

If this were not the case theater would cease to be a "mirror" for life and for the customs that confine us. After all, it is a place of the spirit where St. John, Sister Juana Inés (also of the Cross), Villaurrutia, López Velarde, don Francisco de Quevedo and Lucientes all converge, contributing together to the show's new interpretation.

According to Gurrola, it's a matter of washing down the scaffold where both directors have been the hangmen; they start out by judging themselves. "We both know that there is a scaffold behind intelligence and we want to cleanse those frames for theater. We use a variety of weapons, the most outstanding of which include visual and verbal violence, vengeance, pornography — of great importance — which never becomes eroticism."

AN ILLUSION OF REALITY

"Love's enigma was completely protected...and I saw that I was with death, and I saw that in life, I was dead," intoned Sister Angélica. The excellent acting by Juan José Gurrola (Tiresias), Mauricio Davison (Narcissus, alias "The Marquis"), Gabriela Araujo (Sister Angélica), Mariana Botey (Eco) and a dozen other actors creates the daily reality of modern society, marked as it is by increasing emotional complexity and incomprehensibility.

The tragic-farce in two acts and countless disconnected scenes, contrary to its essence, abandons the realist illusion and opens the way to a literary journey that erodes away any trace of credibili-

ty by affirming a mixture of representations in which man's dark side appears and assaults the viewer.

At times humorous, at others dramatic and shocking, the play dilutes and equates sexuality with all of the desires of whoring. Sexuality does not exist, only relationships that are initiated through language: "What is said and what is named defines the possibilities that bodies will come together in one or another way; it is not necessary to understand because it is perceived." That is what creates the possibility that the viewer will identify with what happens on stage.

The constant flow of scenes from different periods completely does away with time as measure and linearity. Rather, it gives way to history's great cycles that seem to repeat themselves in the dialogues of a Greek tragedy, or those of Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, St. John, Villaurrutia and even Shakespeare himself: "Contemporary man is made up of the same elements as his ancestors, and he continues to suffer from the same contradictions despite the modern world's invasion of us, presenting the same situation behind a different appearance, but at the root of things, we are still the same salt." The challenge for new theater lies in how to treat these unresolved problems, without turning to moralistic formulas or terrestrial forms in use since Aristotle's *Poetics*. An echo of this reaches those viewers who seek a different response to their reality. ★

Ramsés Ramírez

Cinema

GABY BRIMMER, A Gigantic Film Production in Mexico

The cameras began to roll in Mexico City on September 22 as Mexican film-maker Luis Mandoki directs the production of *Gaby Brimmer*. The leading roles are played by noted Swedish star Liv Ullman and Argentine Norma Aleandro (1985 winner of the

Cannes prize for best actress for her role in *The Official Story*, also this year's Oscar winner for best foreign film). Rachel Levin, a U.S. stage actress making her film debut, plays the title role as Gaby. Robert Loggia (*Scarface*, *Prizzi's Honor*) and Lawrence Monoson, who had an extraordinary role in *Mask*, round out the cast.

