MEXICO CITY IN THE AGE OF THEATER, 1830-1901

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For Lauren, *mi amor*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

DEDICATION iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

LIST OF TABLES xii

LIST OF FIGURES xiii

NOTE ON CURRENCY, WAGES, AND PRICES xiv

Chapter

INTRODUCTION: THE CITY AND THE AGE OF THEATER 1

A Deep History of Theater and Performance in Mexico 4
The Age of Theater and the Atlantic World 9
Theater, Urban History, and Nineteenth-Century Historiography 15
A Note on Terms and Sources 22
Structure 25

1. PERFORMING STATECRAFT: STAGING ITALIAN OPERA AND THE MODERN NATION IN 1830S MEXICO CITY 28

Lucas Alamán and *Bel canto* as Policy Program 31
Opera in Mexico City 40
Italian Singers come to Mexico City 42
The Politics and Economics of Italian Opera, at Home and Abroad 48
The End of the State-led Opera Project and its Legacy 62

2. THE THEATER CONSTRUCTION BOOM: THE THEATER BUSINESS AND URBAN LIFE AT MID-CENTURY 73

Financing the Boom 78
Why Invest in Theaters? 92
Theater and the Local Economy 102
Theatrical Production and Urban Life 112
Conclusion 120

3. THE POLITICS OF THEATER: *LA PATA DE CABRA*, SATIRE, AND THE STAGE AT MID-CENTURY 122

The Play 126

The Context 132
The Press 138
Conclusion 150

4. THE AGE BROADENS: TANDAS, ZARZUELA, TEATRO FRÍVOLO, AND THE POPULARIZATION OF THEATERGOING 154

The Rise of the Tanda 156
Tandas in/and the Entertainment Marketplace 165
Zarzuela, Tandas, and the Género Chico 172
Theatergoing and Tanda-going public(s) 177
Changing Consumer Tastes and the Teatro Frívolo 188
Conclusion 204

CONCLUSION: THE END OF THE AGE 208

Appendix

A. LIST OF THEATERS IN MEXICO CITY, 1830-1901 219

REFERENCES 220

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1. Theaters Constructed, 1840-1860 87

LIST OF FIGURES

Table Page

1. Teatro Nacional (then named the Gran Teatro de Santa Anna), c. 1854 85
2. Oil painting of interior of Gran Teatro Nacional, Pietro Gualdi, c. 1840s 81
3. Chamber of Deputies, c. 1910s-20s, following its reconstruction after a fire. Formerly the Teatro de Iturbide 83
4. Spatial distribution of theaters in Mexico City, c. 1860 89
5. 1870s Theater Poster, *La pata de cabra* 128
6. *D. Simplicio's* masthead, c. 1845-6 140
7. *La Pata de Cabra*, c. 1855-6 143
8. Lithograph of Don Simplicio from Spanish periodical, *El Entreacto*, c. 1830s 146
9. Permanent Playhouses, c. 1868 168
10. Permanent Playhouses, c. 1902 169
11. Façade of Teatro Guillermo Prieto 199
12. Bird's Eyes View, Patio Seating, Teatro Guillermo Prieto 200
13. Second-level seating, Teatro Guillermo Prieto 201
14. Transversal view. 1st and 2nd level seating, Teatro Guillermo Prieto 202

NOTE ON CURRENCY, WAGES, AND PRICES

For much of the nineteenth century, the *peso* (*peso fuerte* or *peso duro*) and the *real* formed the backbone of Mexico's monetary system. The real, equivalent to 1/8 peso, was further subdivided into smaller denominations like *medios* (½ real) and *cuartillas* (¼ real). Mexico formally adopted a decimal-based monetary system in the 1860s and began minting centavos; 100 centavos equaled 1 peso, and 12.5 centavos equaled 1 real. Though reales and medios were no longer minted, people continued to use them until the end of the nineteenth century. The terms pesos, reales, medios, and centavos are used in this study, following how they appear in the original documentation. Until about 1870, the Mexican peso was the equivalent of the U.S. silver dollar. However, as the price of silver fell globally, the Mexican peso lost some of its value. In 1877, for example, U.S banks redeemed a Mexican peso for just 85 cents. By 1900, 1 Mexican peso was the equivalent of about $0.50 US.

Nominal daily wages for unskilled laborers in Mexico City remained steady at about 3.25 reales (approx. $0.40 US until the 1870s) throughout the period on which this study focuses. Real wages by contrast represent nominal wages adjusted for changes in purchasing power. Real wages thus take into account changes in the prices of goods. Prices for basic goods remained relatively stable between 1830 and 1900. The average price of corn, bread, and beans remained constant between 1825 and 1900. The prices of beef, lard, *pulque*, and cloth declined during this same period, while the prices for pork, sugar, soap, and charcoal increased. The nineteenth-century consumer price index (CPI), which measures the average price of a market basket of household goods and services, reflects these trends. In Mexico City, real wages (or the purchasing power of wages) increased

between the 1820s and 1840s, declined in the 1850s and 1860s, and rebounded during the 1870s. Real wages grew from the 1870s until the 1910 revolution. All prices cited in this dissertation are nominal, as reported in the original documentation.

INTRODUCTION: THE CITY AND THE AGE OF THEATER

In his first review as theater critic for *El Siglo XIX* in 1868, Ignacio Altamirano lamented the recent suspension of his predecessor's weekly chronicles. Waxing poetic, he sympathized with elderly women, the infirm, and those from the provinces who were unable to visit Mexico City and who depended on the theater chronicles to imagine what life was like in the capital. "It seems to me," Altamirano wrote, "that through these narratives the veil of distance covering their eyes was lifted allowing them to contemplate, for a moment, our stunning theaters with their opulence and beauty, their magnificent art and marvelous erudition; our proud promenades with their boisterous and colorful multitudes; our splendid and rich soirées; our public and private parties. Through these chronicles the songs of the siren Anáhuac reach the farthest points of the republic, this beautiful and versatile México, this indifferent courtesan who forgets in the pleasure-filled romps of today the terrors of yesterday or the troubles of tomorrow. The city, with its Spanish and Aztec aspects, its French flair and its proverbial unkemptness, with all its defects that make even the most rigid politicians loathe it, as they did Sybaris in its day, it is without a doubt for the rest of the nation our Athens, our Rome, our Paris… "[1]

Altamirano's review might appear aggrandizing to the twenty-first century reader, but for his contemporaries it captured the spirit of the age. Mexico City's allure as a symbol of modernity captivated nineteenth-century Mexicans. It drew people into its orbit figuratively through newspapers, magazines, almanacs, and other materials that circulated through the republic describing and depicting its modern buildings, stylish fashions, and

[1] Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *Obras completas de Ignacio Altamirano*, t. 10. *Crónicas teatrales* t. 1 (Mexico City: SEP, 1988), 31. Author's translation.

thriving nightlife. It did so physically as well, as a center of economic activity, political power, and cultural production. Between one-third and one-half of the city's population in that century was born outside it, including Altamirano, a native of Guerrero who like many had been lured by the promise of that metaphorical courtesan.[2] Once resident in the city, Altamirano immersed himself in its cultural and political life, becoming an important cultural critic, journalist, (*costumbrista*) sketch artist, and novelist.[3] As his review suggests, Altamirano was also swept up in the capital's theater culture. He became an avid theatergoer, critic, and booster of the arts.

Altamirano was not alone. Tens of thousands of nineteenth-century Mexico City residents participated in the capital's theatrical scene. Mexico City was the epicenter of the republic's theatrical activity, and its emergence as a hub in global opera and dramatic networks only deepened its appeal and symbolism. The city attracted touring opera, dramatic, and zarzuela companies from around the world, including some of the world's most talented artists. Artists entered and left the city to tremendous fanfare; crowds swarmed to welcome artists and bid them adieu once their seasons ended. New playhouses appeared in the urban landscape and performances became more frequent. Notices of upcoming seasons filled the pages of the press. Posters littered the walls of city buildings, and the rhythmic cadence of *voceadores* announcing upcoming shows filled the soundscape. Stage music and theatrical references infused urban culture. Opera scores

[2] Robert McCaa, "The Peopling of Nineteenth Century Mexico: Critical Scrutiny of a Censured Century," *Statistical Abstract of Latin America* 30, part 1 (1993): 626.

[3] Christopher Conway, "Technologías de la mirada: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, la novela nacional y el realismo literario," *Decimonónica* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 32-44; see also Edward N. Wright-Rios, "Indian Saints and Nation States: Ignacio Manuel Altamirano's Landscapes and Legends," *Estudios Mexicanos/Mexican Studies* 20, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 47-68.

enlivened churches and public plazas, and local bookstores sold sheet music. Vagrants reportedly whistled arias on street corners. Characters from the stage appeared on the covers of annual almanacs (*calendarios*), satirists re-imagined them, and journalists adopted the language and imagery of the stage in their analysis of current events. Dozens of magazines dedicated exclusively to the performing arts were born during this period, and a clothing stall named Guillermo Tell, named after Rossini's opera about Swiss liberation, sold winter coats. Theater penetrated nearly every corner of the land- and soundscape. More importantly, however, it came to occupy a central place in urban public life. Between 1830 and the turn of the twentieth century, theater stood at the heart of Mexico City's cultural, political, social, and economic life.

Perhaps surprisingly, theater's importance to nineteenth-century Mexico City in particular, and Mexico more generally, is not well known. Scholars of Mexico's nineteenth century have relegated theater to the margins. Our present understanding of that formative century has thus emerged largely based on studies of political leaders and ideologies, insurrection, and economic uncertainty. By returning theater to the center of nineteenth-century urban life where contemporaries understood it to be, this dissertation challenges that historiographical impulse. Intellectuals like Ignacio Altamirano wrote about theater because they thought it was important, believing that it offered a lens to better understand the country's politics, its culture, and its people.[4] Others shared Altamirano's belief. Theater's importance extended well beyond staged productions and the playhouse. As the chapters in this project examine, theater formed a pillar of early republican statecraft, it

[4] Christopher Conway, "Próspero y el teatro nacional: encuentros transatlánticos en las revistas teatrales de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, 1867-1876," *Iberoamericana*, año III, no. 9 (marzo de 2003): 149; see also, Héctor Azar, "Introducción," in *Obras completas de Ignacio Manuel Altamirano*, t. 10. *Crónicas teatrales* 1:23.

provided subsistence and investment opportunities in a flagging economy, and it offered a language and a place for a growing number of Mexicans to engage in politics and public life.

A careful study of the ways Mexicans funded, promoted, consumed and metabolized drama recasts our understanding of Mexico's nineteenth century. It reveals how public life developed in a cosmopolitan center and sheds new light on urban culture and the city's historical development. More broadly, it shows how theater provided the script and stage directions for urban life. Stage characters, content, and imagery provided ready material for interpretation and re-imagination. Theatergoers, journalists, politicians, and other urban residents consumed this material by attending performances and listening to and reading plays and newspapers. They re-imagined theatrical characters and adopted theatrical modes to write opinion journalism. They also embodied and interpreted theatrical roles in performances of urbanity, identity, and everyday life. In this way, theater became a central referent and metaphor for the ways urban dwellers experienced and reacted to that century's challenges.

A Deep History of Theater and Performance in Mexico

This project does not propose that theater emerged in Mexico in the nineteenth century. While theater's place in that century was unrivalled, theater and performance had deep roots. Indigenous societies possessed musical and performance traditions long before the arrival of the first Europeans to the Americas. Large spectacular events organized social life among the Aztecs, Mayans, and Inca. These events included performance repertoires of music, song, dance, recitation, dialogues, impersonation, acrobatic feats, and mimetic routines. They often featured colorful costumes, masks, body make-up, large numbers of

performers, and lavish staging as well. Early chroniclers mistakenly referred to these embodied practices using familiar terms of European theater and performance. Nevertheless, research has shown that embodied and highly ritualized acts such as these served as powerful transmitters of knowledge, culture, and power in indigenous societies. Such spectacles made political hierarchies, religious beliefs, and social mores visible and were thus critical to society's functioning.[5]

Spanish colonizers introduced multiple theatrical traditions upon their arrival to the New World. Evangelist theater staged by the Franciscans sought to teach Catholic doctrine by fusing Catholic beliefs and traditions with popular indigenous performance practices into a genre that one scholar has called "a spectacular cultural patchwork…[of] native-language dialogue, Latin hymns, European and indigenous costumes, native scenography…[and] European mechanical special effects."[6] *Juicio Final*, or *Final Judgment*, for instance, one of the first evangelist plays staged in the Americas, featured fire, drums, gunfire, and more than 800 indigenous actors. Staged in Nahuatl, this eschaatological drama told the story of the final reckoning in which the living and the dead passed before Jesus; Christ forgave those who converted to Christianity while sentencing non-believers to eternal damnation, literally disappearing stage characters into the fiery abyss using trapdoors. The Franciscans believed these evangelist (or missionary) plays, complete with song, dance, pageantry and religious paraphernalia, were far more effective in transmitting Christian ideology than content delivered passively by priests such as

[5] Diana Taylor and Sarah J. Townsend, "Introduction," in *Stages of Conflict: A Critical Anthology of Latin American Theater and Performance,* eds. Diana Taylor and Sarah J. Townsend (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 2-4.
[6] Frederick Luciani, "Spanish American Theatre of the Colonial Period," in *The Cambridge History of Spanish American Literature*, eds. Roberto Gonzalez Echeverría and Enrique Pupo-Walker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 264.

homilies and sermons.[7] Through embodied practice, they hoped—and expected—indigenous actors to adopt the ideologies presented in the drama.[8]

The Jesuits introduced humanist theater to the Americas in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Their fervor to use theater as a pedagogical tool matched that of the Franciscans, but their plays were staged in Latin and Spanish and were thus directed at a far narrower audience: educated elites and student-actors. While religious in content, these plays highlighted rhetorical talent and humanistic learning.[9] Humanist theater never achieved the following of these other theatrical forms. It languished and for the most part disappeared by the eighteenth century.

Religiously themed plays dominated the sixteenth-century repertoire, and they remained important features of religious celebrations in post-colonial Mexico. They also sparked an indigenous, or Nahuatl theater, performed in the native language by Nahua actors, primarily for Nahua-speaking audiences. Existing indigenous performance traditions and practices easily accommodated this genre's development. And while it drew upon religious content, Catholic doctrine in particular, Nahuatl theater developed along its own trajectory and was not simply a theater of evangelization; as Louise Burkhart has argued, it also served as a theater of celebration, self-legitimation, and transformation. Authored and/or edited by native Nahua speakers and performed by Nahua actors capable of imparting alternative meanings through tone and gestures, these plays were never exactly what the Franciscan friars thought. Rather, this theater allowed indigenous peoples

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[7] Louis M. Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 4 and 43.

[8] Taylor and Townsend, eds., *Stages of Conflict*, 48-9.

[9] Luciani, "Spanish American Theatre," 270-1.

to perform identities, forge community, and accommodate Christian narratives and practices into existing linguistic and cultural structures. As such, Nahuatl theater provided an important mode through which indigenous peoples negotiated the colonial encounter.[10]

Spaniards also brought with them secular or profane theater. This latter type of theater, which co-existed with religious dramas, featured historical dramas, comedies of manners, and romantic comedies that flourished in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain.[11] Secular plays often accompanied important civic and religious celebrations such as saints' days, the arrival of the Viceroy, or the consecration of the archbishop. Theater grew in popularity, especially in the seventeenth century with the circulation and performance of the Spanish comedies of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Pedro Calderón de la Barca. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also witnessed the development of a type of creole theater featuring plays written by individuals born in Mexico City but influenced by Spanish dramatic traditions. Emblematic works in this tradition include the *comedies*, *sainetes*, and *autos sacramentales* of Sor Juana Ínes de la Cruz, and, later, the comedies of Eusebio Vela.[12]

Theater in Mexico City received a boost when colonial administrators commissioned the construction of the first permanent playhouse, the Coliseo, in 1725.[13]

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[10] Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*, 45-8. On Nahuatl theater, see also Barry D. Sell and Louise M. Burkhart, eds. *Nahuatl Theater*, vols. 1-4 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004-2009).

[11] Luciani, "Spanish American Theatre," 270-1..

[12] Antonio Magaña Esquivel, *Imagen y realidad del teatro en México (1533-1960)* (Mexico City: INBA, 2000), 67-84.

[13] Manuel Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal de México*, 1753-1931 (Mexico City: Editorial Cultura, 1932), 15.

Prior to that time, most plays had been performed on improvised stages established in plazas and churches with spectators looking on from windows and balconies, or in the patio of the Royal Indian Hospital, the institution the theater helped fund.[14] Historian Juan Viqueira Albán identifies the middle of the eighteenth century as a turning point for the dramatic arts in Mexico. According to Viqueira Albán, civil authorities, guided by principles of the Enlightenment, began to support theater, believing that "if developed with skill and wisdom, [theater] had the potential to become a powerful medium for the moral regeneration of society."[15] The viceroy displayed his support by ordering the Coliseo be remodeled and constructed with stone. Completed in 1753, the renamed Coliseo Nuevo had a capacity for 1500 spectators; that playhouse would later become the Teatro Principal, independent Mexico's first playhouse. Ecclesiastical authorities also dialed back their previous animosity toward the theater. This did not mean, however, that theater lost its moralizing aim. Civil authorities had painted on the Coliseo Nuevo's stage curtains a message declaring that drama's duty was correct mankind, and "to make of the people 'a friend of virtue' and 'an enemy of vice'."[16] They also censored plays and regulated the behavior of audiences.

As the colonial period came to a close, Spanish dramas and comedies continued to dominate the repertory but other forms of entertainment increasingly found their way onto

[14] Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*, 10-14. Some date the establishment of the first permanent playhouse to the 1620s or the 1670s, but this was a temporary structure erected in the patio of the Royal Indian Hospital. See for instance Mañon, *Historia*, 14 and J.R. Spell, "The Theater in New Spain in the Early Eighteenth Century," *Hispanic Review* 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1947): 137.

[15] Juan Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico*, trans. Sonya Lipsett-Rivera and Sergio Rivera Ayala (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1999), 34.

[16] *Ibid.*, 39.

the stage at the Coliseo Nuevo. Such shows included magnetism and magic, acrobatics, the occasional opera or zarzuela, and Mexican-authored plays. Nevertheless, there remained only one permanent theater in a city of perhaps 125,00 to 140,000 over which the Royal Indian Hospital exercised a monopoly; a royal edict from the sixteenth century had granted hospital administrators, and later private renters, exclusive rights to theatrical productions in the city.[17] Theater fell on difficult times during the wars for independence and stumbled along during the first decade of independent life.[18] The recruitment of the first full Italian opera company to the Americas in 1830-1831, led by the renowned Roman bass, Filippo Galli, rejuvenated theater in the city, ushering in a new era that saw theater come to the fore of urban public life.

The Age of Theater and the Atlantic World

From the recruitment of Fillipo Galli's Italian opera company in 1830-31 to the 1901 demolition of the Gran Teatro Nacional, the city's (and the republic's) marquis theater, the stage occupied an outsize role in city life. Never before had theater been so central to the political, cultural, social, and economic life of Mexico City. It never would again thereafter. This seventy-year period of unprecedented activity, energy, and focus in the theatrical arts was the Age of Theater.

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[17] Population statistics from McCaa, "Peopling," p. 610, Table C2. For 1810, McCaa cites a figure of 128,218. John Lear cites a figure of 138,000 in 1803. See John Lear, "Mexico City: Space and Class in the Porfirian Capital, 1884-1910," *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 4 (May 1996), 464, Table 1.

[18] Susana Delgado, "Entre murmullos y penurias: El teatro novohispano del siglo XIX," in *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México, tomo 4. Bienes y vivencias. El siglo XIX*, ed. Anne Staples (Mexico City: El Colegio de México / FCE, 2005), 367-96. See also Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la independencia* (México: UNAM, 1969).

The Age's emergence owed to a broader set of global transformations, primarily centered in the Atlantic World. Chief among these was the expansion of Italian opera. Between the 1820s and 1850, Italian companies embarked on tours that took them to the Americas, the Caribbean, Australia, India, Russia, and South Africa.[19] Moreover, that century witnessed the widespread construction of grand opera- and playhouses. Performing arts halls became central features of cities and towns, especially in the Americas. As a scholar of theater in the United States put it, "the theatre became as necessary to the city's sense of completeness as the city hall."[20] In Mexico City, the construction of two of the republic's marquis playhouses, the *Gran Teatro Nacional* in 1844 and the *Teatro de Iturbide* in 1856, indexed the republic's place in this emergent globalization of performance art; at the time of its construction, the Gran Teatro Nacional ranked among the largest theaters in the world, with a capacity for over 2200 spectators. In addition to large urban centers, performance halls appeared in small cities and towns. In the lumber town of Manistee, Michigan, for instance, Thomas Ramsdell erected a grand opera house. A theater featured at the center of the company town in Pullman, Illinois as well.[21] These two performance halls counted among thousands operating in towns and cities in the United States by 1900.[22] In Manaus in the Brazilian Amazon, wealthy rubber barons constructed a

[19] Roger Parker, "The Opera Industry," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 88-89.

[20] Mary C. Henderson, *The City and the Theatre: The History of New York Playhouses. A 250-Year Journey from Bowling Green to Times Square* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2004), 9.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Ann Satterthwaite, *Local Glories: Opera Houses on Main Street, Where Art and Community Meet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9.

lavish opera house using marble from Tuscany, steel from Glasgow, cast iron from Paris, and candlesticks from Murano.[23]

Increasingly dense transportation networks and technological innovations facilitated the movement of people and goods. The advent of the steamship reduced travel times between port cities. Railroads facilitated travel over land, shrinking transit time between venues. These changes also helped make possible the kinds of material exchanges involved in the construction of the opera house in Manaus. This is not to say, of course, that such exchanges had not previously happened. Performers made circum-Atlantic voyages on sail-powered vessels before the advent of the steamship. The months' long transatlantic sailing voyage of Galli's opera company in 1831 was just one among many such trips taken by touring companies in the first half of the nineteenth century. Steamships and railroads simply eased and quickened these trips, which allowed more touring companies to spend more time performing. These technologies decreased lag times between the debuts of new works in Europe, Mexico, and the rest of Latin America. They also helped maintain fresh repertories in playhouses and on the shelves of city bookstores, as demand for novelty onstage and rising literacy rates increased the demand for new plays, printed scripts, and sheet music.

The growth of touring companies and improved modes of transportation helped forge performance networks that deepened Mexico City's integration into circum-Atlantic circulations of goods, people, and culture. These networks linked the Mexican capital to cities such as Havana and New Orleans, and more indirectly to circuits extending northward to Louisville, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and New York, and southward to Central

[23] Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5-6.

America, Lima, and occasionally Buenos Aires. They also linked Mexico City to secondary cities in the republic such as Puebla, Querétaro, Guadalajara, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí. Dramatic and lyric companies from Spain and Italy—often via Havana or New Orleans—staged comedies, dramas, zarzuelas (popular Spanish lyric theater), and operas. The occasional company offered vaudeville, in French.

The expansion and commercialization of theater in Spain also provided an impetus for the age of theater's emergence in Mexico City. The growth of urban populations and an improved economy bolstered the theater industry in Spain, especially after 1840. Investors and impresarios financed the construction of new playhouses; in Madrid, the number of theaters increased from seven in 1850 to forty-eight just two decades later in 1870.[24] Since Spanish productions continued to dominate Mexican repertoires in the post-independence era, theater's growth in Spain had a direct effect on the Mexican stage. Spanish companies increasingly toured in Latin America. Taking advantage of improved transportation and established networks of impresarios and agents, these companies offered audiences a deep repertory of comedies, romantic dramas, and French melodrama popular among Spanish audiences.[25] Zarzuela in particular found favor with Latin American audiences. A form of Spanish lyric theater inspired by both Italian opera and French *opera buffa*, zarzuela's

[24] José Luis González Subías, "Nineteenth-Century Spanish Theatre: The Birth of an Industry," in *A History of Theatre in Spain*, eds. María M. Delgado and David T. Gies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 219-20.

[25] Helena Buffery, "Theatre, Colonialism, Exile and the Americas," in *A History of Theatre in Spain*, 330.

resurgence in the second half of the nineteenth century in Spain spilled over to playhouses throughout the region, especially in urban areas like Mexico City and Buenos Aires.[26]

These global developments coalesced in nineteenth-century Mexico City, transforming the Mexican capital into a hub in global performance circuits. Given its legacy as a population and power center, Mexico City's emergence as a node in performance networks does not come as a surprise. Around 1500, Mexico City (then Tenochtitlán) was the largest urban center in the Americas, home to perhaps 200,000 people, and the power center of an empire that stretched westward to the Pacific, eastward to Yucatán, and south to Guatemala. It became the capital of New Spain during Spanish colonialism and the pivot of a vast empire that extended from San Francisco (California) through Central America and included the Spanish Caribbean and Manila (Philippines).[27] With about 150,000 residents following independence in 1821, the city retained its designation as the largest urban center in the Americas, that is, until the second half of the nineteenth century when cities such as New York, Buenos Aires, and Río de Janeiro surpassed it.[28] While Mexico City regained the mantle as the Americas' largest metropolitan center in the late twentieth century, it had never relinquished its place as the symbolic and physical center of the country's cultural production, financial exchanges, and political power. Nonetheless, the age's emergence and endurance in Mexico City depended upon local decision-making, in particular political wherewithal and economic investment.

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[26] Kristen McCleary, "Popular, Elite *and* Mass Culture? The Spanish Zarzuela in Buenos Aires, 1890-1900," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 21 (2002): 1-27.

[27] John Tutino, "The Political Economy of Urban Power, Marginality, and Informality: Population, Production, and Participation in Mexico City," (unpublished essay, Working Group on Urbanization in the Americas, University of Houston, Mar. 8-9, 2010).

[28] McCaa, "Peopling," 610.

Elites in nineteenth-century Mexico viewed theater as more than mere entertainment. To them, it was a school of morals and virtue, a civilizing force capable of transforming theatergoers to the core.[29] Theater also served as a marker of a society in the midst of positive transformation. Because excellent dramatic arts represented a litmus test of advancement, idealized modernity, and the state's identity in the minds of Mexico's leaders, most supported a strong theater culture. Conservative statesman, Lucas Alamán (1830-32), put the full weight of his government behind Italian opera believing it the antidote to Mexico's challenges, both domestic and international. The enigmatic, thirteen-time president Antonio López de Santa Anna did too, championing the construction of the Gran Teatro Nacional alongside municipal authorities, aristocrats, and wealthy capitalists who helped finance it and other city theaters. Through arts patronage, elites came to believe they were helping usher Mexico into the global order of prosperous, civilized nineteenth-century nations.

Non-elites contributed to theater's growth in the city by supporting it with their pocketbooks. Urban dwellers flocked to city playhouses to see the latest dramas and operas. They went to be seen, but they also attended plays and engaged in the city's theatrical life so they could participate more fully in the shared public culture that developed around it. Others capitalized on the vogue of theater by sating growing demand for scripts and sheet music, or by leveraging its popularity to engage in political life. Still

[29] A focused explanation of Argentine intellectual and writer Domingo Sarmiento's belief in theater's transformative and educational power, shared among nineteenth-century Latin American elites, is found in Berta de Abner, Cristina Castro, Laura Valenzuela, Liliana Scalia, and Jamile Apara, *La vida del teatro en la cultura del joven Sarmiento: Una propuesta interdisciplinaria como aporte metodológico y didáctico para E.G.B. 3 y Polimodal* (Argentina: Editorial FFHA / UNSJ, 2004), 127-38.

others supported it by helping to produce theater, finding employment and forging careers in playhouses.

The expansion of playhouses perhaps best captures the growth of the city's theater culture. In 1823, there had been just one theater located in the heart of the city. By the turn of the twentieth century, the city counted fourteen permanent playhouses, dispersed widely across the city, with a total capacity for perhaps 15,000 spectators.[30] This growth in theaters far outpaced more modest population gains, which saw the city increase in size from about 150,000 in 1830 to approximately 350,000 in 1900.[31]

Theater, Urban History, and Nineteenth-Century Historiography

It is nearly impossible to disentangle the histories of cities and theater. Especially since the sixteenth century, the two have developed along parallel trajectories. While the Romans were among the first to construct magnificent theaters within the city limits and devote more days to theatrical entertainment (the Greeks constructed theaters on the outskirts of cities), urban dwellers in Renaissance Italy and France, Elizabethan England, and Golden Age Spain ushered in an era of theater construction and dramatic production that left a lasting imprint on the performing arts in the modern era. By the eighteenth century, public theaters in France were centerpieces of urban life. The "most prominent and prestigious new cultural institutions of the century," theaters operated in more than seventy

[30] Nine of the permanent theaters had a combined capacity for 12,327 spectators. Such information is not available for the other five playhouses; however, since the average capacity of each the nine playhouses was 1370, 15,000 is likely a conservative estimate for total capacity at the turn of the century. For theater capacities, see Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal (henceforth AHDF), Administración de Rentas Municipales, Vol. 5464, tomo 2, 1906. See also, AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4017, expedientes 45 BIS and 124. For estimated capacity at the Teatro Colón (Teatro Eslava) see Antonio Magaña Esquivel, *Los teatros en la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Colección Popular Ciudad de México, 1974).

[31] McCaa, "Peopling," 626.

metropolitan cities and eleven overseas colonies.[32] Permanent, stand-alone playhouses appeared later in Spanish American cities because they drew heavily upon the Spanish tradition of the *corral*, an open-air theater erected in courtyards that remained the prototype playhouse in Spain until at least the eighteenth century. Playhouse construction did not peak in Latin America until the nineteenth century, when urban populations grew and cities expanded beyond their colonial limits.

As embodied physical spaces, cities were hubs of commercial and cultural activity, and theatergoing ranked among the most popular urban activities. Across Latin America, theater and urban life united the region. Theatergoers in Buenos Aires, Caracas, and Mexico City saw the same European plays and operas staged by touring companies. They also enjoyed local plays that were similar in theme and style.[33] But, cities also served as symbols of modernity and progress, or civilization and refinement in the formulation of Argentine intellectual and writer, Domingo Sarmiento. Cities were, in short, "laboratories for grafting foreign ideas onto local environments, and making progress visible through buildings, monuments, tree-lined avenues, and parks."[34] Playhouses as structures occupied part of the visible progress of the nineteenth-century urban landscape. The theatergoing culture they inspired formed part of a cluster of visual practices and attractions that revolutionized the ways urban dwellers experienced the modern world in that century. In

[32] Lauren R. Clay, *Stagestruck: The Business of Theater in Eighteenth-Century France and its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 2-3.

[33] Christopher Conway, *Nineteenth-Century Spanish America: A Cultural History* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 13.

