



Photos: Voices of Mexico archives

Mexico City's Metropolitan Cathedral by night.

XIV Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center

Like old European cities, every year Mexico City celebrates its own Festival of the Historic Center. For 13 consecutive years, this festival has lit up old palaces, colonial mansions and churches, pre-Columbian temples, plazas and streets with its performances. These are the venues where the city's most demanding audiences enjoy

More than 1,421 monuments make up the pre-Hispanic and colonial legacy of the Historic Center.

music, dance, theater, art exhibits and good food.

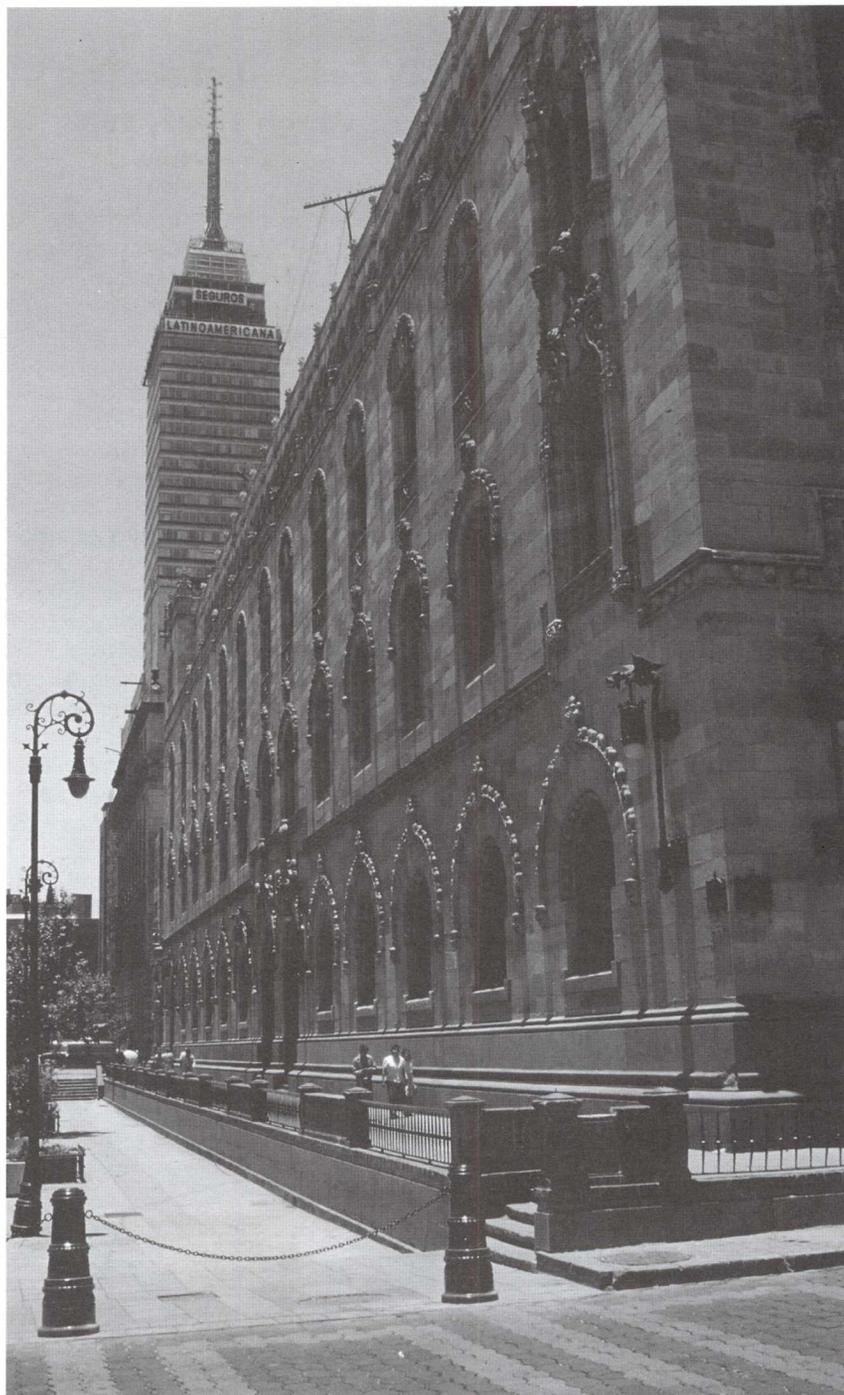
Some 26 museums present vast exhibits to make the festival shine. Lined up in two visual-arts corridors, one in the environs of Moneda Street and the other around the Alameda Park, the museums are an invitation to visit the pavestoned streets of the old city, to wander from a

palace to a colonial mansion, from a renovated cloister to an old college. They are a call to ramble from the past to the present, to admire the pre-Hispanic art of the Great Temple, to be fascinated by a baroque painting in the Viceroyal Picture Gallery and, later, to be surprised by a contemporary canvas in the José Luis Cuevas Museum. They are a call to roam through the thousand-year-old time of our visual arts and stop, perhaps a bit tired, to try one of the delicious snacks available in both corridors that remind us that gastronomy is also an art.