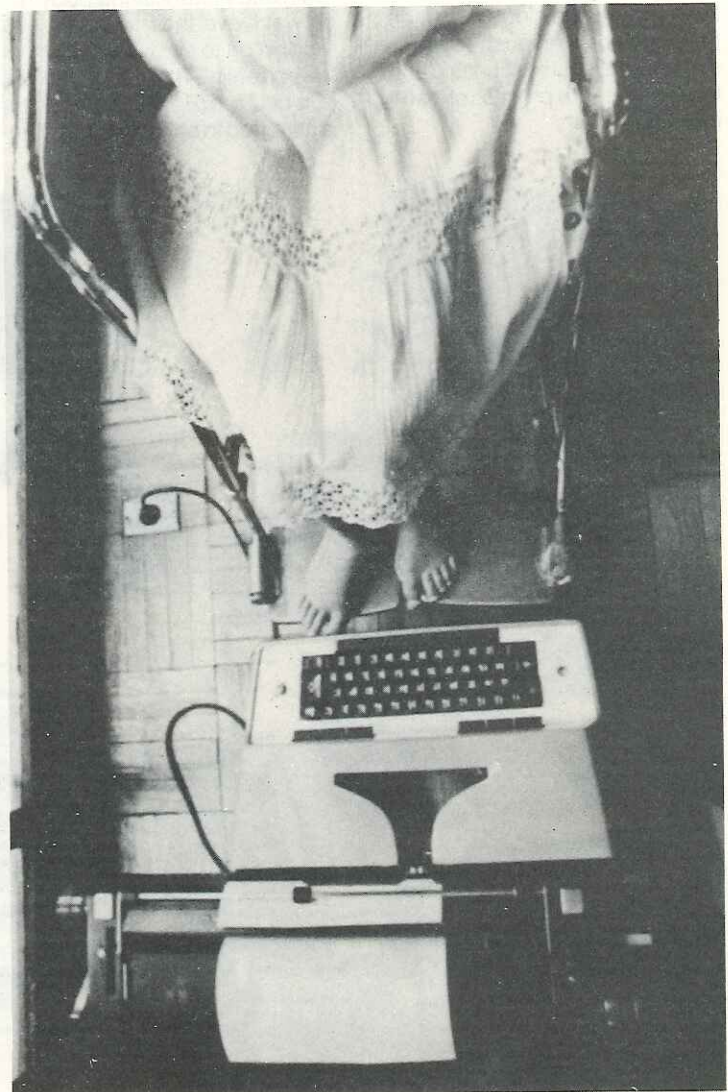
Hungarian Lajos Koltai (*Mefiste*, *Angy Very*, *Colonel Red!*) is photographic director, Alejandro Luna (*Frida*) is in charge of set and Lucinne Donnai, a native of France and long-time resident of Mexico, with years of experience in theater and opera, is wardrobe director.

Very few times has such an outstanding cast and technical crew worked together in Mexico under a Mexican director (in recent times we can only recall *Fox-Trott*, directed by Arturo Ripstein). To make things even more unusual, Mandoki, born in 1954, is practically a debutante in the movie world. While he has made several shorts, he has only one full-length feature to his credit, *Motel*



The aviator hallucinates in *Mirrors*

Photo by Carlos Gattell



Gaby's difficult way of writing.

Photo by Rogelio Cuellar

odds and ends

(1983). While not a particularly bad film, it was no gem either (although it did show a fine use of closed and asphyxiating environments). His greatest claim to fame came with a Cannes award for best short film, but even with that, people are asking: How did Mandoki manage to pull together a production like *Gaby*?

WHO IS GABRIELA BRIMMER?

Gabriela Brimmer (Rachel Levin), daughter of Austrian Jewish immigrants, was born in Mexico City in 1947 with cerebral palsy. Her future was quite uncertain at first, as her parents debated over integrating her into the family or sending her away to live in a specialized institution. Her life changed when a new servant appeared at the house. Florencia Morales (Norma Aleandro), illiterate and of Indian origin, discovers Gabriela's intelligence and sensitivity; and she discovers something even more important, that the child can express herself through the movements of her left foot, the only part of her body she controls. And that is how these two human beings, both marginalized from society and alone (although for different reasons), build a strong emotional relationship and together begin a process of learning and growth.

Institutionalization disappears as a possibility, and Gabriela begins to study at a school for the handicapped. There she falls in love for the first time, with Fernando (Lawrence Monoson). Together they try to break out from the narrow realm of the handicapped to face the "normal" world. Their dream is to be able to attend a regular public high school. But at the critical moment, Fernando pulls back, terrorized, and she is left alone in her project, hesitant and insecure.

As this process develops, Gaby's mother Sari (Liv Ullman) becomes more involved. Carried along by the subconscious fantasy of seeing her daughter transformed into a normal person, she fully supports Gaby's increasing aspirations until "reality's" concrete and fictitious limits give way to Gaby's true condition.

Gaby enters a high school for "normal people" only to discover that if the handicapped world is marginal, her life among the "normal" is a complete island. Nonetheless, she devotes herself to her studies, and Gabriela-the brain and Florencia-the body not only achieve their first goal, but they go on to study journalism at the university. There, Gaby meets Luis del Toro (Robert Beltrán) who is attracted to her courage and in-

telligence. They begin a close companionship. Florencia, together with the mother and father (Robert Loggia), fear another disappointment for Gaby, like the one with Fernando.

