984), a Caribbean Scenic Arts Festival (Santiago de Cuba, 1985); III National Theatre Workshop: "The Relation of Music to Theatre," and VI Festival of New Theatre (Colombia, 1984); I Encuentro-Taller and IV Muestra Nacional de Teatro (Nicaragua, 1984); XII Chicano Theatre Festival organized by TENAZ, and IV Latin American Popular Theatre Festival, organized by COLAT (Corporación Latinoamericana de Teatro), a new alignment of East Coast popular theatres (USA, 1984).

The III Encuentro was announced for 1985 in Colombia; a Coordinating Commission was named comprised of members from Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Venezuela and USA, as well as a representative of theatre in exile from Teatro El Galpón (Uruguay). The Encuentro de Teatristas Latinoamericanas y del Caribe continues to serve as a vital forum for new perspectives and controversies, and the ongoing work of promoting the Latin American popular theatre movement.

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