



The List

I am delighted to welcome back *The List* as a Festival sponsor. The magazine, which does so much to promote the arts in Edinburgh and Glasgow, is a loyal supporter of the Edinburgh International Festival.

Consistent with the interests of its hip and informed young audience, *The List* directs its support towards productions at the cutting edge of the contemporary performing arts, and this quick-fire black comedy, *Diciembre*, from Teatro en el Blanco is no exception.

Please join me in acknowledging *The List's* importance to the Scottish arts scene, and in thanking it for its support of the Festival.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Mills", with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Jonathan Mills
Director, Edinburgh International Festival



**EDINBURGH
INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVAL**

presents

Teatro en el Blanco

Diciembre

Guillermo Calderón

Performed in Spanish with English supertitles

Thursday 2, Friday 3 and Saturday 4 September 8.00pm
Saturday 4 September 2.30pm
Royal Lyceum Theatre

The performance lasts approximately 1 hour 15 minutes with no interval

Sponsored by



Please ensure that all mobile phones and electronic devices are switched off

The use of cameras, video and tape recorders is forbidden



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**Paula Zúñiga,
Trinidad
González,
Jorge Becker**
Photo: Valentino Saldívar

Diciembre

Brother 3, Jorge, Uncle León	Jorge Becker
Aunt Julie, Brother 1, Trini	Trinidad González
Brother 2, María Paula	Mariana Muñoz
Playwright, Director	Guillermo Calderón
Technician	José Tomás González
Tour manager	Paola Hevia

A Serious Man of the Theatre

Guillermo Calderón is an intelligent, sensitive actor with a great critical sense of our national reality and the capitalist system we live in. As director, he rescues the essence of theatre, freeing his productions of 'paraphernalia', external elements and decor... it is a pure theatre in text and with extraordinary acting, which is moving and thought-provoking.

María Fernanda García, actor and president of the Chilean Actors' Union

Guillermo Calderón emerged in 2006 as the bright star of a new generation of post-dictatorship Chilean playwrights and directors when the first of his three ensemble plays, *Neva*, opened at the Santiago a Mil International Theatre Festival. His second and third plays, *Clase* and *Diciembre*, were given in the 2008 Festival. Once the work of Calderón and Teatro en el Blanco came to the attention of the international festival circuit, the group began to travel and participate in a plethora of theatre festivals in Latin America, Europe and USA, among them Cádiz, Rome, Seoul, Vienna, Montreal, New York, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Lisbon. On an American tour earlier this year, of Los Angeles, Denver and Miami, *Diciembre* received unanimously brilliant reviews. The play continued its successful tour in Bogotá, Mexico City and Moscow.

Born in 1971 in Santiago, the second child of three of a middle-class family, Calderón grew up under the military dictatorship (1973–90). Both these factors shape his work: his sensitivity to the racism and classism of Chilean society and his abhorrence of violence are always present. 'I was marked by the traumas of growing up in the dictatorship. I only write political plays.'

Neva, the only one not located in Chile, takes place on a stage in St Petersburg in 1905, during the Russian Revolution, six months after Chekov's death. While Chekov's widow, the famous actress Olga Knipper, and two other actors await their fellow actors to rehearse *The Cherry Orchard*, they sit round a wood-burning stove discussing acting techniques, the meaning of theatre and Olga's personal guilt for not being with her husband at the end of his life. Outside the military is savagely repressing a peaceful workers' protest, an event that became known as 'Bloody Sunday'. This incongruous juxtaposition is full of black humour — one of Calderón's trademarks.

There is another juxtaposition of personal and social issues in *Clase*. A high-school teacher enters his classroom to find just one student, who informs him that her classmates are protesting in the street, demanding reforms of the education system in Chile. This is a direct reference to the country-wide student protests of 2006, events that were called the 'Penguin Revolution' because of the students' uniforms. *Clase* reveals the generational divide

between the teacher who experienced the coup and the 17-year dictatorship and the young student who considers the utopian ideas of that generation *passé* and failed. For the single student, the teacher holds a class on what it means in Chile to belong to a less privileged class, making the title a double play on the word 'class'. In the last scene the student delivers her final dissertation on Buddhism and Enlightenment. She stands alone in front of a large projected 'installation of row upon row of empty school uniforms, as mantras are chanted. This is Calderón's favourite of his plays. 'It is more personal. Perhaps *Diciembre* is the most mature of the three, but I have more affection for *Clase*.'

