**Poesía en Voz Alta**

Poesía en Voz Alta [Poetry Out Loud] was an experimental theater group in existence from 1956 to 1963 whose members included several well-known artists associated with Mexican and international modernism. Rather than emphasizing sophisticated costumes and sets, as was popular in Mexican theatre at the time, Poesía en Voz Alta attempted to allow the word to come through, using simple spaces and elemental costumes. The members of Poesía en Voz Alta eschewed the use of everyday language that was typical of realist theatre. The format of performances was based on poetry recitals, and the group was closely tied to the University Theatre of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The inaugural session took place in a small theatre, the Trianón, in Mexico City, where Juan José Arreola (1918-2001) gave the group its name. His original intention, to recite classical Spanish poetry, was rejected by Octavio Paz (1914-1998), who proposed to present experimental plays. Paz wrote his only play, *La hija de Rappaccini* (*Rappaccini’s Daughter*), based on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s story, for the company. The group emphasized the ludic elements of theatre that freed its members, mostly artists from other fields, to play with language.

Paz and Arreola, both writers, joined the painters Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) and Héctor Mendoza (1932-2010) to create Poesía en Voz Alta in 1956. Their fellow founding member José Luis Ibáñez (1933--), meanwhile, was among the first generation of students to study Dramatic Literature and Theatre at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, part of the university’s push to institutionalize and professionalize the theatre. The group, tied by friendship, began performing Spanish poetry and also staged Paz’ translations of modernist and avant-garde French playwrights like Georges Neveux, Jean Tardieu, and Eugène Ionesco as well as his original adaptation of *Rappaccini’s Daughter*. The focus was on language and play, and the company rejected the lavish, big-budget productions that were en vogue in Mexico City. As Arreola wrote in the playbill that accompanied the first program in 1956,

‘[W]e are not doing *theater* in the more and more anomalous sense of the word. [. . .] We lucidly renounce the majority of technical means that pervert and complicate the contemporary theater. [. . . ] Together, we will be able to recover the lost spirit of the theater which, in the final analysis, is no more than ancient, recondite, and amusing poetry: poetry out loud.’ (cited in Unger, 1981)

While the first two seasons, or programs (both held in 1956) took place in the University-owned Teatro Caballito, the third and fourth (1957) took place at the Teatro Moderno. The Teatro Caballito, a converted stable, only allowed for weekly showings, while the Moderno had daily performances that attracted an audience from beyond the university community. While the first two programs were characterized by a strict dedication to poetry, the third and fourth contained plays written for the stage, including three by the Mexican novelist Elena Garro. Before the fifth program (1957-59) Mendoza left the group, and the company found itself lacking public funding. This moment, between the fourth and fifth programs, represents a break in the trajectory of the company between the first phase, which focused on dramatic montages or collages and took an uncompromising, critical stance toward commercial theatre, and the second, which presented singular plays and underwent a serious change in personnel. Indeed, after the fifth program Juan Soriano (1920-2006) was the only original member of the group left, and Poesía en Voz Alta became a commercially-driven enterprise dominated by Soriano’s directorial voice until it folded in 1963. The company itself decided to end its Eighth Program without warning and for reasons that are not clear, though the decision may have had to do with waning interest on the part of both actors and audiences.

**List of works**

Arreola, J. J. (1971) *Obras de Juan José Arreola*, Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz.

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Garro, E. (1958). *Un hogar sólido*, Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana.

Paz, O. (1990) *La hija de Rappaccini*, Mexico City: Ediciones Era.

**References and further reading**

Gurrola, J. J. (1988) ‘Prólogo a la edición en español’, *El teatro ambientalista* (pp. 1-9), Mexico City: Arbol.

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