

TEATRO DE CIERTOS HABITANTES
PRESENTS



The **GRAY AUTOMOBILE**
IN THE JAPANESE BENSHI STYLE

Directed by **CLAUDIO VALDÉS KURI**

A Reinterpretation of Enrique Rosas' Famous Silent Film from 1919

PRESENTATION

During the silent film era, the land of the Rising Sun produced a unique phenomenon: the Benshi, a narrator seated beside the film screen who would give voice to each character with explanatory comments and descriptive actions of the film being shown.

The golden age of the Benshi tradition was that of the silent film era in both Japan and Mexico. These films project images of a now defunct past—images that seem as new, unfamiliar, and surprising to today’s audiences as the film shorts of the Lumiere brothers appeared to early twentieth-century audiences.

The role of the Benshi was rendered obsolete with the introduction of “talkies.” Now, however, we recognize the Benshi-accompanied silent film as a contemporary genre—uniting film, theatre, and music—indeed, a truly interdisciplinary art form.

The Gray Automobile is a project that gives life to Benshi art, through the interpretation of a Mexican silent film classic. It represents a meeting of geographically distant thought: the strict, traditional Japanese and the spontaneous, forgetful Mexican.

This refined narrative style is only the starting point of the project: it is where languages, histories, and habits meet and clash, where interpretation and misinterpretation share the same level of importance in the search for “something” universal.

Claudio Valdés Kuri



SYNOPSIS

A Japanese actress and an Afro-Caribbean actress stand next to a film screen, working from and beyond the great Japanese silent film narrative tradition called “Benshi.” They narrate *The Gray Automobile*, a Mexican silent film classic directed by Enrique Rosas in 1919.

As the film progresses, the actors make comments and give each character a distinctive voice, playing with language, treading the fine and fascinating line between correct interpretation and misinterpretation generated by the encounter of distant very different culture.

A pianist also accompanies the film, creating original compositions as well as delving into a battery of Japanese and Mexican silent film scores. His music weaves a dramatic atmosphere around scenes involving a gang of thieves who terrorized Mexican society in 1915.



CREDITS

Directed by Claudio Valdés Kuri *

Irene Akiko Iida.....Japanese Benshi
Fabrina Melón.....Afro-Caribbean Benshi
Ernesto Gómez Santana.....Pianist

Director.....Claudio Valdés Kuri
Producer.....Josafat Aguilar
Original Composition and piano arrangements.....Ernesto Gómez Santana
Lighting Designs.....Angel Ancona/Josafat Aguilar
Costume Designer.....María Rosa Manzini
Make-up.....Carlos Guizar / Irene Akiko Iida
Company Coordinator.....Fabrina Melón

Sponsors.....Rosas Priego Family

* Member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte FONCA
Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes has the support of the program "México en Escena" FONCA.

AWARDS

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of Experimental Theatre

Asociación Mexicana
de Críticos de Teatro

BEST THEATRE
GROUP

Asociación de Periodistas
Teatrales





PRESS

You had to be there! The synching is absolutely brilliant and made this film vibrant and entertaining in a completely honest and unforced way.

David Bowie

The High Line Festival, Nueva York

I avoid clichés like “You've never seen anything like this before,” but the fact is, you haven't.

Roger Ebert

Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago

A chimerical show. Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes, faithful to Enrique Rosas' will, succeeds in bridging the gap between just a show and a magical and charming moment.

Armelle Héliot

Le Figaro, Paris

It was intriguing and exciting. As I watched them, I found myself thinking that perhaps the true actors of the past belonged to this type of performer, and that idea comforted me.

Nehad Selaiha

Al-Ahram Weekly Online, El Cairo

The work parodies, subverts, desacralize not only the figurative condition of film representation, but also the status of the real.

Andy Arencibia Concepción

Revista Conjunto, La Habana

A ritual scenic performance. The final result surpasses the components, even though these component in themselves are full artistic expressions.

William Venegas

La Nación, Costa Rica

Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes spills over and across so many aesthetic parameters.

Chris Jones

Chicago Tribune, Chicago

The main strategy rests on the beauty of the image, on the skill of the performer, on the subtlety of the dramatic score, questioning and sarcasm, poetry and synthesis.

Esther María Hernández

Nuevo Herald, Miami

A surprising result. What is revolutionary is what the actresses do, who perform true wonders. Fun, exciting, surprising and novel are just some of the words that can be used.

Manuel Lino

El Economista, CDMX



THE COMPANY



With more than 20 years of experience, **Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes** (Certain Inhabitants Theatre) is a Mexican company of wide international prestige, and a benchmark of Latin American avant-garde theatre.



In their constant search for renewal, each staging of this iconic collective has been conceived by way of different challenges and artistic processes. It has performed in more than 200 cities, in the most prestigious festivals and theaters of the world, as well as in remote towns often excluded from theatrical experiences. In addition to their stage work, the company has created fiction and documentary films, television programs, radio series, book editions, recordings, conferences, and workshops.

THE DIRECTOR

Claudio Valdés Kuri is a prestigious Mexican director and playwright with great international acclaim. He has directed opera and large-format spectacles. His work has received multiple awards and great praise from critics around the world.

Some of the most important institutions that have commissioned and coproduced his work include: The Edinburgh International Festival, Theater der Welt (Germany), Wiener Festwochen (Austria), Kunsten Festival des Arts (Belgium), Writers Theatre (USA), Festival Internacional Cervantino (Mexico), National Institute of Fine Arts (Mexico), National Autonomous University (Mexico), among others.

He is a member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Artes (National System for Arts Creators). The journal *Líderes Mexicanos* has named him as one of the 300 most influential leaders in Mexico.



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