

## International Theatre Festival-- On the Border/Between Bridges

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"La primera llamada, la segunda llamada, la tercera llamada y principiamos" with the first International Theatre Festival--"On the Border/Between Bridges"--held on the University of California Riverside campus July 10-14, 1991.

Five Chicano theatrical groups from the United States came together with a pair of Mexican troupes in an attempt to bridge two theatre traditions that are united by language, culture and spirit, but separated by life experiences and political borders.

A Fulbright scholarship enabled Carlos Morton, the festival's organizer and coordinator, to spend a year in Mexico City where he experienced the distanced relationships between Chicanos and Mexicans. This realization led to his writing a weekly column for the newspaper *Uno Más Uno* titled "Un pocho en México." Morton, through these essays, gained considerable recognition and a key collaborator. Eduardo Rodríguez Solís of Mexico City, who works with Programa Cultural de las Fronteras, is also the festival's Mexican coordinator. The two conceived the idea of "On the Border/Between Bridges" and have plans to enhance these initial cultural exchanges between the United States and Mexico by making the week-long theatre festival an annual event to be held at different sites along the border from California to Texas and forming bridges that will by means of the stage bring together the intellectual spirits of both nations.

The 1991 festival began with *Máscara Mágica* of San Diego, a group directed by William A. Virchis of Southwestern College. A brash and inventive conceptual blend of mime, verse, music and dance, *Máscara Mágica* boldly addresses contemporary Chicano themes in stark yet artful vignettes of mime and poetry with an underlying didactic tone titled *Impressions of the Border*. This non-linear collage of art forms, 85 percent of which is drawn from experiences of the students who wrote it (mainly Jordan Faris), played to a good house and a receptive audience. Outstanding were the mime, Patrick García, and the singer María Acevez who closed the show singing "En mi tierra mexicana."

Advertised as "Aztlán's most wanted comedy troop," the Chicano Secret Service gave an outstanding performance to an appreciative packed house for the festival's second night of drama. The trio that makes up the Chicano Secret Service--Thomas Carrasco, Eduardo López and Elias Serna--are educated and intelligent young men from Berkeley. Their performance is fast paced, crisp, fresh, timely and funny. Their well-written and well-performed material was rewarded by good audience reaction. The performance began with a mime spray painting graffiti, an episode that evolves into a police brutality scene that in turn fades into a modern dance that then becomes a rap song. Following is an inventive and funny scene where an actor models the numerous ways to wear a serape. Also in the play are a series of outstanding comical skits such as a CNN newscast ("Chicano News Network"); "Spit Lee" of Chicano movie fame; Frida Kahlúa; IBM (I be Mexican) and finally to the question, "Are you too nopalote?" we are told, "Don't panic, get Hispanic" in a TV commercial for a spray-on product called "Hispanic" that enables the Chicano to fit into the corporate business world. The performance ended with "President Bush" speaking to a Latino audience with his "Little Brown One" serving as translator. The president's remarks are paraphrased into a less than accurate translation in Spanish that is hilarious. The young comedy troupe from Berkeley was described as a "Culture Clash clone" but I, for one, think the Chicano Secret Service is an offspring that stands on its own.

The third day's offerings were by a Riverside group called Alternatives that presented a Chicano version of Anton Chekhov's *A Marriage Proposal*. Alternatives' one-act play *Un brindis to Love* was written and directed by Carlos García. The actors, Suzanne Milson, Patrick Romero and Carlos García, turned incredible performances and the play was funny and entertaining. For the second performance of the evening, Ruby Nelda Pérez did a bilingual one-woman show called *A Woman's Work*. The play is a series of skits and recollections depicting the "typical" life of a Texas Chicana. Ruby is an excellent story teller and the audience sat spellbound throughout the telling of a ghost story about a guy on his way to a dance who picked up a girl on the road. During the dance party he falls in love with her only to discover the next day that she has been dead for twenty years. In the post-performance discussion, Ruby explained that as a *tejana* from San Antonio, she feels that her act is regional. However, an Hispanic lady in the audience from California, when referring to the play's protagonist stated, "She is me."

