

Cheers to George

Jacqueline E. Bixler

This issue of LATR is dedicated to our mentor, friend, and colleague George Woodyard, who left us for that big LATT in the sky on November 7, 2010. His presence remains so strong among us that we find it hard to believe that five years have already passed since his departure. The strength and persistence of his memory merely attest to his stature as a man who embodied those professional and intellectual qualities to which those of us who knew him forever aspire. In short, George was simply larger than life.

George not only taught, read, and wrote about theatre. He *went* to the theatre. In fact, I've never met anyone who goes to the theatre as often and as faithfully as George did. It didn't matter where he was. It could be in the local theatres of Lawrence, Kansas, the most recent of which was built thanks to his support and his tireless fundraising efforts. Or it could be in Buenos Aires, where he was known to attend as many as five shows in a row as he moved through the theatre district of Corrientes. He fervently believed in the theatre and its capacity to produce change, not only in the world but also in the way that we perceive and think about things. This same belief is reflected in what you now hold in your hand, *Latin American Theatre Review*. Founded by George in 1967, the journal now celebrates its 49th year of continuous publication. While he liked to joke about the black cover that would adorn the final issue, the journal not only outlived him, but continues to thrive.

The contributors to this special issue all recognize the lasting influence that George has had on their lives as well as their scholarship. Three of them (Moreno, Tomé, Warren), like myself, had the privilege of studying with George at the University of Kansas. Three others (Alzate, Magnarelli, Meléndez) came to know George through the LATT conferences held in Lawrence, where they became life-long members of the LATT "mafia." The remaining trio (Cypess, Huerta, Rizk) consists of fellow pioneers who worked alongside



The author (right) and George Woodyard. Photo: Jacqueline E. Bixler.

George in forging the field of Latin American and Latino/a theatre. Whether it was through his teaching, through the journal, or through the five LATT symposiums he staged in Lawrence between 1982 and 2003, George created a large “family.” In the words of Jorge Huerta, “we must never forget the influence of George Woodyard as one of the people who brought us all together.”

The essays themselves are loosely grouped around the concept of history and memory, a topic that, while trendy today, was already being tackled by George half a century ago. Jorge Huerta leads with a beautiful tribute in which he interweaves personal memories of George with the origins and growth of Chicano/a theatre as both a vital movement and a field of study. Sandra Cypess, another one of George's lifelong colleagues, studies the concept of absence and disappearance in the theatre of Elena Garro, whose characters, like George, maintain a magical "presence" long after they disappear. Beatriz Rizk traces the theatre of Virgilio Piñera as it has been performed throughout the years by Teatro Avante, a theatre group with which George became well acquainted through his faithful participation in the International Hispanic Theatre Festival held each year in Miami. Both Rizk and Patricia Tomé focus on Cuban theatre, a national theatre to which George first turned his scholarly attention in his 1966 dissertation. Meanwhile, Sharon Magnarelli, Priscilla Meléndez, and Michelle Warren focus on yet another one of George's favorite national theatres, that of Argentina, following the close and yet very political reading that he himself practiced in the classroom as well as in his own writing. Gastón Alzate traces the development of Mexican cabaret theatre from its origins in the 1970s, showing just how far the genre has come both sexually and politically during the past half-century. In a country that for some reason does not stagger performances, George often included late-night cabaret performances in his quest to see as much theatre as possible while in the D.F. Finally, former student Iani Moreno inherited George's fascination with Brazilian theatre. We do not receive many submissions on the theatre of Brazil, so it is with great pleasure that I include Moreno's study of plays that cleverly combine music, history, and political protest.

On behalf of all those who contributed to this special tribute to George, I end this preface with the salutation that he invariably used to sign off on his letters and emails. It seems significant that "cheers!" serves not only as an invitation to drink, but also as a way of saying "goodbye" and "thank you." And so I say "cheers, George!" as we remember and celebrate yet again the man who started not only this journal but also the journey that so many of us have followed in his name and his memory.

Virginia Tech