Diciembre has indeed been heralded, in Chile and internationally, as Calderón's most accomplished work. Michael Fields, co-founder of the Dell'Arte Institute in California, who saw it in Colombia in March, told me, 'I think it has truly all come together — the perspective, the language, the idea and the use of a powerful theatricality. [Calderón] knows how to write for an ensemble of actors. The work requires a ferocious playing together, and in *Diciembre* he takes that to a whole new level'.

As I watched *Diciembre* I could not help remembering Caryl Churchill's *Drunk Enough To Say I Love You*, first staged in 2006 at the Royal Court in London, which I saw at the Public Theatre in New York in 2008. Both plays are stinging political commentaries on the theme of war. Both have fast-moving, informed scripts, with characters that are archetypal yet identifiable in real time and space. In Churchill's play there are two gay men, representing the USA and Britain, caught in a doomed relationship as they argue about their lives and the Iraq war. In *Diciembre* Calderón's three siblings, twin sisters and their younger brother, argue their opposing positions on wars with Peru, their evolved or evolving personal value systems and their reactions to an eruption of the continuing internal struggle of Chile's indigenous *mapuche* population in the south.

Both plays have a single, compellingly visual set. In *Drunk Enough To Say I Love You*, a sofa on a dark stage seems to float in space, rising slightly higher with each scene change as it slowly takes the two characters farther from reality. Light bulbs that frame the proscenium flash during the scene blackouts, à la vaudeville. In *Diciembre*, a table on a dark stage is dimly lit by clusters of small coloured light bulbs — a poor man's Christmas lights, suspended above and below it. For Calderón, however, the image on stage is secondary to the text: 'Too much set equals a poverty of ideas. I like an austere set so that the acting and the ideas in the text take centre stage'. One is certainly riveted by the power of *Diciembre*'s text. Its rhythms bounce backwards and forwards,

up and down, at a furious pace like staccato musical notes, full of cutting humour, pausing now and then for ‘arias’ of solid, poetic monologues.

The setting for *Diciembre*'s heated heart-felt discussion of the pros and cons of war is Santiago in 2014, on Christmas Eve, a traditional night of peace. Jorge, on leave from the army in the north, is visiting his sisters, Trinidad and Paula, both of whom are visibly pregnant. (The characters use the actors' real names in this play.) His dilemma is whether or not to return to duty. Paula urges him to go back, but Trinidad wants him to desert and go into hiding in the south. His decision at the end will define an impassioned philosophy about war and nationhood, a clear connection with the land, and a sense of camaraderie with his fellow soldiers.

Diciembre succeeds in being deeply Chilean — in its idiom, its political history, its references to the sea, the cold, the national drink *pisco* and to the Chilean character — while levying commentary on broader attitudes towards national identities, territorial struggles, inhumane acts inflicted on fellow human beings, and the way in which the act of war and its political spins can influence the consciousness of a people. Records of Christmas songs like ‘Jingle Bell Rock’ and ‘White Christmas’ intermittently interrupt the dialogue to illustrate the invasion by American culture of Chile's national identity and the irreversible cultural globalization in which we live.

References to Chile's past and present border wars, especially the 1879 War of the Pacific against Peru and Bolivia, which deprived Bolivia of access to the sea, highlight the growing and unwelcome immigration of Peruvians from the north and the denial of many Chileans of their own indigenous roots. Paula says, ‘My skin is a little lighter than yours... We have to keep on killing Peruvians’. Jorge (the character as well as the actor) is himself of mixed race. His last names are Becker and Reyes, one German and one Spanish; but his costume, a soccer shirt and military camouflage pants, is a visual reminder of his *mestizaje*.

Each actor briefly portrays a second character in the play: their Aunt Julie, Jorge's girlfriend María and Uncle León, of the generation who suffered under the dictatorship as the professor did in *Clase*. Uncle León says, ‘I'm from another time. I already lost one war. I was born in the last century. I'm still afraid of black cars. I don't want them to follow me. They always win. There were women who were much braver than I, and they burnt them. There were even children carrying flags. I couldn't bear it if they entered my house again. I couldn't bear their smell of partying. The gorillas won. The sparrows lost. We earthlings can be horrible. I can't do it, Trinidad. Ask Jorge to forgive me. Tell

him I'm sorry. Tell him to flee on his bicycle. Merry Christmas'. Other allusions to the dictatorship are dotted through the play: several power blackouts occur; there is talk of hiding in a 'secure' place, fear of torture and rape, censored letters 'with complete lines blacked out', concentration camps, which Paula refers to as 'refugee' camps. Aunt Julie comments: 'This used to be a beautiful country. I would sing all day long'.