[34] *Ibid.*, 23.

short, urban life, with its buildings, panoramas, newspapers, signs and sounds, came to symbolize modernity.[35]

As Ignacio Altamirano's theater review signaled, cities' status as symbolic centers magnified the importance of events that happened within them. This explains why Lucás Alamán recruited the first Italian opera company in the Americas to Mexico City. It also explains why Antonio López de Santa Anna supported the construction of the republic's marquis theater, the Gran Teatro Nacional, in the heart of Mexico City rather than his home state of Veracruz. Cities' symbolism, in turn, heightened their allure. Opera impresario Max Maretzek was drawn to Mexico City in 1852 because of its profit potential, but even he was astounded by his good fortune. On tour in the United States, he sold all his props and negotiated loans from banking houses to pay for his trip to Mexico City. Once there, ticket sales for the first twelve-performance subscription (*abono*) given by his company netted 18,000 pesos, enough to pay back loans and the salaries of his company with some leftover.[36] Maretzek's example also points to a more tangible aspect of the allure of nineteenth-century cities and urban culture in the age of theater. If experiencing performances of artists who had delighted audiences on European and North American stages helped spectators in Mexico feel connected to the modern world of their imaginations, they also supported theater with their pocketbooks, sometimes paying handsomely to attend performances. They did so in ever-larger numbers as the age broadened in the second half of the century, a subject taken up in chapter 4.

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[35] David Henkin, "Word on the Streets: Ephemeral Signage in Antebellum New York," in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, eds. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004), 194.

[36] Max Maretzek, *Crotchets and Quavers or Revelations of an Opera Manager in America* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1966), 219-301.

This dissertation tells two intertwined histories: one of the city and another of its burgeoning nineteenth-century theater culture. By re-inserting theater into narratives of Mexico City's—and the republic's—nineteenth century, this dissertation challenges a historiography that has relegated theater to the margins, treating it as tangential to what really mattered or denigrating it as a European cultural import patronized exclusively by elites. Theater's marginalization is most evident in the scant literature produced on that subject. Scholars who have worked on theater are based in centers for the study of aesthetics and the performing arts, and historians seldom cite their works.[37] Moreover, virtually everything we know about nineteenth-century theater comes from articles written and published serially in nineteenth-century newspapers and multi-volume sets that in large measure transcribe theater reviews or serve as anthologies of important plays with minimal scholarly analysis or a clear analytical angle.[38] This study's focus on theater's appeal across

[37] Two notable examples include the late Luis Reyes de la Maza, long-time faculty member at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas at the National Autonomous University and Miguel Angel Vásquez Meléndez, based out of the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Teatral 'Rodolfo Usigli" in Mexico City.

[38] Enrique Olavarría y Ferrari's *Reseña histórica del teatro en México, 1538-1911*, 3rd ed., 5 vols. (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1961), appeared serially in *El Nacional* between 1880 and 1884. The group of multi-volume works includes the fourteen-volume set compiled by Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la independencia (1810-1839) [programas y crónicas]* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1969); *El teatro en México en la época de Santa Anna*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: UNAM, 1972-79); *El teatro en 1857 y sus antecedents, 1855-56* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1956); *El teatro en México entre la Reforma y el Imperio, 1858-1861* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1958); *El teatro en México durante el Segundo Imperio (1862-1867)* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1959); *El teatro en la época de Juárez, 1868-1872* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1961); *El teatro en México con Lerdo y Díaz, 1873-1879* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1963); and *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: UNAM, 1964-68). It also includes the twenty-volume set titled *Teatro mexicano: historia y dramaturgia*. Two final studies merit mention, though they too offer little analysis of nineteenth-century theater. Antonio Magaña Esquivel's *Imagen y realidad en el teatro mexicano* places nearly 75 percent of its emphasis on the twentieth century. Miguel Angel Vásquez Meléndez's *Mexico personificado. Un asomo al teatro del siglo*

broad swaths of the urban public, its politically-charged reverberations, and its deep integration in local commercial networks forges new ground topically. It also does so methodologically by offering a new model for writing nineteenth-century theater history—one that is interdisciplinary and multi-faceted in approach, yet tethered firmly to the social, economic, and political context.

In situating theater's study in and as an integral part of the city's historical development, this study dialogues with works by scholars of other Latin American cities while contributing to a significant gap in the literature on Mexico City during the first five decades of independent nationhood.[39] The stagnation or decline of urban population centers relative to rural and frontier zones during this period, the so-called "primacy dip," helps explain the paucity of scholarship on this era.[40] In the immediate post-independence period, cities throughout Latin America lost a measure of economic and, in some cases, administrative primacy. No longer the grand power centers of the colonial past, large cities

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XIX (Mexico City: INBA, 2012) is a series of three loosely connected essays that search for the origins of a national theater that did not develop until the twentieth century; Vásquez Meléndez devotes half of the text to transcriptions of theater critic Manuel Peredo's reviews published in nineteenth-century newspapers.

[39] Aiala Teresa Levy, "Forging an Urban Public: Theaters, Audiences, and the City in São Paulo, Brazil, 1854-1924," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2016); Kristen McCleary, "Culture and Commerce: An Urban History of Theater in Buenos Aires, 1880-1920," (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 2002). Notable exceptions to the paucity of scholarship on Mexico City in this period include Marie Eileen Francois, *A Culture of Everyday Credit: Housekeeping, Pawnbroking, and Governance in Mexico City, 1750-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2006); Regina Hernández Franyuti, ed. *La ciudad de México en la primera mitad del siglo XIX*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 1994); and John Frederick Shaw, Jr., "Poverty and Politics in Mexico City, 1824-1854," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1975).

[40] Richard M. Morse, "Cities as People," in *Rethinking the Latin American City*, eds. Richard M. Morse and Jorge E. Hardoy (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1992), 7.

thus lost a degree of importance to historians, who focused instead on depleted treasuries, administrative difficulties, and political disintegration—the challenges of state and nation formation.[41] Cities only regained their centrality in historiographical terms in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries when significant European immigration and cities' integration into North Atlantic industrial economies began to transform them into the megacities many are today.[42]

The periodization of the age of theater will doubtless seem unfamiliar to scholars of Mexican history. Neither 1830 nor 1901 signpost critical years in Mexico's nineteenth

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[41] A small sample of works that focus on politics in early post-independent Mexico includes Michael P. Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico, 1835-1846. Hombres de Bien in the Age of Santa Anna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993); Michael P. Costeloe, *La primera república federal de México, 1824-1835: Un estudio de los partidos políticos en el México independiente* (Mexico City: FCE, 1975); Will Fowler, *Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna, 1821-1858* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2016); Will Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals, 1821-1853* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); Stanley C. Green, *The Mexican Republic in the First Decade, 1823-1832* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1987); Peter Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and Formation of Mexico's National State: Guerrero, 1800-1857* (Palo Alto: Stanford University, 1997); Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995); Alicia Hernández-Chávez, *La tradición republicana del buen gobierno* (Mexico: FCE, 1993). Influential works on Mexico's economic and financial troubles include Barbara Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury: Debt and Taxes in Mexico, 1821-1856* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1986); Carlos Marichal and Leonor Ludlow, eds. *Un siglo de deuda pública en México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1998); and Luis Jáuregui, "Los orígenes de un malestar crónico. Los ingresos y los gastos públicos de México, 1821-1855," in *Penuria sin fin: historia de los impuestos en México siglos XVIII-XX*, eds. Luis Aboites Aguilar and Luis Jáuregui (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2005), 79-114.

[42] Diego Armus and John Lear, "The Trajectory of Latin American Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* vol. 24, no. 3 (March 1998): 294. For Mexico, see Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012); Michael Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz* (Austin: University of Texas, 1997); and Steven Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2012). The most comprehensive treatment of Mexican historiography for this period writ large is Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo and Aurora Gómez Galvarrieto, *El porfiriato* (Mexico City: FCE, 2006).

century. This dissertation diverges from historiographical convention. Its periodization does not track with standard political narratives and regime changes or eruptions of violence and civil conflict because these events did not have an overbearing influence on theater and its place in city life. While periods of intense fighting, disease outbreaks, or earthquakes in the capital forced temporary closures of city playhouses, theater endured through the regime changes, wars and insurrections, and economic uncertainty that have commanded much scholarly attention. The Teatro Nacional, for instance, kept its doors open following the annexation of Texas (Dec. 1845), the onset of war with the United States (April 1846), the outbreak of the Caste War in Yucatán (July 1847), and U.S. troops' occupation of the city in 1847-48. City playhouses offered productions as civil war raged displacing Benito Juárez's regime to Querétaro (1858-61), and again during the Second Empire (1864-67).

Perhaps more importantly, the broad periodization adopted in this study reframes the focus of Mexico's nineteenth century. Urban and rural dwellers experienced that century and its challenges quite differently.[43] This dissertation's focus on the ways that residents of the capital consumed, engaged, and deployed theater illuminates worlds of urban commerce, political engagement, and city life that are often omitted from studies of this period.[44] In so doing, it seeks to recast narratives that have characterized parts of the

[43] Among the best studies of broadly national agrarian violence and insurrection is John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution: The Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750-1940* (New Haven: Yale University, 1986).

[44] Two notable exceptions are Richard Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens: Politics and the Masses in Mexico City from Colony to Republic* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001) and Silvia M. Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City: The Parián Riot, 1828," *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 68, no. 2 (May 1988): 245-268, though the focus of both is largely politics.

era as the age of chaos and caudillos, intentions, proposals, Santa Anna, Benito Juárez, and Porfirio Díaz among others.[45] It also argues for theater's place in the making of modern Mexico. Historian Mauricio Tenorio has argued that "Far from being the exotic town described by foreign travelers or the mere involuntary consequence of cultural atavisms, Mexico City has been so much a part of the making of the modern [and the fulfillment of so many modern promises—either rapid economic and demographic growth or cosmopolitanism] that examining it is but another way to inhabit what is known as the modern world."[46] A study of theater in a place that embodied and symbolized nineteenth-century modernity, and that fulfilled so many modern promises, thus enhances our understanding of Mexico's broader post-independence history.

A Note on Terms and Sources

This dissertation takes a broad view of theater. That is, it conceives of theater as a cultural production, physical space, and business. Stage characters and their politicized re-imaginings, theatrical language, theatergoing and performance halls, and a host of associated business practices thus figure into the analysis. Theater here includes dramas, comedies, zarzuelas, and a variety of hybrid genres and one-act pieces. It also includes opera, since dramatic action and spectacle were central to its production and

[45] See for instance Charles Chapman, "The Age of Caudillos: A Chapter in Hispanic American History," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 12, no. 3 (August 1932): 281-310; Josefina Zoraída Vásquez, *Nacionalismo y educación en México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1975), p. 3; Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico*; Fowler, *Independent Mexico*; Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals;* and Johns, *The City of Mexico in the Age of Díaz*. Mark Wasserman's study of politics and everyday life in nineteenth-century is divided into three parts: The Age of Troubles, The Age of Civil Wars, and the Age of Order and Progress. Mark Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth Century Mexico: Men, Women, and War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2000).

[46] Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the* City, xv.

consumption.[47] In terms of performance spaces, this study prioritizes semi-permanent or permanent structures in which these more traditional theatrical productions were staged; however, when appropriate and especially in the fourth chapter, it also examines the seasonal makeshift theaters, or *jacalones*, where enterprising entrepreneurs pioneered new formats that revolutionized and popularized the practice of theatergoing, thus broadening theater's reach and influence.

This project approaches the history of theater in Mexico City from rich but disparate document collections. This archival organization resulted in part from shifting jurisdictions in theater management between municipal and federal officials; broadly speaking, collections and document clusters on theaters found in the *Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal* (AHDF) reflect moments when municipal authorities were in charge of theater oversight while collections found in the *Archivo General de la Nación* (AGN) reveal moments when management and financial responsibility rested with the federal government. Theater's connections to many aspects of public life left a broad historical footprint. In addition to public oversight, theater involved contracts negotiated between private business partners and renters, and wills. Individuals conducted these transactions in the presence of notaries public, and their transactions left a paper trail in the *Archivo Histórico de Notarías* (AHN) that illuminates financial contours of the theater business. The theater business also depended on local printers. Posters, playbills, and invitations provided important revenue streams for city printers, and while many of these items have been lost or discarded, some remain, waiting to be discovered in judicial case files or the

[47] Simon Williams, "Opera and Modes of Theatrical Production," in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, edited by Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 140.

many dusty volumes of the *Administración de Rentas Municipales* in the AHDF. These material artifacts provide data points for the historian, recording performances of particular plays, ticket prices and casts, which help reconstruct the history of staged performances. At times, they also offer helpful visual cues for how audiences may have interpreted them. Among these, the collection of theater aficionado Armando María y Campos, housed and digitized by the *Centro de Estudios de Historia de México* (CEHM-CARSO), merits mention for its volume and rarity. Much of the remaining documentary evidence comes filtered through the observations of theater critics, whose columns were published in nineteenth-century newspapers and specialty magazines; the unparalleled physical and digitized collections of the *Hemeroteca Nacional* have been essential to this project, as have the published transcriptions of theater columns found in Luis Reyes de la Maza's multi-volume set on Mexican theater. A careful reading of these reviews helps fill in some of the gaps left by the memos, correspondence, inspectors' reports, contracts, ledgers, theater posters, and judicial cases consulted in the archives.

This project develops the contours of the age of theater in Mexico City. It also examines important moments therein, though it proceeds in a somewhat episodic manner based on the nature and scope of the documentary record. Many of its conclusions and arguments draw on a database of more than 3000 performances staged in over a dozen city playhouses between the early 1820s and 1900. That database, which I constructed from transcribed theater chronicles, newspaper searches, theater posters and other archival

documents, reflects my attempt to track down the fragments in order to piece together the lost score.[48]

Structure

Organized chronologically (though with some overlap), each of the chapters in this project examines a different way in which theater influenced life in the city during the 1830-1901 period. Chapter 1 examines the opening of the age of theater in Mexico City. More specifically, it employs theater ledgers and correspondence exchanged between theater managers, overseas emissaries, and Mexico's minister of relations, Lucas Alamán, to analyze the herculean effort to recruit the first full Italian opera company to Mexico City (and to the Americas) in the early 1830s. The chapter explores the tension between opera's symbolic power and its expense, showing how politicians diverted resources to sustain the opera company in spite of depleted treasuries and growing political challenges. In so doing, it argues that establishing a tradition of excellence in the fine arts ranked among important state-building priorities that included restoring the country's financial credibility and its diplomatic standing in Europe, damaged by Mexico's default on its British debt in the 1820s. Together, these efforts formed part of a performance of statecraft, enacted onstage, in Mexico, and in Europe for domestic and international consumption.

[48] The database consists of over 3000 performances staged between the 1820s and 1880s, compiled from searches in newspapers (including both physical newspapers and digitized periodicals consulted through the Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México and the World Newspaper Archive), Enrique Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica*, vols. 1-3, and transcriptions of theater chronicles found in Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México en la época de Santa Anna*, 2 vols. (1840-1855); *El teatro en 1857 y sus antecedentes; El teatro en México entre la reforma y el imperio, 1858-1861*; *El teatro en México durante el Segundo Imperio (1862-1867)*; *El teatro en México en la época de Juárez, 1868-1872*; and *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo*, 3 vols.

Opera's sumptuous music and magnificent staging created a demand for spectacle that increased during the century. The popularity of opera and Galli's company brought about a theater construction boom in the city that saw the number of theaters quadruple in just two decades, between 1840 and 1860. Chapter 2 picks up here, using wills, contracts, inspectors' reports, ledgers, and disputes taken before notaries' public to examine the financing of playhouses and the motivations behind such investments. The chapter's examination of theater's deep ties to local commerce challenges a historiography that has characterized the period as one of economic stagnation or contraction. Meanwhile, its exploration of the theater construction boom from the perspective of spectators and theatrical production offers a textured portrait of theater's centrality to mid-century cultural life, a topic that textbooks and historical monographs have overlooked.

If theater was enmeshed in the city's economy, it also influenced urban cultural and political life. Theater offered stock characters, situations, and a language that helped Mexicans metabolize politics. A focus on the ways Mexicans engaged with popular staged productions and their reverberations in the public sphere helps us more fully understand how Mexicans suffered and struggled to make sense of the era's uncertainty. Chapter 3 does just this by assessing how a single play, a Spanish magical comedy titled *La pata de cabra* (*The Goat's Hoof*), came to sit at the heart of serious debates about Mexican politics, society, and the current and future nation from 1840 to the late 1870s. Through a close reading of the play and the press and a careful analysis of the ways these intersected with staged performances, the chapter shows how *La pata de cabra* developed into a cultural phenomenon and a political force. Its attention to satire's role both in the play and its creative re-imaginings, helps forge a deeper understanding of the ways Mexicans processed

uncertainty and instability in the period. The chapter also challenges scholars to take seriously theater as a place and form of politics.

Chapter 4 broadens out to theatergoing. In particular, it analyzes changes to the format, content, and pricing of shows that popularized theatergoing and broadened the age of theater. Focusing on entertainment pioneers like Soledad Aycardo, the chapter shows how innovations introduced in popular and seasonal theaters made their way into the city's first-class playhouses thus muddying once-clear distinctions between theater audiences and genres, and dichotomies of high and low culture. These transformations in theater and theatergoing, combined with the construction of additional performance halls, broadened theater's appeal and its reach. At the same time, they led to the demise of the age by establishing the foundations for film- and cinema-going, and twentieth-century mass entertainment more generally.

This study concludes with a brief exploration of four events that coalesced to signal the close of the age of theater. Among these were the 1894 theater *reglamento*, the failed project to construct a municipal theater in 1894-95, the appearance of Frenchman Louis Lumière's film projector in 1896, and the demolition of the Teatro Nacional in 1900-01 to improve traffic flow and congestion—events that augured theater's diminished role in twentieth-century urban life.

CHAPTER 1

PERFORMING STATECRAFT: STAGING ITALIAN OPERA AND THE MODERN NATION IN 1830S MEXICO CITY

In the summer of 1831, *The Ferro*, a one-hundred-foot-long, copper-sheeted brigantine (a sailing ship with two masts) armed with eight cannons set sail from Genoa en route to Veracruz. Onboard were Filippo Galli, a veteran of the Italian stage and one of the world's finest operatic basses, and eleven other Italian singers and musicians. Cayetano de Paris, a Catalan emissary sent by the Mexican government's minister of relations, Lucas Alamán, to recruit an Italian opera company to Mexico City, accompanied them on the transatlantic voyage.[49] Six pianos, dozens of tin-lined, soldered boxes carrying sheet music for thirty operas and hundreds of extravagant costumes made of velvet, silver, and gold were stored in the ship's hold. Its 288 tons of cargo also included trunks filled with the singers' personal effects, lanterns (or *quinqués*, similar to ones displayed at the Milan's La Scala Opera House), one hundred pounds of sequins, and four pounds of gold and silver glitter. An additional piano was perched on deck so Galli and the rest of the company could rehearse during the trip. Imagine the scene: Galli and eleven other singers and musicians gathered around the piano in the middle of the Atlantic belting out the *bel canto* arias of Rossini and the more classical styles of Paer and Cimarosa.[50]

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[49] The formal term is "minister of interior and exterior relations," but I've shortened it to minister of relations for brevity and flow. The same goes for the ministry of relations, which was technically called the ministry of interior and exterior relations.

[50] Reconstructed from correspondence found in Archivo General de la Nacion (henceforth AGN), Fondo Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 15.

The Ferro docked in Veracruz in late July. On August 6, the Italian singers arrived by coach into Mexico City amid much fanfare, though the excitement ebbed when opera fans found out they would have to wait another month before the performers took the stage in September. Heavy rains between the port and the capital had delayed the mules carrying 20,000 pesos' worth of costumes, sheet music, and pianos.[51] Contemporaries must have noted the irony. Even the sheen of grand, extravagant projects could not hide the country's many challenges, not the least of which was its poor infrastructure.

This colorful historical episode marked the beginning of an important if little known experiment in cultural engineering and statecraft cooked up by minister of relations, Lucas Alamán.[52] The experiment placed Italian opera at the center of a plan to rehabilitate Mexico's image, tarnished by recent debt defaults and political instability. Italian opera formed a centerpiece of the performance of statecraft: a multi-faceted effort to fashion an image of the country internationally and domestically as a civilized and stable republic ready to join the nineteenth-century march of modernity. Building a foundation of excellence in the performing arts ranked among—and was intertwined with—other priorities such as reestablishing financial credibility and solvency, restoring diplomatic standing, rebuilding Mexico's image, and securing domestic order. Understanding how Mexicans viewed, promoted, and consumed the arts, Italian opera in particular, thus sheds new light on a tenet of early republican state making that scholars have not seriously considered.

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[51] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 15, 1831. The episode receives only a passing mention in Green, *Mexican Republic*, 218. Other scholars do not mention it.

[52] Though Anastasio Bustamante was acting president, scholarship has shown that Alamán ran the government. As such, later in the chapter I term it alternatively Alamán's government, administration, or regime.

Scholarship on early republican Mexico paints a picture of the state beset by political factionalism, greed, financial challenges, flawed constitutional experimentations, and ideological polarization.[53] Historian Timothy Anna recently pointed out that during Mexico's first decades of independent nationhood "governments were weak, constitutional order lacked legitimacy, and law was a matter of opinion."[54] Textbooks focus on the period's political flux, noting that between 1824 and 1851 only two of Mexico's presidents completed their term in office. They also overemphasize themes such as instability, which were applicable to other emerging Atlantic nations, including the United State and France. Such characterizations mask policies and priorities shared by many in the ruling elite whose implementation suffered due to abrupt and frequent changes in power. As this chapter examines, the performing arts provided one such priority. Nineteenth-century elites in Mexico shared a belief in art's didactic power. They promoted theater- and opera-going, literature, and music as pathways through which society might advance. More generally, they celebrated the generative power of culture and treated cultural advancement as an integral part of the nascent nation's modernization.

Through an analysis of correspondence, account books, and federal and municipal documents, this chapter argues that the recruitment of Galli's opera company formed an important facet of state formation that requires attention and careful study. Alamán understood the symbolism of bringing celebrity Italian singers to Mexico City, and he

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[53] Notable examples include Costeloe, *La primera república federal de México;* Costeloe, *The Central Republic in Mexico*; Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury;* Fowler*, Independent Mexico;* Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals.*

[54] Timothy E. Anna, "Book review of Will Fowler, Independent Mexico: The Pronunciamiento in the Age of Santa Anna," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (October 2016): 1331.

leveraged that to his advantage. But, ever the pragmatist, Alamán also believed contracting singers would help reestablish Mexico's credibility in Europe while setting the foundations of a strong performing arts culture capable of reshaping the values and tastes of the Mexican people. As this chapter shows, it was a risky if calculated gamble with ambiguous returns. Like most initiaves of the era, unexpected regime change prevented its full implementation. Nonetheless, documents reveal that the project was neither fanciful nor frivolous, but rather a central component of Alamán's vision for transforming Mexico into a prosperous, civilized nation.

The Italian opera project's most enduring legacy, however, was to usher in a new age in Mexico City. The presence and celebrity of Galli's company in the 1830s transformed the city into a node in global performance networks. It also sparked a revolution in theatergoing in the city by setting in motion a demand for sumptuous spectacle and theater that would define urban life until the turn of the twentieth century.

Lucas Alamán and *Bel canto* as Policy Program

When he assumed office as minister of relations in 1830, Lucas Alamán established a set of priorities to centralize power, restore the church, reinvigorate cultural and educational establishments, and bring respectability to Mexican finance—a set of goals historian Stanley Green terms a coherent "program for renewal."[55] Alamán attempted to bring Texas back into the federal government's sphere of influence by pressuring Congress to pass legislation that would return jurisdictional authority to the federal government, encourage colonization by Mexicans or emigration by 'friendly' European nations, boost

[55] Green, *Mexican Republic,* 210-29.

trade in cotton, and end American immigration there.[56] His efforts to rebuild the Catholic church's image, an institution he considered an important arbiter of Hispanic culture, met with some success; Alamán persuaded the Pope to approve the appointment of bishops, and he helped ecclesiastics get more involved in politics (churchmen filled roughly half the seats in the Chamber of Deputies).[57] In the scientific and cultural realms, Alamán pressured Congress to create and fill a museum with plant specimens, historical curiosities, paintings, and regional handicrafts from around the republic. He also sponsored the scientific expedition of mining engineer Jean Frederic Waldeck.[58] Prior to his acceptance of the position as minister in 1830, Alamán founded and served as first president of the Institute of Sciences, Literature, and the Arts (1825), and he attempted unsuccessfully to systematize education in the country.[59]

Alamán achieved his greatest success in restoring Mexico's finances and securing the republic's footing in that realm. He waged a publicity campaign to rehabilitate the country's image. Alamán encouraged town councils to subscribe to *El Registro Oficial*, the administration's official organ, and he instructed diplomats to blanket newspapers in New York and across Europe with favorable advertisements about Mexico. He restructured local debt, which allowed his administration to borrow at an interest rate of three percent per month (half the previous rate of six percent), and he established the *Banco de Avío*, a national bank and state investment corporation intended to spur domestic industrialization

[56] *Ibid.*, 220-27. Indian raids and American desire for territorial expansion ultimately rendered this effort moot.

[57] Will Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals,* 58-59.

[58] Green, *Mexican Republic*, 218-19.

[59] *Ibid.*, 99.

and development.[60] Most importantly, however, Alamán reinitiated payments on Mexico's debts to London bondholders, suspended since 1827.[61]

The recruitment of Galli's Italian opera company formed a core component of Alamán's program to restore Mexico's financial credibility and rehabilitate its image as a trustworthy and cultivated country ready for international trade.[62] Several related events reveal Italian opera's importance to this larger performance of statecraft. For instance, on the same day that Alamán made public his intent to bring to Mexico City an Italian opera company, a dramatic troupe, and French ballet dancers "worthy of the erudition of the city's residents," the finance minister issued a decree declaring Mexico's intent to reinitiate debt payments, and Congress accepted the London bondholders' terms.[63] Moreover,

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[60] The seminal work on this institution remains Robert A. Potash, *El Banco de Avío de México: el fomento de la industría, 1821-1846* (Mexico City: FCE, 1959). A revised and expanded edition appeared later in English. Robert A. Potash, *Mexican Government and Industrial Development in the Early Republic: The Banco de Avío* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983).

[61] Richard J. Salvucci, *Politics, Markets, and Mexico's 'London Debt,' 1823-1887* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 120-1. See also Michael P. Costeloe, *Bonds and Bondholders: British Investors and Mexico's Foreign Debt, 1824-1888* (Westport: CT: Praeger, 2003), 29.

[62] One notably provocative, if not wholly satisfactory, account argues that the opera's recruitment was a calculated plan to divert attention from former president Vicente Guerrero's assassination, in which Alamán and the rest of Bustamante's cabinet were implicated (three of the four were later indicated but never prosecuted). See Nancy Vogeley, "Italian Opera in Early National Mexico," *Modern Language Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (June 1996): 279. Vogeley appears to borrow this idea from Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica* 1:262. A careful study of the timing of two events that are central to Vogeley's hypothesis casts doubt on her argument.

[63] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica* 1:262. Full text of proclamation, issued on Oct. 2, 1830, reads: "Deseando el Excelentísimo señor Vicepresidente proporcionar a los habitantes de esta capital una compañia de teatro, digna de su ilustración, en los ramos de verso, canto y baile, y bien penetrado de las cualidades que adornan a V.S. para llenar los indicados deseos, ha tenido a bien S.E. comisionarle para que, asociado con los demás individuos que han propuesto hacer algunas anticipaciones, se sirva practicar cuanto sea

Alamán instructed Mexican consuls general and diplomats in London and Paris—the very same men tasked with renegotiating Mexico's debt—to help negotiate contracts and advance payments to artists, and to vouch for the project more generally.[64]

Mexican leaders like Alamán observed the world in search of national models of modernization in their effort to throw off the yoke of Spanish colonialism. They read the works of David Hume, Edmund Burke, Benjamin Constant, and Alexis de Tocqueville, even if they often disagreed on the country's proper path forward. In political and economic matters, Alamán found inspiring templates in Britain and the United States.[65] Culturally and artistically, he directed his gaze toward France and Italy, places he visited while traveling and studying in Europe between 1814 and 1820. Indeed so taken was Alamán by European culture that some have alleged he returned to Mexico with continental tastes and a lingering French accent.[66] He may also have developed a taste for opera. In 1824, Alamán took a visiting British delegation that he was courting to establish an embassy in Mexico to see Stefano Cristiani's opera, *The Caliph of Baghdad*, at the Teatro Principal.[67] A few years later, Manuel García's performance in Mozart's *Don*

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necesario al efecto, formando y presentando a esta Secretaría el reglamento que V.S. estime conveniente.—Dios y Libertad.—Mexico, 2 de octubre de 1830.—Alamán.—Señor coronel don Manuel Barrera." On proclamations by finance minister, Rafael Mangino, and the Congressional response to the London bondholders' terms, see Salvucci, *Politics,* 120-1 and Costeloe, *Bonds and Bondholders,* 29.

[64] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 13, foja 575.

[65] Eric Van Young, "In Mexico There are no Mexicans: Decolonization and Modernization, 1750-1850," (lecture, Mexican Studies Group at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Vanderbilt University, January 19, 2016).

[66] Green, *Mexican Republic*, 11-12.

[67] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la independencia*, 17.

Giovanni at the Teatro de los Gallos moved Alamán to compose an ode to the Spanish tenor. Published in the newspaper *El Sol*, it read

> Genius of the world! Divine García!
> Who could measure the breadth of your power?
> Were you born where Eurydice called the celestial voice—
> The voice of Orpheus himself?
> Where harmony first surrendered its magic?
> When men and cruel beasts were awed
> …
> Ah! How deserted, without your presence
> Will the theater, where you now sing, one day be seen.[68]

Elites shared Alamán's affinity for European culture. News from Europe filtered in through publications like *El Aguila Mexicana* and *El Sol*. The British-owned Spanish language periodical, *Variedades o Correo de Londrés,* established an outpost in the city from which it disseminated information on consumption, behavior, architecture, and interior design.[69] Salons in the city center offered customers imported French wigs and cork hair curlers.[70] City bookstores sold compilations of writings by Voltaire and Madame de Stael, French conversation guides, books on French history, and sheet music for popular Rossini operas.[71]

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[68] James Radomski, *Manuel García (1775-1832): Chronicle of the Life of a bel canto Tenor at the Dawn of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 228.

[69] Steven B. Bunker and Victor Macías-González, "Consumption and Material Culture from Pre-Contact through the Porfiriato," in *A Companion to Mexican History and Culutre*, edited by William H. Beezley (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 9.

