

Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro, Santiago de Compostela

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As part of last year's celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of the Americas, the Spanish government brought theatre from the New World back to the Old by sponsoring the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro. Eleven theatre troupes from Latin America performed in the touring festival, which was an off-shoot of the VII Festival Internacional de Teatro in Cádiz. Eight groups that performed in Cádiz were joined by three more and, in a brief three-week span in October, all 11 performed in Madrid and Santiago de Compostela to disappointingly vacant houses but nonetheless appreciative audiences. For only 5,000 pesetas (less than 50 U.S. dollars), Latin American theatre enthusiasts could buy an *abono* entitling them to see all the following works:

Miguel Angel Asturias' *El señor presidente*. This work, performed by actors and samba musicians of Boi Voador de Brasil, was one of two that were actually created at the Cádiz Festival as co-productions of CELCIT-EXPO '92.

Bertolt Brecht's *Baladas del bien-estar*, performed by Teresa Ralli, of Yuyachkani de Perú, and pianist José Bárcenas.

Carlos Gorostiza's *Aeroplanos*, performed by Teatro Circular de Montevideo.

Jorge Goldenberg's *Poniendo la casa en orden*. This one-woman show was performed by the Argentinean actress Mabel Manzotti.

Rubén Pagura's *Memorias del ombligo del mundo*. Besides writing the work, Pagura composed the music for the piece and was its sole performer.

Franklin Caicedo's *Che Tanguito (o el Emperador Gynt)*, performed by members of the writer's Chilean company.

Enrique Polo D'Keraty's *Los caballeros, un requiem*. Actors of Grupo Justo Rufino Garay de Nicaragua performed this work based on Sergio Ramírez's novel *Te dio miedo la sangre*.

Mauricio Rosencof's *El vendedor de reliquias*, performed by El Galpón de Uruguay. This was the second work, along with that of Boi Voador de Brasil,

produced at the Cádiz Festival for CELCIT-EXPO '92. The play is based on Eduardo Galeano's *Memoria del fuego*.

Franz Kafka's *Josefina la cantora y La gruta*, performed by Paulo Lisboa and Fernando Lima, two actors of Compañía Absurda de Brasil who live in Portugal.

Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La secreta obscenidad de cada día*, performed by Fermín A. Reyna and Dimas González of Teatro Itinerante de Venezuela.

The two-member Costa Rican group Diquis Tiquis concluded the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro with their work *Paredes de brillo tímido*. Their unique work melded together two performance genres: theatre and dance.

Most of the performances given in Santiago de Compostela were of superior quality in terms of the actors' technical abilities or the innovative methods in which the works were interpreted and staged. However, five of the performances were outstanding due to the level of excellence achieved in both these areas. In the performances by Boi Voador, Grupo Quetzal, Compañía Absurda de Brasil, Teatro Itinerante de Venezuela and Diquis Tiquis, technical strength was matched by creative genius, producing magical nights in which the audience, mesmerized by the artistic experience, became oblivious to the world outside the theatre's doors.

In some instances, on those nights when all was not perfection, an actor's talents would outshine those of the playwright, director and set designer. Such was the case with actress Mabel Manzotti, in *Poniendo la casa en orden*. Manzotti brought audience members into her home and heart by greeting spectators at the door of Santiago's Teatro Principal and inviting them in for coffee. She then demonstrated her exceptional talent for multiple character portrayal by playing the part of more than half a dozen characters, each representing a different aspect of Argentinean society. Although Manzotti was outstanding, the script itself offered no unique approach to its underlying conflict of dictatorship vs. democracy. Another weakness of the work was the set. Consisting of an elaborately furnished dining room, it had the acute attention to detail of a made-in-Hollywood television set and detracted from Manzotti's ability to create images in the audience members' minds.

In other performances of lesser magic, all the artists involved in the creative process of bringing the dramatic work to the stage excelled except for the actors. This was the unfortunate case in *Los caballeros, un requiem*, performed by Grupo de Teatro Justo Rufino Garay. Playing with space, time and reality by shifting the action from Managua to Guatemala, from a cantina to a guerrilla encampment, and from "real-life" war characters to a ghostly singing trio, the playwright Enrique Polo D'Keraty converted Sergio Ramírez's novel dealing with the

Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua into a powerful work for the stage. By depicting in a microcosmic fashion both the blatant and the subtle ways in which this dictatorship has corrupted the lives of people of all levels of society—from war colonels to tavern whores—the playwright poignantly personalized a conflict often made impersonal in the news. Scenic designer Donalddo Aguirre, working in collaboration with the playwright, and lighting and sound technicians W. Soto, D. Soto and P. Hidalgo created a Copacabana-barroom ambience that accentuated the images of horror and excess already abundant in the script. However, the actors lacked the years of diligent training necessary for them to let their own personalities submit to the strengths of the playwright's text and scenic and lighting designers' visual creations. By overacting in a style typical of Latin American soap opera stars, the performers caused their personal presence on the stage to eclipse the innate power of the work.