The influence of today's global wars is expressed by Paula: '[Trinidad] thinks I like war. No, I like peace... Bring me peace on a plate of war... We like the smell of petroleum, we like families and clans, but not tribes... with all my heart, I think that the Chileans are better than anyone else... I'm prepared psychologically to win large wars'. Jorge responds in his final monologue,

War isn't the way you imagined it. It's much better [...] We acted like prophets. We saw the future and everything was white. That's why I came back. I want to return to my place. Because I feel like December. I feel like I'm full of sad holidays. Thanks for this party, Paula. The decorations are nice. Trinidad, you want to save me. But I don't know if I can go to the south. I can't change again. The time came when I said, this is who I am. And I resigned myself. I'm an ex-youth. I feel like a prophet. The soldiers taste like soup and their breath smells like homemade cooking. Here in Santiago I miss the desert. And the light. But when I return to the front I want to die loyal to my troop defending Santiago from the Michimalonco Army [the *mapuches*]. Even though my army is going to disappear, I'll go to the glory of defeat. I'll enter heaven through the door of the infamous. I really don't even want to fight. All I want is to sleep again with my soldiers.

With that, Trinidad and Paula announce their Christmas present for their brother. Calderón and his company of three remarkable actors have created a brilliant anti-war, anti-'patriotic' play. 'A fantasy of mine', Calderón told me, 'is to do away with the army altogether — to destroy it, and have Chile disappear as a nation'.

★

Calderón began his professional training as an actor in 1989 at the University of Chile, crediting the well-known acting teacher Fernando González with teaching him 'almost everything I know about theatre'. He attended classes at the Actors' Studio in New York and studied the *commedia dell'arte* for a short time with Antonio Fava, in Reggio Emilia, Italy. In 1998–9 he trained at the Dell'Arte International Institute in Blue Lake, California, and in 2006 received an MFA in theatre theory from the graduate school of the City University of New York.

Calderón and Trinidad González, one of the actors in *Diciembre*, were the first Chileans to attend the Dell'Arte International Institute. According to Joan Schirle, the institute's founding artistic director and director of its International School of Physical Theatre, both were among the top students in their class. Schirle describes Calderón as 'smart, creative, and crazy — the kind of artist we love at Dell'Arte International. He is a serious man of the theatre who thinks deeply about his work and is equally capable as an actor, a director, a playwright and leader of an ensemble. It is for this kind of artist that our training exists'.

That kind of accolade has been forthcoming throughout the world. In Montevideo, Calderón's first play, *Neva*, received the 2009 Florencio Award (named after the 19th-century Uruguayan playwright Florencio Sánchez and awarded annually by the Association of Theatre Critics of Uruguay) for Best Foreign Play. In Chile, *Neva* brought him the coveted Altazor Award for Best Direction and the Circle of Art Critics Award for Best Play, both in 2007. The Circle of Art Critics Award was repeated in 2008 for *Clase*. In 2008 *Neva* won the José Nuez Martín Award from the Catholic University of Chile. At the awards ceremony, the president of the José Nuez Martín Foundation, Ramón Carbó Nuez, commented, 'I am convinced that we are witnessing a phenomenon never before seen'.

The 'phenomenon' of Calderón is the layered, highly textured postmodern style of his work as a writer and director, and the ease with which he moves between the two roles. He cites Pinter, Beckett and Kushner as having influenced his writing and recognizes his Chilean predecessors Alfredo Castro and Rodrigo Pérez as influences on his directing. Castro and his protégé, Pérez, came to the forefront in Chile in the 1990s, with a directing style that broke with the codes of realism and linear structures that had characterized most of Chilean theatre in the 1950s and 60s.