[70] *El Sol*, 13 de marzo de 1828.

[71] Advertisements in *El Sol*, 12 de Julio de 1826, p. 4 and 28 de agosto de 1826, p. 4 include compilations of Voltaire's plays, his essays on French customs and philosophical ruminations, as well as Madame de Stael's writings on the French Revolution. On the introduction of lithography in Mexico that allowed for the printing of sheet music, see Luisa del Rosario Aguilar Ruiz, "Jesús Rivera y Fierro. Un impresor musical en la ciudad de México, 1842-1877," in *Los papeles de Euterpe: La música en la ciudad de México*

Among European cultural forms in the nineteenth century, Italian opera occupied a privileged role. That century witnessed the construction of grand opera houses, an expansion of opera markets, and an explosion of touring companies. It also saw Italian opera exert global dominance. As an art form, Italian opera represented the apogee of European high culture, and it blossomed in 1820s Paris when the famed Italian composer Gioachino Rossini took over management of the Italian Theatre in that city. Rossini revived the fortunes of that opera house and left an indelible mark on vocal art in France and beyond, ushering in a period of "Rossinimania."[72] French novelist, Stendahl, captured Rossini's outsize influence in his 1824 biography of the composer, when he quipped, "Napoleon is dead; but a new conqueror has already shown himself to the world: and from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta, his name is constantly on every tongue."[73] Italian opera symbolized modernity and cosmopolitanism, and it spread globally as ruling groups of powerful, prosperous nations—or simply those that aspired to such a designation—believed they were duty-bound to support opera.[74]

Italian opera formed a cornerstone of the modernization project promised by Alamán's regime. As a member of the creole political class, the so-called hombres de bien, Alamán shared fears of social dissolution and political instaibilty with leaders of all

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desde la historia cultural. Siglo XIX, ed. Laura Suárez de la Torre (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2014), 62-99.

[72] Rodolfo Celetti, *A History of Bel Canto*, trans. Frederick Fuller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 135. On 'rossinimania,' see Carlotta Sorba, "Between Cosmopolitanism and Nationhood: Italian Opera in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Modern Italy* 19, no. 1 (2014): 56.

[73] Cited from Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 206.

[74] Sorba, "Between Cosmopolitanism and Nationhood," 55.

persuasions.[75] Historian Will Fowler has argued that the pace of reform, not reform itself, was what most distinguished competing ideologues and ideologies in this period. Alamán, among the more traditionalist factions, believed reform needed to be gradual.[76] Economic modernization, decolonization, and the maintenance of law and order required a strong central state. It also required a reformed populace. The anarchy and ignorance on display during the destruction of the city's most luxurious market, the Parián, in December 1828, loomed in the minds of Mexico's political class years after the event as a threat to the nation's future stability and viability.[77] Mexico and Mexicans were in need of civilization and refinement. To nineteenth-century elites such as Alamán, culture provided the antidote.

The idea of culture that Alamán and his contemporaries subscribed to developed in the late Enlightenment. As "a cluster of conventional models of thought and behavior that includes value systems, beliefs, norms of conduct, and even forms of political organization and economic activity," culture was transmitted through a learning process, not inherited.[78] Theater thus provided an important arena for cultural transmission. Regardless of their political ideologies, elites wrote frequently about the performing arts' power to educate and moralize citizens, and instruct them in good taste.[79] Opera could stir the soul, as suggested

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[75] Will Fowler, "Dreams of Stability: Mexican Political Thought during the 'Forgotten Years.' An Analysis of the Creole Inteligentsia (1821-1853)," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 14, no. 3 (Sept. 1995): 287-312.

[76] Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals*, 45.

[77] Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City," 256.

[78] Jesus Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 179.

[79] This trope is repeated over and again in archival documents and newspapers of the period. See, for instance, AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4016, expediente 35, fojas 1-2. Original text reads: 'En efecto, si el teatro ha de ser la escuela de bueas costumbres, del gusto y pureza

by a Mexican journalist who asked rhetorically, "Can a thousand ghosts and another million magic tricks cause the enchantment produced by an aria, a duet, or a trio…or any chorus from [Rossini's] *Semíramis* and *Moisés en Egipto* or [Bellini's] *El Pirata*? I don't believe so, and I think many others feel the same."[80] Furthermore, elites believed the absence of performing arts would be "quite pernicious," especially in times of political and economic crisis.[81] In 1830s Mexico, the state assumed a leading role as patron of the arts, engineering a project to bring Italian opera to Mexico City. Similar ideas about cultural transmission and edification drove decisions to build grand opera houses and theaters throughout the Americas.[82] Such performance spaces represented, in the words of one nineteenth-century historian, "essential commitments of the new liberal governments."[83] New York City opened its first opera house in 1833. Havana followed suit in 1838 with the *Teatro Tacón*. The following two decades, grand performance halls opened in Mexico City, Barcelona, Madrid, and Montevideo.

Opera's potent symbolism in Mexico stemmed from the belief that, in addition to representing a marker of civilization and culture, it reflected a set of aesthetic and ethical

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del idioma…" This was even the case during the pitched political battles between rival masonic groups, the *yorkinos* and *escoses,* in the 1820s. While they differed on critical issues, all agreed about theater's instructive power as a school of morality, instruction, and good taste. See Luis de Pablo Hammeken, "Don Giovanni en el Palenque: El tenor Manuel García y la prensa de la ciudad de México, 1827-1828," *Historia Mexicana* 61, no. 1 (julio-sept. 2011): 268.

[80] *La Lima de Vulcano*, 9 de mayo de 1835.

[81] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 10. Words of Governor of the Federal District, José María Tornel, c. 1829.

[82] These ideas mirrored those in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France. See Clay, *Stagestruck*, esp. chapter one.

[83] Cruz, *Rise of Middle-Class Culture*, 179.

values distinct from those of the Spanish empire. These values, which set it apart apart from and in opposition to traditional Spanish culture, appealed to early republican leaders who sought to distance their newly independent nations from the colonial past. For Alamán, opera's symbolic power functioned on multiple levels. To foreign and outside observers, contracting Galli's company displayed the Mexican state's willingness—and ability—to engage in the culture of cosmopolitanism shared among modern nations. As the first full opera company to visit the Americas, Galli's company beat the arrival of Giacomo Montresor's Italian opera company to New York by one year, and Havana's first touring company by three years.[84] To elites in Mexico, Alamán hoped it would symbolize the restoration of domestic order, unsettled by the ongoing war with rebels in the south. Watching Galli perform as Assur in *Semíramis* or Muhammad the Conqueror in *Mahometo II* on the Teatro Principal's stage in Mexico City, just as he had for audiences during the the operas' world premieres at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice and the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, might also help them "imagine themselves as part of a community of civilized nations: an international republic of music."[85] At the very least, it would help establish Mexico City's place on the map of nineteenth-century cosmopolitan capitals.

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[84] Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), 139. Prior to the arrival of Galli's company, Italian singers had traveled to other parts of the Americas—first to Rio de Janeiro then to Montevideo and Buenos Aires. But, these tended to be incomplete companies that did not perform full operas. See John Rosselli, "Latin America and Italian Opera: A Process of Interaction, 1810-1930," *Revista de Musicología* 16, no. 1, Del XV Congreso de la Sociedad Internacional de Musicología: Culturas Musicales del Mediterráneo y sus Ramificaciones: Vol. 1 (1993): 140.

[85] Quote from Luis de Pablo Hammeken, "La república de la música: Prácticas, códigos e identidades en torno al mundo de la opera en la ciudad de México, 1840-1870," (tesis de doctorado en historia, El Colegio de México, diciembre de 2014), 26. On Galli's roles in the operas' premieres, see Charles Osborne, *The Bel Canto Operas of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini* (London: Methuen, 1994), 100-4 and 110-14. The premiere of *Semíramis* was

Opera in Mexico City

Mexican audiences had enjoyed opera prior to the Galli company's debut on September 12, 1831. The first recorded performance of opera in Mexico City (then New Spain) took place in 1711 at the Viceregal Palace. It was a little known piece, *La Parténope* (libretto by Silvio Stampiglia), enjoyed only by members of the court. Nearly a century would pass before the first full-length, public opera was performed at the Coliseo Nuevo (then the city's lone playhouse), a Spanish translation of Dominico Cimarosa's opera titled *El filósofo burlado* (The Mocked Philosopher). A year later, in 1806, the company at the Coliseo Nuevo staged *El barbero de Sevilla (*The Barber of Seville*)*, a translation of Giovanni Paisiello's popular composition.[86]

Opera's popularity surged in the mid-to-late 1820s following a break during the wars of independence (1810-21).[87] During the 1823-24 season, a company headed by Spanish actors Luciano Cortés and Victorio Rocamora debuted two of Giaochino Rossini's operas that became audience favorites, *The Barber of Seville* and *La italiana en Argel* (The Italian Girl in Algiers). The arrivals of Spanish singers Andrés del Castillo and Rita Gonzalez de Santa Marta, and the opening of a second theater in the capital, the *Teatro de los Gallos*, so named because of its prior use as a cockfighting ring, did much to improve the quality and frequency of operatic performances in the city. The rivalry forged between Castillo and Santa Marta benefitted opera-goers, who could enjoy performances at both

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staged at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice on Feburary 3, 1823. The premiere of *Mahometo II* was staged at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples on December 3, 1820.

[86] Michael S. Werner, ed. *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001), 523.

[87] Susana Delgado, "Entre murmullos y penurias," 367-96. A full accounting of theatrical and operatic activity during independence remains to be done.

theaters. It also created a stir in the press, with journalists debating fiercely which was the better performer.[88] In addition to its performance onstage, opera's popularity spread through the diffusion of operatic music in the salons and parlors of elites. As one critic testified following an 1826 performance of Rossini's *Tancredo,* "there was not a soul in the city who did not recognize the music from that opera, played so abundantly wherever there was a piano."[89]

Performances by the world famous Sevillan tenor, Manuel García, in 1827 and 1828 also advanced opera's fortunes in Mexico City. García had made his career on Europe's best stages, including lengthy tours in Paris, Italy, and London. No one rivaling García's immense talent and training had set foot on the Mexican stage. Nor had any before him sung opera in Italian, which García did in his June 29, 1827 Mexico City debut as the Count of Almaviva in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. Heated political debates and the Spanish explusion decree of 1828 cut García's tour in Mexico short. Nonetheless, García left an impression in his short time in Mexico.[90] He directed the Mexican premieres of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (Don Juan). He composed and staged original operas as well, helping establish Mexico City the site of the world premieres of *Abufar, ossia la famiglia araba*, *Semíramis, Jaira, and Los maridos*

[88] Ernesto Peña, "Algo acerca de la ópera en México," in *La opera mexicana 1805-2002*, eds. Ernesto de la Peña and Gabriela de la Vega (Mexico City: Joaquín Porrúa Editores, 2003), 14-43.

[89] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante the independencia*, 183-4. Original text appeared in *El Iris*, 15 de abril de 1826. .

[90] Hammeken, "Don Giovanni en el palenque," 231-73.

solteros—the last three original operas written in Spanish for Mexican audiences.[91] García spoke fondly of his experiences in Mexico upon his return to Paris. A widely read French newspaper, the *Journal des débats*, published García's observations on the talent of Mexican musicians and the orderly system by which Mexican theaters operated relative to those in Europe.[92]

Italian Singers come to Mexico City

Following the October 2, 1830 decree in which the Mexican government declared its intent to bring to Mexico City opera singers, actors, and ballet dancers "worthy of the erudition of the city's residents," Alamán's government quickly set in motion a far-reaching effort that involved emissaries, diplomats, agents, and financial transactions spanning Europe, South America, and the Caribbean. Most immediately, it commissioned Manuel Barrera, a veteran of public entertainments management in the city and a long-time acquaintance of Alamán, to run the theater. Barrera, in turn, appointed Cayetano de Paris to travel to Europe, recruit singers, purchase operas and costumes, negotiate contracts, and coordinate the singers' travel to Mexico.

Cayetano de Paris set off for Milan via Veracruz, New York, and Paris in the final months of 1830 on the frigate *Virginia* on what he later described as a "long, painful, and dangerous" winter voyage.[93] From Paris, he boarded a coach on a seven-day, seven-night trip to Turin. From there he made his way to Milan, where he hired thirty men to purchase

[91] Data on García's Mexican premieres collected from http://operadata.stanford.edu/, a cross-index of data for over 38,000 opera and oratorio premieres originally compiled by Richard Parrillo.

[92] Article translated in Radomski, *Manuel García*, 242-3.

[93] AGN, Gobernación, caja 195, legajo 122, expediente 20.

the rights to thirty operas and ensure the delivery of sheet music for the choir and orchestra. Paris bought an elaborate wardrobe to outfit this new opera company. He also purchased lanterns and contracted singers.[94] In Europe, Milan was the heart of such negotiations. Agents' offices and cafés on the streets surrounding the La Scala Opera House were a "nexus of elaborate theatrical exchange…frequented by pretty well the whole of the opera world."[95] During a brief interlude, Cayetano de Paris traveled to Genoa to charter a ship to take the opera company and all his purchases to Veracruz. He later returned to Genoa, from where he set sail with Galli's company in tow sometime after April 15, 1831.

The press promoted the project with gusto. In a congratulatory article that lauded Alamán for his efforts to contract an Italian opera company, *El Sol* (a pro-Alamán newspaper whose offices were located underneath Alamán's residence) wrote: "In a cultivated country, in a country that aims to forge new customs, that should give its people an honest diversion…a beneficent project that contributes to the progress of civilization and culture in our country as this one does should suffer no unnecessary delays.[96] Following the company's arrival the following year, the Veracruz newspaper *El Censor*

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[94] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 15. Letter from Cayetano de Paris to Lucás Alamán dated April 15, 1831, sent from Genoa.

[95] John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 139.

[96] Reyes de la Maza*, El teatro en México durante la independencia,* 253-4. Original text reads: "En un país culto, en un país en que es preciso formar las costumbres, en que debe proporcionarse al pueblo una diversion honesta, un proyecto tan benéfico no ha de sufrir la menor demora ni atrasarse por ningún pretexto. Los aficionados al teatro han pensado que llegará el día de encontrar en él las ventajas que ofrece su establecimiento; han creido que el honor del gobierno está en cierto modo comprometido en las mejoras del nuestro, y que los beneficios palpables de un regimen justo y moderado deben coronarse con la realización de estos deseos, muy conformes al progreso de las luces, de la civilización y de la cultura de nuestro país."

praised the singers' efforts in two concerts offered at the salon of the Sociedad de la Unión. "[Galli's] reputation is so well established," the newspaper wrote, "there's no need to say anything more."[97] Galli had performed across Europe, in Bologna, Venice, Milan, Naples, Paris, and in Spain, and, while past his prime, he remained one of the world's better basses. If not as well known as Galli, the company's other singers were also established artists. Tenors Luis (Luigi) Sirletti and Ludovico Sirletti, and contralto Elena Baduera had performed with Galli in the 1820s at La Scala.[98] Bass Antonio Finaglia had toured with Ludovico Sirletti in Saluzzo in 1829.[99]

On September 12, Galli's company opened its three-year engagement at the Teatro Principal with the Mexican premiere of Rossini's grand opera, *Torbaldo y Dorisca*. Galli and Carolina Pellegrini occupied the leading roles. The *Registro Oficial del Gobierno de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, the recently founded organ of Alamán's regime, did its part to back the Italian performers and the project more generally.[100] Following the opening night's performance in Mexico City, the newspaper declared. "It can be said without exaggeration that since the founding of the Coliseo de México [1753], never has the public

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[97] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica* 1:275. Original text reads: "…del señor Galli está demasiadamente bien sentada su fama para que sea necesario decir de ella otra cosa sino que dio testimonio de ser bien merecida…"

[98] *The Harmonicon. A Journal of Music*. Vol. 1. (London: William Pinnock, 1823), 213; Baduera citation from online archive guide from the Archivi di teatro Napoli. <Accessed June 9, 2016. http://cir.campania.beniculturali.it/archividiteatronapoli/atn/foto/libretti/dettagli_libretti_titolo?oid=35419&query_start=584>

[99] *Gazzeta piemontese*, no. 53, 2 maggio 1829.

[100] Green, *Mexican Republic*, 205.

been so perfectly served, nor has it enjoyed a show so perfectly executed, so satisfying."[101] That same congratulatory article continued: "The current administration can enjoy the satisfaction of having delivered not only that which is necessary and useful but also something so enjoyable. It has achieved peace in the republic, reestablished order, unseated anarchy, and it also has the distinct pleasure of having apportioned the capital a show that the erudition of its inhabitants demanded."[102] *El Registro Oficial* was also quick to combat any negative press. When journalists questioned the company's unity or the motives of Cayetano de Paris for not having contracted certain singers, the government newspaper quickly put those rumors to rest.[103]

The company built on the success of its debut performance. By the close of 1831, Galli had offered at least six different operas from Rossini, Morlacchi and Cimarosa. He featured ten more between 1832 and 1833, including the Mexican premieres of *Federico II de Prusia* (Frederick II of Prussia), *El Conde Ory* (The Count of Ory), *La dama del lago* (The Lady of the Lake), and *Moisés en Egipto* (Moses in Egypt)—all by Rossini.[104] While Galli's company featured operas by other composers such as Paer, Coccia, and

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[101] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña* histórica 1:277. Original text reads: "…puede decirse sin exagaración que desde la fundación del Coliseo de México, no se había visto el público tan perfectamente servido, ni había gozado de un espectáculo tan brillantement ejecutado y que le llenase de más satisfacción."

[102] *Ibid*. Original text reads: "La administración actual tiene la satisfacción de haber atendido con fruto, no sólo lo necesario y útil, sino también lo agradable. Ha logrado ver tranquila y pacífica la república, reestablecido el orden y desterrada la anarquía, y tiene también el placer de haber proporcionado a la capital un espectáculo de que carecía y estaba demandando la ilustración de sus habitantes."

[103] *Ibid*, 281.

[104] José Octavio Sosa and Mónica Escobedo, *Dos siglos de opera en México*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: SEP, 1988), 21-3.

Mercadante, Rossini was by far the favorite. Of forty-two operas staged between June 2, 1832 and April 23, 1833, twenty (or nearly half) featured Rossini scores. Rossini's *Semíramis* was staged at least five times in 1832 alone and *Mahometto II* seven times following its June 2, 1832 debut. According to the late scholar of Mexican theater Luis Reyes de la Maza, Rossini's operas were so popular that "*Semíramis* and *La Cenerentola* could be heard all over the capital, from the voices of [soprano Magdalena] Masini and Galli emanating from the Teatro Principal's stage to the grating whistles of vagrants loitering on street corners."[105] Data collected from account ledgers bolster Reyes de la Maza's claim. Operas comprised nearly 35% of total performances at the Teatro Principal between October 1832 and July 1833.[106]

Galli's company was particularly resilient in the face of political turmoil and disease outbreaks. The day after Antonio López de Santa Anna called for the immediate resignation of acting president Anastasio Bustamante and his cabinet (including Alamán) on June 2, 1832, Galli's company debuted Ferdinando Paer's *Agnese de Fitz-Henry* (more commonly known as *La Inés*), its first staging in Mexico. In subsequent weeks, as skirmishes continued between government forces and those loyal to Santa Anna in

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[105] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la independencia*, 32. Original text reads: "Semíramis y la Cenerentola se escuchaban por todas partes de la capital, desde el proscencio del Principal en las voces de la Masini y de Galli, hasta el estridente silbido de los vagos apostados al pie de un faro en las esquinas…"

[106] These represent the only extant and relatively complete ledgers I have found for the period, 1830-1900. AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 6 (Oct. 6-12, 1832); expediente 2 (Dec. 15-21, 1832); expediente 1 (Dec. 29, 1832-Jan. 4, 1833); AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 3 (Jan. 5-11, 1833); AGN, Sección Justicia, Volumén 66, legajo 24 (Apr. 7-May 3, 1833 and June 22-July 19, 1833). For the period June-September 1832, data culled from author's database, compiled from Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México…*; Sosa and Escobedo, *Dos siglos*; Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica*, vol.1; and digitized newspaper searches.

Veracruz, the company staged Dominico Cimarosa's *El matrimonio secreto* (The Secret Marriage) and Rossini's *Semíramis*. Nor did significant personnel changes in theater management or top-level government posts fundamentally alter their performance schedule. Manuel Barrera's resignation as manager in May 1832, and the resignations of Bustamante's entire cabinet weeks later proved only a hiccup. By June 1832, twice-weekly operas resumed as rebellion coursed through the republic, with many states supporting Santa Anna's Plan de Veracruz. The theater closed for two months when Santa Anna's army marched toward the capital, but operas resumed again in mid-December 1832, two weeks before Manuel Gómez Pedraza replaced Bustamante as president.[107] Galli's company weathered another regime change in April 1833 and a cholera outbreak between August and October that killed about five percent of the city's population.[108] In the four months between April and August 1833, the company offered at least twenty-five performances including, for the first time in Mexico, Rossini's *Ricardo y Zoraída*.

The opera company's fortunes were not fully immune to changing political winds, however. By April 1834, the Teatro Principal was yet again under a new manger. Management had changed hands three times since the negotiation of contracts with Galli's original company, and newer contracts negotiated with other singers and interim managers had not been fully honored. Salaries for Galli's entire company went unpaid for months. The theater manager claimed not to have the funds, and the office of the ministry of relations was in disarray, on its third minister since Alamán's resignation in May 1832. With seemingly little recourse and facing a manager who had no desire to extend the

[107] AGN, Gobernacion, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 3.

[108] María del Pilar Velasco M.L., "La epidemia de cólera de 1833 y la mortalidad en la Ciudad de México," *Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos* 7, no. 1 (Jan. –Apr. 1992): 95.

company's contracts (which he judged overly burdensome), Galli's company could do little but continue to perform until its contract expired in August.

The Politics and Economics of Italian Opera, at Home and Abroad

Alamán's opera project formed part of a broader effort to implement a socio-political model of development that would help Mexico prosper. By sponsoring opera and the performing arts more generally, he sought to generate widespread support for cultural projects while imposing a vision for Mexico's cultural modernization that had a decidedly European aura. Many elites shared Alamán's vision. They conceived of culture as a powerful tool for shaping attitudes, securing social stability, and promoting a society's advancement, and they looked to Europe for inspiration. However, the context of penury and political instability in which the project emerged, and the sheer expense of contracting and sustaining an Italian opera company in Mexico City, presented significant challenges to the project's implementation.

When Alamán took office on January 8, 1830, Mexican finances were in disarray. The municipal government in Mexico City had struggled for years to generate sufficient revenues to maintain basic services for local residents. Increasingly, it farmed out these services to private individuals.[109] At the federal level, enforcement of new tariffs proved difficult. Customs collections on foreign trade declined, as did the volume of foreign trade, owing in part to a financial crisis in England that slowed investment in Mexico to a trickle. The loss of federal revenues forced Mexico to default on its loan obligations to British bondholders, and it led municipal and federal officials to turn to usurious lenders to keep

[109] Ana Lau Jaiven, *Las contratas en la ciudad de México: redes sociales y negocios: el caso de Manuel Barrera* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2005).

the feeble government apparatus intact.[110] Pitched political battles in the city between 1826 and 1828 and Mexico's war with Spain in 1829 placed serious strains on the national treasury.[111] Recruiting Galli's company to Mexico City stretched the country's limited resources and its already precarious financial footing.

A careful examination of theater ledgers and correspondence reveal the tremendous expense incurred in contracting and sustaining a full Italian opera company in 1830s Mexico City. Alamán allotted Cayetano de Paris a 32,000-peso budget to negotiate contracts and purchase operas, costumes, and other accoutrements. Of that amount, he spent the most, 24,707 pesos, as an advance on singers' salaries, valued at one third of the total contract.[112] Demand for opera led to a sharp increase in singers' fees in the late 1820s in Italy and elsewhere. Cayetano de Paris thus paid a premium for Galli's services, offering him a yearly salary of 6,696 pesos, nearly 900 pesos more than Galli had earned at the Royal Theater in Naples during the 1819-20 season at the peak of his career, and almost 2,000 more pesos per year than a leading bass (Luigi Lablanche) earned at that same Naples theater during the 1829-30 season.[113] Galli, in turn, only sang two times per week in

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[110] Economic assessment summarized from Tenenbaum, *Politics of Penury*, 22-37.

[111] For an excellent and in-depth description of popular politics in Mexico City between 1824 and 1830, see Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, chapter four.

[112] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 15. This included the salary for his wife, soprano Carolina de Pellegrini, resident in Mexico.

[113] John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), 135-6. There is documentary disagreement on Galli's annual salary. AGN, Gobernación, caja 195, legajo 122, expediente 21 places it at 6,696 pesos. A ledger from June 1832 places it at 465 pesos per month or 5,580 pesos per year. For the latter, see AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 10.

Mexico City, whereas in Italy he may have sung four to five times weekly.[114] Soprano Carolina Pellegrini earned 7,740 pesos per year.[115] The celebrity salaries these two singers received were about twice as much as those earned by the highest ranking administrators of the city's fiscal departments. They also exceeded the salaries of the directors of the tobacco monopoly and the finance ministry, making Galli and Pellegrini among the highest paid individuals in the city.[116] Cayetano de Paris paid 3,600 pesos to charter *The Ferro* to transport Galli and company and all his purchases from Genoa to Veracruz. He spent an additional 300 pesos on seven pianos, and estimated that the wardrobe items, staging and lighting equipment and other accoutrements cost him approximately 3,200 pesos. Those expenses alone totaled 31,807 pesos, nearly exhausting his budget.

Cayetano de Paris and Galli's company incurred other expenses along the way. De Paris reported to Alamán that transporting the luggage, pianos, and other effects overland from Veracruz to Mexico City cost nearly as much as transporting them by sea from Genoa to Veracruz. A mule train receipt from September 1832 confirms the high costs of land transport relative to overseas shipping.[117] Whereas Cayetano de Paris paid two pesos per ton for cargo on *The Ferro*, the federal government paid a muleteer 75 pesos to transport

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[114] *Ibid.*, 127.

[115] AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 12.

[116] Linda Arnold, *Bureaucracy and Bureaucrats in Mexico City, 1742-1835* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1988), appendices A and B.

[117] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 3. The person signing for the receipt, Francisco Fagoaga, formed part of a committee that had taken over management duties at the Teatro Principal on an interim basis between May 1832 and January 1833. His signature suggests that the five trunks transported from Veracruz to Mexico City belonged to Aimee Guénant de Magnin and Eugenio Crombé, French classical dancers recruited to fill out the dance company.

five trunks from Veracruz to the capital. At such a rate, transporting the Italian opera company's dozens of boxes and seven pianos estimated to weigh 288 tons would certainly not have been cheap, likely running into the thousands. Other indeterminate costs included lodging in Europe (due to an unexpected delay, at a cost of 72 pesos per day) and at a French-run boarding house in Jalapa. Paris paid undisclosed amounts to get all the items through European customs, and for a stagecoach to move the singers from Veracruz to Mexico City. We also do not know how much Cayetano de Paris's trip from Mexico City to Milan via Veracruz, New York, and Paris cost or how much he was paid for the commission. These additional costs ensured the project ran many thousands—perhaps more than ten thousand—over budget.[118]

The abovementioned outlays fail to account for costs associated with the recruitment of a dramatic troupe and a French ballet company (specified in the 1830 decree) that rounded out the city's cultural offerings. Alamán commissioned Alberto Gutiérrez to hire actors then performing in Lima, he worked through Mexico's consul in New Orleans to hire more actors working in that city, and he brought still others from Havana.[119] Documentation from that part of the venture is scarce. We do know, however, that the following season, 27 actors and actresses comprised the dramatic company and they earned 1,076 pesos per week, or roughly 51,650 pesos per year.[120] We might assume the federal government paid an advance of between 10,000 and 20,000 pesos to retain their

[118] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 15.

[119] AGN, Gobernación, caja 195, legajo 122, expediente 9. The regime paid Gutiérrez 500 pesos for this commission. See also AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 13, foja 555.

[120] AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 6.

services and pay for transport to the capital. Alamán called on Tomás Murphy, Mexican Consul in Paris, to negotiate contracts with French dancers. Murphy advanced French ballerina Aimee Guénaut de Magnin part of a three-year contract valued at 15,000 francs per year, the equivalent of approximately 2,790 pesos.[121] He also covered another three hundred pesos, which the ballerina expensed to the Mexican government for lodging costs between Paris and Le Havre, and for the purchase of wigs, costumes, and fifteen pairs of dancing shoes.[122] Murphy was also involved in contract negotiations for another French dancer, Eugenio Crombé.[123] One estimate places the total cost for recruiting these two dancers (including salary advances, transportation, and sundry purchases) at 19,000 pesos.[124]

Sustaining all three companies involved substantial resources. The government paid a twenty-person chorus a weekly salary of roughly 150 pesos, and it paid a set orchestra a weekly salary of about 400 pesos, and another 500 pesos to musicians who only played operas.[125] Choral music featured prominently in operas and in classical dance performances. Orchestral music featured nightly. Overtures from popular operas opened every night's performance (not just operas), and the orchestra accompanied the Italian leads during twice-weekly operas. The government also paid the salaries of anywhere

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[121] Ledgers showing salaries in francs and pesos reveal a currency exchange rate of approximately 1 peso to 5.38 francs in the early 1830s. See, for example, AGN, Gobernación, caja 195, legajo 122, expediente 21, 1832.

[122] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 15.

[123] AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 12.

[124] Lau Jaiven, *Contratas*, footnote #134 on p. 155.

[125] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 2.

between 20 and 40 stagehands, accountants, ushers, coat clerks, and other theater staff and administrators. While the expense for theater personnel was minimal relative to the amounts paid to the opera company and dramatic troupe, measuring between 6.5% and 8.5% of the total expenditures, nominally it still meant at least 125 pesos per week.[126] Beginning in August 1832, once the salary advances had expired, the theater paid combined weekly salaries to the Italian singers and the acting company of approximately 1,900 pesos.[127] The government was also on the hook for lodging. Rent for the house Cayetano de Paris shared with Carolina de Pellegrini and their eight children ran 50 pesos per month, making it twice as expensive as the average rent paid by urban elites.[128]

Other inputs went into staging productions. Managers ordered dozens of posters and hundreds of playbills and invitations for performances. They rented furniture and costumes to stage plays. Moreover, their costs skyrocketed when the company staged new operas. Documents show that staging the Mexican premiere of Rossini's *Ricardo y Zoraída* in July 1833 cost the company over 600 pesos, nearly six times what it cost to stage operas that were already part of the repertoire.[129]

To read the ledgers in search of profit-making is to see a struggling business that hemorrhaged money. While operas generated up to three times more in ticket sale revenues per performance (in part because tickets to opera were more expensive), these revenues

[126] Calculations from October 1832 to April 1833. See AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 6 and AGN, Sección Justicia, vol. 66, legajo 24.