Saturday's offerings began with a matinee staging of *El primero* performed in Spanish by a San Diego troupe called Punto y Coma. An absurdist play, written by Israel Horovitz, the one-act *El primero* deals with our constant struggle to be first and its implications. During the play we see how women use sex (prostitution) to get to the head of the line. Molly and her husband are in line and she "dances" off-stage with each of the men standing in line. Nevertheless, and in spite of apparently dancing instead of making love, there is a strong suggestion of prostitution. The audience also views other strategies

such as brute force, persistence and intelligence to reach and maintain first place. The play was directed by Pepe Stephensky and the actors were Joey Chait, Beto Cohen, Lizette Galicot, David Chait and Zeji Ozeri. The evening performance of *Juegos profanos*, also in Spanish, was staged by the first of two groups from Mexico City. The play was directed by Eduardo Ruiz Saviñón who had earlier this year directed an English version of it for Teatro Dallas. David Martín Hevia Garibay played the role of Saúl and Elena de Haro starred as Alma in a macabre play about incest, murder, necrophilia, and fantasy. Carlos Olmos' *Juegos profanos* (1970) is about a brother and sister who appear to have killed their parents when the latter discover the children's incestuous relationship on Christmas Eve a decade earlier. It can also be argued that the parents murdered Saúl and Alma and what the audience sees is the parents play-acting as their children. Another possibility is fundamentally Freudian in that Saúl and Alma begin as themselves and later choose to become their parents. At any rate, two well-dressed skeletons are manipulated like giant puppets (perhaps the parents Venturina and Nicolás) by what may be the children, as the evening on which their parents learned the secret is re-enacted. The actions of the two actors on stage are sometimes puzzling as they waiver between loving, violent and even erotic behavior in what has been labeled "Latin American gothic." The two Mexican actors turned in an excellent acting performance and represented their country well.

The last performance of the festival was a matinee on Sunday afternoon titled *La hora de las locas*, a two-act play by the Mexican dramatist Pablo Salinas who also attended the festival and directed the Riverside staging. Fernando Gálvez and Beatriz Monroy played husband and wife Armando and Eve with Cristóbal Cervántez as the transvestite Octavio. Along with an informative and interesting exposé of the gay lifestyle in Mexico, the play's main theme is the breakup of a couple, a problem that is ever more common in modern Mexico. The highly entertaining and frequently funny play also shows that the *Mexicana* often doesn't truly understand her liberated United States counterpart. *La hora de las locas*, with its message, entertainment value and excellent directing and acting was a fitting conclusion to the 1991 "On the Border/Between Bridges" international theatre festival.

Mingling among the major components of the festival--enthusiastic theatre audiences, the Chicano and Mexican actors and directors--were also professors and people like Edgar Ceballos of *Escenología* and the Mexican theatre journal *Máscara* and professor/dramatist Gerardo Campillo of Durango, Mexico, all of which made for a fertile milieu whose by-product will be many mutually beneficial projects for the betterment of Hispanic theatre. Also present were members of ATINT (Asociación de Trabajadores e Investigadores del Nuevo Teatro) with Beatriz Rizk, Pregones (New York) and during the event TENAZ (Teatros Nacionales de Aztlán) held its Quinto Seminario de Tenaz under the direction of Marina Pianca and José Guadalupe Saucedo. There were also representatives present from Chicano *Teatros* of California as well as out-of-

state groups such as Colorado's Su Teatro (Debbi Martínez) and The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center (Frank Ontiveros) of San Antonio, Texas.

A general, but fair assessment of the Riverside theatre festival would be to say that the Chicano and the Mexican *teatros*, as per the stated goal, got acquainted during the 1991 theatre event. However, to get to know one another will take longer than one week and one festival. Despite obvious misunderstandings, as often evidenced during the discussions following each performance, the desire of the Chicanos and the Mexicans to meet again and to get to know one another better is encouraging and exciting. Much will be realized in future years and future festivals. The initial 1991 festival will be remembered not only for a series of fine dramatic performances but also for initiating the process for spanning the border dramatically for the betterment of both the United States and Mexico.

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