The major playwrights of those years (among them Isidora Aguirre, Jorge Díaz, Alejandro Sieveking, Sergio Vodanovic and Egon Wolf) left no notable heirs, creating a dearth of new writers for almost 20 years. It was only in the late 1970s, during Pinochet's dictatorship, that a new generation of playwrights began to appear. Two plays of that era, *Pedro, Juan y Diego* ('Tom, Dick and Harry'; 1976) and *Tres Marías y una Rosa* ('Three Marys and a Rose'; 1979), paved the way. Both were co-written by David Benavente, also a sociologist, the first with Teatro Ictus and the second with the Taller de Investigaciones Teatrales (Theatre Investigations Workshop).

Pedro, Juan y Diego was the first play produced during the dictatorship with a theme directly relevant to the time; *Tres Marías y una Rosa* prompted a

military investigation that resulted in an official decree stating that it would be disadvantageous to the regime if the play were banned. That decree opened the door for new writers to comment — if metaphorically — on the political situation.

Marco Antonio de la Parra and Juan Radrigán were two of them. Both were nourished by Gustavo Meza at his Teatro Imagen. De la Parra was the first to break the stylistic mould of the older generation. Radrigán, a more traditional writer, broke new ground in consistently featuring members of the working class in principal roles. De la Parra's first play, *Lo crudo, lo cocido, lo podrido* ('The Raw, the Cooked, the Rotten'), a devastating allegory on the Chilean oligarchy, was banned by the military in June 1978 on the night before its opening. It was, however, allowed a run the following November.

By 1984 the dictatorship had opened up enough to accept de la Parra's *La secreta obscenidad de cada día* ('Every Day's Secret Obscenity'). Two flashers in trench coats, later identified as Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, vie for a bench in front of a girls' school. They then enter into a passionate debate on psychoanalytic theory versus dialectic materialism, searching for the causes of evil and darkness, all in the setting of Pinochet's Chile. The play was a great success. Chileans love to laugh, though the exaggerated bursts of laughter during the performance I saw in Santiago sounded more like a release of tension.

Relevant political subject matter, a search for new expressions and a healthy dose of Chilean humour are echoed in Calderón's work. His plays are developed with the actors of his company during the rehearsal process. He writes many drafts, modifying words and structure right up until the play opens. If the actors are not comfortable saying something, he changes it; but they do not participate in the construction of the plays:

I am interested in constructing the *mise-en-scene* from the political ideas of the piece and from the evolution of the acting. I like to begin without preconceived ideas and prefer the rehearsal process to be the determining factor in the final result. I begin by slowly approaching the play, searching out what moves me most as a playwright. I end the process concentrated on defining the most minimal details that best express the piece's ideological content. Only then am I able to define the production's aesthetics. The piece is finally ready when I have understood the play's sense of humour.

The original company of three, Jorge Becker Reyes, Trinidad González and Paula Zúñiga, who performed in *Neva* and *Diciembre*, began as a group in

2003, working with another director. They had named the group Teatro en el Blanco (which translates as 'Theatre on Target' or 'Starting from Zero'). Calderón liked the name and kept it when he joined them in 2006 to write and direct *Neva*. He knew the actors well. Zúñiga had been his classmate at university; he and Trinidad were a couple at the time and were married that June (they separated three years later but still work together); and he was a good friend of Jorge's, who had acted in modern and postmodern plays and had been a member of the Pe Mellado Dance Company, known for using dancers' bodies as scenic space. Calderón worked with another group of actors for *Clase*, then with Teatro en Blanco again for *Diciembre*.

Calderón's next play, now in progress with another group of actors, is called *Villa*. Its theme is the Villa Grimaldi, one of the most important secret centres of detention, torture and extermination during Pinochet's military dictatorship. In March 1997 the Villa Grimaldi Peace Park was inaugurated on its site, on the outskirts of Santiago, and in April 2004 it was designated a national monument. In January 2011 Teatro en el Blanco will perform *Neva* and *Diciembre* in New York as part of the Public Theater's 'Under the Radar' Festival.

