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Author

Arrizón, Alicia

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Contemporizing Performance: Mexican California and the Padua Hills Theatre

The Spanish word of welcome, *Bienvenido*, is the traditional greeting given at the Padua Hills Theatre and Dining Room near Claremont, California. And it is repeated often by the hostess who receives guests at this unique playhouse in the Sierra Madre Range of the San Gabriel Mountains, thirty-five miles east of Los Angeles. Her attractive Mexican costume and her gracious words set the mood for a visit to one of the most delightful and distinctive spots in Southern California, an institute dedicated to inter-American friendship. (Deuel 1)

The history of Padua Hills Theatre, and its most famous performance group, the Mexican Players, has hardly received any critical attention. The several existing studies are limited to historical approaches to the foundation and development of this theatre.¹ My interest in both this theatre and its players arises out of a larger concern with the representation and misrepresentations of Mexican identity in theatre and performance prior to the emergence of the Chicano movement.² My most recent research has focused on California and Texas between the 1930s and 1950s, examining how certain ethnic and gender constructions first defined and then sustained a notion of what I call the "Mexican Southwest." My approach to the story of the Mexican Players of the Padua Hills Theatre is thus both less historical and more deeply embedded in the context of cultural criticism than previous studies have been.³ This essay addresses the power relations between the Anglo founders and directors of the Padua Hills Theatre and the Mexican actors and actresses whose performances brought the theatre international acclaim as a center for Spanish and Mexican folk-drama. A basic assumption underlying the analysis is that all representation in performance is inseparably bound to ideology. As Jill Dolan has put it, "ideology circulates as a prevailing term in performance from its creation to its reception" (41). The implications of that intertwining are often far-reaching, as the complex relationship between the Mexican Players and their chief benefactor, Bess Adams Garner, demonstrate.

OVERVIEW OF PADUA HILLS THEATRE

The Padua Hills Theatre, located three miles north of the Claremont Colleges in Claremont, California, was built in 1930 as a community center and home of the Claremont Community Players on land that once had been part of the great Rancho San José (Carol Webb 79).⁴ The original tract was enormous and had been granted to Don Ignacio Palomares and Don Ricardo Vejar in 1837 by Governor Alvarado of California on behalf of the Mexican government. When the United States government confirmed the ownership of Rancho San José in 1875, the north side of Claremont was excluded. In 1925, 2,000 acres were purchased by residents of Claremont with the intention of preserving the land's natural beauty. As Deuel (5) and Blakeslee both point out, the direction of this effort was entrusted to Herman H. Garner. The original plans, which called only for a playhouse, were expanded to include an art center, shops featuring imports from Mexico, and a dining room adjacent to the theatre.⁵

The Claremont Community Players made Padua Hills one of the outstanding examples of the little theatre movement in the United States, but the impact of the Great Depression forced a cut in their productions from every weekend to two weekends per month. The Depression also reduced the time individual members of the Claremont Players had available for acting, as many had to work longer hours in their non theatre-related jobs and others spent whole days simply hunting for work. In the hope that a change in residence would help reverse the company's financial decline, the Claremont Community Players elected to leave the Padua Hills Theatre. Their departure marked the advent of a new era of exclusively Mexican folk drama and musicals at Padua Hills.⁶

PEONES AND ENTERTAINERS: THE ROLE OF THE MEXICAN PLAYERS

Obviously, a young member of the Mexican Players is more than just an employee with a full-time position. He is an actor in the theatre; a waiter or a bus boy and an entertainer in the dining room; and an apprentice in the arts of song and dance. These young men and women set up the tables in the dining room before lunch and dinner and then serve the guests. During the meals they leave their duties for a few minutes at a time to dance and sing with the musicians. At night and on matinee days, after clearing the tables, they hurry to the dressing rooms to prepare for their roles in the current play. (Deuel 59)

Ironically, the same dire economic conditions that forced the Claremont Community Players to abandon Padua Hills gave the Mexican Players the opening that eventually established them as the major entertainment component of the

institute. These actors and actresses were the cooks, dishwashers, waitresses, waiters, and janitors who staffed the dining room adjacent to the theatre. Their origin as a company was not accidental: Bess Garner happened to see the kitchen staff acting out stories about Mexico for their own entertainment. She encouraged them to perform, advising them to do more pantomime and less talking because the audiences could not understand Spanish. In April 1931, the Mexican Players debuted at Padua, opening with a performance of *Noche mexicana* (Figure 1).

