

## First Latin American Theatre Festival in Córdoba: Two Perspectives

Judith Bissett

The first festival of Latin American theatre in Córdoba, Argentina took place from October 18 to 28, 1984. The festival was organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Province with support from the Governor, Dr. Eduardo César Angeloz. Members of the executive committee included Daniel Tieffemberg, Subsecretary of Culture, Julio Likseberg, Subsecretary of Programming, Pedro Pont Verges, Director of Artistic Activities and Juan Carlos Marleta, Director of Cultural Action. The committee worked under the direction of Professor Jorge Peyrano, Minister of Culture and Education. The general coordinator, Carlos Giménez, proposed that Córdoba sponsor the festival because this type of international artistic endeavor would represent an opportunity for the theatre in Córdoba, and in Argentina, to become an integral part of the Latin American theatre movement as well as a participating member of the Latin American Community. Carlos Giménez also directed the Venezuelan group, Rajatabla, in its performances of *Macbeth* and *El último vagón*. The list of those who worked on organization or logistics is extensive, and many of the people who provided services for festival participants were volunteers.

Jorge Peyrano saw the festival as a means of meeting the necessity to overcome years of repression and censure of all ideological and cultural expression. It would be, for the people of Córdoba, an open forum in which ideas could be expressed and discussed as well as a workshop that would provide theatre in the province with technical experience on an international level. In order to create the necessary environment for debate and practical experience, workshops, lectures on culture and politics, children's theatre as well as performances—both in theatres and on the street—were offered in several locations throughout the province. Theatre and related activities took place simultaneously in traditional theatres, lecture halls, classrooms and parks. Due to sold out performances, in many cases unscheduled shows were often available to accommodate the enthusiastic crowds that gathered at every theatre. Those who were unable to obtain tickets under any circumstances could always attend presentations by street-theatre groups.

Critics, directors and playwrights from several Latin American countries, Spain and the United States gave lectures, directed workshops, and participated in debates or exchanged ideas with the public. Among those invited were Ellen Stewart, director of La Mama theatre, José Monleón, theatre critic and professor of drama in Spain, Marie Helene Falcón, director of the Theatre Festival of America in Canada, and Atahualpa del Cioppo, director of the El Galpón in Uruguay. This is, of course, only an example of the many participants from Spain and America. Theatre groups representing many Latin American countries and Spain—some working in exile at the time—presented European and American plays that ranged from political protest to expressions of indigenous culture.

As a participant in the festival, I found it impossible to attend every performance being offered due to the sheer quantity. However, festival scheduling which generally began in the early evening and continued through several, often simultaneous, presentations sometimes ending at 1:00 in the morning—or later—afforded me the opportunity to see as many as three plays every day not including street theatre. Two of the most effective performances I attended were *La república de la calle* presented by the Teatro de Todos of Montevideo, Uruguay and *Accions* by La Fura del Baus from Spain. *La república de la calle* uses scene fragmentation and characters representing social and political types to underscore the atmosphere in which Gabriel Terry became dictator in March of 1933. The actions of the hero, ex-president Baltasar Brum, emphasize the attitudes of those who played a part in the historical event from the powerful to the man on the street. When the actors (who were in exile at the time) came forward to acknowledge the applause at the end of the performance, the Argentine audience began to chant “Uruguay, Uruguay” in support of the group and of the views expressed in the play. The audience reaction became an extension of the action on stage and continued both the emotional and intellectual interaction between the public and the play.

A description of *Accions* should be the subject of a separate article, but I will attempt to convey the principal characteristics of the presentation. The subtitle of the “play” is “the Physical Alteration of a Space,” and this is essentially what occurs. The work combines elements from rock music, street theatre, dance, contemporary art and the “happening” of the 1960s to integrate the audience into the action. Well-choreographed events create the impression of a cycle of birth, partial growth, destruction and death—followed by rebirth and death. Characters appear all around the audience, emerging from what seem to be mounds of earth, break through walls and climb down the (in this case) patio roof. Passive, primitive figures are persecuted and tortured by semi-civilized creatures who also destroy manifestations of civilization—here, several refrigerators, television sets and kitchen stoves. The group normally destroys cars, but the Argentine authorities declared that practice to be too expensive. Fireworks and rock music punctuate events and accompany the action. The audience is caught in the movement and becomes part of the play itself reacting to the dramatic chaos in much the same way it would in other circumstances: with a certain amount of panic. There is no escape from the characters, but the only direct contact between the characters

