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Joann Haskins Cimino

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SPANISH LYRIC THEATRE CELEBRATES ITS 32nd ANNIVERSARY

By JoANN HASKINS CIMINO

The tradition of live theatre in Tampa began with the influx of the various Latin groups whose Mutual Aid societies, such as, Centro Asturiano, Centro Espanol, Circulo Cubano, and Union Italiano provided theatre presentations of zarzuelas, comedies and dramas for the entertainment of their members and their cultural enrichment.

The Federal Theatre of the WPA held its debut on March 5, 1936. This account is given by Nicholas Kanellos in the History of Hispanic Theatre in the United States: Origins to 1940. Its last performance was held in September, 1937 due to the enactment of the ERA Act. Performances were still held for a short time thereafter, in the name of the Federal Theatre, but these were eventually terminated. Thus, the renamed Spanish Lyric Theatre holds the distinctive history as the oldest continuous theatre group in Tampa, and the oldest Hispanic group in the nation.

Is he historical, or is he hysterical?? He's both!! Rene Gonzalez is the creative, colorful founder of the Spanish Lyric Theatre. Besides his role as Artistic Director of SLT Rene is in demand for his entertaining programs among Tampa’s civic, historical and social groups. His tales of old Ybor City are especially moving, as he brings to life the potpourri of ethnic characters who add spice to the melting pot of yesterday’s Latin quarter. In his rendition of the diversity of urban life he concocts a spicy, ethnic brew that provides both amusement and nostalgia especially for

Rene Gonzalez

Rehearsals for the first production at the Centro Asturiano Theatre.
This auto and its occupants were probably in a parade in the early 1920s. The cream silk shawl draped on the car once belonged to Rene Gonzalez’ grandmother Rosalia Pardo Gonzalez. The two Gonzalez sisters were among the first Spanish descendants to attend Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee. Their father, Jose Gonzalez, encouraged his daughters to participate in varied beneficial activities that Latin women were not usually directed toward. America G. Escuder proudly tells that her father “enjoyed the freedom and success of his own life and bakery business within the Ybor City community, and desired the same for all of his family.”

Riding in Auto: Right rear: Rosalia Gonzalez Sullivan; Left front: America
those who personally experienced those times and personalities that he brings to life.

Rene began his direction of Spanish Lyric Theatre thirty-two years ago. At that time SIT was known as Spanish Little Theatre. The production was held at the Centro Asturiano Theatre and performed by a troupe of students from the University of Tampa. Rene Gonzalez considers that the continued support of many individuals in the community has contributed to his theatrical successes and the longevity of SLT. His wife Mary he attributes as his "primary
mainstay and her own artistic contributions have been an important accompaniment.”²

The Gonzalez family has been active in the growth of Tampa since Rene's grandparents

Jose and Rosalia Gonzalez arrived in 1901 from Oviedo, Spain and became residents of Ybor City. Jose joined Rosalia's brothers Gumersindo and Saturno Pardo for a partnership in the popular Pardo-Gonzalez bakery.

Rene's parents Anibal and Anita "Nena" Gonzalez owned La Casa Arte, known for many years for its fine needlework and supplies. For two decades costumes for SIT were designed by Rene and created by Anita. Some of these are thirty-years old and still being used today. The Tampa Tribune told of Anita's ability to create in one sitting: she would put together the most intricate piece, measure the actor and would routinely have the costume finished in half a day.³

Comedias Musicales

"La Viuda Alegre"

"EL MURCIELAGO"

"EL SOLDADO DE CHOCOLATE"
Diana Anton and the late Joe Patane, 1971
Musical Comedies

"EL VIOLINISTA SOBRE EL TEJADO"
"EL HOMBRE DE LA MANCHA"
"Man of La Mancha" 1974, 1982
"MAME" 1975
"NO, NO, NANETTE" 1977
"EL MILAGRO DE LA MUSICA"
"The Sound Of Music" 1981
"HELLO, DOLLY" 1983
"MI BELLA DAMA"
"My Fair Lady" 1984

El Pequeño Teatro Español fue el primer teatro en los Estados Unidos a presentar obras de Broadway en español y el único teatro capaz de presentar la misma obra en dos idiomas con el mismo elenco.

The Spanish Little Theatre was the first theatre in the United States to regularly present Broadway musicals in Spanish, and
the only one capable of presenting the same show in two languages with the same cast!

**Operetas Vienesas**

**Viennese Operettas**

"LA VIUDA ALEGRE" 1959, 1963, 1979  
"EL CONDE DE LUXEMBURGO" 1962, 1968, 1971  
"EL SOLDADO DE CHOCOLATE" 1964, 1971  
"LA DUQUESA DEL BAL TABARAN" 1965, 1976  
"EL MURCIELAGO" 1967  
"EL ENCANTO DE UN VALS" 1968  
"EVA" 1965, 1982  
"LA PRINCESA DEL DOLAR" 1973

Las operetas vienesas han sido favoritas del público hispano desde comienzos de este siglo. Una de las primeras representaciones fue una opereta y desde entonces hemos presentado las operetas mas sobresalientes incluyendo una traducción original de "Die Fledermaus" "El Murcielago" de Strauss.

Vienesse operettas have been favorites of Spanish speaking audiences since the turn of the century. One of our first productions was an operetta and since then we have done most of the outstanding works including an original translation of Strauss' "Die Fledermauss" "El Murcielago".

Page from 25th Anniversary Program of Spanish Little Theatre

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**ENDNOTES**


