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THE PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE COMPANY:  
THE FIRST TEN YEARS

By

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## ABSTRACT

### THE PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE COMPANY: THE FIRST TEN YEARS

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One of the most important and positive developments of the theatre in the United States in the past twenty years has been its diversification, allowing drama to address the concerns and values of special interest groups and serve the crucial cultural function of reflecting the ethnic and racial composition of an heterogenous society. Political groups and a wide variety of minorities have been able to express fundamental identities on a public forum and have developed nontraditional approaches which have altered the nature, quality and substance of recent theatre and drama in the United States. Off-Broadway, off-off Broadway, regional companies, Black theatre, Women's theatre, guerilla theatre and groups such as the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre and Teatro Campesino have provided a way of breaking the hegemony of the New York commercial theatre by addressing the audience's need to see their problems enacted in understandable terms. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is one of the most recent of these independent, nonprofit theatre groups.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the work of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York from 1967 to 1976 and the factors that made it possible.

Chapter one demonstrates the relationship between certain social, economic and cultural realities in Puerto Rico and the emergence of the PRTT in New York. A survey of the theatre activities in Puerto Rico from the development of a truly nationalistic drama in 1940 to 1967, sets the theatrical background for the group. An overview of the factors that prompted the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. during the 40s is also included in this chapter.

Chapter two examines the philosophy of the PRTT based on its status as a nonprofit, professional, bilingual theatre organization with the specific task of addressing the concerns of the Hispanic community. The company's three major programs: the Traveling Theatre, the Laboratory Theatre and the Training Unit are also discussed in this chapter as well as its relationship with similar theatre movements.

The productions and activities of the PRTT from 1967 to 1971 are examined in chapter three. The Oxcart by René Márquez, Crossroads by Manuel Méndez Ballester and A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories are discussed in depth as representative productions of this period.

Chapter four examines the work of the company from 1972 to 1976. Luis Rafael Sánchez' The Passion of Antígona Pérez, Osvaldo Dragún's Stories to Be Told and Piri, Papoleto and Pedro, Directed by Pablo--a dramatized anthology of "Nuyorican" poetry--by Piri Thomas, Jesús Papoleto Meléndez and Pedro Pietri are analyzed as representative productions of this period.

The study is an examination of work in progress. What emerges is a portrait of a theatre with a social as well as an artistic function. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is the most important

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Puerto Rican theatre group in the United States. Its history,  
activities and accomplishments are the subjects of this study.

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Grateful acknowledgment is due to my mother, Rosa M. Pérez de Englar and to my husband and friend, Lowell A. Fiet, for his tolerance, love and constant encouragement. To them, and to the people of Puerto Rico, in their quest to control their own destiny, is this study dedicated.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the work of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York from 1967 to 1976 and the factors that made its development possible. These factors are analyzed in a discussion of 1) events which led to the emergence of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York City in 1967; 2) a general history of theatrical activities in Puerto Rico with special emphasis on 1940, when Puerto Rico's first purely nationalistic theatre was founded; 3) the ground rules established in 1940 for subsequent theatre movements; and 4) the migratory phenomenon, intensified during the 1940s in which one third of the Puerto Rican population with its distinct cultural needs and manifestations, established itself in the United States.

The study documents and evaluates the origin, development and accomplishments of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. An examination of selected productions, representative of the different aspects of the group's background and philosophy establishes the importance of the contribution of Puerto Rican theatre to theatre movements in the United States.

The methodology borrows strongly from recent works in related fields, particularly from cross-cultural studies of the Puerto Rican migration to the U.S., its causes and the impact on its participants. Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historic Interpretation by Manuel Maldonado Denis was the major source for the analysis of the historical and political

elements which led to the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States.

A survey of Puerto Rican theatre establishes the cultural background which nurtured the work of the PRTT. Origen y desarrollo de la afición teatral en Puerto Rico, by Emilio Pasarell, El teatro en Puerto Rico, by Antonia Sáez, and Contemporary Puerto Rican Drama, by Jordan Phillips, as well as the unpublished investigative works of Victoria Espinosa and Odette Fumero de Colón, have provided essential information in the compilation of data for the general survey of the Puerto Rican theatre.

Behind these developments there is also a growing body of theory on the nature and function of ethnic-cultural theatre. The ideas of Augusto Boal, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Luis Valdés, Francis Fergusson and John Lahr have been investigated to establish the role diversification can play in serving fundamental social and cultural needs.

The play reviews and newspaper and magazine articles provided the most useful source of information on the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. A personal recorded interview with Miriam Colón, the company's director, as well as an examination of the group's records and files were undertaken in order to analyze the philosophy of the PRTT. An examination of all the plays produced by the company, and critical material about them, were used to formulate the group's basic philosophy in terms of theme.

What emerges is a portrait of a theatre with a social as well as artistic function. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is more than an independent theatre group: it is also a symbol of unification in the New York Hispanic community, providing instrumentation for the

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airing of social and ethnic problems and channeling community spirit and energy into constructive avenues of action. Its overriding objective is to demonstrate that the arts--particularly theatre--can function as a force contributing to the dissolution of the alienating tendencies of modern urban life.

All materials quoted in Spanish have been translated by the author.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE ARTISTIC, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE

Although the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre was founded in New York by Miriam Colón in 1967, it has a tradition which extends far beyond the ten-year history of the group itself. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the relationship between certain social, economic and cultural realities in Puerto Rico and the emergence of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York. To accomplish that objective, a brief survey of the history of theatre and drama in Puerto Rico, and an overview of the socioeconomic factors that resulted in the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. mainland, especially New York City, during the 1940s are employed.

Puerto Rico is a Caribbean island approximately thirty-five miles wide and one hundred miles long. In this small geographical area, three million people live mainly in urban centers. Emigration was evident during the nineteenth century, when the island was still ruled by Spain. But it was during the 1940s, four decades after the United States acquired Puerto Rico from the Spaniards, that an exodus began that resulted in the establishment of a Puerto Rican community of about two million people in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The decade of the

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<sup>1</sup>Adalberto López, "The Puerto Rican Diaspora" in Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, eds. Adalberto López and James Petras (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), p. 319.

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Forties also marked a crucial turning point in another aspect of Puerto Rican history. In all facets of the island's life, strong support emerged for the concept of puertorriqueñidad (Puerto Ricanism or the search for Puerto Rican national identity). After forty-two years of U.S. political domination, the Puerto Rican people were confronted by a question of national identification: "A la larga, el tema responde a un ¿cómo somos? o a un ¿qué somos? los puertorriqueños globalmente considerados. . . ." <sup>2</sup> ("Basically, the theme responds to how, who, and/or what are we, the Puerto Ricans, when globally considered?") The question became crucial to a people living in a land where the prevalent culture, acquired from the European colonial empire (Spain), was threatened by the new power in charge (the United States) without full consultation of the island's inhabitants.

The question is further complicated when asked by the second generation Puerto Ricans on the U.S. mainland who do not really fit either on the island or in the United States:

Where are we? In reality we are nowhere. When we go back to the island after living here, they say, "You're not Puerto Rican! You're an American!" And when we come back to the United States, they say, "Oh, you're nothing but a Puerto Rican!" So, who are we? That just makes me wonder: who am I? Why am I a Puerto Rican? What makes me a Puerto Rican? If I was born here, why doesn't that make me an American? If I am not, why am I not there, on the island? <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Antonio S. Pedreira, Insularismo (Madrid: Editorial Edil, 1934), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Stan Steiner, The Islands: The Worlds of the Puerto Ricans (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 440-441.

The political events of the 1940s also helped to crystallize concepts of Puerto Rican national identity. The nationalistic spirit established itself firmly behind a leader and a party that promised social reform and independence: ". . . convinced of this [independence], thousands of independentistas followed [Luis Muñoz Marín] and helped make him the victor in the 1940 elections,"<sup>4</sup> making him the most powerful political figure in Puerto Rico. However, the island continued to be ruled by a governor appointed by the President of the United States until 1948, when Muñoz was elected governor by popular vote.

Other changes took place during the 1940s. Economically, the island experienced a rapid deterioration of its agricultural resources, which initiated the exodus of the peasant population to island cities and to North American ghettos. According to sociologist Manuel Maldonado Denis,

this migratory process can also be observed in the growth of the slums in the metropolitan zone of San Juan, for the disruptions of their milieus forces great groups of peasants into the cities and into resultant unemployment, extreme poverty and marginality. . . . On breaking the ties which served him as a means of orientation in the country, the migrant dwelling in the slums of San Juan or the ghettos of New York finds himself without points of reference for orientation of his behavior. The result is the phenomenon of alienation: a feeling of impotence and fatalism in the face of the surrounding world.<sup>5</sup>

Other factors contributing to a greater sense of identity and cultural crisis also became evident. U.S. citizenship was imposed in

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<sup>4</sup>Manuel Maldonado Denis, Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historic Interpretation, trans. Elena Vialo (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 154.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

1917 by virtue of the Jones Act. From 1898 to 1948, English was the official language of a territory whose population spoke Spanish. Public schools taught English as a first language and Spanish as a second language (that Spanish was not eradicated was possible due to cultural resistance as well as to the fact that most teachers were Puerto Rican and didn't have adequate English-language training). Even traditional island history and myths were replaced by those of the United States. Today, school children can recite the accomplishments of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, but do not recognize native figures such as Eugenio María de Hostos and Ramón Emeterio Betances. In reaction to cultural bombardment from a foreign culture and language, intellectuals and artists undertook the mission of identifying, evaluating and rescuing Puerto Rican culture.

The political, economic, and cultural developments of the 1940s also appear as major factors contributing to the emergence of indigenous theatre in Puerto Rico. Since 1898, theatrical activity on the island had been limited almost entirely to touring companies from Europe. No strictly indigenous theatre movement had emerged. However, in 1939, Emilio Belaval wrote a manifesto for a modern Puerto Rican theatre, stressing the need of every nation--every distinct cultural and geographical region--to create its own theatre with themes, forms, actors, and settings which reflected the nature of life as it was experienced in that nation. In his study of the Puerto Rican theatre, Jordan Phillips states,

[Belaval] objected that what Puerto Ricans had seen dramatized was not their life, and he did not like the passivity with which it had been accepted. He recognized the problem of having no dramatic tradition of their own on which to build, [and] thus called the new effort

not a renovation, but a building from the now, cognizant of their history but not in imitation of what had gone before. Belaval struck directly at the result of four and one half centuries of domination: the disappearance of their individuality. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Belaval's "manifesto" was put into practice. In 1940, the theatre group Areyto was formed under his direction. The aim of the group was to provide an impetus for the development and practice of basic theories and techniques which would lead to the emergence of a Puerto Rican national theatre. In the words of Latin American theatre historian Carlos Solórzano,

En Puerto Rico, el creador del movimiento nacionalista fue Emilio Belaval, quien fundó el grupo Areyto en 1940. Este grupo tuvo como principal misión la de plantear la problemática propia del puertorriqueño, la de enjuiciar sus procedimientos de vida y la de descubrir su tradición indohispánica en el momento en que la vida puertorriqueña afrontaba su asimilación a la cultura norteamericana.<sup>7</sup>

(In Puerto Rico, the creator of the nationalist movement was Emilio Belaval, who founded the group Areyto in 1940. The group had the principal mission of stating the particular dilemma of Puerto Rico, judging its vital life process, and discovering its Indo-Hispanic tradition at a time when Puerto Rican life was facing assimilation to North American culture.)

The name Areyto was appropriately chosen from tribal dances of the original inhabitants of the island prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in 1493. The Arahuc tribes who inhabited the Antillean Arch were the first to be confronted by the Europeans. These tribes--now extinct--performed choral dances called areitos,

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<sup>6</sup> Jordan Phillips, Contemporary Puerto Rican Drama (New York: Plaza Mayor Ediciones, 1972), pp. 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Carlos Solórzano, El teatro latinoamericano en el siglo veinte (México: Editorial Pormaca, 1964), p. 113.

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which contained embryonic dramatic elements.<sup>8</sup>

Belaval and the Areyto group drew from other historical sources as well, and it is necessary to briefly survey the roots of this group to fully understand the impact Areyto had in Puerto Rico in the 1940s and its relation to the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York.

The recorded history of theatre in Puerto Rico can be traced back to the early Spanish settlement of the island. One of the goals of the Spaniards was to spread and promote Catholic doctrine. The church introduced the formal theatrical practices of the Spanish empire in its colonies to serve that purpose. In Puerto Rico, these performances date as far back as the early 1600s and, during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, theatre performances were part of various religious festivities, political events and coronations, usually taking place on Corpus Christi, the day of Purification and the feasts of Santiago and Santa Rosa.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the dramatic forms which characterized the Middle Ages on the European continent and continued in Spain until the nineteenth century found counterparts in Spanish colonies such as Puerto Rico.

The Spanish tradition continued to grow. "Golden Age" plays found new stages in the colonies and strongly influenced dramatic production in Puerto Rico. Throughout the nineteenth century, the works of Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, and José Zorrilla were

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<sup>8</sup>José Juan Arrom, Historia del teatro hispanoamericano, época colonial (México: Editorial Planeta, 1967), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Emilio Pasarell, Orígenes y desarrollo de la afición teatral en Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico: Casa Baldrich, 1951), p. 4.

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frequently produced, while Shakespeare and Goldoni were among the non-Spanish playwrights presented by Spanish touring companies.<sup>10</sup>

Native Puerto Rican drama also emerged during the nineteenth century and began belatedly to capture the romantic tendencies of the continent.

El teatro en Puerto Rico, al igual que las demás manifestaciones artísticas, tiene sus comienzos en la segunda mitad del siglo diecinueve; y aunque ya en Europa el movimiento romántico había evolucionado, surge aquí el teatro con verdadero carácter romántico; fenómeno que se explica: primero, por lo tarde que llegaban a América las corrientes culturales europeas; segundo, por el eco que las ideas de libertad e individualismo propias de los románticos encontraban en el espíritu de nuestros poetas, ansiosos de ellas y que, debido a la limitación que imponían las condiciones políticas, encontraban campo propicio en las corrientes artísticas. Esta misma limitación política influye en que se manifiesten tan alejados de nuestro mundo y busquen temas fuera de toda relación regional, en los cuales late el ansia de libertad que a todos mueve y anima. No hay que olvidar que muchos de nuestros primeros escritores son también los corifeos de nuestra política.<sup>11</sup>

(Theatre in Puerto Rico, like all other artistic manifestations, begins with the second half of the nineteenth century; and even though the Romantic movement in Europe had already fully evolved, here we see a theatre with a truly romantic character. The phenomenon is justified, first, because of the delay of European trends in reaching America and, second, because of the reception given by our poets, hungry for them, to the romantic's ideas of freedom and individuality. Not being able to express themselves in other ways because of limitations imposed by political conditions, they found a ripe field in the Romantic movement. These political limitations account for the settings--away from our world--and for the search for themes without any regional reality in which they could express their desire for freedom and independence. We cannot forget that many of our first writers were also the chorus leaders in our political life.)

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-61.

<sup>11</sup> Antonia Sáez, El teatro en Puerto Rico, 2nd ed. (España: Editorial Universitaria, 1972), p. 15.

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Carmen Hernández de Araújo was the first known Puerto Rican dramatist. In 1846, she wrote a five-act, verse play called Los deudos rivales ("The Rival Debtors")--a classical Greek theme written in a romantic style. In 1849 Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, the "Father of Puerto Rican theatre," wrote the libretto for the opera Guarionex, based on the life of a Puerto Rican Indian. His Roberto D'Evreux, the first original work by a native writer to be staged in Puerto Rico, is remarkably similar to the works of Alexander Dumas and Victor Hugo. The play depicts the romantic conflicts of Elizabeth I of England and was produced in San Juan by the aficionados of the Sociedad Conservadora in 1856, eight years after it was written. Tapia later wrote an anti-slavery drama entitled La cuarterona ("The Quadroon," produced in 1867) which follows the same basic storyline as Dion Boucicault's The Octoroon.<sup>12</sup>

The third prominent dramatist of this period was Salvador Brau. He chose historical themes to depict the Spanish domination of the island in plays such as Héroe y martir ("Hero and Martyr," 1871) and Los horrores del Triunfo ("The Horrors of Triumph," 1887). A poet as well as dramatist, Brau's contribution to the Puerto Rican theatre is largely due to his lyrical use of language.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, La cuarterona in Decimo Festival de teatro puertorriqueno: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriquena, vol. 10 (Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1969) and Dion Boucicault, The Octoroon in Arthur Hobson Quinn, Representative American Plays, 7th ed., rev. and enl. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957), pp. 369-431.

<sup>13</sup>Antonia Sáez, El teatro en Puerto Rico, p. 40.

In spite of the efforts of writers such as Hernández de Araújo, Tapia y Rivera and Salvador Brau, native theatre and drama did not flourish in Puerto Rico during the second half of the nineteenth century. A heterogeneous audience would gather at San Juan's Municipal Theatre, built in 1824 (renamed the Tapia Theatre in 1950), to watch imported production of Spanish plays, ballet and opera. During this period, two problems served as roadblocks to the emergence of native theatre: island politics allowed few Puerto Rican writers to use theatre as a forum for their ideals and little could be done to encourage the development of native theatre artists due to the control exerted by Spanish companies over all theatrical production in the island. This situation continued nearly unchanged into the twentieth century.

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, several events took place which began to deteriorate Puerto Rico's close artistic and theatrical ties to the European continent and, at the same time, stimulated the development of native theatre. The first was Spain's loss of Puerto Rico to the United States as a consequence of the Spanish-American War.

The influence of Spain and Hispanic culture in Puerto Rico cannot be underestimated, but Spanish political and economic control inhibited the development of autochthonous theatre forms. However, Spain's loss of Puerto Rico to the United States seemed to promise free expression of thought and an impetus for a strong native theatre. Unfortunately, this was not the case. During the first fifteen years of United States rule, the few plays that were written condemned economic domination, sponsored socialist principles, and sought to

attain a more equitable and just society. Titles such as La emancipación del obrero ("The Emancipation of the Worker," 1903) with characters such as Juan--worker's cause, Pedro--economic slavery, Priest--worries, Foreigner--emancipation, Angel--ideals, Politician--oppression, Magistrate--injustice, Master--the capitalist system, the Hut--the rotten building of society, and the Valley--Puerto Rico, created an early alternative theatre which foreshadowed the protest and political theatre of the late Sixties and early Seventies. In 1904, poet José Limón Arce wrote Redención ("Redemption"), a play dealing with problems between capital and labor in Puerto Rico and offering the creation of a union as a solution. Other titles include Futuro ("Future," 1911) and El poder del obrero o la mejor venganza ("The Worker's Power or The Best Revenge," 1915).<sup>14</sup> Commenting on these and similar plays, Puerto Rican theatre historian Antonia Sáez sees little "artistic" value but recognizes their importance as chronicles of the thought and feeling of the time.<sup>15</sup> However, themes similar to those presented in these early examples of protest theatre later found more appropriate forms in the traveling theatre format of the federally sponsored La Farándula Obrera (Workers' Theatre) of the 1930s.

Historical dramas such as El grito de Lares ("The Cry of Lares," 1914; produced in 1929) by Luis Llorens Torres and Juan Ponce de León (1932) by Carlos N. Carrera reacted against the new colonial status of the island and portrayed the struggle for independence and the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-46.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

search for national identity. Although written by native playwrights, these plays were produced by Spanish companies. The need for native theatre artists to produce native plays remained unrecognized.<sup>16</sup>

Theatrical movements also came from the United States. In 1931, an English-language theatre group named "The Little Theatre" was formed in Puerto Rico following general guidelines established by the Little Theatre Movement in the United States. The amateur status of the group roughly paralleled that of amateur Spanish-language groups; however, they were responsible for introducing new U.S. and British plays to island audiences.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1930s, Puerto Rico's economic ties to the United States further emphasized the drive to establish a strong native theatre. As a territory of the United States, Puerto Rico was also hit by the Depression, perhaps more severely than the mainland itself. On the other hand, the island also benefited from the relief projects of the Roosevelt era. Just as the well-known Federal Theatre Project developed in the United States through the Works Project Administration, Puerto Rican theatre also received aid.

An agency of the Federal Economic Reconstruction Administration was established in 1935 to help Puerto Rican peasants and workers with their economic problems. Workshops and six-week seminars were held at the University of Puerto Rico under the direction of Morton

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<sup>16</sup>Francisco Arriví, *La generación del treinta* (España: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1960), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Odette Fumero de Colón, "Las obras de los festivales de teatro" (Tesis de maestría, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1967), p. 10.

W. Royse, a Harvard professor, and contributor to the Encyclopedia of Social Science. The participants were trained in several means of communication, and Manuel Méndez Ballester, author of Crossroads (1958; produced by the PRTT in 1969), offered the drama course. As a result, a traveling theatre group called La Farándula Obrera was created to write and perform plays exposing the problems of Puerto Rican workers.

Entre las obras presentadas, se destacan por su mensaje social las siguientes: El dictador de Arturo Cadilla y las que siguen en que no se mencionen autores y que indiscutiblemente son creaciones en colaboración de todo el grupo: Venciste unión, Con ambos puños, Sombras de Passaic, Caña, etc.<sup>18</sup>

(The most outstanding of the plays produced were The Dictator by Arturo Cadilla and the following in which no mention of author is made and which undoubtedly were collective works: The Union Won, With Both Fists, Shadows of Paissac, Sugar Cane, etc.)

Among the members of La Farándula Obrera were individuals who later became the most significant Puerto Rican dramatists and theatre producers of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>19</sup> One was Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero, a graduate of the Yale School of Drama who later became artistic director of Areyto, founder of the theatre department of the University of Puerto Rico, and organizer and director of a theatre program in the island's public school system. As part of the latter program, Greek and Renaissance classics performed and produced by a

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<sup>18</sup>Victoria Espinosa, "El teatro de René Marqués y la escenificación de su obra: Los soles truncos" (Tesis doctoral, Universidad Autónoma, Méjico, 1969), p. 72.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

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National Company of Teachers toured the island.<sup>20</sup>

Although the influence of the U.S. theatre on Puerto Rican dramatic arts has been strong throughout the twentieth century, other factors can be seen as equally important in the emergence of native theatre. Both World Wars reduced the frequency of visits to the island by Spanish artists, but it was really the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) that halted the flow of professional companies. This helped to develop a national theatre as amateur theatre groups began to flourish. Another Spanish development aided the emergent Puerto Rican theatre: the works of contemporary writers Federico García Lorca and Alejandro Casona. Although García Lorca did not visit the island before his death in 1936, his plays and poems served to revitalize the whole Hispanic theatre and provided an inspiration for Puerto Rican writers. Alejandro Casona, exiled from Spain, visited the island in 1937 to supervise a production of his Nuestra Natacha ("Our Natacha"). He also presented several lectures on his work at the University of Puerto Rico. "Con la influencia de Alejandro Casona surge en nuestro teatro una fuerte tendencia al teatro poético."<sup>21</sup> ("With the influence of Alejandro Casona, a strong tendency towards poetic drama is felt in [Puerto Rican] theatre.") In spite of Casona's impact, during the 1930s and 1940s the Puerto Rican theatre became less dependent on Spanish theatre and began to undertake the task of modernizing itself,

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<sup>20</sup>Nilda González, "Teatro puertorriqueño" in Breve Enciclopedia de Cultura Puertorriqueña, Rubén del Rosario, Esther Melón de Díaz and Edgar Martínez Masdeu, eds. (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cordillera, 1976), p. 429.

<sup>21</sup>Odette Fumero de Colón, "Las obras de los festivales de teatro," p. 8.

finding new models in the North American theatre and in the best theatre of Europe.

During the late 1930s, the fusion of several diverse trends aided the formation of a new kind of theatre in Puerto Rico. These included the Romantic tradition of Tapia and Brau, new social themes responding to the U.S. political presence in Puerto Rico, historical dramas such as El grito de Lares, new social art sponsored by the economic programs of the Roosevelt administration and the new vitality brought to Spanish-language theatre by writers such as García Lorca and Casona. These factors found their most immediate manifestations in the work of Areyto and the federally sponsored La Farándula Obrera. The indigenous character of these groups can be seen in their use of Puerto Rican actors, directors, and scenic artists, in themes that deal directly with aspects of Puerto Rican reality and, most importantly, as in the case of La Farándula, the adoption of a traveling or touring format.<sup>22</sup>

The years surrounding 1940 are crucial to an understanding of both the Puerto Rican theatre and the island's recent political history. In all aspects of Puerto Rican life, two issues were debated: socioeconomic justice and independence, and the concept of puertorriqueñidad. The literature of the era began to further consolidate ideas on the need for cultural manifestations of these issues--ideas which form the theoretical objectives of nearly all Puerto Rican theatre groups both on the island and in the U.S. The question of identity was explored by the two most prominent Puerto Rican men of

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

letters of the time: Antonio S. Pedreira in Insularismo (1934) and Tomás Blanco in Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico (1935).

All the despair and desperation which Puerto Rico lived through during that crucial decade can be observed in Pedreira's book. In the beginning of the book he asks: What are we and where are we going?--the questions that had to be asked of the period that began with the North American occupation, a period Pedreira called one of 'indecision and transition'.<sup>23</sup>

The quest for defining a "national consciousness" undertaken by emerging dramatists reflected the philosophies of Tomás Blanco:

El dilema es, pues: o tomar en nuestras manos, con serenidad y firmeza, nuestro destino, o someternos, como retrasados mentales a una lenta agonía, prolongada por paliativos y aparatos ortopédicos, hasta llegar al límite de la miseria física y postración moral, hasta la total y completa transformación del pueblo isleño en peonaje de parias, en hato de coolies. Entonces sólo se salvarán los muertos.<sup>24</sup>

(We must either take our destiny in our hands, calmly and firmly, or submit ourselves, like the mentally retarded, to a slow, agonizing death, prolonged by palliatives and orthopedic apparatus, till we reach the limit of physical misery and moral prostration, till the total, complete transformation of the islanders into a work gang of pariahs, a gang of coolies. Then only the dead would be saved.)

The affirmation of Puerto Rican identity that the work of these two men represents summarizes the sentiments and desires of the thinkers, writers and artists who were part of a generation reaching political maturity under North American domination. "Faced with the dissolving tendencies of assimilationism, Pedreira and Blanco call attention, through their brilliant essays, to the authentic ethos of

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<sup>23</sup>Manuel Maldonado Denis, Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historic Interpretation, p. 142.

<sup>24</sup>Tomás Blanco, Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico, 6th ed. (España: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1973), p. 135.

Puerto Rican culture."<sup>25</sup>

It was during this era of intellectual and political ferment that a renaissance was realized in the theatre, and the actual history of national theatre in Puerto Rico begins. All the theatrical experiments that had bloomed in one way or another during the 1930s found a home in the Ateneo Puertorriqueño.<sup>26</sup> Emilio S. Belaval, president of the institution during the 1930s and former director of the theatre club of the Casino de Puerto Rico, used the resources of the club--university students and aficionados--to raise funds for the Ateneo. He created an awareness for the need to sponsor theatrical activities based on the impact of this experience.

El Club Artístico del Casino logró mantener vivo el interés por el teatro español en los momentos en que, por causa de la guerra civil española, habíanse suspendido las relaciones culturales con España, en donde hallábamos estímulo para nuestro teatro. Surgen ideas, en parte agresivas, en parte defensivas, de afirmación puertorriqueña y termina así las prevenciones contra el teatro puertorriqueño.<sup>27</sup>

(The Club Artístico del Casino succeeded in keeping an interest in Spanish theatre alive during times that, due to the Spanish Civil War, the cultural relations with Spain--the place where we found the stimulus for our theatre--had been severed. Thoughts of national reaffirmation--defensive and aggressive--emerged, ending the prejudices against the Puerto Rican theatre.)

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<sup>25</sup>Manuel Maldonado Denis, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup>The Ateneo Puertorriqueño was founded on April 30, 1876 by a group of fifty Puerto Ricans who were interested in establishing a society for the stimulation of arts and letters. In its one hundred years of existence, it has produced numerous publications, seminars, conferences and contests. It boasts a liberal tradition, having always opened its doors to discussion of varying ideas, whether they be scientific, literary, religious or political. See Breve Enciclopedia de Cultura Puertorriqueña, pp. 42-44.

<sup>27</sup>Odette Fumero de Colón, p. 11.

In 1937, the Ateneo sponsored a contest for plays and gave awards to El clamor de los surcos ("The Furrows' Clamor") by Manuel Méndez Ballester, El desmonte ("The Dismount") by Gonzalo Arrocho, and Esta noche juega el joker ("Tonight the Joker is Wild") by Fernando Sierra Berdecía.<sup>28</sup> Esta noche juega el joker is the first Puerto Rican drama to deal with the migrant problem in New York: "Observa al hombre puertorriqueño en la centrífuga de Nueva York, con lo que abre perspectivas a la literatura del emigrante puertorriqueño."<sup>29</sup> ("It studies the Puerto Rican in the centrifuge of New York, opening perspectives on the literature of the Puerto Rican migrant.") In the play, the author examines the social implications of role reversals due to the availability of jobs for women and their scarcity for men.

Following the productions of these plays, the Ateneo absorbed the Club Artístico del Casino.<sup>30</sup> In 1939, Belaval wrote "Lo que podría ser un teatro puertorriqueño" (What a Puerto Rican Theatre Could Be"), the cornerstone of much Puerto Rican theatre since that time. He identifies the need for a native theatre by saying,

Algún día de estos tendremos que unirmos para crear un teatro puertorriqueño, un gran teatro nuestro, donde todo nos pertenezca: el tema, el actor, los motivos decorativos, las ideas, la estética. Existe en cada pueblo una inso-  
bornable teatralidad que tiene que ser recreada por sus propios artistas..... Nuestra realidad circundante es que Puerto Rico no parece interesado en el drama puertorriqueño: es un espectador que asiste impasible

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<sup>28</sup>Jordan Phillips, Contemporary Puerto Rican Drama, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup>Francisco Arriví, La generación del treinta, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup>Emilio Pasarell, Orígenes y desarrollo de la afición teatral in Puerto Rico, p. 162.

a su propio drama, que arrincona como inútiles bambalinas aquellas ideas históricas, tradicionales y ambientales por cuya conservación los pueblos luchan desesperadamente. . . . Por ser el hombre clave de nuestra temática teatral, nuestro teatro será antes que nada, un teatro social dignificado hacia el hombre y en esto tendremos hasta la certeza de coincidir con la corriente ideológica más característica de nuestro tiempo.<sup>31</sup>

(Someday we have unite in order to create a Puerto Rican theatre, a great theatre of our own, where everything will belong to us: the theme, the actor, the decor, the ideas, the esthetics. In each people there is an uncorruptible theatricality that has to be recreated by its own artists. . . . Our surrounding reality is that Puerto Rico does not seem interested in Puerto Rican drama: the Puerto Rican spectator watches his own drama passively, discarding historical, traditional, and environmental ideas, that other peoples fight desperately to preserve, like unserviceable props. . . . Because man is the key to our theatrical themes, our theatre will be, above all, a social theatre directed toward the dignity of man and in that way we will be certain to be consistent with the ideological current that characterizes our time.)

Belaval articulates the aspirations of a Puerto Rican theatre as: autochthonous theme and scenic elements, the dignity of the individual as the overall focus, the actor as an interpreter of national feelings, new and dynamic means of production and no simple regionalism of theme or technique. He stated that the theatrical recreation of a Puerto Rican reality must also be consistent with contemporary world currents and themes. These tasks were undertaken by Areyto during the 1940s, when Belaval's principles for a national theatre were put into practice.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Emilio Belaval, "Lo que podría ser un teatro puertorriqueño" in Areyto Mayor, Francisco Arriví, ed. (España: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1966), p. 257.

<sup>32</sup>Jordan Phillips, p. 16.

In 1941, a chapter of Areyto was created in the town of Arecibo under the direction of Rene Marqués, the most prominent modern Puerto Rican playwright and the author of La carreta ("The Oxcart"), the first play produced by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in 1967. In its lifetime, Areyto produced Tiempo muerto (Dead Time," 1940) by Manuel Méndez Ballester, Mi señorfa ("My Lordship," 1940) by Luis Rechani Agrait, La escuela del buen amor ("The School of Good Love," 1941) by Fernando Sierra Berdecía, and He vuelto a buscarla ("I Have Returned to Look for Her," 1940) by Martha Lomar, among others.<sup>33</sup> In producing plays of this nature, the purpose of Areyto was threefold: (1) to stage plays by Puerto Rican authors, (2) to implement new techniques of production in the fields of acting, directing, scene design, lighting, costume, and make-up and (3) to attract a subscription audience as well as achieve artistic recognition from a general public.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the pattern followed by the group resembled the structure of "independent" theatres such as the Freie Bühne and the Provincetown Players that were prominent in Europe and the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although Areyto's life ended two years after it began, its productions had a profound effect on the theatre, for it grouped together some of the island's finest theatre talents: Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero (artistic director), Madelline Williamsen and

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>"Proyecto para el fomento de las artes teatrales," Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1956. Files of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture.

Edmundo Rivera Alvarez (actors), Rene Marqués (dramatist), Juan Luis Márquez (critic), and Julio Marrero and Rafael Ríos Rey (designers).<sup>35</sup>

In 1941, L. Santiago Lavandero became the founder of the theatre program at the University of Puerto Rico. The Drama Division had at its disposal the facilities of the University Theatre, and the production program was developed to stress the second of Areyto's purposes: to prepare native theatre artists in all fields. However, the work focused on productions of international plays of merit rather than on Puerto Rican drama. After the 1944 production of the Puerto Rican play La resentida ("The Resentful One") by Enrique Laguerre--a study of a family caught in the problems of the 1898 society--plays by native playwrights were eliminated from the repertory of the University Theatre. The reasons are described by Francisco Arrivi:

El joven teatro universitario monta el drama en 1944. Ante 10,000 espectadores, sirve para probar, contra los deseos de su director Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero y a pesar de la enorme afluencia de público, que un sector del mundo oficial se enfriaba ya ante la promoción de la cultura puertorriqueña.<sup>36</sup>

(The young university theatre produced the play--La resentida--in 1944. Before 10,000 audience members, against the hopes of its director, and in spite of enormous audience influence, it proved that a sector of the official world was turned off when faced by the promotion of Puerto Rican culture.)

It was not until 1956 that another play by a Puerto Rican playwright was produced by the University Theatre: Francisco Arrivi's Bolero y plena. Nonetheless, the university developed a broad educational

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<sup>35</sup>Francisco Arrivi, La generación del treinta, pp. 10-26.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

curriculum in theatre arts and drama.

The new interest in theatre at the university in the 1940s reflected significant political events of the era. During the Forties, Puerto Rico was governed by the last of the U.S. colonial governors: Rexford Guy Tugwell. "Tugwell--who figured prominently in Roosevelt's brain trust--was without doubt the most intelligent and well-prepared governor"<sup>37</sup> up until that time. Tugwell was also the chancellor of the University and it was under his administration that the institution began to assume a stature of more than regional importance. Although his emphasis was the sciences, new attention was also paid to the humanities--a tendency reflected in the development of the theatre curriculum.

