

The Mexico City Theatre, 1969¹

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¿Qué pasa con el teatro en México? This was the title of an extraordinary anthology which Luis Guillermo Piazza edited in 1967.² It consists of responses by eight dramatists, directors, and critics to the question posed in a 1966 symposium on the Mexican theatre and commentaries on these responses by eight other writers. The answers vary from the pessimism of Luis Reyes de la Maza, who changed the question to "Por qué no pasa nada con el teatro en México?" to the profound faith in the importance of the theatre manifested by Alexandro Jodorowsky.

Three years later, the casual playgoer in Mexico City might side with Reyes de la Maza, supposing, with some justification, that he finds himself in a theatrical desert. The commercial theatres situated in the readily accessible locations offer dismal fare. Some typical titles in 1969 were *Las puras*, *Las golñas*, *Las ficheras*, or, on a slightly higher plane, *Casa de Doña Santa* and *Dos maridos oprimidos*. Among the best works which the commercial theatre presented in 1969 were imports. Dale Wasserman's (b. 1917) *El hombre de La Mancha* (*Man of La Mancha*, 1966) was attractive in the Spanish language, and it played over two hundred performances at the Manolo Fábregas Theatre. Frank Loesser's (b. 1910) *Cómo triunfar en los negocios sin proponérselo* (*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, 1961) might well have been adapted to the Mexican scene, but it was not. Nevertheless, it enjoyed popularity in the Chucho Salinas production at the elegant Insurgentes Theatre. The supporting cast was bright, young and attractive. The costumes struck the right note, and the production was polished. The show deserved its successful run.

No matter how well done, however, this is the theatre which Jodorowsky describes as "TEATRO DE ADORMECER hecho por abarroteros, proxenetas, impotentes y fabricantes de salchichas. Género que ciertos pedoperiodistas

respetan porque produce 'mucha lana.' . . . Allí va la gente a digerir, roncar, ver pierna y muslo como en los caldos de Zenón."³

The other readily accessible entertainment is provided at the Teatro de Bellas Artes. However, except for foreign drama companies, its offerings are usually in opera—both national and international seasons—, music, and dance.

The diligent playgoer could, nevertheless, find in 1969 an interesting repertory of theatrical offerings. The performances are usually announced in the newspapers, although directors complain with good reason of inadequate publicity. A principal problem, however, is to find the theatre. The avid fan must be prepared to cope with the city's arrogant and ignorant taxi drivers and its chaotic transportation system; but he will be rewarded by a view of the active theatrical life that exists outside the more accessible commercial theatre. It is sometimes professional, but mostly it is amateur or semi-professional. It is modestly supported by the government, which provides the theatres and in some cases theatrical services. Admission is often free. If there is a charge, ticket prices are from twelve to twenty pesos (one to two dollars). While such prices may seem low, it must be remembered that they amount to three times and more the cost of a cinema ticket.

Aside from the commercial theatres, of which a dozen or more are usually active, there are four groups of theatres, all of which present works of superior quality, even though the casts are frequently amateur. One group is made up of those theatres in Chapultepec Park which are associated with the Theatre Department of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA): Teatro del Bosque, Granero, Teatro de Cámara de la Casa del Lago, and Orientación (the last one named for the Teatro Orientación which Celestino Gorostiza founded in 1932).

The most interesting development, to the foreigner at least, is the operation of theatres by the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS). The Mexican social security agency has built office buildings, housing developments, and medical clinics, and at the same time has constructed theatres and community centers alongside them. The support given the theatre was especially notable in the administration of Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964), but theatre people complain that it diminished during the Díaz Ordaz administration. Two of the theatres, Reforma and Hidalgo, are in central locations. The Xola and the Antonio Caso are easily accessible and announce performances in brightly lighted marquees. Others are either at some distance from downtown or even on the outskirts of the city in poor neighborhoods where urban renewal projects have been built: Tepeyac, Legaria, Independencia, Cuauhtémoc, Santa Fe, Tlalpan. Plays given at the last six sometimes move from one to the other so that people living in each neighborhood have the opportunity to see them. Some of the theatres (Reforma, Hidalgo, Xola, Antonio Caso) are fully professional, and plaques in the lobbies commemorate runs of one or two hundred performances, suggesting that some of these productions have been financial successes.

