

Foreword

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Readers familiar with *LATR* will know that the present issue constitutes a departure from our normal format. Rather than including the usual variety of items on Latin American theatre in general, this time we have concentrated on one topic alone: modern Mexican theatre. For some time now my colleague George Woodyard and I have toyed with the idea of having more frequent special issues of *LATR*, under the supervision of guest editors. I am very pleased to have been invited to tackle such a task for George Woodyard, while he enjoys a much-deserved sabbatical leave from his myriad of academic duties.

I have taken advantage of this opportunity to concentrate on Mexican theatre, in part for selfish reasons, because it is a particular interest of mine, but also because Mexico is today one of Latin America's major centers for theatre activity. As I look at the way this issue has fallen into place, I feel very satisfied that it gives a good sense of the richness and variety of that country's theatre. Guillermo Schmidhuber, Francisco Beverido Duhalt and Donald Frischmann take Mexican theatre out of its big city, professional and/or commercial contexts and show how it thrives elsewhere and in other circumstances. While some of the other studies concentrate on consecrated playwrights (Usigli, Leñero, Carballido, Vilalta), those by Ron Burgess and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda refer to a newer generation of playwrights waiting impatiently in the wings for its turn to come. Frank Dauster and Margarita Mendoza López remind us that what we enjoy today in Mexican theatre is the result of processes and of historical events that helped to shape the development of important playwrights, theatre movements and architecture. Synopses of theatre activities, like those by the Radio UNAM and Sharon Magnarelli, are invaluable records of what gets performed in present-day Mexico and the quality of its staging. And if it is true that the public gets what the public wants, then these records of Mexico City's 1984 playbills are also indicators of the tastes of theatregoers there, as well as of what proves most profitable for theatre entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, in both instances it seems to be mostly what is made in the U.S.A., or at least in places other than Mexico. Needless to say, this theatrical "malinchismo" has severe conse-

quences for the well-being of a national theatre in Mexico. Luis Gimeno's brief comments concerning the effects of his country's economic woes on the theatrical enterprise are timely indeed; for the so-called crisis is having a major and perhaps permanent impact not only on what theatre professionals can or cannot accomplish, but also, its social ramifications are providing fodder and ammunition for playwrights, something hinted at by Luisa Josefina Hernández in the interview included here.

As complete as this picture of Mexican theatre might be, there are still some noticeable blank spaces in it. I regret most strongly the absence of any detailed discussion of stagecraft in Mexico, and particularly of the contribution made to it by such very talented directors as Ignacio Retes, Héctor Mendoza, Luis de Tavira, Julio Castillo, Marta Luna and Ludvik Margules, to name but a few. They are a dynamic force in present-day Mexican theatre and some of them, especially those who are wont to use the playtext as mere directorial pretext, have managed to be quite controversial. While the antagonism between the so-called "teatro de director" and the "teatro de dramaturgo" is a recurrent topic in Mexican theatre circles, it is only touched on briefly here, in my interview with Vicente Leñero. To fill in this gap, I would refer our readers to the last issue of *LATR* (18/1), where Guillermo Schmidhuber takes up the case for the playwrights, in his essay "Nueva dramaturgia mexicana." The case for the directors, at least in the pages of *LATR*, is still to be heard. Many of these directors work with the experimental theatres of the UNAM, a major locus for the avant-garde which, unfortunately, also has not been given proper attention here. This particular black hole can be expertly filled by the UNAM's fine theatre magazine *Escénica* (previously called *La cabra*). And finally, many of Mexico's outstanding playwrights have gotten short shrift in this issue. To them, I offer my apologies and hope that they will understand that limitations of space have forced me to be more selective than I otherwise would have been.

I want to thank everyone who has helped make this special issue of *LATR* possible: George Woodyard, who has placed his trust in me; Sandi Bair and Nina Molinaro, who have been good friends and saintly in their tolerance of my editorial inexperience; the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose fellowship support helped make possible the short pieces of mine included here; all the contributors who have done such fine work and been so conscientious about deadlines and other such annoyances; and the many generous playwrights and theatre practitioners I have had the pleasure of knowing in Mexico. This issue is dedicated to them and to *all* Mexican theatre people, as proof that we are not such distant neighbors (to borrow Alan Riding's term) that some of us in the United States fail to appreciate Mexico's theatrical wealth. We are pleased and honored to share some of that wealth with readers who may not have yet discovered it.

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