At first, the Mexican Players alternated weekend performances with the Claremont Community Players. As the Depression wore on and the Claremont Players left, the future of the Padua Hills Theatre became increasingly uncertain. In spite of the Depression's critical impact, the Garners did not want to see the theatre close. The Mexican Players offered a seemingly ideal solution: they would do double duty—at a single pay—in their roles as service workers and performance artists. Even this use of "cheap laborers" might not have been enough to save the Padua Hills Theatre had the Garners not also used their personal wealth to help sustain the Mexican Players.

According to David Streeter, who knew the Garners personally, Bess Adams Garner was a rich woman who did not know what to do with her money.⁷ Garner felt guilty toward the poor Mexicans, whom she saw as losing control of their own cultural history as a result of a complex process of Americanization in which the traditional roles of such institutions as the family, the Catholic Church, and the educational system, were seriously eroded. Cultural critic Jon Slott (10) described Mrs. Garner's interest in the Mexican Players somewhat less artistically as initially, "a real estate venture; then a hobby" that eventually culminated in "a magnificent obsession."

According to Deuel (15-20), and further documented by *Padua Hills Theatre Collection*, the Mexican Players were formally established as an artistic component of Padua Hills with *Serenata mexicana* (Figure 2) which was scheduled for regular presentations in 1931 and 1932. *Serenata mexicana* was produced by Charles Dickinson who continued to direct the Players for over fifteen years.⁸ The play depicts a day's events in a little town in Mexico. According to the "Program Notes" on the Padua Hills Theatre Collection for this production:

The *Serenata* is a simple story of life in a village street somewhere—anywhere in Mexico. It opens at the end of siesta time and closes with the evening closing of a little Inn or Fonda at the end of the street. People come and go—boys sing, girls dance, youth love. We hope you will enjoy watching this very simple but sincere picture of a life that must be a part of the background of all Californians.



(Figure 1: Cast of the first performance of the Mexican Players in "Noche Mexicana". Padua Theatre Hills Collection at Pomona Public Library. L. to R. Maximina Zúñiga, Philip García, Josephine García, Lupe González, Sarah Gómez, Florence Alvarez, Manuela Huerta, Jesús Huerta, José García, Gregorio Ornelas, Miguel Vera, Emma López, Marie Gómez, Grace Ramírez, Juan Matute, Beatrice Anaya, Flavio Vera, and Rachel Sepúlveda.)



(Figure 2: Scene from "Serenata Mexicana". Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library. From L. to R. Sarah Gómez, Marguerite Park, Samuel Valadez, Maximina Zúñiga, Juan Matute, Eva Rodriguez, Miguel Vera, Jesús Huerta, Felix Moreno, Manuel Madrid, Pauline Anaya.)

Serenata mexicana was followed, the same year by *El Rancho San Antonio*. Written and directed by Fred and Mary Harris, this play deals with the early days in Pomona. According to the Harrises in the "Program Notes," the play attempts to portray "the charm and life of the great Spanish Ranchos." *Serenata mexicana* celebrates its Spanish setting as the lost paradise of California, a land that once belonged to the Spanish settlers of the past century. The play honors the natural beauty of the "old California."

All of the Mexican Players performances were popular, but two in particular, the *Posadas* (Christmas celebrations) and *Ysidro*, became ritual events at Padua. Beginning in December 1932, with *Christmas at mi rancho bonito*, the *Posadas* were celebrated as part of the theatre's repertoire every Christmas season. The *Posadas* ceremony dates back to colonial times in Mexico. This popular ritual mixes indigenous practices and beliefs with folklore and music to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The *Posadas* use of the dialectics of "good" versus "evil" as the dramatic construction also celebrates humanity. Community members in the *barrios* of Mexico and the American Southwest still practice this ceremony during the Christmas season.

The second traditional performance, the play *Ysidro* (Figure 3), was first produced in May, 1933. *Ysidro* enacts another ritual deeply rooted in Mexican culture. In rural areas of Mexico, celebrations in honor of Saint Ysidro, are an annual event. Like the celebration of *Posadas*, this ritual involves a religious ceremony mixed with indigenous beliefs and Christian values. In the pre-Hispanic era, the first eight months of the Aztec calendar were dedicated to the water gods. The Indians performed ceremonies emphasizing a communion with nature and the essential forces of the universe. When the Spanish colonizers introduced a new calendar and a new religion, they permitted the Indians to keep the rituals they had always used to bring rain to a land of drought. However, the Christian saint San Ysidro, not the Aztec gods, was glorified as the bearer of rain and crops.