and the audience is initiated by the spectators themselves. Some join in the destruction of the stoves and other items. Others plaster themselves against the walls of the patio only to discover a figure from the play dropping directly onto their space. The impact on the spectator/participant is tremendous and continues for some time after the performance has ended. For those who have not experienced this group first hand, it is worth making an extra effort to do so.

Another interesting, experimental performance was a series of sketches titled *Lucifer en el Zoo* presented by prisoners from a penitentiary in the province of Córdoba. The actors portrayed animals in a zoo who dream of circumstances in which they are free to fulfill their desires. However, even in their dreams, they are frustrated. The group was directed by a Chilean, Sergio Valencia, and was well-received by the public.

There were several plays with regional or indigenous themes, but the two I attended were *Amor Indio* by the Argentine group, MOJUTI (Movimiento Juvenil Tilcareño) and *La fanesca*, a collective work by Malayerba from Ecuador. *Amor Indio* portrays the customs and culture of the Indian people by recounting a story of love and betrayal. *La fanesca* uses the background of "carnaval" to demonstrate the problems faced by poor communities when they are forced to leave their homes.

Many of the plays presented, like *La república de la calle*, used Brechtian structures to reinforce themes of political or social protest. Two that I had the opportunity to attend were *I took Panamá* by the Teatro Popular of Bogotá, Colombia and *A gaiola* by the Teatro Debate do ABC of São Paulo, Brazil. *I took Panamá* portrays the somewhat dubious way in which the United States acquired the right to build the Panama Canal. Social signs like American football are used to introduce the theme in the first scenes, and documents presented in a didactic manner in the final act deliver the message through direct contact with the audience. The audience reacted in much the same way it had to *La república de la calle*.

*A gaiola* illustrated the conditions that Brazilian factory workers often encounter. A Brechtian narrator first relates each segment of the story to the spectators and then participates in the action. The message is directed to workers who do not have any means of dealing with management. Organization and cooperation is the answer. Generally this group spends time after every performance leading a dialogue with the audience. However, because there was a language barrier—the play was in Portuguese—no discussion could be held. ABC also performed on the street with a great deal of success in spite of the language problem. Outdoors, a Colombian actor bridged the gap between the two languages with an introduction in Spanish. Also, the scenes they presented were done in a very broad style with easily recognizable social types.

The festival program offered European drama representative of several countries. The opening performance was a presentation of *Fuenteovejuna* by La Comedia Cordobesa, and the closing shows included Rajatabla's *Macbeth*. I was able to see *Memorias del subsuelo*, an adaptation of Dostoevsky's text by FYL of Buenos Aires, and *Muerte accidental de un anarquista* by Mexico's UNAM. Both were excellent. The most striking effect in *Memorias del subsuelo* is the use of few stage props in almost every scene. A large cabinet, for

example, functions both as furniture and a sign for passage of time in the narrator's mind. The actors in *Muerte accidental de un anarquista* create the right balance between comic action and the play's very serious questions concerning legitimate methods for transforming society.

The only performance which was not well-received by an audience, in my experience, was a one-man show done by Roberto Videla of Córdoba. This was a dramatization of several texts which represented the actor's personal view of the world. Unfortunately, his work was not competent and his material suffered as a result. Another former resident of Córdoba, Graciela Ferrari, was much more successful in a performance which depicted the plight of an exile. Her work contained very little dialogue. Instead, numerous props illustrated the constant movement from place to place every exile must face.

All of the groups or individuals mentioned represent only a few of the many who took part in the festival. They do, however, represent the majority of the types of theatre available to the spectator. According to the sponsors, Córdoba will host another festival in 1986. If their efforts are successful, everyone interested in theatre will have another opportunity to either observe or participate in an effective (although at times controversial in the community) experiment in communication.

