

**"La Celestina" (teatro). Teatro Estable, Granada. Director: Fernando Cobos. Marzo 1992.**

On the 20th of April of 1992, demolition work is due to begin on the premises of the Teatro Estable of Granada, the brainchild of the formerly-exiled theatrical director Fernando Cobos, an 'autor' in the classical sense of the word. Cobos has had a long career in Spanish and international theatres, starting with the direction of the Teatro Universitario in Madrid in the early fifties. He ran the Teatro Ibero-Latino Americano de París in the sixties and the Le Théâtre de l'Ensemble and Le Théâtre du Hangar in the seventies. The latter presented and toured "La Celestina," with Cobos playing the lead role.<sup>1</sup>

Cobos' present small repertory company has been operating since 1987, and the theatre, a renovated studio, was opened in 1989. The company tours worldwide each year with a repertory of Spanish and international classics, and while at home plays every night except Wednesdays. The current repertory includes "Casa con dos puertas...", "El vergonzoso en palacio," Cobos' own "Cristóbal Colón," and works by Shakespeare, Brecht, and Joyce. The Ayuntamiento of Granada has decided to allow demolition of the row of studios to make way for an apartment block, despite protests in the national press.

As Cobos explained to the small audience on the Monday evening when I attended the hour and a half production, any staged version of Rojas' *Celestina* must be a selective adaptation, and he chose this time to emphasize the youthful vitality of the comic side of the work, ignoring the tragic side entirely.

Thus his *Celestina* is played by a young woman dressed in gypsy fashion, whose only concession to age is a crone-like voice and a spectacularly back-combed wig. Flamenco music is supplied by the famed Granadine singer Enrique Morente. Eva Castro is exceptional in the role of *Celestina* which--in this production--demands a fair amount of athleticism, as the set is a tall construction platform of tubular steel, on wheels for mobility. This provides a see-through tower and rooms for the three houses of the work, those of Calisto, Melibea, and *Celestina*. *Celestina*'s house is rendered even more effective by the use of a huge

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<sup>1</sup> In Madrid, this Cobos version played the Teatro Alfil, August 30-September 4, 1977. It was reviewed by L. López Sancho in *ABC*, September 1, 1977, on page 40.

cloak which she wears at the top of the tower to cover the entire structure. This is particularly telling in the 'Crito' scene, with Crito, Elicia and Sempronio popping in and out of the covering cape.

Cobos has made an intelligent selection of the text and has used his cast of six characters effectively. The well-endowed Sonia García Valdecasas plays both Melibea and Areúsa. Areúsa is another comic turn, a big girl in underwear sitting in a 'bower' suspended from the platform. Melibea, too, is house-bound; we never see her garden and only hear Pleberio's voice once. Cobos' adaptation concentrates on Celestina's seduction of Melibea in acts 4 and 10. Very effective use is made of the swirling cape in the scene of Celestina's return with the *cordón* and the good news. (The *cordón* itself is an extraordinary garment with bra and panties sewn into a tulle and feather strip, which Melibea at first wears on her head.) The fetichism of Calisto (Daniel Tunes) when he receives this garment is much emphasized. The remaining roles were played by Sara Fernández as Elicia, Pablo Guzmán as Pármeno, and Johannes Walkenhorst as Sempronio.

All in all there may be too much sexual simulation on stage for the taste of some theatre-goers, and one would not necessarily recommend seeing this production accompanied by one's maiden aunt. On the other hand, a good part of the lubricious behavior is explicit in the text, and those who are bored with nudity on the Spanish stage will be relieved to hear that clothing is worn throughout.

Cobos makes his selection of the text with a sure hand, and I would only quibble with a few modernized words which miss the meaning of the original. The sequence of acts and action is maintained until near the end, when suddenly we skip Act 9, and at the end of Act 10 we are startled to hear that Celestina is arranging the assignation of Calisto and Melibea at her house and not Pleberio's! This gives Cobos the chance to run the seduction and the banquet scenes together and the play ends suddenly with Calisto's sudden entrance and announcement that machines have appeared to destroy their 'corral de comedias.' This seems a quite tragic enough ending to this experiment in live theatre in Granada. Let us hope that the Teatro Estable will survive the loss of its performing space and will continue to tour with its classical repertory.

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