[127] AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 6.

[128] Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit*, 95.

[129] AGN, Gobernación sin sección, caja 361, legajo 167, expediente 2.

rarely covered expenses.[130] In nine weeks between June and August 1832, for instance, the Teatro Principal posted a net loss of 18,470 pesos; expenses that July ran almost 20,000 pesos.[131] Weekly deficits from mid-December 1832 to the middle of 1833 ran between 500 and 1,500 pesos.[132] Extrapolated over the course of a theater season, the federal government might stand to lose anywhere between 50,000 and 108,000 pesos, perhaps even more during when events forced theaters to close temporarily. Building renovations also added up; a major renovation in early 1832, which expanded the Teatro Principal's seating capacity to 2100 and improved sight lines, cost an additional 40,000 pesos.[133]

If instead we read the documents with an eye to who negotiated the artists' contracts and how the government funded the Teatro Principal's deficits, a clearer picture emerges of Italian opera's centrality to Alamán's vision for Mexico's future and his broader program for renewal. London-based *chargé d'affairs*, Manuel Eduardo Gorostiza, whom Alamán had ordered to convene British bondholders to discuss a settlement of their claims, wrote letters in support of Cayetano de Paris, confirming his commission and the Mexican government's support for the opera project. Alamán ordered Mexico's Consul in Paris, Tomás Murphy, to do the same. He also bestowed Murphy with the power to

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[130] Calculations derived from AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 6 (Oct. 6, 1832); expediente 2 (Dec. 15-21, 1832); and expediente 1 (Dec. 29, 1832-Jan. 4, 1833); See also AGN, Gobernacion, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 3 (Jan. 5-11, 1833); AGN, Sección Justicia, Vol. 66, legajo 24 (Apr. 7-May 3, 1833 and June 22-July 19, 1833).

[131] AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 12.

[132] Analysis of account books from Dec. 15, 1832-Jan. 4, 1833, Apr.-May 1833, and June-July 1833. AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expedientes 1 and 2 and AGN, Sección Justicia, vol. 66, legajo 24.

[133] AGN, Gobernación, caja 195, legajo 122, expediente 21.

negotiate contracts with French dancers.[134] Alamán persuaded Congress to allot 20,000 pesos in early 1831 to support the project.[135] To pay artists' advances, Alamán transferred funds through the Banco de Avío.[136] He also moved money out of a fund titled *gastos extraordinarios y secretos* (these appear in the ledgers as periodic installments of 1000, 2000, and 4000 pesos from a "cuenta de suplementos").[137] While we know little about the size and scope of the *gastos secretos*, we do know that its funds pertained to the ministry under his direction.[138] This gave Alamán complete discretionary authority over the fund as long as he held the post.[139]

For a while at least, Alamán's brand of statecraft and cultural engineering went according to plan. His regime made headway in restoring Mexico's international financial credibility. By the middle of 1830, diplomats from the United States and Britain were optimistic about Mexico's future. U.S. *chargé d'affairs*, Anthony Butler, felt confident that

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[134] AGN, Gobernación, caja 56, legajo 28, expediente 13, foja 575.

[135] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 3.

[136] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 7. Document header contains the Banco de Avío's stamp.

[137] *Ibid.*, expediente 13. Interim manager Francisco Fagoaga received 20,750 pesos from a "cuenta de suplementos" between June 1832 and January 1833 to cover salaries and other operational costs.

[138] AGN, Gobernación, sin sección, caja 349, expediente 3. Juan José del Corral clarified the ministry to which the *gastos extraordinarios* belonged in his explanation for why the ministry of the treasury (*Hacienda*) could not pay back wages owed ballerina Aimee Guénant. Quite simply, the funds from this account did not pertain to *Hacienda*.

[139] Despite its sinister-sounding name, at the municipal level, *gastos extraordinarios* tended to cover expenses for civic and religious festivals, military operations, and other unforeseen events. See Francisco Téllez Guerrero and Elvia Brito Martínez, "La hacienda municipal de Puebla en el siglo XIX," *Historia Mexicana* 39, no. 4 (1990): 964-5.

a new era of favorable commercial relations was on the horizon.[140] Agents in London expressed similar hope. Writing about what he perceived as Alamán's prioritization of the British debt, consul-general Charles T. O'Gorman declared, "nothing can be more friendly and cordial than [Mexico's] disposition toward Great Britain."[141] The British press followed suit, proclaiming that Mexican finances were "in a better state than for some time past and [Alamán] is said to have a considerable amount due from mercantile houses on account of duties."[142] The wave of optimism that grew among British investors and creditors caused Mexican bond prices to rise 150% between January and June 1830.[143] Their optimism was not wholly unfounded. Alamán successfully rescheduled domestic debts, news he shared with British bondholders. He also relaxed tariff prohibitions, a measure which increased customs collections nearly two-fold. These actions helped Mexico renegotiate its debt. They also freed up much-needed money, which Alamán used to reinitiate debt payments.[144] Domestically, Alamán had successfully squelched much dissent. His government levied fines on opposition newspapers, which forced many to shut down.[145] And as the capture and execution of former president Vicente Guerrero

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[140] Warren, *Vagrants and Citizens*, 100.

[141] Salvucci, *Politics,* 116.

[142] *Ibid.*

[143] *Ibid.,* 114.

[144] For a detailed analysis of the 1827 default and 1830-31 debt renegotiation, see Salvucci, *Politics,* 100-24.

[145] On repression of the press, see Green, *Mexican Republic*, 203-5. Notable newspapers included Andrés Quintana Roo's *El Federalista Mexicano*, a defender of Manuel Gómez Pedraza (the president-elect from the 1828 election, never installed) and the pro-Guerrero newspaper, *El Atleta.*

demonstrated in early 1831, Alamán's government showed its willingness to exile, imprison, or murder those it could not coopt. Galli's opera company continued to headline the city's cultural life, offering new operas with infectious music. The investment in opera, it appeared, was paying dividends.

Alamán's forced resignation in May 1832 fundamentally altered the project's trajectory. From the vantage of strengthening Mexico's image in Europe, the project's success depended on timely payment of performers' salaries and the fulfillment of contracts; so long as Alamán held the cabinet post, he could assure the singers were paid on time. No documented complaints about owed wages appear in the archive for the period in which Alamán served as minister of relations. Following his resignation, however, complaints poured in. By early 1833, acting minister of relations, Bernardo Gonzales, had received at least four complaints about owed wages from singers Carolina Falconi and Carolina Pellegrini, and French dancers Aimee Guénant de Magnin and Eugenio Crombé. Falconi complained to the ministry that she had not been paid since her arrival in Mexico City in September 1832 and that she was owed 1,700 pesos. Making matters worse, she had been robbed en route to the capital from Veracruz and thus did not have sufficient funds to pay for her return trip to Italy.[146] Pellegrini, frustrated about the settlement she received from city authorities following a contract dispute from 1828-9, raised the issue a second time, appealing to the federal government to grant her the full amount of her original claim.[147]

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[146] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 7.

[147] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 4. Pellegrini submitted her first appeal to the city council in 1831 requesting 3900 pesos in back wages. She was awarded a settlement of 750 pesos. AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4016, expediente 53.

The cases brought by Guénant de Magnin and Crombé were messier, prompting the involvement of the French legation in Mexico, including the Minister Plenipotenciary Baron Deffaudis. Deffaudis leveraged his powers as a French diplomat to intervene on behalf of the dancers, who were owed four months' salary. When Deffaudis's attempt at using an intermediary failed, he threatened the Mexican government. If the back wages were not paid promptly, he would annul the contracts of French experts contracted by the Banco de Avío to establish and oversee several industrialization projects and instruct them to return home, thus inflicting a damaging blow to the centerpiece of Alamán's program for economic modernization. While it is unclear whether Deffaudis arranged for the return of the French businessmen or if his threats had any real effect on manufacturing plants, we do know that the baron was one of the first to advocate for a French military intervention in Mexico, believing that brute force was the French government's only hope of attaining reparations it had demanded for property damage (most notably from the sack of the Parián in December 1828), surtaxes placed on French citizens resident in Mexico, the imposition of forced loans, and Mexico's refusal to negotiate a formal treaty of commerce with the French.[148] Though not the sole point of friction between the two countries, this issue over unpaid salaries certainly strained relations.

The dispute over unpaid wages remained unresolved until 1837, and it involved at least a half dozen Mexican officials. The dancers got the run-around, their claims bouncing around from the minister of relations, to theater managers, to the minister of the treasury and back again. In January 1835, they sought formal legal representation and presented a case for repayment in the amount of 11,000 pesos. The Mexican government disagreed,

[148] William Spence Robertson, "French Intervention in Mexico in 1838," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (May, 1944), 223-5.

and ultimately settled the suit for less than half the amount of the original request.[149] Italian contralto Carolina Falconi, having seen her appeals thwarted or left unanswered, also sent a note to the French legation requesting its assistance in securing wages and other expenses she claimed the Mexican government owed her.[150]

By 1834, Galli's company and finances at the Teatro Principal were in disarray. Opera director Cayetano de Paris wrote to minister of relations Francisco Lombardo that the opera company had not been paid for three months' worth of work and that the theater's wardrobe was in terrible shape.[151] "Can you blame the performers for taking costumes and pawning or selling them when they haven't been paid and they have no relatives to support them?," Paris asked rhetorically. Theater managers had been unable to pay the opera singers, whose contracts stipulated payment in silver (*pesos fuertes*) or gold, since late 1833 because theatergoers tended to pay at the box office in copper coins, a currency that flooded the local market in the 1830s.[152] But, when singers like Antonio Finaglia requested that the Mexican government expedite his passport so he could return to Italy, government officials denied his request, claiming he had not yet fulfilled the terms of his contract that ran through August 1834.[153] Other members of Galli's company, anxious to complete their

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[149] AGN, Gobernación, sin sección, caja 349, expediente 3.

[150] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 7.

[151] AGN, Gobernación, caja 222, legajo 145, expediente 6.

[152] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 7. On copper coins and their emission, see José Enrique Covarrubias, *La moneda de cobre en México, 1760-1842: Un problema administrativa* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2000), chapter two and anexo I, 217-9.

[153] AGN, Gobernación, caja 222, legajo 145, expediente 6. Enrique Olavarría y Ferrari incorrectly claims it was Galli in his *Reseña histórica*, t. 1, 298-9 based on an article that appeared in *La Lima de Vulcano* on April 9, 1834.

contractual obligations and return to Italy, raised the issue of back wages to relevant authorities, though disputes and changes in administrative personnel delayed repayment (directorship of the opera alone passed from the hands of Cayetano de Paris to Manuel Gargollo to Felipe Neri del Barrio between April and October 1834). Carolina Falconi's claim remained in limbo and Carolina Pellegrini's second appeal for unpaid wages from an 1828-29 contract was still pending a final resolution.[154] Settlement claims for three other singers in Galli's company, Luis Spontini, Catarina Amati, and Ladislao Bassi, remained unresolved as of October 1834, at least a month after the contracts for all three had expired.[155]

If on the one hand the project—and later the appearance and performance of the same singers who had starred on European stages—helped Mexicans imagine themselves as part of an emergent coalition of republican nations that would chart the course of nineteenth century politics, on the other the project's proponents and allies failed to properly account for its potential to backfire. An article written in the procentralist newspaper, *La Lima de Vulcano,* reveals the extent to which Mexicans registered the international implications of the Italian singers' presence and the possible consequences of failing to honor their contracts. The article asked readers, "What will the editors of *El Monitor*, *El Comercio*, in Paris, say in light of this new act of vandalism by those [Mexican leaders] who seek to give lessons on culture and liberalism to the peoples of Europe? How will it appear that the very same day the government that expelled the bishop of Puebla,

[154] AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 4.

[155] AGN, Gobernación, caja 222, legajo 138, expediente 6. They had arrived in September 1832 to reinforce Galli's company, and all had signed two-year contracts valued at between 2,200 and 2,400 pesos each.

who felt obligated to protest against anti-constitutional acts, denied the passport request of a noted opera singer [Antonio Finaglia] who refused to sing because the government had not paid him what it owed and declared null a contract negotiated just six months ago?"[156]

Alamán gambled in recruiting Galli's company to Mexico City in 1830-31. He doubtless saw the risk in attempting to pull off such a feat in a country he would later lament had suffered from progeria.[157] Alamán and the legacy of the opera project also suffered from a smear campaign launched by federalist newspapers such as *El Fenix de la Libertad*. "We do not dislike the opera, and we know the merits of some of [Galli's] singers," an editor for the newspaper wrote in February 1833, "but we do not judge it a necessity to make the capital more like Paris, especially when many of the nation's villages and towns look more like those found in the Far East."[158] Of its 22 million–peso budget, Alamán's government had spent only 60,000 pesos on education, and only 3,000 pesos on Lancasterian schools, *El Fenix* claimed. This was, they argued, one of Mexico's most pressing concerns and the reason for its backwardness.[159] Later that year, the newspaper offered a more pointed critique. Responding to news from Toluca about prizes distributed at a primary school affiliated with that city's literary institute, they wrote: "Was this seen during the execrable administration of Alamán? Tell it to the school that was closed to

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[156] *La Lima de Vulcano*, 9 de abril de 1834, reproduced in Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la independencia*, 320-1.

[157] Van Young, "In Mexico There are no Mexicans."

[158] *El Fenix de la Libertad*, 1 de febrero de 1833, p. 4. Original text reads: "…no nos disgusta la opera, conocemos el mérito de algunos individuos de este ramo; pero juzgamos como una necesidad, asimilar la capital de la republica a Paris, cuando muchos pueblos de la nación se parecen a los del Oriente."

[159] *Ibid.*

bring Italian opera to Mexico City."[160] While the validity of *El Fenix's* allegations is dubious, the newspaper had identified its scapegoat.[161]

Viewed in the context of the nineteenth-century Americas and Europe, however, Alamán's vision aligned with ruling groups of other nations who patronized the arts, and in particular Italian opera. Wealthy arts patrons in New York City, who had gone without Italian opera since the 1826, pooled their resources to construct the Italian Opera House, the first performance hall designed exclusively for opera in that city.[162] It opened in 1833, in time for the arrival of Giacomo Montresor's Italian opera company. However, after just three seasons, its backers put the theater up for auction. It burned down in 1841. A subsequent attempt by New York City patricians to construct a fully subsidized "metropolitan theater, corresponding to the wealth and population of [that] metropolis" failed before the project moved past the planning stages.[163] Such was the nature of the performing arts in this era. Failure was frequent and often expected. In Mexico City, the declining fortunes of Galli's opera company after 1832 did not portend the end of opera

The End of the State-led Opera Project and its Legacy

When the Office of the General Treasury paid out the final 1,400 pesos owed Galli's company, choir members, and theater personnel at the behest of the ministry of

[160] *El Fenix de la Libertad*, 12 de diciembre de 1833, p. 4.

[161] Alamán called on Congress to allot money to keep the struggling Lancasterian schools afloat when the society canceled dues payments for its members. The society and its schools closed in early 1833 when Goméz Farías assumed the presidency. Nevertheless, Alamán's opponents placed the blame on him. See Green, *Mexican Republic*, 219.

[162] Henderson, *The City and the Stage*, 65-66. See also Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825-1860 (Champaign*-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 106-7.

[163] Henderson, *The City and the Stage*, 67.

relations in September 1834, the grand Italian opera experiment initiated by Lucás Alamán effectively ended. Cayetano de Paris lobbied to extend the contracts of Galli's opera company for another two years, but Manuel Eduardo Gorostiza, who had returned from his diplomatic mission in London to take over theater management at the Teatro Principal in September 1833, disagreed. While he supported the opera, Gorostiza believed hiring a new company would benefit both the government and city residents.[164] The short-term result was a compromise. Gorostiza supported stopgap measures to ensure that opera would continue in the city during an abbreviated 1834-5 season, until he could get a plan in place to recruit new singers. These included a short-lived association to sustain opera in the city with limited financial support and oversight from the ministry of relations.[165] Gorostiza also signed a contract with Felipe Neri del Barrio (who had taken over the opera's directorship from Gargollo in October 1834) for use of the Teatro Principal twice weekly to stage operas, though operagoers complained vehemently about infrequent performances.[166]

Gorostiza's 1835 proposal to bring a new opera company to Mexico City for three years won approval, but it reflected a new approach to patronage. Following models adopted elsewhere including in the United States, the onus shifted to groups of wealthy patrons rather than the state.[167] Gorostiza intended to recruit a group of investors to

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[164] AGN, Gobernación, caja 222, legajo 145, expediente 6.

[165] *Ibid*.

[166] Archivo Histórico de Notarías (henceforth AHN), Francisco Madariaga, #426, 15 de octubre de 1834, Vol. 2847 (t. 2), fojas 1011-13. For complaints see *La Lima de Vulcano*, 15 de enero de 1835 and 9 de mayo de 1835, reproduced in Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la independencia*, 343-70.

[167] Thomas Ertman calls this the impresarial model, popular in Italy (1639-1861), Britain (to 1939), and the United States (to the present). See Thomas Ertman, "The Opera, State, and Society," in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, 25-52. Alamán's

contribute 6,000 to 10,000 pesos in initial start up capital that would be used to pay salary advances and transportation costs from Europe. Once the investors were in place, he would request an additional 10,000 pesos from the federal government (renewable each year for the duration of the contracts), which would be repaid if the company earned a profit. The investors would be on the hook for all losses, and neither group could interfere or intervene in the company's composition, the works performed, etc., save issues relating to finances and accounting.

Scant documentary evidence from this period offers us only the slightest glimpse of how Gorostiza's project plan faired. He granted Joaquín Patiño authority to negotiate contracts with singers, actors, and anyone else whose services could help ensure the proper staging of opera and drama at the theater.[168] Posters from the 1836-7 season show that when new singers arrived in 1836, Galli, who had remained in Mexico after his original contract expired, formed a new company comprised of the recent arrivals and the artists who had worked in Mexico since 1831.[169] That company enjoyed a successful first season, staging the Mexican premieres of Bellini's *La Sonnambula* (The Sleepwalker), *Norma*, and *Il Pirata* (The Pirate), Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (William Tell), and Meyerbeer's *Il*

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experimental model was most similar to the impresarial-statist model, popular in France (1638-1939).

[168] AHN, Francisco Madariaga, #426, 23 de abril de 1835, vol. 2848 (t. 2), fojas 338-9.

[169] Images of five posters found in Laura Suárez de la Torre, "Los libretos: Un negocio para las imprentas. 1830-1860," in *Los papeles de Euterpe,* 100-142. Singers from Galli's original company included Luis (Luigi) Spontini, Joaquín Musatti, Sr. Sissa, Elena Baduera, and Galli. New arrivals included Napoleona Albini, Adela Cesari, Juan Bautista (Giovanni Battista) Montrésor, Sr. Strazza, Sr. Santi, Amelia Passi, Amalia Majocchi, Luis Leonardi, and Luciano Fornasari.

Crociato en Egitto (The Crusader in Egypt).[170] However, its fortunes turned south the following season. Galli and several of the company's most talented singers departed for Havana in late 1838, contracted by the Havana Italian Opera Company to perform at the newly constructed Teatro Tacón.[171]

The presence of Galli's company in early 1830s Mexico City marked the beginning stages of Mexico's insertion into nascent global performance networks that, while concentrated in European capitals, extended throughout the Americas from the United States to the Southern Cone, and by about 1840 to Turkey and Greece, Russia and Scandinavia.[172] Those networks linked the capital city directly to places such as Havana and New Orleans. More indirectly, they linked Mexico City to circuits that extended northward to Louisville, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and New York, and southward to Central America, Lima, and Buenos Aires.[173] By 1900, eighty-six opera companies, mostly Italian, had performed on the capital's stages.[174]

Italian opera's global popularity owed to a number of interrelated factors. Pioneering companies like Galli's created webs of human infrastructure—agents, representatives, printers, singers (choir members), musicians, and officials—that facilitated trips for future groups of singers. The structure of touring circuits and opera networks

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[170] Sosa and Escobedo, *Dos siglos* t. 1, 24-6.

[171] Contracts for tenors Giovanni Battista Montresor and Joaquín Musatti, bass Filippo Galli, and soprano Napoleona Albini found in AHN.

[172] Rosselli, *Singers*, 80-1.

[173] Preston, *Opera on the Road,* 99-148

[174] Verónica Zárate Toscano and Serge Gruzinski, "Ópera, imaginación y sociedad. México y Brasil, siglo xix. Historias conectadas: Ildegonga de Melesio Morales e Il Guarany de Carlos Gomes." *Historia Mexicana* 58, no. 2 (oct.-dic. 2008): 815.

meant that news often circulated by word of mouth, as singers and composers moved between companies. Soprano Amalia Majocchi, who had arrived to Mexico City to perform in 1836, provides an illustrative if suggestive example. Majocchi departed Mexico sometime around 1838, eventually landing a role at the Palmo's Opera House Company in Manhattan in early 1843 alongside singers Eufrasia Borghese and Luigi Perozzi.[175] She toured with Perozzi to New Orleans, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia as part of the Havana Italian Opera Company the remainder of the year before returning to New York.[176] In 1845, Borghese headed a company featuring Perozzi and others that toured to Mexico City just ahead of Mexico's War with the United States.[177] It is not inconceivable to think Perozzi and Borghese hatched that idea after first discussing it with Majocchi. Italian composer and orchestra director, Lauro Rossi, provides a second example of the ways information and knowledge potentially passed through opera networks. Rossi came to Mexico in 1836, where he served as the musical director for Galli's reformed company and staged some of his own original compositions.[178] He worked for a time with the Havana Italian Opera Company and toured at least once to New Orleans. Rossi returned to Europe after receiving an appointment to head Milan's Conservatory of Music in 1850. There, he trained composers like Brazilian Carlos Gomes, who would enjoy much success in Europe and the Americas.[179] Rossi later directed Naples' Music Conservatory from 1871-8. Given the

[175] Preston, *Opera on the Road,* 321.

[176] *Ibid*., 320-1.

[177] Hammeken, "La república de la música," anexo 3.

[178] Sosa y Escobedo, *Dos siglos*, v. 1, 24-6.

[179] Zárate Toscano and Gruzinski, "Ópera," 816-21.

importance of those positions, from which he kept in touch with famous composers like Rossini, Verdi, and Tchaikovsky and trained hundreds of others, we might imagine he also served as an ambassador to groups of singers considering testing their lot in the Americas.

The presence of companies like Galli's increased demand for opera outside of Europe. A journalist writing in 1834 claimed he was convinced of two things: "first, that our [Mexican] public cannot go without opera, and, second, that there is no one more fit to lead a company than Sr. Galli."[180] Perhaps overstated, the sentiment was clear: opera, sung by Italians, was there to stay.[181] With few exceptions (the U.S.-Mexican War, e.g.), Italian companies toured to the capital annually, spurred on in the 1840s and 50s by political upheavals and economic depression in Europe that sent more companies abroad in search of work and higher wages. Many performers endured disease, violent storms, bad hotels, and defaulting managers because they believed that Eldorado would pay.[182] Opera director Max Maretzek contributed to this myth when he famously boasted in his memoir of the eighteen sacks of silver coins (each containing 1000 *pesos fuertes*) delivered to him by poor indigenous servants prior to his company's first show in Mexico City in 1852, the

[180] *La Lima de Vulcano*, 9 de abril de 1834, reproduced in Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la independencia*, 320-1.

[181] Anna Agranoff Ochs, "Opera in Contention: Social Conflict in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico City," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2011), 213. Mexican composers and singers tried to break the Italian monopoly, but for the most part failed. One notable success was composer Cenobio Paniagua, whose Compañía Mexicana de Ópera of young Mexican singers performed across Mexico in the 1860s. Their contract to perform in Havana was cancelled before they embarked from Veracruz. See Áurea Maya, "La opera en el siglo XIX en México: resonancias silenciosas de un proyecto cultural de nación (1824-1867)," in *Los papeles de Euterpe*, 329-358.

[182] Rosselli, *Singers*, 144-5 and 186-7.

result of advance sales for the first twelve performances.[183] But, even that amount paled in comparison to the 10,000 pesos soprano Adelina Patti reportedly raked in nightly during a weeks' worth of performances in 1886-7—the most of any city on her six-month North American tour.[184] Between April and October 1854, two touring companies offered at least eighty separate opera performances to city residents in spite of a cholera epidemic that claimed the lives of some 4,000 individuals, including internationally acclaimed German soprano Henriette Sontag.[185]

Increased demand for opera sparked the publication and diffusion of journals and magazines dedicated to the arts. Cultural publications like *El museo teatral* held an important place in elite social life. They offered readers biographies of famous composers, opera scripts, and reviews of performances staged in Mexico and Europe. Published in 1841, *El museo teatral's* third issue reacquainted readers with the career of Filippo Galli.[186] In the city's broader periodical press, opera commanded space even when touring opera companies were not performing in the city.[187] Printing related to the opera was also big business. Librettos, which featured Italian text and Spanish translations on facing pages, generated steady and secure revenues for printers, as did sheet music, invitations, and playbills.[188]

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[183] Maretzek, *Crotchets and Quavers*, 245-8.

[184] Rosselli, *Singers*, 144-5.

[185] Hammeken, "La república de la música," 10.

[186] *El museo teatral* no. 3. Fondo Reservado, Hemeroteca Nacional, UNAM.

[187] Hammeken, "La república de la música," 25-6.

[188] Suárez de la Torre, "Los libretos," 114-22.

The sounds of opera infused daily life and extended well beyond the playhouse and the elite salon. Operatic overtures opened the night's entertainment at puppet shows and in popular theaters. Bands that played open-air concerts in public plazas incorporated operatic music into their sets, and most every church had its own repertory of sheet music.[189] Organizers of civic festivals staged operas to celebrate Mexican independence day. Rossini's grand opera about Swiss freedom and liberation, *William Tell*, premiered on September 16, 1836, and it was staged again in 1862, the year that Mexican soldiers defeated invading French troops in Puebla and patriotic sentiment ran high.[190]

Italian artists and performers influenced the city's cultural life beyond the stage. One of the more notable examples is painter Pedro (Pietro) Gualdi. Gualdi had studied at the Academy of Arts in Milan and worked as a set designer and scene painter at that city's La Scala Opera House. He was contracted to come to Mexico alongside soprano Marietta Albini in 1835-6 to form part of Galli's reformed company at the Teatro Principal. Unlike many of the company's other artists, Galli remained in Mexico after 1838, where he made significant contributions to urban landscape painting. Gualdi published one of the first lithographic albums in Mexico, *Monumentos de Méjico*, published serially between 1839 and 1842, and he influenced a generation of lithographers. He may have also served as an unofficial tutor to Mexico's most important nineteenth-century painter and lithographer, Casimiro Castro. Echoes of his work and influence are visible in works of *costumbrismo*

[189] Áurea Maya, "La opera en el siglo XIX," 342.

[190] Miguel Ángel Vásquez Meléndez, *Fiesta y teatro en la ciudad de México, 1750-1910 (dos ensayos)* (Mexico City: INAH / Centro Nacional de Investigcación, Documentación e Información Teatral 'Rodolfo Usigli', 2003), 282-6.

like *Mexicanos pintados por si mismo* and *México y sus alrededores.*[191] All the while, Gualdi continued to work as a scene painter and set designer, training Mexicans in that art, while winning praise for the quality of his curtains and backdrops, painted to create the illusion that audiences were closer to the onstage action.

The opera companies' onstage feats left the most indelible mark on nineteenth-century city residents. Galli's companies—and those that came after—introduced Mexican audiences to the spectacle of opera, to its sumptuous music and its magnificent staging. Galli convinced manager Manuel Barrera to hire additional stagehands for the Mexican premiere of Rossini's *Ricardo y Zoraida*, commission Mexican painter Francisco Tamayo to create new backdrops, and pay tailors large sums to update the existing wardrobe and create new costumes.[192] As in France, audiences and opera directors alike had come to see staging as crucial to an opera's success.[193] The addition of Gualdi, Italian tailor Bernardo Ramponi, and an embroiderer in 1836 pointed to this new impetus. Fanny Calderón de la Barca, an avid operagoer who had seen operas staged in Europe, wrote of the *mise-en scene* on Anaide Castellan de Giampietro's company's opening night performance in 1841: "The theatre is extremely well got up, the dresses are new and rich, and the decorations and scenery remarkably good."[194] Later that season, during a performance of *Belisarius* given

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[191] Arturo Aguilar, "Pedro Gualdi. Pintor de perspectiva en México," in *El escenario urbano de Pedro Gualdi, 1808-1857* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional del Arte, 1997), 33-68.

[192] AGN, Gobernación sin sección, caja 361, legajo 167, expediente 2.

[193] Simon Williams, "The Spectacle of the Past in Grand Opera," in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 61.

[194] Francis Calderón de la Barca, *Life in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), 399-401.

in honor of Santa Anna, she found Donizetti's opera "...really beautifully *montée*; the dresses new and superb—the decorations handsome. They brought in real horses, and Belisarius entered in a triumphal chariot, drawn by white steeds…the music, beautiful as it was, was the least effective part of the affair."[195] "With all its faults and drawbacks," wrote Calderón, "[opera] is decidedly the best public exhibition in Mexico."[196]

Though we might quibble over Calderón's claims about opera's superiority, the performances of early Italian companies initiated a sea change in the expectations of the theatergoing public and in the performing arts more generally. Put another way, Alamán's grand project bore fruit. Galli's opera companies created a demand for spectacle, which successive governments, enterprising entrepreneurs, and wealthy patrons met. In 1839, ninety-three city residents formed an association to set a plan for the construction of a grand performance hall that could attract the world's best performers while also indexing the city's place as a global, cosmopolitan city.[197] Completed in 1844, the Gran Teatro Nacional became the republic's flagship theater, with a capacity for nearly 2400 spectators. But, it was only one among more than a half a dozen new playhouses and performance halls constructed at mid-century. Between 1840 and 1860, the number of playhouses in the city quadrupled. These decades saw audiences flock to theaters to be awed by pyrotechnics, optical illusions and other stage tricks commonly found in *comedias de magia* (magical comedies). They also came to witness the large ensemble casts and grandeur of dramas "de

[195] *Ibid.,* 451-2.

[196] *Ibid.,* 401.

[197] AHN, Ramon de la Cueva, #169, 24 de octubre de 1839,Vol. 992, fojas 519-525.

grande espectáculo" and grand opera. In short, Italian opera generated an enduring craze for spectacle and theatergoing.

