

TEATRO DE CIERTOS HABITANTES
MÉXICO

presents

THE GRAY AUTOMOBILE

In the Japanese Benshi Style

A Reinterpretation of Enrique Rosas' Famous Silent Film from 1919

Directed by

Claudio Valdés Kuri

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www.ciertoshabitantes.com

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.

The Gray Automobile is also an attempt to remember. Destined for failure from the very start, this is a trip to Ithaca that will take us to new places as we search for the old ones. It is a voyage through the forgotten Mexico City of 1915, where the streets have the same names but with twenty-five million less people walking through them. It is an exercise in which the filtering effect of time plays an important role: what made them cry then, makes us laugh now, and what they laughed at then, we may not even understand. Therefore, it is not an easy task: to explore innovative paths towards interpretation, without betraying the spirit and essence of the creative forces of the past.

Claudio Valdés Kuri
Director

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.

PROGRAM

Credits

TEATRO DE CIERTOS HABITANTES

THE GRAY AUTOMOBILE

In the Japanese Benshi Style

A Reinterpretation of Enrique Rosas' Famous Silent Film from 1919

Directed by: Claudio Valdés Kuri*

Irene Akiko Iida	<i>Japanese Benshi</i>
Fabrina Melón	<i>Afro-Caribbean Benshi</i>
Ernesto Gómez Santana	<i>Pianist</i>
Director	Claudio Valdés Kuri
Producer	Josafat Aguilar
Original Composition and piano arrangements	Ernesto Gómez Santana
Lighting Designs	Angel Ancona
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 Artes FONCA.
Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes has the support of the program "México en Escena"
FONCA.

Program Notes

The 1919 silent film *The Gray Automobile* was the greatest cinematic event of its time. With a mixture of reality and fiction, it narrates the story of the "Gray Automobile Gang," which terrorized Mexico City during the chaos of the Revolution. This 21st century Mexican production juxtaposes the classic film with actors onstage and a brilliant piano accompaniment. Inspired by the Japanese Benshi tradition - an actor onstage doing all the voices of the characters on the screen - *The Gray Automobile* surprised the audience by leading them to a hilarious crossing of languages, cultures, and time.

THE COMPANY

TEATRO DE CIERTOS HABITANTES

Founded in 1997, Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes (Certain Inhabitants Theatre) has had a singular trajectory based on the premise of many hours of laboratory research that produce few and highly recognized productions worldwide.

In their constant search for renewal, each staging of this iconic collective has been conceived by way of different challenges and artistic processes. The company has maintained a commitment to its conception and vision of art as service, even though the content and form of each stage production is vastly different. Likewise, the company has constantly privileged the development of a multidisciplinary performer - demanding the best of their abilities - as the primary form of communication with the spectator.

The company has trained multiple artists, creative producers and promoters of all nationalities, who in turn they have brought the experiences acquired to their own projects. Throughout more than two decades, Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes has opened unexplored routes for Mexican theatre and has innovated forms of stage production, inspiring and motivating many other companies. In addition to their stage work, the company has created fiction and documentary films, television programs, radio series, book editions, recordings, conferences, and workshops.

With the validation and the experience accumulated through the years, the current interests of the company have extended to the transmission of knowledge, and the active participation in social and ecological projects through its center for creation, education, and collaboration in the performing arts: ArtBoretum.

Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes 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. The company has the support of the "México en Escena" program by the FONCA (National Fund for Culture and Arts).

AWARDS

"Best Director of Experimental Theatre"

Asociación Mexicana de Críticos de Teatro

"Best Group Theatre 2002"

Asociación de Periodistas Teatrales

PRESS

You had to be there! The synching is absolutely brilliant and made this nearly ninety-year-old piece of history (not me, the film) vibrant and entertaining in a completely honest and unforced way. Brilliant.

David Bowie

The High Line Festival, Nueva York, EUA

The work of the two actresses, accompanied by the pianist Ernesto Gómez Santana, 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

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

Innovative and different. The project was a splendid combination of aesthetic vocal and dramatic mockery, music, and silent film.

Talía Rodríguez

Noroeste, Mazatlán

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

William Venegas

La Nación, San José

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

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

If the best internationalist theatre always probes border and boundary crossings, *Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes* spills over and across so many aesthetic parameters.

Chris Jones

Chicago Tribune, Chicago

Valdés Kuri and his company have created an innovative and amusing theatrical show and we anxiously await his next surprise.

Norma Niurka

Nuevo Herald, Miami

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