Neither ritual is traditionally performed as entertainment or as a folkloric exhibition. Theatrical performances like those held at Padua Hills introduce an element of commercialism that is inherently exploitative.

REPRESENTATIONS OF OTHERNESS: CONSTRUCTIONS OF ETHNICITY AND GENDER

When the Padua Hills Theatre was incorporated as a nonprofit educational organization in 1935, one of its stated aims was to promote and encourage interest in the arts and manners of early California and Mexico, and to promote friendly relations between the U.S. and Mexico and other Latin American countries. However, the particular view of Mexico and early California held by the trustees was a value-laden, Anglocentric one. Mexico was seen as the "other," the subject of a romantic and idyllic memory of the "old California." This idealized construc-



(Figure 3: Scene from "Ysidro." Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)

tion is clear in the following passage written by Bess Garner:

To many people, Padua Hills means a California summer's night, a full moon, dark-eyed boys and girls, soft Spanish voices—and romance. And it is on such a night that plaintive violins, strumming of guitars, flowers bright under the fiesta lights or pale in the shadows of old olive trees bring something back to California. To the tall white theatre on its hillside against the blue mountains there comes then something of Latin beauty and grace which California and the Southwest once had and must not lose.⁹

Mrs. Garner's artistic imagination was dominated by this yearning for a lost "Latin beauty and grace." Under her guidance, the plays performed by the Mexican Players during the 1930s unfailingly evoked romantic notions of Mexican identity and nationality. The following selections, taken from the program notes of various productions, document this pattern.¹⁰ All depict the subject of representation within romantic notions of identity and nationality. The subject formation is constructed as an integral part of a defined "colorful" and "beautiful" space:

"Rosita" is a human little story of the love affairs of a group of sweethearts ("*novios*") in any town in Mexico. We see Chema and Teresa, the accepted lovers, though never un-chaperoned; the more or less turbulent affair of the little sister, Chiquita and Pedro; and specially the one of Luis and Rosita; how they meet, woo, and wed.

Rosita (1933), produced under the direction of Bess A. Garner.

Please say the "x" in Mexico as if it were an "h." And if you can make a sort of a little "tz" sound after the word, it will mean not only lovely Mexico, but something like "Mexico, how swell!" and you will have the idea of the play you are going to see.

Qué bonito México (1936), produced under the direction of Bess A. Garner.

The *calle del beso* is a little street in Guanajato which received its name because it was so narrow that lovers walking down opposite sides of it could kiss each other without leaving their own side of the street—hence, the Street of the Kiss.

Calle del beso (1938), produced under the direction of Charles A. Dickinson.

The region around Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco, is called the "*Tapatío*." Famed for its gallant charros and beauti-

ful señoritas, it has both cosmopolitan and rural qualities blended in its picturesque life which may be found only in Mexico. The “*Rancho Tapatío*” of the play might be found within an hour or two of Guadalajara.

Rancho Tapatío (1938), produced under the direction of Charles A. Dickinson.

The representation of exotic costumes, laughter, guitars and romance abound. In each of these folk dramas, the basic setting involves a colorful land occupied by beautiful *señoritas* and handsome *charros*. Romance develops the central dramatic event for characters whose lives are represented as part of a never-ending *fiesta*. In *Rosita* (Figure 4), the character ended with a wedding procession in which the play’s cast moved out through the auditorium and into the lobby, followed by the audience. Romances such as *Rosita* and *La calle del beso* are performances that generalize Mexicans, creating the mythical perception of a romantic ethnic “other.”

In plays such as *Qué bonito México* and *Rancho Tapatío*, which celebrate the attractiveness of Mexico and its people, the female subject becomes the “object” of this representation, a symbol of a romantic nationality. At the same time the female representation may embody a submissive sex appeal (Figure 5). Here, gender becomes a social construct and the product of dominant culture. Within a power dynamic, females are fashioned into genderized objects, constructed to benefit others. Overall, the settings in *Rosita*, *Qué bonito México*, *Calle del beso*, and *Rancho Tapatío*, could be taken as symbolizing the Garden of Eden before Eve decided to liberate Adam and challenge God.

The idealized representations of ethnicity and female subjectivity that characterized so many of the plays performed by the Mexican Players in the 1930s had their counterpart in films. As Antonio Ríos Bustamante (21) has noted, Hollywood created and exploited images of the *femme fatale* and the Latin lover during this same time period.