In 1946, the University Theatre acquired a traveling unit designed by Rafael Cruz Emeric. Its task was to take theatre to hospitals, town squares, jails--wherever the cart could be opened for production. The idea was fashioned in the spirit of Garcia Lorca's La Barraca which traveled throughout Spain in 1932, and the university's unit later became the structural model for the traveling unit of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. The Teatro Rodante Universitario toured the island every weekend during its first year. In subsequent years, it has followed a less intense schedule and now tours approximately thirty times a year to remote towns on the island.

The university's traveling theatre consists of two mechanical units: a bus, and a trailer that opens up into a platform stage sixteen feet long, twenty feet wide, and four feet high. When closed,

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<sup>37</sup>Manuel Maldonado Denis, p. 155.

it carries the set and props. The bus transports the actors and technicians and the lighting equipment is mounted to its roof during performance.<sup>38</sup> "Cumple el propósito de la Universidad de llegar al pueblo, educar y divertir a la gente en los pueblos y campos."<sup>39</sup> ("It fulfills the purpose of the University by reaching the people, educating and entertaining the inhabitants of both town and country.") Important productions include Sancho Panza en la Insula Barataria ("Sancho Panza on the Island Barataria") and The Marriage Proposal (1946-47), The Imaginary Invalid (1953-54), Títeres de Cachiporra ("Punching Puppets," 1960-61), The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife and Mirandolina (1966-67), and Los Melindres de Belisa ("Belisa's Prudery," 1970-71). Federico García Lorca's farce La zapatera prodigiosa ("The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife") was the most popular selection, touring in the 1947-48, 1957-58, 1961-62, and 1968-69 seasons.<sup>40</sup>

Impressed by a documentary film on the University of Puerto Rico's traveling theatre project, the Rockefeller Foundation offered several fellowships to dramatists, designers and directors from the island to help them study abroad. Francisco Arriví and Rene Marqués received awards in 1949 and went to Columbia University to study

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<sup>38</sup>Rafel Cruz Emeric and Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero, "Proyecto para el Teatro Rodante Universitario," Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1945. Files of the Departamento de Drama de la Universidad de Puerto Rico.

<sup>39</sup>Victoria Espinosa, p. 81.

<sup>40</sup>"Lista de producciones teatrales del Departamento de Drama 1941-1976." Files of the Departamento de Drama, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico.

playwriting.<sup>41</sup> UNESCO asked for the plans of the unit in order to facilitate them in India in the creation of a similar project.<sup>42</sup>

In her work on the plays of Rene Marqués, Dr. Victoria Espinosa states that in light of the repertory chosen by the University Theatre--basically classical farces and comedies with happy endings--the audience had been underestimated and considered incapable of appreciating other theatrical genre. She draws an appropriate comparison with Garcia Lorca's La Barraca:

No hay que olvidar que en La Barraca, García Lorca llevó, por campos y ciudades españolas, obras como Fuenteovejuna y El Caballero de Olmedo de Lope de Vega, La vida es sueño y El gran teatro del mundo de Calderón, El Burlador de Sevilla de Tirso, etc. Todo sin menoscabo del aprecio y admiración del público.<sup>43</sup>

(We cannot forget that with La Barraca, García Lorca toured, through Spanish villages and cities, plays like Fuenteovejuna and The Knight of Olmedo by Lope de Vega, Life is a Dream and The Great Theatre of the World by Calderón, The Trickster of Seville by Tirso, etc. All without diminishing the degree of admiration and appreciation expressed by the audience.)

Dr. Espinosa established a children's theatre and a high school theatre program (1946-1964) as university sponsored projects. Both followed a touring format as well. Luis Rafael Sánchez, the island's most promising dramatist of the 1960s, received training and experience working with these programs. Under the direction of Ludwig Shajovick (1947-1954), Lavandero's successor, a scholarship program allowed Miriam Colón, along with other promising theatre students, to pursue

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<sup>41</sup>Victoria Espinosa, p. 81.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

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a theatre career in the United States.<sup>44</sup>

The impact of the University Theatre's programs, which started in the 1940s, cannot be overlooked. Along with aspects of the program already mentioned, it provided a solid Bachelor of Arts degree in theatre comprised of courses in acting, directing, mime, voice, diction and production as well as academic courses in history, theory and literature.<sup>45</sup> Until 1958, when the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture established yearly festivals of Puerto Rican theatre, the University Theatre provided the only continuous center of theatrical activity on the island. In its main theatre, it also supported professional productions by both native and foreign companies. The University Theatre continues to serve this function and in 1957 it became the home of the famous Pablo Casals Festival, one of the most impressive annual music festivals in the modern world.

During the Forties, the University Theatre began producing plays from an international repertory, including works by George Bernard Shaw, Federico García Lorca, Maxwell Anderson, Alejandro Casona, Anton Chekov, Georg Kaiser, Calderón de la Barca, Luigi Pirandello, Molière, Henrik Ibsen, Zorilla, Jean Anouilh, Euripides and Shakespeare.<sup>46</sup>

El énfasis e interés primordial del departamento está en lo educativo-cultural en todos sus aspectos, lo que ha permitido la gran variedad de estilos y producciones

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>45</sup>"Registro oficial de cursos," Oficina del Registrador, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1950.

<sup>46</sup>"Lista de producciones teatrales del Departamento de Drama, 1941-1976."

que se revelan a través de las lecturas de la lista de obras que se ha presentado desde 1941 hasta hoy [1969] alrededor de doscientas.<sup>47</sup>

(The main emphasis and interest of the department lies in the educational-cultural area in all its aspects. This has permitted the great variety of styles and productions that can be seen in the list of around two hundred plays produced between 1941 and 1969.)

The academic theatre's emphasis on ancient and modern "classics" is indicative of the University's attempt to follow the model set down by United States and European universities. However, the Drama Department remained indifferent to native Puerto Rican playwrights for nearly two decades, just as Puerto Rican history and literature received little attention in other departments of the University. The first Puerto Rican theatre survey course was not added to the curriculum until 1967.<sup>48</sup>

During the 1940s, the task set down by the Areyto society began to be fulfilled, in part, by the University Theatre. Another group, outside the University, Tinglado Puertorriqueño, furthered the original goals of Belaval and Areyto by producing native plays. Angel F. Rivera, director of the 1973 Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre production of the Brazilian drama Payment as Pledged, received his early training with this group.<sup>49</sup>

In the late Forties, the Puerto Rican theatre was again influenced by trends in the Spanish theatre. Connections which had

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<sup>47</sup>Victoria Espinosa, p. 81.

<sup>48</sup>"Registro oficial de cursos," Oficina del Registrador, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rfo Piedras, Puerto Rico, 10 mayo 1967.

<sup>49</sup>Victoria Espinosa, p. 81.

remained broken since the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) were re-established in the immediate post-World War II era and playwrights, actors and touring companies began to travel to the island. One of the individuals who brought about the revived interest in the Spanish theatre was dramatist and visiting professor at the University of Puerto Rico, Cipriano Rivas Cheriff. Rivas Cheriff had collaborated with both García Lorca and Alejandro Casona in his native Spain in the early 1930s. In Puerto Rico, he created a chapter of Teatro Español de América with a group of Puerto Rican actors.

"Con Alejandro Casona . . . y Rodolfo Usigli, dramaturgo mejicano, Rivas Cheriff ha organizado el Teatro Español de América, T.E.A., un proyecto de alcance interamericano."<sup>50</sup> ("With Alejandro Casona . . . and Mexican dramatist Rodolfo Usigli, Rivas Cheriff has organized the Spanish Theatre of America, a project of Interamerican scope.") The group had an international flavor and brought the theatre of Puerto Rico in contact with the mainstreams of Latin American drama.

The case of Rivas Cheriff is indicative of a factor governing much theatre activity in Puerto Rico: theatre movements are highly dependent on individuals who bring foreign theories and ideas to the island. These are then adapted to the island's immediate cultural and artistic needs. The isolated geographical and political nature of the island often prevents theatre movements from reaching it with the kind of ease apparent in Europe, Latin America, and the United States. This isolation has sponsored the gestation of a nationalistic

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<sup>50</sup>Luis Hernández Aquino, "Rivas Cheriff se halla interesado en proyecto patronato de arte" (San Juan) El Mundo, 8 septiembre 1949, p. 12.

tendency which, in the words of theatre historian Carlos Solórzano, has not only helped provide a very important force within the life of the country, but has also sponsored the most organic, homogeneous and interesting nationalistic theatre in Latin America.<sup>51</sup>

Important political events of the 1940s have had a lasting impact on Puerto Rico and have influenced the themes of nearly all significant Puerto Rican drama since that time. It was during the administration of Rexford Guy Tugwell that a policy of industrialization drastically changed the island's agricultural economy. One result was the progressive deterioration of Puerto Rican agriculture and the mass migration of the peasant population to the city of San Juan and to North American ghettos--a theme that will be addressed in the forthcoming analysis of Rene Marqués' La carreta (The Oxcart). Thus, the decade of the Forties reflects the beginning of a social paradox that characterizes much of the island's recent history. On one hand, the island's cultural identity was expanding, new artistic forms emerging and intellectual attention was being paid to the dilemma of puertorriqueñidad. On the other hand, unemployment and poverty were drawing those who could most benefit from the new sense of national identity to urban ghettos in the United States.

Also in the 1940s, a strong socialist oriented party with pro-independence leanings--the Popular Democratic Party--became the most powerful political force in Puerto Rico.<sup>52</sup> Party leader Luis Muñoz

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<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Jordan Phillips, Contemporary Puerto Rican Drama, p. 83.

<sup>52</sup>Bolívar Pagán, Historia de los partidos políticos puertorriqueños, Vol. 2 (San Juan, P.R.: Librería Campos, 1959), p. 225.

Marín, the first elected governor of Puerto Rico, continued in that post until January, 1965. During his tenure as governor, Muñoz's promise of independence was postponed to make way for social and economic reform, making Puerto Rico increasingly dependent on the United States. This situation is reflected in the dramas of the 1940s, where the themes of independence, self-determination and national pride are omnipresent. According to Jordan Phillips,

Typical subjects were political abuses, displacement of jibaros from the land either because of its unproductive quality or because of economic strangulation by the centrales [sugar cane refineries], the dissolution of simple people in the slums of San Juan and New York, the importance of working one's own land to preserve self-respect, the problem of racial inequality, awareness of all aspects of Hispanic heritage, and appreciation of Puerto Rican heroes.<sup>53</sup>

New and significant Puerto Rican playwrights began to deal with these problems. Francisco Arriví initiated his career during this period. Maria Soledad (1947) the best of Arriví's early works, records a new stylistic approach:

More than any other, [Arriví] is the dramatist who not only signals the break with social realism but forecasts the concern with metaphorical language, psychological problems, and innovative uses of light and sound which will characterize the plays of a new decade.<sup>54</sup>

Arriví's success indicated that native Puerto Rican playwrights could gain the recognition of Puerto Rican audiences. He has continued to write for the theatre throughout the past three decades, and since 1960 has served as the administrator of the theatre division of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture.

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<sup>53</sup>Jordan Phillips, p. 29.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

The end of the 1940s brought another promising sign: the emergence of René Marqués, Puerto Rico's most prominent and renowned playwright. Marqués published his first play, El hombre y sus sueños ("Man and His Dreams") in 1948 and "En ella se advertía ya su vinculación con las ideas del existencialismo que anima su posterior creación."<sup>55</sup> ("In it he foreshadowed the association with existentialism that gives life to his subsequent works.") In 1951, Marqués became the founder and director of the Ateneo's "experimental" theatre. The season opened with The Misunderstanding by Albert Camus, which introduced existentialist literature to Puerto Rican audiences. Productions of works by Ramón del Valle Inclán, August Strindberg, Anton Chekov and Luigi Pirandello followed.<sup>56</sup>

The last play produced by Marqués while director of the experimental theatre was his own La carreta (The Oxcart), which maps the trajectory of Puerto Ricans from the countryside to the city slums and from there, to the ghettos of New York. The play remains one of the most important and influential works by a Puerto Rican writer and sets the tone and thematic parameters for the work of many subsequent playwrights. La carreta played in Spanish in New York in 1953 and "Miss Miriam Colón created the part of Juanita in the 1953 Spanish language production in New York City. . . ."<sup>57</sup> The play was

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<sup>55</sup> Carlos Solórzano, El teatro latinoamericano en el siglo veinte, p. 158.

<sup>56</sup> Ateneo Puertorriqueño, "List of Productions, 1951-1954," Record of Puerto Rican theatrical productions. Files of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Pilditch, "Introduction" to The Oxcart by René Marqués (New York: Scribners, 1969), p. vi.

revived in New York in 1966, when it provided the impetus for the formation of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre:

The Oxcart opened at New York's Greenwich Mews Theatre on December 19, 1966, and became the fifth longest running play of those that opened off-Broadway during that season. A total of eighty-nine performances were given including five special matinees for students from various New York City Junior High Schools. . . . In August, 1967, again through the efforts of Miss Colón and under the auspices of Mayor John Lindsay's Summer Task Force, The Oxcart was revived by the newly created Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. Free outdoor performances were given in various parks and playgrounds throughout New York City.<sup>58</sup>

This play and Marqués' contribution to the Puerto Rican theatre will be further discussed in chapter three.

The success of writers such as Francisco Arriví and René Marqués led to other significant developments in the 1950s. In 1956, the Ateneo instituted an annual literary contest which involved a playwriting competition and provided for full production of the plays receiving awards. Pedro Juan Soto's El huésped ("The Guest") received the first prize that year (it was later produced by the PRTT in their 1974 experimental season). The Ateneo contests have continued since that time offering young playwrights a cash bonus and the opportunity to see their plays produced.

The Puerto Rican theatre also began to attract scholarly attention. Two histories of the Puerto Rican theatre were published at the beginning of the decade. El teatro en Puerto Rico ("The Theatre in Puerto Rico," 1950) by Antonia Sáez and Orígenes y desarrollo de la afición teatral en Puerto Rico ("Origins and Development of

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

Theatrical Tastes in Puerto Rico," 1951) by Emilio Pasarell give an historical perspective on the development of theatre in Puerto Rico and have become the standard reference works for any study on the subject.

The drama of the 1950s, characterized by the works of Arriví and Marqués, initiated a shift from the objectivity in form and theme that had been sponsored by the Areyto movement. The themes remained the same, while a greater variety in form provided a more subjective context. The concept of puertorriqueñidad was dealt with throughout the decade through the use of symbols, allegories and metaphorical language. Dream sequences, flashbacks and the dislocation of time mark a definite transition from the social realism of the 1940s to the poetic realism of the 1950s. The reasons for the change are several: the influence of U.S. writers such as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, the prevalence of "Absurdist" drama on the European continent and, most importantly, a change in Puerto Rico's political status and the artistic reaction to it.

During the Fifties, significant events altered the economic and political scene in Puerto Rico. On October 30, 1950, President Truman signed the Puerto Rican Commonwealth Bill--known as Public Law 600--which enabled the island to draft its own constitution. In reaction to what they saw as a patronizing act further delaying Puerto Rican independence, a group of Nationalists attacked the governor's palace in San Juan. One policeman and four Nationalists were killed. Meanwhile, uprisings in several island towns left a death toll of twenty-seven. On November 2nd of the same year, two Puerto Ricans attacked the Blair House, the temporary presidential

residence in Washington D.C., in an attempt to assassinate President Truman.

A fear that colonial status would be legalized as a form of government was the force behind these violent acts, which were later captured by playwright Gerald Paul Marín in his play Al final de la calle ("At the End of the Street," 1959). Developing three different stories happening simultaneously in the same apartment building at the time of the attack on the Governor's mansion in Puerto Rico, Marín succeeds in creating a vivid microcosm of the social and political climate in Puerto Rico at the time.

In 1951, voters favored the Estado Libre Asociado--Commonwealth Status--which literally translated means "Free Associated State." The new status, however, did little to resolve political tensions and, according to Kal Waggenheim,

Opponents called the vote unfair, since its only two choices were to adopt the new status or to remain a colonial territory; and many registered voters abstained. A strong controversy developed over the meaning of the new status. An exuberant Governor Munoz said, '. . . we can proclaim to the world that the last juridicial vestiges of colonialism have been abolished.' But Joseph Mahoney of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs said, 'The United States Constitution gives Congress complete control and nothing in the Puerto Rican Constitution could affect or amend or alter that right.'<sup>59</sup>

Nationalist violence broke out again in 1954 after the United States succeeded in eliminating Puerto Rico from the United Nations' list of colonial territories. Nationalists attacked a session of the

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<sup>59</sup>Kal Waggenheim, Puerto Rico: A Profile (New York: Preager, 1973), p. 79.

U.S. House of Representatives, yelling Viva Puerto Rico Libre!-- ("Long Live Free Puerto Rico") and wounding five congressmen.

While violence plagued the decade of the Fifties, the new "commonwealth" status firmly took hold. At the same time, the cultural movement continued to seek greater autonomy, and in 1955 the government created the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. "El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña fue creado para promover el estudio, conservación, enriquecimiento y difusión de los valores culturales de Puerto Rico."<sup>60</sup> ("The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was created to study, preserve, enrich and make known the cultural values of Puerto Rico.") The theatre division of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was created in 1958 to encourage the writing and production of native dramas. The role played by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture is evident in Victoria Espinosa's statement that "A partir de 1958 hasta hoy, se inicia una epoca de efervecencia en el quehacer teatral de Puerto Rico."<sup>61</sup> ("From 1958 until today, an effervescent era of theatrical creativity has been initiated in Puerto Rico.")

In 1956, the theatre advisory council of the Institute submitted a project for theatre arts development. After analyzing the theatrical events of the preceding three decades, it completed its report discussing the basic elements needed to facilitate greater theatre production. It proposed the creation of a national dramatic

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<sup>60</sup>"Introducción," Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (octubre-diciembre 1958): I.

<sup>61</sup>Victoria Espinosa, p. 98.

arts company, general public sponsorship of theatre programs and an annual festival of Puerto Rican plays.<sup>62</sup> The allocation by the Puerto Rican Legislature of only one-third of the funds requested--\$20,000--provided only for the yearly festivals. A one-percent tax on the price of film tickets was to fund the project. On May 15, 1958, the annual tradition of the Puerto Rican Theatre Festival began. Years later, an International Festival (1966) and an Avant-Garde Festival (1967) were possible thanks to the active support given to the enterprise by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the Puerto Rican audience.

The first festival season opened with Encrucijada ("Crossroads") by Manuel Méndez Ballester. Encrucijada, like the earlier Esta noche juega el jôker, belongs to a group of island dramas in which the action takes place in the United States. In this play, each generation represents a further step in the deterioration and assimilation of the Puerto Rican family. Each family member symbolizes a political alternative to the status problem. Thus, Encrucijada characterizes the artistic reaction to the island's status as well as the dilemmas confronting Puerto Ricans living on the mainland:

The strong feeling for the Island, the displacement of a family to New York, the impoverished conditions and the naturalistic style, coupled with occasional humor . . .<sup>63</sup>

Encrucijada also demonstrates the relationship between the theatre festivals of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre which produced Crossroads in its 1969

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<sup>62</sup>"Proyecto para el fomento de las artes teatrales," pp. 5-50.

<sup>63</sup>Jordan Phillips, p. 120.

summer season. There are numerous examples of plays first produced by the Institute's theatre festivals which later toured in English versions through New York City or were staged at the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre's experimental theatre.

Table 1. Productions Staged by Both the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture

	IPRC Festivals	PRTT Productions
<u>Encrucijada</u> --M. Méndez Ballester "Crossroads"	1958	1969
<u>Los soles truncos</u> --R. Marqués "The Fanlights"	1958	1972
<u>La carreta</u> --R. Marqués "The Oxcart"	1961	1967, 1977
<u>Los ángeles se han fatigado</u> -- L. Rafael Sánchez "The Angels are Tired"	1961	1974
<u>Las ventanas</u> --R. Rodriguez Suarez "The Windows"	1967	1976
<u>La pasión según Antígona Pérez</u> -- L. Rafael Sánchez "The Passion of Antígona Pérez"	1968	1972
<u>Flag Inside</u> --J. Carrero	1973	1973

Plays by other authors such as Gerald Paul Marín have been produced by both the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's festivals and the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, although different Marín plays have been produced by each. Thus, the annual festivals held in Puerto Rico have exerted an impact on the play selection of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York and have been the single largest resource

contributing to new dramatic materials for the mainland group.

As well as encouraging the writing and production of native drama, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture has served as a showcase for play selection by companies in the United States, Latin America and Europe. All the plays produced by the annual festivals are compiled and published and each volume is circulated to the university libraries of the Americas and Europe. This has prompted the production of Puerto Rican plays in numerous countries, including Mexico, Argentina, Spain, Cuba, Venezuela, Jamaica, France, Czechoslovakia and the United States.<sup>64</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, developments such as the establishment of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the works of a new generation of dramatists had resulted in a solid concept of a Puerto Rican theatre with a promising future. In fact, theatre scholars on the continent had already recognized the fact:

Ya para 1956, varios tratadistas de teatro hispano-americano como Enrique Anderson Imbert, argentino; Willis Knapp Jones, estadounidense; Luis Osorio, colombiano, han reconocido la aparición en suelo puertorriqueño de un teatro característico, suceso este muy raro en el grande mapa de las Américas y en otros mapas. Algún tratadista, como Frank Dauster, catedrático de la Universidad de Rutgers, interesado en las proyecciones escénicas al sur del Río Grande, se atreve a afirmar que solo Méjico, Argentina, y Puerto Rico pueden sentirse orgullosos de una expresión dramática propia.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Derived from analysis of newspaper and magazine clippings about Puerto Rican theatre abroad. Files of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture--theatre section, 1958-1976, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

<sup>65</sup>Francisco Arriví, "Primer Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño," Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (enero-mayo) 1959: 38.

(By 1956, several essayists on Hispanic American theatre such as Enrique Anderson Imbert, an Argentinian, Willis Knapp Jones, a North American, and Luis Osorio, a Colombian, had recognized the emergence of a particularly Puerto Rican theatre--a rare event on the huge map of the Americas as well as on others. Another essayist, Frank Dauster, a professor at Rutgers University interested in theatrical developments south of the Rio Grande, has dared to declare that only Mexico, Argentina, and Puerto Rico can feel proud of a dramatic expression which is truly their own.)

With a concrete basis for a national drama established, the theatrical activity of the island took diverse avenues during the 1960s. In 1961, Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero, aware that audiences have to be educated and nourished early in life, initiated a theatre program in the public school system. The Teatro Escolar coordinated the teaching of theatre in intermediate and high schools and has toured productions of "classics" throughout the island's school districts since 1962. The plays produced included Lope de Vega's Fuenteovejuna, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, the Medea of Euripides, and Calderón de la Barca's Life is a Dream. In 1967, Lavandero organized the Compañía teatral de Maestros (Theatre Company of Teachers) whose members receive a teacher's salary for producing and touring plays in schools. A puppet program geared towards elementary schools was also introduced.<sup>66</sup>

The Sixties also witnessed the creation of many independent theatre companies engaged in the production of a broad range of foreign plays. In one of these groups--Yucayeque, organized in the late 1950s--Pablo Cabrera began his career as an actor and stage director. Cabrera is probably the best trained and most accomplished

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<sup>66</sup>Nilda González, p. 430.

Puerto Rican director of the past twenty years. His work will be discussed in greater detail as it relates to the development of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York since 1971. The most consistent company organized in the 1960s has been Teatro del 60, founded by the artistic director of the University Theatre traveling unit, Dean Zayas. The company recruits university students and engages in a repertory greatly influenced by popular Broadway musical comedies. It has its own theatre and has toured Latin America and Europe. In 1974, the group represented Puerto Rico at the Annual international theatre festival in Nancy, France.<sup>67</sup> Groups such as Yucayeque and Teatro del 60 also produced works for the International Festival sponsored by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture.

A new modality of theatre production started in San Juan in 1963 when Iris Martínez and Noberto Kerner--both later became actively involved in the work of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre--created La Tierruca, a cafe-theatre in Old San Juan. Its success prompted the creation of similar establishments both in San Juan and other cities. The most prominent of these has been the Cafe-teatro La Tea, owned and operated by Abelardo Ceide, who provides space for promising new groups and productions. A wide variety of theatre experiments, ranging from surrealistic mime to political theatre, have been produced in these settings.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Teatro del 60, Program Notes for the production of Puerto Rico Fué, Nancy, France, 1974. Files of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture--theatre section, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

<sup>68</sup>Victoria Espinosa, p. 117.

The professional theatre in Puerto Rico, even in its more conventional forms, is not commercial theatre as it is understood in the United States. In the majority of cases, theatre is nonprofit enterprise which does not aim to be commercially successful. This characteristic of professional theatre in Puerto Rico has positive and negative aspects. It allows for greater selectivity in materials and less financial pressure. Often a stipend from the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture covers or at least significantly defrays production expenses. However, token salaries for artists have prevented the creation of a theatre profession and its potential members must depend on income earned in radio and television work or look abroad for additional opportunities.

Although the Puerto Rican theatre has experienced many new developments in the past thirty years, its purpose and themes have remained consistent and, according to Jordan Phillips,

the drama in Puerto Rico has been and remains essentially a nationalistic drama. By this is meant that the Island, its people, its problems, its history, and its future have been the subject and object of nearly every play written and produced in Puerto Rico since 1938. This is not to say that the Puerto Rican drama is in any sense petty or propagandistic. It does indicate that Puerto Rico is faced with absorption by the United States, not simply economically or territorially, but culturally.<sup>69</sup>

By 1967, Puerto Rico had a strong theatrical tradition that became the main source of plays, artists, and theatrical techniques used in the development of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in New York City. Events and artistic trends in the Puerto Rican theatre after 1967, the date that marks the production of the English version

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<sup>69</sup>Jordan Phillips, p. 205.

of Rene Marqués' La Carreta (The Oxcart) by the newly formed Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, will be discussed as they directly affect and influence the philosophy and productions of this first institutionalized representation of the Puerto Rican theatre in the United States. In Puerto Rico and New York, the impulse stimulating the Puerto Rican artists remains the same:

There is . . . taking place a renaissance of Puerto Rican art, theatre, and literature of no mean proportions. One thinks of the younger playwrights [on the] Island and mainland, who have rejected an "art for art's sake" position and have married art to political protest. . .<sup>70</sup>

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is an extension of theatre principles and practices which emerged in Puerto Rico between approximately 1935 and 1967, although its cultural tradition extends far beyond that. The reality of Puerto Ricans in New York shares many common characteristics with that in Puerto Rico and is defined by the relation of the island to the United States. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is, in many ways, a kind of communications center. It brings the cultural heritage and advancements of the island to Puerto Rican residents in New York, reminding them of their past in order to help in the better definition of their future, and offering a stage for New York-Puerto Rican artistic creativity. Let us now examine the raison d'etre of the group itself.

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<sup>70</sup>Gordon Lewis, Notes on the Puerto Rican Revolution (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 248.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PHILOSOPHY AND STRUCTURE OF THE PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE

In his book, The Idea of a Theater (1949), Francis Fergusson discusses the necessity for U.S. society to recapture an "idea" of theatre that is relevant to its citizens:

Unless the cultural components of our melting pot are recognized, evaluated, and understood in some sort of relationship--our religious, racial, and regional traditions, and our actual habits of mind derived from applied science and practical politics, seen as mutually relevant--how can we get a perspective on anything? And how can we hope for a public medium of communication more significant than that of our movie-palaces, induction-centers, and camps for displaced persons?<sup>1</sup>

Fergusson's "idea" is not a new one, for throughout history the social function of theatre has been recognized and accepted. For example, in his study of the origins of tragedy in ancient Greece, Gerald F. Else describes the political situation that gave rise to the emergence of this peculiar dramatic form. "Tragedy represented, in effect, the beginning of a new spiritual unification of Attica."<sup>2</sup> Theatre became a cohesive element in the creation of a national spirit for the ten hostile Attic tribes and, above all fulfilled an

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Gerald F. Else, The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 76.

educational purpose:

[Pisistratus'] motive for supporting tragedy must have been at least to some extent pedagogical: he wanted to stand forth as the educator of his people, as Homer did in the Panathenaea. And perhaps we can conjecture that he had an even more specific idea in mind: tragedy, along with Homer, as an instrument for the rapprochement of the classes, an emotional unification<sup>3</sup> of all Athenians in a common sympathy for fallen greatness.

During the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, theatre was utilized to spread the Christian faith by means of didactic representations. Furthermore, theatre was used as a vehicle in the conquest of the "New World" with the aim of instilling patriotic as well as religious pride in the souls of both invaders and invaded.<sup>4</sup> The Elizabethan theatre also maintained the cohesiveness of its community.

Elizabethan theatre was itself a mirror which had been formed at the center of the culture of its time, and at the center of the life and awareness of the community . . . the dramatic art of Shakespeare and the dramatic art of Sophocles, both of which were developed in theaters which focused, at the center of the life of the community, the complementary insights of the whole culture.<sup>5</sup>

A decade and a half after Francis Fergusson published his famous analysis, the United States gave signs of possibly recapturing the immediacy of theatre for its audience through the emergence of two powerful fronts: the anti-Vietnam War Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, which left indelible marks on the theatrical development of the country.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>4</sup>Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), p. 170.

<sup>5</sup>Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater, pp. 1-2.

The anti-war movement prompted bitter playlets of political struggles. Henry Lesnick, in his introduction to Guerrilla Street Theatre, states,

The great majority of groups [political theatre groups] in this country [USA] have come into existence since 1967 or '68, under the impetus of the anti-war movement. A number of them meet regularly and become fairly well defined in terms of membership, political perspective and style, but most are more ephemeral, members get together to prepare a play which advances a specific struggle or helps build for a demonstration, they perform it for a while, and then disband to attend to other political tasks until the need for new material and performances brings them together again.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, some groups did attain a degree of permanency and made high quality contributions to the field. In his History of the Theatre, Oscar Brockett states their importance:

Of these [radical theatre groups] the most sophisticated artistically has been the Bread and Puppet Theatre, founded in 1961 by Peter Shumman and based in New York. Using puppets of varying sizes, live actors, and stories based on myths and the Bible, and well-known tales, it seeks to promote love, charity and humility and to denounce the evils of materialism and deception.<sup>7</sup>

Among other important radical theatres, Brockett includes the San Francisco Mime Troupe which uses broad caricature styles, and the Teatro Campesino, "(founded in 1965 by Luis Valdés to dramatize the plight of grape pickers in California and later used to encourage pride in Mexican-Americans.)"<sup>8</sup>

As a political front, the Teatro Campesino's efforts earned the United Farm Workers Union higher wages. It also pursued a didactic

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<sup>6</sup>Henry Lesnick, "Introduction" to Guerilla Street Theater (New York: Avon, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Brockett, History of the Theatre, p. 633.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

aim. John Lahr describes their efforts as follows: "In showing an audience how it teaches the migrants the vocabulary of social protest, El Teatro also teaches its audience."<sup>9</sup> The target audience of Teatro Campesino is the Chicano population and its primary concern is ethnocentric. As Jorge Huerta states in his analysis of the Teatro Campesino and Chicano theatre, in general, "the experiences of the Chicano, as related through teatro, must address themselves to the needs of the Chicano."<sup>10</sup> This ethnocentricity has been questioned by theatre groups from Latin America and the United States such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, with whom Luis Valdés got his early theatrical training and experience. The criticism states the need for broader social and political experiences in theatre that would make connections between all forms of social struggle. Professor Nicolás Kanellos defends the Chicano position in his "Notes on Chicano Theatre:"

[These groups] continually criticized the Chicano theatres for taking refuge in cultural nationalism and for being philosophically retarded. The Chicano theatres answered, in part, that only by relating to their own people and culture and by developing these uniquely Chicano ideas and forms could they find their relationship with all men and discover universal truths.<sup>11</sup>

Theatre serving an ethnic function also contributed to the Civil Rights Movement. A vibrant Black Theatre emerged from the racial

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<sup>9</sup> John Lahr, Up Against the Fourth Wall (New York: Grove Press, 1970), p. 249.

<sup>10</sup> Jorge Huerta, "Concerning Teatro Chicano," Latin American Theatre Review (Spring 1973): 15.

<sup>11</sup> Nicolás Kanellos, "Notes on Chicano Theatre: The Present State of the Art" (Unpublished article, Indiana University, 1975), p. 5.

awareness of this period. "The 1960s reflected a heightened social and cultural consciousness . . . Culture offered an immediacy and richness in defining and articulating the Black ethos."<sup>12</sup> Groups such as the Black Arts Repertory, the Negro Ensemble Company, the National Black Theatre and the New Lafayette Theatre were manifestations of a decade that came to recognize the relevant function theatre can play in addressing the ethnic components of its society. Recognizing their immediate social and cultural values, art foundations--the National Endowment for the Arts, State Councils for the Arts, and other similar "Establishment" funding institutions--began to sponsor these theatrical manifestations of the movement.<sup>13</sup>

The awakening of an ethnic consciousness in U.S. society had its impact on more traditional theatres such as the New York Shakespeare Festival as well. By the mid-Sixties it was touring Spanish-language productions in order to reach the Latino audiences of New York City, following a pattern previously established in the late thirties by the Federal Theatre Project's programs in black and Spanish-language theatre.<sup>14</sup> The New York Shakespeare Festival's 1964 production of Federico García Lorca's La zapatera prodigiosa (The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife) featured Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre director Miriam Colón in its leading role.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Joan Sadler, "The Black Presence: A Theatre of Creative Alternatives," Black Arts (Fall 1971): 40-41.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Jane De Hart Mathews, The Federal Theatre Project, 1935-1939 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 89-140.

<sup>15</sup>New York Shakespeare Festival, Program Notes for La zapatera prodigiosa, New York, Summer 1964. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

Ms. Colón, aware of the impact of such theatre as a tool for instilling pride in the Latino community, found a fertile ground for the creation of a theatre group who would respond to the specific needs of the Puerto Rican community in the city. So, in 1967, with the aid of an advisory board Miriam Colón founded the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, the first theatre group of its kind in the United States.