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### EL PÚBLICO

El teatro no marcha demasiado bien. Dicen que por culpa de la televisión, del cine, o del mismo teatro. ¿Qué fue lo que incitó en Córdoba a unas 70.000 personas para pelearse por entrar al teatro, para producir aglomeraciones y empujones como en los estadios de fútbol o los festivales de los cantantes populares? Los organizadores fueron totalmente superados por una afluencia de público que fue más allá de todas las expectativas, de todos los cálculos previos. Jóvenes en cantidad abrumadora alternaban en las plateas con señoras "emperifolladas," mezclando jeans y sombreros de paja con elegancias provincianas. La novedad de los visitantes latinoamericanos atrajo hasta los más renuentes, ansiosos por ver espectáculos que en esta oportunidad única podían verse. Con el agregado de asistir a una puesta en las serranías de Ellen Stewart, la "figura" del festival, con más de 45 actores seleccionados tras un examen.

Los dos espectáculos locales seleccionados para el Festival, aunque eran excelentes, pudieron verse con mayor tranquilidad; y ya Raúl Brambilla, autor y director de *El gran Ferrucci*, fue invitado a Nueva York por su llamativo talento. Esta obra, una sátira de los personajes de los escritores "duros" de la novela policial norteamericana, tuvo también una muy buena puesta de su autor.

Esos diez días, con 17 espectáculos de la muestra oficial, 10 de la muestra paralela, 8 callejeros e innumerables funciones extraordinarias para calmar al enfervorizado público, pasarán a la historia.

¿Pero qué sucederá después? La fiesta terminó, vuelve el tiempo común y las dificultades cotidianas. ¿Esta explosión de energía revitalizará la actividad teatral y el intercambio latinoamericano? El tiempo nos dará la respuesta.

#### LOS ESPECTÁCULOS

Brasileños, chilenos, colombianos; ecuatorianos, mexicanos, puertorriqueños; uruguayos, venezolanos, peruanos y argentinos revelaron algunas formas teatrales que se dan en América Latina, y catalanes explosivos—mensajeros del Apocalipsis—mostraron el más discutido espectáculo del Festival. *Accions*, realizado por el grupo La Fura dels Baus, suscitó furia y admiración, pero creo que nadie quedó indiferente ante estos españoles creativos al máximo, que expusieron sin convencionalismos la destrucción que acecha en nuestro mundo, con excepcional potencia y momentos de gran belleza, con música y pasión jóvenes, transgresores y libres.

En el Festival hubo un predominio del teatro político, y un ejemplo destacado fue *I took Panamá* por el Teatro Popular de Bogotá, Colombia, que trata la historia del Canal dramatizada por Luis A. García, y desde su estreno en 1974 ha cosechado elogios en festivales internacionales; con buenos trabajos actorales y dirección de José Alí Triana. La ópera rock *El espectáculo va a comenzar* del Grupo Teatro Hoy de Córdoba—gran realización; *Morte aos brancos* del Teatro União e Olho Vivo de Brasil, con un lenguaje propio dedicado a sectores marginales; *La fanesca* del Grupo Malayerba de Ecuador; *Muerte accidental de un anarquista* de Darío Fo, por el Teatro Profesional de la Universidad Nacional de México; *La república de la calle*, de Teatro de Todos de Uruguay, y *A gaiola* del Teatro Debate do ABC de Brasil, se inscribieron en esa línea que señala las frustraciones y carencias de nuestras sociedades. La presentación de los peruanos, con *Los músicos ambulantes*, por el Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, puso más el acento en la problemática cultural de su tierra. A juicio de muchos el mejor espectáculo del Festival, lograron a través de la actuación, el canto, el baile, la ejecución de instrumentos típicos, comunicar alegrías y tristezas de la gente de su país, con vitalidad y elaborado trabajo: el grupo ya cuenta con 12 años de trayectoria. Una verdadera expresión de teatro popular que finalizó con todos los jóvenes bailando en el patio escénico con los actores, contagiados por los ritmos andinos.