Significantly, the ethnic misrepresentations found in both these media provided audiences with a reassuring, though false, vision of a glorious past at a time when dramatic changes were occurring in U.S. society at large. This contrast is well described in the program notes of *México, mi tierra* (1937):

A composite picture of the Republic of Mexico, its colorful cities, rugged mountains, high plateaus, and tropic shores. A colorful saga of great nation revealed in the song and dance of its people. The pulse of a new world race mingled in primitive Indian rhythm and stately old world grace.

The lure of the “other” is especially strong during times of social and economic upheavals such as occurred during the Great Depression. In her study of images of

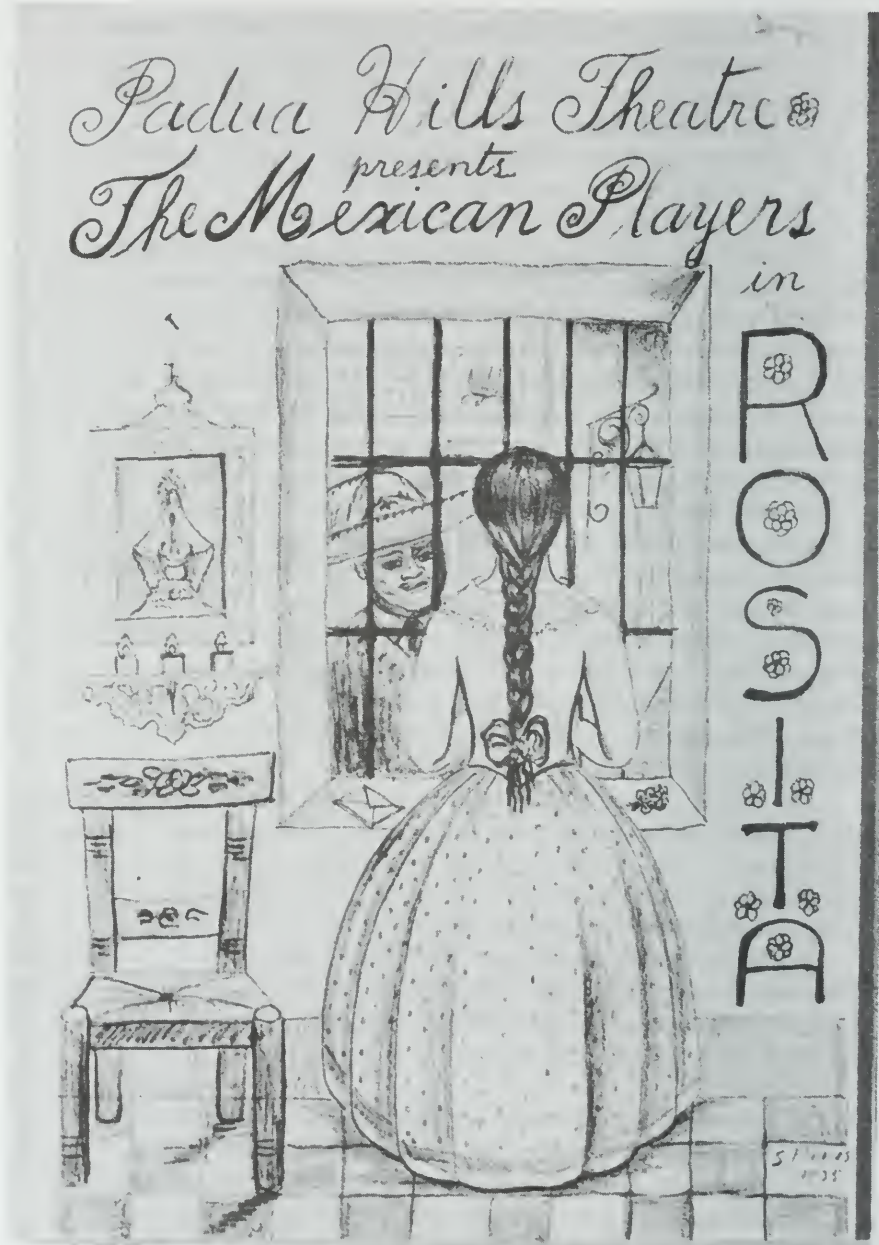


Figure 4: Cover page of the "Program Notes." Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)



(Figure 5: Scene from "Qué bonito México". Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)