For such an undertaking, Ms. Colón's credentials were superb. She studied drama for five years at the University of Puerto Rico, where she was awarded a scholarship to study at the Erwin Piscator Dramatic Workshop and Technical Institute in New York City. She then became the first Puerto Rican to be accepted at the Actor's Studio. Her Broadway credits include roles in In the Summer House, opposite Dame Judith Anderson, The Innkeepers, opposite Geraldine Page, and The Wrong Way Lightbulb, directed by Stephen Foster. Her off-Broadway credits include Matty and the Moron and Madonna, directed by José Quintero, Winterset, The Oxcart and The Passion of Antígona Pérez, among numerous others. She has also starred in numerous radio and television programs and films, co-starring with Marlon Brando in One-eyed Jacks and The Appaloosa. Her latest film credit was The Possession of Joel Delaney opposite Shirley MacLaine. Aside from being the founder and executive director of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Ms. Colón is also a member of the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Cultural Council and consultant to the National Endowment for the Arts. "Her latest commitment has been as one of the founders of the Association of Hispanic Arts (AHA), a group representing all the disciplines in the art world which has as its

main purpose the defense and recognition of the Hispanic Arts in New York."<sup>16</sup>

Special social and cultural circumstances guided the establishment of a theatre which would address the ethnic heritage and contemporary concerns of the Puerto Rican community in New York. One crucial factor in understanding the unique character of the Puerto Rican community is the process of Puerto Rican emigration during the past several decades. According to Clarence Senior, a leading authority on Puerto Rican affairs, "emigration is persistently recommended as a solution to overpopulation problems."<sup>17</sup> Overpopulation and the increased unemployment in Puerto Rico, 39 percent by 1941, caused by the drop in available shipping facilities during the second World War, allowed for the first airborne migration to the United States. Government agencies recruited Puerto Ricans and flew them to the mainland--a practice that was followed by private companies specializing in agriculture and war materials. The Puerto Ricans worked in twenty of the forty eight states during the war, but the largest concentration (50 percent) was in New York City.<sup>18</sup> The end of the war did not reverse this trend and, according to the 1960 U.S. census, almost 900,000 Puerto Ricans, about a fourth of the island's total population was living on the mainland. (1976 estimates bring

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<sup>16</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for Eleuterio, El Coquí, New York, Summer 1976. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>17</sup> Clarence W. Senior, Puerto Rican Emigration (Universidad de Puerto Rico: Social Science Research Center, 1946), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-7.

the Puerto Ricans population in the U.S. close to two million and the island's total to over three million.)

Between 1940 and 1950 an average of 18,700 Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States annually. In the decade of the 1950s the average rose to 41,200 per year, and in the 1960s it declined to an average of about 14,500 annually. In 1953 alone, when the migration reached its peak, about 69,000 Puerto Ricans left the island to settle on the United States mainland. In 1960 the number of Puerto Ricans living in the states was almost 900,000 and in 1970 the number had increased between 1.5 and 2 million, the figure varying with the inclusion or exclusion of third-generation Puerto Ricans.<sup>19</sup>

The great majority of the migrants had been born in Puerto Rico and seventy percent of the Puerto Rican population on the U.S. mainland had settled in New York. The growing population resulted in a new generation of Puerto Ricans from New York called "Neoricans," "Nuyoricans," or "Ricans." The lure of New York is well described in Maldonado Denis' assessment of the process of emigration:

This mass emigration is a forced emigration in the greatest number of cases. Due to both the high degree of unemployment and to the colonial government's encouragement of emigration, the country's poorest inhabitants are forced by circumstance to submit to an even worse ordeal in a society which scorns them.<sup>20</sup>

The entire literature on the problems of Puerto Rican migrants provides exhaustive and depressing facts about the economic, social and cultural conditions of this migrant body, drawn to the United States

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<sup>19</sup>Adalberto López, "The Puerto Rican Diaspora," p. 319.

<sup>20</sup>Manuel Maldonado Denis, Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historic Interpretation, p. 161.

by the promise of work and prosperity.<sup>21</sup>

Since 1967, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has tried to reach this audience of Puerto Rican immigrants to help minimize the alienation resulting from the uprooting process of migration. This same audience has itself been responsible for a considerable cultural impact: "Probably no other immigration has hit New York with the impact of the Puerto Ricans, whose language difficulties have spurred Spanish language curricula in many public schools, Spanish signs on the streets, and Spanish television."<sup>22</sup> This influence has also been felt in the field of higher education. With the creation of the first Puerto Rican Studies department at Herbert H. Lehmann College--City University of New York--in 1969, many other New York universities and two-year colleges have followed suit adding similar departments to their programs. Hostos College in the Bronx goes as far as offering Spanish courses in all its departments and its Puerto Rican Studies department, headed by PRTT artistic director Pablo Cabrera, offers courses in Puerto Rican theatre.

In their studies of Puerto Rican assimilation in the United States, sociologists have been struck by a phenomenon different from the one experienced in the majority of migratory movements. Milton

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<sup>21</sup>For additional analysis of the migration phenomenon, see C. Wright Mills, The Puerto Rican Journey (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967); Elena Padilla, Up from Puerto Rico (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Dan Wakefield, Island in the City (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1959); Oscar Handlin, The Newcomers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959); and Stan Steiner, Islands: The Worlds of the Puerto Ricans.

<sup>22</sup>Kal Waggenheim, Puerto Rico: A Profile (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 193.

Gordon's study, Assimilation in American Life (1964), finds little or no assimilation by Puerto Ricans on any level. He admits very little cultural assimilation and only partial civic assimilation.<sup>23</sup> This might be explained by the fact that the proximity of the island and the ability to return seem to prompt the Puerto Rican to find in the island the sense of strength, support and identity which former immigrants could not find in their homelands. According to British sociologist Gordon Lewis,

For the first time in the long history of American migration there is a two-way movement: the working class may decide to return home instead of remaining permanently . . . it is evident that this is a new phenomenon<sup>24</sup> in the historic migration movement to the promised land.

Without further analysis of the social factors of migration, the pattern emerges of an urban population that continuously finds and transplants native cultural manifestations in its new environment in New York. The result is evident in the development of new artistic forms. One of these is music:

There are the new popular musical forms that have grown out of the Puerto Rican experience in the Northern cities, notably the salsa phenomenon, the neo-Rican blend of Afro-Jibaro, and American rock styles, not unlike the Jamaican reggae that has become the rage of the black West Indian minorities in Britain. Thematically, the salsa songs celebrate, as do many of the reggaes, the desperate tribulation of the exile experience.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Milton M. Gordon, Assimilation in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 76.

<sup>24</sup>Gordon Lewis, Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 6-7.

<sup>25</sup>Gordon Lewis, Notes on the Puerto Rican Revolution (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 247-248.

Similarly, the work of "Nuyorican" poets such as Miguel Algarín, Piri Thomas, Jesús Papoleto Meléndez and Pedro Pietri, influenced by the new reality, synthesize both cultures into a strong and poignant bilingual literature. Pedro Pietri, for example, writes:

. . .  
Beware of signs that say  
"Aqui se habla Espanol" ["Spanish Spoken Here"]  
Do not go near those places  
of smiling faces that do not smile  
and bill collectors who are well train  
to forget how to habla español  
when you fall back on those weekly payments

Beware! Be wise! Do not patronize  
Garbage is all they are selling you  
Here today gone tomorrow merchandise

You wonder where your bedroom set went  
after you make the third payment

Those bastards should be sued  
for false advertisements  
What they talk no es español  
What they talk is alotta BULLSHIT<sup>26</sup>

Pietri and others have created a new bilingual form of artistic communication with meaning for the Puerto Rican experience in New York.

The poetry of the "Nuyorican" poets was captured in Piri, Papoleto, and Pedro Directed by Pablo, a dramatized production of their works, produced by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in 1975 and directed by Pablo Cabrera. Stan Steiner, in one of the latest books analyzing the problems of Puerto Ricans in New York, develops an explanation for the cultural experience on the mainland:

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<sup>26</sup>Pedro Pietri, "Beware of Signs" in Puerto Rican Obituary (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), pp. 18-19.

The culture of the Borinquen [Indian name for Puerto Rico] was buried by the decay of the city. But it was not destroyed, nor was it assimilated or mercifully banished, but hidden beneath the debris, like seeds that could not yet be seen, the old "traditional peasant culture" of the jíbaro [Puerto Rican peasant] flowered in new forms.<sup>27</sup>

Thus a community of almost one million Puerto Ricans was starting to enrich the cultural life of the city through artistic manifestations of their ethnic heritage.

The "Nuyorican" artist has addressed issues arising from the Puerto Rican experience in New York, developing new forms and a new poetic language often referred to as "Spanglish." However other individuals and groups seek to reinforce the traditions of the island, fighting against the impact of New York, preserving the Spanish language in its purest forms and denouncing Puerto Rican assimilation and cultural adulteration. The Spanish Repertory Theatre is representative of group activity to preserve the traditional Hispanic culture, as is Miriam Colón, director of the PRTT. Although the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has offered a few productions which demonstrate manifestations of cultural adulteration, its work is strongly reflective of dramatic creation in Puerto Rico and Latin America. Thus, the most prominent Puerto Rican theatre on the U.S. mainland is also the one with the closest ties to the native culture of the island and most strongly reflective of the island's theatrical history, particularly that of the post-World War II era.

Since 1967, Ms. Colón has been responsible for the most prominent and consistent Puerto Rican theatre group in the United

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<sup>27</sup>Steiner, The Islands: The Worlds of the Puerto Ricans, p. 443.

States. She controls each aspect of the enterprise from the headquarters of the organization. In the files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre and through taped interviews with Ms. Colón the philosophy of the constantly growing theatre complex is revealed.

The PRTT defines itself as a "nonprofit, professional bilingual theatre organization"<sup>28</sup> with the dual purpose of producing works relevant to the Latin community in New York and at the same time serving as a source of cultural enrichment for the New York community, in general, placing emphasis on its deprived areas.

In its first proposal to the City of New York in 1967, the PRTT stressed the need for a theatre that would strengthen the sense of community in the areas considered by the city as deprived, or in need of special attention. Its main objectives were to

1. promote identification and self esteem in alienated ethnic minorities
2. increase understanding and tolerance between the different national and ethnic groups
3. bring free high quality entertainment to neighborhoods which cannot afford to pay Broadway or off-Broadway prices
4. provide a constructive outlet for boredom, restlessness and frustration
5. be a source of wholesome entertainment and cultural enrichment for the community, in general, and its deprived areas specifically.
6. offer community participation, vocational opportunity and talent development to our youth.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Derived from analysis of Program Notes for Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre productions, 1967-1977. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>29</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company: A Proposal," New York, 1 May 1967, p. 1. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

The language used in the original proposal does not mention Puerto Ricans specifically (aside from the name of the theatre group). It deals with minority groups and with audiences from economically deprived areas. It is important to know that although Puerto Ricans comprise the second largest ethnic minority in New York City (blacks are the first) they are the poorest segment of the total city population.

Federal data collectors have found in a year-long study that more than half of the 85,700 New Yorkers of Puerto Rican birth or parentage who live in poverty areas make up the poorest block of people in the city . . . Of all New Yorkers, they are the least skilled and the least educated.<sup>30</sup>

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre understood that the physical poverty created by economic conditions went hand-in-hand with spiritual poverty:

. . . a principal problem of the alienated member of a minority group comes, not only from dissatisfaction with his material means, but also from a debilitating feeling of aloneness, of separation and confusion as to his sense of self worth. We are able to confirm that projects in the arts play a key role in helping to establish bridges of communication with our undeveloped communities. We further learned that the possibilities of successfully capturing the attention of such communities are greater when we take into consideration their ethnic background, their interests, the subjects that are relevant to their reality and to their taste.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Will Lissner, "U.S. Study Finds City's Poorest are Puerto Ricans in the Slums," New York Times, 17 November 1969, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Anatomy of a Summer Project," Presentation by Ms. Miriam Colón at Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey's Conference, Mayors and City Coordinators: 1968 Summer Youth Opportunities Program, Washington, D.C., 29-31 January 1968, p. 4. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

The 1969 Master Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre, narrowed the broad language of the 1967 document by dealing specifically with the need for a theatre that would address and benefit the Puerto Rican community of New York City. The proposal started with a quotation from a study made by the Agency ASPIRA, a federally funded agency in charge of the educational needs of the Puerto Ricans, in May 1968 which appeared in "The Special Educational Needs of Urban Puerto Rican Youth":

In any other society a bilingual child is usually encouraged and admired. In New York City he is called "culturally deprived." Thousands of Puerto Rican children have been herded into classes for the mentally retarded and vocational schools by a system that equates a language difficulty with intelligence deficiency and which eyes with distrust anything suggesting a plurality of culture.

The self-defeating cycle in which educational failure is locking Puerto Rican children is to a great degree responsible for the shocking number of Puerto Rican children dropping out of high schools and for the frustration and lack of motivation prevalent today. Lack of self-esteem and a feeling of worthlessness are the accompanying side effects.

The Puerto Rican community in New York does not have any meaningful outlets for expression and assertion of their artistic and cultural heritage which can help to alleviate the sterility of present conditions . . .<sup>32</sup>

Recognizing the fact that a permanent Puerto Rican theatre would not solve the problems of the Puerto Rican community, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre saw the communication achieved through theatre as a powerful and essential force.

The solution to the problems of the Puerto Ricans in New York is a complex one. A theatre will not be the answer, but a theatre can help, for it can dramatize

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<sup>32</sup>ASPIRA, "The Special Educational Needs of the Urban Puerto Rican Youth," Conference held in New York, May 1968. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

the problems of a people, can instill in them pride in their rich cultural heritage, open new perspectives, release aggressions and suggest solutions.<sup>33</sup>

The training program instituted by the company in 1972 followed specific ethnic objectives:

Promote ethnic identification and self-esteem in an otherwise alienated ethnic minority group.

Increase understanding and mutual respect between Puerto Ricans and the rest of the community.

Serve as an outlet of expression to Puerto Rican creative talents in acting, writing for the theatre, scenic design and execution, costume design and execution, props, etc.

Widen the job margin for youngsters for careers in the theatre.

Acquaint New York students and the community in general with the rich reservoir of Puerto Rican drama.

Expand the activities of its present traveling theatre to reach more deprived areas, more schools.<sup>34</sup>

In the breakdown of the grants and contributions given to the company between 1967 and 1973, the theatre's function as a promoter of the Puerto Rican identity was further stressed: "The theatre aims to instill pride in its Puerto Rican audiences--especially the young--who do not know their own culture and are still in conflict as to their heritage."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre, Including the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre," Submitted to the City of New York, May 1969, p. 2. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Background and Objectives," New York, 1973, p. 1. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

So far, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has produced nine Puerto Rican plays in their Spring-Summer touring seasons.

Table 2. Puerto Rican Plays Produced by the Touring Unit

<u>The Oxcart</u>	1967
<u>La farsa del amor comprado</u> -( <u>"The Farce of Purchased Love"</u> )	1968
<u>Crossroads</u>	1969
<u>The Golden Streets</u>	1970
<u>A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories</u>	1971
<u>The Passion of Antígona Pérez</u>	1972
<u>Pipo Subway no sabe reir</u> -( <u>"Pipo Subway Can't Laugh"</u> )	1972
<u>Noo Yall</u>	1973
<u>Eleuterio, El Coquí</u>	1976

Numerous Puerto Rican plays have also been staged by the experimental theatre during the regular yearly season. These include Pipo Subway no sabe reir ("Pipo Subway Can't Laugh," 1972), Flag Inside (1972), The Guest, Scribbles, and The Innocent (1974), Al final de la calle ("At the End of the Street," 1974), Los ángeles se han fatigado ("The Angels are Tired," 1974), Piri, Papaleta, and Pedro, Directed by Pablo (1975), and Las Ventanas ("The Windows," 1976).

The experimental theatre has served as a home for productions by other New York and Puerto Rican groups engaged in staging Puerto Rican plays: Los soles truncos ("The Fanlights," 1972), Aspazquanza (1972), Pipo Subway no sabe reir (1972). In this way, the theatre has tried to fulfill one of its main objectives: "to bring to the attention of U.S. audiences distinguished Puerto Rican and other Hispanic authors previously unknown in this country. By so doing, the theatre seeks to educate U.S. audiences, Hispanic and non-Hispanic alike, to the cultural achievements of Hispanic authors and

artists."<sup>36</sup> These two main objectives--the ethnic emphasis and the showcase aspect--bring about the problem of language: the vernacular of the Puerto Ricans is Spanish, whereas the prevalent language of the city is English. How to reconcile these objectives became a major concern.

After the 1967 touring production of the English version of The Oxcart and for the next three summers, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre produced two different plays, one in English and one in Spanish: 1968: Winterset--English and La farsa del amor comprado ("The Farce of Purchased Love")--Spanish; 1969, Crossroads--English and Los títeres de cachiporra ("Punching Puppets")--Spanish; and 1970, The Golden Streets--English and El maleficio de la mariposa (The Butterfly's Evil Spell)--Spanish. By 1972, English-language productions toured multi-ethnic areas, while Spanish-language productions were scheduled for primarily Spanish-speaking (Hispanic or Puerto Rican) neighborhoods. After the opening of the experimental theatre unit, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre sought to stage each play with a bilingual cast which could switch from Spanish to English depending on the experimental theatre audience or, in the case of the touring productions, the language preference of the community sponsoring the street performances. The experimental theatre advertises bills such as the 1974 production of three adapted short stories.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Table 3. Sample Dual-Language Schedule

<u>Scribbles</u> ( <u>Garabatos</u> )	<u>The Innocents</u> ( <u>Los inocentes</u> )	<u>The Guest</u> ( <u>El huésped</u> )
	8:00 p.m. Weekdays	
	Matinee (Sunday Only) 3:00 p.m.	
	Thursday, May 9	English
	Friday, May 10	English
	Saturday, May 11	Spanish
	Sunday, May 12	Spanish <sup>37</sup>

Whereas the Actos of the Chicano theatre utilize a combination of Spanish and English words creating a new form frequently called "Spanglish" and requiring an understanding of both languages,<sup>38</sup> the plays staged by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre seek, as much as possible, to keep the languages separate and in pure forms. In that sense, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is strongly influenced by the language necessities set by the Puerto Ricans from the island and does not have the policy of catering to the popular dialect created in the streets of New York ("Spanglish"). Although the mixture of both languages is very common in the everyday conversation of the Puerto Rican on the mainland, the maintenance of Spanish is a highly pursued goal for the community. In a study on bilingualism in the barrio, language researchers from Indiana University stated:

All working class adults with whom they talked agreed that maintenance of Spanish was one important means of retaining contact with its [Puerto Rico's]

<sup>37</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for The Guest, New York, May 1974. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>38</sup> Jorge Huerta, "Differences Between Teatro Chicano and Traditional Theatre," Delivered at the Conference for the Sixth "Teatro" Festival, Los Angeles, 1976, p. 72.

people and with the emotions it evokes in those who are living there. Adult respondents decried the poor Spanish facility of their children as a barrier to interaction with the family and friends in Puerto Rico, for without Spanish how could contact with the island and its people be maintained?

To desire language maintenance is not by itself sufficient to realize the goal. However, Spanish maintenance is a reality among adult New York Puerto Ricans because they do associate the language with this most important value cluster--family, kinship, and ethnic ties. Spanish is the language of the home, and is used almost exclusively with infants in the most Americanized homes. . . . For the youngsters, with whom the responsibility of language maintenance ultimately lies, Spanish is not only necessary for conversation with aged grandparents, but also with younger relatives in Puerto Rico who frequently visit and who are frequently visited.<sup>39</sup>

When asked about their peculiar approach to the production of plays in both original languages and translations, Ms. Colón answered:

We have tried that formula and it's starting to show results. We are conditioning an audience that follows us . . . the audience in the laboratory and in the streets, we ask them: do you want it in English or in Spanish and they take their preference. Right now we had a situation where we had to perform in some activity in the Battery Park on the fourth of July and they said English . . . the same week at Lincoln Center . . . we asked what language and they said Spanish. . . . So it's achieving a flexibility now that I was hoping we could have . . . .

Question: But you don't sponsor the possibility of a Spanglish Language?

Miss Colón: No, no, Spanglish only if it serves as a vehicle to dramatize the tragedy, like Pipo Subway.<sup>40</sup>

Although the experimental theatre and the training unit are integral parts of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, its essence is

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<sup>39</sup> Joshua Fishman, Robert L. Cooper, and Roxana Ma, Bilingualism in the Barrio, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Miriam Colón, private interview with the writer at the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre headquarters, 15 July 1976, New York.

the touring unit, bringing free professional theatre to economically deprived neighborhoods in the boroughs of New York City, Long Island, and New Jersey. Since 1967, its first season, when the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre performed The Oxcart in fourteen different locations, the traveling unit has remained the most active single component of the theatre. Furthermore, in 1970 the traveling unit became a year-long project and during the colder months it toured to indoor spaces:

Plays relevant to the realities of their [people in New York's most deprived areas] lives will be brought during the winter months to schools, community centers, churches . . . During this period special emphasis will be given to plays which should conceivably supplement school curricula.<sup>41</sup>

In the Winter, the number of trips is determined by the number of schools, community centers and other organizations requesting presentations, but a minimum of twenty-five is pursued by the company.<sup>42</sup>

In the presentation and defense of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre during Vice President Hubert Humphrey's Conference: Mayors and City Coordinators, 1968 Summer Youth Opportunities Program, Ms. Colón explained why the traveling format was essential to its target audience:

Whenever federal and state funds go to the arts in this country, they invariably benefit the large white middle class. These government sponsored programs, funded with taxpayers money, charge in most cases, admission prices that are out of reach of the ghetto dweller. Secondly, having little or no knowledge about the cultural scene around town, the slum dweller seldom will go on a cultural expedition out of his own community. Therefore, conventional federal, state and privately sponsored cultural programs by-pass the hard core underprivileged. To

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<sup>41</sup>"Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre," p. 8.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

correct this inequity, several things can be done: First, new guidelines must be attached to government fundings for the arts. Specifically, there should be some provision for free admission on a regularly allotted basis for ghetto dwellers. In the case of philanthropic institutions, the clause demanding matching funds should be abolished in the case of organizations legitimately engaged in the development of performing arts programs in the ghettos. Whenever possible, cultural performances should be taken out of their marble mausoleums and brought to the ghetto's streets, assembly halls and community centers.<sup>43</sup>

When asked about the traveling unit during our interview, Ms. Colón reiterated the position of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre as a vehicle of cultural movement:

The group that goes to the street is important and it gives us our essence and I don't think it will ever be eliminated because it distinguishes us from the myriad of . . . other such groups that do the same-- [they] present theatre in little holes-in-the-walls in New York City.

Bringing the theatre to the people, brings us in contact with an element of the community that ordinarily will not come in contact with it. So we feel that we are servicing youth and segments of the society that, if it were not for these opportunities, I don't think they would even be exposed to theatre. There are a lot of artistic endeavors going to the streets, which is a marvelous thing in New York City. But, we were kind of pioneers, we feel that we have an obligation to that segment of the population--to the youth, to ordinary citizens--and sharing with them in that experience is, I think, an important part of our being and distinguishes us from the subscription type theatre where the well-to-do and the already sophisticated people will go. I feel they are being served by other very meritorious groups.<sup>44</sup>

The "free-of-charge" productions are performed by professionals  
The company works under Equity's League of Resident Theatres (LORT)

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<sup>43</sup>"Anatomy of a Summer Project," pp. 8-9.

<sup>44</sup>Miriam Colón, private interview.

"D" contract,<sup>45</sup> a classification based upon potential weekly gross receipts below \$8,000.00.<sup>46</sup> The minimum salary for actors is \$137.50 a week.<sup>47</sup> The number of nonprofessional actors allowed by the union is determined by the number of standard contracts in the company at no less than the minimum salary:

Standard "D" Category Contracts	Nonprofessionals
7	1
9	2
11	3
12	unlimited <sup>48</sup>

Due to the nature of the contract with Actor's Equity, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has helped to increase the number of professional Puerto Rican actors in the New York theatre community, exposing them to other media as well.<sup>49</sup>

As a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization whose purpose is largely educational, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre must depend on grants from foundations, business firms, individuals, and government agencies. The enterprise which began in 1967 with a \$23,000 grant from the New York City Parks Department developed by

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<sup>45</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Application for funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, 1975-76, p. 6. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>46</sup>Actor's Equity Association, "Agreement and Rules Governing Employment in Resident Theatre," effective 2 July 1972, p. 9. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>49</sup>Examples include 1974 ABC-TV production of The Guest, 1976 NET production of "Puerto Rican Obituary," and the casting of actors from Eleuterio, El Coqui for several 1976-1977 episodes of "Kojak."

1977 into a year-round operation with a \$163,000 budget.<sup>50</sup> Table 4 shows the breakdown of foundation contributions between 1967 and 1973.<sup>51</sup>

Since 1974, the theatre has been supported mainly by two government agencies: the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. The amounts and significance of contributions from these and other funding sources can be seen in the 1974-1977 breakdown of grants received by the company (Table 5).<sup>52</sup>

The expenditures for the touring unit of the PRTT can be seen in the proposed breakdown for a 1974 production which toured indoors for nine weeks during the spring and for eight weeks, outdoors, during the summer (Table 6).

The financial support given to the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre during its first ten years of existence has helped it to branch out and create its experimental theatre with an Equity Showcase contract and the training unit directed by paid professionals. These two additions to the original production format of the theatre help to strengthen the original philosophy that inspired the creation of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre: to reinforce the cultural traditions of the Puerto Ricans in New York, to serve as a showcase for the work of Puerto Rican dramatists, directors, designers, actors, and technicians, and to strive to enrich the theatre

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<sup>50</sup>PRTT, "Statement of Financial Condition for the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1977," by accountant William Samovitz, Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>51</sup>"Background and Objectives," p. 12.

<sup>52</sup>PRTT, "Breakdown: Grants and Contributions, 1967-1977," New York, July 1977. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

Table 4. Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Co., Inc.--Breakdown, Grants & Contributions, 1967-1973

	1973	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967
New York State Council on the Arts	\$ 50,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 14,330	\$ 8,500	\$ 4,966	
National Endowment for the Arts	25,000	20,000	10,000				
Model Cities	9,864	12,610					
New York City Parks Department	6,830	9,299	15,918	20,000			
New York City Board of Education	4,454		500				\$23,000
Mayor Lindsay's Urban Action Task Force							
Rockefeller Brothers Fund	30,000*	5,000	10,000	10,000	39,063	39,950	
Avon Foundation	2,000						
Bernhard Foundation	1,000						
Chase-Manhattan Bank, N.A.	2,500						
Center for Inter-America Relations	500	500					
Vincent Astor Foundation		15,000	15,000				
New York Foundation		10,000	5,000				
Edward John Nobel Foundation		7,500					
Rockefeller Foundation			15,000				
Cathedral of St. John the Divine			100				
Miscellaneous Individual		1,529	1,065				
Total	\$132,148	\$111,438	\$122,583	\$44,330	\$47,563	\$44,916	\$23,000

\* Purchase/Rehabilitation of theatre.

Table 5. Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Co., Inc.--Breakdown, Grants &amp; Contributions, 1974-1977

	1977	1976	1975	1974*
<u>Governmental</u>				
New York State Council on the Arts	\$ 76,825	\$ 94,000	\$ 72,160	\$50,000
National Endowment for the Arts	60,000	32,500	45,000	25,000
New York City Parks Department			3,610	
<u>Foundations</u>				
Avon Foundation				2,000
Shubert Foundation	2,500		1,000	
T. Malcolm Mossman Charitable Fund		2,000		
<u>Corporate</u>				
Chase-Manhattan Bank, N.A.		1,000	2,000	2,000
Con Edison	1,000			
Chemical Bank		1,000		
Exxon Corporation	1,500			
HRH Construction Corporation	100			
Miscellaneous-Individual	<u>1,078</u>			
Total	\$143,003	\$130,500	\$123,770	\$79,000

\*6 month period--January 1, 1974 to June 30, 1974

experience of the audience of the entire New York community. The work of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in fulfilling this philosophy is the subject of the following chapters.

Table 6. Proposed Breakdown for the 1974 Production of Noo Yall


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Salaries and Fees	\$ 99,100
Artistic personnel as well as technical and administrative staff. ( <u>Noo Yall</u> by Jaime Carrero had fifteen people on the technical staff, ten on the administrative staff and sixteen actors).	
Royalties	
Author and Composer	4,000
Payroll Taxes	9,800
Pension and Welfare Benefits (LORT "D" contract requirement)	3,200
Set Construction	
Design, Construction, Painting	3,000
Outdoor Stage	
Maintenance and Painting	1,000
Sound and Lighting	
Rental equipment including microphones, mixers, amplifiers, and entire lighting set-up including towers, cables, and generator	7,000
Costume Construction	1,500
Wardrobe Maintenance	600
Prop Construction and Purchasing	500
Vehicle Expense	
Auto Rental (coordinator), Bus Rental (actors), Truck Rental (platform stage), Van Rental (lighting and sound), Garage and Maintenance	10,000
Local and Long Distance Travel	1,100
Promotional Expense	
Printing, Photographs, Community Relations, Radio, and Television	6,000
Rental Expenses	
Rent, Utilities, Maintenance, Storage, Insurance, Machinery, Office Supplies, etc.	<u>9,400</u>
Total Operating Expenses in 1974 for Professional Touring Unit	\$156,000 <sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Financial Projection--1974," annual budget projection. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FIRST FIVE YEARS (1967-1971)

On August 7, 1967, under the auspices of Mayor John V. Lindsay's Summer Task Force, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre performed La carreta (The Oxcart), its first production. At the press opening on August 8th, Mayor Lindsay joined an audience of 1,200 at the Carver Amphitheatre on 102nd Street, between Park and Madison Avenues in New York City. The production then toured fourteen locations in Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens in a self-contained bus and a flat-bed truck with drop-down side wings that extended into a stage.<sup>1</sup>

The Oxcart had been produced in both Puerto Rico and New York in Spanish in 1953, two years after it had been written by René Marqués. On December 19, 1966, it re-opened in English (translated by Charles Pilditch) at New York's Greenwich Mews Theatre. The success of this production, directed by Lloyd Richards and with Miriam Colón playing the young lead, paved the way for the creation of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.<sup>2</sup> The cast, set, and technicians of the 1967 traveling enterprise remained the same as those of the off-Broadway

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Calta, "The Oxcart Begins Summer Travels," New York Times, 9 August 1967, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>"The Cultural Expression of Puerto Ricans in New York" in Culture and the Puerto Ricans: Critique and Debate (New York: Research Foundation of the City University of New York, 1976), p. 128.

show except for the role of Luis, the older son, which had been played by Raúl Juliá during the 1966 run but in 1967, was interpreted by Jaime Sánchez.<sup>3</sup> The production combined Puerto Rican and U.S. talent. Lloyd Richards, who had previously directed the New York production of Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, was responsible for the artistic direction of The Oxcart, while Lucy Boscana, one of the most prominent actresses from Puerto Rico, "made a special trip to New York City for these performances"<sup>4</sup> to play doña Gabriela, the elderly lead of the play.

The City of New York provided the funding:

Mayor Lindsay's 1967 Summer Task Force, in cooperation with New York City's Parks Department, sponsored the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre's fourteen location tour of the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. . . . Financial support from the Task Force amounted to \$23,000.<sup>5</sup>

The production's success allowed for the establishment of the group as a nonprofit professional organization. During the next five years, 1967-1971, the PRTT followed a traveling format and during the summers, produced eight plays, totaling 190 performances. All plays produced during this period are listed below in Table 7.

The original organization included Miriam Colón, president, and José Ocasio, secretary. At the time, Ocasio was an executive of the Puerto Rican Community Development Project. With Ms. Colón, Ocasio had helped to establish the First Spanish Arena Theatre of New York

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Pilditch, "Introduction" to The Oxcart, pp. vi-vii.

<sup>4</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for The Oxcart, New York, Summer 1967. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>5</sup>"Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre," p. 5.

Table 7. Plays Produced by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre (1967-1971)

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1967	<u>The Oxcart</u> by René Marqués directed by Lloyd Richards August 7 - August 26	15 performances
1968	<u>Winterset</u> by Maxwell Anderson directed by Ramon Gordon July 22 - August 23	25 performances
	<u>La farsa del amor comprado</u> ("The Farce of Purchased Love") by Luis Rafael Sánchez directed by Pedro Santaliz July 28 - August 25	7 performances
1969	<u>Crossroads</u> by Manuel Méndez Ballester directed by Roberto Rodríguez Suárez August 3 - August 31	25 performances
	<u>Los títeres de cachiporra</u> ("Punching Puppets") by Federico García Lorca directed by Jorge González August 9 - August 31	8 performances
1970	<u>The Golden Streets</u> by Piri Thomas directed by Miriam Colón August 10 - August 30	17 performances
	<u>El maleficio de la mariposa</u> (The Butterfly's Evil Spell) by Federico García Lorca directed by Norberto Kerner August 14 - August 30	9 performances
1971	<u>The Golden Streets</u> April 6 - May 29 (indoor locations)	45 performances
	<u>A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories</u> directed by Pablo Cabrera August 7 - September 12	35 performances

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(Five Puerto Rican plays, two Spanish farces by García Lorca and one social play by U.S. playwright Maxwell Anderson.)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Derived from analysis of Program Notes for Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre productions, 1967-1971. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

City in 1954. The theatre's business advisor, George Edgar, had been responsible for producing several off-Broadway shows including Jean Genet's The Blacks. The treasurer, Francis Druckner, was a New York City public school teacher and was associated with producer Stella Holt and the Greenwich Mews Theatre in the Village. Anibal Otero, a prominent scene designer from Puerto Rico and the director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Programs in the Bronx, was the technical director.<sup>7</sup> The company's production director during the early seasons was Robert Buzell. In 1970 Allen Davis III succeeded Buzell and has served to the present. Davis had previously been the general manager of the Santa Fe Theatre Company in New Mexico and of Playhouse-in-the-Park in Cincinnati. His other credits include playwriting, lighting design and off-Broadway directing.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the original actors and technicians continue working with the company today. Among the actors from 1967-71 were Miriam Colón; Iraida Polanco; Pedro Santaliz, who now directs his own theatre group based on the goals and principles of the PRTT; Jaime Sánchez; winner of the Clarence Derwent Award and the 1965 Theatre World Award<sup>9</sup> and whose film credits include David and Lisa and The Pawnbroker; María Soledad Romero; Norberto Kerner; Walter Rodríguez; Fiji Islander actor Manu Topou; and United States actress Betty Miller. Designers included Anibal Otero, Julio Biaggi, Douglas Schmidt, and Peter

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<sup>7</sup>"Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre," pp. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for The Golden Streets, New York, Summer 1970. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>9</sup>Program Notes for The Oxcart.