CHAPTER 2

THE THEATER CONSTRUCTION BOOM: THE THEATER BUSINESS AND URBAN LIFE AT MID-CENTURY

Galli's Italian opera companies created a palpable enthusiasm for spectacle in Mexico City. Starting in the late 1830s, unprecedented numbers of individuals petitioned the city government for licenses to hold entertainments in the city's streets, public plazas, and theaters. Between 1840 and 1860, peddlers submitted no fewer than 200 licensure petitions for street comedy skits, acrobatic and circus acts, equestrian shows, open air concerts, verse and dance performances, puppet theater, *pastorelas* (popular Nativity plays), hot air balloon launches, and even battles between lions and tigers.[198] An "o-rama craze" gripped the capital.[199] Dioramas, panoramas, and *cosmoramas,* which employed optical illusions to re-create landscapes, city scenes, and architectural marvels the world over, allowed patrons to be armchair tourists, to imagine themselves traveling to distant places without having to leave the city. Visitors could thus "experience" Paris on Calle Tacuba, and Parisian boulevards, a London tunnel, and St. Petersburg, Russia on Calle de San Francisco.[200] O-ramas dotted the streets of San Francisco, Tacuba, Palma, Acueducto, and Coliseo Viejo and could also be found in public leisure spaces like the Alameda. A

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[198] This would not have included entertainments that happened beyond the gaze of municipal authority, including banned activities like betting-based card games, dominoes, and billiards that tended to happen behind closed doors. In the decade prior (1830-39), entertainment peddlers submitted only 11 petitions. AHDF guide, Fondo Ayuntamiento, Sección Diversiones Públicas (pdf version, Mar. 2010, courtesy of Linda Arnold).

[199] I borrow this phrase from Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siecle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 149-76.

[200] *El Siglo XIX*, 19 de febrero de 1851, p. 4.

wax museum—perhaps the city's first—opened on Coliseo Viejo. For just 2 reales (1 for children), visitors could observe 110 wax figures depicting Napoleon's funeral procession from the island of Santa Helena to Paris.[201]

Swept up by this burgeoning demand for spectacle, groups of investors that included presidents, municipal authorities, wealthy arts patrons, capitalists, and small-time merchants championed and financed the construction of eight new playhouses. Between 1840 and 1860, the number of operational playhouses in the city quadrupled, and they ranged from quaint popular neighborhood playhouses like the *Teatro de la Unión* to the monumental 2200-seat Gran Teatro Nacional. The expansion of playhouses broadened the menu of romantic dramas, French melodramas, Spanish comedies, and operas available to theatergoers. On May 1, 1856, for example, theatergoers could attend the second part of José Zorrilla's *El zapatero y el rey* (The Cobbler and the King), a translation of Alexander Dumas's *Gabriela de Belle-Isle*, Cuban poetess Gertrudis Goméz de Avallaneda's comedy *La aventurera* (The Adventuress), Spanish adaptations of Delavigne's *Sullivan* and Melesville's *Los hijos de Eduardo* (Edward's Children), or Antonio Gil y Zarate's grand drama *Masanielo libertador de Nápoles* (Masanielo, Liberator of Naples).[202] With Amílcare Roncari's Italian company having recently departed, opera aficionados would be forced to wait until the October arrival of a new company under the direction of Felicita Vestvali.

Literary societies and publications focused on the city's cultural life blossomed in these decades as well. Groups such as the Academia de San Juan de Letrán (1836-56), the

[201] *El Siglo XIX*, 30 de septiembre de 1849.

[202] Information on plays comes from author's database.

Ateneo Mexicano (1840-?), and the Liceo Hidalgo (1849-88) brought together men of all ideological persuasions to present research, recite literary compositions, and offer lectures.[203] Through their participation, Mexican playwrights such as Fernando Calderón and Ignacio Rodríguez Galván rubbed shoulders with intellectuals-cum-statesmen like Guillermo Prieto, Ignacio Ramírez, Manuel Payno, Lucás Alamán, and José María Tornel. The city's burgeoning theatrical culture also spawned the publication of journals and magazines such as *El Apuntador*, *El museo teatral*, and *El Anteojo*, which featured biographies of performers, arguments of specific works, and reviews of plays staged in Mexico City, Venice, Milan, Naples, London, Lisbon, Paris, and Madrid.[204]

The fluorescence of the city's cultural life in this period, especially its theater culture, stands in marked contrast to a historiography that paints a grim economic picture of this period. At the national level, the standard narrative tells of a series of unsuccessful attempts to alleviate the republic's financial crisis. Successive federalist and centralist governments' minted specie, confiscated money and capital, imposed taxes, and requested loans from foreign governments and speculative resident lenders, or *agiotistas*, to avoid bankruptcy. However, inconsistent fiscal policies, poor enforcement, and political maneuvering worsened the republic's financial standing. A series of interventions and conflicts, internal and external, compounded the republic's financial troubles. Military costs related to the Texas War in 1836, the Pastry War with the French in 1838, and the suppression of rebellions and independence movements in the states of Sonora, Baja

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[203] Alicia Perales Ojeda, *Asociaciones literarias mexicanas. Siglo XIX* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1957).

[204] *El Apuntador*, 1841; *El museo teatral*, nos. 1 and 3, 1841-42; and *El Anteojo. Periódico de Teatros*, 1845. All housed in the Fondo Reservado, Hemeroteca Nacional, UNAM.

California, and Yucatán burdened federal coffers. These conflicts forced governments to accept more high interest loans and further weakened central authority.[205]

In Mexico City, scholarship argues that the labor market contracted, workshops closed, and the economy stagnated.[206] Copper devaluations and its amortization caused disruptions. Riots broke out when storekeepers refused to accept *monedas de cobre* and when factory owners tried to pay their workers in copper coins.[207] Its coffers empty, the federal government struggled to pay employees' salaries and fulfill obligations to pensioners, widows, and other dependents. Taxes on businesses, professions and trades, and consumer and luxury goods strained household incomes. An endemic shortage of specie exacerbated the situation, forcing families to finance subsistence or accommodate a certain lifestyle by hocking material goods at pawnshops and grocery stores, or *pulperías.*[208]

This chapter plumbs the apparent contradiction between the city's theater construction boom and its supposedly stagnant economy. An analysis of contracts, wills, and inspectors' reports illuminates the financing and management of playhouses in this era. As such, the chapter reveals the ways a heterogeneous group of city residents mobilized

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[205] The most comprehensive study of Mexico's fiscal system during the early republic is Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury.* See also Luis Jáuregui, "Los orígenes de un malestar."

[206] Sonia Pérez Toledo, *Trabajadores, espacio urbano y sociabilidad en la ciudad de México 1790-1867* (Mexico City: UAM-Itzapalapa, 2011), 69-74. Pérez Toledo notes that there were 20% fewer workshops in the city in 1842-3 than there were in 1794.

[207] Covarrubias, *La moneda de cobre.*

[208] Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit.* On pulperías in the colonial period see John Kizca, *Colonial Entrepreneurs: Families and Business in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983). See also Marie Francois, "Prendas and Pulperías: The Fabric of the Neighborhood Credit Business in Mexico City, 1780s-1830s" *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 20, no. 20 (1999): 67-110.

capital in support of the arts. It also probes the motivations underlying such investment. Theater's popularity—and potential profitability—certainly contributed to the construction of new playhouses in the city. However, patronizing the arts also brought investors prestige and status.

The chapter also takes a close look at theater's deep entanglement in webs of local commerce. Operating theaters required a host of personnel beyond the actors and musicians who featured in performances. Ledgers show that theaters provided relatively stable—and potentially long-term—employment opportunities for city residents as stagehands, machinists, makeup artists, tailors, and scene painters. As new playhouses opened and audiences' tastes changed to favor grand spectacle, employment opportunities expanded. Theater's economic impact reached beyond the stage as well. As the chapter examines, city printers and booksellers capitalized on the increased demand for posters, playbills, scripts, librettos, and sheet music. Securing printing contracts provided a steady source of income and helped buoy such businesses.

Lastly, the chapter examines theater's popularity from the vantage of audiences, exploring the kinds of plays audiences saw and enjoyed. In so doing, it offers a textured portrait of urban life at mid-century and the central place of theater within it—something both textbooks and historical monographs have overlooked.[209] If one of the chapter's primary aims is to recast our understanding of mid-century life in the capital, its analysis of theater construction, capital mobilization, and theater's deep ties to local commercial

[209] A leading textbook on Mexican history makes no mention of theater in its chapter on society and culture in the mid-nineteenth century. Instead, its authors focus on bullfighting, literature, visual art, and patriotic music. See Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman, and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 310-19.

networks challenges historiographical formulations that have characterized the city and its economy as stagnant in this period.[210] Playhouses alone did not drive the city's economy, but they did significantly boost commercial activity and offer more secure livelihoods for many city residents.

Financing the Boom

Lamenting the dilapidated state of the city's two theaters in 1839, a group of ninety-three men met at the Royal and Pontifical University in Mexico City to elect a directory board that would coordinate the construction of a modern theater. The group, which included federal and city officials, aristocrats, merchants, capitalists, and an Italian opera singer who had arrived with Galli's original company, formed a joint-stock company.[211] At the meeting, the men empowered secretary-in-perpetuity, Francisco Arbeu, and three other board members to negotiate building and operations contracts for the future Gran Teatro Nacional, a building whose architecture and prominence they hoped might symbolize Mexico's refinement while also drawing celebrity performers from around the world.[212]

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[210] See in particular Pérez Toledo, *Trabajadores, espacios urbanos* and Jorge Jimenez Muñoz, *La traza del poder. Historia de la politica y los negocios urbanos en el Distrito Federal, de sus origenes a la desaparicion del ayuntamiento* (1824-1928) (Mexico City: Codex Editores, 1993). One notable exception to this literature is Andrew Philip Konove, "Black Market City: The *Baratillo* Marketplace and the Challenge of Governance in Mexico City, 1692-1903," (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, May 2013), see especially chapter 3 on Mexico City's Would-Be Renaissance between 1841-43.

[211] The opera singer was Luis (Luigi) Spontini, whose signature appears in the notary's book. See AHN, #169, Ramón de la Cueva, vol. 992, Oct. 24, 1839, fojas 519-525.

[212] *Ibid.* For the city council's views on the theater's aesthetics and the ways it ould contribute to the beautification of the city, see also AGN, GD10, Sección Ayuntamientos, vol. 21, 1841, fojas 3-6. I refer to this theater as the Gran Teatro Nacional throughout this chapter to avoid confusion, though its name changed during certain administrations. At various points it was also named the Gran Teatro de Santa Anna and the Gran Teatro Imperial.

The Guatemalan-born and –educated architect, Arbeu, solicited shares (or *acciones*), from group members to assist in the construction of the new theater, to which he added much of his own personal fortune amassed through the construction of a railway that connected Mexico City to neighboring villages to its south such as Tlalpan.[213] Arbeu also secured an 85,000-peso loan from the city.[214] While initial work began in 1841, cost overruns plagued the project from the start. Arbeu requested a series of additional loans from Senator José Joaquín de Rozas amounting to well over 100,000 pesos.[215] By the time the Gran Teatro Nacional opened in February 1844, total costs had exceeded 350,000 pesos.[216]

At the time of its construction, the National Theater was architecturally unrivaled. One city official described it as "magnificent and grand, rivaling those found in Europe."[217] The three-story neoclassical structure boasted four large, elevated Corinthian columns that guarded its recessed portico and allegorical figures that adorned its façade (see Figure 1). Inside, the building contained 75 balconies spanning three levels and ten closed boxes. Above the boxes was the gallery, with a capacity of nine hundred. Twenty rows of seats capable of holding more than 550 spectators sat in front of the stage. Altogether, the National Theater could entertain 2,248 patrons, making it one of the largest theaters in the

[213] For more on Arbeu, see María Eugenia Aragón, "El teatro nacional de la ciudad de México, 1841-1901," (Mexico City: Insituto Nacional de Bellas Artes / Centro Nacional de Investigación y Documentación Teatral Rodolfo Usigli, 1995), 67-75.

[214] AGN, GD10, Sección Ayuntamientos, vol. 21, 1841.

[215] Rozas offered Arbeu four loans total, three in 1842 and one in 1843. Copies of contracts are found in the AHN.

[216] Aragón, "El teatro nacional de la ciudad de México," 75.

[217] AGN, GD10, Sección Ayuntamientos, vol. 21, 1841, foja 3.

Americas (see Figure 2).[218] Perched at the western end of Avenida 5 de Mayo in a bustling commercial zone between the zócalo and the Alameda, the theater's prominent location accentuated both its symbolic power and its imposing physical presence as a cultural landmark.

Figure 1: Teatro Nacional (then named the Gran Teatro de Santa Anna), c. 1854

[218] The best architectural analysis of the National Theater is Aragón, "El teatro nacional de la ciudad de México," 89-109.

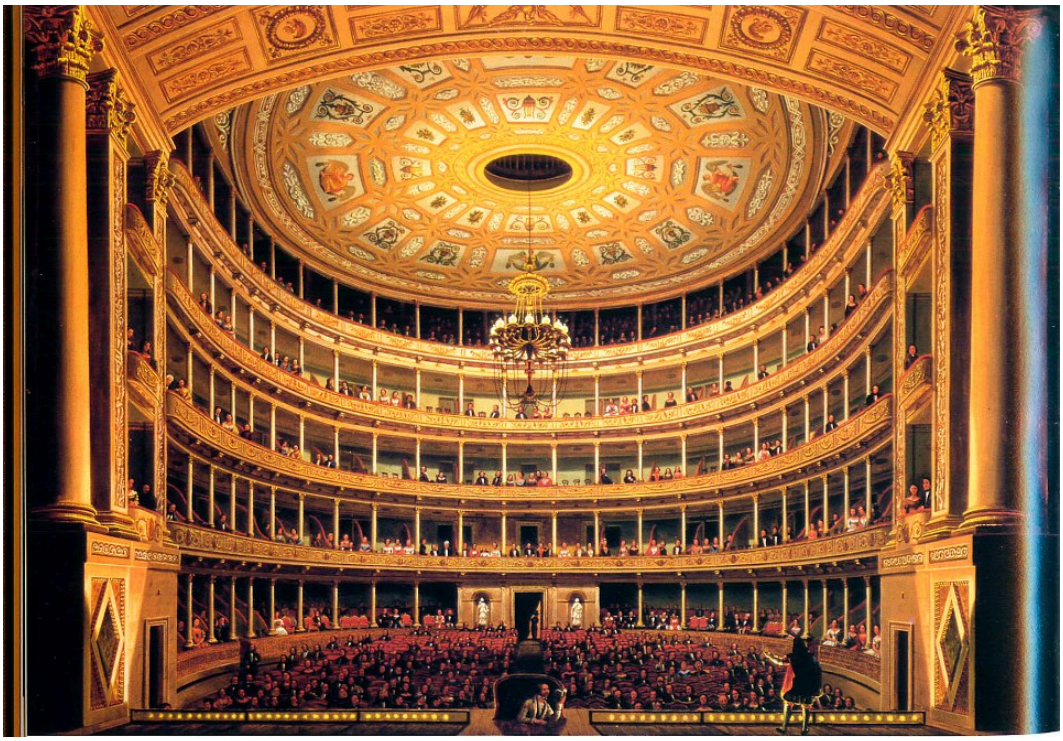

Figure 2: Oil painting of interior of Gran Teatro Nacional, Pietro Gualdi, c. 1840s

Less than a decade later, Arbeu headed a new project to construct a municipal theater, the Teatro de Iturbide. In a proposal submitted to the city council in 1851, Arbeu claimed he had raised 75,000 pesos through the private sale of shares in the venture. Estimating total construction costs at 104,522 pesos, he requested a municipal contribution of 25,000 pesos.[219] Arbeu proposed to manage the theater for a period of 15 years (to recuperate his and his shareholders' investment), at which point the city government would take over its management.[220] Arbeu sold the project as a moneymaker for the city. The

[219] AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4018, expediente 1, foja 37.

[220] *Ibid*., foja 20.

council ultimately agreed to the deal; however, after five years of construction, city investment in the project soared to 70,000 pesos. [221]

Though not as large as the Gran Teatro Nacional, seating 1800, the Teatro de Iturbide was equally as impressive and imposing architecturally.[222] The architects who conducted an inspection before the theater opened to the public described its "richness, good taste, and magnificence" as "worthy of the capital." They also called it the city's most ornate playhouse.[223] Located a few blocks north of the city's main commercial district (on the former site of the *Mercado del Factor*), The Teatro de Iturbide's positioning on a 45-degree angle relative to the street corner drew attention to the structure. Its interior construction consisted of a mix of stonework, native wood (oak, cedar, and pine), and metal. Parisian adornments accompanied stone carvings, tin plating, mock velvet-covered seating, and oil-based lamps and chandeliers (see Figure 3).[224]

[221] *Ibid.*, fojas 135-36.

[222] AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4016, expediente 61.

[223] *Ibid.*

[224] AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4018, expediente 1, foja 21.

Figure 3: Chamber of Deputies, c. 1910s-20s, following its reconstruction after a fire. Formerly the Teatro de Iturbide

Investor-entrepreneurs seeking to capitalize on the vogue for theater followed models other than the public-private partnership evidenced in the construction of the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide. For instance, pawnbroker and retailer José María Ortega formed an *asociación* (private partnership) with Vicente Alfaro, a respected public figure and well-connected merchant, to construct the Teatro del Pabellón Mexicano on the Calle de Arsinas, six blocks north of the zócalo.[225] The theater opened on December 23, 1849. Situated in what contemporaries described as a narrow house, its stage measured between 22 and 27 meters in length and was covered by a *cielo raso*, a decorative ceiling which gave it a certain luster. Thirty spacious boxes, each with a capacity for 15-16 individuals, lined the sides of the performance hall. Above the boxes was a sizeable gallery, while below them sat rows of graded, bench seating. A theater critic estimated the

[225] AHN, #721, Agustín Vera y Sanchez, vol. 4854, 20 de julio de 1853, fojas 141-43.

theater's capacity at nearly 1,000 spectators. He also commented on the theater's well-constructed wood plank floors and its stage machinery, which he wrote was "not as bad as one might expect on the Calle de Arsinas."[226] Construction of the wooden Teatro de Nuevo México followed a similar model. Manuel Patiño Gallardo hatched the idea. He then partnered with Fernando Batres and Manuel Barreiro to get construction underway.[227] Located two blocks south of the Alameda, the Teatro de Nuevo México opened its doors to the public on May 30, 1841.

The third and most common model for theater construction in this period was the sole proprietorship. José Rebull, owner of a butcher's stall and chandlery, exemplified this model. Rebull secured a 1000-peso loan from landowner and arts patron, Manuel Campero, to build the Teatro de Oriente in 1852, located in a working-class area near San Pablo southeast of the city center.[228] Per the terms of the mens' contract, Rebull would manage the theater for three years, paying off the loan from the theater's revenues. When the contract expired in 1855, Campero, the owner of the land on which the theater sat, would purchase the theater from Rebull for half its value.[229]

The will of storekeeper and theater impresario, Mariano Aduna, permits a much deeper look into the financing of sole proprietor, popular theaters like the Teatro de la

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[226] *El Monitor Repúblicano*, 31 de diciembre de 1849.

[227] Patiño Gallardo petitioned the city to construct the theater in March 1841. He formed an empresa with Batres and Barreiro in April, and the theater opened in May. See AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4016, expediente 36. On the partnership, see AHN, Simon Negreiros (#463), 10 de abril de 1841, Vol. 3144, fojas 16-7.

[228] Campero formed part of the 1839 meeting at the university that helped construct the Gran Teatro Nacional.

[229] AHN, Ramon de la Cueva (#169), 15 de febrero de 1853, Vol. 1017, fojas 176-78.

Unión.[230] Born to a humble family in Mexico City in 1799, Aduna was one of three siblings. Aduna inherited little from his parents and he did not benefit from a dowry in either of his marriages. Rather, he supported his family from his work. Aduna rented a *cajón* (market stall) at the once bustling and luxurious Parían market in the city center where he sold watches to a clientele consisting mainly of middle- and upper-class women.[231] When business went south, he closed the stall and devoted his energies to a new venture—the construction of a theater. Aduna sold off possessions, hocked items at neighborhood pawnshops, paid for goods and services on credit, and borrowed from acquaintances to fund this new business. In his will, Aduna claimed to have spent nearly 4000 pesos on the building. He listed the Teatro de la Unión among his assets alongside a used cedar chest and theater costumes valued at more than 1000 pesos.

Scant newspaper references to Aduna's theater are all that remain, leaving us to surmise much about the building's aesthetics and design. One critic found the theater's interior "indecent" and "uncomfortable," its floors covered by *petates* (rural indigenous mats) instead of *alfombras* (carpets), its paintings askew, and its lighting insufficient. He also complained about the indecipherable allegory on the stage curtain, a standard feature of nineteenth-century playhouses that reflected elite views of drama's moralizing power (at the Teatro Principal, for instance, the curtain included prose suggesting that it was 'duty' of drama was to 'correct mankind' and make of the people a 'friend of virtue' and 'an enemy

[230] AHN, Juan Navarro (#464), 18 de mayo de 1843, Vol. 3171, fojas 46-51.

[231] Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit*, 93. On the Parían market, see also Arrom, "Popular Politics in Mexico City."

of vice.).[232] Constructed of wood, the structure boasted balconies, stage-level seating, and a gallery. That meant it likely had a capacity for a couple of hundred spectators.

Documentation on the financing for other theaters constructed during these decades is not readily available. For instance, we know little about the construction of either the Teatro del Puesto Nuevo (later renamed the Teatro del Progreso), which opened in 1843 or 1844 on the Calle de Puesto Nuevo, or the Teatro de Relox, the long-time refuge of entertainer-showman Soledad Aycardo (considered in more detail in chapter 4) located well north of the city center near the *barrio* of San Sebastián. We likewise know little about the financing of the Teatro de la Esmeralda (later renamed the Teatro de la Fama and the Teatro de Hidalgo), a playhouse located five blocks south of the zócalo that endured from 1855 into the 1910 revolution. In sum, entrepreneurs and investors financed eight new playhouses in the city in the 1840s and 1850s; only Aduna's Teatro de la Unión closed before 1860 (see Table 1).

[232] *El Apuntador*, 30 de noviembre 1841. On the Teatro Principal's stage curtain (then the Colideo Nuevo), see Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness*, 39.

Table 1. Theaters Constructed, 1840-1860

Theater Name	Year Opened	Year Closed	Financiers
Teatro de la Unión	1841	1851	Mariano Aduna
Teatro Nuevo México	1841	1878	Manuel Patiño Gallardo, Fernando Batres, Manuel Barreiro
Teatro del Puesto Nuevo/Teatro del Progreso/Teatro del Oriente	1843/44	1877	José Rebull, Manuel Campero (Teatro de Oriente)
Gran Teatro Nacional	1844	1901	Francisco Arbeu, joint-stock company, Mexico City government
Teatro del Relox	1849	1867?	*unknown*
Teatro del Pabellón Mexicano	1849	1861?	José María Ortega, Vicente Alfaro
Teatro de Iturbide	1856	1872*	Francisco Arbeu, joint-stock company, Mexico City government
Teatro de la Esmeralda/Teatro de la Fama/Teatro Hidalgo	1856	1910s	José María Martínez, Valente Martínez (Teatro de la Esmeralda)

* - converted into the Chamber of Deputies
? – indicates year of last extant reference I located

From the vantage of the twenty-first century megalopolis, these eight playhouses appear to be clustered in the city's historic center (see Figure 4). But until 1854, the city's spatial footprint remained the same as it had been since the colonial period.[233] Moreover, its population core was dense. Seventeen percent of city residents lived within a 500-yard

[233] Jimenez Muñoz, *La traza del poder*, chapter one. A February 6, 1854 decree expanded the city limits for the first time since the early colonial era.

radius of the zócalo, and 83 percent (perhaps 125,000-145,000 people) lived within a 1000-yard radius.[234] Some city residents thus considered playhouses like the Teatro de Oriente distant. For example, when René Masson's Italian opera company performed at the Teatro de Oriente in 1854, the theater's director offered ticketholders rides via horse-drawn trolleys (*omnibus)* that would depart from and return to the Portal de Mercadores, right off the zócalo.[235]

[234] Shaw, "Poverty and Politics," 47-8.

[235] *El Siglo XIX*, 11 de abril de 1854.

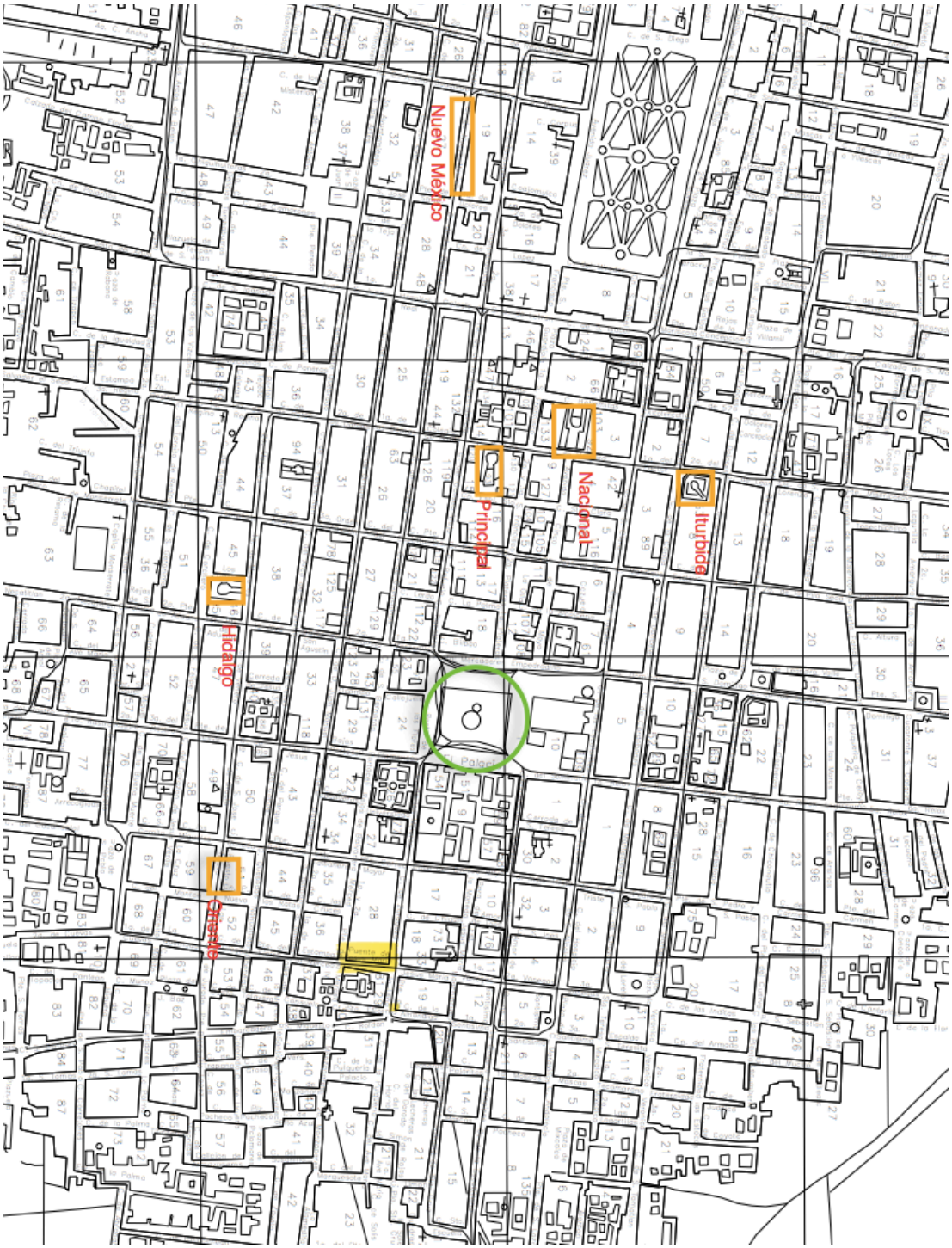

Figure 4. Spatial distribution of theaters in Mexico City, c. 1860

Theaters' locations mapped on to ideas about playhouse hierarchy and perceptions of the city's spatial segregation. City authorities classified playhouses into first-, second-,

and third-class establishments roughly corresponding to their location and clientele. First-class theaters like the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Iturbide tended to be the most exclusive; they charged the highest prices, attracted the city's wealthiest residents, and hosted the best touring companies and celebrity artists. They were also the most centrally located, in the heart of the city's upscale commercial district. Many urban dwellers did not attend performances at the Gran Teatro Nacional because they could not afford to pay the 3 to 5 *reales* the theater charged for a single gallery seat, the equivalent of 1-2 days' worth of an unskilled urban laborers' daily wages.[236] Distinctions between second- and third-class establishments were more difficult to parse. They often had more to do more with authorities' perceptions of a theater's clientele and the respectability of its offerings than with tangible markers such as ticket prices.

Though they used different language, contemporary observers noted differences between theaters and their patrons. A commentator writing for *El Monitor Republicano* identified the Pabellón Mexicano and the Progreso as popular theaters ("*a los que concurre el pueblo bajo"*), reflecting their location in working-class neighborhoods, the local actors who performed there, and their lower ticket prices.[237] City chronicler Angel de Campos would later describe the San Sebastián barrio where the Progreso was located (near the

[236] Ticket prices at the Gran Teatro Nacional between 1840 and 1860 ranged from 8-16 pesos for balconies (capable of seating 8-10 theatergoers each), 1-2 pesos for floor-level seats, and 3-5 reales for the gallery. See Anexo 2, Hammeken, "La república de la música," 200-2. On wage equivalencies, see Amílcar E. Challú and Aurora Gómez-Galvarrieto, "Mexico's Real Wages in the Age of the Great Divergence, 1730-1930," *Revista de Historia Económica/Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* 33, no. 1 (2015): 97. Challú and Gómez-Galvarrieto estimate average nominal wages in Mexico in the nineteenth century at 3.25 reales per day.

[237] *El Monitor Republicano*, 26 de junio de 1851.