Another government patron of the theatre is a section of the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores called Organismo de Promoción Internacional de Cultura (OPIC), and its theatre located at Cozumel, 33, in the Colonia Condesa is appropriately called the Casa de la Paz. A plaque in the theatre states: "Esta casa fue construida por el Gobierno de la República para la actuación de artistas mexicanos y extranjeros. Es un cruceo del arte y del pensamiento, abierto a la amistad de los pueblos por la cultura. Por eso se le ha designado Casa de la Paz." It was inaugurated March 24, 1965, with a "composition" of music, poetry, and lights directed by Alexandro Jodorowsky. OPIC provides personnel, services, and publicity; and it gives to the artists the total amount of the box office receipts. It also sponsors art exhibits in the lobby. It has expressed the wish that similar institutions may be founded in Mexico City, in the provinces, and in other countries. Indeed, there is now a second Casa de la Paz in an excellent location on the Zócalo (Plaza de la Independencia, 7).

OPIC was the sponsor in 1968 of the I Festival de Teatro Nuevo de Latinoamérica. Conceived by Carlos Solórzano, the Guatemalan playwright long resident in Mexico, it was held to coincide with the Olympic games. Eighteen short plays from as many countries were presented in six programs. Six of Mexico's best stage directors mounted the productions: Héctor Mendoza, Alexandro Jodorowsky, Virgilio Mariel, Julio Castillo, Xavier Rojas, and Juan José Gurrola. They worked with an extraordinary range of material from the traditional to the boldly advanced and gave the public an unusual opportunity to see the contemporary theatre of the Americas. The play which represented Mexico was Elena Garro's *La señora en su balcón*.⁴

Student theatre makes an important contribution to the dramatic fare. Besides performances on the campus of the National University (which are announced irregularly and often with mistakes in the newspapers), the Teatro Estudiantil de la Universidad de México (TEU) has as its principal house the Teatro de la Universidad in a very good location at Avenida Chapultepec, 409. Frequently during the season there are two different plays in a week, each playing three performances. Admission is free. The offerings vary from the oldest traditions of the Spanish theatre to the latest novelty from France or from Eastern Europe.

Apart from these official or semi-official groups and locales, the enterprise of a single person deserves special mention. Margarita Urueta is a playwright, producer, and owner of her own Jesús Urueta Theatre, named for her father. In this small, modern theatre, inaugurated in 1962, she has sought to stage plays with a Mexican theme written by young Mexican playwrights. Some critics fear that such a nationalistic direction may serve only to perpetuate what they call a "maguey curtain" at a time when cosmopolitanism is needed. However, the 1969 season gave evidence that it is easier to see an avant-garde foreign play than to attend a performance by a Mexican author, either new or established. Miss Urueta's own plays are in the vanguard of the current theatre, and she has

scored some notable artistic successes since she wrote her first play at the age of twelve.⁵

American plays dominated the Mexico City stage in 1969, and two authors were particularly popular. Three plays by Arthur Miller (b. 1915) were being performed at the same time: *Todos son mis hijos* (*All My Sons*, 1947), *Panorama desde el puente* (*View from the Bridge*, 1955), and *El precio* (*The Price*, 1968). Two works by Edward Albee (b. 1928) were running simultaneously: *La historia del zoológico* (*The Zoo Story*, 1959) and *¿Quién teme a Virginia Woolf?* (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, 1962). Also, Tennessee Williams' (b. 1914) *Un tranvía llamado deseo* (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1947) was revived once again. All of these had substantial runs.

Next in order of importance were Spanish Peninsular plays, principally because the number of works represented received a boost from the visit in July and August of Madrid's María Guerrero Theatre Company. The troupe played at the Bellas Artes, giving only nine performances of six authors' works. Although tickets there cost several times the usual price in the Mexican theatre, audiences were fairly large. The result of their visit was that, with the efforts of various Mexican troupes, it was possible to see in 1969 a Peninsular play from every century between the fifteenth and the twentieth, except the eighteenth.