Una expresión diferente de Argentina, *Facundina* del Grupo Inyaj de La Plata, que interpreta Graciela Hall sobre la historia de vida de una mujer indígena, recogida por el antropólogo Manuel Rocca, obtuvo gran interés, y ya fue invitada para el año próximo para los Festivales de Teatro de las Américas de Canadá, y al Festival Internacional de Caracas, Venezuela. Algo que merece párrafo aparte, también de nuestro país, fue la presentación del elenco de la Unidad Regional No. 4, de Río Cuarto, con el Grupo Escena, integrado por presos comunes, que dieron algunas funciones en una cárcel de Córdoba y en la Sala Luis de Tejeda. Mientras el colectivo de la Penitenciaría los esperaba en la calle, los actores representaron sus fantasías y sus sueños—

sacar la lotería, ir a un hotel con dos mujeres, por ejemplo—y finalizaron con un escalofriante zoológico donde las fieras, detrás de sus rejas, agredían al guardián llamándolo “hombre.” *Lucifer en el zoo*, por varios motivos, fue un conmovedor espectáculo, posible gracias al trabajo de Sergio Valencia, un director chileno.

El teatro histórico estuvo muy bien representado por *Simón* de Isaac Chocrón, con excelente dirección de Cabrujas, el destacado dramaturgo venezolano. Narra el encuentro de Simón Bolívar, a los 21 años en París, con su maestro Simón Rodríguez; dos actores muy buenos dieron vida a estos apasionantes personajes.

Los clásicos tuvieron su lugar: *Fuenteovejuna* de Lope de Vega, por la Comedia Cordobesa dirigida por Jorge Petraglia, y *Macbeth* de Shakespeare, por el Grupo Rajatabla dirigido por Carlos Giménez, de Venezuela, dieron versiones actuales de estas obras del Renacimiento europeo.

El teatro callejero fue uno de los mayores aciertos: *Sancucho, el hijo del caos*, que interpretó Juan López, un cordobés residente en España, fue una jubilosa muestra de creatividad con gran participación del público. Ironía, humor y profundidad le permitieron transitar por la sátira política, social y costumbrista. Los brasileños se lucieron con su *Show de emergencia* por el Grupo A.B.C., con nueve actores que hicieron mímica, música y corrosivo humor, que logró la mayor comunicación en un humilde barrio cordobés. Los otros espectáculos callejeros también fueron entusiastamente recibidos: el Teatro de la Libertad con *Juan Moreira*, el Grupo Sur Teatro con *A cielo abierto*, etc., reunieron atentas rondas que los siguieron fervorosamente.

Amén de todo esto, la Sección Eventos Especiales programó una cantidad de espectáculos de acceso gratuito, que no siempre tuvieron la difusión adecuada. El Festival de Teatro de Muñecos, que reunió, a nuestras grandes titiriteros, Javier Villafañe, Héctor Di Mauro, Roberto Espina, tampoco tuvo suficiente publicidad. Los inconvenientes de organización y de traslado fueron abundantes, así como la falta de un centro de reunión que posibilitara el encuentro de la gente de teatro de diferentes procedencias, para intercambiar experiencias.

En el campo de la discusión teórica, se realizaron diversos foros: gremiales, de estudiantes de teatro, sobre el teatro argentino actual, sobre promoción y difusión de la actividad teatral en América, y conferencias varias, entre las que se destacaron la exposición de José Monleón acerca de “Teatro y democracia,” que rompió algunos tabús del tema, y la de Heda Kage, dramaturga de la República Federal Alemana, que señaló el interés por los autores latinoamericanos en las emisiones de radioteatro de su país, y la apertura de un nuevo mercado para los dramaturgos.

Finalmente, en el debe, quedaron todos los inconvenientes; en el haber, el fervor por el teatro que se desató incontenible durante diez días, la muestra de once países, el transformar a la ciudad de Córdoba en centro de una actividad cultural nacional y latinoamericana. Y el triunfo de la vida, con los jóvenes de energías inagotables, que bailaban en la calle, bailaban en los teatros, bailaban salsa en “La nueva trova”—el boliche de onda—y escalaban los cerros al amanecer, para completar la fiesta.