Mexican-Americans in U.S. literature, Marcienne Rocard has noted “a romantic nostalgia for the past, for a people of unchanging values” (51) in the work of writers of the 1930s and 40s.¹¹ She writes:

With the apparent failure of American Civilization, a failure capped off by the Depression, some writers turned to people with a different set of values. Just like Presley, Norris’s turn-of-the-century romantic poet, Paul Horgan’s poet and musician, David and Edmund Abbey respectively, find their inspiration in the Mexican people. David writes poems about them while Edmund, in his symphony titled *Mexicana*, attempts to capture the Mexican soul. (53)

Bess Adams Garner’s interest in and support of the Mexican Players was firmly rooted in her admiration for Mexicans as a “different” people. Like writers of her generation such as Ernest Hemingway, Richard Summers, and John Steinbeck, Bess Garner found her inspiration in the Mexican people. The Mexican Players represented for her what the *Paisanos* did for Steinbeck in *Tortilla Flat* (1935).¹² According to her idealistic views of ethnic relationships, the aim of Padua Hills was to give the young women and men working there the opportunity to express their Mexicanness. Moreover, Garner proposed to instill in these young Mexican women and men a pride in their heritage and nationality. Ironically, her efforts were based on misconceptions of the historical and social condition of her own staff. Some of the Players were from Mexico, but most of them were the children of Mexican immigrants living in Southern California.

The plight of U.S. Mexicans did not especially interest Bess Garner. In fact, although she described herself as a “sympathetic observer” of a “country struggling with its problems” (*Notes* 164), it was Mexico folk culture that captured her heart. She gave little or no attention to social, economic and political conditions under which Mexicans and Mexican Americans existed during the 1930s:

I do not know what will happen to Mexico socially, politically, or economically. And I’ve written and am writing no book telling about that. I have loved my excursions down the paths leading away from the main road with its problems, back to the folk background, the cultural roots of the people I find so dear. (*Notes* 164)

That Mrs. Garner apparently had no difficulty holding “dear” a people whose actual daily existence roused in her neither interest nor sympathy underscores the nature of her infatuation with Mexico. Her “obsession” with that country’s “fascinating aesthetics” was fatally flawed by an Anglo ethnocentrism she never even recognized, much less overcame.¹³ Believing herself sincerely committed to an

“authentic” reproduction of Mexican folk culture at Padua Hills, she saw no inconsistency in limiting storylines to simplistic romances and stage settings to colorful and exotic designs and costumes.

In describing her relationship with the Mexican Players, Bess Garner suggested that she was a student and they were the teachers:

Five years ago at Padua Hills, Claremont, California, a group of Mexican young people and I started the Mexican Players of Padua Hills, and we have been entertaining our theater audiences since that time with plays, using the folk-lore, customs, songs, and dances of their native land. I knew no Spanish, little of Mexican people, and nothing about Mexico. At first our material had to come entirely from the young people of the group, struggling with their inadequate English against my ignorance. (Notes 1)

In fact, the plays were based on simple stories formulated either by Garner herself or by Charles Dickinson and recorded only in outline form. During rehearsals, the dialogue and action came automatically out of the natural movements of the young actors and actresses. Although improvisations in the style of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* enlivened the Mexican Players performances, it would be naive to think that Garner's role as director did not influence the artistic development of the Mexican Players. As “patron” and founder of the group, she was in a position of power.

The influence of Garner's perception of authentic Mexican performances is clear in the plays produced by Dickinson, as well. For example, in 1937 Dickinson directed *La Adelita* (Figure 6), a play loosely based on an episode in Pancho Villa's life. The “Program Notes” from the Padua Hills Theatre Collection summarizes the plot this way:

The Mexican Players of the Padua Hills Theatre present a dramatic legend of the revolution based upon a folk tale woven around Pancho Villa's favorite song, “*Adelita*,” and portraying the vivid life of his followers, their loyalty, spirit, the invaluable services given them by their women without which their campaign would have been futile, and specially the supreme sacrifice of Adelita.

In this version of “*La Adelita*,” *la soldadera* (woman soldier) sacrifices her life for revolutionary hero Pancho Villa. Adelita is depicted as a jealous woman who plans the murder of her lover. When she realizes that her jealousy is groundless, she takes the bullet meant for the General.