An amateur group playing under IMSS sponsorship presented an anthology entitled *Estampas del teatro español*. It included the *Representación del nacimiento de Nuestro Señor* by Gómez Manrique (1412?-1490?), selections from the *Eufemia* of Lope de Rueda (1505?-1565) and from *Reinar después de morir* by Luis Vélez de Guevara (1579-1644), and an anonymous *sainete*, *Los dos sacristanes*. While such an effort is not entirely satisfactory, the selection and bridging were done with care, and the group performed with polish. The TEU offered the *Comedia himenea* by Bartolomé de Torres Naharro (d. 1524?) in a clearly amateur performance which yet gave the audience a sense of the importance of the work in theatrical history as a well developed treatment of the honor theme. To round out the Golden Age Spanish theatre, the TEU produced *El vergonzoso en palacio* by Tirso de Molina (1571?-1648), and the María Guerrero troupe performed *La dama duende* by Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681). From the nineteenth century, the public was offered *Locura de amor* (1855) by Manuel Tamayo y Baus (1829-1898), with Ofelia Guilmain in the role of mad queen Juana. It had over a hundred performances at the Xola (IMSS).

From the early twentieth century the María Guerrero Theatre gave *El señor Adrián, el primo* (1927) by Carlos Arniches (1866-1943) and two short plays by Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866-1936): the *Farsa italiana de La enamorada del rey* (1920) and *La rosa de papel* (1924). An amateur troupe, "La Farsa," presented *El verdugo de Sevilla* by Pedro Muñoz Seca (1881-1936) at IMSS theatres. This group represents a special interest and appeals to a particular audience. Founded in 1953 by Dr. Fernando Colchero, a surgeon, it is made up

of professional people whose careers are outside the theatre. Its performances are free, so that its expenses are borne by the group itself and by an occasional contribution. It began with a production of *La casa de La Troya*, a dramatic version of the popular novel (1915) of student life in Santiago de Compostela by Alejandro Pérez Lugín (1870-1926). Their explanation of why they selected the *casi sainete en tres actos* of Muñoz Seca for their 1969 production exemplifies the theatrical philosophy of this particular group: "En estos tiempos en que el teatro experimental, de vanguardia y surrealista está tan de moda, consideramos que dar un respiro y la oportunidad de divertirse con teatro ligero, cómico y decente será bien recibido por nuestro público." If one realizes that most of the theatres of the IMSS have a ready but unsophisticated public, made up of both adults and children, it becomes readily apparent that the aim of "La Farsa" is a legitimate one.

Two plays of Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) were presented in 1969. The Teatro de Cámara de la Casa del Lago gave an excellent interpretation of *El retablillo de Don Cristóbal* (1931), which became a full-fledged operetta through song, recitative and musical accompaniments. The OPIC theatre on the Zócalo gave what was announced as the world première of Lorca's *Así que pasen cinco años*.⁶ Completed in 1931, Lorca had read it privately to friends, and Germaine Montero performed the mannequin scene of Act II at the Salon Iena in Paris in 1937. The work is lyrical and subjective. The fundamental theme is time. All the men are the same man, and all the women the same woman. They meet and separate in the present, freely moved by memory and imagination. In his direction Julio Castillo interpreted the work for the public of today, and the "mod" costumes of some characters did no violence to Lorca's concept. Unfortunately, the men spent so much time on the floor that the knees of their velveteen pants showed the wear after a few performances. Lorca's play is uneven, but the poetry of the second and third acts was moving in Castillo's production.

Lorca's name attracted sell-out crowds for the first few performances, but the nature of the piece could not sustain such numbers for long. Nevertheless, it played to small audiences for several weeks.

The María Guerrero Theatre presented plays by two current dramatists: *Tres sombreros de copa* (written in 1932, first performed in 1952) by Miguel Mihura (b. 1905); and *Los verdes campos del Edén* (1963) by Antonio Gala. Mihura's play, although written twenty years before its first performance, is esteemed both in Spain and in Europe as a work that belongs to the currents of contemporary theatre. Gala's play was both a critical and a box-office success. Therefore, when the Teatro de la República in Mexico City staged *El armario* (première at the Arniches Theatre, Madrid, on April 6, 1969) by the prolific and commercially successful Alfonso Paso (b. 1926), it could be said that the Mexican public had the opportunity of seeing a cross-section of current Spanish plays in the 1969 season.

The French boulevard theatre has long had a following in Mexico. In 1969 Nadia Haro Oliva was appearing at the Arlequín in a comedy, *El desliz de Carolina*, by Haguet and Valmy. In recognition of her eighteen years of presenting French authors to Mexican audiences, the French ambassador awarded her the Palmes Académiques on July 28. The same distinction was given in the past to Virginia Fábregas and to María Tereza Montoya for their work with French theatre in Mexico.

