
TENAZ XVI

Article by Kat Avila; photos
 by Kat Avila & Belinda Acosta

The TENAZ (Teatros Nacionales de Artistas) XVI International Theatre Festival was hosted by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, Texas, Nov. 10-15, 1992. The festival was the most recent in a line of Chicano/Latino theatre festivals dating back to spring 1970. In the '70s, the festivals were held annually; now they are biennial, partly because of the cost and logistics of putting one together. At one time, as many as 70 teatros participated, and in 1975, the festival was spread across several cities in a counter-propaganda effort against the Bicentennial.

In 1975, a group called Women in Teatro formed to more effectively address Latina theatrical issues and needs. Their activities influenced TENAZ to include a women's seminar at its 10th festival (1979) and women's groups at its 11th festival (1981).

So it was symbolically significant that the 16th TENAZ festival opened with a play by a Chicana lesbian that was directed by a Latina. Though some traditional ways of looking die hard (compare the festival's somewhat Old World Mona Lisa poster by Cesar A. Martinez to Yolanda M. Lopez's liberating "Our Lady of Guadalupe" paintings), the festival's conscious inclusion of work by Chicanas and Latinas recognizes that there can be no progress for a people as a whole so long as there remains oppression from within.

Cherrie Moreaga's Harass and Sains was directed by Susana Tubert and performed by Los Actores de San Antonio, the Guadalupe's resident theatre company, who had been performing Harass there for the last three weeks (Oct. 23-Nov. 7). The play's start was delayed by a half hour as everyone, including the playwright herself, waited for world-famous Enrique Buenaventura's troupe to arrive from the airport for the play.

When the theater finally went dark, Los Actores rushed the stage with their flashlights, then scattered into the wings. Lights gradually came up on the beautiful, intelligent Cerecita (Mariana Vasquez), a mere head propped on a mobile lectern. (The character's body had never developed because of pesticide poisoning.) In a prison of a house, amongst fields of deformed grape vines twisted into each other, Cerecita's sexual feelings are awakened by the town priest and she finds purpose to her life as a community activist.

Video monitors positioned on both sides of the stage periodically came on during the play to run footage of crop dusters dropping their deadly rain. During one segment, a news video cam recorded the actors live as their characters protested horrible living and working conditions. Simultaneously, the images played on the monitors. The protesters paraded up and down the theater aisles handing out fliers for Lorena Parilla's video The Wrath of Grapes, a documentary about a poisoned California town whose children paid the price.

The following night, Weds., Nov. 11, Raquel Salinas performed Beat Your Own, a personal exploration of images of the Chicana/Latina as activist. She was followed by 11-year-old Jose Manuel Galvan, Jr., who did a heartfelt monologue about a child's perspective of the Los Angeles Riots/Rebellion: "It was like a day of festivity. Everything was free.... [But] now that I think of it, the whole thing wasn't a dream. It was a nightmare." (Jose's father is director of Teatro Vivo in Baldwin Park, CA. The monologue comes from a children's workshop after the riots.)

El Centro Su Teatro did double duty at the festival quickly filling in that night for Grupo Cultural Zero, one of whose members was detained in Mexico. Su Teatro delivered a nostalgic collection of actos (complete with musical accompaniment) titled Intro to Chicano History 101: "¡Que viva La Raza! ¡Que viva La Causa! ¡Que viva La huelga!" Their director, Anthony J. Garcia,

shared with the audience afterwards that he had only told his troupe at three o'clock that afternoon that they were doing another show.

On Thurs., Nov. 12, the visually impressive and well-acted Cronica was unveiled. Enrique Buenaventura's Cronica was the winner of TENAZ's International Quincentennial Playwriting Competition (worth \$5,000 and a world premiere at the festival); Josefina Lopez's Unconquered Boirita was the runner-up. El Teatro Experimental de Cali, Enrique's internationally known troupe, was directed by Jacqueline Vidal in this all-Spanish work. It was an historical drama of two shipwrecked Spanish soldiers who survive amongst the Maya. When conquistador Hernan Cortes lands on their shores, one soldier chooses to stay with the Maya with whom he has started a family and he asks the other soldier to say that he has died. In the end, he is betrayed and the villagers are massacred.