When the father dies, Gaby's mother, alone and fearful, threatens to retire to the province. Gabriela seeks Luis' support, and together they look for work for her. But because she is crippled, newspaper editors will not hire her. Seeking another route to independence from her mother, Gaby declares her love to Luis and proposes that they live together. He makes it clear that he can offer her friendship and admiration, but nothing more. And Gabriela is crushed. The mother takes advantage of her daughter's moment of weakness to move the three of them, Gaby, Florencia and herself, to a rest home in the province. By the time she reacts, it's too late, and Gabriela's life is once again how it was before knowing Florencia.

The mother learns she has cancer and goes to the the United States, without explaining the real reasons to the other two women. Florencia once again takes control of things and carries Gaby back to Mexico City. There Gaby gets a second wind and begins her career as a writer. Later the

two women learn of the mother's illness, and Gabriela is understanding. The three reunite, and without demanding explanations, begin daily life together again from a new perspective.

Gabriela-the brain and Florencia-the body continue to work in literature and journalism and together adopt a child: Alma Florencia.

Mrs. Brimmer dies of cancer in 1982.

The above is a kind of synopsis that lies somewhere between the script and Gabriela Brimmer's true story.

The movie project began in 1980 when Luis Mandoki returned to Mexico after studying film-making in England. He first heard about Gaby from a book about her life, written together with Elena Poniatowska. Mandoki contacted Gabriela, who agreed to the project, and they started work. Under Mandoki's direction, she wrote about those moments in her life that could be portrayed in a movie, rewriting some and writing up others for the first time. Using this original manuscript, finished in 1980, a whole string of script writers tried to develop a suitable film script, but none of them satisfied Mandoki, Gabriela or Florencia.

Meanwhile, Mandoki cut *Motel*, his first full-length movie. The Brimmer project seemed illusive. Then in 1983 at the Cuban Film Festival, Mandoki met Martín Salinas, an Argentine film writer who had studied at Mexico's Center for Cinematographic Training. Salinas began his professional career as an animator with *Grupo Cine Six*, winner of numerous international awards for its work, including a film on Pancho Villa and a series for Nicaragua's literacy campaign.

Salinas picked up *Gaby*, laying aside the scripts produced by other writers. He worked only with Brimmer's original material, following her ideas and Mandoki's. Meanwhile he also made his full-length movie, *Noche de Califas* (*Night of Califas*); it had no special merits and has still not opened in Mexico. Mandoki was the executive producer.

It is important to note here, however, that for both Mandoki and Salinas, *Motel* and *Noche de Califas* were really just projects to let them polish the skills of their trade and to help them survive. Their real project was *Gaby Brimmer*.



Photo by Rogelio Cuéllar

Gaby Brimmer

As the Mandoki-Brimmer-Salinas team came together, they were joined by U.S. script writer, Michael Love, who worked with Salinas to shape the story's final version. Later, lawyer Pinchas Perry came up with the money to get the film rolling, thus initiating his own career as a movie executive producer.

Today, almost seven years after Mandoki first got the idea for the movie, members of the cast and crew talk about the project that is finally under way.

Norma Aleandro:

"I liked the script very much when I read it because there's no speculating with misfortune as is so common with stories like this one. But I said to myself, I wonder what the director's going to do with it. I met Luis in New York, and the first time we talked, it was really just to feel each other out. The second time we met, it became clear that he had no intention of speculating with misfortune, and I accepted immediately...if just one viewer leaves the theater after seeing the movie thinking 'my problems are not so terrible compared to others,' I'll be satisfied."

Rachel Levin:

"I think Gaby is a complete person. By this I mean that she has true courage; that is, courage directly proportional to her fears. With that kind of courage you can overcome fear. My case is similar. (Rachel was chosen to play Gaby, aside from her acting skills, because she had been paralyzed by a viral infection for four years.) I've had to work very hard and show a lot of courage to earn my place in theater."

Lawrence Monoson:

"There's lots of abuse in TV and movies. I was interested in this project because I didn't find any of that in it. I think that I, Lawrence, have a lot in common with Fernando. The greatest thing in life is to struggle to overcome one's own limitations, even though you may fail. I also think that the limitations often exist in our heads."

