

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-

odds and ends

self answers this and other questions for us.

"Ever since I read Fuentes' story, I was fascinated by the atmosphere of confinement created by the author and by the way real people and ghosts mingle in the narrative. I have found several examples of this in Oriental literature, especially in ancient Chinese stories and in the plays of Yukio Mishima; there may also be some influence from Henry James. I think the main theme in *Aura* is the eternal expectation of love and the idea that love can transcend death and that lovers can meet after death."

The libretto will be done by Juan Tovar who has written consistently for film and the theater. How will the librettist and the composer approach such a difficult story?

"The first problem confronting Juan Tovar is the fact that *Aura* is basically a non-verbal story, so he has to start by creating dialogues that aren't there, dialogues to be spoken and sung in the opera. There are three main characters in the story: Felipe, Consuelo and *Aura*, and we must take *Aura* to be the personification of Consuelo. There is another character, General Llorente, who never really appears in the story; but we learn a lot about him through the fragments of his memoirs read by Felipe. Juan and I have reached the conclusion that the General must indeed appear in the opera as a flesh and blood character, even though he is a ghost. Moreover, we think that the General himself should read his own memoirs aloud. Thus, we would have a nice balance: *Aura* as Consuelo's personification and Felipe as General Llorente's personification."

What about narrative continuity and the cast?

"We are thinking of a one-act opera, with four singers who must be, above all, very good actors. My idea is of an opera with a lot of acting, a lot of dialogue, a lot of whispering and a little singing; that is, an opera in which we use vocal resources more appropriate to the story's mood."

Will the opera be scored for a big orchestra?

"Definitely not. I want the characters in this opera to move inside a sort of closed aural vault, which will be provided by the music. Thus, I am thinking of using a small instrumental ensemble that will allow me to write in the same style

that I've been using these past few years, emphasizing the newest virtuosic techniques for wind instruments and string. This would be impossible with a big orchestra, but in a small, chamber-like ensemble I can count on having soloists in every chair. So far, I have a pretty good idea of the kind of ensemble I'll use: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, probably two French horns, trumpet, a pair of trombones, celeste, string quintet and maybe a couple of percussion instruments to add a bit of color, a vibráphone, a gong."

Will *Aura* follow traditional operatic structures?

"On the contrary, I have always thought of writing the work without the usual division into arias, duets, trios and the like. The idea is to build a unity, a whole, without pauses, from beginning to end. In fact, I could say that in planning this opera I have certain role models. Specifically Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*, a work in which the music creates a vault that the characters move, act and sing in, but in which voice is not of paramount importance, as is the case in Italian opera. I would also like to play with the time element. In Fuentes' original story everything happens in just three days and two nights. I have talked with Juan Tovar about this, and for the libretto I want no clear divisions between day and night, only a continuous flow of time and space, in which ghosts can appear, come and go about their business in a normal way. The moment Felipe comes into the house, he must know that time has been suspended."

Aura will be Mario Lavista's first opera, although he is no stranger to the world of vocal music. To date, he has written no fewer than six works featuring the human voice; one, for baritone and chamber ensemble, another for three unaccompanied choirs and four others, for mezzo, either with piano or orchestra. Lavista has had his idea for *Aura* since 1980. Only recently, after finding Juan Tovar to write the libretto and convincing Ludwig Margules to do the staging, has the project really gotten off the ground.

Despite the fate of so many other Mexico operas, even at this early date it is safe to assume that *Aura* will not go unheard. The Fine Arts Opera has officially commissioned the work from Lavista, making it certain that the opera will be staged.★

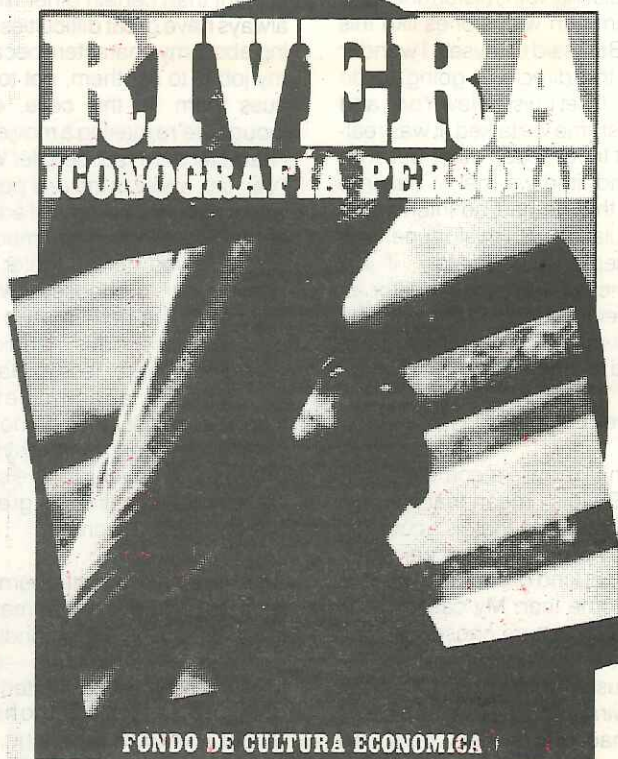
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RIVERA

ICONOGRAFÍA PERSONAL

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Pintor extraordinario, militante político excéntrico, protagonista de una época fulgurante de México y del mundo, Diego Rivera es una de las figuras entrañables de la cultura moderna. Este álbum iconográfico narra al lector, a través de 92 imágenes y textos de Alfonso Reyes, André Breton, Lázaro Cárdenas, Guadalupe Marín, Efraín Huerta, Elié Fauré y Edward Weston, entre otros, la vida de este personaje legendario.



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