

Dialogue in Bethlehem

By Joanne Pottlitzer

Across the north-south gulf that separates the two Americas, a pair of small ensemble theatre companies—one American, one Chilean—recently met in Bethlehem, Pa. to explore the possibilities of recognizing and synthesizing their differences. Bethlehem's Touchstone Theatre and Santiago's Teatro la Memoria collaborated on an adaptation of Marco Antonio de la Parra's new play, *Daedalus in the Belly of the Beast*, creating a unique, bilingual production which premiered at Touchstone in September and will be performed this month at Baltimore Theatre

made this bilingual, bi-national theatre experiment happen.

"I fell in love with the work of Teatro la Memoria when I saw their production of *Manzana de Adan (Adam's Apple)* in Santiago," George comments. "Like Touchstone, the company focuses on emotion, gesture, space and simplicity of means. The presence and intimacy of the actors are everything." With the Chilean company in mind, she commissioned de la Parra, whose *Secret Obscenities* ran at

gual concept would go beyond words and extend to the movement, visual and musical elements of the production.

Many ideas for bilingual variations—brought to the process by the director, actors, stage manager, dramaturg, producer—were tried. Among those that worked were the use of echoes, interpreters (actors in character, playing foreigners), tape recorders, a ventriloquist, and dialogue in alternating languages. Bilingual demands dictated that entire scenes be rewritten and restaged. The character Icarus, for example, appears as one of his father Daedalus's toys, and—because Pablo Schwarz, the actor who plays the role, speaks excellent English—interprets some of Daedalus's lines into English. Pasiphae's ghost, played by Touchstone's Susan Chase, was brought into a scene between Phaedra and Ariadne so that English could be integrated into the dialogue:

PHAEDRA

And what if he's the foreigner we've heard so much about?

ARIADNA

Icarus?

PHAEDRA

Podria ser.
Por que no?

ARIADNA

If it were him, I'd know it.

PHAEDRA

Ariadna? Me escuchaste?

PASIPHAE'S GHOST

She doesn't hear you.

PHAEDRA

What are you keeping from me?

Actors speaking in two languages add textures; differences are approached as richness. The music, by Chilean composer Miguel Miranda, offers yet another dimension of language.

As a point of departure for exploring language, director Castro opted to take the similarities between the two groups as givens and concentrate on their differences—not in opposition, but to explore "diversity in terms of the labyrinth, the foreigner and the amazement of feeling strange even with ourselves," he explains. "Artaud said that within the heterogeneous, everything can happen, but that homogeneity produces death. The acceptance of difference is important. In the world today, people talk about



Paulina Urrutia as Ariadne and Eric Beatty as Theseus in *Daedalus in the Belly of the Beast*: the different and the painful as a way of creation.

Project, Philadelphia's Painted Bride and New York City's INTAR Hispanic-American Arts Center, before participating in Santiago's Theatre of Nations Festival next April.

The project has brought together Chile's leading playwright, who emerged as an important voice of the Chilean people during the military dictatorship; a young Chilean director, Alfredo Castro, whose strong, minimalist aesthetic has gained recognition within the Chilean and international theatre communities; four young actors who, with Castro, formed Teatro la Memoria six years ago; three American actors; and Touchstone producing director, Bridget George, who

Touchstone's intimate, 72-seat theatre in 1990, to write a bilingual play which addressed the encounter between the two Americas.

Bilingual variations

The Touchstone/la Memoria collaboration proposed to interweave Spanish and English organically throughout the text, in a search for a new theatrical language (a process in which this writer took part as translator and dramaturg). As rehearsals got underway, we were certain of three things: we did *not* want a simultaneous translation of the text on stage; the audiences *must* be able to follow the content of the piece; and the bilin-

oppositions. If someone isn't like me, he's against me. This attitude must be changed."

The first sign of differences was apparent in the relationship between author and director. De la Parra had long wanted to write a modern tragedy. He chose Daedalus (in his words, "the technical genius who made wings from feathers and wax to flee Crete and created the technological pornography of his era when he designed Pasiphae's wooden cow") as his hero, because "Icarus's enchantment by the sun is an ominous lesson. We have all wished to fly toward the sun. We have all experienced the fall."

Castro, however, arrived in Bethlehem with a heavily edited and adapted text: His minimalist sensibility had not corresponded to de la Parra's broad sense of the ridiculous. The director also felt that the "two Americas" theme was not only limiting but self-evident in the project itself. So, with the author's blessing, Castro and his dramaturgical collaborator, Francesca Lombardo, rewrote the script, focusing on the character of the Minotaur as a metaphor for "the other"—the foreigner, the beast within us all, our mirror image whom we encounter at the center of our own labyrinth and must learn to accept. In Castro and Lombardo's adaptation, the stage became the labyrinth which lures us to our death.

'Amor' sounds like love

Differences in methods of work and, of course, in the use of the two languages also surfaced among the actors. Amparo Noguera, a Teatro la Memoria member, was moved by the different resonances words can have. "When I say a sentence in another language, I may know the meaning of what I'm saying, but in my own language, words produce an emotion within me that the same words in another language do not. If I say 'amor,' it *sounds* like love to me. In English, it doesn't have the same resonance. There's a certain separation in that, beyond consciousness."

"A difference which has amazed me," added Chilean actor Rodrigo Perez, "is

the American actor's capacity to assimilate directions. Whatever the director gives you, you do it immediately. We are more complicated. I have to go to a corner, mull it over, consider it, and maybe I'll do it the following day."

After the first week of a six-week rehearsal period, Castro asked his Chilean colleagues to take that cue from the U.S. actors and open themselves to direction with more violence, energy and spontaneity. In turn, he asked the Touchstone actors to try to understand the deep relationship with death

"which comes from deception, horror, misery, the human condition in general," which exists in his work and in this production. Teatro la Memoria's strong psychological investment in the concept of pain and death may be rooted in Chile's

traditional, deep-seated Catholicism and its more recent experience with the horrors of living under a military dictatorship. "Our work," Castro explains, "assumes the different and the painful as a way of creation. One must pass through this thing of death to be able to create a wonderful, positive space. It's inevitable. You cannot avoid it."

Bill George, co-founder of Touchstone, reflected on international collaboration in light of his own 1989 trip to Chile. "Our two cultures are a gift. If we can actually come together, mix the vanilla and chocolate ice cream without losing the flavor of either one, this is what building the new culture is all about—the world culture, which we're only beginning to weave, thread by thread. I find that the real challenge." **AT**

Joanne Pottlitzer translated Daedalus in the Belly of the Beast and acted as dramaturg for the production.

"The Minotaur becomes a metaphor for 'the other,' the beast within us all."

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