Lajos Koltai:

"I accepted this project because I think it's important. There are many sick people in all parts of the world, and I think that this film will help us to understand them better. I also hope to have my collaboration contribute to make that happen. For me, photography isn't just the image in and of itself;

the image is drama. The money they pay you and the chance to be in Mexico are important, but they're not everything."

Liv Ullman:

"The script is beautiful. It's very original because it shows us a heroine who is not a Rambo or a Superman, but someone from real life who fights with life, not with weapons, but with her intellect and her will to live. I am very proud to be part of a project that glorifies this part of reality. And I'm glad that somebody cares to make a picture that may not seem at first like it's going to be a great box office hit, but may in the end prove to be more enduring and more important than certain other films. I always have great difficulties talking about my characters because my job is to act them, not to discuss them. In this case, even though we're making a movie, the characters are real people. What I can talk about is the real person who was Gaby's mother. I admire her for the decision she made to stand behind her daughter and to allow her to choose how she wanted to live her life. And this, despite tremendous handicaps—and here I refer less to Gaby's physical handicap and more to attitudes in society that do not encourage people with physical problems to develop at the same rate as others. I think it's great to portray such a woman."

After seven years of stubborn perseverance, Mandoki has managed to start filming under conditions that many other directors—even the most established—often only dream about. He's come to his trial by fire at a very young age, and given everything that the film has going for it, there are only two possible results: his leap to glory or his plunge to oblivion.

For Mandoki, Salinas and Perry, for the Mexican and U.S. investors who've put money into this project and for the Mexican film community, we hope they achieve their objectives. As Gaby Brimmer says:

"The reason for filming my life, as Luis and I see it, is not just to show that despite my physical limitations, I've tried to overcome them, but rather it will show that I am not just what I appear to be at first sight: a young woman in a wheelchair...I'm not only that...I have many faces. Do you want to see them? Come take a look! ★

Manuel Sorto

Music

Work in Progress: A New Mexican Opera

Fifty-two years have gone by since the Theater of Fine Arts, Mexico's main opera house, staged Puccini's *Tosca*, its first operatic production. Since then, nearly 180 operas have been performed there. Of these, only ten have been by Mexican composers, such as Carlos Chávez, José Pablo Moncayo, Ricardo Castro, Carlos Jiménez Mabarak and others.



Composer Mario Lavista at work

Elsewhere in Mexico, notably at the National University, there have been a few performances, including works such as *Leoncio y Lena* and *Orestes parte*, both written by Federico Ibarra. Many of these operas were never staged again after their opening seasons, and there are some Mexican operas, like *En la encrucijada*, by Manuel Enríquez, that have never been shown. It would seem, then, that opera is not very well established in Mexico's music circles. Thus, a new Mexican opera is always a curiosity.

Years ago, American composer Samuel Barber wrote a short piece, *On waiting for a libretto*, describing the agonizing years

spent looking for a suitable story for an opera until Gian Carlo Menotti provided him with the text for *Vanessa*. Similarly, Mexican composer, Mario Lavista (born 1943), has been waiting for several years to start work on an old, cherished project of his. Lavista chose his text years ago, *Aura*, a short story written in 1962 by Carlos Fuentes, Mexico's best known writer abroad.

Traditionally, composers have chosen texts that offer strong characters, a clear narrative, some twists of plot and a dramatic ending. In this case, Lavista has set a very difficult task for himself and his librettist; Fuentes' story follows none of those traditional lines.

What, then is *Aura* about? Felipe, a young, sensitive historian, is drawn by a classified ad to a dark, mysterious house in downtown Mexico City. There he is met by a bedridden old lady who, for a very good salary, asks him to edit the memoirs of her late husband, General Llorente. The young man takes the job and agrees to live in the old lady's house until he finishes. Once in the house, Felipe

meets *Aura*, ostensibly the old woman's niece and becomes fascinated with her. Slowly, the encounters between Felipe and *Aura* drift away from the real world and move into the realm of fantasy. At the same time, Felipe's work on General Llorente's memoirs bring him ever closer to the family secrets: wealth, power, romance, love...and madness.

In the end, the images of Consuelo, the old woman, and *Aura*, the young girl, become blurred into a single being, and Felipe is trapped in a twilight zone between fact and fantasy.

Why was Mario Lavista drawn to a story apparently devoid of operatic qualities? The composer him-