Harvey. Directors such as Norberto Kerner, Ms. Colón and Pablo Cabrera, who, since 1971, has directed most of the summer productions, have contributed to the creation of the particular stylistic unity of the PRTT.<sup>10</sup>

During its first five years, the enterprise retained a "nomadic" character, playing different locations in New York. Some locations became standard performance "homes" for the annual summer venture. These are listed below in Table 8.<sup>11</sup>

Most locations are in poverty areas of the city where most blacks and Puerto Ricans reside. Members of these communities often request the services of the PRTT. According to Ms. Colón,

Our audiences are very mixed because we choose ninety percent of the locations to be in areas where there is more unemployment, more poverty, more deterioration of the neighborhood. In these communities we get a mixture of proportions of three to one, blacks to Puerto Ricans.<sup>12</sup>

Miriam Colón also states that the remaining ten percent of the performances are scheduled in order to expose middle-class audiences to this theatre experience: "We'll also perform in a museum like the Metropolitan Museum . . . because there is another segment of the community that does not need to see theatre for free, but that we want to acquaint with [our work]."<sup>13</sup> According to Ms. Colón, who

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<sup>10</sup>Derived from analysis of Program Notes for Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre productions, 1967-1971

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Miriam Colón, private interview.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Table 8. Most Frequent Performance Locations, 1967-1971

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971			
	<u>Oxcart</u>	<u>Winterset</u>	<u>Farsa</u>	<u>Titeres</u>	<u>Crossroads</u>	<u>Maleficio</u>	<u>Golden Sts.</u>	<u>Anthology</u>
Manhattan								
Riverside Park (103rd St.)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tompkins Sq. Park (Ave. A, E. 10 St.)	x				x	x	x	
Hamilton Fish (Park (Houston & Pitt Sts.))	x	x			x			
Chelsea Park (28th & 7th Sts.)	x	x	x					
Bronx								
St. Mary's Park (E. 145th & Jackson Sts.)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Crotona Park (E. & Charlotte Sts)				x	x	x	x	x
Queens								
Linden Park (Corona - 104th St. & 41st Ave.)	x	x			x			
Brooklyn								
Lindsay Park (Montrose & Lorimer Sts.)				x	x	x	x	
Red Hook Park (Dwight & Richards Sts.)	x	x				x	x	

selects the plays, street audiences influence play selection as well as production styles. When asked what she looks for when choosing a play, she answered:

I think a lot about content and possible impact . . . thinking that it is a type of audience that has to be arrested. Therefore, the vehicles necessarily have to have something that sometimes has to sacrifice in certain subtleties, in the delivery, in the timing we can afford under laboratory [indoor] conditions; they have to be done away with for a larger stroke, for a more robust kind of delivery.<sup>14</sup>

The selection of plays with a social message that is relevant to the street audience, reflective of the Spanish-speaking experience, and furthermore encompassing high artistic values, is an arduous task.

. . . unfortunately part of our bigger problem is that we cannot find properties that . . . besides [being] good pieces of theatre, have these qualities . . . serving as a mirror, to have them [the audience] see the conditions, exposing them to situations . . . in the hope that by being confronted they may be persuaded to think, to compare, to react.<sup>15</sup>

Through an examination of the eight plays performed during 1967-1971 a history of this first period of the PRTT can be reconstructed. Furthermore, an in-depth study of three representative productions --The Oxcart, 1967, Crossroads, 1969, and A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories, 1971--should reveal more exacting information about the artistic purpose and process of the PRTT during this early stage of development. The selection has been based on availability of supporting materials on the texts and performances, their success in meeting the philosophy of the PRTT, and the recommendations

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

of Ms. Colón in terms of the plays' impact on the group itself. Related events and activities undertaken by the company during 1967-1971 will also be discussed in order to better understand this five year period in the history of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

### The 1967 Season and The Oxcart<sup>16</sup>

The Oxcart traces the migration of a Puerto Rican family from the country to a San Juan slum and to a New York ghetto. Each act represents one stop on the journey: Act I, el campo (the country); Act II, el arrabal (the slum); and Act III, la metrópoli (the metropolis). Luis, the adopted son of doña Gariela, has not been able to maintain the family farm in Puerto Rico. He is convinced that technology is the only solution to poverty and makes the family move to a San Juan slum so he can get a factory job. His grandfather, Don Chago, is left behind because he would rather die in the country than in the city. In the slum, the youngest son, Chaguito, is sent to prison for petty theft and Juanita, the daughter, is raped and has an abortion. Economic and moral ruin forces them to move to New York where they believe workers can earn higher wages. In New York, Luis is able to make a "decent" living and provide his family with some comforts. Juanita has moved out and doña Gabriela lives with constant cultural shock. Luis is killed by the same machines he wanted to understand, and doña Gabriela and Juanita vow to return to Puerto Rico to bury Luis and to establish themselves in the pure environment of the countryside.

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<sup>16</sup>René Marqués, The Oxcart; and Marqués, La Carreta in Cuarto Festival de Teatro, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, Vol. 4 (Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1962), pp. 320-563.

The play is written in a dialect which emphasizes the strict phonetic pronunciation of the peasant, an element lost in the translation. But the poetic images and symbols remain. There is no lack of well-planned images in the play, a characteristic of Marqués' style, as indicated in a long list provided by María Teresa Babín in "Apuntes sobre La carreta."

Los elementos musicales y plásticos de La carreta tienen variedad y riqueza . . . El gallo, el trompo de Lito, el sillón de doña Gabriela, el San Antonio de palo, la carreta, el canto del boyero, la música de la vellonera y de la radio, la Cueva del Indio, el batir de las olas del mar, las imágenes de la Virgen del Carmen y del Corazón de Jesús, las estampas religiosas que adornan la desnudez de la casita jíbara, el rosario y hasta la botella de alcoholado, serenata de viandas y bacalao, el paño ensangrentado y las latas de cerveza, transmiten en los instantes precisos en que se nombran o se hacen visibles y palpables, un poder de sugerencia muy sutil y ayudan a crear la dimensión de realidad transida de emociones poéticas o trágicas, de acuerdo con el estado de los personajes.<sup>17</sup>

(The lyrical, musical and plastic elements of The Oxcart are varied and rich. The rooster, Lito's top, doña Gabriela's rocking chair, the statue of San Antonio, the oxcart, the voice of the cart's driver, the juke-box and radio music, the Cave of the Indian, the sound of the waves, the religious images that decorate the country house, the rosary and even the bottle of rubbing alcohol, the typical meal of salted cod-fish and tubers, the bloodied cloth, and the cans of beer, transmit at the precise instances in which they are mentioned or made visible, a very subtle power of suggestion which help to create the dimension of truth filled with poetic and tragic feeling that reflects the mood of the characters.)

The strongest image is that of the oxcart itself. In his analysis of the play, Jordan Phillips states:

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<sup>17</sup>María Teresa Babín, "Apuntes sobre La carreta," Asomante 19 (October-December 1953): 69.

The most important symbol is that of the carreta, whose off stage rumbling leads the characters to a point of severe anguish and brings on-stage action to a stand still. The lowly mode of travel points up the level to which their unsuccessful efforts to live on the land have reduced them. The groaning sounds of the carreta are magnified in the heartaches caused by leaving the family home. The good things of that home are perpetuated in the miniature cart which Juanita's friend, Miguel, makes and presents to her in San Juan. And as the original carreta had brought the family from the village to the city, Juanita's decision to accompany her mother back to Puerto Rico is set in the image of the carreta.<sup>18</sup>

At the closing of the play, doña Gabriela asks her daughter Juanita: " You" You too? But you always said that from now on you were gonna drive the oxcart of your life wherever you wanted?" Juanita replies, "For that very reason, Mamá, for that very reason! 'Cause I do drive it wherever I want."<sup>19</sup> Juanita then decides to return to Puerto Rico with her mother to start life over again. The oxcart becomes life itself: the life that transported a poor peasant family away from the country, because the mountains were too stifling, into the slum where the sea also became a stifling force and further into New York where buildings that resemble oceans and mountains kept them isolated-- the isolation of the migrant in a foreign land.<sup>20</sup>

The most notable themes of the play are the salvation of the national soul by adherence to the land, pleading for a return to the "land which gives life"<sup>21</sup> as opposed to the false values of a mechanized

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<sup>18</sup>Jordan Phillips, Contemporary Puerto Rican Drama, p. 95.

<sup>19</sup>Marqués, The Oxcart, p. 154.

<sup>20</sup>Agustín del Saz, Teatro social hispanoamericano (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1967), p. III.

<sup>21</sup>The Oxcart, p. 154.

society, the difficulty of forsaking traditional values, and the condemnation of Puerto Ricans to suffering.<sup>22</sup> This latter theme has become the main target of attack against Marqués' philosophy. His contention of the docility of the Puerto Rican and the simplicity of returning to the land as the solution to all problems has been questioned by Puerto Rican and mainland critics. John Lahr calls The Oxcart "a play which argued astoundingly for submission, rather than resilience and dignity."<sup>23</sup> An analysis of the play by the Center of Puerto Rican Studies, a research branch of the City University of New York, summarizes this critical position:

La carreta is one of the best and most realistic plays of conventional Puerto Rican theatre. It is indisputably the most significant dramatic statement thus far on the experience and impact of the post-war migration. Marqués portrays the voyage "from the Island countryside through the urban slum to the New York ghetto" primarily as the historical reason for the disintegration of the Puerto Rican family and the lamentable cultural disorder and degeneration that accompanies the breakdown of the national ideal. Its denouement, however, a nostalgic return to the farm, is symbolic of its backward perception. The realism of the play is in fact deceptive, since it lacks all historical dimension and offers no real indication of the underlying forces which engendered the massive dislocation and cultural trauma. Ultimately it reflects and accepts the submission of the Puerto Rican nation. The suffering and loss sustained by the Puerto Rican people lacks, in this dramatic portrait, all sense of popular resistance.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Phillips, Contemporary Puerto Rican Drama, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup>John Lahr, Up Against the Fourth Wall, p. 41; also, see Juan Angel Silén, Hacia una visión positiva del puertorriqueño (Río Piedras, P.R.: Edil, 1970).

<sup>24</sup>"The Cultural Expression of Puerto Ricans in New York," p. 128.

Nevertheless, the play continues to attract large audiences who enjoy its melodramatic style.

Desde su estreno y luego en sus reiterativas representaciones hasta el presente, no ha dejado de atraer a un gran número de público.<sup>25</sup>

(Since its opening, and later through its repeated productions up to now, it has always attracted large crowds.)

The play was translated into Czechoslovakian as "Kara" in 1966 and was produced on the same year in the Most Theatre in Prague. A Swedish translation was approved for a future performance by the Arlecchino Teateforlag in Stockholm.<sup>26</sup> The translation used by the PRTT was made in 1964 by Charles Pilditch at the author's request and was published by Scribners in 1969.<sup>27</sup>

In 1958, La carreta became the first work by a Latin American dramatist to be staged at the Teatro Nacional Marfa Guerrero in Madrid,<sup>28</sup> but it was mutilated by censors. René Marqués' reaction to the production was less than enthusiastic:

El teatro Nacional María Guerrero de Madrid estrenó en 1958 mi obra La carreta . . . Asistí al estreno en Madrid y sólo entonces comprendí que la "aprobación" de La carreta por la censura oficial significaba la mutilación despiadada del drama (algo que, de saberlo el autor por anticipado, habría resultado en su rotunda negativa a que se estrenase la obra en España). No sólo

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<sup>25</sup>Victoria Espinosa, "El teatro de René Marqués y la escenificación su obra Los soles truncos," p. 210.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>27</sup>Pilditch, "Introduction" to The Oxcart, p. v.

<sup>28</sup>Espinosa, "El teatro de René Marqués," p. 210.

se mutiló el texto por motivos morales y políticos, sino por otros extra-teatrales . . .<sup>29</sup>

(The National Theatre Maria Guerrero in Madrid opened my play The Oxcart in 1958 . . . I was present at the opening in Madrid and only then did I understand that the "approval" of The Oxcart by official censorship meant the merciless slaughter of the drama (a fact that, if the author had been aware, would have resulted in the cancellation of the performance rights). Not only was the text mutilated for moral and political reasons, but for other reasons that had nothing to do with theatre. . . .)

The cuts included two characters from the second and third acts and an overall shortening of the play to meet Madrid's normal mass transportation schedule.<sup>30</sup>

In 1966, the play was performed in Spanish at Buffalo University in New York. The same year, its English version was produced at the Greenwich Mews Theatre and was well received by U.S. critics:

A Puerto Rican classic. One can see the reasons so many Latin American and North American critics have praised it. The Oxcart has truth behind it . . . with a cast worth watching.<sup>31</sup>

Norman Nadel of the World Journal Tribune praised the narrative quality of the drama:

If René Marqués had been alive in Old Testament times, he would have written Exodus. There is that feeling for the massive, epochal narrative in his drama, The Oxcart (La carreta) which was completed thirteen years ago, and has since been produced widely not only in his native Puerto Rico but also through Central and South America and Spain. . . . Beyond its strength of narration, Marqués' drama is well fortified with psychological insights. We come to understand why the members

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<sup>29</sup> René Marqués, "Nacionalismo vs. Universalismo," Cuadernos Americanos 25 (January-June 1966): 222-223.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Sullivan, "The Oxcart," New York Times, 20 December 1966, p. 58.

of this family behave as they do, and to accept the inevitability of their tragedy.<sup>32</sup>

As for the merits of the New York production, critic Emory Lewis of Cue magazine stated:

The drama is immensely helped by the sensitive, subtle direction of Lloyd Richards, and by the sturdy performances of Raúl Juliá, Lucy Boscana, José Pérez, Carla Pinza, and, most notably, Miriam Colón. The drama says more about the Puerto Ricans in New York than reams of editorials.<sup>33</sup>

The same cast and crew toured the City of New York under the newly established Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre during the summer of 1967. The schedule of the group's first production follows in Table 9.

Table 9. Schedule for The Oxcart, 1967

Location	
<u>Manhattan</u>	
August 7 East Harlem	Amphitheatre in Casita María Carver Houses, 102nd Street between Madison & Park Avenues
August 8 East Harlem	(Press Opening) Maria Carver Houses
August 9 Central Harlem	P.S. 136 Playground St. Nicholas Avenue & West 135th Street
August 10 West Side	103rd Street and Riverside Drive Riverside Park
August 11 Chelsea	Chelsea Park, Playground 28th Street & 9th Avenue

<sup>32</sup>Norman Nadel, "Marques' The Oxcart, Poignant Drama Premieres Off-Broadway," World Journal Tribune, 20 December 1966, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup>Emory Lewis, "The Oxcart," Cue, 31 December 1966, p. 16.

Table 9. Continued

Location	
August 14 Washington Square	Washington Square 5th Ave. & 7th Street
August 15 Lower East Side	Tompkins Square Park Avenue A and E. 10th Street
August 16 Lower East Side	Hamilton Fish Park Houston and Pitt Streets
<u>Bronx</u>	
August 17 Mott Haven	St. Mary's Park Playground East 145th Street and Jackson Avenue
August 18 South Bronx	P.S. 149 Playground Third Avenue and East 144th Street
<u>Brooklyn</u>	
August 22 South Brooklyn	Red Hook Park Stadium, Swight & Richards between Wolcott & Verona Streets
August 23 N. Bedford- Stuyvesant	Tompkins Park, Brooklyn, behind Library Tompkins and Marcy between Lafayette & Green Streets
August 24 Williamsburg	McCarren Park Across Pool on Lorimer and Driggs Streets
August 25 Brownsville	Betsy Head Park Ballfield Dumont & Livonia between Hopkinsons & Strauss Streets
<u>Queens</u>	
August 26 Corona	Linden Park Corona--104th Street and 41st Avenue <sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for The Oxcart, New York, Summer 1967. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

The success of the production and the entire project convinced the task force to double their subsidy the following summer.<sup>35</sup> Another result was the response from an impressive number of individuals and institutions who approached the PRTT for translations and more information about Puerto Rican dramatic literature.<sup>36</sup> Numerous letters such as the following can be found in the PRTT's files:

. . . Youth-In-Action is the major Anti-Poverty Program serving the Bedford-Stuyvesant community in Brooklyn. The target population is estimated at approximately 300,000 people, most of whom are American Negro and Puerto Rican. I am the Coordinator of the Community Action and Development Program whose major long-term goal is effective organization and mobilization of heretofore unaffiliated and unorganized people. Our goal is to reach the point where the poor of this community as in any other community are functioning effectively in analyzing their situation, setting priorities as to what they perceive as their major problems, and then taking the necessary steps to resolve those problems. However, the organization and orientation of a community is a long, time consuming and complex process made up of many factors. It is our contention that one of these factors is the exposure of a community to the fine arts especially work such as "The Oxcart" which, aside from being good theatre, is also meaningful in terms of story line and the situation being dramatized. . .<sup>37</sup>

While The Oxcart was touring New York City, dramatic readings of the play were staged on the West Coast. "En junio de 1967 se produce en lecturas dramatizadas en el Migrant Theatre de Berkeley,

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<sup>35</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Background and Objectives," Breakdown of grants and contributions, 1967-68. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>36</sup>"Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre," p. 4.

<sup>37</sup>Yolanda Sánchez, Coordinator of Community Action and Development Program for Bedford Stuyvesant Youth-in-Action, Inc., letter to Miriam Colón, New York, 27 March 1967. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

California, bajo la dirección de Joanne Syrek, en inglés."<sup>38</sup> (In June 1967, it was produced in dramatic readings at the Migrant Theatre of Berkeley, California, under the direction of Joanne Syrek, in English.)

Numerous productions have been staged and have toured in Puerto Rico since 1967, and two United States film producers were interested in turning it into a feature-length English-language film.<sup>39</sup> Excessive demands from Marqués have, until now, prevented an agreement for the filming of the play. An excerpt from a letter written by Marqués to producer Jules Schwering on August 7, 1967 explains why:

Your concern about Miriam's [Colón] age regarding her role as Juanita in a movie is a little confusing to me . . . Your suggestion of Rita Moreno as the leading role of The Oxcart is still more confusing. Actually the leading role goes to the actress who interpreted doña Gabriela because that is the leading role in my play. Are you suggesting Rita Moreno to play Juanita or doña Gabriela? . . . Originally you suggested Baldwin as a possibility for the screenwriter. I agreed . . . I still insist on holding my right to approve the movie script as the author of the original work, no matter who the scriptwriter might be . . .<sup>40</sup>

In the Spring of 1977 and in order to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the PRTT, La carreta was revived, this time in Spanish and under the direction of Miriam Colón, at the Manhattan Center in New York.

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<sup>38</sup>Expinosa, "El teatro de René Marqués," p. 209.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>René Marqués to Jules Schwerin, 4 August 1967. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

### The 1968 Season

In an article published on July 13, 1968, Show Business praised the contribution of "street theatre" programs which "perhaps more than any single influence," were revitalizing theatre in New York. These programs "(many sponsored by city agencies) are not only providing satisfaction to people in depressed areas but are illustrating the value of theatre to new audiences."<sup>41</sup>

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre offered two productions during the 1968 summer season: Winterset<sup>42</sup> by Maxwell Anderson and La farsa del amor comprado<sup>43</sup> ("The Farce of Purchased Love") by Luis Rafael Sánchez. The sum of \$40,000 was awarded by Mayor Lindsay's Urban Action Task Force through New York City's Parks Department, Cultural Affairs Division for the production of Winterset.<sup>44</sup>

The social content of the play and its location in a dilapidated tenement in New York was easily adaptable to the Puerto Rican experience. Following the theories of Brazilian playwright and theorist Augusto Boal, the PRTT proceeded to "nationalize the classics."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>"Theatre Units Playing Streets Creating New Audiences Here," Show Business, 13 July 1968, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup>Maxwell Anderson, Winterset (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1946).

<sup>43</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, La farsa del amor comprado (Río Piedras, P.R.: Cultural, 1976).

<sup>44</sup>"Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre," p. 5.

<sup>45</sup>Augusto Boal, Teatro del Oprimido (Buenos Aires: La Flor, 1974), p. 200, defines their tactics in "nationalizing the classics": "Un clásico es universal en la medida que sea brasileño. El clásico universal que solo el Old Vic o la Comedie pueden hacer, no existe. Nosotros también somos el universo." ("Classics are universal as they become Brazilian. A universal classic that can only be staged by the Old Vic or the Comedie does not exist. We are also the universe.")

The review of El Diario-La Prensa, the largest-circulation Spanish-language newspaper in the New York Hispanic community reported:

Más de 500 personas presenciaron el desarrollo de la situación que plantea el autor, la cual ha sido adaptada con hechos de vigencia--a la época actual en cuanto a las características de diversos personajes, como en el caso del radical de aquella etapa, que en la era de las melenas abrazadas a las barbas se transforma en un nacionalista de voz y voto.<sup>46</sup>

(Over 500 people watched the development of the events exposed by the dramatist, events that were adapted--with relevant facts--in order to update the traits of the characters, as in the case of the radical of that era, who in this age of long hair and beards, becomes a member of the Nationalist Party.)

In an interview for the New York Times, Miriam Colón justified the selection of the piece on the basis of its theme, saying she had selected Winterset for presentation because of its stand for justice and integrity:

Its situations are pertinent today. He was a boy whose father was unjustly accused; it has organized crime and it's about people whose values are distorted. The people in it are looking for truth and an answer.<sup>47</sup>

However, the play's ending has the same romantic failings as the ending of The Oxcart. Man is destroyed by reality and that makes his tragedy noble. John Gassner questioned the validity of the play's conclusion:

As a discharge for the problems of social justice raised by Judge Gaunt's own words, the third-act conclusion of Winterset is patently inadequate; in fact, it is no discharge at all. Nor does the

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<sup>46</sup> Alberto Alonso, "Teatro Rodante Puertorriqueño Actualiza la Obra Winterset" (New York) El Diario-La Prensa, 24 July 1968, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Luis Calta, "Puerto Rican Group Gives Winterset," New York Times, 23 July 1968, p. 28.

pseudo-rabbinical peroration make any sense as a commentary on that problem since it is pure rubbish for Esdras to say that Mio and Miriamne died unsubmitting when they actually went to their slaughter like lambs.<sup>48</sup>

The English-speaking tour of Winterset included twenty-five locations. A less ambitious tour of the Puerto Rican play La farsa del amor compradito, ("The Farce of Purchased Love") performed in Spanish, covered seven locations. Five thousand dollars for La farsa were provided by the New York State Council on the Arts.<sup>49</sup> The production was geared towards children, as part of the first of the Children's Theatre Projects of the PRTT. Matinee performances were scheduled to make use of the facilities and talent pool from Winterset:

. . . the main physical and artistic facilities (cast bilingual) of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre will be used for this purpose, thus making unnecessary the rental of additional equipment. . . .<sup>50</sup>

This pattern of fewer performances in Spanish, which was followed through three summer seasons, and the use of the same talent involved in the longer-running show indicate that funding may have been more readily available for plays that would appeal to the larger English-speaking segment of the New York population rather than just to the Hispanic community.

La farsa follows the pattern of Federico García Lorca's "puppet-like" farces. It concerns the nature of theatre and through

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<sup>48</sup> John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Dover, 1954), p. 682.

<sup>49</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "The Children's Theatre Project," Report and Budget, New York, July 1968, p. 2. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 1

commedia dell'arte techniques and paints a colorful picture containing social and literary criticism.<sup>51</sup> The basic plot involves a love triangle and exposes Arlequín as a villain and General Cataplúm as the deceived lover. Colombina, the girl, lives in a brothel with her Aunt Quintina and Madame. Her wedding with the General is prevented by war. In order to marry Colombina, Arlequín re-writes a letter from the General and announces his death in battle. Arlequín and Colombina marry. The truth is discovered and Colombina stops the action of the play to give it a happy ending, while Pirulí Pulchineló, the dramatist, is angered by the fact that the show has gotten out of hand and begs the audience to return the next day in order to hear his ending.<sup>52</sup> Contrary to the tradition of Lorca, the young girl wants to marry the old man instead of the young suitor.

The production had extras for children:

Children in our most deprived areas, accompanied by their parents, will attend the previously selected sites in the four Boroughs, and will enjoy an afternoon of Commedia dell-Arte style theatre, music, and a gay profusion of hats, balloons, surprises, flowers and lollipops.<sup>53</sup>

The children's theatre project staged Los títeres de Cachiporra ("Punching Puppets") in 1969 and El maleficio de la mariposa (The Butterfly's Evil Spell) in 1970 (both written by Federico García Lorca) following the pattern established by La farsa del amor comprado.

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<sup>51</sup>Angelina Morfi, "El teatro de Luis Rafael Sánchez," Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña 52 (July-September, 1971): 41

<sup>52</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, La farsa del amor comprado, p. 83.

<sup>53</sup>"The Children's Theatre Project," p. 1

1968 was a very rewarding and busy year for the company. In January, Mayor John Lindsay invited Miriam Colón to become a member of the New York City Cultural Council.<sup>54</sup> Also, during January, Ms. Colón went to Washington, D.C. to propose federal funding of the PRTT.<sup>55</sup>

Vice-President Hubert Humphrey answered:

I have read with deep interest the presentation you made for traveling theatre, representing the varied cultural interests of our fellow citizens. I do believe strongly in this type of program, not only on a summer but, hopefully, on a year-round basis. The financial situation remains, unfortunately, very difficult; but I am in contact with a wide number of private organizations and will be cooperating closely with Mayors and Community Action Agencies across the country.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to production and fund-raising activities, the PRTT engaged, in the compilation of data about minority employment in the casts and crews of Broadway, repertory theatre, and off-Broadway productions during the 1967-1968 season. Its purpose was to stress the need for hiring minorities. The findings were presented at hearings on employment patterns, policies, and practices in theatre conducted by the New York State Division of Human Rights.<sup>57</sup> The results showed that off-Broadway productions, with casts totaling one hundred and thirteen, hired four blacks, one Oriental and no Spanish-

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<sup>54</sup>John V. Lindsay, Mayor of the City of New York, letter to Miriam Colón, New York, 18 January 1968. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>55</sup>"Anatomy of a Summer Project," p. 9.

<sup>56</sup>Hubert H. Humphrey, Vice President of the United States, letter to Miriam Colón, New York, 13 February 1968. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>57</sup>"Proposal for the Funding of a Puerto Rican Theatre," Charts A-D, pp. 30-33.

speaking actors during that season. Neither the Phoenix Theatre nor Lincoln Center theatres had Spanish-speaking members in their casts during the same period of time. A breakdown of the composition of Broadway casts follows in Table 10.<sup>58</sup>

Table 10. Minority Participation in the Casts of Broadway Productions-1967-1968 [Prepared by the PRTT]

	Black	Oriental	Spanish-speaking	Total [White plus ethnic]
<u>Cabaret</u>	0	0	0	37
<u>Cactus Flower</u>	0	0	0	10
<u>Don't Drink the Water</u>	0	0	0	13
<u>Fiddler on the Roof</u>	0	0	0	43
<u>Golden Rainbow</u>	1	0	0	52
<u>Hello, Dolly!</u>	45	0	0	46
<u>Now, Now, Dow Jones</u>	1	0	3	58
<u>I do! I do!</u>	0	0	0	2
<u>I Never Sang for my Father</u>	1	0	0	11
<u>Joe Egg</u>	0	0	0	6
<u>Mame</u>	0	1	0	57
<u>Man of La Mancha</u>	0	0	3	26
<u>Plaza Suite</u>	0	0	1	5
<u>Portrait of a Queen</u>	0	0	0	19
<u>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern</u>	0	0	0	32
<u>Spofford</u>	0	0	0	17
<u>The Happy Time</u>	2	0	0	46
<u>The Price</u>	0	0	0	4
<u>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</u>	0	0	0	11
<u>There's a Girl in my Soup</u>	0	0	0	7
<u>Weekend</u>	7	0	0	16
<u>You Know I Can't Hear You</u>	0	0	0	5
Added Total	57*	1	7	523
Percentage	10.9	.2	1.3	100

\*Without Hello, Dolly!, the figures are: Total - 477 (100%) and Black - 12 (2.5%)

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 30, chart A.

The production staffs of the Phoenix and Lincoln Center included twelve Spanish-speaking persons out of fifty-eight and one out of sixteen, respectively.<sup>59</sup> A crusade was undertaken by the PRTT to introduce producers to the Hispanic talent available in New York.

### The 1969 Season and Crossroads<sup>60</sup>

The influence of theatre in the streets on neighborhoods and ethnic locations has so often been demonstrated that there remains no reason further to salute it and its needful goals.<sup>61</sup>

With this statement, Whitney Bolton of the New York Morning Telegraph began his article, "Puerto Rican Theatre Ready to Travel" on the 1969 summer season. The company presented Encrucijada ("Crossroads") by Manuel Méndez Ballester and Los títeres de Cachiporra<sup>62</sup> ("Punching Puppets") by Federico García Lorca in the streets and parks of New York City.

Encrucijada explores the disintegration of the Puerto Rican culture in the City of New York. Written in 1968, the three act, naturalistic play<sup>63</sup> has not lost its relevance. It delves into the

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<sup>59</sup>Information gathered through interviews of managers and stage managers of Broadway, off-Broadway, and Repertory theatres, New York, 1967-68, Ibid., pp. 20-33.

<sup>60</sup>Manuel Méndez Ballester, Encrucijada in Primer Festival del Teatro Puertorriqueño, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, Vol. I (Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1959); and Crossroads, trans. Robert Boss (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1968). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>61</sup>Whitney Boulton, "Puerto Rican Theatre Ready to Travel" (New York) Morning Telegraph, 23 July 1969, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup>Federico García Lorca, Los títeres de Cachiporra in Obras Completas, 14th ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1968), pp. 723-62.

<sup>63</sup>Frank N. Dauster, Historia del Teatro Hispanoamericano, Siglos XIX y XX (Mexico City: Ediciones de Andrea, 1973), p. 76.

lives of a middle-aged Puerto Rican couple living in New York and their three children, Felipe, Mario and Marta. Don Alfonso, who in 1898 had served on the United States' side during the Spanish-American war, has wasted the family's wealth. Felipe, a veteran, helps to support the family by working in a filling station and by selling drugs on the side. Irma's love sets him straight. Mario, the younger son, is a militant Nationalist and is always in serious conflict with his father. Mario is jailed for his activities. While serving seven years in prison, his son has grown up and hardly knows any Spanish, representing the loss of Puerto Rican culture. The ultimate dissolution of the family sends the married children to Chicago, the Bronx and Miami, while the elderly couple contemplates the possibility of returning to Puerto Rico.

A few adjustments were made in the Robert Boss English translation to bring the text up-to-date and to solve difficulties created by the fact that the drama deals with the characters' knowledge of both languages. In a letter by Miriam Colón to the author, she explains the nature of the changes in the translation:

El personaje de Luis tendría que ajustarse de alguna manera pues como todos hablan inglés, no se podría decir que no lo entienden. El personaje es tan ligero que tal vez podría hablar en español malo o eliminarse toda alusión al hecho de que mezcla dos idiomas . . . Lo que de veras necesita atención son otros detalles más serios como el cambiar ciertas fechas, especialmente al final del primer acto, donde el extraño dice que va para Iwo Jima, donde tiene un hermano, etc. . . .<sup>64</sup>

(Luis' character will have to be adapted; since everybody speaks English, there is no reason to say that they do

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<sup>64</sup>Miriam Colón, letter to Manuel Méndez Ballester, 18 June 1968. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

not understand him. The character is so light that maybe he could speak bad Spanish or all allusions about the fact that he speaks combining both languages could be eliminated. What really needs attention are other details which are more serious, like changing dates, especially at the end of Act One when the Stranger says that he is leaving for Iwo Jima, where he has a brother, etc.)

Due to the dual language problems, the play was less powerful in translation. Its main theme, the assimilation of the Puerto Rican to the United States culture, is based on the amount of English uttered by the Puerto Rican characters. The English translation omitted the Epilogue where Mario's seven-year-old son, Tony, speaks better English than Spanish, thereby demonstrating the reality of language assimilation. This duality could not be achieved in an English-speaking version. Nevertheless, the disintegration of the national identity comes across in spite of these adjustments, as Jordan Phillips noted.

A natural result of such an environment is the loss of those honorable qualities which the unassailed culture of the characters might have retained . . . close family ties, pride in their nationality, existence within the law and without violence. The family of Alfonso and Patricia is an example of Puerto Ricans inevitable loss of identity in New York.<sup>65</sup>

The struggle between both cultures is the main conflict of the drama. In the prologue of the volume of plays produced during the first season of the Puerto Rican Theater Festival on the island (1958) which opened with Encrucijada, dramatist Francisco Arriví discussed the play's importance:

Encrucijada nos desnuda los conflictos de adaptación de una familia puertorriqueña emigrada a la vorágine urbana de Nueva York. La fuerzas disolventes de la ciudad nos subrayan por contraste los valores morales que apoyan la vida isleña. El drama surge de la resistencia de estos valores a las presiones invencibles del monstruo

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<sup>65</sup>Phillips, Contemporary Puerto Rican Theatre, p. 119.

erizado de rascacielos.<sup>66</sup>

(Crossroads strips before our eyes the adaptation conflicts experienced by a Puerto Rican family who has emigrated to the urban whirlpool of New York. The dissolving forces of the city underline by contrast the moral values that constitute life on the island. The drama emerges from the resistance of these values when faced by the unsurmountable pressures of the City.)

During the summer of 1969, the PRTT received \$40,000 to produce the play from New York's Urban Task Force.<sup>67</sup> The tour included twenty-five locations and concluded at Central Park at the Puerto Rican Folklore Festival.<sup>68</sup> A New York Times article entitled "Enthusiasm Fuels PRTT" stated:

The performance by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company, Inc. which opened its third season this week as a bilingual outdoor theatre troupe, possessed enough undampened zeal to justify a parade of !!! marks. The setting is a third floor walk-up apartment in a New York City tenement, which, in Anibal Otero's scenic design, is authentic down to the last faded streak of grease on the walls. If it were even a shade more realistic, the actors would have to pay rent for using it. The performance achieves an equal authenticity . . . The action involves twelve actors, of whom six are Puerto Ricans, and the others Italian, Costa Rican, Negro, Irish, and Russian.<sup>69</sup>

Among them were Miriam Goldina, translator of Stanislavski Directs, Dermot McNamara, co-founder of The Irish Players of New York, Pat

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<sup>66</sup>Francisco Arriví, "Introducción" to Primer Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1959), p. 14.

<sup>67</sup>"Puerto Rican Troups Given Grant of \$40,000," New York Times, 24 July 1969, p. 42.

<sup>68</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for Crossroads, New York, Summer 1969. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre,

<sup>69</sup>McCandid Phillips, "Enthusiasm Fuels Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre," New York Times, 7 August 1969, p. 28.

McNamara, and Puerto Rican actors Walter Rodríguez and María Soledad Romero.<sup>70</sup>

Segments of the play were broadcast on the NBC "Today" Show. In a letter from "Today" producer, Stuart Schelberg, to the company, he states, "We are happy to present the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre on our program. . . . We in turn want to thank you and your group for their concern and cooperation in making the segment such a success."<sup>71</sup> German Television expressed a desire to include a filmed segment of the play in one of their documentaries.

We wish to know if we could film a small portion of "Crossroads," the play about the struggles of a Puerto Rican family. This would be included in our color documentary television program called "New York, New York" which will be shown to five million viewers in Germany and Switzerland.<sup>72</sup>

Requests from Scholastic Magazines, Inc., and from private individuals to publish Crossroads were also received.<sup>73</sup>

The run of Crossroads coincided with the run of Garcia Lorca's Los titeres de Cachiporra ("Punching Puppets"). Written in 1930, the play deals with the romantic pursuit by three lovers of their lady Rosita. Designed for a puppet stage, it is written in a poetic

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<sup>70</sup>Program Notes for Crossroads.