Teatro de Oriente on the map in figure 2.4) as a place full of *pulque* taverns that did a brisk afternoon business with with sweaty policemen and local deadbeats; he added that shoemakers, carpenters and *cargadores* (muleteers) gathered at the main grocery store after work to smoke cigarettes and get drunk while women purchased rations of coffee, beans, and eggs on credit.[238] Ticket prices at the Pabellón Mexicano, which charged just 1 real for a gallery seat (roughly 1/3 of a laborers' daily wage), put theatergoing within reach of a significant number of the city's middle and lower-middle sectors, if not its most destitute.[239]

Actual distinctions between playhouses were probably muddier than contemporary observers might lead us to believe. Mid-century census data reveals that the city center, or the *traza*—the 13-block area of the city designated for Spanish habitation during the colonial period—was more socioeconomically diverse than many contemporaries believed.[240] Playhouses and also boasted crossover appeal, especially among elites. In his memoir, Guillermo Prieto reminisced about attending a patriotic puppet show at the popular, wooden Teatro del Puente Quebrado (what he termed a "teatrito").[241] Set at the fortress in San Juan de Ulúa (Veracruz) during the Pastry War (1838-39), the play featured "el negrito," a dark-skinned soldier who personified Mexico. In the play, "el negrito"

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[238] Descriptions from Johns, *The City of Mexico*, 36. Original observations from Ángel de Campos's novel, *La rumba*, published serially in the newspaper *El Nacional* in the 1890s.

[239] *El Monitor Repúblicano* 23 de diciembre de 1849. On opening night at the Pabellón Mexicano, seats in primary boxes sold for 4 *reales* and seats in secondary boxes sold for 2 *reales*.

[240] Shaw, "Poverty and Politics," 47-8. The upper-class made up 37 percent of the toal habitants of the traza, artisans 33 percent, and unskilled laborers 22 percent.

[241] Guillermo Prieto, *Memorias de mis tiempos, 1828-1840* (Mexico City: Librería de la Vda de C. Bouret, 1906), 279-80.

marches to the top of the fortress when defeat against the French forces (represented as monkeys) seems inevitable. He invokes the Virgen de Guadalupe, who descends from the sky. The Virgen forces the French to flee, thus rendering Mexico victorious. While puppet theater audiences in particular comprised all social and ethnic groups, observers noted "mixed audiences" at other popular theaters that offered more standard theatrical fare.[242]

Why Invest in Theaters?

The investor-entrepreneurs who built playhouses sought to capitalize on theater's popularity, but the business was full of risks. Frequent downpours, tremors and earthquakes, and heavy use enacted a toll on the city's theaters. The question of who was financially responsible for repairs created disputes between proprietors, renters, and city officials. José Joaquín de Rozas, owner of the Gran Teatro Nacional, found himself in this type of predicament between 1851 and 1852, when city architects conducting an inspection of that playhouse found deficiencies including cracked walls and arches, twisted support beams, and a leaky roof. Rozas added to the list of needed repairs treacherous passageways and stairwells, ceiling stains, and unusable toilets. Though he agreed to pay for the structural repairs, he balked at fixing the theater's other defects, claiming that its renter, Miguel Mosso, was contractually obligated to make the "small repairs"—the leaky roof, the ceiling stains, and general maintenance required to make the bathrooms functional and the passageways and stairwells navegable. Mosso, in turn, placed the blame on the two men from whom he sublet the theater, Juan Manuel Lasquetti and Vicente Pozo, who had

[242] On puppet theater, see William H. Beezley, *Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2010), 6. On mixed audiences, see the review of a performance at the Teatro de la Unión in *El museo teatral*, no. 3, 165-6.

left it in a sorry state. Lasquetti and Pozo also tried to shirk responsibility, claiming that they, too, had received the building in poor condition. The dispute continued for nearly a year after the municipal commission that oversaw public entertainments rendered its judgment. Anxious to reopen the theater for the new season in 1852, Rozas reluctantly shouldered the financial burden.[243]

Material deterioration affected all theaters, not just the Nacional. Architects commissioned by the city found serious structural deficiencies at the Teatro de Nuevo México in July 1843, just two years after its construction. In 1854, the city government required a new inspection of the Nuevo México, fearing it in a state of ruin. In 1861, public works administrator Francisco P. Vera declared the theater closed indefinitely until significant structural renovations were made to correct cracked support beams, sagging balconies, and a wall that had caved in. Reported structural deficiencies forced temporary closures of the Teatro de Relox and the Teatro de la Esmeralda as well, the latter just one year after its inauguration.[244] Occasionally, city officials determined theaters were simply not worth saving. For instance, they ordered Mariano Aduna's Teatro de la Unión demolished in 1851.[245]

Besides costly repairs and maintenance, the threat of fire worried theater proprietors. Beliefs about theaters as fire hazards circulated publicly as early as the 1820s during the construction of the Teatro de los Gallos. A concerned citizen writing under the

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[243] The lengthy back and forth can be found in AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4016, expediente 52, 1851, fojas 1-31.

[244] For the Relox see AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4016, expediente 55, 1853. For the Esmeralda, AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4016, expediente 62, 1856. The Esmeralda was renamed twice, the Teatro de la Fama and the Teatro de Hidalgo.

[245] *El Monitor Repúblicano*, 2 de agosto de 1851.

pseudonym *El Precavido* (The Sage) warned in *El Aguila Mejicana* that the theater's shoddy construction and its lack of doors could spell disaster for spectators in the event of a fire or other hazard.[246] Despite the existence of a comprehensive set of fire laws that aimed to regulate construction materials and designs, lax enforcement resulted in large numbers of buildings in clear violation of existing ordinances.[247] Theaters were particularly concerning because they concentrated combustible substances (oil and gas lamps, for example) and highly flammable materials like wood and cloth in small spaces. Compounding this threat were cigarettes, which could be enjoyed inside the theater until regulations banned them in 1855. Municipal regulators tried to counteract the threat of fire by mandating that all theaters install water pumps by 1846, but their inability to enforce this decree meant that in most theaters the pumps rarely functioned.[248] Proprietors were also well aware that fires, once started, were nearly impossible to contain. Prior to the 1860s, fire fighting was a neighborhood responsibility. First responders went directly to the parish church to ring the bell, which signaled neighborhood residents to come running to help extinguish the flames. This process took precious time and generally resulted in extensive fire damage. Because insurance agents and companies did not begin selling fire insurance until the mid-1860s, losses resulting from fires were total.[249] Fires had destroyed

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[246] *El Aguila Mejicana*, 3 de agosto de 1825. Newspaper clipping found in AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4016, expediente 17, 1825.

[247] For more on fire in Mexico City see Anna Rose Alexander, *City on Fire: Technology, Social Change, and the Hazards of Progress in Mexico City, 1860-1910* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

[248] For the 1845 *reglamento de teatros* see AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4016, expediente 53, 1851.

[249] Alexander, *City on Fire*, 116.

Mexico's first theater in the eighteenth century, and a significant number of playhouse fires beginning in the 1870s confirmed many proprietors' worst fears.[250]

Outbreaks of violence posed yet another challenge to investor-entrepreneurs. Theatergoing—and theatrical production more generally—diminished considerably when U.S troops occupied the capital from September 1847 until May 1848. Only the Gran Teatro Nacional kept its regular production schedule. During that nine-month period, American soldiers attended performances staged by an English acting company. The Spanish Dramatic Company headlined by María Cañete and Juan de Mata also performed to audiences consisting primarily of Americans and Spaniards, with just a handful of Mexican men. A group of struggling Mexican actors formed a company at the Teatro Principal, but they were only able to offer intermittent performances.[251]

Given the risks, why finance and build theaters? An analysis of the scope and scale of investors' projects, I argue, reveals multiple if overlapping reasons for making such investments. Being a successful theater impresario was not simply about profits. Supporting the arts also brought prestige and status, something the capitalists, merchants, and city authorities who funded the construction of monumental buildings like the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide understood and sought. Arts patronage helped proprietors and investors of smaller wooden theaters improve their standing as well, though generally at the local, neighborhood level.

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[250] I have not found any references to theater fires during the 1840-1860 period. Alexander identifies the 1860s as a turning point in fire regimes in Mexico City, as industrial and urban expansion created conditions ripe for fires.

[251] Mañon, *Historia del teatro principal*, 97.

Aduna sacrificed considerably to bring his investment to fruition. He sold books and pawned items—including a strand of pearls, a set of crystal dishes, tunics, and scarves—that belonged to Espiridion Castillo, a minor who had come under Aduan's custodial care. He spent money that others had entrusted him for safekeeping, including 200 *pesos fuertes* (silver coins) from an individual who had shown up at his watchmaking stall at the Parián market. He borrowed an additional 800 pesos from Manuel Arias Camacho, owner of the lot where the Teatro de la Unión was constructed. In total, he leveraged 2400 pesos to construct the Teatro de la Unión. Its operations had only increased his debts. He owed Camacho back rents, printer Luis Abadiano for posters and invitations, and several artisans for repairs and other work done on the theater.[252]

In the absence of account books, the profitability of Aduna's theater remains unclear. However, theater reviews suggest that the Teatro de la Unión was both popular and well attended. Aduna advertised its shows widely. In November 1841, a theater critic for *El Apuntador* noted that posters advertising a production of *Quiero ser cómico* (I Want to be an Actor) at the Teatro de la Unión were visible on many street corners. He also claimed to have seen an immense poster for the production located near the heavily-trafficked shops at the Portal de Mercaderes.[253] Critics attended shows and wrote about their experiences. While some found spectators' decorum lacking—one advised that parents not take their children due to audience members' "full and free exercise of their rights"—others, including Guillermo Prieto, enjoyed the raucous, near-capacity crowds.[254]

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[252] AHN, Juan Navarro (#464), 18 de mayo de 1843, Vol. 3171, fojas 46-51.

[253] *El Apuntador*, 30 de noviembre de 1841.

[254] *Ibid.*

One critic opined that actors' "candor, humility, and desire to please the mixed public" set that stage apart from the city's other theaters.[255]

Its profitability aside, Aduna likely benefitted from a certain amount of local celebrity among neighbors and associates based on his theater's reputation and popularity. By constructing and managing the Teatro de la Unión, Aduna hoped to present himself as someone of status and refinement. On a more practical level, his ability to purchase and maintain a large wardrobe afforded him greater opportunities for financial security, perhaps even a means to show off as someone of standing. In the nineteenth century, a household's material goods acted as a savings account. Pawning these items allowed individuals to secure short-term cash loans that they could use to purchase basic necessities goods, or to maintain affluent lifestyles by purchasing luxury items and experiences through which they could perform an aspired status.[256] As he noted in his will, Aduna hocked several hundred pesos' worth of the theater's costumes.[257] Such practices gave Aduna and his family a steady source of cash-based discretionary income. While we do not know how Aduna used this income, the debts itemized in his will suggest he did not use it to repay his creditors.

Pawnbroker, retailer, and proprietor of the Teatro del Pabellón Mexicano, José María Ortega, provides a second example of the ways investors used theaters for social or economic advancement. Less than a year after inaugurating the theater, Orega's business partner, Vicente Alfaro, initiated legal proceedings against him. Alfaro had contributed

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[255] *El museo teatral*, 1842, no 3.

[256] Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit*, 92.

[257] AHN, Juan Navarro (#464), 18 de mayo de 1843, Vol. 3171, fojas 46-51.

well more than half of the capital to get the venture off the ground (he had originally agreed on the condition that all costs would be split evenly), but the men were unable to reconcile how to fairly divide revenues. An 1850 mediation attempt failed when they were unable to find a buyer for the Pabellón Mexicano, so the men continued the partnership begrudgingly by renting the theater. In 1853, they reached a breakthrough. Alfaro paid Ortega 180 pesos to take over full control of the theater, thus dissolving the partnership.[258] Since 1851, however, both men had received monthly payments of 40 pesos from the theater's renter.[259] While it is impossible to know with certainty, chances are Ortega invested the 180 pesos, and the 40 pesos he received monthly in rents, in the retail business he ran on the Primera Calle de Rastro and his pawnshop on the Quinta Calle de Relox, just two blocks from the Pabellon Mexicano.[260]

The Ortega-Alfaro partnership also illuminates the prestige that many investors hoped they would gain from owning a theater. Ortega reaped the benefits of partnering with a man of standing. Alfaro served multiple times as a primary elector (for federal elections), and as treasurer of the city's patriotic committee. Alfaro collected money from other storekeepers to help cover costs associated with yearly patriotic festivals.[261] An established merchant who ran a successful store in the heart of the city's bustling

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[258] AHN, Agustin Vera y Sanchez (#721), 20 de julio de 1853, Vol. 4854, fojas 141-43.

[259] AHN, Luis Rodriguez y Palacio (#613), 16 de abril de 1851, Vol. 4139, fojas 27-32.

[260] See Appendix 2, Table K in Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit*, 305.

[261] For more on electors, citizenship, and status, see Marcello Carmagnani and Alicia Hernández Chavez, "La ciudadanía orgánica mexicana, 1850-1910," in *Ciudadanía política y formación de las naciones: Perspectivas históricas de América Latina*, ed. Hilda Sábato (Mexico City: El Colegio de México / Fonda de Cultura Económica, 1999), 371-404.

commercial district, Alfaro's reputation lent credibility to the theatrical enterprise. Ortega likely sought to benefit from Alfaro's deep entwinement in webs of civic and commercial life, even if the acrimonious dispute between the two men later derailed Ortega's aims. Alfaro, by contrast, saw in arts patronage a means to enhance his status in the city. Running a theater was fashionable, but it was also important. For elites who believed in theater's educational and moralizing power, its support signaled the fulfillment of civic duty and a commitment to society's advancement. The Pabellón Mexicano's generally positive reputation as a space dedicated to the working classes where morality reigned certainly did not damage the mens' reputations.[262]

The motivations of elites who supported the construction of grand performance halls like the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide were to some degree similar to those who supported smaller playhouses. Elite shareholders of joint-stock theater companies understood it as their duty to support the arts, just as ruling groups of other powerful, prosperous nations did. For non-elite shareholders, arts patronage offered opportunities to demonstrate cultural accomplishment and exert civic leadership.[263] Still others may have used their participation in these projects as part of broader efforts to insert themselves among a new generation of ruling elites that emerged during the post-independence period. Francisco Arbeu doubtless sought to carve out a legacy for himself

[262] Censorship, it appears, played a part in its earning such a reputation. Luis Reyes de la Maza claims that the play *Doña Jimena de Ordoñez* was prohibited from showing at the Pabellón Mexicano because in one scene a gentleman kills a nun in front of an altar as retribution for the nun preventing him from marrying the woman he loved. It is not clear whether Ortega or Alfaro were involved in its censorship. Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México en la época de Santa Anna* 2:7. On another generally positive review of the Pabellón Mexicano, see *El Monitor Republicano*, 26 de Julio de 1851.

[263] For a similar process in eighteenth-century France, see Clay, *Stagestruck*, 37.

through contributing vast quantities of his personal fortune. City authorities meanwhile gained esteem by allocating funds for such projects, even if they were not financially lucrative.

The imposing architecture and symbolism of buildings such as the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide, however, made these groups' support for the performing arts stand out. Francisco Arbeu, the principal promoter and financier of the Gran Teatro Nacional, sought to construct a building that could express the cultural advancement of Mexican society to Mexicans and foreign visitors alike. Possessing such a theater, Arbeu thought, would help put Mexican society—and its capital city—on par with the most advanced societies in Europe.[264] Prior to the Gran Teatro Nacional's construction, the city's oldest and best playhouse was the Teatro Principal, the entrance of which one commentator described as looking more like a coach house than a building that should model good taste.[265]

Grand theaters transformed and beautified the urban landscape. City authorities greeted such projects warmly, especially Arbeu's proposal to construct the Teatro de Iturbide on the site of the Baratillo, or the Thieves Market, at the Plaza del Factor. Dominated by small merchants who sold second-hand clothing and fenced stolen merchandise, the Baratillo had long been a point of contention for elites. Writing in 1841, one observer called it a "feo lunar," or an ugly blemish.[266] The following year, city resident

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[264] Javier Rodríguez Piña, "'Con mano protectora de la civilización': Los dificiles primeros años del gran teatro nacional de méxico, 1842-1850," in *Los papeles de Euterpe*, 293.

[265] Mañon, *Historia del teatro principal*, 83.

[266] *El Apuntador*, junio 1841, 34-6.

José Sánchez wrote to the city council, urging the body to move the "filthy Baratillo" to a more distant locale. In his view, the crude wooden structure that housed the market (erected in 1793) had no place in an increasingly sophisticated city.[267] While the city had relocated some Baratillo vendors in the mid-1840s, used furniture salesmen continued to sell until the city sold the land to make way for Arbeu's theater in 1850. More generally, elites believed that beauty and order signaled advancement. Channeling ideas from the eighteenth-century French discourse of *embellissement*—which saw improvements to urban infrastructure (including grand municipal theaters) as contributing not only to the beautification of cities but also promoting public health, the maintenance of order, and encouraged commerce—city authorities tore down old, dilapidated buildings like the Baratillo and Parían markets while championing the construction of modern new markets and monumental theaters.[268] Wrote one supporter of the Parián's destruction in 1843, "a nation that presents in its cities an emerald cleanliness makes it known that it has left the barbarous state of ignorant nations."[269]

The Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide became prominent cultural markers and institutions in the city. Posters advertising performances at both theaters did not offer a street address because city residents knew exactly where to find them. They served as sites for civic orations and national celebrations. Both theaters, but especially the Gran Teatro Nacional, hosted some of the world's most renowned artists and performers. These theaters also helped establish the city's place among modern, cosmopolitan cities the

[267] Konove, "Black Market City," 176.

[268] Clay, *Stagestruck*, 22.

[269] Translation from Konove, "Black Market City," 200. Original quote from *El Siglo XIX*, 4 de Julio de 1843.

world over, but especially those in Europe where cultural elites focused their gaze. For some arts patrons, like Francisco Arbeu, the cultural cachet they sought—and perhaps achieved—came at great cost. Construction of the Teatro de Iturbide wrecked Arbeu's personal finances. He died in 1870 in a small room he rented in the Teatro de Iturbide; half a decade later, theater impresarios named a new theater in his honor, the Teatro Arbeu.

Theater and the Local Economy

The city's burgeoning theatrical culture provided a boon to the city's economy, in a period that most scholars have identified as stagnant.[270] Playhouses directly employed hundreds of city residents as actors, musicians, stagehands, wardrobists, tailors, ushers, and other auxiliary personnel. More indirectly, they generated business for a number of related industries. Demand for posters, playbills, librettos, and invitations provided important revenue streams for city printers. Growing interest in the production and consumption of dramatic texts brought more residents into city bookstores, which sold plays and sheet music. Theaters also served as magnets of nightlife for the areas surrounding them. Increased foot traffic on nights of performances sparked additional business for nearby cafés. This section examines theaters' deep entwinement in the local economy. In so doing, it paints a clearer picture of theater's impact on the livelihoods of city residents.

Musicians counted among the largest groups of theatrical employees. At popular and first-class theaters alike, instrumentalists were integral to performances. Playhouse managers hired them to perform operatic overtures and provide musical accompaniment to the featured drama and the dance ensemble or *juguete cómico* (one-act farse) that concluded the day's entertainment. In most cases, musicians drew from the ranks of local

[270] Pérez Toledo, *Trabajadores, espacio urbano y sociabilidad*, 69.

residents, some of who had probably trained at one of city's music academies or societies.[271] Many held jobs as professors of music or gave private lessons to children of the elite to supplement what they earned from playing in the theater. Ledgers from the Teatro Principal in the 1830s reveal that the city's then-premiere performing arts hall staffed a permanent orchestra of twenty-three and a choir of twenty; both groups received a wage of between six and eight pesos per week, similar to the weekly wages earned by skilled artisans.[272]

While less complete, evidence from the 1840-1860 period suggests that a significant number of musicians found primary or supplemental work in city playhouses. For instance, in 1841-42, famed Irish violinist and composer, William Vincent Wallace, directed an orchestra of 52 musicians at the newly remodeled Teatro de la Opera (formerly the Teatro de los Gallos).[273] That orchestra played for Anaide Castellan de Giampietro's Italian opera company and included individuals like violinist, José María Miranda, who had performed in city theaters since the early 1820s.[274] The stage manager at the Gran Teatro

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[271] Joaquín Beristaín and Agustín Caballero founded one academy in 1838, which focused on opera. The short-lived Great Philharmonic Society was founded in 1839, which taught both singing and instrumental performance. The *Junta del Fomento del Artesano* also established a music society. See Daniel Mendoza de Arce, *Music in Ibero-America to 1850: A Historical Survey* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 403.

[272] *Ibid.*, 456. On wages of musicians, see AGN, Gobernación, legajo 122, caja 194, expediente 6, 1832. Wage comparisons come from the 1849 industrial census, cited in Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit*, 88-90.

[273] Mendoza de Arce, *Music in Ibero-America*, 457.

[274] Miranda's name appears in a program announcing an 1841 production of Donizetti's *Lucía de Lamermoor* at the Teatro de la Ópera, in which he served as the second chair violinist. See appendix in Suárez de la Torre, "Los libretos," 131-2. For his earlier employment in the orchestra at the Teatro Principal, see AGN, Sección Civil Volumenes, vol. 2020, expediente 3, 1824.

Nacional in 1854 hired a 40-person orchestra and a 40-person choir to accompany operas performed by an Italian opera company led by renowned German diva, Henriette Sontag.[275] Wage data is spotty, though it suggests wage trends similar to the 1830s, with musicians earning 1-2 pesos per performance. The stage manager at the Teatro Nacional paid his instrumentalists 60 pesos to perform a benefit concert held in 1848.[276] Musicians' payouts for a second benefit performance held at the Gran Teatro Nacional years later netted the orchestra 30 pesos.[277]

A large number of Mexican actors also found work in playhouses. Though the city lacked a permanent conservatory for professional training until the 1870s, aspiring Mexican artists improvised to fashion careers onstage.[278] Some got their start performing in seasonal religious street theater. Others cut their teeth on popular neighborhood theater stages, where managers could not afford to hire foreign touring actors and companies. Still others caught a break landing temporary roles on the city's first-class stages when touring

[275] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica*, t. 1, 572.

[276] *El Siglo XIX*, 10 de octubre de 1848.

[277] This benefit performance was held on September 10,1867 to raise money for the upcoming independence day celebration. Musicians' earnings for a benefit performance held on October 20, 1854 hosted by the Mosso brothers seem abnormally high; the choir earned 100 pesos, the orchestra 187 pesos, and a lone violinist 40 pesos. See *El Siglo XIX*, 5 de noviembre de 1854.

[278] Reference here to the conservatory run by the Philharmonic Society in the early 1870s. Previous efforts had been short-lived. Spanish actor Bernardo de Avecilla founded one such school in 1831, which quickly dissolved. There are references to other actor training centers and schools formed in 1847 (on the Calle de Betlemitas), 1853, and 1865, but no one of these stuck. See Vásquez Mélendez, *México personificado*, 146-57.

performers fell ill.[279] The trajectory of beloved Mexican actor, Merced Morales, provides an illustrative example of the ways Mexican actors forged professional careers. Morales first plied his trade at the popular Teatro de la Unión.[280] He honed his craft as an apprentice with touring companies, featuring in secondary roles in those companies' tours to cities such as Puebla, Veracruz, Querétaro, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Guadalajara.[281] Upon his return to Mexico City, Morales's career took off; he moved on from secondary roles at places like the Teatro Principal in the mid-1840s to leading roles (and companies) at the Teatro de Iturbide and Gran Teatro Nacional in the 1850s and 1860s.

The size of dramatic companies at the city's playhouses varied widely, which makes quantifying the total number of actors employed by theaters at any particular time difficult. As a general rule, first-class theaters housed casts of twenty-five to thirty or more.[282] Companies at smaller theaters like the Pabellon Mexicano and the Nuevo México tended to be a bit smaller, numbering between about fifteen and twenty.[283] Extrapolating from these numbers, in 1856, the city's eight operational playhouses may have employed between 150 and 190 actors. The absence of ledgers prevents us from knowing actors'

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[279] This was how noted Mexican actor Antonio Castro got his start at the Teatro Principal in Mexico City in 1838. See *El Panorama*, 1856, Fondo Reservado de la Hemeroteca Nacional, Folletería Miscellánea.

[280] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México en la época de Santa Anna* 1:17-19.

[281] Vásquez Meléndez, *México personificado*, chapter two.

[282] *Ibid.*,100-1. See cuadros 4 and 5 for company lists at the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide for the 1856 season.

[283] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica* 1:491. Olavarría y Ferrari claims there were 21 actors in the company at the Pabellon Mexicano when it opened in December 1849. For the cast in 1858 at the Nuevo México, see Vásquez Mélendez, *México personificado*, 108, cuadro 8.

salaries for this period. However, in previous decades, account books show that leading men and ladies (usually non-Mexican) earned celebrity salaries far above those earned by the city's highest paid administrators.[284] Secondary perfomers, roles that Mexican actors and actresses were more likely to fill, earned between fifteen and sixty pesos per week, putting their earning power well above most city residents.[285]

In addition to actors and musicians, staging productions required a host of auxiliary personnel. In 1833, for example, the staff at the Teatro Principal numbered approximately thirty-four, including 6 stagehands, 7 ushers, 7 cobradores (those who collected money for tickets), 2 doormen, 2 seat repairmen, a *maestre de sala* (head of all production personnel), a wardrobist, a tailor, a carpenter, a lighting technician, a billsticker, a scribe, a street sweeper, an archivist, and a prompter.[286] The wages they earned varied widely. Ushers, billstickers, and street sweepers made the least, earning wages of 1.25 pesos per week or less. Stagehands made more, around 5.25 pesos, but less than the *maestre de sala*, wardrobists, and tailors, who earned between 6 and 8 pesos a week.[287] The earnings of of ushers, billstickers, and street sweepers were thus comparable to working-class laborers,

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[284] During the 1832-33 season, leading Spanish actors Bernardo Avecilla and Diego María Garay who headed the dramatic company at the teatro Principal earned about 90 pesos per week. Bureaucrats who administered federal fiscal departments earned a similar amount. AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expedientes 1, 2, 6, 10, and 12. For bureaucrats salaries, see Arnold, *Bureaucracy and Bureaucrats,* chapter six and appendix.

[285] AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expedientes 1, 2, 6, 10, and 12.

[286] AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 138, expedientes 2, 5, and 6. See also AGN, Sección Justicia, vol. 66, legajo 24, 1830-35.

[287] AGN, Gobernación, legajo 122, caja 194, expediente 6, 1832.

seamstresses and washerwomen, while those of stagehands, wardrobists, and tailors were roughly equivalent to wages earned by skilled artisans.[288]

Playhouse employment provided important revenue streams for city residents like Tiburcio Godoy and Gavino Medina. Godoy worked his way up from *bambalinero* (stagehands who worked curtains) at the *Teatro Principal* in 1832 to *maestre de sala* at the Teatro de la Ópera in 1841, a post in which he oversaw the theater's stagehands, lighting technicians, ushers, tailors, wardrobists, and other production personnel.[289] Hair stylist and make up artist, Gavino Medina, who sold imported French wigs and cork hair curlers to customers at his salon in the heart of the city in the 1820s, also took advantage of the growing theater business. Documents show that Medina worked as the *peluquero* for Anaide Castellan de Giampietro's visiting Italian opera company during the 1841-42 season. A little more than a decade later, in October 1854, Medina earned five pesos working as a stylist and make up artist for a benefit performance at the Gran Teatro Nacional.[290] Medina also had a longstanding interest in theater; in 1828, he offered for sale a collection of 380 comedies, tragedies, and one-act pieces—old, modern, and new.[291] Given his vast experience and interest, Medina likely worked for touring dramatic and opera companies more regularly during this period.

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[288] Wage comparison from the 1849 industrial census. See Francois, *Culture of Everyday* Credit, 88-90.

[289] Suárez de la Torre, "Los libretos," 131-2. See also AGN, Gobernación, caja 194, legajo 122, expediente 1, 1832-33.

[290] *El Siglo XIX*, 5 de noviembre de 1854.

[291] *El Sol*, 13 de marzo de 1828.

Demand for maquinistas, stagehands, scene painters, and extras grew as audiences clamored for "espectáculos/dramas de grande aparato" in the 1840s and grand opera in the 1850s— shows that featured complicated stage machinery, exceptionally large casts, and sundry stage effects. Managers invested heavily in these productions. In 1858, F. Loran, stage manager at the Teatro de la Fama (later the Teatro Hidalgo), boasted to have spent more than 2000 pesos to stage a production of the magical comedy, *El triunfo del amor o La estrella de oro* (Love's Triumph, or The Golden Star). He commissioned the creation of 125 new costumes and seven newly painted backdrops (*decoraciones*) for this production that was six months'-in-the-making.[292] The execution of such plays, however, required more stagehands and machinists. Skilled carpenters and craftsmen like Antonio Franco and his brother, José María, composed this latter group. The owner of a furniture shop adjacent to the Teatro de Nuevo México that sold hand-crafted, silk-upholstered mahogany furniture sets and wardrobes, Antonio and his brother carved out reputations as skilled machinists. As such, their services were in high demand, especially among visiting opera companies and managers who planned to produce shows requiring significant stage effects.[293] The Franco brothers, in turn, employed workers to help them create complicated stage machinery and props, and to operate the machinery during performances. During an 1854 production of Rossini's *El nuevo Moisés* (The New Moses), critics praised Antonio and his crew of stagehands for the design and execution of stage effects that included the appearance of a rainbow, a rain of fire, a lightning bolt, and the parting of the Red Sea; the

[292] Vanderbilt University, Special Collections, Theater Poster, 31 de octubre de 1858.

[293] For Antonio's shop, see *El Siglo XIX*, 29 de septiembre de 1854. On their reputations, see *El Siglo XIX*, 15 de mayo de 1863.

rain of fire was so spectacular the critic suggested that every performance in the city end with that trick.[294]

The economic impact of theater extended far beyond the playhouse. The vogue for theater reached deeply into local business networks, though none benefitted more than the city printers. The arrival of touring Italian opera companies in the 1830s increased demand for invitations, playbills, posters, and librettos. Ledgers from the Teatro Principal in 1833 show that stage managers spent on average 425 pesos per week for print runs of between 200 and 800 invitations and playbills and 30 posters.[295] Demand for opera librettos, offered for sale to operagoers at the theater's box office for 4 reales, further bolstered business. As nineteenth-century print scholar Laura Súarez has noted, libretto and poster contracts negotiated between stage managers and printers offered the latter a steady source of income and constant work in a stagnant economy.[296] By the 1840s and 1850s, the market for posters, playbills, playscripts, librettos, sheet music, and journals dedicated to the performing arts expanded in line with the growth of theatrical entertainments. Mariano Aduna ordered at least 100 pesos' worth of invitations and posters for the Teatro de la Unión between 1841 and 1843.[297] The following decade, the Gran Teatro Nacional's manager spent more than 1000 pesos on posters and playbills in just three and a half

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[294] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la época de Santa Anna* 2:200-1.