The play not only misrepresents the story of Adelita, it transforms this strong,



(Figure 6: Scene from "La Adelita". Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)

courageous soldier into a powerless victim of her own passions, and it does so at the hands of an Anglo director. Dickinson's play "kills" the legacy of women such as Adelita, Valentina, and many other *soldaderas* of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, a legacy that has enriched the feminist historical background of women of Mexican descent from north to south of the border. The revolutionary spirit of Mexican women is distorted and weakened by the exaltation of romanticism in the play. *Soldaderas* were women who fought, foraged for food, cooked, nursed the wounded, and performed many other services during the Mexican Revolution. Most of the *soldaderas* were Indians or poor *mestizas*. *Corridos* (ballads) such as "La Adelita" and "La Valentina," gave recognition to the participation of *soldaderas* in the revolution. (Soto 43-45)

Marina, directed by Bess Adams Garner, and performed during the same year *La Adelita* was staged, is similarly flawed. The play's plot involves an Anglo woman trying to learn about Mexican culture (Figures 7 and 8).¹⁴ This is a distortion of the highest magnitude. *Marina*, or Malinche, as she was known before the conquest of Mexico, was given to the Mexican *conquistador* Hernán Cortés by a Tabascan tribe.¹⁵ She became his mistress, mother of one of his children, and a translator. It has been suggested by many cultural critics and historians that without Malinche the conquest of Mexico would have been difficult, and perhaps even impossible. The importance of Malinche, not only as symbolic figure, but as a powerful historical character, lies in her representation of the ethnic split between the indigenous people and the Spanish *conquistadores*.

Marina's interpretation, featuring an Anglo Malinche searching for Mexicanness, is a glaring example of Anglo ethnocentrism in relation to the "ethnic-gender-other." *La Malinche* and *La Adelita* deserve better than to be reduced to comedies that deny the historical and psychological reality of female subjectivity within a historical context.

CONCLUSION

Although my interests lie mainly in describing and analyzing the ways in which the Padua Hills productions in the 1930s contributed to a negative stereotyping of Mexicans and "old California," the story of the Mexican Players would be incomplete without some discussions of the positive effects of their long reign. Bess Adams Garner's accidental discovery of the talents of her service staff was providential for these young people as well as for the Garners. The Great Depression drastically affected both Anglo and Mexican society in Southern California; theatre people were no exception. In *Hispanic Theatre in the United States*, Nicolás Kanellos describes the impact of the Depression on the Hispanic theatre in the Southwest and the Midwest. He maintains that artists in the Southwest who wanted to practice their profession had three choices:

- (1) [they could] return to Mexico and eke out a living there;
- (2) stay on in the Southwest and place their art at the service of

The MEXICAN PLAYERS present a romantic

MARINA

A gay story of a 'Mexican' dancer from the United States and her adventures with a theatrical family whose home she mistakes for a hotel when she is fleeing from the town's too inquisitive reporters. by Emily Wardman Bell.

JUNE 30 TO AUGUST 28, 1937

WED. THUR. FRI. SAT. EVE. AT 8:30 AND WED. AND SAT. MAT. AT 2:30

After each performance the songs, dances, games, of a colorful street fair will be presented under the olive trees in the gay

'Jamaica'

PADUA HILLS THEATRE

3 MILES NORTH OF CLAREMONT Phone CLAREMONT 6081



(Figure 7: "Marina." Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)



(Figure 8: Scene from "Marina". Padua Hills Theatre at Pomona Public Library.)

the church and community charities, but give up hopes of making a living from the stage;

(3) or move to New York where the growing influx of Puerto Ricans during the Depression and war years gave them a second life on the stage, principally as vaudevillians. A few other artists were able to land jobs in Spanish-language radio and small tent theatres that toured the border. (11)

The Mexican Players, with their dual roles as performers and workers, were so valuable to the Padua Institute that they weathered the Depression with much less hardship than their counterparts elsewhere. The Mexican Players' popularity may also have helped insulate them from the upturn in anti-Mexican sentiments that accompanied the Depression. State and Federal deportation and repatriation campaigns were initiated in Southern California during the Depression, and the influential nativist tract *The Alien in our Midst* was published in 1930. Working at Padua Hills gave the Mexican Players a measure of emotional and psychological protection as well as an economic boost.