Grupo Cultural Zero was finally able to do their all-Spanish Que cada quien... le ponga... como quiera... on Fri., Nov. 13, before El Centro Su Teatro's scheduled production, Ludlow: El arito de las minas. With masks and costumes ready to use on stage, Grupo actors delivered a fascinating circus-like show filled with music...form...dance...color...and historical education for Latinos, reminding one of a sobering Sesame Street for adults. The production was directed by Eduardo Lopez Martinez, who was assisted by Norma Zarate Pavla.

Ludlow, which Anthony J. Garcia wrote and directed, focused on a regional parcel of Colorado history documenting the killing of Mexican men, women, and children by the state militia during a 1914 coalfield strike. The central character Emilia (Debra Gallegos) comes to a greater appreciation of her heritage when she finds her grandmother's diary, which recalls the coalfield strike and its heroes from firsthand experience. As Emilia reads aloud from the diary, scenes from it come alive on stage.

Sat., Nov. 14, Belinda Acosta did her one-woman show Machismo: Voices from the

TENAZ XI

TENAZ VI

TENAZ VIII

TENAZ I

TENAZ V

TENAZ IX

TENAZ II

Earp, a refreshing portrayal of nines and mujeres with chutzpah. Among Belinda's memorable characters were an old "lady" who liked to scare obnoxious little kids with her cataract, and a bright little girl who had to deal with a racist bully yelling in her face. "You ain't so great, Alamo killer! All you people are Alamo killers!" It was a delightful show in spite of her occasional throat-clearing, and a visibly touched Belinda thanked the audience for their standing ovation. What was especially significant about the presentation was that "it brought folks back to the unspoken issue--that the female voice is not just a replication of the male voice. It has its own story and its own way of telling that story," as Belinda penned later about the Machismo critics (critiques were scheduled for all TENAZ performances).

Univ. of Calif. professor and Chicano theatre expert Jorge Huerta next introduced the 21-year-old Teatro de La Esperanza, of which he was a founding member and its original director. The troupe did a highly stylized, gender-bender version of Roy Cohnoy's cat-and-mouse Dancing with the Missing, directed by Roberto Gutierrez Vazquez, a graduate of this country's first and only Hispanic theatre MFA program (now defunct). Strong casting choices made the production a pleasure to watch.

In Esperanza's Dancing, a mannish-looking, chain cigarette-smoking Nino (Charo Toledo) is hired to find a stolen child. She then becomes enmeshed in a complex, dangerous relationship between a suave, mysterious man (Eduardo Robledo) and "Las Mujeres de Sangre," women who have each suffered a loss to Central American death squads.

The TENAZ festival concluded, Sun., Nov. 15. One of the two final productions was Terry Tafayo Earp's alternately humorous and dramatic Laura's House, directed by Jose Guadalupe Saucedo and performed by Teatro del Valle, with choreography by Michel Cote (aka Michele Ceballos). The production spotlighted children's acting, but central to the play was an endearing

nana Laura (Nita Luna) whose stories came alive in her three grandchildren's imaginations and on stage. The sincerity and energy of the children actors together with the show's content helped one to overlook the awkward staging, and the show melted more than one critic's heart. A particularly critical elderly couple who had been attending the TENAZ festival performances loved the show and could find nothing bad to say. During the intermission and after the show, people could be seen dabbing at their eyes as they remembered their own grandmothers.

A promising second generation of teatristas and artists was represented by Michel Cote's daughter, Natalia, and Zerco Guarrero's son, Quetzal, in Laura's House. Natalia ably played one of the grandchildren and was the show's calm and competent narrator. The multi-talented Quetzal not only acted in the show as one of the goblins, but he also played violin and sang solo. Hopefully, these children will continue to find opportunities to develop their craft, as well as the children who served as peer critics during the critics.

Terry's play was followed by Chicano Secret Service's Locura Le Cura. (This show was also performed in Austin, Fri., Nov. 13.) Ricardo Salinas from Culture Clash introduced the group. Eduardo "Lalo" Lopez started the show by screwing "TENAZ Y QUE" on a blank screen behind him, then the group proceeded to launch into its usual irreverent, wildly humorous shtick. Thomas Carrasco did his trademark Frida Kahlo. Their strong showing at the festival, pumped up especially by Elias Sernas' performance, reflected an emerging professional aesthetic, which may not seem significant, except that Chicano Secret Service has taken great pride in the past in not being professional actors.