On a more serious plane, the Teatro Coyoacán presented Jean-Paul Sartre's (b. 1905) *A puerta cerrada* (*Huis Clos*, 1944; *No Exit*), translated into Spanish by Alvaro Arauz. The TEU gave a moving performance of *Magia roja* (*Magie Rouge*, 1931) by the Belgian Michel de Ghelderode (1898-1962).

Also worthy of note was a monologue by the Argentine Enrique Suárez de Deza (b. 1905), who has worked mostly in Spain. His *Sarah Bernhardt* is a piece like those which have been composed around the life and works of Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and G. B. Shaw. He wrote it originally for the Argentine actress Berta Singerman, and he was reluctant to approve another actress for the role. In Mexico it was finally performed by Julia Bautista. While neither an author nor an actress could hope to equal the legend of the great Bernhardt, both Suárez de Deza's concept of her personality and Julia Bautista's interpretation merited the applause which they received.

British theatre was scarcely represented at all in 1969. There was a production of *La importancia de llamarse Ernesto* (*The Importance of Being Ernest*, 1895) by Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), performed by a group called Teatro Universal Contemporáneo and directed by Guillermo Hagg.

Other national theatres were represented sporadically. *La danza macabra* (*The Dance of Death*, 1901) by August Strindberg (1844-1912) had a long run at the Granero in a production directed by Xavier Rojas. Of special interest was the monologue *Diario de un loco* based on a short story by Gogol. This work, which in this version really belongs to the Mexican theatre, is acted by Carlos Ancira under the direction of Alexandro Jodorowsky.⁷ They presented it first in 1964, performed it both in Spain and in Russia, and have been keeping the production alive in Mexico since then. In 1969 it was being performed once a week during the season at the OPIC Casa de la Paz on Cozumel street.

In summary, the Mexican public in 1969 had the opportunity—if it wished to avail itself—to see plays of varied tendencies and from a number of historical periods. While the works from abroad were often no longer novel in the country of their origin, the Mexican audience could keep abreast of American and European theatre.

Nevertheless, a disquieting incident occurred in October, 1969. The Antonio Caso Theatre was preparing to stage *Los incendiarios* (*Biedermann und die Brandstifter*, 1958) by Max Frisch (b. 1911), the German-Swiss dramatist. He and his compatriot, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, are the leading dramatists of the German-speaking world today; with *Biedermann and the Incendiaries*, Frisch

ventures into the Theatre of the Absurd. According to newspaper reports, Mexico City police blocked the way of would-be spectators as they approached the theatre, and they also removed the actors and the director from the building.* The supervisor of the Oficina de Espectáculos of Mexico City, Víctor Moya, was quoted in the press as saying that the play was prohibited because the author "is a communist." He went on to say, according to the newspapers: "Un grupo tendencioso trató de aprovecharse para montar una obra teatral comunista, que pretendía descubrir un mensaje que a nosotros no nos interesa." Moya is also reported to have observed that the work was dull and that it had boring Germanic humor with political coloring. The author, he said, "no es ningún clásico, como pretenden los empresarios, ya que su nombre no figura en ninguna antología."⁸

That censorship may be a real problem is indicated by reports that the Mexican company of the Broadway musical *Hair* played one night in Acapulco before local authorities closed it and jailed the cast for several hours, accusing them of undermining the morals of youth. While the musical is not all innocence, there were at the time permanent companies in four American cities and in several foreign countries, all of which retained the vulgar language and the nude scene.⁹

The national theatre of Mexico did not offer a brilliant season in 1969. Important writers—Celestino Gorostiza, Sergio Magaña, Carlos Solórzano, Wilberto Cantón, to mention a few—figured scarcely or not at all. Even so, it was possible to see plays from both the colonial period and the twentieth century.

From the sixteenth century the TEU presented Fernán González de Eslava's *Coloquio XVI* in the theatre of the School of Architecture on the campus of the National University. At the Casa de la Paz (Cozumel Street), the Teatro Helénico de México gave a program of three sonnets, two *loas*, and a *sainete* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. This was as exciting an evening of theatre as the city had to offer in 1969. The costuming was suitably baroque, and the actors were charming in the sonnets, amusing in the *sainete*, and skillful in interpreting the abstractions of the *loas*. The spectator left impressed by the intellectual level of Sor Juana's audience as well as by her meaningfulness in our times.