<sup>71</sup>Stuart Schelberg, Producer of NBC's "Today" show, letter to the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 16 September 1969. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>72</sup>Patricia Naggin, Producer for German Television, Channel 1, Hamburg Germany, letter to New York City Parks Administration, 5 August 1969. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>73</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, correspondence files for production of Crossroads, New York, Summer 1969.

style and contains many techniques of slapstick humor. The PRTT used live actors for their production. Lorca's play received \$8,500 from the New York State Council on the Arts.<sup>74</sup> It toured through eight locations and was performed in Spanish.

In the September 28 issue of the New York Sunday News, a photographic display of the 1969 PRTT's summer season was followed by this caption:

All the world's a stage, including the platform of a flatbed truck. Using the latter for a stage, the PRTT put on thirty-two performances this past summer throughout the five boroughs. Some 20,000 saw [the] shows.<sup>75</sup>

On November 8th, Crossroads closed the PRTT's 1969 season as part of "A Puerto Rican Festival" at Town Hall--New York University's Midtown Cultural Arts Center.<sup>76</sup>

During 1969 the PRTT also engaged in cosponsoring a playwrighting contest. Vignettes or plays geared toward outdoor production with maximum casts of ten were to be submitted to the Department of Cultural Affairs of the Administration of Parks. Judges included James Earl Jones, Jose Ferrer, Piri Thomas, author of Down These Mean Streets, Miriam Colón and Vinnette Justin Carroll, director of the Ghetto Arts Program, New York State Council on the Arts.<sup>77</sup> The competition was

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<sup>74</sup>"Puerto Rican Troupe Given Grant of \$40,000," p. 42.

<sup>75</sup>"All the World's a Stage," New York Sunday News, 28 September 1969, p. 62.

<sup>76</sup>"1969-1970, Saturday Afternoon Showtime at Town Hall," New York University's Mid-town Cultural Center, Program of Events, New York, 8 November 1969. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>77</sup>"Playwright Talent Competition," Press release by the New York City Parks Administration, New York, 25 April 1969. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

designed to discover and encourage new playwrights in the city. The winning plays would be considered for future production by the PRTT.

### The 1970 Season

In 1970, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre began its fourth season with The Golden Streets,<sup>78</sup> Piri Thomas' first full-length play. The play deals with a drug addict and the effects of his habit on the members of his family. Raúl, a rehabilitated drug-addict, tries in vain to prevent his brother, Luis, from falling into the habit. Luis dies of an overdose while his father vows to continue struggling for a better life for the rest of the family in New York. Mr. Thomas, born of Puerto Rican parents in the New York barrio, had experienced the addict's life (drugs, crime, prison) and in his well-known novel, Down These Mean Streets, started a crusade for drug rehabilitation.<sup>79</sup>

The impact of the play on its audiences was recorded by journalist Norman Nadel, a Scripps-Howards staff writer:

"Mátalo, mátalo." Kill him! Kill him! The five middle aged women, seated together in a row, were livid. A few hours earlier they'd been amiable housewives, office workers, clerks, far from murderous thoughts. Now like an unrehearsed Greek-chorus, they were urging the petite Puerto Rican girl on the stage to destroy the pusher who was trying to get her ex-junkie boyfriend back on the stuff. And she was doing her best to kill him. She kicked, punched and clawed in the last extremity of anguish--an anguish shared and understood by all but the small children in an audience that knew the narcotics scene first-hand.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Piri Thomas, The Golden Streets (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1970). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>79</sup>Norman Nadel, "The New York Scene," San Juan Star, 23 May 1971, p. 12.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

The explanation for the spontaneous outburst of the women was given by Carol Rose of the Chelsea-Clinton News when describing the same incident:

Hunts Point is a community with a great drug problem, with precisely the real-life drama depicted in the play. Many of the people in the ghetto audiences have never before seen live theatre. Their reactions are frequently as open and unguarded as they were at Hunts Point.<sup>81</sup>

When asked about her response to such active and vocal audiences, Ms. Colón replied: "It's better than the sophisticated audiences from uptown, who just sit so quietly that we don't know if we're reaching them. But, an audience like this, we're sure they're listening."<sup>82</sup>

The Golden Streets ran simultaneously with the third Spanish-language children's production, El maleficio de la mariposa<sup>83</sup> (The Butterfly's Evil Spell), which was the second of Lorca's plays to be produced by the group; another colorful and poetic farce about insects and love. The two plays totaled twenty-six performances. The group received \$44,330 in grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Parks Department and Mayor Lindsay's Urban Task Force. The grant money was less than the budgets of the two previous seasons. A lack of funds from these institutions was responsible for the financial difficulties and the limited run of the 1970 season.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Carol Rose, "The Ghettos are not Really Their Home," Chelsea Clinton News, 15 April 1971, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup>Norman Nadel, "The New York Scene," p. 12.

<sup>83</sup>Federico García Lorca, El maleficio de la mariposa in Obras Completas, pp. 669-721.

<sup>84</sup>Rudy García, "Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Starting 4th Season," New York Daily News, 9 August 1970, p. 21.

A \$50,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts made possible a revival of The Golden Streets during the spring of 1971. It was the first time the group had toured indoors. The project included forty-five locations.<sup>85</sup> The summer project ahead was to be the most ambitious the Company had undertaken during its first five years of touring.

The 1971 Season and A Dramatized Anthology  
of Puerto Rican Short Stories<sup>86</sup>

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre's fifth summer season began with \$74,606 in grants from City, State, Federal, and private sources. Among the new donors were: the New York Foundation, \$5,000; the Vincent Astor Foundation, \$15,000; the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, \$10,000; the National Endowment for the Arts, \$10,000; and the Rockefeller Foundation, \$15,000.<sup>87</sup> The total amount allocated for the summer season, plus the \$50,000 from the State Council on the Arts for the spring tour added up to more than five times the 1967 (\$23,000) budget for The Oxcart. (For a comparison between the 1967 and the 1971 budget see Appendices B and C.)

Ten Puerto Rican short stories were chosen for production. Following the saga of The Oxcart--from the country to the slum to the metropolis--the stories offered a panorama of the Puerto Rican experience, both on the island and in New York. Miriam Colón was responsible

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<sup>85</sup>Nadel, "The New York Scene," p. 12.

<sup>86</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Unpublished scripts of adapted and translated short stories for production of A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories, New York, Summer 1971. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>87</sup>"Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Sets 5th Season," New York Times, 9 July 1971, p. 23.

for the staged adaptations, while Dr. Carlos Hortas of the Spanish Department of Yale University did the English translations.

The potpourri of stories started with Compadre Baltasar's Feast, a late nineteenth-century short story written by Matías González García about a promised feast, the expectation of the guests and the realization that once at the right location there was nothing to eat. The story is rich in visual and aromatic images and in a picaresque fashion portrays the simple and unsophisticated lives of the jíbaro (Puerto Rican peasant).

The Ladies' Man by María Cadilla de Martínez furthers the peasant theme in Puerto Rico. An intruder from the lowlands comes to a small town in the mountains to flirt with a peasant's wife. The couple tricks the suitor and he receives a beating from the jealous husband. Having learned his lesson the "Ladies' Man," he runs back to the lowlands vowing never to return.

Pacholí ("Patchouli") by Enrique Laguerre takes place in a little village where two old friends meet after years of separation. The dreams of happiness have disappeared. After a few moments of reminiscing, Pablo (Pacholí), who is dying of tuberculosis after aging rapidly from years of work in the cane fields says to his friend, the Teacher, "At least you are happy." And the Teacher replies, "Don't believe it. I am only a shadow. In this life of useless appearances we don't really live, others shape life for us, a cruel, counterfeit life."<sup>88</sup> The story ends with the entrance of Margarita, with whom

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<sup>88</sup> Enrique Laguerre, "Pacholí", adapted and trans. by Miriam Colón and Carlos Hortas (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1971), pp. 5-6. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

both friends were in love; they stare at her and she stares back without recognizing them. The Teacher concludes: "In the past we three were the happiest creatures in the world. Today we no longer know each other. Today, praise the Lord, each one of us opened himself before the others like a sewer of unknown depths."<sup>89</sup> The poetry and the sadness conveyed by this short story reflects the tragic sense of some of the characters of Puerto Rican literature. Don Chago, the old man in The Oxcart, expresses the same feelings when faced by the passage of time:

Those were good times, my boy. There were less people, it's true, but they were better. Life was long and nobody was in a hurry. . . . Nowadays there's not enough room for everybody, and there's no room for pride, and there's no place for dignity.<sup>90</sup>

Pacholí hits the audience with the crushing tragedy of reality, where dreams do not come true.

The next story is Black Sun by novelist Emilio Díaz Valcárcel. Its setting is a shack in the Puerto Rican black community of Loíza Aldea. A village drummer's obsession for an instrument to play makes him attack a small sleeping child in order to create new sounds and rhythms. The atmospheric elements help to motivate his frenzy. The townspeople attack the drummer with "rhythmic precision" until he collapses and only "The sound of the rain persists."<sup>91</sup> The story is

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>René Marqués, The Oxcart, p. 34.

<sup>91</sup>Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, Black Sun, adapted and trans. by Miriam Colón and Carlos Hortas (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 1971), p. 11. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

rich in aural and visual images underscoring the development of the action of the main character, Bernabé.

The setting for the next story is a slum; no longer do the forces of nature protect or motivate the characters. The story is Interlude by José Vivas Maldonado. The environment surrounding the main character, Luis, is "a garbage dump in a swampy section of a slum."<sup>92</sup> An old man rummages through the garbage at a dump where he is caretaker. Sometimes he is indistinguishable from the rubble. A child breaks the monotony. The man tells him stories. After several joyous encounters, the child is killed by a passing car as he returns to his wonderful storyteller. Impotent, the man returns to his garbage and becomes indistinguishable again. Interlude explores a moment of beauty in an otherwise humdrum existence. Unlike Faust, who was able to stop life at the moment of contentment, the caretaker enjoys some fleeting happiness and then is crushed again by reality. Once more, the machine destroys the beauty of the interlude. Vivas Maldonado goes into great detail in order to create the bleak environment where, for an instant, history is recreated for the sake of "a calm little boy . . . with big, peaceful eyes."<sup>93</sup>

The last story about life in the island is El Josco by Abelardo Díaz Alfaro. El Josco, a proud Puerto Rican bull is replaced by a new stud--a white bull from the United States. After a

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<sup>92</sup> José Vivas Maldonado, Interlude, adapted and trans. by Miriam Colón and Carlos Hortas (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 1971), p. 7. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

tense duel between the two animals, the white bull retreats, but el Josco realizes that although he was won the round, he has lost his supremacy over the land. After searching for Josco all over the farm, his trainer finds him dead and says, "My poor Josco, he broke his neck out of rage. Don Leopo, I told you. That bull was a stud by birth, he wasn't meant for the yoke."<sup>94</sup> In allegorical fashion, Díaz Alfaro captures the struggle of the Puerto Rican to remain independent and free, choosing death with dignity instead of a life of submission. His richest images emerge from the vivid description of the encounter between the two beasts.

The action of the next story moves to the mainland. Kipling and I by Jesús Colón is told by a fifty-seven year old man as he remembers his adoration for the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling, when he was seventeen. After months of searching for a job, guided only by the words of the poem which he kept beautifully framed in his small room, the youth returns home on a freezing day to find no kindling wood to make a fire:

I was hungry. My room was dark and cold. I wanted to warm my numb body. I lit a match and began looking for some scraps of wood and a piece of paper to start the fire. I searched all over the floor. No wood, no paper. As I stood up, the glimmering flicker of the dying match was reflected in the glass surface of the framed poem.<sup>95</sup>

After reflecting for a minute, he broke the frame and lit the paper to make the fire. "I watched how the lines of the poem withdrew into

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<sup>94</sup>Abelardo Díaz Alfaro, El Josco, adapted and trans. by Miriam Colón and Carlos Hortas (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 1971), p. 7. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>95</sup>Jesús Colón, Kipling and I, adapted by Miriam Colón (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 1971), p. 6. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

ashes inside the small stove"<sup>96</sup> is the ending line of Kipling and I, the only short story of the ten originally written in English.

Another story of pathos follows. The Innocent by Pedro Juan Soto becomes less poetic and more realistic and crude in its portrayal of a retarded man and his family. Hortensia, the daughter, has decided to "institutionalize" her brother because in New York he has become a nuisance. She says to her mother:

In Puerto Rico it was different. People knew him. He could go outside because people knew him. But in New York people don't bother; they don't care about meeting their neighbors. Life is tough. I sew year in and year out and I'm still not married. But that's not the real reason. They watch him better over there.<sup>97</sup>

The mother resists but to no avail; Hortensia takes Pipe away and as she walks out with him into the bright noon sun "she wished for hurricanes and eclipses and snowstorms."<sup>98</sup> The story uses the stream of consciousness technique to let the audience know the clear inner thoughts of Pipe, which he cannot articulate, that express his longing for nature and freedom.

The Lead Box That Could Not Be Opened, like El Josco, deals with the theme of the social and political ties between the island and the United States. It is a story about a family that receives the coffin of their son who has been killed during the Korean war. Written in a quasi-humorous form, it describes the efforts of the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Pedro Juan Soto, The Innocent, adapted and trans. by Miriam Colón and Carlos Hortas (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 1971), p. 6. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

mother to see the corpse of her son. But, the lead box could not be opened. The vigil and burial took place and the story teller explained the reason why he remembered the events: that day he had received his own draft notice. Following the tradition of adapting the materials, the PRTT changed the setting of the original story from San Juan to New York and updated the events to the Vietnam War era. As described by New York Times critic Howard Thomson, "The box is the coffin of a dead Army veteran of Viet Nam, returned to his mother in a tenement."<sup>99</sup>

The program ends with a vigorous scene with pickets protesting yellow journalism. The story is The Protest by Luis Quero Chiesa. Doctor Max Medina is appalled by the way his fellow Puerto Ricans were shouting and carrying on in the picket line. "He had never protested," but as he mingles with the crowd, "shadowy figures from his past sprouted from his memory."<sup>100</sup> A little girl clutching a flag makes him react. He picks up an abandoned picket and "kept walking towards the fatherland."<sup>101</sup>

The ten stories, each in a different way, depict traits of the Puerto Rican character and experience. The peasant, the poor, the middle class and the outcasts are handled with heroic romanticism. The

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<sup>99</sup>Howard Thompson, "Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Shows Vigor and Purpose," New York Times, 11 August 1971, p. 43.

<sup>100</sup>Luis Quero Chiesa, The Protest, adapted and trans. by Miriam Colón and Carlos Hortas (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, New York, 1971), p. 7. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

moods evolve from the comic to the somber to the pathetic and even to the ridiculous, ending with dignity and hope.

The staged adaptations used the figure of the Narrator as the connecting thread for the stories. Action and narration were alternated in a story-telling, presentational style in order to produce a unified experience. The New York Times review stated that "fortunately, in the case of each playlet, a sideline narrator, moving center, clearly conveyed the author's flavor and content."<sup>102</sup>

Pablo Cabrera was invited to direct the Anthology. Cabrera, who at the time was a television director the the Educational Station of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, had studied theatre and film in Italy. His television and theatre directing credits included opera, the Casals Festival, National Educational Television's "Realidades" and the premiere of The Sound of Music in Madrid, as well as numerous plays by European, United States, Latin American, and Puerto Rican authors. He is presently the Chairperson of the Puerto Rican Studies Department at Hostos College, City University of New York and since 1971 has been associated with the PRTT in the capacities of artistic director, advisor and instructor in the group's actor training program.<sup>103</sup> Cabrera assembled a cast of twenty-eight which included

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<sup>102</sup>Howard Thompson, "Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Shows Vigor and Purpose," p. 43.

<sup>103</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories, New York, Summer 1971. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

"such excellent actors as Manu Tupou, Bette Miller, Héctor Elías, and James Victor [who] proceeded to mesmerize the audience. . . ." <sup>104</sup> Tupou had recently been in the Broadway production of Indians, Bette Miller had completed a national tour in The Price, and black actor Don Blakely had acted in The Great White Hope. The Puerto Rican contingent included Iris Martínez, Gilda Orlandi and Héctor Elías, as well as five small children. <sup>105</sup>

The New York Times review, entitled "Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Shows Vigor and Purpose," praised the production, acclaiming "robust playing," "keen direction," and a "strong and gifted company." <sup>106</sup> The set, designed by Peter Harvey, was skeletal. A multileveled set of bleacher ramps at the rear of the stage simulated everything from the heights of the mountains to a New York tenement.

The staging was done in a "stylized, modified 'story telling' manner" <sup>107</sup> with the use of mime for scenes such as the Compadre Baltasar's horse back ride and ballet-like choreography for El Josco. "El Josco, Aberlardo Díaz Alfaro's richly worded story symbolizing a Puerto Rico menaced from without, was exotically highlighted by two young men as bulls warring in dance pantomime." <sup>108</sup> A voice-over technique was used for the inner monologue of The Innocent and still

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<sup>104</sup> Marilyn Stasio, Cue, 11 September 1971, p. 12.

<sup>105</sup> Program Notes for A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories.

<sup>106</sup> Howard Thompson, "Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Shows Vigor and Purpose," p. 43.

<sup>107</sup> Marilyn Stasio, p. 12.

<sup>108</sup> Thompson, p. 43.

life was employed for the crowd scene in The Protest where the Doctor examined the faces of the group.<sup>109</sup>

Audiences were occasionally active.

Once during this play [The Protest]--when the police confront the demonstrators--a woman jumped up from the audience and ran onto the stage. "Don't you tell us to get out," she raged at the actor playing a cop. "We belong here and we're staying." The cast improvised with her and when the show finished, she just wandered off. The experience was so real to her, I don't think she ever knew she'd ever been on a stage.<sup>110</sup>

Not all audience participation was harmless. "Some neighborhoods have so much despair, nobody can sit still. They throw bottles, they heckle."<sup>111</sup> A record of disruptive incidents and copies of letters to the authorities are kept in the PRTT's files. The following is an excerpt of a letter sent to Mr. Tiley, the representative of the Cultural Affairs Division of the Parks Administration:

On the night of Friday, September 3, 1971 an actor from the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Mr. Don Hinde, was hit by a stone during a performance. He bled profusely and had to be taken to an emergency clinic in the vicinity. We were playing in Crotona Park, Boston Road, at Prospect Avenue, Morrisania, in the Bronx.

This particular area was imposed on us by the Cultural Affairs Division of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration, which in our contact, you represent. I am somewhat disturbed because several times, during the scheduling of shows in the different areas our community coordinator Mr. Allen Davis, had encountered a reluctance on the side of the Parks Department to listen to our arguments in favor or against a particular location

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<sup>109</sup> Directors notes in script of A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories.

<sup>110</sup> Patricia Bosworth, "Look, Let's Have Some Justice Around Here," New York Times, 12 September 1971, p. D5.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

based on our previous contact with such dangerous areas.

Several times during our tour in previous years and also this season we have encountered episodes of rowdiness and chaos in the communities we have visited. We are familiar with these moods, but nothing, absolutely nothing compares with the destructiveness and sheer vandalism that we encountered in this Morrisania area.

It is our habit to contact the Police precincts during our run and we take all necessary measures to have, not only the Police, but also representatives of the community there. Two members of our company work full-time on that. On the night of Friday the 3rd, not only did the community people (Morrisania Community Corporation Council; 292-9600, Ex. 49) fail to show up, the<sup>112</sup> Police precinct also failed to send any help. . . .

Even with these incidents, the Company staged about thirty-five performances of the Anthology which brought the first five-year period of the PRTT to an end. During this period the performances staged by the company made use of a variety of acting and production styles, ranging from poetic realism in The Oxcart and Winterset to naturalism in Crossroads and The Golden Streets to slapstick farce in the plays of Luis Rafael Sánchez and Federico García Lorca and finally to presentational story-telling techniques of high stylized quality in the Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories. Economically, the operation grew from a budget of \$23,000 in 1967 to \$123,000 in 1971, and the summer venture was becoming a year round traveling project. But the group still required a permanent location from which they could better coordinate their operation. In the 1971 report, they stressed the need for a rehearsal space and for an actor training unit:

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<sup>112</sup>Miriam Colón, letter to Mr. Tiley, Cultural Affairs Division, New York City Parks Administration, 4 September 1971. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, though highly regarded as a community-oriented professional theatre company, has operated as a nomadic group since 1967, for it is a homeless organization. Though it has operated under a mobile roof during the past four summers (thanks to the generosity of the Urban Action Task Force, the assistance of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration, the New York State Council on the Arts, and lately, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund), during the rest of the year it depends on the generosity of strangers, meeting in livingrooms and in churches in Harlem, the Lower East Side, and the Bronx. The group does not have a home, a room, or even a basement in which to rehearse, explore new materials, train younger people, or prepare the launching of new programs. . . .

The second goal for 1971 is the establishment of a Training Unit for youngsters who will attend classes after school hours and on Saturdays. Among our objectives are the sharing with them our knowledge of the craft, and to expose them to teachers, performances, technicians, etc., who will train them and guide them in the exploration of the theatre as an avenue for expression and as possible future vocation. . . .<sup>113</sup>

Both the acquisition of a "home" and the implementation of a training unit were realized in 1972, the first year of their second five-year period of operation. These aspects and the plays produced from 1972 to 1976 will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>113</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Proposal: Free Presentations, A Tour Through New York's Less Affluent Communities, Including a Training Unit," Proposal for funding presented to the New York City Parks Administration, New York, 1971, pp. 1-2. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SECOND FIVE YEARS (1972-1976)

The 1972-1976 period was one of intensified activity for the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. The long sought "Experimental Laboratory" and "Training Unit" became realities. The group's 1972 report states:

During 1972 the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre was able to inaugurate a Training Unit and Experimental Laboratory in the Borough of Manhattan in New York City. This was possible thanks to a grant from the Expansion Arts program of the National Endowment for the Arts. The creation of an Experimental Laboratory and of the Training Unit came to fill a much needed element in our operation and in our growth. It has been our hope to make the transition from being not only a bilingual performing group but also [to being] an institution where we could train and experiment and share what we know with interested youngsters and adults; where students could be exposed to the theatre as an aesthetic and humanizing experience; where youngsters could come in contact with disciplines not ordinarily offered in our present public educational system.

The establishment of the Experimental Laboratory and Training Unit, located at 124 West 18th Street in Manhattan, provided for an increase in the number of plays produced by the company during this five-year period. A list of all the plays produced by both the Traveling Unit and the Experimental Laboratory of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre appears below (Table 11).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Report, 1972," New York, 1972, p. 1. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>2</sup> Derived from analysis of Program Notes for Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre productions, 1972-1976.

Table 11. Plays Produced by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre (1972-1976)

1972	<u>Ceremony for an Assassinated Black Man</u> by Fernando Arrabal directed by Jaime Sánchez March 10 - April 14	Laboratory Theatre
	<u>The Passion of Antígona Pérez</u> by Luis Rafael Sánchez directed by Pablo Cabrera May 18 - June 4 August 7 - August 26	Traveling Theatre
	<u>Pipo Subway no sabe reír</u> ("Pipo Subway Can't Laugh") by Jaime Carrero directed by Jaime Sánchez August 12 - August 26	Traveling Theatre
1973	<u>Sin bandera</u> by Jaime Carrero ("Flag Inside") directed by Norberto Kerner January 11 - February 4	Laboratory Theatre
	<u>El médico a palos</u> by Molière ("The Doctor In spite of Himself") directed by Norberto Kerner June 21 - July 15 August 16 - August 26	Laboratory Theatre Traveling Theatre
	<u>Noo Yall</u> by Jaime Carrero ("New York") directed by Pablo Cabrera August 25 - September 15	Traveling Theatre
1974	<u>The Angels are Exhausted</u> by Luis Rafael Sánchez <u>At the End of the Street</u> by Gerald Paul Marín directed by Manuel Yesckas February 7 - March 3	Laboratory Theatre
	<u>The Guest, Scribbles, The Innocent</u> by Pedro Juan Soto directed by Reinaldo Arana May 9 - June 21	Laboratory Theatre

Table 11. Continued

	<u>Payment as Pledged</u> by Alfredo Días Gómez directed by Angel F. Rivera August 6 - August 25	Traveling Theatre
	<u>The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit</u> by Ray Bradbury directed by Alba Oms August 18 - August 30	Traveling Theatre
1975	<u>Ceremony for an Assassinated Black Man</u> by Fernando Arrabal directed by Miriam Colón <u>The Two Executioners</u> by Fernando Arrabal directed by Norberto Kerner February 9 - March 16	Laboratory Theatre
	<u>Piri, Papoleto, &amp; Pedro, Directed by Pablo</u> by Piri Thomas, Jesús Papoleto Meléndez and Pedro Pietri directed by Pablo Cabrera April 17 - May 4	Laboratory Theatre
	<u>If You Promise not to Learn...</u> <u>(Stories to be Told)</u> by Osvaldo Dragún directed by Pablo Cabrera July 21 - August 9	Traveling Theatre
1976	<u>Windows</u> by Roberto Rodríguez directed by Roberto Rodríguez March 2 - March 28	Laboratory Theatre
	<u>The Dinner Guest</u> by Manuel Martínez Mediero <u>Everything not Compulsory is</u> <u>Strictly Forbidden</u> by Jorge Díaz directed by Alba Oms June 25 - July 18	Laboratory Theatre

Table 11. Continued

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<u>Eleuterio the Coquí</u> adapted from the Tomás Blanco short story by Miriam Colón, Rosa Luisa Márquez, and Pablo Cabrera directed by Pablo Cabrera <u>Everything not Compulsory is</u> <u>Strictly Forbidden</u> August 16 - September 12	Traveling Theatre
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Table 12 indicates the locations most frequented by the "street theatre" productions during this period.<sup>3</sup>

Starting in 1972, the group's small but permanent home provided a new space for indoor, laboratory theatre, some of which would then tour the streets. This was the case with El médico a palos (The Doctor in Spite of Himself) produced in 1973 and Everything not Compulsory is Strictly Forbidden produced in 1976. With an average of two laboratory performances each year in addition to the traditional traveling productions, the number of productions for 1972-1976 period totaled nineteen. Only eight plays had been produced between 1967 and 1971.

A year to year history of the PRTT through an account of the plays produced during this period will be the subject of this chapter. Three "representative" productions will be analyzed in greater depth: The Passion of Antígona Pérez, produced in 1972, If You Promise Not to Learn...., produced in 1975, and the laboratory production of

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Table 12. Most Frequent Performance Locations, 1972-1976

	1972		1973	1974	1975	1976
	Antígona	Pipo	Noo Yall	Payment	If You Promise...	Everything ...Coquí
<u>Manhattan</u>						
Central Park		x		x		x
Riverside Park						
W. 103 Street & Riverside Drive			x	x	x	x
Lincoln Center Plaza	x		x	x		x
Metropolitan Museum Plaza			x	x		x
E. 110th Street Between Lexing- ton and Park Avenues			x	x		
Cathedral Saint John the Divine 112th Street & Amsterdam	x			x		
<u>Bronx</u>						
P.S. 77						
E. 172nd Street			x	x		
178th Street Be- tween Arthur & Hughes Streets		x	x	x	x	x
Federation of Puerto Rican Volunteers 2317 Washington Avenue	x				x	
<u>Brooklyn</u>						
PROUD P.S. 298 85 Watkins Street	x				x	
<u>New Jersey</u>						
Goden Street Be- tween 4th & 5th Streets, Hoboken			x	x		

Piri, Papoleto and Pedro Directed by Pablo, also staged in 1975. The selection of these works has been made on the basis of available resource materials, their success in meeting different aspects of the philosophy of the PRTT, on the pieces' distinct theatrical approaches to style, theme and language, and their relation to the Puerto Rican experience. Furthermore, all the three productions were directed by Pablo Cabrera, the major new artistic influence in the development of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre during this period.<sup>4</sup>

The 1972 Season and The Passion of Antígona Pérez<sup>5</sup>

The Passion of Antígona Pérez is an "American chronicle"<sup>6</sup> in which dramatist Luis Rafael Sánchez, making use of a Sophoclean theme, depicts the individual's struggle against tyrannical rule. The setting and relationships have been altered: Antígona, a Latin American woman, has been sentenced to death by her uncle, dictator Creón Molina, for the burial of two brothers who had attempted to assassinate Creón. Her death sentence is the result of her defiance of Creón's edict that their bodies should be left to rot in public display as much as it is for the burial itself. An ideological and physical campaign are carried out against Antígona to make her reveal the spot where

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<sup>4</sup>Miriam Colón, private interview.

<sup>5</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, La pasión según Antígona Pérez, 2nd ed. (República Dominicana: Ediciones Lugar, 1970) and The Passion of Antígona Pérez, trans. Charles Pilditch (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1972). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>6</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, La Pasión según Antígona Pérez, p. 1.

her two friends are buried. Members of her family and representatives of the State and the Church engage in a futile effort, for Antígona never budes. Her fate is irreversible and in her first speech she characterizes her situation:

Empecemos por donde se empieza siempre. Nombre, Antígona Pérez. Edad, veinticinco años. Continente: América. Color. . . no importa. Traigo una historia para los que tienen fe. Alguno advertirá; es demasiado joven para decir algo que merezca oírse. Cierto que soy joven. Pero, esta juventud del cuerpo ha sido acunada por la triste vejez del alma. ¡Poesía! Claro que poesía. Si tengo veinticinco años y voy a morir mañana.<sup>7</sup>

(Let's start at the beginning. Name: Antígona Pérez. Age: twenty-five. Continent: America. Race: doesn't matter. I have a story for those with faith. Someone will say: she's too young to say anything worth hearing. It's true, I'm young. But my body's youth has been craddled by the sad aging of the soul. Poetry! Of course, poetry! I'm twenty-five and will die tomorrow.)

The play transcends the existential crisis of the heroine to make a concrete, political statement. According to critic Lowell Fiet:

the conflict involves more than Antígona's defiance of Creón, for both characters symbolize contrasting elements of Latin American political life. Antígona expresses the desire for self-determination and freedom from economic and political exploitation, while Creón represents the domination of military dictatorship and foreign influence.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, Sánchez has drawn his characters and events from the political reality of Latin America, and Creón embodies the Batistas, the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Lowell A. Fiet, "Luis Rafael Sánchez's The Passion of Antígona Pérez: Puerto Rican Play in North American Performance," Latin American Theatre Review (Fall 1976): 97-98.

Trujillos, the Peróns and the Somozas, the right-wing dictators who found models to follow in Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. The unraveling action of the play is also surrounded by references to historical events which help to create the presentational and semi-documentary style of the piece. Thus, the play uses techniques usually attributed to German playwright Bertolt Brecht, an aspect on which Francisco Arriví comments:

. . . la acción, . . . se desarrolla acorde con una dinámica de teatro épico propio de la escena contemporánea, la cual en Bertolt Brecht, por ejemplo, se da muy influida por lo periodístico y cinematográfico.<sup>9</sup>

(. . . the action . . . develops according to the dynamics of the epic theatre characteristic of the contemporary scene, which like in Bertolt Brecht, for example, is much influenced by journalistic and filmic effects.)

Also in epic style, the heroine, Antígona, steps away from the action to comment on and summarize its outcome. In her article on the plays of Luis Rafael Sánchez, Angelina Morfi states:

Dentro de una tendencia épica está el don de ubicuidad de Antígona para que pueda comentar y protestar los argumentos de sus antagonistas en Palacio.<sup>10</sup>

(Within an epic tendency is the ubiquitous quality of Antigona which allows her to make comments and protest against the arguments of her antagonists at the Palace.)

In order to achieve a documentary style, Sánchez specifies detailed directions for lighting and scenery:

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<sup>9</sup>Francisco Arriví, "Onceno Festival de Teatro en Puerto Rico," Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña 41 (octubre-diciembre, 1968): 44.

<sup>10</sup>Angelina Morfi, "El teatro de Luis Rafael Sánchez," Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña 52 (julio-septiembre, 1971): 48.

El telón lento descubre un mural regio de fondo . . . [que] es la suma de ocho columnas gigantescas y tri-dimensionales. Al principio, el mural es sólo una cámara negra. Luego, se convierte en panel que acomoda, simétricamente, láminas de metal con anuncios de gaseosas, cervezas, cigarros, señales de tránsito y toda bulla de propaganda. En la segunda parte el mural revuelve a su otra cara: una pared en la que se despliega información periodística, noticias de absoluta historicidad se reparten por el panel. Entre las fotos destacan las monumentales del Generalísimo Creón Molina en gala militar y de Antígona Pérez luchando con la guardia del palacio. Resaltan también las consignas que aluden a la vida política hispanoamericana de los últimos años: Democracia Cristiana, Lo harán los descamisados, Patria ó Muerte, 26 de julio, Bosch para presidente, Yankis go Home, El Canal es de Panamá, Minas de Bolivia para los bolivianos. El mural sustituye abiertamente el ciclorama tradicional. No hay ningún mueble. Si cualquiera escena<sup>11</sup> precisara de asientos podría recurrirse a los escalones.

(A slow curtain reveals a regal back mural . . . [which] is composed of eight giant periaktoi. One side is a black wall. Then it becomes a panel on which symmetrical metal plaques advertising soda pop, beer, cigars, traffic signals, and a myriad of propaganda are displayed. The other side reveals journalistic information, news of absolute historical truth are scattered throughout. Among the photographs is one of Generalísimo Creón Molina and another of Antígona Pérez struggling with the palace guards. Slogans alluding to political life in Latin America during the last few years are also obvious: Christian Democracy, Fatherland or Death, July 26, Bosch for President, Yankee go Home, The Canal belongs to Panama, Bolivian mines for the Bolivians. The mural substitutes for the traditional cyclorama. There is no furniture. If any scene should require a seating area, the steps can be used.)

The rest of the setting was to be composed of a series of platforms and stairs, while the lighting effects were to be used to limit the acting areas. As Jordan Phillips describes,

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<sup>11</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, Antígona Pérez, pp. 11-12.

Lighting is highly important: Creón demands maximum lighting whenever he appears. It is used ably in areas to set apart Antígona when she speaks in aside, and the five newsmen who serve as inter-scene dispensers of the progress of the play and as reflections of the tyrants' manipulation of the press and the public.<sup>12</sup>

Lighting is also used as an "alienation" device which reflects Creón's character when the transition from the first to the second act is achieved through a lighting cue which he orders.<sup>13</sup>

The starkness of the production elements is an extension of the play's total style. The language is poetic but also very precise.

In this regard, Anglina Morfi writes:

. . . en esta obra el estilo dramático de Luis Rafael Sánchez se ha depurado, vemos como el language responde estrictamente al modo de ser de los personajes, no hay regodeo en expresiones bellas que no reflejen el carácter ó la situación. La frase poética surge natural, . . . Y la poesía que satura su teatro anterior está ahí pero está íntimamente ligada al desarrollo del tema, del acontecer dramático y del ser heroico, traspasando el estilo periodístico, directo y escueto y el diálogo de lógica incisiva.<sup>14</sup>

(. . . in this play the dramatic style of Luis Rafael Sánchez has been refined, we see how language responds strictly to the pattern of behavior of the characters, no time is wasted in beautiful expressions that do not reflect the characters or the situation. The poetic phrases emerge naturally. . . . The poetry that saturates his previous theatre is here, but it is intimately linked to the development of the theme, to the dramatic event, to the heroic character, piercing through the journalistic style--direct and economical--and through the dialogue of incisive logic.)