As Lalo said during the critics, they are getting more artful about how messages are conveyed. Chicano Secret Service does do their homework, checking out "the scene" where they are going to perform and looking at area newspapers in the same manner

as Culture Clash. Long-term goals for Chicano Secret Service include doing film.

In addition to the festival performances and critiques, there were also workshops and forums. In ongoing workshops, Marcos Martinez taught the Suzuki method of actor training. Paulina Sahagun did mask and movement. Dolores Frida focused on character development for playwrights, and Graciela Perdomo-Galvan did creative dramatics for children.

Judith Rivera, associate director of Teatro Pregonero, gave an excellent two-hour workshop on audience development. She talked about bringing in outside artists, giving group discounts, building relationships with local schools, having a membership program, and promoting one's theatre as the good news in a community.

Susan Tubert, director of the festival's Heroes and Saints production, also gave a workshop on directing. A show is about the director's truth, she opined, adding how important it was to discover a strong heartbeat in a play that speaks to one's self.

Many other people, far too many to name individually here, contributed to the success of TENAZ XVI. This writer would like to thank all the people who graciously contributed their time and resources to help document the festival, especially festival coordinator Jorge Pina, the very obliging Guadalupe Cultural Arts staff, and Jim Mendiola, who despite being overworked with festival details offered to drive me to workshop locations. Without Jim, many of the photographs on these pages would not have existed.

A very special thank you goes to the people who gave their consent to be interviewed: Culture Clash's Ricardo Salinas (11/12), actress/scholar/columnist Belinda Acosta (11/14), actress Ruby Nelda Perez (11/14), playwright Terry Tafayo Earp (11/15), performance artist Severly Sanchez-Fadilla (11/15), famed mask-maker Zerco Guarrero (11/15), and actress Paulina Sahagun (11/15). The next Buscando California will feature their interviews.

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bl. Josefina Lopez (L.) and editor Kat Avila take a break. Josefina's red shirt garnered able mention in the eyewriting ion. (photo by Aneta)

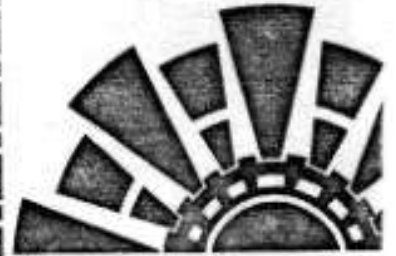


Professor Judith A. Weiss (3rd from L.) and her Hispanic drama class from Mt. Allison Univ., New Brunswick, Canada. They raised \$5000 in two weeks for their TENAZ trip.

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Raquel Salinas as the Virgin
Mary listens incredulously as
men pray for and describe
their ideal women.



Our Lady of
Guadalupe Church



Jim Mondiola,
TENAZ asst. coord.



El Centro de Teatro hastily
rehearses Intro to Chicano
History 101 to fill in for
Grupo Cultural Zero, one of
whose members was stuck in
Mexico.

Ric Salinas of Culture Clash.
Culture Clash participated in
TENAZ XIV in San Antonio,
Texas, in 1988.



ip leader Judith Rivera
Jones shares with
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TENAZ general meeting. L. to R.: festival coord. Jorge
Piña, TENAZ chair Jose Guadalupe Saucedo, prof. Marina
Pianca, Guadalupe asst. theater mgr. Franco Ontiveros.



Director Jacqueline Vidal (far R.) and wife of Enrique Buenaventura guides her group as they rehearse *Cronica*.



Enrique Buenaventura accepts the audience's applause for *Cronica*.



Show's over.



Paulina Sahagun (L.) instructs a student in her Mask and Movement workshop.



A standing ovation for El Centro Su Teatro's performance of Anthony J. Garcia's *Ludlow*.



Prof. Jorge Huerta introduces El Teatro de La Esperanza. (Photo by Belinda Acosta)