Of twentieth-century Mexican dramatic authors, four should be mentioned for their contributions to the 1969 season. An amateur group revived *El gesticulador* (published 1943; first performed, 1947) by Rodolfo Usigli (b. 1905), presenting it at several IMSS theatres. The direction was weak and the acting wooden; as a result, the play seemed dramatically dated. Yet the audience reacted vociferously to the criticism of Mexican political life—the making of a governor

* [Ed. note] Antonio Magaña Esquivel writes: ". . . es indudable que los dos Ignacios, López Tarso y Retes, como productores de esta pieza excelente [*Los albañiles*] que, para mi gusto, es la merecedora del Premio Ruiz de Alarcón 1969, disponían de alguna subvención oficial, alguna ayuda, como luego la tuvieron cuando repusieron en el Teatro Xola, del Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, *Los incendiarios*, de Max Frisch." ["Balance del teatro en 1969," *Revista Mexicana de Cultura* (VI época/No. 48), supl. de *El Nacional* (28 dic 1969), p. 7.]

—and clearly showed that the play, which is subtitled *Pieza para demagogos*, still has a message to communicate.

Another group performing at IMSS theatres gave Emilio Carballido's *Yo también hablo de la rosa*, first produced in 1966. The story is a simple one: Polo and Toña, a boy and a girl twelve or thirteen years old, stay away from school, Polo because he has no shoes, Toña to be with him. Their mischief is innocently delinquent: for instance, they use wire to get coins from a telephone box in order to buy ice cream. In the course of the play, they roll a cement-filled can onto a railroad track and derail a train. Various people—a psychologist, a communist—interpret the incident according to their own prejudices, and the players re-enact the action in the light of these interpretations.

The role of La Intermediaria, played by the same actress who does the part of Polo's mother, is puzzling. She seems to be a sort of Mother Mexico (she is costumed in attractive Indian garb and wears thick braids), and she is evidently the author's mouthpiece. But the role is pompous and at the same time hardly necessary. The value of the play lies, I think, in the depiction of what I have termed the "innocent delinquency" of the boy and the girl, its grave consequences, and the insights which its portrayal gives into Mexican life. The *costumbrista* aspect of the piece results in a *leitmotiv*: the incident is publicized in the newspapers (Mexican newspapers produce sensational extra editions regularly every day). These papers then become the trash which is collected by *pepenadores*, or ragpickers, in rope bags (a common sight in Mexico City).

Carballido's technique recalls, of course, Luigi Pirandello's (1867-1936) in *Right You Are if You Think You Are* (*Così È Se Vi Pare*, 1918). Yet the appeal of the play lies more in its *costumbrista* portrayal than in the questions that the interpretations raise about the causes of the children's actions.

Two one-act plays by Emilio Carballido were given at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria No. 7 "Ezequiel A. Chávez" as a part of a theatrical festival of new one-act plays. Carballido's *El censo* won first prize in the contest sponsored by the school. Unfortunately, the reward for the prize (whatever it may have meant in pesos) included performance by high school actors before a high school audience—and the audience could not contain its juvenile mirth at seeing friends on the stage. The play is a farce about the difficulties a census-taker experiences in obtaining the required information from an unconventional household. In this play, as in *Yo también hablo de la rosa*, Carballido's strong point is his command of the *costumbrista* elements of the Mexican milieu, in this case seen as a part of the farce of life.

On the same program was a Carballido monologue, *La selaginela* (*Club-Moss*), which admirably captured the pathos in the life of a teenage girl (conflicts with her mother, problems with her complexion, etc.). It absorbed its audience sufficiently well to produce silence, and, in the circumstances, that was the best measure of Carballido's success.¹⁰

One of the most interesting Mexican plays of the 1969 season was Vicente Leñero's *Los albañiles*, performed at the Antonio Caso, an IMSS theatre. It was based on the author's best-selling novel of 1963, which won the Biblioteca Breve prize offered by the Barcelona publisher Seix-Barral. The dramatic version is remarkably successful. The scene is a building under construction, and at the beginning of the play the actors work so hard that one thinks they really ought to be members of the "Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Construcción, CTM," as a sign on the building says they are. However, Ignacio Retes, one of Mexico's outstanding directors, had the good sense to stylize this aspect of the action once the play got underway.