The popularity and profitability of the Mexican Players, coupled with the Garners own interest in Mexico, led them, along with most of the Anglo executives of Mexico. Deuel notes:

Believing that the future of Padua Hills lay with the Mexican Players, the Garners plunged whole-heartedly into the task of learning about Mexico. They had been interested in Mexican culture for many years, but they were in no way steeped in information about the country. In order to be of more assistance in the role of director which had fallen to her, Mrs. Garner made the first of many trips to Mexico, where she collected material for future plays, bought costumes to be used at Padua, and made contacts with government officials which later proved to be of great value. (27)

One positive outcome of the Garners' productive relationship with the Mexican government was the arrival at Padua Hills of several outstanding Mexican artists, sent by the Ministry of Education. The visitors lived and worked with the Players. The first of these invited instructors, Luz María Garcés, visited the institution in 1934 (Deuel 33).¹⁶ The next year, Francisco Sánchez Florez, an artist from Guadalajara, joined the Mexican Players. His visit was particularly significant because he produced *¿Idolos muertos?* (*Are the Idols Dead?*, Figure 9) which introduced to Padua Hills the traditional *Jamaica* (Deuel 35, Blakeslee 53).¹⁷

In the fall of 1935, actress Graciela Amador visited Padua as an instructor. She became very popular with the artistic members of the Players. She was not only an actress and director, but a great musician. She was a relative of Casilda Amador, a noted performer of the group (Figure 10 and 11).



(Figure 9: Scene from "¿Ídolos Muertos?" Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)



(Figure 10: Graciela Amador. Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)



(Figure 11: Casilda Amador. Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)

AGUILA y NOPAL

THE EAGLE AND CACTUS



FEATURING

GRACIELA AMADOR

ASSISTED BY THE
MEXICAN PLAYERS

PRESENTED NOV. 6, 7, 8, 9, 1935

AT THE PADUA HILLS THEATRE



(Figure 12: The cover page from the program notes of "Aguila y Nopal." Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library.)

As Deuel (35) points out, in November of 1935, Graciela Amador directed *Aguila y nopal* (*Eagle and Cactus*, Figure 12), a musical play that represented a nationalist vision of Mexico with its different regions.

The improvisational nature of the plays produced by Garner and Dickinson also provided some scope for the talents of the individual actors and actresses. Characters often engaged the audiences in conversations, making the "spectatorship" feel as an essential part of the play. For example, the wedding procession in *Rosita* followed by the audience. Of course, there were limits on the areas of production the Players could affect. In the 1930s, Mexicans were virtually absent from the technical side of stage production and management

Many changes took place at Padua with the beginning of World War II.¹⁸ After some of the Anglo producers and directors were drafted, women began to have more of a presence in the institute. In the "News Notes" on the Padua Hills Theatre Collection of 1943, Herman Garner announced:

How can the work go on with these two directors and so many others drafted? Well, Hilda Ramírez has taken on the main load of the directing in addition to her responsibility for the costumes. She is doing a swell job, too.[She] Has very excellent ideas. Miss Marjory Allen who is now living at Padua Hills will be available for consultation and assistance. Mrs. Dickinson [is] back on the job on the technical end.

Nevertheless, the false notions of Mexican identity, culture, and history that characterized so many of the Padua Hills productions during the 1930s live on. Racial stereotyping and distortions of ethnicity and female representation vis-a-vis Mexicans and Latinos in the U.S. have not disappeared. Nor is there an end to the romanticism that plagued the Mexican Players. I agree with the Mexican writer Luis Quintanilla, who pointed out in 1943 the Anglo habit of confusing passion with romanticism. In his book *A Latin American Speaks*, Quintanilla noted:

Here we find ourselves confronted with another current prejudice. "So, so romantic" is usually followed by a wistful sigh straight from the heart of an otherwise normal, undemonstrative school-teacher. One prejudice is as bad as the other. The U.S.A. has no more a monopoly on freedom than we have on romance. Of course, we love romance. But be careful with the word "romantic." Latin Americans are passionate, not romantic people. (32)

Real change will require re-educating those in power so that the views of the dominant group can be brought more fully into line with the true social, cultural, and political identity of Mexicans and other minorities in the U.S.

Alicia Arrizón

University of California, Riverside

NOTES

¹*Mexican Serenade: The Story of the Mexican Players and the Padua Hills Theatre* was the first published historical account of the Padua Hills Theatre. There are also two unpublished master's theses: Selma Elizabeth Louisa Litle, "The Padua Hills Project Introduces Mexican Folk Lore Into California Culture," University of California at Los Angeles, 1943; and Margaret Simpson Hall, "Padua Hills Mexican Theatre: An Experiment in Inter-Cultural Relations," Claremont Colleges, 1944. The most recent publication is Norma Hopland Blakeslee's, "History of Padua Hills Theatre," *Pomona Valley Historian* 9 (Spring 1973), 46-66.

