

Honduras Celebrates the IV Festival de Teatro por la Paz

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May 28-31, 1992, marked the occasion of the IV Festival de Teatro por la Paz in Santa Bárbara, Honduras. The Festival has been held every two years for the last decade, barring one hiatus in the mid-1980s when governmental repression brought on by the climate of the Contra war with Nicaragua drove its founder, playwright and theorist Candelario Reyes into foreign exile for a year. Except for a brief visit by secret police to one of the hotels hosting Festival participants, the 1992 Festival went rather smoothly, showcasing a decade's work creating a popular theatrical movement on a national scale from the pedagogical concept of Paolo Freire. Known in Honduras as the movement of the *Método de la Basura*, from Reyes' theatrical treatise of that title, the peasant theatre movement normally operates in workshops conducted in *campesino* communities as consciousness-raising exercises in the oral tradition. The biennial Festival allowed not only for a meeting of the many diverse groups, amateur and professional, arising from or responding to the "Teatro de la Basura" movement; it also served as an occasion for crystallizing the efforts of the past two years into a formal theatrical presentation.

Representatives of the Honduran television series "Abriendo Brechas" devoted extensive coverage to the Festival's opening parade and ceremonies. Critics and academics traveled from Costa Rica, the United States and Europe to attend, and over 20 groups from around Honduras participated in the IV Festival. Rascaniguas and La Fragua represented the professional sector, while Fr. Brian Pierce led a newly-formed group of university students from San Pedro Sula. Group sizes varied: most consisted of from four to eight actors, while actor Medardo Mejía performed a monologue, and Grupo El Sembrador included an ensemble of about 15 actors in its production.

The amateur *campesino* groups often included children. Grupo CNTC, one of many sponsored by Honduras's Farm Workers' Union, consisted entirely of preadolescents, directed by actor Carlos Agastume, who could not have been over 12 years old himself. Festival organizers gave special recognition to the children in Grupo Buen Ejemplo, some of whom are developmentally disadvantaged due to the effects of malnutrition and political repression. In addition, homage was paid to Honduras's pioneer in *teatro popular*, Moisés Landaverde, who was assassinated for his activism in promoting popular theatre in 1987.

Some of the group names revealed their origins or affiliations: Las Varas, Escuela Normal Pedro Nunfio, Actores del Lago, Pastoral Universitaria. Others were more exotic: Bambú, Ozono, Soluna, Ekela Itzá. Names forming acronyms such as INTAE, SITRAMEDHYS, SITRABANTAL, and UPN confused outsiders, but these groups, most of which have ties to the sponsoring Centro Cultural Hibueras, seemed well-known regionally.

The Festival was based in the provincial capital of Santa Bárbara, near the Guatemalan border, with many nearby villages hosting satellite performance. Some groups performed each night in a different venue, in towns such as Trinidad, Colina, Ilama, Gualala, La Cuesta, and Zacapa. Performance spaces included churches, schools, and an adapted discotheque. Props, scenery and costumes, which were often recycled from trash (as per the "método de la basura") were minimal, yet highly original and effective. Many groups provided their own live musical accompaniment, and incorporated dance and song into their performances.

The latter, with a few exceptions, were local *creaciones colectivas* with markedly socio-political themes that sympathetically addressed the concerns of the predominantly *campesino* audience. Several recapitulated Honduran history, beginning with the Stone Age and ending with the *campesino's* ongoing struggle for land reform. In a series of short sketches titled "Sálvese el que quiere," Grupo Ozono broadly mocked twentieth-century commercialism, foreign cultural imperialism, urban problems, and governmental pomposity. In several scenes, such as the "Miss Honduras" parody, the three male actors took on female roles, while the female actress played a male, playing against type for satirical effect.

Among the international contributions, director Rafael Murillo Selva, of Grupo Rascaniguas from Tegucigalpa, submitted a riveting production of Venezuelan Rodolfo Santana's acclaimed *La empresa perdona un momento de locura*, in which Napoleón "El Chino" Pineda gave an exemplary and convincing performance. Ekela Itzá entertained the audience with its

imaginatively-costumed adaptation of a Molière farce. Teatro La Fragua, directed by Jesuit missionary Jack Warner, performed a similar repertoire too that included the PBS special which documented the group as a force in Honduran popular theatre in 1989. Performances included Luis Valdez's *Las dos caras del patroncito*, an adaptation of Rubén Darío's "Los motivos del lobo," and a ballet set to Debussy's "Clair de Lune." La Fragua had originally intended to offer several new short pieces based on local legends and Bible parables, but due to the illness of one of the principal actors, director Warner relied on the aforementioned standards from the La Fragua repertory.

In addition to performances, daily discussions, panel presentations, and critical dialogues took place with the majority of the Festival's 100-150 participants in attendance at a conference center located in a nearby *balneario*. Each session focussed specifically on the previous night's performances in all their aspects, as well as generally addressing problems in fomenting a popular theatrical movement in Honduras, the hemisphere's second poorest nation after Haiti. Discussion was conducted in an egalitarian fashion following the principles of Freire, in keeping with the obvious training that members of the movement had undergone in the numerous workshops of Candelario Reyes and his disciples of the *método de la basura*. The entire event was sponsored, organized and hosted by the Centro Cultural Hibueras, an institution Reyes also founded as nexus for the movement's work across the country.

Judging by 1992's scale and standards, the Festival is beginning to project itself on an international scale and should be one of the more noteworthy events of 1994 in Latin American theatre.

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