The plot centers around the death of the old night watchman Don Jesús. Did he die of an epileptic fit or was he murdered? A length of pipe, which might have been used by the killer, is found near the body. His death occurs at the beginning of the play, and then the story is told in a series of flashbacks that intermingle with the police investigation. Half a dozen people had motives for getting rid of the poor old man (a foreman was stealing materials from the project; the young architect was professionally incompetent; another man was carrying on with Don Jesús's wife—a woman some years younger than her husband—and so on). In the end, it is not important who committed the crime, if there actually was a crime, and the spectator does not find out. Leñero himself sees a theological meaning in his play. In the program notes he uses the Apostle Paul's words in speaking of Don Jesús the night watchman: "A quien no conoció pecado, lo hizo pecado entre nosotros, para que fuésemos justicia de Dios en él."

Aside from the theme, the language offers the most interesting aspect of the play. The intonation is that which one rarely hears on the stage but which is common to the lower classes in Mexico. So is the syntax and vocabulary, and the latter caused considerable comment in Mexico, which has not yet accustomed itself to the strong language that New York audiences have come to accept on the stage.

The most active man in the Mexican theatre today is Alexandro Jodorowsky, a Chilean who began his career as a puppeteer. He arrived in Mexico in 1960 by way of Paris, where he had worked with the French mime Marcel Marceau.

The critic Lyn Engel has compared Jodorowsky's impact on the Mexican theatre to that of the Japanese Seki Sano (d. 1966) when he arrived in Mexico in 1939.¹¹ Jodorowsky began to shake the Mexican theatrical world with productions of Strindberg, Beckett, Ionesco, Arrabal and others at the same time that he taught Mexican audiences to appreciate their own dramatists: Margarita Urjeta, Luis Spota, Elena Garro and Carlos Solórzano, among others.

His very first efforts met with rigid censorship. His production of Strindberg's *Sonata de los espectros* (*The Spook Sonata*, 1907) was shut down with fines for everyone. His own play *La ópera del orden* was closed also. When he produced Ionesco's *La lección* (*La Leçon*, written 1950, first performed 1951),

the censors obliged him to remove two balls from an actor's cape because they resembled testicles (and they were intended to, Jodorowsky said).¹² In another production they forbade an actor to show his navel. When Jodorowsky hung a photograph of the Pope on the bass drum in a "pop" show, the censors closed down the production.

Commenting on his first encounter with censorship, Jodorowsky recognized his own ingenuousness: "Nunca creí que en el teatro pudiera prohibirse cosas. Supuse que estaba haciendo obra para adultos y que ellos sabían muy bien adónde iban."¹³ He came to terms with the situation, however, rationalizing his position in these words quoted by Jed Linde: "Es menester conocer las particulares limitaciones de cada lugar donde se trabaja, y ser libre dentro de esos confines. Debiendo escoger entre trabajar con limitaciones o no trabajar, yo elijo lo primero."¹⁴

After his first setback with the censors, Jodorowsky staged Samuel Beckett's *Final de partida* (*Fine de Partie*, 1957; *Endgame*); and, at Carlos Solózano's request, he performed as a mime in *Acto sin palabras* (*Acte sans Paroles*, 1957; *Act without Words*), by the same author. Jodorowsky says Solózano lost 50,000 pesos. The average audience was eight people, of whom two or three walked out regularly when Hamm's legless parents appeared in the garbage cans. But Jodorowsky has persisted, and thanks to him, Mexico has encountered the contemporary theatre.¹⁵

Jodorowsky has also introduced into Mexico such vanguard movements as participatory theatre. He has staged happenings, including his *Melodrama sacramental* at the Festival of Free Expression in Paris in 1965. He has advocated the Teatro Pánico (the name refers to the god Pan), which invites actors and public to improvise on a basic structure. In one of his books on the subject he says: "los pánicos tienden a convertir al espectador en actor. No son obras sino más bien recetas. Presentan como materia poética toda la realidad y desafían al espectador a dejar su asiento y sumergirse en esa realidad hasta que él mismo se convierta en héroe."¹⁶

In the 1969 season two works directed by Jodorowsky were playing at OPIC's Casa de la Paz: the aforementioned version of Gogol's *Diario de un loco*, featuring Carlos Ancira; and Albee's *La historia del zoológico*, in which the young actor José Roberto Hill gave an outstanding performance.