[295] Figures from a theater audit in AGN, Gobernación, caja 214, legajo 138, expediente 4.

[296] Suárez de la Torre, "Los libretos," 108.

[297] AHN, Juan Navarro (#464), 18 de mayo de 1843, Vol. 3171, fojas 46-51.

months; per performance, he placed orders for 1200 to 1900 playbills and 30 posters.[298] Printers took the initiative as well. They printed and sold playscripts that circulated widely throughout the republic, especially after 1850. The repertoire of Carlos Villalongín's traveling dramatic troupe in northern Mexico included plays from the printing businesses of Vicente García Torres, Vicente Segura, and Rivera y Murguia.[299] Printers also capitalized on music made popular onstage. Their businesses counted among the forty places where sheet music was produced or sold in the city between 1840 and 1860.[300]

Theater's popularity benefitted proprietors of city bookstores, too. Booksellers imported printed and bound dramas, which they offered for sale to city residents. Don Ignacio Julián's bookstore at the Portal de Agustinos sold "at affordable prices" newly debuted works from popular Spanish dramatists like Manuel Bretón de los Herreros.[301] The bookstore located at the Calle de la Joya no. 3 offered an even greater variety. For 6 pesos, residents could purchase a 20-volume set of plays by Golden Age dramatist Tirso de Molina, collected and bound in Madrid. The bookstore sold bound volumes of 3-5 of the newest plays from the modern Spanish repertoire for one peso apiece. It also sold individual Spanish comedies as *piezas sueltas* for 2 reales apiece.[302] Bookstores also sold

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[298] AGN, Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Distrito Federal (henceforth TSJDF) (1822-1899), caja 306, unnumbered expediente.

[299] BLC, Box P, Folders 26 and 87. Carlos Villalongín Dramatic Company Records, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

[300] Luisa del Rosario Aguilar Ruiz, "Jesús Rivera y Fierro," 63.

[301] *La Hesperia*, 7 de noviembre de 1840.

[302] *El Siglo XIX*, 7 de septiembre de 1843.

popular almanacs (*calendarios*) inspired by stage characters and scenes. For instance, Simón Blanquel's bookstore offered customers two new *calendarios* in 1858, "El Tío Caniyitas" and "Don Junípero Mastranzos."[303] The first contained the text and musical score to José Saenz Pérez's popular zarzuela of the same name; the title of the second referenced the protagonist of Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch's popular magical comedy, *Los polvos de la Madre Celestina*, and it offered readers a reproduction of a popular scene from the play.

In addition to drumming up business for printers and booksellers, theaters' operations contributed to the city's nightlife and growing leisure culture. Guillermo Prieto remembered the Café Veroly (later renamed the Café del Progreso) as an important space of sociability where politicians, men of letters, merchants, lawyers, actresses, and young dandies met to socialize, play chess, and talk politics over *chocolate*, *molletes*, and *tostadas*.[304] Situated near both the Teatro Principal and the Gran Teatro Nacional, he claimed the café brought more people into the theater and served as a refuge for touring actors.[305] The café was also home to frequent gatherings of men like Fernando Calderón, Ignacio Rodríguez Galván, and Ignacio Ramírez, whose theatrical productions and journalism left a lasting impression on the era.

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[303] *Diario de Avisos*, 18 de agosto de 1857, p. 3. For more on these almanacs, see Edward Wright-Rios, *Searching for Madre Matiana: Prophecy and Popular Culture in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2014), 87-124.

[304] Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, *Los cafés en México en el siglo XIX* (Mexico City, UNAM, 2000), 26.

[305] *Ibid.*, 31.

Theatrical Production and Urban Life

Theater's fashionability and its multivalent meanings in mid-century Mexico City inspired unprecedented levels of theatergoing. The appearance of new playhouses represented one of the most obvious markers of theater's growing popularity. But, contemporary observers also noted this trend. In an 1851 article, a commentator for *El Monitor Republicano* wrote, "We note with pleasure that every day our people's fondness for theater grows." Believing that "theater [was] a practical school of education and morals," he praised a group of young theater aficionados who planned to stage at the popular Teatro del Progreso a production of Joseph Bouchardy's *El Campanero de San Pablo* (The Bell-Ringer of Saint Paul's), a four-act French romantic drama.[306]

Much as theater investors and proprietors, mid-century audiences had multiple motivations for attending plays. An evening at the theater could symbolize a performance of status or status-seeking (discussed in more detail in chapter four). It could simultaneously serve as a moment of respite or leisure, and a space to engage politically. In more general terms, basic familiarity with staged dramas signaled a certain degree of refinement and learning. And while many acquired such status by attending performances at the theater, there were other ways of keeping abreast of staged productions. Literate city residents who could not afford subscriptions to literary magazines or newspapers could go to a reading room (*gabinete de lectura*) where they could gain access to a number of publications for a small fee. For the non-reading public, read aloud practices common in the city at that time extended to the realm of the arts. Theater patrons read dramas aloud in

[306] *El Monitor Republicano*, 26 de junio de 1851.

public spaces, just as they did the weekly theater column in the city's major dailies.[307] City residents also became familiar with the city's theater culture through everyday life, where stage references abounded. Pulque taverns, popular almanacs, and clothing stalls took the names of plays and stage characters.[308] Editors and caricaturists reimagined the world of the stage to comment critically on politics and society. Bands played operatic overtures in public plazas, and stage music infused cafés, bars, and dance halls throughout the city.[309]

Based on anecdotal evidence and ticket prices, it is plausible to think that tens of thousands of city residents attended at least one or two plays during the 1840s and 1850s. A smaller number from the city's middle groups probably went to the theater a few dozen times. A more exclusive group of elites for whom theater was a central feature of social life likely attended hundreds. A few of the city's most prominent arts patrons may even have seen upwards of one thousand plays. If we extrapolate from the 1856-57 season at the Teatro de Iturbide, where the resident company staged 127 plays, we can suppose that over the course of two decades companies staged thousands of plays for Mexico City audiences.[310]

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[307] Vásquez Meléndez, *México personificado*, pp. 237-8.

[308] The city had pulque taverns named La Cabaña de Tom and La pata de cabra. The first was an obvious reference to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The staged adaptation made its Mexico City debut in 1856. The second was a reference to the most popular play in nineteenth-century Mexico City, *The Goat's Hoof*, the subject of chapter three in this dissertation. In 1844, the city boasted a clothing stall named Guillermo Tell, after Rossini's opera about Swiss liberation. See *El Siglo XIX*, 9 de septiembre de 1844.

[309] Maya, "La opera en el siglo XIX," 340-2.

[310] John W. Brokaw, "A Nineteenth-Century Mexican Acting Company—Teatro de Iturbide: 1856-57," *Latin American Theatre Review* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1972): 11.

The hierarchical nature of playhouses meant that elite and popular audiences did not always attend the same performances. Elites saw renowned touring artists and celebrity performers; they had the means to experience firsthand the melodic voice of Anna Bishop, the deft touch of pianist Henri Herz, or the haunting bow of violinist Maximilian Bohrer. Nevertheless, there was significant cultural overlap between these spaces, which gave residents of lesser means opportunities to participate in the shared public culture that developed around theater. For instance, urban dwellers unable to afford a gallery seat at a first-class playhouse to see a performance of Bellini's *Los puritanos* (The Puritans) could probably afford one at the popular Teatro de Relox, where arias from that opera featured in 1856. Similarly, Ramón de Valladares y Saavedra's rendition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was staged at the Teatro de Relox in 1858, a year after it debuted in Mexico at the Teatro de Iturbide. Gallery seats at the 1858 performance sold for just 1 real.

Some general production trends emerge across city playhouses between 1840 and 1860 with respect to the kinds of shows audiences attended. Romanticism's stranglehold on the mid-century capital meant that melodramatic plays like Bouchardy's *El Campanero de San Pablo* were staple fare. Two of Mexico's earliest romantic playwrights, Ignacio Rodríguez de Galván and Fernando Calderón, offered their sentimental patriotic melodramas to great fanfare. The dramatic company at the Teatro de Nuevo México selected Calderón's, *El torneo* (The Tournament), a melodrama set in Medieval England, to inaugurate the playhouse's opening in May 1841. When a bust commemorating "the balladeer's" life and work was unveiled at the Gran Teatro Nacional in July 1845 (Calderón earned this moniker from a contemporary theater critic), a performance of his beloved *El torneo* followed. The Teatro Principal staged the Mexico City premiere of

Calderon's *Herman o La vuelta al cruzado*, a play set during the Crusades that highlighted the power of reconciliation, trust, and forgiveness. In *Herman,* Duke Othón finds his wife together with her former love, Herman, recently returned from fighting. The Duke suspects the worst and sentences both to death, but ultimately he accepts his wife's innocence and forgives Herman. Ignacio Rodríguez Galván's patriotic-romantic *Muñoz, visitador de México* (Muñoz, the Mexican Visitador) was also staged at the Teatro Principal during the 1841-42 season. Loosely based on a 1566 episode which exposed latent tensions between the Mexico City (New Spain) creole elite and Spanish colonial authorities, *Muñoz* offered spectators a cruel Spanish colonial inspector, Muñoz, who delighted in torturing and killing Mexicans; Baltasar, an honorable creole nobleman who dies resisting colonial injustice; and his wife, Celestina, who symbolized Mexicans' oppression at the hands of an evil tyrant. In the play, Muñoz is obsessed with possessing the beautiful Celestina. He captures her twice and threatens violence to Baltasar if she does not accept his advances. When she demurs, Baltasar's dead body is thrown in front of her. She collapses then dies, sending Muñoz into an episodic rage. Plays like *Muñoz* sought to inspire the audience into patriotic fervor and compel them to believe that good would triumph over evil.

More than a handful of "romantically romantic" Spanish dramas featured as well.[311] City playhouses staged Ramón de Valladares y Saavedra's *Don Álvaro o La fuerza del sino* (Don Álvaro or The Force of Destiny*),* Francisco Martínez de la Rosa's *La conjuración de Venecia* (The Venice Conspiracy), Joaquín Francisco Pacheco's *Alfredo* (Alfred), Antonio García Gutiérrez's *El trovador* (The Troubador), and Antonio Gil y Zárate's *Carlos II el*

[311] Phrase borrowed from David Thatcher Gies, *Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 96.

hechizado (Carlos II The Bewitched). Mexican crowds especially enjoyed *El trovador* and *Carlos II el hechizado.* García Gutíerrez's play featured a romantic hero, Manrique, who breaks into a convent to steal away Leonor, professing that not even God can stand between him and his love. *Carlos II el hechizado*, whose plot revolved around the machinations of a power-hungry priest, Froílan, overwhelmed by his passion for the young Inés. Rejected by Inés, Froílan denounces her to Inquisition officials, accusing her of bewitching King Carlos II in exchange for access to a political post. King Carlos II's notorious ineptitude doubtless resonated with spectators, who saw the king as a metaphor for Spain itself. Many other plays featured that borrowed romantic elements, most notably José Zorilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, a play that would become annual fare on celebrations of All Saint's Day.

Comedias de costumbres (comedies of manners) were also quite popular. These plays captured manners, looks, frailties and strengths of middle-class society.[312] Mexican playwright Fernando Calderón's *A ninguna de las tres* (None of the Three) headlined this genre in Mexico City. Companies at the Teatro Principal and the Gran Teatro Nacional staged *A ninguna de las tres* dozens of times in the 1840s and 1850s. The work borrowed stylistically from the genre's most notable purveyor, Spanish playwright Manuel Bretón de los Herreros. In particular, Calderón modeled it after Bretón's popular *Marcela o A cuál de las tres?* (Marcela or Which of the Three?), staged multiple times in the capital during the 1830s and 1840s. Calderón set *A ninguna de las tres* in Mexico, and he sketched characters that Mexico City audiences would recognize. Memorable characters like the vulgar Don Timoteo, the pseudo-erudite Clara, the frivolous María, the womanizing Don Juan, the very

[312] *Ibid*., 231.

Mexican Don Antonio, and the Europeanized Don Carlos thus engage in witty, satirical dialogue in Calderón's play, levying trenchant social critiques against vanity, false culture, Francophilia, and extravagant romanticism. Mexican playwright Carlos Hipólito Serán's *Ceros Sociales* (Social Zeros) also fits this category. Serán's play, which debuted to a full house at the Gran Teatro Nacional in December 1851, offered a thinly veiled critique of the Mexican army and aristocrats, blaming the country's misery on those two groups. The play also criticized elite Mexicans' penchant for imitating European—and especially French—fashions. Its object of satire: the perfumed Francophile dandies whose sole "occupation" was to stroll around the city and stir up trouble. Serán's play enjoyed great popularity, and the term became a euphemism for anyone or any group that threatened society's development or the republic's future. Thus, in the early 1860s, newspapers staunchly opposed to the French intervention used Serán's term to lambast the insincere diplomats, false patriots, and journalists who sold themselves out by supporting French monarch Maximilian. A decade later, one theater critic included among the list of social zeroes Mexico's government, its deputies, generals, bureaucrats, journalists, and anyone else who devalued Mexican literary works.[313]

French melodramas and comedies also formed part of the repertory at most city theaters. Audiences at the Teatro Principal and the Nuevo México enjoyed multiple stagings of Bouchardy's *El Campanero de San Pablo*, before it was staged at the popular Teatro del Progreso in 1851. Other French playwrights popular among Mexican audiences included Eugene Scribe, Alexander Dumas, and Moliere. A 16-act translation of Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, staged over four consecutive nights at the Gran Teatro Nacional in

[313] Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, *Un enigma de los Ceros: Vicente Riva Palacio o Juan de Dios Peza* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1994), 90-92.

late 1851, ranked among the most memorable productions in this genre. Audiences apparently enjoyed the novelty, though they grew tired by days three and four of the nightly five-hour performances.

Opera retained its place among the most popular elite entertainments. Touring companies continued to stage full operas at first-class playhouses, even if by the 1840s and 1850s the repertoire had evolved. Whereas audiences had favored Rossini in the 1830s, tastes during this period veered toward compositions by Gaetano Donizetti, Vicente Bellini, and Guiseppe Verdi. They also enjoyed grand operas by Daniel Auber and Giacomo Meyerbeer. Much as it had in the past, city residents' love for operatic music diffused widely. Overtures opened performances at popular theaters and played during intermissions. Less accomplished singers also performed arias at popular theaters, allowing broader engagement with this musical culture.

Perhaps what most distinguished theatrical production in this period was the vogue for grand spectacle. Theatergoers demanded to be wowed by the action onstage. They wanted to see historic battle scenes enacted that brought hundreds of soldiers and men on horseback parading onstage, common in *dramas de grande aparato* and grand operas. In an 1854 staging of Daniel Auber's grand opera, *La Muette de Portici* (The Mute Girl of Portici), critics thus noted with delight when the Gran Teatro Nacional's stage filled with more than 100 Neopolitan fishermen and villagers (played by choral members and extras) following Masanielo into battle against the Spanish while Mount Vesuvius erupted in the background.[314] Mexico City audiences also craved set changes (*transformaciones*),

[314] For critic's review, see Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante la época de Santa Anna* 2:251. In keeping with the patriotic tenor of the times, managers advertised Auber's opera in Mexico as *Masanielo, o La muda de Portici* (Masanielo, or The Mute Girl

pyrotechnics, and other stage tricks (*tramoyas*). Managers responded by staging more of these types of plays and operas. They also advertised them differently. Indeed, the linguistic shift in how stage directors marketed shows to the public—as "de grande aparato" or "de grande espectáculo"—is remarkable. José de Cañizares's *Marta la Romarantina* was among the first to receive this designation, but by about 1850, such designations had become standard practice.[315]

Few genres of dramatic production rivaled the staging effects required of magical comedies (*comedias de magia*). These shows showcased the talents of machinists and scene painters. They also sated theatergoers' appetites for these new forms of staged spectacle. In 1851, for instance, stage managers advertised Francisco Sánchez del Arco's *Urganda la desconocida* well in advance to drum up excitement among the city's theatergoers. Named after the mysterious and occult persona from a poem appearing in Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, managers labeled Sánchez del Arco's work a "comedia de magia de grande espectáculo." They wrote these words on collosally large posters, which they affixed to buildings on street corners throughout the city. The manager hired renowned scenographer, E. Riviere, to design luxurious costumes and paint new backdrops. Wrote one commentator to describe the buzz surrounding the play's debut, "The day had finally arrived. Boys gathered on street corners reading with great admiration everything the play promised [set changes, flights, and stage tricks]. They ran home, anxious to get their parents' permission to take them to the theater that evening. Judging by the audience that

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of Portici*)*. English-language performances of the opera at Covent Garden in 1820s London also used this alternative title.

[315] *El Siglo XIX* advertised Cañizares' magical comedy as a "GRAN ESPECTACULO DE MAGIA." *El Siglo XIX*, 18 de octubre de 1843, p. 4. The first references I've found using this language date to 1840.

Friday evening, however, it wasn't just the boys who attended, but also bearded men and matrons anxious to see what the play had to offer."[316] By 8pm that evening, the critic noted, the theater was full, as it always was when magical comedies were staged. Among comedias de magia, no play rivaled the popularity, resonance, and endurance of Juan Grimaldi's *La pata de cabra* (*The Goat's Hoof*), the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

The theater boom of the 1840s and 1850s marked a watershed in the city's cultural and economic life. The construction of new playhouses forged a market for theatergoing. Theaters took center stage, as middle sectors grew in the second half of the century and leisure culture expanded. Constructed in the heart of the business district and in peripheral neighborhoods extending out from the city center, playhouses offered city residents of multiple means a menu of options to seek entertainment, perform status, engage in the shared public culture of urban life, or to do all three simultaneously. Grand performance halls like the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide served as symbols and magnets. They attracted opera, vaudeville, zarzuela, and dramatic companies from Europe and the United States. These playhouses transformed the urban landscape, and, in so doing, they changed ways urban dwellers and foreign observers imagined the city. In the eyes of some elites, they also put Mexico on par with other nineteenth-century nations, for whom arts patronage signaled not only prosperity but also cultivation and refinement.

Theater's popularity also impacted the city's economy. For entrepreneurs, theaters represented opportunity in a period often defined by economic stagnation and political uncertainty. If they were not always financially viable investments in the long-run—though

[316] *El Siglo XIX*, 2 de noviembre de 1851.

we might imagine that some were—investor-proprietors used them for a variety of reasons: to enhance status, establish a legacy, forge a place among the ruling elite, secure additional financial stability, or simply to live more lavishly in the present. For a growing number of residents who found work as stagehands, musicians, doormen, and staff, theaters provided relatively stable employment in an uncertain economy. For others, they jumpstarted careers onstage while also fostering the development of professional acting in Mexico; more stages increased opportunities for aspiring local actors. For printers and booksellers, theater's fashionability and its mid-century growth generated business. By negotiating contracts with stage managers for posters and playbills and by otherwise capitalizing on the popularity of the stage, these individuals secured important revenue streams. In this way, theaters promoted commerce and economic growth.

The 1840s and 50s theater boom also gestured toward larger social and economic transformations then taking place in the city. The florescence of entertainments, led by small-scale merchants, aspiring entrepreneurs, and other middling folk, signaled an opening and a simultaneous shifting of the guard. Though the state monopoly over theatrical entertainments had loosened after independence, a small group of well-heeled and well-connected men—the so-called generation of 1821—continued to exert significant control not only over the city's theaters but also in the country's political life. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, their grip on power loosened, opening the way for a new generation to take the reins as the country's ruling class.[317] To some of these men, arts patronage marked one potential path toward forging the future nation.

[317] Costeloe, *The Central Republic*, 306.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLITICS OF THEATER: *LA PATA DE CABRA*, SATIRE, AND THE STAGE AT MID-CENTURY

In the first weeks of January 1842, audiences flocked to the Teatro de Nuevo México to see the recently debuted *Todo lo vence el amor, o La pata de cabra* (Love Conquers All, or The Goat's Hoof). Theatergoers anxious to see extravagance paraded onstage reveled in the play's wacky song and dance numbers and spectacular stage tricks (*tramoyas*). They found the extra-terrestrial travels and serial misadventures of the play's bombastic, gluttonous, and effeminate protagonist, Don Simplicio, irresistible, though never more so than when stage managers pointedly humiliated him by casting actresses in his role. The play's satirical mockery of society and social norms amid absurdity, fantasy, and farce also resonated. Much as it had across the Atlantic following its 1829 debut in Madrid, Juan Grimaldi's magical comedy took the city by storm. *La pata de cabra* as the play came to be known became one of the century's most popular plays, staged at least 120 times before 1900 (and probably dozens if not hundreds more).[318] One theater alone presented it thirty times between 1841 and 1848.[319] The play's unprecedented success on the boards and at the box office led critics and stage directors to propose changing its name to *La pata de plata* (The Silver Hoof, and a simultaneous reference to Mexican-minted silver coins, or *pesos fuertes*, in demand globally) or *La pata de oro* (The Golden Hoof).[320]

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[318] Figures from author's personal database, described in the introduction.

[319] *El Siglo XIX*, 28 de noviembre de 1848, "Revista teatral."

[320] *El Universal*, 10 de diciembre de 1848; Centro de Estudios de Historia de Mexico (henceforth CEHM-CARSO), Fondo LXI-1 Impresos Armando María y Campos. Programas de Teatro, Serie 5, Legajo 725.

Re-imagined by newspaper editors, Don Simplicio's character informed how the press framed concerns of daily life. A deep probing of this play and the cultural phenomenon it sparked challenges scholars to reappraise satire's historical importance as a political language and unifying discourse. It also demands that historians take more seriously theater's role as a place and practice of politics in nineteenth-century Latin America.

La pata de cabra's enduring popularity and economic success presents a striking contrast when set against the standard narrative of chaos, tumult, and calamity that marked Mexico's mid-nineteenth-century history. In broad strokes, that (surprisingly enduring) narrative focuses on a series of unsuccessful attempts to bring stability and predictability to the country's development. It tells of the failure of centralized government (1835-46), Mexico's devastating war with the United States (1846-8) that saw it lose more than half its national territory and wonder seriously whether independent nationhood was sustainable. It then points to hardening ideological divisions as the cause of church-state conflict (1855-61), civil war (1858-61), and foreign intervention (1862-7). These internecine conflicts exhausted the treasury, increased debt, and contributed further to the era's instability and uncertainty.[321]

Why amid such grave problems did audiences go crazy for an over-the-top farce like *La pata de cabra*? How do we account for the play's endurance and resonance in Mexico long after it languished on the Spanish stage? How did the play, most often through

[321] Chapter titles of Mark Wasserman's *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* reflect this narrative well. Select titles read: "Everyday Life, 1821-1846: Tradition and Turmoil," "The Politics of Disorder," "The Origins of Underdevelopment," "The Disastrous War," Politics and Economy in Civil War," "Foreign Intervention and Reconstruction, 1861-1867," and "Everyday Life, 1849-1876: The Impact of War and Reform."

its protagonist, come to occupy center stage in public debates for more than three decades? Perhaps most importantly, why should present-day scholars concern themselves with this forgotten play and its colorful cast of characters?

La pata de cabra matters because it reveals the central historical role that both satire and theater played in Mexico from 1840 and the late 1870s. An examination of the play's popularity, resonance, and re-imaginings shows how city residents deployed and consumed satire to make sense of and cope with the tumult and uncertainty of the time. Satire offered a powerful discursive weapon that mocked power structures, politics, social hierarchies, and social practices. It also revealed tortured efforts to understand the era's uncertainty, determine who Mexicans were as a people, and forge a unified and stable path forward. Unlike the more ephemeral political administrations, constitutions, and forms of government that have commanded much scholarly attention, expressive metaphors and theatrical tropes endured throughout the period.[322] A serious, focused study of how and why satire worked thus offers historians not only a new window into this period but also a deeper and more complete understanding of how city residents experienced and processed the era's flux.

Through a careful analysis of the play, its political context, and its resonance in the press, this chapter proceeds in four parts. It focuses first on the world of the play, mining its satire to highlight the ways it turns the world upside down and inside out. It then situates

[322] A sampling of these studies includes Costeloe, *La primera república* federal; Costeloe, *The Central Republic*; Torcuato S. Di Tella, *National Popular Politics in Early Independent Mexico, 1820-1847* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996); Guardino, *Peasants, Politics, and the Formation of Mexico's National State*; Hernández Chávez, *La tradición republicana*; Donald F. Stevens, "Autonomists, Nativists, Republicans, and Monarchists: Conspiracy and Political History in Nineteenth-Century Mexico," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 247-66; and Fowler, *Independent Mexico.*

the play in the political and economic context of the era, showing how angst and uncertainty created propitious conditions for satirical expression. Third, the chapter examines the ways editors re-imagined Don Simplicio and the play to critique society and politics while simultaneously making fun of themselves and lamenting the country's predicament. The chapter concludes by suggesting that satire might in fact offer an explanation for how despite wars, dictatorships, empire, and deep social and ethnic rifts, Mexico remained a politically and culturally cohesive unit. In so doing, it reveals theater as an important place and form of politics.

To explain the evolving relationship between politics, performances of the play, and the press in this period, the chapter draws on performance studies scholar Diana Taylor's theorization of the relationship between history and performance. Taylor argues that "the mechanics of staging can keep alive an organizational infrastructure, a practice or know-how, an episteme, and a politics that goes beyond the explicit topic."[323] Considered in this light, performances of *La pata de cabra* sustained interest in and shaped the way audiences understood and engaged with satirical re-imaginings in the press and in public life more generally. But, the inverse was also true. The play's satirical renderings in the press influenced how audiences interpreted and engaged with the play and its characters onstage. Moreover, contemporary events also influenced spectators' and reader's engagement. Such events were capable of politicizing—or re-politicizing—the play, constantly inscribing it with new meaning. Keeping these dynamic relationships in mind is essential for understanding how and why *La pata de cabra* surged to popularity and sat at the center of urban public life for so long.

[323] Diana Taylor, "Performance and/as History," *The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 68.

The Play

At its simplest, *La pata de cabra* was a moralistic boys-meets-girl love story that fit the romantic mold then in vogue in Mexico.[324] The play narrates the tale of a beautiful maiden, Leonor, who falls in love with the rogue (*pícaro*), Don Juan, just before she is to wed the false nobleman, Don Simplicio. The tension over whom she will marry drives the plot, which Grimaldi embellished with all manner of stage tricks, sets, and scene changes.

In the play's opening scene as Don Juan is about to commit suicide, two pistols magically fly out of his hands and discharge harmlessly into the air. Cupid appears and after more stage effects—the moon and water turn red, thunder claps, and lightning strikes an urn holding a goat—he presents Don Juan with a goat's hoof, the talisman that will ensure Don Juan's happiness and his marriage to Leonor. Later in Act I, four musicians who helped Don Juan serenade Leonor while performing a folk dance transform onstage into female chaperones (or duennas) who have come to guard Leonor. In Act II, as Don Simplicio pursues the two lovers who have fled, balconies move from one level to another, constables are suspended in midair, and portraits take up arms against Don Simplicio. As Act II closes, Don Simplicio's hat becomes a hot air balloon and carries him off into the sky. The curtain falls with the protagonist floating among the moon, planets, and comets.

This was the prelude to one of the play's most memorable scenes, which served doubly as a satire on the country's politics and society (see Figure 5). After Don Simplicio comes crashing back down to earth, he tells the search party about his conversations with the lunar people (*lunáticos*), a pun that also meant lunatics

[324] My analysis of the play is based on Juan de Grimaldi, *La pata de cabra*, edición, introducción y notas de David T. Gies (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1986).

> Imagine that everything there is the reverse of here. Lovers are loyal, spouses are faithful, salesmen don't mislead you, bureaucrats speak using good manners ("con buen modo"), soldiers don't vote…In the way they eat, in the way they dress, even in their public entertainments, the *lunáticos* prefer national things to foreign ones…Literature is honored there. All men with talent are rich and all rich men are talented. Journalists speak impartially about things they can judge, and they are quiet about things they cannot judge. Politics are urbane. Everything's upside down, my friend, everything's upside down.[325]

Though written for 1829 Madrid audiences, this critique resonated with mid-century Mexicans who delighted at the suggestion that a lunatic government knew how to conduct business better than their own and that lunatic societies were more genteel.

[325] Author's translation.

Figure 5. 1870s Theater Poster, *La pata de cabra*

As they did with other magical comedies in this era, audiences came to immerse themselves in this zany, fantastical world full of stage tricks, set changes, and illusions. But, they also came to laugh at Don Simplicio and his misadventures. Spectators first meet Don Simplicio in Act I Scene IV, when his bravado is on full display. In response to Don Lope's mockery of his horsemanship and physical endurance, for having traveled just one *legua* [approx.. 2.5 miles] in three hours, Don Simplicio boasts, "Why would I need rest?

Fatigue is mere diversion for this herculean body!" He then proceeds to tell Don Lope in reference to his irresistible charm, "…no woman has ever not paid me attention." In the following scene (Scene V), when Don Lope presents him to Leonor as "one of the most distinguished noblemen from Navarro," Leonor looks him up and down and breaks into laughter. Soon thereafter, the audience hears Don Simplicio's full name for the first time: Don Simplicio Bobadilla Majaderano y Cabeza de Buey. Grimaldi probably intended the name's length and wordplay to make audiences laugh aloud. The first part was a riff on the words simpleton (*simplicio*), bird-brained (*majadero*), and dunce (*bobo*). The last part, Cabeza de Buey, was a play on the surname of the Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca, only Grimaldi changed "cow" to "ox." Following this exchange between the protagonist and his would-be bride, Grimaldi continues to parade Don Simplicio's verbal slapstick and foolishness. Don Simplicio remarks to his mute sidekick, Lazarillo, after stumbling over his proposal to Leonor, "Good sir, I think I made a favorable impression."

Near the end of Act I, Don Simplicio's cowardice comes to the fore, calling into question his masculinity. Hidden behind a mirror in Leonor's room, Don Juan has been mocking Don Simplicio and his pursuers. When Don Juan jumps out to challenge the men to a fight, Don Simplicio reacts by hiding behind the servants. Pushing them toward Don Juan, he commands "Hold me back, boys. Hold me back so I don't kill him!"

In Act II, it becomes clear that Don Simplicio is not simply a coward hiding behind bombastic rhetoric and false bravado. Grimaldi shows him to be a voyeur and a cuckold, worried less about defeating his rival than quenching his gluttonous appetite. From a tree, he listens quietly as the two lovers lob insults his way. Leonor calls him ugly and dumb; Don Juan labels him cowardly and ridiculous. When Leonor and Don Juan profess their

mutual love through song, Don Simplicio sings his own couplet (to the audience) about his hunger pangs and the wonderfully aromatic trout on the lovers' table. His cover blown, Simplicio flees to avoid direct confrontation with Don Juan.