²I am specifically referring to the emergence of *Teatro Campesino* and its role in the Chicano movement of the 1960s. The Chicano theatre movement can only be understood in relation to a larger context: political, social and cultural movement of which it was a part. Luis Valdez, with his Farm Workers Theatre recreated the "actos" (acts or sketch), in which social and political issues were represented in a very comical way. The actos themselves depicted events and characters familiar to all who had grown up in the barrios.

³My perspective in no way detracts from the significant contributions of Deuel and Blakeslee, whose studies have been invaluable in documenting the historical experience of the Mexican Players and in disseminating information previously available only in archival form.

⁴As a part of the Valley Community Theatre in Pomona, this group was organized in 1928 by Bess Adams Garner. The group consisted of approximately 30 members.

⁵Padua Hills was named for the Italian city of Padova, a famous university town, with an atmosphere similar to that of Claremont and its many colleges. The name Padua was also associated with the San Antonio Peak, which dominates the Sierra Madre mountain range and the valleys of this part of Southern California, because Anthony is the patron saint of Padua.

⁶Padua Hills continued as an exclusively Mexican theatre for more than 40 years, finally closing in 1974.

⁷David Streeter currently works in the special collection department of the Pomona Public Library. I gratefully acknowledge his help and his confidence in lending me the material available on Padua Hills.

⁸Charles A. Dickinson was director of the theatre for many years until his death in 1950. His association with Padua began when he was a graduate student in Claremont. He wrote most of the plays that were performed during the 1930s.

⁹The first of the organization's Articles of Incorporation stipulated the name of the corporation as the Padua Institute. In addition to the objectives noted in the text, the second article of incorporation stated that the institution was intended to establish, maintain, and

conduct an educational institution or school for the teaching of music, dramatics, arts, and crafts. These articles were endorsed and filed in the office of the Secretary of the State of California on December 30, 1935. The document was undersigned by H. H. Garner, Bess Adams Garner, Erlo V. Simon, Mary Nicholl Kerr and Robert J. Bernard. The trustees' copy of the articles of incorporation can be found in the Pomona Public Library.

¹⁰This quote is taken from one of the scrapbooks located at Padua Hills Theatre Collection at Pomona Public Library. This album was put together by Bess Adams Garner in the 1940s.

¹¹These passages are verbatim quotes. The sometimes senseless language is a further indication of the lack of sensitivity toward the perception of the culture and people of Mexican descent.

¹²The French critic examines the work of Mexican American as well as Anglo American authors, demonstrating the former evolution from the *corrido*, with its subtle criticism of Anglos, to broader writings that address the loss of cultural identity. Rocard studies the changing image of the Mexican American over three periods: from the United States' annexation of the Southwest in 1848 to 1940; the "assimilationist" period from 1940 to 1965; and the explosive period of the Chicano movement, from 1965 to 1974.

¹³Rocard describes *Tortilla Flat* as the first book of real value devoted to Americans of Mexican origin.

¹⁴The term "obsession" and "fascinating aesthetics" are part of Jon Slott's description of Bess Garner's relationship with the Mexican Players. (10)

¹⁵The dramatic text was written by Emily Wardman Bell.

¹⁶Malinche was also known as Malintzín Tenepal and, later by her Spanish name, doña Marina.

¹⁷Luz María Garcés was a respected dancer and specialist on Mexican folklore. She taught songs and dances; designed costumes; and helped to write some of the plays. From January 19 to March 30, her play *Mi compadre Juan* was staged. Apparently, she also directed the songs and dances in *Cuadros de México viejo*. I found this information in the program notes in one of the scrapbooks of the collection. However, this play does not appear in the "Repertoire of the Mexican Players of Padua Hills," listed in Deuel's book.

¹⁸With the play *¿Idolos muertos?*, the *Jamaica* started to take place every summer at Padua Hills. This type of Mexican fair still takes place in some areas of Southern California. Also *jamaica* is a delicious fruit made from dried petals of the roselle plant imported from the island of Jamaica.

¹⁹The research of Marian Perales and Alicia Rodriguez reveals that World War II positively affected the women at Padua Hills since they began to occupy roles men traditionally held. Rodriguez and Perales are currently graduate students in the History Department at Claremont Graduate School.

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