What today we call the Historic Center was originally Tenochtitlan, the great indigenous city. In the sixteenth century, the Spaniards built a colonial city on top of it, creating what may well have been the cultural capital of the Americas. On a single street, Moneda Street, three buildings testify to its greatness: the Americas' first print shop, first university and first academy of fine arts. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the town of the conquistadors become a baroque city; and the nineteenth century gave rise to neoclassical architecture.

Today, 1,421 historical monuments make up the pre-Hispanic and colonial legacy of the Historic Center. Among them are the Great Temple (the ruins of Tenochtitlan's ceremonial center), the Plaza of the Constitution (or Zócalo), the National Palace, the Metropolitan Cathedral, many colonial palaces built for people of high birth and innumerable churches that still hold paintings and sculpture of considerable artistic value.

The festival was born in 1985, set up as a private civic organization to join



The Palace of Mining.

with other institutions and individuals interested in helping the economy and the dissemination of information about Mexico City's downtown area. As a result of these efforts, in recent years the festival has been supported by the Mex-

ico City government and the National Council for Culture and the Arts. The group's activities have fostered the recovery and dignity of the Historic Center, which the UNESCO declared a World Heritage Treasure in 1987. **MM**

Highlights of the XIV Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center March 9 - 27, 1998

The theme of the fourteenth annual festival will be "nationalism and universality."

The inaugural gala performance in the Palace of Fine Arts is to feature soprano June Anderson from the United States and baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky from Russia, accompanied by La Camerata under the baton of Enrique Diemecke from Mexico.

The festival program will include "A New Geography of the Novel," a series of lectures given at the National College by Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes; Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia); José Saramago (Portugal); Antonio Tabucchi (Italy); Juan Goytisolo (Spain); Nérida Piñón (Brazil); J.M. Coetzee (South Africa); and Edna O'Brien (Ireland).

In the Palace of Fine Arts, George Steiner will make a presentation on nationalism and Rem Koolhaas on architecture. At the Old College of San Ildefonso, Richard Rogers (Great Britain), Charles Correa (India) and Ricardo Legorreta (Mexico) will participate in the round table "Roots and Universality in Architecture."

The International Book Fair at the Palace of Mining deserves special mention, as does the International Art Book Week at the National Museum of Art, both of which will be part of the festival for the first time.

The visual arts will contribute with 26 exhibitions in the two art corridors. The Moneda Street corridor will also host the performance "Five Continents," in which a group of embassies in Mexico will participate in accordance with the 1998 festival theme.

Dance will be represented by the Rambert Dance Company from Great Britain; Marie-Claude Pietragalla, prima ballerina of the Paris National Opera company; Amalia Hernández' Folklore Ballet and the Monterrey Ballet company from Mexico; and "African Night," with Youssou N'Dour.

Music will be plentiful, with performances by the Cappella Cervantina in the Regina Coelli church; German tenor Peter Schreier at the Palace of Fine Arts; the Prieto Quartet in the Saint Inés church; the Chamber Orchestra from Bologna, featuring flautist Andrea Griminelli; the National Symphony Orchestra in the Palace of Fine Arts; and pianist Silvia Navarrete and actress Emoé de la Parra in the Franz Mayer Auditorium. The downtown area's plazas will host

music by the percussion group Tambuco and military bands, as well as the performances "Rock in the Afternoon," "Evening of Boleros" and "Evening of Mariachis," among others.

For those with a taste for theater, there will be performances of Zero Hour, or The Art of Service from Germany in the Jiménez Rueda Theater and by the Malpaso Group from Spain in the Lyric Theater.

The festival's gastronomical fare particularly emphasizes the creativity of Mexican food and its links with international cuisine. The 1998 festival will feature, among others, the following events: the "Exclusively for the Republic of Mexico" Dinner in the Old Palace of the Archbishopric; a dinner concert featuring pianist Silvia Navarrete in the Franz Mayer Museum, which will also show an important collection of works by Toulouse Lautrec; and the closing dinner, in the central patio of the National Palace on the last evening of the festival.

Avant-garde designer clothes have occupied a special place in the last three festivals. In the fourteenth festival, "alternative fashions" will have their runway at the Chopo Museum.

Guided tours are a tradition at the festival. The large numbers of people anxious to see our cultural heritage has prompted the organizers to keep up this tradition in the spirit of the idea that "you only love what you know."

Children have a very special place in the festival. In the 1998 celebration, the Historic Center museums join together in the project "Explorers to the Center," an invitation to visit them and have fun at the same time. In addition, just like in the past, the festival will present theater, puppets and food for children, as well as a special children's closing ceremony in the Alameda Park, complete with parade, costumes, balloons and lots of surprises.

The super-production "Hymn" is scheduled to close the festival on a circular stage built around the flagpole in the middle of Mexico City's Plaza of the Constitution.

This overview of the programming for the 1998 Festival of Mexico City's Historic Center explains why it has become the city's most significant festival and one of the most important in the whole country.



Left: The Old San Ildefonso College.