In contrast to these few disappointments, the richness of the drama, the innovations in its staging and the brilliance of the performers were in harmony in five of the eleven performances. Most conventional among these works in terms of text and interpretation was Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La secreta obscenidad de cada día* performed by Venezuela's Teatro Itinerante. Actors Fermín A. Reyna and Dimas González portrayed Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx with such warmth of character and finesse of comic timing as to inspire the small house's audience to three rounds of applause.

In a refreshing break from the conventional, the two Brazilian companies offered performances that challenged the audience's pre-established methods of interpretation. By assaulting spectators with rock music, nudity and the undefined significance of a wide variety of props—including a red balloon, a football, goggles and mounds of crumpled newspaper—Grupo Boi Voador forced audience members into participating in the creative process by formulating their own meanings for, and logical connections between, the varied visual and verbal signs in this theatrical version of Miguel Angel Asturias' *El señor presidente*.

Whereas Grupo Boi Voador's performance, which opened the festival in Santiago, initiated the audience into participating in the creative process, the performance by Compañía Absurda de Brasil stretched the spectators' powers of interpretation even further by coupling the abstract visual and vocal imagery of absurdist theatre with Franz Kafka's equally abstract texts *Josefina la cantora* and *La gruta*. According to program notes explaining Kafka's work, the force of Josefina's song resided in her ability to "liberar el pueblo de las cadenas de lo cotidiano." The same can be said for the force of this company's performance.

The performances by the two groups from Costa Rica enhanced the thematic and artistic unity of last year's Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro by forming bonds between Spain and Latin America and between the years 1492 and

1992 in ways unforeseen. Rubén Pagura—the one-man tour de force from Grupo Quetzal who wrote the script, composed the music and was the only performer in *Memorias del ombligo del mundo*—formed a bridge between two distinct worlds and two radically different eras by relating the story of how the last great inhabitants of Easter Island fell to invaders from the high Peruvian coast. Through the humorous portrayal of members from the opposing tribes of Orejas Largas and Orejas Cortas, Pagura softened the political message behind his work. The socio-historical distancing of the audience that Pagura established by focusing the play's actions through the lives of two primitive peoples allowed the playwright/performer to present the audience with a positive vision of the imperialist invasion while simultaneously suggesting that, in some parts of Latin America, looking towards the Pacific is just as important as looking towards Europe when seeking to understand one's cultural roots.

Artistic and cultural roots between the continents intertwined at the festival's closing performance by Diquis Tiquis. With their work *Paredes de brillo tímido*, performers Sandra Trejos and Alejandro Tosatti tore down walls between the genres of theatre and dance and between the primitive influences of Costa Rican aboriginal art and the sophisticated ideology of the European theatre of Polish painter Tadeusz Kantor and Grotowski disciple Eugenio Barba. Tosatti's hybrid art form, which he has labeled "teatro-danza," contains no linear plot, making a textual recreation or critique of the theatrical experience an impossibility. In *Paredes de brillo tímido*, the music of Wim Mertens, Giacinto Scelsi, Jorge Reyes and Patrick O'Hearn produced a hypnotic effect when combined with the choreography of Tosatti, Trejos, Mexico's Adriana Castañón and Peru's Oscar Naters. The poetry of Alvaro Mata G., describing "valles, muros y paredes - distancias que separan irremediamente," added verbal signs to those abstract visual ones created by the music and the dance. This irrational mixture of mediums and messages jolted audience members out of traditional methods of interpretation that seek to reduce the theatrical experience to a logical series of cause and effect ideas. The end result of Tosatti's teatro-danza was so overpowering as to inspire professional actors and dancers in Santiago to invite him back to give a workshop in December. Teaching at the "Nave de Servicios Artísticos" (NASA), which is a theatre complex that was established in Santiago last fall, Tosatti transported part of his rich Latin American theatrical heritage across the Atlantic to artists in Spain. Thus, in a year of celebrations commemorating the discovery of the Americas, a native of the New World enlightened inhabitants of the Old.

Santiago de Compostela