At the Xola, Jodorowsky and the dancer Sonia Amelio created a show, called *Drama Pop*, that was as delightful a spectacle as could be seen in Mexico City. The familiar story of a stenographer who falls in love with her boss, loses him and then gets him back is told in dance, music, mime, castanets that "talk," and a minimum of dialogue. The creators purposely melded styles and genres: "Hemos intentado lograr un espectáculo Camp Pop basado en la CONFUSIÓN de géneros: ¡Qué placer mezclar el teatro y la pantomima al zapateado español, sobre bossa-nova, el music-hall, a la sátira y al melodrama, a Cri Cri y Chopin; al bello mal gusto y al vulgar buen gusto! Les ofrecemos este 'monstruito' con

la mejor de las risas" (program note). In view of Jodorowsky's previous problems with censors, it is worth noting that the show could be advertised as "Apta para toda la familia."

In the theatres of Mexico, as the performance is about to begin, an actor announces in person or by loudspeaker: "Primera llamada, primera. Primera llamada, primera." The announcement is repeated for the "Segunda llamada" and for the "Tercera." Then, with the word "Empezamos," the lights dim and the show is underway. What awaits the spectator is far different from what he could expect two decades ago. Subservience to Peninsular drama has so far passed that the appearance of Spanish actors in Spanish plays is a refreshing experience for the theatre public. To the extent that censors permit, the Mexican stage is now open to the latest currents in world drama. The "maguey curtain" of provincial realism has been parted slightly with the production of plays of cosmopolitan significance by Mexican authors. Yet, it is still not easy to see plays by Mexican playwrights. Fortunately, there are at work in Mexico directors and producers like Margarita Urueta and Alexandro Jodorowsky and playwrights of diverse tendencies who are aware and who are making sacrifices for the realization of their artistic ideals. Thanks to them, one of the great cities of America has a theatre that is, if not yet outstanding, worthy and promising.

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Notes

1. This study was carried out, in part, during a seven-week stay in Mexico City in June and July, 1969. It does not attempt to include all of the works performed during the year but rather intends to be representative of the Mexico City stage at this particular time. When it seemed appropriate and I could give accurate dates for works or authors, I have done so since they may be helpful to the reader in assessing current trends. Usually I have given titles of foreign works in Spanish and either in English or in the original language.

2. Luis Guillermo Piazza, ed., *¿Qué pasa con el teatro en México?* (México: Organización Editorial Novaro, 1967), 203 pp.

3. Piazza, p. 88.

4. Carlos Solórzano, "Méjico: Una escena permanente de América Latina," *Primer Acto*, No. 105 (febrero, 1969), 60-66. By the same author, "Primer Festival de Teatro Nuevo de Latinoamérica," *Latin American Theatre Review*, 2/2 (Spring, 1969), 61-68.

5. Margarita Urueta has written more than twenty plays that have been published in half a dozen volumes. A recent collection is *Teatro nuevo* (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1963), 181 pp., which contains four plays: *Las máquinas devoran a una señorita llamada Rivela*, *o El dios laico*; *Grajú*; *La mujer transparente*; *Angel de justicia, o El señor perro*.

6. I have heard that the actress Carmen Troitiño presented the work in Barcelona some eight or ten years ago and that Marcelle Auclair, the biographer of Lorca, has given it in Paris, but these were apparently not full-fledged commercial presentations.

7. This is a different version from that prepared by Daniel Bohr, the young director of Argentine background who works in Spain. *Diario de un loco*, "adaptación teatral española de Daniel Bohr sobre las 'novelas breves petersburguesas' de Nicolás Gogol," was first performed at the Teatro Infanta Beatriz, Madrid, January 26, 1967; and was published at Madrid: Ediciones Alfíl, 1967, 59 pp.

8. I take my information from the account in Madrid's *ABC* for November 25, 1969, which was based on reports in Mexico City's *Excelsior*.

9. *Time*, European edition (December 13, 1969), p. 47.
10. Also awarded a prize in the same contest was Elena Garro's *El árbol*, which was performed at 7:00 p.m. on June 19, 20, and 21, 1969. Carballido's plays were performed at 12:00 noon on the same days.
11. *¿Qué pasa con el teatro en México?*, p. 111.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
14. Jed Linde, "Cinco rostros del nuevo teatro mexicano," *Américas*, XX, No. 3 (marzo 1968), 18-19.
15. *¿Qué pasa con el teatro en México?*, pp. 88-89.
16. Linde, p. 19.