

ARMANDO PARTIDA TAYZAN

For A New Cultural Journalism

By CARLOS XIMENEZ
The News Arts Editor

Armando Partida Tayzan is a researcher and professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). He has been a cultural journalist and theater critic since 1970, writing for dailies, cultural supplements, and both regular and specialized magazines, national and international. These include *Revista de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, *Los Universitarios*, *Proceso*, the Cultural Weekly of *Novedades*, and the *Escenica*, *Plural*, *El Público* magazines, as well as the *El Gallo Ilustrado* cultural supplement of *El Día*.

He is a co-founder of magazines specializing in theater, including *La Cabra*, *Artes Escénicas* and *Gala Teatral*. As an editor he was in charge of research for the Collection *Teatro Mexicano*, *Historia y Dramaturgia*, 20 thematic-anthological volumes from the 16-19th centuries, edited by the National Council for Culture and the Arts' Direction General of Publications. He is author of several translations into Russian, including narratives, poetry, theater and essays. Besides writing critical and cultural journalism he has written countless prefaces, introductory studies and literature about Mexican playwrights, as well as Russian dramaturgy and individual publications.

He has just published a book, entitled "*Teatro Adentro al Descubierta*," edited by the National Council for Culture and the Arts in its Cultural Journalism Collection.

How did you become interested in cultural journalism and theater criticism?

It has much to do with the creation of the Muestra Nacional de Teatro (National Theater Festival) sponsored by the National Fine Arts Institute (INBA) in the mid-70s, and the First Northwest Regional Theater Festival, organized by the Theater Workshop of the Sinaloa Autonomous University in 1984.

Do you think that there is a lack of proper education in theater and a lack of repertoires?

I think there is. It is because the goals of the new generation, of the people who study theater, lead toward acting, everything undoubtedly a result of the promise to work in soap operas.

What would be one of the worst problems in teaching theater?

Since the early '80s, a large number of theater students at UNAM's school of Philosophy and Letters don't know where they stand, maybe because tuition costs just 20 centavos.

Regarding repertoire, various works have been created by regional theaters and local playwrights, who talk about their surroundings on the one hand, while on the other, it is reality itself which prevails and imposes itself.

The 9th theater festival, staged more than 10 years ago, was admired by some and denounced by others. Do you think that moment was important for the theater movement?

I think it was important, this memoir-diagnosis I wrote about the Muestra Nacional de Teatro was an attempt at a

somewhat different cultural journalism. Globally, theater researchers have to write more than texts which sit in an archive.

To write this chapter, I resorted to several sources, I mixed field research — interviews both with creators and cultural journalists themselves — and analyzed the cultural politics of that moment, as well as poking into old newspapers and bibliographies specifically about the Muestra.

In the first five years of the '90s, theater plays became more varied throughout the country. What happened in 1996 and 1997?

The format changed. What used to be a *Muestra* (Festival) Nacional de Teatro, has become *Lo Mejor del Teatro* (The Best of Theater), with the result that there are fewer groups participating. These groups had to be of better quality, hence the new name.

The problem is that in trying to select the best and not the most representative, false expectations are created. One expects plenty of quality, when the truth is that the plays staged are the least inferior. This is what I would say about



MARIA EUGENIA ARENAS
Armando Partida Tayzan is a journalist and theater critic who also teaches at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

the last two *muestras*.

What do you think of Oscar Liera, known as a wonder of theater promotion and organization in the provinces?

To begin with, his is a kind of theater that surges forth in a spontaneous way. In the anthology published by Vicente Leñero in 1996, *La Nueva Dramaturgia Mexicana*, he included a play by Oscar Liera, "El Jinete de la Divina Providencia." He writes that, unfortunately, because of lack