The Passion of Antígona Pérez was written in 1966 and first produced in Puerto Rico during the Eleventh Puerto Rican Theatre

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<sup>12</sup>Jordan Phillips, Contemporary Puerto Rican Drama, p. 183.

<sup>13</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, Antígona Pérez, pp. 86-87.

<sup>14</sup>Angelina Morfi, "El teatro de Luis Rafael Sánchez," p. 48.

Festival in 1968. The production was directed by Pablo Cabrera.

The collaborative efforts of playwright and director were well received by the island critics. Juan Luis Márquez states:

Juzgando con serena objetividad, el Undécimo festival de Teatro presentado por el Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, que estuvo a punto de fracasar por la pobreza de sus primeras obras, se salvó, y de manera excepcional, con la puesta en escena de "La pasión según Antígona Pérez," del autor puertorriqueño Luis Rafael Sánchez. . . . Su dirección [Pablo Cabrera] que en muchas ocasiones tuvo características del teatro épico, que glorificara en 1930 figuras como Erwin Piscator en Alemania y Vesleod Mayerhold en Rusia, con la dinámica y controlada actuación de muchos de los personajes y con sus escenas estáticas, con su vigoroso e imaginativo ritmo interno, contribuyó en medida singular a darle al espectáculo una poderosa presencia escénica.<sup>15</sup>

(Judging objectively, the Eleventh Theatre Festival produced by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was almost a total failure due to the poor quality of the plays produced, but it was saved in an exceptional way by the production of Puerto Rican playwright Luis Rafael Sánchez's Passion of Antígona Pérez. . . . The diredtion [Pablo Cabrera] which in many instances had characteristics of the epic theatre glorified in 1930 in Germany by Erwin Piscator and in Russia by V. Meyerhold, filled with dynamic and controlled acting and with tableau scenes of vigorous and imaginative internal rhythm, contributed in a singular manner to create the powerful stage presence of the spectacle.)

Theatre critic Annie Fernandez of the San Juan Star also praised the production success of the Sánchez-Cabrera team:

Working from Sánchez' spare yet suggestive treatment of the "Antigone" in a contemporary American context, Cabrera weaves an animated tapestry of crowds, representatives of the military, ecclesiastical and news media establishments together with Antigone's individual drama. From the opening tableau itself his imaginative

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<sup>15</sup>Juan Luis Márquez, "Entre Mayas y Cundeamores: La pasión según Antígona Pérez," El Mundo, 8 June 1968, p. 28.

mise-en-scene augurs well for "La pasión" as dramatic spectacle.<sup>16</sup>

As for the epic character of the production, Ms. Fernández states:

Perhaps the best theatrical stroke in the Sánchez-Cabrera collaboration is the highly effective use of five newsmen (armed with cameras, notepads and cigarettes) who gyrate among the principals and the crowds and offer the official version of local events in Molina salted with tidbits from the international scene. A more apt --or more Brechtian--handling of the classic chorus for a modern Antigone couldn't be desired.<sup>17</sup>

On May 18, 1972, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre production of The Passion of Antígona Pérez, again directed by Pablo Cabrera, opened at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine. New York Times critic Howard Thomson wrote:

Only genuine, stirring theatre performed in the nave of a huge church could make you forget the premises. Such is the culminative effect of "The Passion of Antígona Pérez," an updated "Antigone" by Luis Rafael Sánchez, which was given two performances in English by the bilingual Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre at the theatre minded Cathedral of St. John the Divine."<sup>18</sup>

The opening night location also drew remarks from Daily News drama critic Tom McMorrow:

'Antígona Pérez puts Passion in Cathedral'

The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, an admirable enterprise with formidable leading players, brought a play of the spirit to a place of the spirit when they performed "The Passion of Antígona Pérez" in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine Wednesday and Thursday nights.

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<sup>16</sup>Annie Fernández Seín, "Passion According to Antígona Pérez," San Juan Star, 1 June 1968, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Howard Thomson, "Stage: Antígona Pérez," New York Times, 20 May 1972, p. 20.

It is a shame that the company has departed the ecstasy of the Cathedral because it is a helluva place to see a story that has a lot to do with man's right to enter heaven.<sup>19</sup>

From the Cathedral the group toured through thirteen other indoor locations in metropolitan New York, including the Greenwich Mews Theatre.<sup>20</sup> A second, outdoor run of the show started on August 7 and ended August 26.<sup>21</sup>

The complete run was performed in English. Charles Pilditch, who had previously translated Rene Marqués' The Oxcart, was in charge of the translation. Pilditch was unable to transpose the poetic images of the Spanish-language original into similar images in English. The outcome was a somewhat corny literal translation. In this respect, the Daily News reviewer said,

If The Passion of Antígona Pérez comes off less effectively than might be hoped, part of the fault may be laid at the door of the foundations, well-established as dubious judges of quality, which assigned a thoroughly competent translator, who lays no claim to being a writer, to the job of preparing "Antígona Pérez" for Americans.<sup>22</sup>

And he furthers his argument with an example:

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<sup>19</sup>Tom McMorrow, "Antígona Pérez Puts Passion in Cathedral," New York Daily News, 20 May 1972, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of The Passion of Antígona Pérez, New York, summer 1972. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>21</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Plays presented by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1967-1977." Record of plays produced, New York, 1977. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>22</sup>Tom McMorrow, "Antígona Pérez Puts Passion in Cathedral," p. 23.

She [Antígona] has a scene with her mother in which she obviously is parent and the foolish mother, the child. She says, in an apostrophe to the audience, "My mother looks at her past like a faded postcard." A writer might have helped with something like: "She fondles her past like a faded post card." That is what this play lacks . . .<sup>23</sup>

Anthony Mancini of the New York Post also questions the translation:

The play itself is not without its shortcomings, although perhaps they stem from the translation. Some of the lines are embarrassingly corny: "With Fernando life must be taken in small sips like a rare liqueur whose flavor lingers" . . . But there are good lines too: Creón's wife Pilar to Antígona: "I'm still the same one who is too proud to see you die tonight because you will be the center of attraction."<sup>24</sup>

Another difficulty emerges from the interpretation of the concept "America" from its connotation within the context of the Latin American reality to its meaning in the United States as a synonym for the country. Antígona wants to address the issues "de los que crecimos en una América dura, América amarga, América tomada."<sup>25</sup> ("of us who have been raised in a hard America, a bitter America, a taken America.") Her "taken America" is Hispanic America; first taken by the European settlers and conquerors and, within the context of the play, now "taken" by local repressive regimes supported by U.S. interests. Repeated news flashes report U.S. support of Creón's dictatorship over the Republic of Molina.<sup>26</sup> Near the conclusion of the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Anthony Mancini, "Antígona Takes to the Streets," New York Post, 10 August 1972, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, Antígona Pérez, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-18.

play, Antígona addresses the victims of tyranny by chanting in verse, "América, no cedas; América, no sufras; América, no pierdas; América, no mueras; América, prosique; América, despierta; América, tranquila; América, alerta."<sup>27</sup> Pilditch's translation of this passage reads: "America, don't yield; America, don't wait; America, don't loose, America, don't die; America, be calm; America, watch out."<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the cadence and meaning of the original is better captured in the following: "Don't yield America; don't suffer, America; don't loose, America; don't die, America; ahead, America; awake America; be calm, America; beware, America." Still, the confusion created by the meaning of "America" remains. This is the subject of Fiet's article "Luis Rafael Sánchez's The Passion of Antígona Pérez: Puerto Rican Drama in North American Performance."

Was Antígona sending a message to the United States (the audience's America) to intervene in her Latin American homeland? Was she boldly rejecting the assumed right of the United States to characterize itself as America? Or, was she warning U.S. citizens that what was happening in the fictional country of Molina was possible in their own nation?<sup>29</sup>

And he concludes,

Although Antígona's "America" does not directly include the United States, the play assumes additional thematic qualities when performed for North American audiences. What we in the United States egotistically consider America is redefined and Antígona Pérez calls to the people of all Western Hemisphere nations--All American

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>28</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, The Passion of Antígona Pérez (Unpublished translation by Charles Pilditch) Act II, scene 2.

<sup>29</sup>Lowell Fiet, "Luis Rafael Sánchez's The Passion of Antígona Pérez," p. 97.

countries--to examine themselves in terms of the "passion" being performed.<sup>30</sup>

The "passion" was performed in New York with Miriam Colón as Antígona. Opposite her was Manu Tupou as Creón. According to Anthony Mancini, the scenes of confrontation were very effective and a tribute to fine acting:

A good share of the credit belongs to the two main performers. Miriam Colón plays the valiant, doomed Antígona with understated conviction and a kind of calm, resolute passion. And Manu Tupou, an imposing six-foot-plus Polynesian actor who combines great presence with a beautiful voice and solid talent, was brilliant as the banana republic dictator Generalísimo Creón Molina. The scene in which he tries to convince Antígona to renounce her principles and escape the firing squad (Sophocles had her buried alive) is particularly affecting.<sup>31</sup>

Playing other leading roles were June Adams as Creón's wife Pilar, Peter Blaxill as Monsignor Escudero, Mary Bell as Antígona's mother Aurora, and Irene de Bari as Irene, Antígona's close friend.<sup>32</sup>

As for the directing by Cabrera, the New York Times review stated,

Last night the play, the players and the very setting of the Church, merged no less than hauntingly, under Pablo Carera's understanding direction. Nothing more was needed.<sup>33</sup>

The Daily News review also praised the overall quality of the production: "They are top-notch actors, and the direction of Pablo Cabrera,

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>31</sup>Anthony Mancini, "Antígona Takes to the Streets," p. 21.

<sup>32</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of The Passion of Antígona Pérez.

<sup>33</sup>Howard Thomson, "Stage: Antígona Pérez," p. 20.

and the settings, lighting and technical effects are all big theatre."<sup>34</sup>

Aside from their New York City tour, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre took the production to the city of Boston during the month of August. The actors confronted a hostile audience. A letter by Miriam Colón to Boston Mayor Kevin White reveals rivalries between Cuban exiles and Puerto Ricans in the city, and specifically at the Jamaica Bay neighborhood where the company attempted unsuccessfully to perform. The letter, in part, reads:

It seems to me that the incident of violence that took place in Jamaica Bay was planned. We saw elements arriving at the place, forming different fronts, and at a specific moment, they went into action.

The argument that they wanted the play in Spanish is not entirely convincing. When we announced that it was going to be in English not a stir was heard in the audience. When a synopsis of it was read in Spanish some people applauded. . . .

Later, we found out some of them were accusing the play of being communistic. . . .

I am sure you remember that Sophocles' Antigone dies defending the principle of freedom of the individual, the principle of democracy, rather than accepting a dictatorship. Mr. Luis Rafael Sánchez . . . follows the Sophoclean theme. . . . The only difference is that he sets his action in an unidentified Latin American country. . . . The Puerto Rican and Cuban communities of Boston are struggling at the bottom; fighting among themselves, looking for a direction, a center, a voice.<sup>35</sup>

A more peaceful incident of audience involvement was also recorded by Miriam Colón in a letter to Luis Rafael Sánchez:

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<sup>34</sup>Tom McMorrow, "State Aided Plays: One Tastey, One Turkey," New York Daily News, 22 May 1972, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup>Miriam Colón, letter to Boston's Mayor Kevin White, City Hall Plaza, 1 September 1972. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

En la función que dimos junto a la fuente del Lincoln Center, un joven puertorriqueño endrogado subió al escenario durante mi escena con Irene. Vino directamente a mí con los brazos abiertos, me abrazó, me dijo su nombre, me pidió que lo ayudara y también añadió que acababa de salir de un hospital. Dejé a Irene en la escena y con mucha suavidad tomé de la mano al muchacho. Le dije que dentro de poco iba a hablar con él y que se sentara por allí cerca del escenario pues yo lo atendería muy pronto. Me obedeció tan dulcemente, tan dócil, que apenas pude continuar la escena con Irene. . . . Una señora preguntó si tal vez ese era el personaje de Fernando.<sup>36</sup>

(During the performance staged in front of the Lincoln Center fountain a young Perto Rican drug-addict stepped on the set while I was engaged in a dialogue with Irene. He walked directly towards me with open arms, he embraced me, told me his name, he asked for help and added that he had just been released from the hospital. I left the scene and softly held his hand. I told him that I would soon be with him, that he should sit very close to the stage, that I would take care of him in a while. He obeyed so sweetly and peacefully, that I almost could not continue my scene with Irene. . . . A lady later asked if he was an actor playing the role of Fernando.)

The Passion of Antígona Pérez was later staged during Michigan State University's 1975 Summer Circle Free Festival and at the Loeb Center at Harvard University during 1977. Both English-language versions were directed by Vicente Castro.<sup>37</sup> The play was revived in Spanish by Colectivo Nacional de Teatro (National Theatre Collective) in 1976 during the First National Sample of Theatre produced by the newly founded Corporación Puertorriqueña de Grupos de Teatro (Puerto Rican Corporation of Theatre Groups) in Puerto Rico. The production under the direction of José Luis Ramos lacked the sparkle and quality

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<sup>36</sup> Miriam Colón, Letter to Luis Rafael Sánchez, 27 August 1972. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>37</sup> Lowell Fiet, pp. 97-98; and Program Notes for the production of The Passion of Antígona Pérez at Loeb Center, Harvard University, 1977.

of the 1968 and 1972 productions. Vocero critic Ramón Porrata summarized the outcome:

"La pasión según Antígona Pérez" como crónica histórica corre el riesgo de ser mal interpretada. El drama de Luis Rafael Sánchez contiene otros méritos que los que quedan representados en esta escenificación.<sup>38</sup>

(The Passion of Antígona Pérez, an historical chronicle runs the risk of being misinterpreted. Luis Rafael Sanchez' drama contains more merits than the ones being represented in this production.)

The production of The Passion of Antígona Pérez is particularly important to the history of the PRTT for several reasons: (1) with the exception of René Marqués' The Oxcart, the play, in its original language, has received more critical acclaim than any other recent example of Puerto Rican Theatre; (2) it brought the PRTT in contact with a new and broader range of dramatic materials, with a style and themes departing from the poetic realism which characterized much of the group's early work; (3) the production incorporated new and important artistic collaborators such as Pablo Cabrera into the group; and (4) it emphasizes the PRTT's continued commitment to plays and ideas emerging from the Puerto Rican theatre.

The Passion of Antígona Pérez was only one of several projects undertaken by the PRTT in 1972. By the time the summer tour started, the company had already inaugurated an Experimental Laboratory located at 124 West 18th Street (sixth floor) in Manhattan. Its first two productions were: Aspasganza ("An Evening of Puerto Rican Protest Poetry") and Ceremony for an Assassinated Black Man by Fernando Arrabal

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<sup>38</sup>Ramón Porrata, "Colectivo Nacional presenta Antígona" (San Juan) Vocero, 16 February 1976, p. 12.

directed by Jaime Sánchez.<sup>39</sup> On May, 1972, the group also sponsored the Puerto Rican street theatre group Anamú and their production of Pipo Subway no sabe reir ("Pipo Subway Can't Laught") by Jaime Carrero.<sup>40</sup>

Pipo Subway no sabe reir portrays the struggles of a Puerto Rican boy in East Harlem in his attempt to acquire a new bicycle. Through a simple plot, Pipo, his mother and friends create a microcosm for the airing of problems such as unemployment, school discrimination witchcraft, consumer mentality, the dissolution of the family and misconceptions about the island. As a result of Anamú's production, a PRTT touring production of Pipo Subway was scheduled for the end of the 1972 summer.

The PRTT sponsored production by Anamú, directed by Pablo Cabrera, was highly stylized, using adult actors in the children's roles and having the role of the mother played by a male actor with a half mask in order to create a "larger than life" vision of ghetto problems; whereas the PRTT's own interpretation, directed by Jaime Sánchez, attempted to portray the characters realistically.<sup>41</sup> The Parks Department donated \$9,300 towards the traveling production of

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<sup>39</sup>Program Notes for the production of The Passion of Antígona Pérez.

<sup>40</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of Pipo Subway no sabe reir, staged by Anamú, New York, May 1972. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., and Manuel Galich, "El teatro puertorriqueño dentro del nuevo teatro latinoamericano," Conjunto 26 (octubre-diciembre, 1975): 64.

Pipo Subway. Puerto Rican dramatist Jaime Carrero was to have two more of his plays staged by the PRTT; Flag Inside in 1973 at the Laboratory Theatre and Noo Yall as the 1973 summer touring production.

The tiny sixty-seat laboratory theatre where Pipo Subway was originally staged, was also the home of the newly established Training Unit.

Over 100 youngsters and adults ranging from ages 10 to 50 registered for the courses. The courses included the Principles of Acting, Speech (in the Spanish language), Body Movement, Speech (in the English Language), and Improvisation. The classes were conducted after school hours [and] on Saturdays at our Training Unit located at 124 West 18th Street (6th floor) in Manhattan.<sup>42</sup>

On September 10, 1972, the first group of students to complete the three-month training period presented a program to demonstrate their talents and received a certificate of accomplishment from the company.<sup>43</sup> The original teaching staff was composed of William Maloney from the Speech Department of the Herbert Berghof Studio, Allan Miller of the Actors Studio, dancer Aida Alvarez, actress Carla Pinza, and Iris Martínez as Unit director.<sup>44</sup> More recent staff members include Pablo Cabrera, Padjet Fredericks, Sandra Gallardo, Lily Lodge Marcus, Janet Coleman and Joseph Lliso, among other.

By June, 1975, the company had given certificates to five "graduating classes."<sup>45</sup> Receiving its major funding from the New York

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<sup>42</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Report, 1972," p. 2.

<sup>43</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the Training Unit's final project, New York, 1972. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>44</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Report, 1972," p. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the Training Unit's final project, New York, 1975. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

State Council on the Arts and the Expansion Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Training Unit has continued to advance theatre as a career alternative for minority students, to help all the participants express themselves, to increase the students' awareness of the international dramatic and poetic literature, and to emphasize the study of their own cultural heritage. Fifty-six of the sixty-six graduating students from the 1975 course had Spanish surnames.<sup>46</sup>

The Training Unit and the Laboratory Theatre have become permanent fixtures of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, which until 1972 had been known solely for its summer touring ventures. A total of \$111,438 in grants was employed by the PRTT for all the projects undertaken during 1972 (see pp. 68).

#### The 1973 Season

During 1973, the PRTT received \$132,148 in grants, an amount exceeding that of any previous year. The grant awarded by Model Cities provided for a second Training Unit in the South Bronx.<sup>47</sup>

In January, the Laboratory Theatre produced Jaime Carrero's *Sin Bandera* ("Flag Inside").<sup>48</sup> The play deals with the theme of compulsory military service and how the Viet Nam War affects a

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of Flag Inside, New York, 1973. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>48</sup>Jaime Carrero, Flag Inside (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1973). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

conservative Puerto Rican family. A soldier, who dies in Viet Nam, has left a letter expressing his wishes about what is to be done if he dies: no flowers, no prayers, no military symbols and no flags. The rejection of the U.S. flag by a veteran is too much for his family to deal with. The fear of loosing her job in an ultra-conservative community forces the dead veteran's sister to ignore his final wishes, and she places the U.S. flag on the coffin. The realistic drama has a symbolic element: Carrero has introduced a deaf-mute child, not unlike Kattrin in Brech's Mother Courage, who engages in a surrealist ballet with the flag. In a violent frenzy, she succeeds in fulfilling her brother's wishes, tearing and stomping on the U.S. flag. In so doing, she becomes the symbol of the Puerto Rican spirit struggling to maintain its identity in the shadow of "the colossus of the North."

In the summer of 1973, Jaime Carrero had another play produced by the PRTT: Noo Yall ("New York").<sup>49</sup> The comedy about preparations for the Puerto Rican Day parade in New York City was directed by Pablo Cabrera. Once again the theme is assimilation versus national identity. Its content was summarized in the Daily News review:

Without ever losing its sense of humor, it tells of a group of people who live, or hang out, in and around a tenement building and how they hang on to, or try to lose, their own national identity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Jaime Carrero, Noo Yall (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1973). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>50</sup> Patricia O'Haire, "Noo Yall--Lively Play," New York Daily News, 29 August 1973, p. 60.

The play, written in a rhythmic vaudeville style, draws its characters in broad strokes from typical personages expected to be found in the Latin ghetto. They range from the idealistic young artist to the cynical college student. Four neighborhood dropouts, each named Ramón, embody the concept of sameness and repetition bred into the minds of social workers that come to study the flamboyant species. A pompous character parading around in the uniform of a nineteenth century Spanish general adds a touch of the commedia style to the play. His goal is to be named Grand Marshal of the Puerto Rican Day parade. His rival is the omnipresent Puerto Rican mother, who, like her Jewish counterpart, is constantly engaged in the process of protecting her offspring. As Edmund Newton of the New York Times states:

It is she, after all, who wins the spiritual struggle at the end, as all but the hapless Grand Marshal go off to plan a counter parade to protest that sanitized version of Puerto Ricans to be served on Fifth Avenue.<sup>51</sup>

The production's musical score was composed by Ray Barretto and the set was designed by Peter Harvey. It toured throughout seventeen locations in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, Long Island and New Jersey.<sup>52</sup>

While the English language production of Noo Yall was meeting its hectic schedule, the Spanish-language version of Moliere's The Doctor in Spite of Himself<sup>53</sup> by Spanish playwright Miguel Moratín,

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<sup>51</sup>Edmund Newton, "Noo Yall Opens, Set to Tour Parks," New York Post, 28 August 1973, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of Noo Yall, New York, 1973. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>53</sup>Moliere, El médico a palos, trans. Miguel Moratín (Madrid: Editorial Aguilar, 1945).

which had been staged during June and July at the Laboratory Theatre, was revived for touring. Ten locations were visited and the play closed the 1973 season in Central Park during the festivities of the Fiesta Folklórica Puertorriqueña" (Puerto Rican Folklore Festival). The style and the exclusive use of Spanish in this short touring production reflect the Spanish language productions of comedies by Federico García Lorca and Luis Rafael Sánchez during the 1967-1972 period.

### The 1974 Season

With the acquisition of the Laboratory Theatre, the production activities of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre were intensified. A double bill including Gerald Paul Marín's Al final de la calle<sup>54</sup> ("At the End of the Street") and Luis Rafael Sánchez' monologue Los ángeles se han fatigado<sup>55</sup> ("The Angels are Exhausted") initiated the 1974 bilingual season. "Las producciones podrán ser vistas en inglés los jueves y viernes y en español los sábados a las ocho de la noche y los domingos a las tres de la tarde solamente."<sup>56</sup> ("The productions can be seen in English on Thursdays and Fridays and in the Spanish language on Saturdays at eight P.M. and Sundays at three.")

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<sup>54</sup>Gerald Paul Marín, Al final de la calle (Unpublished play-script, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1974). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>55</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, Los ángeles se han fatigado in Cuarto Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, Vol. 4 (Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1961), pp. 623-674.

<sup>56</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "El Teatro Rodante Puertorriqueño presentará dos obras contemporáneas," Press release, New York, January 1974. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

Al final de la calle depicts the lives of the tenants of a Fortaleza Street building in San Juan, close to the governor's mansion, during the 1950 Nationalist uprising. The PRTT staged only two of the three acts. In the first act, a militant young Nationalist is torn between his love for his wife and his equally strong love for the land which he wants to see free from foreign domination. He chooses the latter and goes to fulfill his duty by attacking the governor's mansion where he is killed by the guards. The second act staged by the PRTT, actually the third in the original, deals with the confusion created by a policeman trying to avoid a confrontation with the Nationalists and a senile lady who decides that the policeman wants to evict her from her home because she has failed to pay the rent for the last fifteen months. The romantic style of the first act contrasts with the comedy of errors style of the last one.

Luis Rafael Sánchez' two act monologue Los ángeles se han fatigado completed the bill. A demented prostitute lives in a fantasy world, recreating her past life and making up a dream world about the wealth she has lost. Located on another San Juan street, Sol 13-interior, Sánchez portrays the psychological realm as opposed to Marín's depiction of the social and political events. Sánchez employs flashback techniques to describe the circumstances causing the moral and physical deterioration of the character. Nevertheless, the political element is present. The angels, as the protagonist called the U.S. army officials which came to visit her, transformed themselves into destructive beasts.

Luego se iban convirtiendo en bestias. Y aquellos ángeles que en el principio eran santos y serenos y buenos se iban

convirtiendo en buitres enloquecidos mordiendo como  
culebras venenosas.<sup>57</sup>

(Then they turned into beasts. And those angels which  
at the beginning were serene and saintly and good be-  
came vultures who madly kissed, biting like poisonous  
vipers.)

Los ángeles se han fatigado and Al final de la calle ran simultaneously  
for four consecutive weekends at the PRTT's Laboratory Theatre.<sup>58</sup>

During the month of May, the Laboratory Theatre produced three  
pieces by short story writer Pedro Juan Soto: The Guest, Scribbles,  
and The Innocent.<sup>59</sup> The latter had already been staged during the  
1971 summer season as one of the pieces of the Dramatized Anthology  
of Puerto Rican Short Stories. The three pieces by Soto deal with  
the process of desensitizing the Puerto Rican in the City of New York.  
Village Voice critic Arthur Sainer expressed his desire to see  
these pieces in a style better suited to addressing the social  
problems they reveal. He states,

The plays have a sweetness to them, a poignancy that  
suggests the works have come out of feelings rather  
than ideas about feelings. And they engage universal  
sympathies even as they speak to the particular plight  
of Puerto Ricans trying to find viable modes of exis-  
tence in New York today. In a sense, since the plays speak  
to a community in sympathy with its problems they ought  
to confront a critical mind that is also deep into those  
problems. A Puerto Rican critic might not see these

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<sup>57</sup>Luis Rafael Sánchez, Los ángeles se han fatigado, p. 639.

<sup>58</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the pro-  
ductions of Al final de la calle and Los ángeles se han fatigado,  
New York, Summer 1974. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling  
Theatre.

<sup>59</sup>Pedro Juan Soto, The Guest, Scribbles, The Innocent (Un-  
published playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1974). Files  
of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

plays as throwbacks to the Odets era. But, in another sense it's valuable to have an eye who can see the work in the context of theatre history and in that context one can see fresher approaches to the material, a la the work of El Teatro Compesino or the Mime Troupe or the Bread and Puppet's. I am not suggesting that the approach changes the nature of the problem, but that the problem can be more appropriately seen, that worn-out forms tend to blur vision and that new forms tend to sharpen focus.<sup>60</sup>

The three pieces played at the Laboratory Theatre in both English and Spanish, and The Guest was chosen to be televised by WNBC-TV. The program, directed for television by Paul Freedman, was broadcast on Sunday, July 7, at ten P.M. The New York Times review had this headline: "TV: An Absorbing Puerto Rican Drama on WNBC; Station's Attention to Minorities Shifting."<sup>61</sup> The "old-fashioned" style of the piece that had been criticized by the Village Voice was praised by reviewer John J. O'Connor:

"The Guest" proved to be a quietly effective and absorbing slice of "folk theatre," a form with city roots going back to Yiddish theatre in the nineteenth century. The structure is simple: three sisters in New York argue over who will take care of their aged father as he lies dying in the next room. The language is direct, fastening onto everyday experiences of immediate impact to the audience.<sup>62</sup>

The review concludes with an observation:

Moral: If this is the type of programing being stimulated by the pressure groups, more power to the pressure groups. By paying intelligent attention to their communities, the

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<sup>60</sup> Arthur Sainer, "The Ethnic Question, Realism and Ritual," Village Voice, 20 June 1974, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> John J. O'Connor, "TV: An Absorbing Puerto Rican Drama in WNBC; Station's Attention to Minorities Shifting," New York Times, 10 July 1974, p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

stations are managing, tentatively, to improve their product.<sup>63</sup>

Two English language productions toured the streets of New York during the 1974 summer season: Payment as Pledged<sup>64</sup> by Brazilian playwright Alfredo Días Gómez and The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit<sup>65</sup> by U.S. short story writer Ray Bradbury. A combined total of twenty-seven performances was staged that summer.

Payment as Pledged, written in 1960, deals with the struggle of a peasant to fulfill a pledge to Saint Barbara and the obstacles that he encounters. In 1962, the play received the National Theatre Award, the São Paulo Governor's Award and the Best Brazilian Play Award, and its film version won the Golden Palm Award from the 1962 Cannes Film Festival<sup>66</sup>. The 1974 summer production by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre was praised by the critics:

In a vibrant production, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company establishes a careful balance between the broad acting necessary to street theatre and the credibility needed to keep the play from preaching.<sup>67</sup>

The action of the play develops in front of a town church. Peter Harvey's set was substituted on one occasion for the natural

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Alfredo Días Gómez, El pagador de promesas in Primer Acto 75 (Fall 1966): 22-47.

<sup>65</sup>Ray Bradbury, The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit (New York: Bantam, 1972).

<sup>66</sup>"Introducción" to El pagador de promesas in Primer Acto, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup>Debbi Wasserman, "Payment as Pledged," Show Business, 22 August 1974, p. 7.

setting of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine (see Appendix F for photos). Contrary to the tradition of the PRTT of "nationalizing" the texts, Payment as Pledged retained its Brazilian setting and allusions without attempting to bring them closer to the Puerto Rican experience. Mercedes Batista, a Brazilian dancer and teacher whose folkloric company has toured Latin America and Europe, was in charge of the choreography of the "capoeira"--a traditional Afro-Brazilian dance--which opened the third act. The play has had a wide appeal for other Latin theatre groups in New York; the 1974 summer production by the PRTT had been preceded by three others in both Spanish and the original Portuguese.<sup>68</sup>

The summer bill was completed by Bradbury's The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit, a short play about six Latin men who save enough money to buy a beautiful white suit and their adventures while sharing it. Ten performances were scheduled, ending the 1974 summer touring season on August 31.

The 1975 Season and Piri, Papaleta, and Pedro,<sup>69</sup> and  
If You Promise Not to Learn<sup>70</sup>

1975 began with the staging of two Arrabal plays in the Laboratory Theatre: Ceremony for an Assassinated Black

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<sup>68</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of Payment as Pledged, New York, Summer 1974. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>69</sup> Piri Thomas, Jesús Papoleto Meléndez, Pedro Pietri, Piri, Papoleto and Pedro, Directed by Pablo (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1975). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>70</sup> Osvaldo Dragún, Historias para ser contadas, trans. Pablo Cabrera and Ricardo Matamoros (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1975). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

Man<sup>71</sup> and The Two Executioners.<sup>72</sup> The plays, exercises in cruelty "a la Genet," ran for three weeks in the traditional fashion of alternating performances in both Spanish and English. Ceremony for an Assassinated Black Man was later chosen for isolated touring engagements. Its original production, directed by Miriam Colón, was highly praised by Clive Barnes:

It is all madness--crazy, decadent madness a perverse, but always humorous, glance at corruption. Black comedy has rarely been blacker, but it is heartless, rootless and therefore, in final count, pointless. Directed by Miss Colon (the imaginative set designs for both plays are by John Branon), the play is extremely well done. The deranged actors are beautifully played by Mr. Kerner and, with special virtuoso gusto, James Victor, but the whole cast is admirable. And, as always with Arrabal, the fetid images of insanity linger in the mind.<sup>73</sup>

The two Arrabal plays were followed by an evening of "Nuyorican" poetry written and performed by Piri Thomas, Jesús Papoleto Meléndez and Pedro Pietri. Under the direction of Pablo Cabrera, the poets were accompanied by six actors in a dramatized version of their poetry. A combination of wit, humor, hope, despair, frustration and anger heightened by searing poetic images was presented in theatrical form. The production is unique in the work of the PRTT, for only rarely has the group dealt so directly with themes emerging from the contradictions of the "Nuyorican" experience, and even the most

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<sup>71</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Ceremonia por un negro asesinado (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1975). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>72</sup>Fernando Arrabal, Los dos verdugos (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1975). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>73</sup>Clive Barnes, "Stage: Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre at Home," New York Times, 25 February 1975, p. 43.

humorous pieces by Pedro Pietri convey the constant struggle of the Puerto Rican in the vortex of New York City. In an interview for a Rochester newspaper, Miriam Colón comments on the recurrent moods and themes of the "Nuyorican" literature:

But very few of our writers find anything humorous to write about. The mood of the writers, and especially the poets, is angry, pained, anguished. It's hard to extract humor from the living conditions they see Hispanic people living in. Their work is an observation of what's going on, and it's a harsh commentary.<sup>74</sup>

A deeper analysis of some of the themes exposed in the poetic selections chosen for this theatrical production uncovers another aspect of the Puerto Rican experience, which is no longer the life of the traditional middle-class or healthy peasant family on the island or in New York, but the harsh reality of the ghetto, with its rats and cockroaches, with its deaths and hopes. Following a dramatic format which later characterized productions such as For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf, Cabrera brought to the stage the real experience of the majority of the Puerto Rican population in New York. The three sections or acts are named: Message to Urban Sightseers by Papoleto, A Poetic Essence of Down These Mean Streets by Piri Thomas and Puerto Rican Obituary by Pedro Pietri. Each poet, raised in New York and of Puerto Rican descent, expresses his particular view of his environment. An article printed in El Diario-La Prensa describes the poems:

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<sup>74</sup>Mary Rita Kurycki, "Puerto Rican Theatre for the Common People," (Rochester, New York) Democrat and Chronicle, 8 June 1975, p. 1H.

La obra de estos tres poetas, que forman parte integral de la literatura puertorriqueña, resume en imágenes cortas y vivas el viaje de inocencia a experiencia que ha sido cruzado por todo puertorriqueño, ya sea él o ella de La Perla, el Barrio, o el sur del Bronx. Esa es su óptica, su visión y Nueva York, la experiencia. Una poesía pensada y ejecutada con la firmeza y exactitud que uno normalmente encuentra en los mejores artistas gráficos.<sup>75</sup>

(The work of these three poets, which is an integral part of the Puerto Rican literature, depicts in short and live images the journey from innocence to experience that has been felt by the Puerto Ricans, from La Perla to the Barrio to the South Bronx. A well thought poetry executed with the firmness and preciseness one usually find in the best of graphic artists.)

With the staging of this experiment in dramatic poetry, it can be said that all aspects of the Puerto Rican experience have been covered through the selections produced by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, for without the "exile" experience in the depths of the ghetto, the Puerto Rican saga is not complete.