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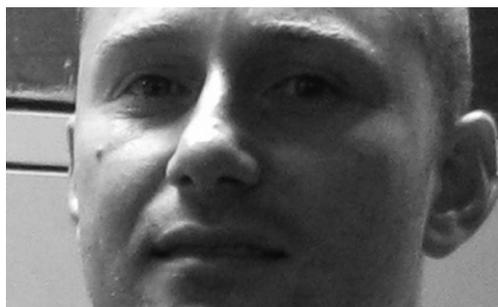
Joanne Pottlitzer, a freelance playwright, theatre director and translator, has produced many Latin American plays in New York and is the winner of two Obie Awards; she has taught courses on Latin American theatre, on which she has written widely, and her next book is Symbols of Resistance: The Legacy of Artists under Pinochet

Biographies



Guillermo Calderón playwright, director

Guillermo Calderón is a Chilean writer, director and acting teacher. He graduated with a degree in acting from the University of Chile, then studied at the Dell'Arte International Institute in California and in Italy. He also has a master's degree in film from the City University of New York. His acting credits include *Manu militari*, *Mala onda*, *Cagliostro*, *El señor Galíndez*, *Caricias*, *Perversion Sexual en Santiago*, *Después de la lluvia*, *Mad Love* and *Golden State*, the last three of which were performed in the USA. His directing credits include *Platonov*, *Three Sisters*, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. *Neva*, the first play he wrote, and also directed, won many awards, including Best Play of the Year in 2006 from the Circle of Art Critics, three Altazor Awards in 2007 (including Best Director and Best Playwright) and the 2008 José Nuez Martín Prize, given by the Faculty of Letters of the Catholic University of Chile. In 2008 *Clase*, which he also both wrote and directed, won an award for Best Play, its author nominated as Best Playwright at the Altazor Awards. His newest work, *Diciembre*, dates from 2008.



Jorge Becker Brother 3, Jorge, Uncle León

Jorge Becker received his bachelor's degree in theatrical pedagogy from the Catholic University of Chile. He is also a graduate of the Escuela Teatro Imagen and has a degree in cinema studies. Between 2000 and 2007 he was part of the dance company Remellado, performing nationally and internationally in such plays as *Lugar del Deseo* and *Ser-tocado*. For several years he worked as a voice teacher at the University of Chile, Teatro Imagen, Bolivariana, Finniss Terrae, and elsewhere. In 2006 he joined Teatro en el Blanco and has appeared in *Neva* and *Diciembre*.



Trinidad González Aunt Julie,
Brother 1, Trini

Trinidad González has degrees in acting from the Escuela Teatro Imagen and Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre in California. She has also studied *commedia dell'arte* in Italy. Touring in both *Neva* and *Diciembre*, she has been to countries including Spain, Italy, Brazil and Korea, and to Moscow. Her other theatre credits have included *Caricias*, *Los principios de la fe*, *Hamlet*, *Submarino amarillo*, *Pecados Capiales* and *Blood Wedding*. She has also worked on such films as *Ausente* and *Pecados Capiales*, and directed two plays, *Insomnio* and *Gritos y Susurros*.



Mariana Muñoz Brother 2, María,
Paula

Mariana Muñoz gained a degree in performing arts from the University of Chile. She joined the children's theatre company Niños Prodigio Teatro, taking part in all its productions (*Kinder*, *Norway Today* and *Mi joven Corazón Idiota*). She had roles in *Clown*, *Risa y pasión de nuestro Señor* and *Las siete vidas del Tony Caluga*, written and directed by Andrés del Bosque. She acted in *Cocinando con Elvis*, directed by Andrés Céspedes for the Un Mundo Theatre Company. In 2004 and 2005 she took part in the production of *Provincia Kapital*, directed by Rodrigo Pérez for La Provincia Theatre Company, and in 2008 the dramatized reading of the *Iliad*, written by Alessandro Baricco and directed by Héctor Noguera. She has taught at several institutions in Santiago. The short film *Toto, un artista del hambre*, directed by Pablo Stephens, was released in 2009. Her next long film, *Guiñar el diamante*, written and directed by Roberto Contador, was selected by the 16th International Film Festival of Valdivia in 2009.

Teatro en el Blanco

Teatro en el Blanco was founded by the playwright and director Guillermo Calderón in 2004 and met with immediate success with its thought-provoking and witty productions on the subject of Chilean culture, politics and the artist's place in society. Comprising only its founder and a creative team of five, it has spent much of its brief existence taking Chilean theatre to the world and revealing to a global audience the inner workings of Chilean society, also aiming to participate in the exchange of ideas with audiences and theatre professionals in other countries. Since its inception the company has taken its work on tour in Latin America (Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia, Cuba), to the USA and Canada, and to Europe (Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Austria), earlier this year also visiting Moscow.

Teatro en el Blanco are supported by