The poetry of the "Nuyorican" poets is filled with juxtaposed images of the New York and the Puerto Rican scenery. They define themselves as products of their parents' strong Hispanic ties and the ghetto world which surrounds them. The description of the Puerto Rican environment is rich in unpolluted elements of nature in which palm trees, coconuts, the ocean and fresh air dominate. Their view of urban New York is of a leaden nature: fire escapes, overdoses, death and despair. For the "Nuyorican" poets, the Caribbean island turns into an enchanted paradise where goodness and happiness prevail. This romantic conception often leads them to half truths and illusory

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<sup>75</sup>"Teatro Rodante Puertorriqueño presenta Piri, Papoleto y Pedro, dirigidos por Pablo" (New York) Diario-La Prensa, 2 May 1975, p. 14.

statements of hope. The first poem of the dramatized anthology describes, through a child's eyes, both worlds:

Palm trees  
and Cocos [coconuts]  
and Aguacates [avocados]  
and Guayaba [guava]  
Don't grow in my back yard  
Green waves  
and clear waters  
and fresh air  
Don't touch me  
and make me free  
And when I climb our fire escapes  
I don't pretend to search for cocos  
I'm the cowboy  
and you're Indian  
I ride off into the sunset

and when Mami sits me on her lap  
and remembers  
San Juan  
Aguadilla  
and Cocos  
and Aguacates  
and Guayabas  
Green waves  
and Clear Waters  
Fresh Air  
She smiles

and I dream of Central Park and Squirrels<sup>76</sup>

The same themes are captured in the last verses of the production's closing poem written by Pedro Pietri. The poem, a saga of the "Nuyorican" experience is a requiem to those who, crushed by an overpowering system, aim their hostilities towards their fellow Puerto Ricans. Its ending praises the advantages of living on the island over the trauma that is living, or as Pietri says, dying in New York:

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<sup>76</sup> Jesús Papoleto Meléndez, "When Mami Sits Me on Her Lap" in Piri Papoleto and Pedro, Directed by Pablo (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1975). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

And now they are together in the main lobby of the void  
 Addicted to silence  
 Off limits to the wind  
 Confined to worm supremacy in Long Island cemetery

. . . . .  
 Here lies Juan  
 Here lies Miguel  
 Here lies Milagros  
 Here lies Olga  
 Here lies Manuel  
 Who died yesterday, today, and will die again tomorrow

Always broke  
 Always owing  
 Never knowing that they are beautiful people  
 Never knowing the geography of their complexion  
 Puerto Rico is a beautiful place  
 Puertorriqueños are a beautiful race

. . . . .  
 If only they had kept their eyes open at the funeral of  
 their fellow employees who came to this country to make  
 a fortune and were buried without underwear  
 Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga, Manuel  
 Would right now be doing their own thing  
 where beautiful people sing and dance and work together  
 where the winner's a stranger to miserable weather  
 conditions  
 where you do not need a dictionary to communicate with  
 your hermanos [brothers]

Aquí se habla español siempre [Here Spanish is always spoken]  
 Aquí you salute your flag first  
 Aquí there are no dial soap commercials  
 Aquí everybody smells good  
 Aquí TV dinners do not have a future  
 Aquí the man admires, desires and never gets tired of  
 his woman  
 Aquí "que pasa power" es what's happening  
 Aquí to be called Negrito means to be called Love<sup>77</sup>

An additional element seldom present in the work of the Puerto Rican dramatists is evident in the work of the "Nuyorican" poets: racial consciousness. In the U.S., the Puerto Rican emigrants face a racial awareness not experienced in their homeland. Entering a race

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<sup>77</sup> Pedro Pietri, "Puerto Rican Obituary" in Piri, Papoleto and Pedro.

conscious society and sharing with the U.S. black population the poorest areas of the city, has made the second-generation Puerto Ricans borrow patterns of behavior as well as elements of language from their neighbors. Words like "brother," "beautiful people," "soul," and such concepts as the perfect and pure homeland, which is Puerto Rico for the exiled "Nuyorican," find corresponding values in the Black experience. A racial consciousness is imposed on the already present national consciousness.<sup>78</sup> In the dramatized poems written by Piri Thomas, a Puerto Rican Black, the race issue is a reiterated theme. "Didn't get the Job" ends with: "Damn, oh damn. . . I did want that job/ Didn't get it though. . ./ I was the wrong color."<sup>79</sup> In "Sounds from a Street Kid" he talks about "a world of name calling like Niggers and mucho Spicks."<sup>80</sup> Hope is expressed for the racial problem in his poem "Our World":

I do not wish destruction to be our course,  
But I do not believe that all my brothers and sisters  
Among all the cities and all the mountains  
And all the valleys and by the sea,  
Can stop short of anything but dignity,  
No matter what their color might be.<sup>81</sup>

Even though the "Nuyorican" poetry is filled with despair and cynicism, it is also sprinkled by elements of humor and hope.

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<sup>78</sup>Adalberto López and James Petras, Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, p. 122.

<sup>79</sup>Piri Thomas, "Didn't Get the Job" in Piri, Papoleto and Pedro.

<sup>80</sup>Piri Thomas, "Sounds from a Street Kid" in Piri, Papoleto and Pedro.

<sup>81</sup>Piri Thomas, "Our World" in Piri, Papoleto and Pedro.

"Consumer," a poem by Jesús Papoleto Meléndez, embodies both:

In school  
There was some learning.  
What goes up  
Must come down.  
That's what the teacher said.  
So it is my guess  
There will be a sharp decline  
in the price of food.  
It will be free.<sup>82</sup>

The most hopeful message is stated in his poem "Against the Mighty Structure":

The child  
Threw stones of earth  
Against the mighty structure  
that felt no pain  
And stones fell  
back onto this earth

But this child had endless supplies of earth  
and stone  
He smiled tears

And though I did not stay  
to see  
I knew the wall  
would fall.<sup>83</sup>

The "Nuyorican" poets write in English. Spanish words are only infrequently interjected into the poems. Alfredo López, author of The Puerto Rican Papers, explains the reason for the usage of Spanish in the English poems:

. . . even the Puerto Rican street poets, who write mainly in English, will sprinkle their poetry with Spanish phrases. . . because this is their way of telling our people that we stand together.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jesús Papoleto Meléndez, "Consumer" in Piri, Papoleto and Pedro.

<sup>83</sup> Jesús Papoleto Meléndez, "Against the Mighty Structure" in Piri, Papoleto and Pedro.

<sup>84</sup> Alfredo López, The Puerto Rican Papers (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), p. 197.

For these Puerto Ricans, the process of creating in English has become a matter of survival. They fulfill in their creative process the statement of Franz Fanon that "every colonized people--in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality--finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation, that is, with the culture of the mother country."<sup>85</sup> Although the possibility of the total assimilation into the U.S. culture of the new breed of Puerto Ricans who the "Nuyorican" poets represent exists, their ties with other elements of the Puerto Rican culture have prevented this from happening. They are, unlike the rest of the Puerto Rican writers, poets and dramatists that have been dealt with thus far, the only group emerging from the ranks of the ghetto society which constitutes the greater percentage of the Puerto Rican community in New York.<sup>86</sup> Paradoxically, while losing some of the cultural traits of their homeland, they frequently grow closer to the roots of the Puerto Rican experience. The conditions they face in New York ghettos often forces an awareness of and a groping for identity as well as a recognition of the unique character of being Puerto Rican, even though the island is hundreds of miles away.

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<sup>85</sup>Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 236.

<sup>86</sup>"Census of Population: 1970-General Social and Economic Characteristics; Final Report PC(1)-C53 Puerto Rico" (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1972), Table 52, pp. 53-208. "Poverty Status in 1969 of Families and Persons by Urban and Rural Residence" states that 59.6 percent of Puerto Rican families earned income lower than poverty level.

Both the social and artistic impact of this piece were recorded by Ramón Porrata in his review:

En Nueva York, prácticamente la capital del Imperio que actualmente nos cautiva, el Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre está dedicándose al beneficio del teatro. La labor didáctica que la compañía ha realizado, cobra con la presente producción, un matiz de calidad y precisión temporal digno de ejemplificación. Representar en Nueva York y en 1975 la gesta heroica del puertorriqueño emigrado, es un indicio de compromiso artístico, no sólo con la historicidad de una nación en progreso, Puerto Rico, sino con el desarrollo literario de la misma. Fundamentar un espectáculo teatral no en una pieza de arte dramático sino en poesías de estructura y emoción primitiva, es un indicio o un aviso de que una nueva época. . . que tiene cabida y garantía.<sup>87</sup>

(In New York, practically the capital city of the Empire which imprisons us, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre is dedicating itself to the art of theatre. The didactical task which the company has undertaken achieves with this production a quality and precision worth emulating. It stages in New York and in 1975 the historical saga of the Puerto Rican emigrant through new literary developments. To base a theatrical spectacle not on a play but on poems of primitive emotion and structure is an indication of a new era . . . that has a place and a future.)

The poems were sometimes enacted and other times interpreted through readings by the nine actors. Sub-plots and interactions between the interpreters were added to the written text by Pablo Cabrera. Long pieces were divided among the actors, creating individual characterizations. A script note before the poem "Puerto Rican Obituary" by Pedro Pietri, states,

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<sup>87</sup>Ramón Porrata, "El teatro está renaciendo en Nueva York" (Unpublished article, 1975), pp. 1-2. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

Please notice that this poem was reworked by Mr. Cabrera. No lines were cut in the final version. The poem was converted to dialogue using the author's identical words and using five or six different actors and actresses.<sup>88</sup>

Pietri, also wrote the introduction to Stories to be Told by Osvaldo Dragún. The Argentinian play was adapted to the Puerto Rican experience by Pablo Cabrera and Ricardo Matamoros and toured the city during the 1975 summer season under the title of If You Promise Not to Learn, I will Teach You a Few Things. In the already customary fashion of "nationalizing the classics," the PRTT substituted the Buenos Aires settings for New York ones. A peddler of Paddle balls becomes a New York street vendor selling umbrellas, jewelry and kitchen utensils and a lower class Argentinian worker is transformed into a U.S. Black hired to fill a firm's minority quota. The play, composed of three different stories and enacted by a group of itinerant actors, is about dehumanization due to economic pressures. The Story of an Abscessed Tooth tells of a street vendor who has a tooth ache, cannot speak and, therefore, is unable to sell his merchandise. Nagged by his wife, and unable to afford the dentist's bill, he leaves for the streets to make a "last effort." He collapses and dies in the midst of indifferent bystanders. The Story of How our Friend Willie González Felt Responsible for the Black Plague in South Africa is about a worker who is assigned the task of finding inexpensive meat to pack and ship to South Africa. He settles for rat meat, which earns him a medal for erradicating the animals from the

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<sup>88</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Script Note preceding "Puerto Rican Obituary" in Piri Papoleto and Pedro.

city but also inflicts on him the burden of responsibility for the outbreak of black plague in South Africa. He loses his job but questions his willingness to do it again if the price is right. The Story of the Man Who Became a Dog is about a worker, who, unable to find work, finally accepts a job as a watchman's dog. In so doing, he slowly loses his human identity and becomes a dog. The "stories" are written in presentational form with the actors directly addressing the audience. Exaggeration and humor are used to make each situation striking and new in the eyes of the spectator. Dragún describes his style:

Mi obra no tiene elementos melodramáticos, lo que si tiene son elementos dramáticos proyectados exageradamente "ex-profeso," casi llevados a la farsa. . .

Hay que pensar en el teatro como guión para una acción, y por lo tanto rescatar todos los elementos que sean válidos para que esa acción se ponga en contacto con la gente. Por eso personalmente so me interesa la estructura realista convencional. Pero sí, un teatro realista en cuanto a la actitud del autor frente a la realidad, no en cuanto a estructuras formales. . . . Es más válido hoy el absurdo que la comedia tradicional porque puede ir acompañado de un contenido que interesa, que destruye estructuras mentales que uno desea ver destruídas.<sup>89</sup>

(My plays do not have melodramatic elements, only dramatic elements projected through planned exaggeration, almost farcical. . .

One has to think about theatre as a scenario for an action, and for this reason one has to utilize all the valid elements that would make that action come in closer contact with the audience. That is why I am not interested in a realistic conventional structure. I am interested in a realistic theatre in terms of the attitude of the dramatist as he faces reality, and not in terms of formal structure. In these times, the absurd

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<sup>89</sup> Osvaldo Dragún, "Prólogo" to El amasijo (Argentina: Calatayud Editor, 1968), pp. 5-6.

has more validity than the traditional drama because it can go hand in hand with a relevant context, which destroys mental structures that one wants to see destroyed.)

Stories to be Told, written in 1957, has been staged in Spain, France, Russia, Rumania, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, as well as in the United States.<sup>90</sup> It was chosen in 1977 as one of the American College Theatre Festival plays to be presented at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. performed by Texas A and I University.<sup>91</sup>

Reviews for the PRTT production were favorable: "Mr. Cabrera's direction makes the most of the script, by coloring it with lively characterizations, precise movement, and an energetic sense of humor."<sup>92</sup> New York Times reviewer Richard Eder found particular merit in the third story, the only one of the three that he considered good political theatre: ". . . the last [\"The Story of the Man Who Turned Into a Dog\"], dealing with the same theme of the exploitation of the poor man by the capitalist system, is suddenly and movingly brilliant."<sup>93</sup> He furthers his argument by praising the actor portraying the "dog": "Ernesto González plays the part stunningly. His

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<sup>90</sup>Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of If You Promise Not to Learn, I Will Teach You a Few Things, New York, Summer 1975. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>91</sup>ACTF Newsletter 15 (April 1977): 2-6. Production of Stories to Be Told by Texas A and I University, directed by Joseph Rosenberry, Eisenhower Theatre, Kennedy Center, Washington, D.C., 4 April 1977.

<sup>92</sup>Debbi Wasserman, "If You Promise. . . , Street Theatre for Everyone," Show Business, 31 July 1975, p. 14.

<sup>93</sup>Richard Eder, "Puerto Rican Troupe Brightens Way for Street Weary," New York Times, 25 July 1975, p. 12.

transformation into a dog is a combination of anguish and grotesque determination. He brings the whole evening to life."<sup>94</sup>

The production was further praised in the French newspaper Le Monde, which described the impact, beginning with the introductory song by Pedro Pietri, on the audience.

Dès ce moment, le public est conquis, et, malgré le bruit de la rue et les rumeurs de la grande ville, le spectateurs--enfant compris--demeureront immobiles pendant plus d'une heure face à ces saltimbanques qui leur parlent, de sales métiers, de familles à nourrir et de vies de chômeurs. . .

Histoires terribles que celle d'Oswaldo Dragún: les spectateurs du théâtre de rue ne s'y trompent pas. Depuis 1967, la qualité de productions, le métier de comédiens, la force des auteurs jовés--parmi eux Lorca, Arrabal, Jaime Carrero, Maxwell Anderson, et Molière--ont fait du Théâtre Itinérant Portoricain non pas un porte-drapeau, mais un vigie, un amplificateur, et peut-être même un signal d'alarme dans l'instant où les desfilés de protestation de Noires et de Portoricains s'organisant de plus en plus fréquemment dans les rues de New-York.<sup>95</sup>

(From that moment on, the public is won over, and in spite of the street noises and the sounds of the big city, the spectators--children included--remain motionless for more than an hour in front of the performers who tell them about little murders, dirty jobs, families to feed, and jobless lives. . .

With such terrifying stories as those of Oswaldo Dragun, the spectators of the street theatre are not cheated. Since 1967, the quality of the productions, the professionalism of the actors, the force of the writers performed--among them Lorca, Arrabal, Jaime Carrero, Maxwell Anderson, and Moliere--have made the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company not a flag bearer but a harbinger, an amplifier and signal of alarm at the moment when protest marches by blacks and Puerto Ricans are seen more and more frequently in the streets of New York.)

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Liliane Kerjan, "West Side Story 1975, Theatre Portoricain Dans le Rues de New York" (Paris) Le Monde, 4 September 1975, p. 16.

The 1975 productions of Stories to be Told, Piri, Papaleta, and Pedro directed by Pablo, Ceremony for an Assassinated Black Man, and The Two Executioners, plus the work of the Training Unit, were made possible by grants and admission fees totaling \$154,167.42<sup>96</sup> (see Appendix D). The amount of \$47,500.00 of excess income over expenditures for 1974 and 1975 was being saved for a theatre fund.<sup>97</sup> In June, 1975, the news of the negotiations for a permanent home for the PRTT appeared:

The group has been negotiating for more than eight months to acquire a firehouse from Mayor Beame, Miss Colón said. The members hope to convert the firehouse into a permanent theatre.<sup>98</sup>

The theatre fund, set aside for the rent or purchase of a better located and equipped theatre for the company, made it possible for the PRTT to acquire a four-story firehouse at the Broadway theatre district as their new permanent home in 1977. Details about the new theatre and its meaning for the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre will be discussed in the Conclusion.

### The 1976 Season

On March 4, 1976, the Experimental Laboratory of the PRTT opened its season with the dual language production of Roberto

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<sup>96</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "Statement of Financial Condition for the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre for the Fiscal Year ended September 30, 1975" by accountant William Samovitz, New York, 1975. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Mary Rita Kurycki, "Puerto Rican Theatre for the Common People," p. 1H.

Rodríguez Suárez' Las ventanas<sup>99</sup> ("The Windows"). The play premiered in New York in 1966 and was restaged in 1967 during the Tenth Puerto Rican Theatre Festival in Puerto Rico. It concerns the common theme of the Puerto Rican migrant in New York. Avoiding the tragic resolution of previous dramas dealing with the same subject, Rodríguez solves the dramatic conflict by allowing his main character, Don Juan, an elderly gentleman trapped in his son's apartment, to flee his imprisonment and return to Puerto Rico. For once, the solution is one of action and not merely words. The play is divided into short scenes days and months apart from each other. Francisco Arriví describes Rodríguez' style:

Roberto Rodríguez Suárez presenta este mundo y su vida de una manera personal, válido de observaciones realistas al tiempo que fraccionamientos y asordamientos impresionistas, procedimientos a los que se inclina como dramaturgo.<sup>100</sup>

(Roberto Rodríguez Suárez depicts this world and its life from a personal point of view filled with realistic observations and impressionistic fragments that characterize the work of the dramatist.)

The PRTT production closed after sixteen performances on March 28.

On June 29, the Laboratory reopened with a double bill: Está estrictamente prohibido todo lo que no es obligatorio<sup>101</sup> ("Everything

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<sup>99</sup>Roberto Rodríguez Suárez, Las ventanas in Décimo Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1968).

<sup>100</sup>Francisco Arriví, "Décimo Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño," Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña 39 (abril-junio, 1968): 41.

<sup>101</sup>Jorge Díaz, Everything not Compulsory is Strictly Forbidden (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1976). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

not Compulsory is Strictly Forbidden") by Chilean dramatist Jorge Díaz and El convidado<sup>102</sup> ("The Dinner Guest") by Spanish playwright

Manuel M. Mediero. The Daily News described the bill as follows:

In what has to go down as its most ambitious project to date, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has kicked off its tenth season by staging its very first musical comedy 'Everything not Compulsory is Strictly Forbidden.'<sup>103</sup>

Díaz, who has been responsible for such absurdist pieces as The Genesis was Tomorrow and The Tooth Brush borrows strongly from the techniques of the epic theatre to develop the theme of oppressed and oppressors in this new quasi-operatic piece. The action takes place in a country club where an upper-class couple sits on and rides two male servants. The servants dare to stand up and attempt a rebellion, the outcome of which is left to the audience to resolve. The New York Post review lauds this ending:

The choice is up to you, says the four member-cast in a rousing musical finale. No, it's not one of those cute teasers where the audience is forced to supply an ending. Playwright Díaz, you suddenly realize, is demanding a political decision. Crude? Of course. But the play's charm and force is in its lack of subtlety.<sup>104</sup>

The cast was composed of Luis Avalos, who had played the lead in the PRTT 1974 production of Payment as Pledged and is a regular in the TV series "The Electric Company," soprano Eva de la O, Tony Díaz

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<sup>102</sup>Manuel Mediero, The Dinner Guest (Unpublished playscript, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 1976). Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>103</sup>David Medina, "Tunes, Tears and No. 10," New York Daily News, 8 July 1976, p. 90.

<sup>104</sup>Edmund Newton, "A Bout with the Ruling Class," New York Post, 1 July 1976, p. 20.

and Ernesto González, who had just finished a run in the New York Shakespeare Festival production of The Leaf People. González also played the lead in the second part of the bill as the deaf-mute in The Dinner Guest.<sup>105</sup>

Medeiro's The Dinner Guest portrays the same theme of oppression, but in a more cruel way. The play is a short piece of subhuman violence in which two members of the aristocracy beat, whip, poison, insult and ultimately kill a destitute deaf-mute during the course of a dinner. Performed at close proximity to the audience in the small Laboratory Theatre, and forcing them to react both intellectually and viscerally, the piece became almost too brutal to bear.

Everything not Compulsory is Strictly Forbidden was chosen to accompany Eleuterio, the Coquí, an adaptation of a story by Tomás Blanco, for the 1976 summer tour. The Coquí, a story about a tiny Puerto Rican singing frog who refuses to be assimilated by a foreign language and culture, was adapted for the stage by its director Pablo Cabrera, Miriam Colón and Rosa Luisa Márquez.<sup>106</sup>

Tomás Blanco's "coquí" became Rafael Hernández, one of Puerto Rico's most prolific composers, and the piece developed into a musical theatre review within the boundaries of the original story. Hernández' songs were interpreted by Emmanuel Logroño, who in 1972 had created the

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<sup>105</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the productions of Everything not Compulsory is Strictly Forbidden and The Dinner Guest, New York, Spring-Summer 1976. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>106</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of Eleuterio, el Coquí, New York, Summer 1976. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

leading role in the Anamú production of Pipo Subway Can't Laugh staged at the PRTT's Laboratory Theatre. Carlos Cestero, who played one of the leads in the New York Shakespeare Festival production of Two Gentlemen from Verona both on Broadway and on tour, was the story's Narrator. Other cast members included PRTT's regulars Iraida Polanco and Norberto Kerner.<sup>107</sup> The double musical bill toured from August 17 to September 12 in twenty-three different locations.

During 1976, the group received an invitation to attend the International Theatre Festival in Florence. It stated:

We would be very interested to receive any news about some present production of yours (cast, cost, press reviews, technical problems, photos, etc.), about your possible availability to come to Florence during the summer '76 to play in open air.<sup>108</sup>

Although the possibility of taking the production of Arrabal's Ceremony for an Assassinated Black Man was explored, the idea did not materialize.<sup>109</sup>

The second five-year period in the life of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre proved to be more fruitful than the first. The Laboratory Theatre and the Training Unit became integral elements of the enterprise. At least fourteen different plays were staged at the company's Laboratory Theatre on 18th street, and 1966 reports indicate that "some 700 students from low income homes have received

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Valerio Valoriani, Rassegna Internazionale di Teatri Stabili, Firenze, Italy, letter to Miriam Colón, 12 March 1976. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>109</sup>Miriam Colón, letter to Valerio Valoriani, 13 May 1976. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

training in this free-of-charge school."<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, Hostos College, one of the community colleges of City University of New York, started offering academic credit for the courses taken at the PRTT's Training Program.<sup>111</sup> Most of all, the Traveling Unit, which gives the group its essence, was responsible for the staging of nine different plays during the 1972-1976 period, four of which were staged by Pablo Cabrera whose experience with and preference for presentational theatre gave the company a new style.

The future offers exciting perspectives for the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre: a new locale on Broadway, new plays and playwrights, the possibility of theatre workshops, etc. The trajectory has been an upward one. By 1977 some of the group's projects have been realized. These plans and an evaluation of the work in progress of the PRTT will be the subject of the study's conclusion.

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<sup>110</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Program Notes for the production of La carreta, New York, Summer 1977. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

<sup>111</sup> Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, "1976-1977 Application for the New York State Council on the Arts," New York, 1976. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

## CONCLUSION

Puerto Rican theatre is characterized by a strong sense of cultural reaffirmation. This fact is evident in all theatrical activity on the island, and the defensive attitude towards cultural aggression has provided for a nationalistic theatre reflective of the theories of Emilio Belaval in his 1939 manifesto: "Lo que podría ser un teatro puertorriqueño," ("What a Puerto Rican Theatre Could Be"). Due to economic pressures many Puerto Ricans have migrated to the United States and have extended Puerto Rican culture far beyond the island's boundaries. The artistic manifestations of this ethnic group have enriched the cultural experience of the United States as well as provided a link with the country of origin for the migrant Puerto Rican community on the mainland.

In the field of theatre, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company has undertaken the task of introducing plays by Puerto Rican and other Hispanic writers to the urban residents of New York City. During the past ten years, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has served the dual function of bringing high quality, professional theatre to the Hispanic community in New York and making other sectors of the U.S. population aware of Hispanic culture, art and heritage.

The task of studying, preserving, enriching and making known the cultural values of the island fulfilled in Puerto Rico by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, has been undertaken by the PRTT in the City of New York. The postulates of Emilio Belaval as pursued

by the Areyto dramatic society in 1940--to stage plays by Puerto Rican authors, to implement new and dynamic production techniques and to attract and develop a broad and diversified audience--have characterized the work of the company in nearly every aspect of its work. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre has been an extension or outpost of the Puerto Rican theatre, a means of bringing audiences in New York in touch with an authentic Puerto Rican ethos.

In its first decade (1967-1976), the PRTT staged seventeen plays by Puerto Rican authors. These include such works as The Oxcart by René Marqués (produced in 1967 and again in 1977), Crossroads by Manuel Méndez Ballester (produced in 1969) and The Golden Streets by Piri Thomas (produced in 1970 and 1971). In a naturalistic fashion, these three plays deal with the clash between Puerto Rican and U.S. cultures. The deterioration of the family is seen as a result of assimilation, and a return to the island is proposed as the only solution. Social problems such as drug addiction, rape, unemployment and poverty are blamed upon the process of transculturation. The mood is tragic and only at the conclusion of the plays do the characters decide upon what should be done to change the conditions of their existence. These three plays represent trends evident in the social plays written in the island during the 1940s.

A more distinctive presentational style is evident in other plays staged by the company. The Passion of Antígona Pérez, written by Luis Rafael Sánchez and produced by the PRTT in 1972, reflects new tendencies in the Puerto Rican theatre which were first explored by dramatists such as René Marqués and Francisco Arriví during the late Fifties and Sixties, relating the Puerto Rican experience to myths of

universal scope which deal with the struggle of individuals within hostile environments controlled by powerful political forces. The "epic" style of The Passion of Antígona Pérez echoes other selections staged by the company. A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories (produced in 1971), Piri, Papoleto and Pedro, Directed by Pablo (produced in 1975) and Eleuterio, Coquí (produced in 1976) are examples of dramatic adaptations of short stories and poems based on the Puerto Rican experience. These works were directed by Pablo Cabrera. Cabrera had demonstrated a consistent preference for presentational theatre and was responsible for creating a panorama of the Puerto Rican reality from two different points of reference. The Dramatized Anthology and Eleuterio El Coquí were written from the point of view of the island-raised Puerto Rican, whereas Piri, Papoleto and Pedro portrays the world as seen through the eyes of the "Nuyorican." Narrators were added to the adaptations as a device to relate essential information which could not be enacted. These pieces responded the question of Puerto Rican identity both on the island and in New York and traced the stylistic development of island dramatists.

The reliance on Puerto Rican authors, texts and themes has helped the PRTT to strengthen a sense of national identity and pride in the largest Puerto Rican community in the United States. Adapting non-Puerto Rican plays with strong social messages which speak to issues confronting Puerto Ricans, has also been a practice utilized by the company. By adopting or "nationalizing" works such as Winterset by Maxwell Anderson (produced in 1968) and Stories to Be Told by Osvaldo Dragún (produced in 1975), among others, the PRTT has attempted to make the action of the plays more relevant to the audiences's reality.

In order to reach a broader segment of the population, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre introduced dual-language--Spanish and English--performances by the same cast. This approach has also helped give the group a larger flexibility by allowing it to adapt to the language preference of the specific audience it serves.

The key to the group's success over the past ten years, has been its summer traveling unit, which plays the streets, parks and playgrounds of the five boroughs of New York City, tours consistently to communities in New Jersey and Long Island and has ventured to other Eastern cities as well. The traveling unit has been responsible for the production of nineteen different plays, all presented free-of-charge to their audiences. The success of the productions in establishing strong rapport with urban audiences and maintaining artistic excellence is well recorded by newsmen and critics who have consistently praised and encouraged the work of the traveling unit. Perhaps of even greater interest are the instances of participation and intervention on the part of ghetto audiences who find the theatrical experience provided by the PRTT to be direct and engaging, dealing with issues and characters common to their own experience.

With the acquisition of a small in-door locale on 18th street in New York City in 1972, the PRTT began to address two areas of concern: a laboratory theatre in which new plays could be tested and a training unit to offer theatre courses to minority students. Thirteen plays were produced by the Laboratory Theatre between 1972 and 1976, several of which were later chosen for the summer touring season. Both, the Laboratory Theatre and the Traveling Theatre perform under the jurisdiction of Actors Equity, which has allowed

numerous Hispanic actors, directors, designers and technicians to enter the professional artistic community of New York.

The three principal components of the PRTT--the touring unit, the Laboratory Theatre and the training program--have become realities through the support given the company by major funding organizations such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration of New York City, the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. The group's funding from these and other prominent organizations has increased seven-fold during the past ten years.

During 1977, a new funding campaign has been a major concern for the company as it embarks on a new phase of development. Under Mayor Abraham Beame's direction, the City of New York granted the company a twenty-five year lease on a four-story firehouse at 304 West 47th street, in the heart of the Broadway theatre district. The PRTT rents the building for \$240.00 a month and is in the process of converting it into a 199-seat theatre which will also house the administrative offices and the training unit facilities. The total renovation of the building is expected to be complete in 1978 and will cost an estimated \$360,000. David Hays, who has designed settings for numerous Broadway productions and for the Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Vivian Beaumont Theatre in Lincoln Center, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, and the New York Metropolitan Opera was the design consultant for the project with Peter Blake and Brian Smith as architects.<sup>1</sup> (See photos in Appendix F.)

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<sup>1</sup>"Puerto Rican Theatre Finds a Home," New York Times, 3 March 1977, p. 23.

The plans for the new theatre also include an art and photography gallery, a community center in which lecture sessions on contemporary social, political and cultural topics can be held, and the main stage which serves as the primary in-door performance space for the PRTT as well as provides space for concerts, poetry readings and productions by other Latino theatre groups from around the country.<sup>2</sup> The National Endowment for the Arts has already granted the company \$100,000 for 1978 as part of a challenge grant program which requires matching funds from other sources. The funds will be used to complete the renovation of the new facilities.<sup>3</sup>

On March 3, 1977, the building was inaugurated in a ceremony taking place in a temporary 75-seat theatre on the building's first floor. Numerous telegrams were received and one of the most telling was from Senator Jacob Javits:

The establishment of the first Puerto Rican professional theatre in the Broadway area is a fitting tribute to the work of the Traveling Theatre. I applaud your efforts to offer public theatre in the squares, playgrounds and streets of this city.<sup>4</sup>

The new theatre represents the most ambitious project undertaken by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre and holds the potential of significantly altering the nature of the company. Although touring

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<sup>2</sup>Dolores Prida, "El Teatro Goes to Broadway," Nuestro 1 (June 1977): 10.

<sup>3</sup>Grace Glueck, "\$8 Million to Arts to Aid Eighteen Institutions in New York in 1978," New York Times, 27 July 1977, p. A1.

<sup>4</sup>Jacob Javits, United States Senator, telegram to Miriam Colón, New York, 3 March 1977. Files of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

will no doubt always remain a significant factor of the group's operation, the acquisition of a new permanent home indicates a less itinerant format in upcoming years. Nevertheless, the PRTT did stage their twenty-ninth production, I took Panama, a collective work by the members of the Teatro Popular de Bogotá, as a touring production during the summer of 1977. The new theatre does, however, bring to a close a significant portion of the history of the PRTT. The "traveling theatre" format, once seen as the group's "essence," may now become only an "arm" of the permanent theatre. On one hand, the new theatre on Broadway may be responsible for introducing more Puerto Rican artists and plays to the commercial theatre audience, opening new doors for Latino talent; on the other, the time and effort required by this new venture may risk the commitment to the segments of the New York community which the Traveling Theatre aimed to serve during its first decade of production. The creation of other groups that would follow the aims and goals of the PRTT during its first ten years of work may help expand the work of the company to include larger sectors of the New York population.

The group's new location in the Broadway theatre district will no doubt affect the future work of the group. Busing audiences from Hispanic communities might make the new theatre more accessible to audiences not familiar with the Broadway theatre district, insuring that a breach between the audiences for the traveling productions and the "sedentary" productions does not occur.

From 1967 to 1976, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre responded to the cultural needs of a segment of the U.S. population and contributed to the quality of theatre in this country by being a

showcase of Hispanic dramatic arts. Its work, cradled in the Civil Rights Movement of the Sixties, has followed the lines of other ethnic theatres such as Teatro Campesino and the Negro Ensemble Company. Its goals of striving to reinforce the cultural traditions of the Puerto Ricans in New York and providing a showcase for Hispanic art and talent in order to enhance the quality of theatre experience in the New York community continue to be pursued by the company.

The first ten years in the history of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre show the development and maturation of a theatre company capable of demonstrating the valuable contribution of ethnic theatre to the cultural wealth of the United States, responding to Francis Fergusson's plea for a relevant theatre, a theatre based on "racial and regional traditions" and their immediacy to the audience. The PRTT has become a symbol of the struggle of the Hispanic community to preserve its identity in the face of total assimilation. Since 1967, theatre has been an instrument used to pursue that end:

Desde Loíza Aldea, Puerto Rico, hasta Santa Fé, Nuevo México, el teatro ha servido de expresión artística, rito religioso y comentario social, en fin, de espejo de la cultura, la historia y la religión del hispano. Nuestros pueblos, desde el comienzo de su mestizaje, forjan una identidad a través de sus dramas comunales: la fiesta de Santiago Apóstol, Moros y cristianos, Los tejanos, Los comanches, Las posadas, Los pastores. . . La evangelización de los indígenas se realiza, hasta cierto punto, infundiendo el areito con el mensaje cristiano y traduciendo autos sacramentales a los idiomas de América. Llega a ser tan importante el vehículo teatral en el proceso de conversión que las primeras misiones se construyen con un patio especial para espectáculos teatrales. La vitalidad de la afición teatral hoy es obvia, desde lo altamente artístico de las obras de René Marqués en Lincoln Center hasta lo profundamente religioso de Las apariciones de la Virgen en la iglesia del barrio.

Recientemente el vehículo teatral ha servido de portavoz de la afirmación abierta de una identidad hispana en los Estados Unidos. Desde El Teatro Campesino de Luis Valdez hasta el Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre de Miriam Colón, el mensaje se oye en las calles urbanas, los campos, las iglesias, las escuelas. . . en todas partes. Ese teatro, por sí, es una parte esencial del mensaje. Es teatro bilingüe, orgulloso y explorador de su patrimonio cultural. Es popular; la solidaridad con su público refuerza la confianza en la posibilidad de forjar un destino propio en este país.<sup>5</sup>

(From Lofza Aldea, Puerto Rico, to Santa Fe, New Mexico, theatre has been a forum for artistic expression, religious ritual and social commentary. Our peoples, from the beginning of the Spanish conquest, have forged their identity through community dramas: the festivities of Apostle Saint James, Moors and Christians, The Texans, The Comanches, The Christmas Lodges, The Shepherds. . . The evangelization of the indians was realized, to an extent, by instilling a Christian message in the Areito and by translating the Autos Sacramentales into the languages of America. Theatre became so important in the process of conversion that the first missions had a special patio dedicated to theatre spectacle. The taste for theatre is more than alive today, from the artistic quality of the plays of René Marqués in Lincoln Center, to the profoundly religious ritual of The Apparitions of the Virgin at the barrio church.

Recently, theatre has served as an advocate for the affirmation of a Hispanic identity in the United States. From Luis Valdez' Teatro Campesino to Miriam Colón's Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, the message is heard in urban streets, in the countryside, churches, schools. . . everywhere. That kind of theatre is by itself an essential part of the message. It is bilingual theatre, proud and in search of its cultural heritage. It is a popular theatre; the solidarity with its people reinforces the belief in the possibility of forging our own destiny in this country.)

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<sup>5</sup> Nicolás Kanellos, "Nuestro teatro," Revista Chicano-Riqueña 1 (Fall 1973): 1.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH MIRIAM COLÓN - DIRECTOR OF THE  
PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE  
JULY 15, 1976

## APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW WITH MIRIAM COLON - DIRECTOR OF THE  
PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE  
July 15, 1976

1. Do you feel that theatre has a specific social, political, and cultural function?
  - a. How does street theatre better accomplish this?

Yes. I wonder what is the theatre all about if it does not have a social function. Hopefully, it should not be just a mirror of human condition, it should also have a point of view, express an idea, enlighten some situation and I feel a more profound purpose when it has that as part of its essence and being. If it did not have social content, I feel it would only have half value.

(1a.) Street Theatre - It is really not where you perform, it is the vehicle that you select. The function is performed whether we are indoors or outdoors. Naturally, we strive for the street, but also for indoors, to find a vehicle that would express a particular point of view and hopefully that would throw some light or call attention to some facet of it. The street theatre offers an especially attractive opportunity to create this type of theatre (socio-political) because you get the wonderful element of the people reacting, of the people expressing, that is lacking under most other ordinary circumstances. You do not get this element of participation which is terribly exciting and very enlightening. Street theatre is stated as the most important element of our theatre operation. I think it still continues to be the most important element, although we have branched into the laboratory theatre on a year-round basis and although we have branched to traveling to colleges and into the training unit.

The group that goes to the streets is important and it gives us our essence, and I do not think it will ever be eliminated because it distinguishes us from the myriads of . . . other such groups that do the same-- they present theatre in little holes-in-the-wall in New York City.

Bringing theatre to the people brings us in contact with an element of the community that, ordinarily will not come contact with it . So we feel that we are servicing youth and other segments of the society that if it were not for these opportunities, I do not think they would ever be exposed to the theatre. There are a lot of artistic endeavors going to the streets, which is a marvelous thing in New York City. But, we were kind of pioneers, we feel that we have an obligation to that segment of the population--to the youth, to ordinary citizens--and sharing with them in that experience is, I think, an important part of our being and distinguishes us from the subscription type theatre where the well-to-do and the already sophisticated people will go. I feel they are being served by other very meritorious groups.

## 2. What is the philosophy of the PRTT?

I think the philosophy is taking the theatre to the people. Again--the themes--serving as a mirror, to have them see the conditions of a particular group of people--there is the element of exposing them to these situations--of exposing them to these dramas in the hope that by being confronted they may be persuaded to think, to compare, to react, to get either happy or very, very angry, and this has happened, so that the philosophy is just: to bring a theatre that

is relevant, ideally, I am concerned to bring Puerto Rican theatre, to bring Latin American theatre. I think Clifford Odets, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller--so many of the great Americans--already have been exposed, but I feel that part of the mission of our theatre is to make that youth and that audience aware that there are other men and other women writing with great perception and great sophistication, like in the case of the play we are doing now by Jorge Díaz. Well, many people do not know that we have in Latin America men of the perception and the sophistication of this man, so we are a cultural vehicle, not only for the Hispanics but for the New York community and the United States community as well.

3. Does the production of the PRTT reflect mainly the life on the island of Puerto Rico or is it mainly a reflection of life in New York?

There have been a larger number of plays about the life of the Puerto Ricans in New York. I will say The Oxcart had a combination of life here and life there. But, let us say, The Golden Streets by Piri Thomas was about life here. Crossroads (Encrucijada) by Méndez Ballester, was about life here [New York] . Las Ventanas was about life here. The Innocent--I do not . . . (maybe) it could happen anywhere; The Guest--here [New York]. Scribbles--here [New York]; Flag Inside--Puerto Rican reality in Puerto Rico. Anthology was about life in Puerto Rico.

So, . . . come to think of it, there has been a nice balance of things, of situations that depict the Puerto Rican there [in Puerto Rico] and of situations that depict him here [New York].

4. What about the dual-language approach of the PRTT?
  - a. What about the use of Spanglish?

We have tried that formula and it is starting to show results. We are conditioned to an audience that follows us . . . the audience in the laboratory and in the streets. We ask them: do you want it in English or in Spanish, and they take their preference. Right now we had a situation where we had to perform in some activity at Battery Park on the 4th of July and they said English . . . the same week at Lincoln Center we asked what language and they said Spanish . . . So, it is achieving a flexibility now that I was hoping we could have. . . .

(4a.) No, no. Spanglish, only if it serves as a vehicle to dramatize the tragedy--like Pipo Subway.

5. What do you look for when choosing a play? Do you search for a particular theme or style of production in terms of its possible impact on the street audience?

I think a lot about, first, content; second, possible impact. You see, our audiences are very mixed because we choose 90 percent of the locations to be in the areas where there is more unemployment, more poverty, more deterioration of the neighborhood. We get a mixture of proportion of three to one blacks to Puerto Ricans, and then there is the white element too and a great proportion of children. So, inevitably, where poor sections are we find it is not just the Puerto Ricans. It is also the black and poor people of scarce means--white also, but they are in the minority. . . . We will also perform in a museum like the Metropolitan Museum. We have the performance there because there is another segment of the community that does not need to see theatre for free but that we want to acquaint with it.

The performances at Lincoln Center get a combination of subscription audiences and townspeople . . . Again, [the selection of plays is made in terms of] content and the impact [on the audience] . . . it is the type of audience that has to be arrested, therefore, the vehicles have necessarily to have something that sometimes has to sacrifice in certain subtleties in the delivery, in the timing that we can afford under laboratory conditions. They have to be done away with for a larger stroke. For a more robust kind of delivery . . . unfortunately part of our bigger problem is that we cannot find properties that besides being good pieces of theatre have these qualities also.

6. Does the PRTT have a workshop for dramatists?

No, we are thinking that is the inevitable next step. It is an important step, we should take it, we have to take it, soon.

7. Is there something to be said about the theatrical creation in Puerto Rico and in New York during the past five years in terms of available materials.

I am having trouble finding plays. I think plays are being written, it is just that, first, they have to have something, again, that is worth saying. In terms of what is happening in Puerto Rico now, I am disappointed that I am not getting enough properties from them. It seems like there is a repetition there [in Puerto Rico] of the old work horses . . . I wish I could find a play that talks about some of the dramas that are taking place at the moment in Puerto Rico; some of the dilemmas that the present Puerto Rican is confronting on the island or the drama of the Puerto Rican that arrives from New York with a torn family with values totally changed in the family structure; with people that have become embittered

after twenty years in New York . . . or plays in Puerto Rico about the role of the Puerto Rican that was born in New York in trying to adapt [to life on the island], the discrimination against them. . . . There are so many themes, so much wealth of material. Something about the political dilemma of the island at the moment.

In New York some people are writing, like Piri Thomas and Miguel Piñero, a developing talent, very interesting as playwright with the orientation of New York as his background. The same thing is happening to Pedro Pietri and to Papoleto Meléndez. I just could count on the palm of my hand how many playwrights we have here.

8. What are the main differences in theme and production approach between the dramatists of New York and those of Puerto Rico?

In New York's theatre there is a tone of bitterness, . . . and it is also evident in the poetry. I think the most important literary vehicle in New York right now is not the drama among the Puerto Ricans, it is the poetry. I think the truths that are being expressed, the realities that they are depicting, the humor that is contained in this body of poetic literature, to me is infinitely more interesting than the theatrical. The theatrical pieces that are being written amount to close to nothing, I would say.

In the young crop of writers that are writing about the New York experience, there is a harsh quality to the writing. A tremendously important message is contained in that poetry that is devoid of adornments. It does not have the lyric quality and in that sense it does not have the perfection and the classic quality of the Puerto Rican writers from the island that are, in a way, more polished; yet, the ones from New York are more devastating, more piercing, they are more

cutting, they are more bitter.

9. Which have been the most significant productions of the PRTT and why?

I think an important step for us was the presentation of the short stories [Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories] because it was like a little panorama of types from the island, situations from the island, important writers from the island. The most successful vehicle was The Oxcart (La carreta). We were responsible for bringing La carreta to the streets and, through the efforts of two or three people and myself, we were responsible for La carreta off-Broadway and calling the attention of the regular audiences to it. La carreta is still the most famous, the most successful vehicle that we have presented. Significant along with La carreta was Antígona Pérez . . . as an example of Puerto Rican dramatist on another level, on an international level, on the level of the world theatre--not that La carreta is not on that level--but the theme, the style, the structure that he [Luis Rafael Sánchez] followed is international. I think those would be the most important vehicles that we have presented.

10. Which individual artists have made the most significant contributions to the overall success of the PRTT/ In the field of design, acting, and directing?

A number of them. We did not start as a repertory company but somehow, in a strange way, we keep getting back to a certain group . . .

Pablo Cabrera, in terms of the knowledge that he has brought, the style, the professionalism among our directors, he is an asset in our development as a professional group. Performers: Iraida Polanco and Ricardo Matamoros; in Design, a technician from Broadway,

Anibal Otero (also member of board founders); Iris Martínez, not only as actress but her contribution in the school, and as source for plays; Luis Rafael Sánchez and Jaime Carrero, authors, with [plays like] Pipo Subway, Flag Inside and Noo Yall. As time goes by, we could have maybe half a dozen of those people coming constantly to us, thinking of us, creating constantly with the idea: this will be good for a laboratory staged reading. Next year I am going to start doing that, I mean not really production all year long but stage readings, like other groups. The Negro Ensemble Theatre does that, the Black Theatre Alliance does that and I really have to benefit very much by their example. That at the end of the year you really have read thirty to forty plays, although some of them were not performed professionally, a whole production was not attached to it; but discussions were held; actors rehearsed, playwrights listened to, discussions in the privacy of their own peers, . . . this is a very important step that we can start taking towards the development of a true playwright's laboratory.

11. What are your projections about the future of the PRTT?  
Do you foresee it as a permanent institution in the city of New York.

Yes, this is the hope. We are evolving now from what has been the laboratory into moving into the physical space that will eventually be converted into our theatre headquarters, training unit, offices, etc., and it is our hope that this monstrous step will . . . give the permanence of having a small theatre in the Broadway area which is really where the theatre is located. The Firehouse is located 304W. 47th St. on the same street where the Barrymore Theatre is.

I hope that it can seat about 199 . . . . I am sorry that it is not bigger, the physical plant does allow for more but there are serious union complications that would arise if you were going to have more than 199. We would fall into a salary category, according to the Union, that would be devastating.

We have already contacted architects and have some preliminary plans. The important thing is that we have to raise \$300,000. We are going to be calling in every direction so that it does not take twenty years. . . .

APPENDIX B

THE PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE  
OXCART BUDGET BREAKDOWN  
SUMMER 1967

# APPENDIX B

Table 13. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Oxcart Budget Breakdown, Summer 1967

	<u>Weeks</u>	<u>Per Week</u>	
Project Director	4	250.00	1,000.00
Artistic Director	4	125.00	500.00
Stage Manager	4	227.45	909.80
Lighting Technician	4	75.00	300.00
Sound Technician	4	50.00	200.00
Wardrobe-Props	4	75.00	300.00
Technical Assistant	4	50.00	200.00
Community Supervisor	5	80.00	400.00
Bookkeeper - Secretary	4	100.00	400.00
		<u>907.45</u>	<u>3,709.60</u>
(Robert Buzzell)			
(George Edgar)			
(James Gore)			
(Richard Logothetis)			
(George Jacobs)			
(Kathy Scarlett)			
(Dan Fern)			
(Gilberto Zaldivar)			
<u>ACTORS (Equity)</u>			
10 Actors at 130.00			5,200.00
<u>ACTORS (Non Equity)</u>			
2 Actors at 50.00			<u>400.00</u>
	TOTAL		<u>5,600.00</u>
5% for Actor's Equity			306.00
7% Payroll Taxes			785.58
\$30.00 per Equity Actor Welfare			<u>330.00</u>
	TOTAL		<u>1,421.58</u>
	GRAND TOTAL		<u><u>11,231.38</u></u>

APPENDIX C

THE PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE, BUDGET BREAKDOWN  
A DRAMATIZED ANTHOLOGY OF PUERTO RICAN SHORT STORIES  
SUMMER 1971

Table 13. Continued

	<u>Weeks</u>	<u>Per Week</u>	
CONTRACT SERVICES			
Author's Royalties (Rene Marques)	4	100.00	400.00
Play Director's Royalties (Lloyd Richards)	4	40.00	160.00
Translator's Royalties (Charles Pilditch)	4	10.00	40.00
Artistic Director (George Edgar)	4	125.00	500.00
Production Co-ordinator (Marion Graham)	3	150.00	450.00
Technical Advisor (Dick Robbins)	4	50.00	200.00
Insurance (R.A. Boyer)	4		500.00
			<u>2,250.00</u>
SPACE COSTS & RENTALS			
Rehearsal Studio	4	10.00	40.00
Storage Space	4	40.00	160.00
Truck & Trailer Storage	4	60.00	240.00
			<u>440.00</u>
TRAVEL			
Truck Rental (Avis)	5	150.95	754.75
Carry-All Truck (Avis)	4	70.00	280.00
Station Wagons (Bob Buzzell)	5	70.00	350.00
Gas & Oil	4	30.00	120.00
Staff Driver (Buzzell)	4	50.00	200.00
	4	25.00	100.00
Transport Set from Fair Actor's Transportation (Lucy)	4	25.00	100.00
			<u>1,927.50</u>

Table 13. Continued

COMMENDABLE SUPPLIES		<u>Weeks</u>	<u>Per Week</u>	
Programs & Posters		4	25.00	100.00
Props, Food & Replacing		4	10.00	40.00
Clerical & Office Supplies		4	10.00	40.00
Adding Machine		2 (mos.)		16.00
Scripts	(Ethel Waugh)			25.00
Circulars		4	25.00	100.00
Telephone		5	30.00	150.00
Petty Cash		4	10.00	40.00
				<u>511.00</u>
RENTAL, LEASE, PURCHASE EQUIPMENT				
Construction of Mobile Stage (Feller's)				2,500.00
Re-Adapt Stage Set to Mobile Unit				1,000.00
Designer's Fee (Douglas Schmidt)				250.00
Sound Equipment Rental		4	50.00	200.00
Cable & Lighting Equipment		4	60.00	240.00
50 Amp Generator Rental (\$315 per month)				315.00
Tape Recorder Rental (2) (\$15.00 ea.)		4	30.00	120.00
2 Outdoor Speakers (Purchase)				65.00
2 Light & Sound Beams				40.00
Portable Toilet (\$135 per month)				135.00
				<u>4,885.00</u>
Dismantle and Store Set	\$300.00			
BONDS & DEPOSITS				
\$3,104.90 Equity (Returnable)				
200.00 Truck (Avis)				
125.00 Carry-A11 (Avis)				

APPENDIX D

THE PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE  
OPERATIONS FOR THE YEAR ENDED SEPTEMBER 30, 1975

## APPENDIX C

Table 14. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Budget Breakdown--  
A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories,  
Summer 1971

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<u>Research</u>	
10 Stories - \$50	500
<u>Adaptation</u>	
10 Stories - \$200 per story	2,000
<u>Translation</u>	
10 Stories - \$200 per story	2,000
<u>Performance</u>	
<u>Artistic Personnel</u>	
12 Actors - \$150 12 weeks	21,600
3 Understudies - \$85.50	3,030
Artistic Director - \$150	1,800
Stage Manager - \$185	2,200
Assist. Stage Mgr. - \$100	1,200
10 Authors Royalties - \$50 per week, 8 weeks	4,000
<u>Technical</u>	
Technical Director - \$150, 10 weeks	1,500
Sound Man - \$125 (9 weeks)	1,125
Light Tech. - \$125 (9 weeks)	1,125
Assist. Light & Sound - \$75 (9 weeks)	675
<u>Administrative Personnel</u>	
Co. Manager - \$150, 12 weeks	1,800
Community Coordinator - \$150	1,800
Project Coordinator - \$150	1,800
Secretary - \$150	1,800
Accountant - fee	200
House Manager - \$50	600
Public Relations - \$150	1,800
<u>Physical Properties</u>	
Sets	1,000
Costumes	500
Props	250
<u>Rental Space</u>	
Rehearsal & Departure Point - \$150	1,800
Office Space - \$75	900

Table 14. Continued

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<u>Rental Equipment</u>	
2 Typewriters - \$12 per month	288
Adding Machine - \$12 per month	36
Mimeograph - \$20 per month	60
<u>Transportation</u>	
U Haul - \$125 (9 weeks)	1,125
Bus - \$200 (9 weeks)	1,800
Trailer - \$125 (12 weeks)	1,125
Auto - \$125 (12 weeks)	1,500
Gas - \$4 (12 weeks)	72
<u>Promotion</u>	
Programs, leaflets, posters, scripts	1,500
Stamps	300
Telephone - \$25	300
<u>Other</u>	
Insurance	500
Wardrobe Upkeeper - \$15 (8 weeks)	120
Office Supplies - \$15 (12 weeks)	180
Consumables - \$10 (10 weeks)	100
Petty Cash - \$10 (12 weeks)	120
<u>FICA &amp; Welfare Benefits</u>	
Payroll Taxes 10%	4,985
Welfare Actors - \$4.95	970.20
Pension 5%	1,280
Disability \$.55	92.40
	<hr/>
GRAND TOTAL - SUMMER PROJECT 1971	\$73,458.60
PUERTO RICO TRAVELING THEATRE	<hr/>

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## APPENDIX D

Table 15. The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Operations for the Year Ended September 30, 1975

INCOME:	Grant, New York State Council on the Arts			\$ 87,160.00
	Grant, National Endowment for the Arts			45,000.00
	Other Grants			8,610.00
	Individual Contributions			1,904.92
	Performance Fees & Admissions			11,492.50
TOTAL INCOME				<u>\$154,167.42</u>
PROGRAM EXPENDITURES				
Payroll and Fees	Prof. Trav. Theatre		Training Unit	
Production Costs	<u>\$30,772.68</u>		<u>\$26,589.37</u>	
Travel & Transportation	11,092.95	Laboratory Workshop	1,432.11	
Printing & Advertising	5,542.84		130.85	
Rent	1,494.72		830.81	
Office, Phone & Postage	2,900.00		2,325.00	
Insurance	1,262.56		1,063.21	
Utilities	306.33		616.34	
Audit & Legal	361.98		300.15	
Maintenance	270.00		200.00	
Dues & Subscriptions	350.01		298.90	
Field Trip	30.00		86.70	
Protection			147.10	
			<u>62.10</u>	
TOTAL EXPENSES	<u>\$54,384.07</u>		<u>\$34,082.64</u>	<u>\$130,639.21</u>
Excess Income Over Expenditures				23,528.31
Net Worth 10-1-74				25,743.15
Net Worth 9-30-75				<u>49,271.36</u>
Restricted - Theatre Fund				<u>47,500.00</u>
Working Funds 9-30-75				<u>\$ 1,771.36</u>

APPENDIX E

PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE  
STATEMENT INCOME AND EXPENSE  
YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31  
1967-1977



Table 16. Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Co., Inc.--Statement Income and Expense, Year Ended December 31

	6/30/77	6/30/76	6/30/75	1974	12/30/73	12/30/72	12/30/71	12/30/70	12/30/69
<b>INCOME</b>									
Grants & Contributions <sup>a</sup>	\$143,003	\$130,500	\$123,770	\$ 79,000	\$132,149	\$111,438	\$122,583	\$44,330	\$47,562
Earned Income	17,410	6,688	14,485	7,763	17,890	5,900	--	400	--
Interest	1,953		379		509	353	57	--	--
Other	485	350		259	429	--	4,039	--	--
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$162,851</b>	<b>\$137,538</b>	<b>\$138,634</b>	<b>\$ 87,022</b>	<b>\$150,977</b>	<b>\$117,691</b>	<b>\$126,679</b>	<b>\$44,730</b>	<b>\$47,562</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>									
Salaries & Fees	42,896	25,679	49,025	26,150	34,818	65,448	67,612	24,823	26,236
Payroll, Taxes, Pension	74,425	38,094	42,925	28,505	25,035	5,332	9,905	3,088	2,517
Royalties	654	550	500	300		2,031	5,125	645	550
Set Construction	3,441	4,043	4,076	4,133	4,120	3,670	4,676	1,761	3,260
Sound & Lighting	3,674	4,671	4,397	1,464	3,701	3,826	10,020	2,737	2,635
Costumes	1,723	1,063	1,111	673	4,627	3,856	1,250	921	580
Property	1,457	1,082	475	380		807	333	119	--
Vehicle Expense, Travel	9,130	9,690	10,495	5,340	8,517	10,606	9,628	5,020	3,929
Promotion-Printing & Photos, etc.	7,832	2,954	6,809	4,349	5,690	5,757	4,555	2,675	1,766
Rent	5,350	8,250	7,225	4,200	7,100	7,265	4,975	1,445	1,300
Utilities & Maintenance	3,581	3,424	1,499	980	1,121	639	475	43	--
Office Expenses & Teaching Aids	2,362	4,065	3,219	1,937	3,432	1,973	892	320	185
Telephone	2,586	2,049	2,652	1,003	1,089	1,085	952	130	352
Postage	1,163	1,972	1,918	1,436	1,270	1,515	434	--	287
Insurance	766	1,600	1,862	1,344	2,042	1,227	490	525	600
Leasehold Improvements					--	939	3,559	--	--
Stage Equipment					--	3,180	393	--	400
Miscellaneous	356	348	946	503	2,286	721	916	964	2,465
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$161,396</b>	<b>\$109,534</b>	<b>\$139,134</b>	<b>\$82,697</b>	<b>\$104,848</b>	<b>\$119,877</b>	<b>\$126,190</b>	<b>\$45,216</b>	<b>\$47,062</b>
Theatre Program Expenditures	8,858								
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$170,254</b>								
Excess of Income over Expense	1,455	28,004	(500)	4,325	46,129		489		500
Less Additional Expense									(480)
<b>Excess of Total Expenses Over Income</b>	<b>(7,403)</b>		(500)			(2,187)		(486)	
Net Worth, Prior Year	76,846	48,842	49,342	45,017	(1,112)	1,075	586 <sup>b</sup>	36	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$69,443</b>	<b>\$76,846</b>	<b>\$48,842</b>	<b>\$49,342</b>	<b>\$45,017</b>	<b>(\$ 1,112)</b>	<b>\$ 1,075</b>	<b>(\$ 450)</b>	<b>\$ 36</b>
Less Restricted Funds-Theatre Reserve	\$47,500	47,500	47,500	47,500	47,500				
Theatre Reserve Expended	8,858								
<b>Funds Available, Year End</b>	<b>\$30,801</b>	<b>\$29,346</b>	<b>\$ 1,342</b>	<b>\$ 1,842</b>	<b>(\$ 2,483)</b>	<b>(\$ 1,112)</b>	<b>\$ 1,075</b>	<b>(\$ 450)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>\$ 36</b>

<sup>a</sup>\$30,000 Restricted by Donor toward purchase/rehabilitation of Theatre.  
\$ 5,000 Allocated from a 1972 Grant toward similar purpose.

<sup>b</sup>Plus \$1,036 adjustment entry - \$586 available 1/1/71.

APPENDIX F  
PUERTO RICAN TRAVELING THEATRE  
PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 1. Flat-bed Truck (The Oxcart--Summer 1967), Puerto Rican  
Traveling Theatre.



Figure 2. Flat-bed Truck, Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre

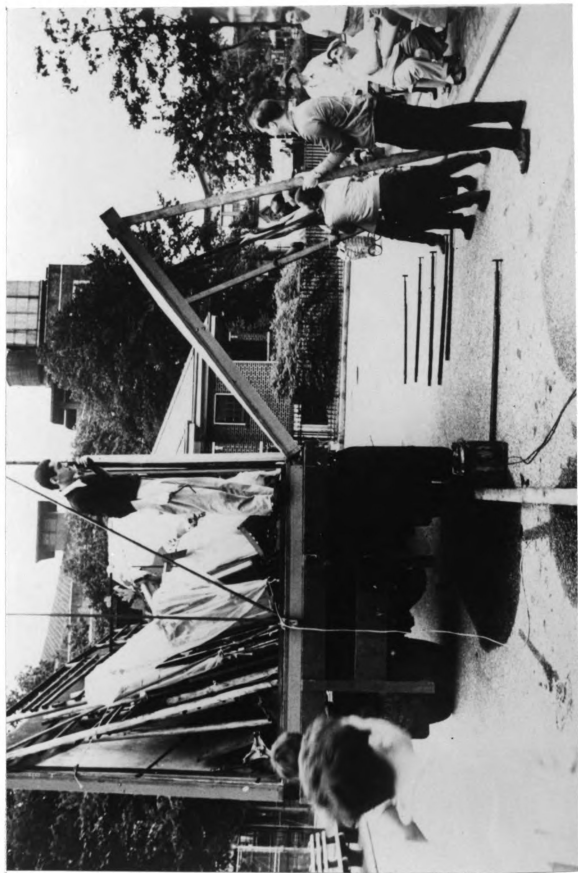


Figure 3. La farsa del amor comprado ("The Farce of Purchased Love")  
Summer - 1968, Central Park

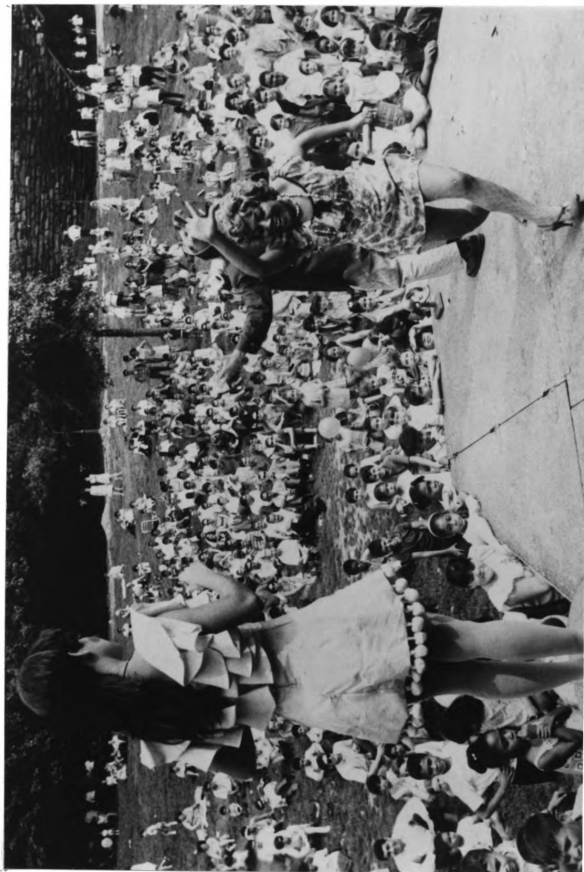




Figure 4. A Dramatized Anthology of Puerto Rican Short Stories,  
Summer 1971, Set Design: Peter Harvey



Figure 5. Pipo Subway no sabe reir ("Pipo Subway Can't Laugh")  
Summer, 1972



Figure 6. Payment as Pledged, Summer 1974, Cathedral-St. John the  
Divine



Figure 7. Payment as Pledged, Summer 1974, Set Design: Peter Harvey

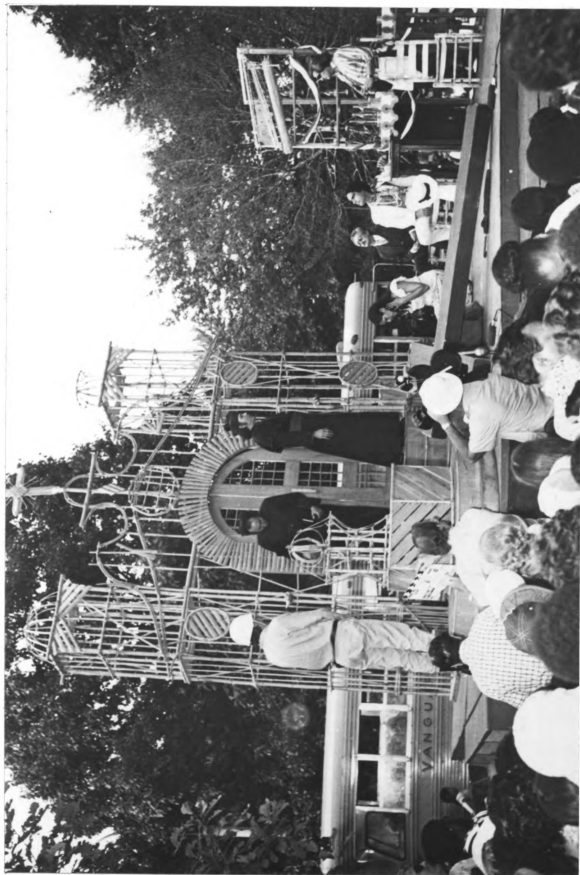


Figure 8. Eleuterio, the Coquí, Summer 1976, Metropolitan Museum of Art

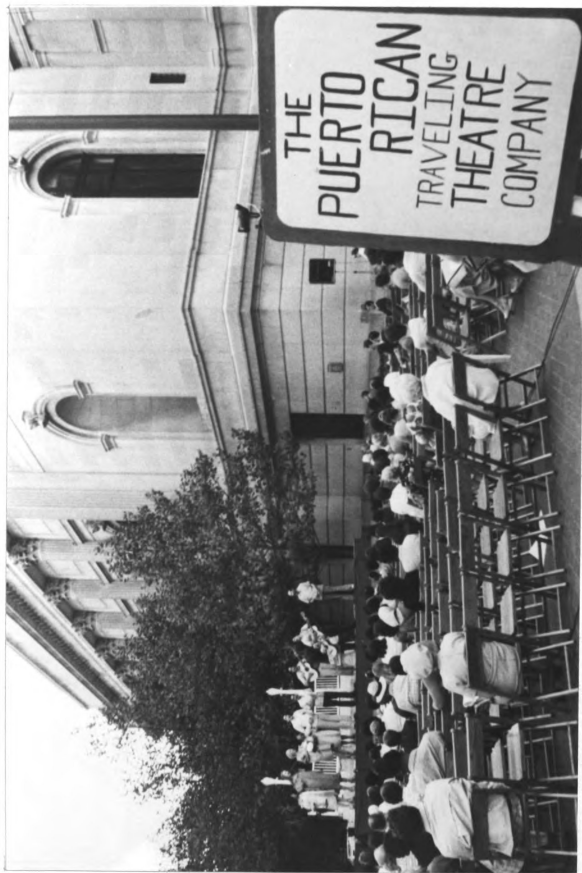


Figure 9. Model--Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre's New Building,  
304 W. 47 Street

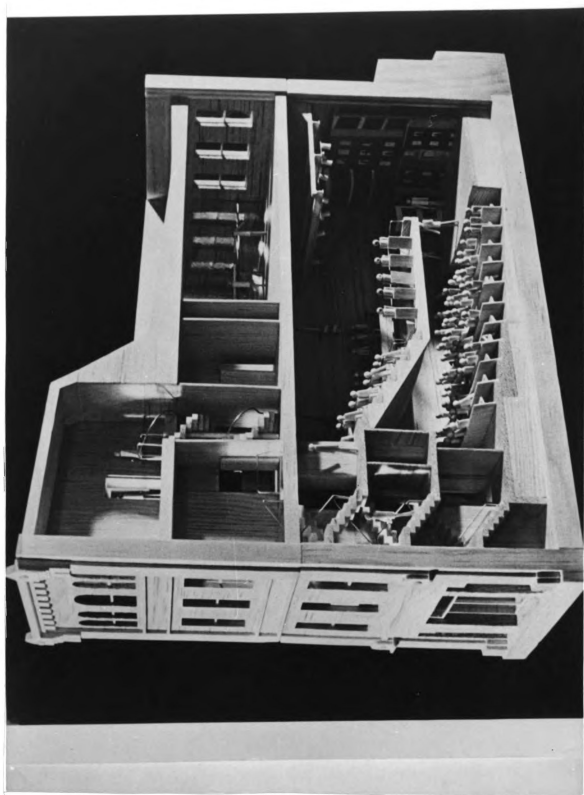
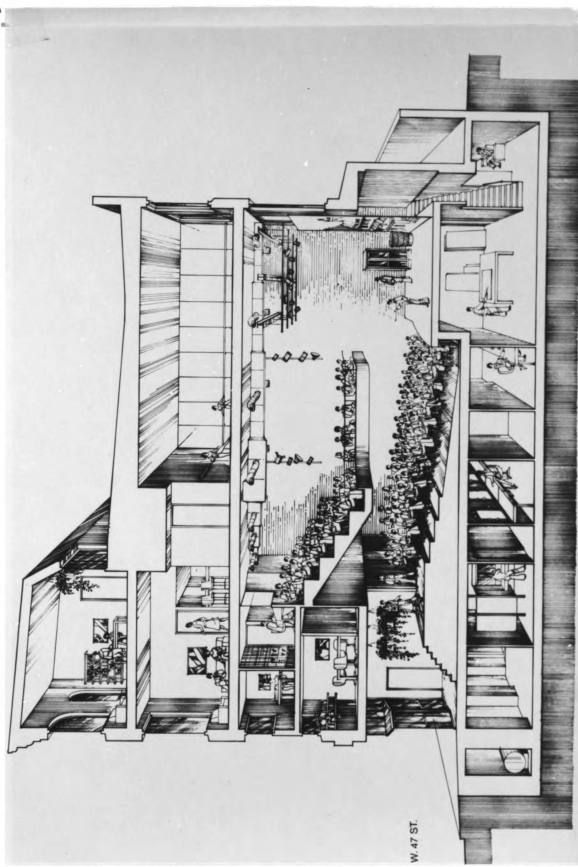


Figure 10. Architectural Rendering, Design Consultant: David Hays  
Architects: Peter Blake and Brian Smith



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