By play's end, Don Simplicio accepts defeat. Cupid and Don Juan outmatch a retinue of Cyclops sent by Vulcan to help Don Simplicio win over Leonor. Leonor has remained steadfast in her love for Don Juan, and even Don Lope has acquiesced, realizing that Don Juan is the only one capable of making Leonor happy. When confronted about his plans in the final scene of Act III, Don Simplicio tells him, "There's nothing left for me to do other than renounce her hand and give it to my rival. It seems the gentlemanly thing to do." Don Juan and Leonor marry shortly thereafter, with Don Simplicio in attendance.

Inside playhouses, spectators entered a whimsical world populated by magic, divine beings, and illusion that in some ways bore little resemblance to daily life. But, it was also a world teeming with satire. Figures that represent authority and power (Don Simplicio and Don Lope) are mocked and defeated. Chivalrous behavior is shown to be hollow and self-admiring. Leonor's defiance, Don Juan's mockery of his social superiors, lunatics' monopoly on propriety, the incongruence between honor and status and noble titles, and the calling into question of masculinity—all of this upended social conventions, gender norms, and power structures. There was even a dash of political commentary thrown in, disguised well enough so as not to merit censure by theater regulators. This combination of farce and satire, and the play's depiction of a world turned upside down, resonated with audiences.

The facile explanation for the play's popularity and resonance is that it offered an escapist pursuit. Using this rationale, *La pata de cabra's* nutty, bizarre world was so unreal

that spectators gladly immersed themselves in it to forget about the challenges of daily life. Spanish playwright, José Zorrilla, explained the play's popularity in 1830s Spain exactly that way. To him, the play became popular because it "distracted the populace of Madrid from politics for a number of months."[326] Though perhaps partly true for some, there was a figurative parallelism between the world of *La pata de cabra* and the world that mid-century theatergoers inhabited that made the farce work—and work well—for a long time. More than a handful of Mexicans viewed daily life at mid-century as a farce, full of ludicrously improbable happenings. Stage managers advertised the play as a *melo-mimo-drama*—a mimetic melodrama, or a melodrama that imitated reality—communicating to audiences some idea of what they could expect.[327] Writing in 1856, journalist Juan de Dios Arias wondered how the Mexican government could prohibit the use of ridicule when its own dealings were nothing short of ridiculous.[328] The farce mid-century residents lived was not populated by divine beings like Cupid and Vulcan, but its wackiness seemed no more extreme than the waves of insurrection, foreign wars, regional separatist movements, presidential ousters, loss and sale of national territory, and squander of treasury resources that marked the period.

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[326] David Thatcher Gies, *Theatre and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Spain: Juan de Grimaldi as Impresario and Government Agent* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77.

[327] Poster located in evidentiary files for auto presented to the second instance judge between Manuel Moreno and Pedro Tello de Meneses in 1855. See AGN, TSJDF, Caja 306, 1855, unnumbered foja.

[328] *La Pata de Cabra*, no. 115, 2 de enero de 1856.

The Context

A deeper probing into the play's endurance and resonance requires a careful look at the angst, uncertainty, and despair with which individuals experienced the period. Few conflicts shaped middle- and upper-class mentalités in Mexico City more than the rebellion that rocked the capital in July 1840. Prior to its outbreak, editors at *El Mosquito Mexicano* offered a grim assessment of the performance of the regime in power and the current state of the republic. Yucatán had risen in rebellion, the executive was in daily conflict with the Congress, Texas had been lost, a war had been waged with the French, and Chiapas was sure to separate.[329] In the editors' minds, the republic was on the verge of disintegration and something needed to be done to avert disaster. A week later, a brutal rebellion broke out that turned Mexico City into what one contemporary described as a *teatro de terror*—a theater of terror. Cannon and gunfire destroyed buildings and shut down commerce. Food and water became nearly unobtainable. Two-thirds of the city's population, perhaps 100,000 to 115,000, lived within cannon shot, and hundreds lost their lives during twelve days of indiscriminate shelling.[330] Roaming packs of dogs tore apart rotting corpses in the streets. Gangs of thieves roamed neighborhoods and looters ransacked houses and shops. Despite its failure, the scale of violence and mayhem caused during the uprising left an indelible impression on the city's ruling elites. The rebellion convinced them that a federalist system of government was incapable of protecting their interests.[331]

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[329] *El Mosquito Mexicano*, 7 de Julio de 1840.

[330] Population figures from McCaa, "Peopling," 615. McCaa estimates the city's population in 1833 at between 150,000 and 175,000.

[331] Analysis of the uprising draws heavily on Michael P. Costeloe, "A *Pronunciamiento* in Nineteenth Century Mexico: '15 de Julio de 1840,'" *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 245-64.

The 1840 rebellion prompted despondency and stoked fears of anarchy and social dissolution. Liberal-leaning José María Gutiérrez Estrada captured the rebellion's psychological impact in an open letter written just weeks after the July uprising. "We have experimented with all possible forms a republic can adopt," wrote Gutiérrez Estrada, "democratic, oligarchic, military, demagogic, and anarchic; to the extent that all of the parties, and always to the detriment of the nation's honor and happiness, have tried every conceivable republican system [to no avail]."[332] Fourteen months later, in September-October 1841, their worst fears were realized when the capital again came under siege. Shops closed, people fled, and more civilians were caught in the crossfire. Heavy thunderstorms, earthquake tremors, rumors of typhus, and food shortages during the crisis helped create an apocalyptic atmosphere. When Antonio López de Santa Anna emerged victorious in October 1841, he installed a *dictadura disfrazada*—a dictatorship disguised as a republican government that endured until December 1844.[333] Just two months after his installation as president, in December 1841, *La pata de cabra* made its timely debut.

Mexico's war with the United States exacerbated feelings of angst. It is difficult to overstate the deep humiliation and disillusionment that resulted from the country's war with the United States (1846-48). Even before it ended, the war revealed dangerous fault lines that threatened the nation's very fabric. As U.S. troops advanced toward the capital in January 1847, National Guard units in Mexico City rose up against the acting government of Valentín Gómez Farías in what became known as the Polkos Rebellion. The intense street fighting that ensued in the capital led to the deposition of Gómez Farías, but it also

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[332] Translation reproduced from Will Fowler, *Independent Mexico,* 195.

[333] Costeloe, *The Central Republic,* 184-212.

exposed an inability to set aside partisan rows even in the midst of war. Separatist uprisings in Tabasco and Yucatán in 1847 further affirmed the state of disunity. Those events, combined with the loss of more than half its national territory following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, dealt a huge blow to national morale. In the wake of defeat, conservative statesman Lucas Alamán lamented that Mexico since its independence (1821) had moved "from infancy to decrepitude without ever having experienced the vigor of youth."[334]

Major events of the 1850s and 1860s did little to assuage Mexicans' fears. Agrarian and indigenous discontent heightened, debt piled up, and political polarization intensified. Santa Anna's return and his imposition of a corrupt, brutal dictatorship (1853-55) angered and alienated nearly everyone. An uneasy coalition united to depose him in 1855, and in the years that followed competing liberal factions (moderates and *puros*, or radicals) fought to dictate the country's future. They succeeded in instituting a series of laws—the Reform Laws—later incorporated into the 1857 Constitution that separated church and state definitively, granted the state the power to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs, and divested the church of property (and thus the source of much of its wealth since the colonial period). This document, particularly unpopular among conservatives, intensified disagreements and set off a bloody struggle in the early part of 1858 that became known as the Three Years War. This civil war claimed the lives of more than 8,000 Mexicans and mired the country even deeper in debt. The liberals' victory in 1861 was short-lived. Within months they found themselves at war with invading French armies, and, by 1864, as unwitting subjects

[334] Van Young, "In Mexico there are no Mexicans."

of an empire ruled by Austrian-Hapsburg Archduke Maximilian (the Second Empire, 1864-67).

Uncertainty about the future dissipated somewhat during the Restored Republic (1867-75) and Porfirio Díaz's first term as president (1876-80). The overwhelming sense of pessimism that had engulfed much of the country for the better part of three decades lightened, and tensions between liberals and conservatives loosened. Still, the period was far from the panacea that Mexico's liberal historiography has claimed. Regional strife and local insurrections continued as villages clamored for the autonomy promised by the liberal reforms enshrined in the 1857 Constitution.

Instability and angst led to deep introspection. Nation-builders had struggled for a generation to forge a broad social consensus and a sense of national community. Scholars have shown that prior to the war with the United States, most of Mexico's creole intelligentsia shared an amorphous ideological center.[335] These hombres de bien were more alike than different. They sought stability and development, and they feared social dissolution.[336] This impulse was particularly noticeable in the literary press and *costumbrista* sketches. Primarily pedagogic in nature and premised on the notion that *mestizaje* (racial mixing) had not brought about social integration or national identification, these publications and sketches sought to create a cohesive cultural order that could serve as the basis for a unified national identity. They did so through the discursive and visual rendering of common social types, rural and urban customs, racial physiognomies, and

[335] Wright-Rios, *Searching for Madre Matiana,* 54.

[336] Fowler, "Dreams of Stability."

collective rituals and spectacles.[337] In essence, *costumbrista* writers and lithographers--those who composed *cuadros de costumbres* (pictures of customs)—created catalogues through which a national community was imagined and could be identified. Staged *comedias de costumbres* like Calderón's *A ninguna de las tres*, discussed in the previous chapter, performed similar work.

Leading intellectuals like Guillermo Prieto and José María Rivera who wrote for the literary press also contributed to the more overtly political press. This is not particularly surprising given the many overlaps between the city's cultural and political life, especially in societies like the Academia de San Juan de Letrán (which Prieto helped found) where literary figures gathered alongside politicians to give lectures and recite compositions. The search for a unifying discourse and social cohesion that animated their writing in the cultural press carried over into this realm, and we should view their efforts in both spheres as two parts of a larger, discursive boundary-setting and nation-making experiment. In the political press in particular, Prieto, Rivera, and others found in satire an expressive mode that they could deploy as a potent discursive weapon.

Since classical times, satire has tended to be reformist in nature; that is, satire criticizes in an effort to improve society. According to Gilbert Highet, "the satirical writer believes that most people are purblind, insensitive, perhaps anesthetized by custom and dullness and resignation. He wishes to make them see the truth—at least that part of the

[337] Erica Segre, *Intersected Identities: Strategies of Visualization in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Mexican Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 5-58.

truth they habitually ignore."[338] Satire as a mode flourishes amid uncertainty and despair. As Rubén Quintero puts it, "satirists write in winters of discontent."[339]

In Mexico and Spanish America more broadly, satire dates to at least the colonial period, where Creoles elites used it against the imperial government to lay the foundations for American self-definition.[340] Mexican writer José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi continued that satirical tradition during Mexico's independence struggles through his newspaper *El Pensador Mexicano*, pamphlets and broadsides, and his novel *El Periquillo Sarniento* (The Mangy Parrot). In the 1840s, however, satire prospered as never before. In part this resulted from growing instability and despair. Historian Will Fowler's categorization of the four stages of Mexico's political evolution offers a useful—if not entirely satisfactory—framework for thinking about this era. In Fowler's classificatory scheme, Mexico evolved from a stage of optimism (1821-28) about its future to stages of disenchantment (1828-35), profound disillusion (1835-47), and despair (1847-55).[341] Mexico's dire economic straits contributed to this evolution. Its treasury decimated by wars over Texas and with the French, the country came to rely heavily on wealthy, high interest loan sharks (*agiotistas*), who provided needed cash in the short-run only to deepen Mexico's longer-term debt burden.[342] The feelings of angst generated by economic

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[338] Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 18-19.

[339] Rubén Quintero, "Introduction: Understanding Satire," in *A Companion to Satire*, ed. Rubén Quintero (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 1.

[340] Julie Greer Johnson, *Satire in Colonial Spanish America: Turning the New World Upside Down* (Austin: University of Texas, 1993).

[341] Will Fowler, *Mexico in the Age of Proposals*, 5.

[342] Tenenbaum, *The Politics of Penury*.

insecurity and political instability thus provided favorable conditions for satire. The blatant contradictions between norms, practices, ideals, and policies, and the general absurdity of contemporary politics offered satirists no small amount of material upon which to direct their scorn.

Grimaldi's play prospered onstage and in the press not just amid turmoil and crisis but also *because* of it. Indeed, the play generally found its greatest box office success when calamity loomed. *La pata de cabra* made an unprecedented run on the boards, showing repeatedly for several weeks in 1841-2, following Santa Anna's installation of the disguised dictatorship. In 1848, companies at the National and New Mexico Theaters staged the play at least ten times in the months after occupying US troops evacuated the Mexican capital.[343] Another series of stagings happened in 1855, as a heterogeneous coalition of forces assembled republic-wide (the so-called Ayutla rebellion) calling for Santa Anna's removal from office. Then, in 1863, as Mexican forces were losing ground to French invaders, audiences again went wild for the play after the stage manager cast beloved Spanish actress, María Cañete, in Don Simplicio's role; sellouts prompted stage managers to schedule additional performances.

The Press

Offstage, newspaper editors, regardless of their ideological persuasions, found in Don Simplicio's bombast, cowardice and slapstick a perfect vessel for criticizing rivals. They readily appropriated the play and Grimaldi's protagonist. *La pata de cabra* inspired at least four satirical political newspapers. The first, *D. Simplicio*, appeared in the run-up to war with the United States in December 1845. Two others, *La Pata de Cabra* and *La*

[343] *El Monitor Republicano*, 30 de agosto de 1848, "Crónica teatral."

Espada de D. Simplicio (Don Simplicio's Sword), appeared in the weeks and months following the toppling of Santa Anna's final dictatorship (1853-55). The fourth, *El Burro de D. Simplicio* (Don Simplicio's Ass), was published in the second half of 1857 as tensions heightened over then-president Ignacio Comonfort's reluctance to implement the new constitution—tensions that pushed the country into outright civil war in the first months of 1858.

Conjured up by two of the country's most brilliant and influential minds, Guillermo Prieto and Ignacio Ramírez, *D. Simplicio* placed Grimaldi's play at the center of public life. Readers would have recognized the emblematic frontman who featured in the foreground of the masthead as Grimaldi's protagonist re-imagined in a Mexican register and context (see Figure 6). Historians, on the other hand, have missed (or perhaps ignored) the connection entirely, due to a propensity to marginalize the study of theater. A squat man with the paunch of a usurer (*agiotista*) or a *pancista* (a political opportunist who skimmed wealth from the treasury), Prieto and Ramírez's Don Simplicio rode atop a donkey backwards brandishing a whip in one hand while using the other to steer the donkey by its tail. Below him, whipped into submission, lay a drunken soldier, a conservative doctor, a beguiling clergyman (with the face of a cat), and a coquettish woman (symbolizing society's decadence). The editors marked their re-imagined Don Simplicio as Mexican not only by those he had whipped into submission—who symbolized still-powerful corporate bodies and legacies of Mexico's colonial past—but also by his *húacaro de indianilla*, Mexican vernacular for the short, military-style jacket he was wearing.[344]

[344] Joaquín García Icazbalceta, *Vocabulario de mexicanismos: comprobado con ejemplos y comparado con los de otros paises hispano-americanos. Propónense además unas adiciones y enmiendas a la última edición (12a) del diccionario de la academia*. Obra

Figure 6. *D. Simplicio's* masthead, c. 1845-6

The paper's first edition took aim at illiterate army officers, beguiling clergymen, corruptible magistrates, unproductive bureaucrats, wasteful public spending, and the ruinous state of Mexican society.[345] Prieto and Ramírez also issued a parodic *pronunciamiento*, or pronouncement, a commonly adopted extra-constitutional political practice used to demand change. Doing so, they doubtless meant to provoke the ire of two

póstuma publicada por su hijo Luis García Pimentel (Mexico City: Tip. Y Lit. "La Europea" de J. Aguilar Vera y ca., 1899), 236.

[345] *D. Simplicio: Periódico Burlesco, Crítico y Filosófico, por unos simples*, primera época, t. 1, no. 1, 1845.

generals who just days earlier issued their own such proclamation calling for the immediate and forceful removal of the president. That first issue closed with an announcement that must have made readers both laugh and cringe. In the space most newspapers reserved for announcements about upcoming theatrical performances, Prieto and Ramírez wrote:

PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENTS
NATIONAL THEATER.
Tonight.—New Comedy:
'Looming Conflict. Yankees in Matamoros and Mexican troops in San Luis'

Metaphorical comparisons between real political events and personalities and onstage performance were a defining feature of Prieto and Ramírez's enterprise. More broadly, these comparisons revealed the men's attempts to make real *La pata de cabra's* absurdist world.

In an 1846 issue, Prieto deployed stage language in a critique of General Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga's monarchist plot, packaged as a fable.[346] In this fable, the "wise" cats (animals associated with greed and guile and in this instance also meant to be read as the president and his followers) created an elaborate ruse to catch mice (republicans), only to have their brilliant trap revealed. Prieto described this plan and trap in vivid detail as if it were a complex piece of stage machinery. A board connecting the structure's wooden support pillars formed a narrow path that led to an aromatic European cheese (a stand-in for monarchy). Near the cheese, a trapdoor hid a boiling cauldron of water into which the mice would fall to their deaths. Because foreign cheese (foreign fashions and forms of government) made them sick, none of the mice fell into the trap. But, the machine's inventor, General Paredes, continued to insist the machine worked, and he sent his helper to his death in a final *golpe de teatro* (theatrical coup de grace). Written in verse, the fable

[346] *D. Simplicio*, t. 2, no. 21. Undated.

ended: “Look for another way to betray the nation, oh monarchist faction!; it was because of a lazy stagehand (*maquinista*) that the mousetrap (*la tramoya del ratón*) was laid bare.”

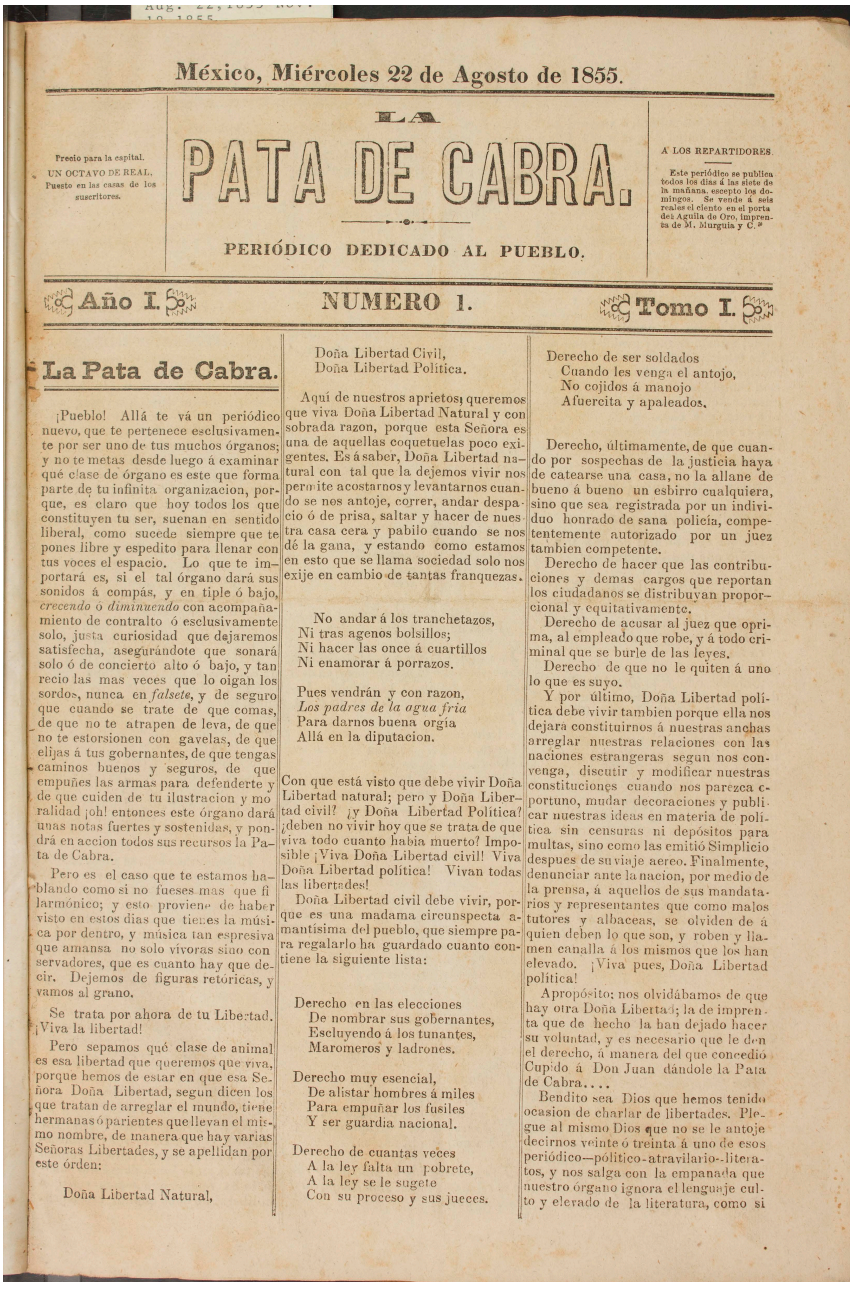
The men’s attempt to turn the real world on its head through satirical re-imaginings of Grimaldi’s play was not without risk. Soon after the fable was published, General Paredes’ ordered a crackdown on press freedoms that landed Prieto and Ramírez in jail for several months. In a bold rebuke, the men re-opened the newspaper with an original drama “in four columns and less than three strides.”[347] Echoing the famous line shouted by Grimaldi’s protagonist upon returning from the moon, Don Simplicio (the character from Prieto and Ramírez’s original play and the pseudonym taken up by Prieto in the newspaper) proclaims triumphantly: “I’ve broken my ribs! But I’ve triumphed!” When queried by another character over what he had triumphed, Don Simplicio declares “fear.”

The eponymous *La Pata de Cabra*, a radically liberal newspaper edited by Juan de Dios Arias and José María Rivera, debuted less than a week after Santa Anna resigned from the presidency (see Figure 7). It thus appeared in a power vacuum that saw competing liberal factions vying for power (three different men would occupy the presidency between August and December 1855). Dios Arias and Rivera inserted themselves into these debates using what they called *pati-cabriología* (goat’s hoof-ism), a brand of satirical invective delivered by way of a personified goat. In a dramatic scene titled “Everything’s Backward,” duenna Doña Ojalá (the chaperone Mrs. I Hope) peers at the moon through a telescope trying to figure out where Don Simplicio might fall.[348] While describing to La Pata de Cabra a revolution in process on the moon, she remarks as if surprised, “Instead of

[347] *D. Simplicio*, t. 3, no. 1, 1 de Julio de 1846, “Escenas simplicianas.”

[348] *La Pata de Cabra* no. 49, 17 de octubre de 1855.

liberty, they seek unity, as if it were a rudder that could save the nation." La Pata replies, "Those *lunáticos* don't understand a thing about the political dance. They're doing everything backward from how we do things here, where unity is understood as saving oneself and letting everything else fall where it may."



México, Miércoles 22 de Agosto de 1855.

LA

PATA DE CABRA.

PERIÓDICO DEDICADO AL PUEBLO.

Precio para la capital. UN OCTAVO DE REAL. Puesto en las casas de los suscritores.

Á LOS REPARTIDORES.

Este periódico se publica todos los dias á las siete de la mañana, escepto los domingos. Se vende á seis reales el ciento en el portal del Aguila de Oro, imprenta de M. Murguia y C.ª

Año I. NUMERO 1. Tomo I.

La Pata de Cabra.

¡Pueblo! Allá te vá un periódico nuevo, que te pertenece esclusivamente por ser uno de tus muchos órganos; y no te metas desde luego á examinar qué clase de órgano es este que forma parte de tu infinita organizacion, porque, es claro que hoy todos los que constituyen tu ser, suenan en sentido liberal, como sucede siempre que te pones libre y espedito para llenar con tus voces el espacio. Lo que te importará es, si el tal órgano dará sus sonidos á compás, y en tiple ó bajo, *crecendo ó disminuendo* con acompañamiento de contralto ó esclusivamente solo, justa curiosidad que dejaremos satisfecha, asegurándote que sonará solo ó de concierto alto ó bajo, y tan recio las mas veces que lo oigan los sordos, nunca en *falsete*, y de seguro que cuando se trate de que comas, de que no te atrapen de leva, de que no te estorsionen con gavelas, de que elijas á tus gobernantes, de que tengas caminos buenos y seguros, de que empuñes las armas para defenderte y de que cuiden de tu ilustracion y moralidad ¡oh! entonces este órgano dará unas notas fuertes y sostenidas, y pondrá en accion todos sus recursos la Pata de Cabra.

Pero es el caso que te estamos hablando como si no fueses mas que filarmónico; y esto proviene de haber visto en estos dias que tienes la música por dentro, y música tan espresiva que amansa no solo vivoras sino conservadores, que es cuanto hay que decir. Dejemos de figuras retóricas, y vamos al grano.

Se trata por ahora de tu Libertad. ¡Viva la libertad!

Pero sepamos qué clase de animal es esa libertad que queremos que viva, porque hemos de estar en que esa Señora Doña Libertad, segun dicen los que tratan de arreglar el mundo, tiene hermanas ó parientes que llevan el mismo nombre, de manera que hay varias Señoras Libertades, y se apellidan por este órden:

Doña Libertad Natural,
Doña Libertad Civil,
Doña Libertad Politica.

Aquí de nuestros aprietos, queremos que viva Doña Libertad Natural y con sobrada razon, porque esta Señora es una de aquellas coquetuelas poco exigentes. Es á saber, Doña Libertad natural con tal que la dejemos vivir nos permite acostarnos y levantarnos cuando se nos antoje, correr, andar despacio ó de prisa, saltar y hacer de nuestra casa cera y pabilo cuando se nos dé la gana, y estando como estamos en esto que se llama sociedad solo nos exije en cambio de tantas franquezas.

No andar á los tranchetazos,
Ni tras agenos bolsillos;
Ni hacer las once á cuartillos
Ni enamorar á porrazos.

Pues vendrán y con razon,
Los padres de la agua fria
Para darnos buena orgia
Allá en la diputacion.

Con que está visto que debe vivir Doña Libertad natural; pero y Doña Libertad civil? ¿y Doña Libertad Politica? ¿deben no vivir hoy que se trata de que viva todo cuanto habia muerto! Imposible ¡Viva Doña Libertad civil! Viva Doña Libertad politica! Vivan todas las libertades!

Doña Libertad civil debe vivir, porque es una madama circunspecta amantísima del pueblo, que siempre para regalarlo ha guardado cuanto contiene la siguiente lista:

Derecho en las elecciones
De nombrar sus gobernantes,
Escluyendo á los tunantes,
Maromeros y ladrones.

Derecho muy esencial,
De alistar hombres á miles
Para empuñar los fusiles
Y ser guardia nacional.

Derecho de cuantas veces
A la ley falta un pobrete,
A la ley se le sugete
Con su proceso y sus jueces.

Derecho de ser soldados
Cuando les venga el antojo,
No cojidos á manojo
Afuercita y apaleados.

Derecho, últimamente, de que cuando por sospechas de la justicia haya de catearse una casa, no la allane de bueno á bueno un esbirro cualquiera, sino que sea registrada por un individuo honrado de sana policía, competentemente autorizado por un juez tambien competente.

Derecho de hacer que las contribuciones y demas cargos que reportan los ciudadanos se distribuyan proporcional y equitativamente.

Derecho de acusar al juez que oprima, al empleado que robe, y á todo criminal que se burle de las leyes.

Derecho de que no le quiten á uno lo que es suyo.

Y por último, Doña Libertad política debe vivir tambien porque ella nos dejara constituirnos á nuestras anchas arreglar nuestras relaciones con las naciones estrangeras segun nos convenga, discutir y modificar nuestras constituciones cuando nos parezca oportuno, mudar decoraciones y publicar nuestras ideas en materia de política sin censuras ni depósitos para multas, sino como las emitió Simplicio despues de su viaje aereo. Finalmente, denunciar ante la nacion, por medio de la prensa, á aquellos de sus mandatarios y representantes que como malos tutores y albaceas, se olviden de á quien deben lo que son, y roben y llamen canalla á los mismos que los han elevado. ¡Viva pues, Doña Libertad politica!

Apropósito: nos olvidábamos de que hay otra Doña Libertad; la de imprenta que de hecho la han dejado hacer su voluntad, y es necesario que le den el derecho, á manera del que concedió Cupido á Don Juan dándole la Pata de Cabra....

Bendito sea Dios que hemos tenido ocasion de charlar de libertades. Plegue al mismo Dios que no se le antoje decirnos veinte ó treinta á uno de esos periódico—político-atravilario--literatos, y nos salga con la empanada que nuestro órgano ignora el lenguaje culto y elevado de la literatura, como si

Figure 7. *La Pata de Cabra*, c. 1855-6
(courtesy of DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University)

Reflecting the growing ideological polarization of the 1850s, the editors adopted a more cynical stance toward the republic's future. In a fictionalized drama that simultaneously revealed the editors' tortured efforts to understand the country's predicament, a character cast as a president claimed that it is "difficult to govern a nation where there's no public spirit, where people join together like leeches in a pot because they were put there…where there's no patriotism / and only selfishness / where bureaucrats rob / with vile pretensions."[349] Nor did they mince words when discussing the recently resigned president. In an independence celebration staged in the newspaper's pages on September 11 (instead of the usual September 16), Dios Arias and Rivera criticized the patriotic committee for forgetting to celebrate the day when the "illustrious fugitive, His Serene Highness, D. Simplicio Bobadilla, Santa-Anna, Majaderano, Cabeza de Buey y Mano de Gato…that hero of a hundred battles" had defeated invading Spanish forces at the Battle of Tampico in 1829.[350] This satirical passage packed a heavy punch. It mocked Santa Anna's self-proclaimed title (Su Alteza Serenísima—His Serene Highness), and compared him to Don Simplicio and thus to the gluttony, effeminacy, and cowardliness of Grimaldi's stage character. Its charge of "Mano de Gato" (Cat's Paw) laid bare allegations of rampant corruption that plagued the former president. Given the timing of this latter charge, it likely invoked for readers Santa Anna's 1853 sale of *La Mesilla* (Gadsden Purchase), 45,000 square miles of land in present-day Arizona and New Mexico for $10 million, which he had squandered by spring 1854. Their criticism of Santa Anna aside, Dios Arias and Rivera were also skeptical that Ignacio Comonfort, the man who would ultimately replace Santa

[349] *La Pata de Cabra* no. 48, 16 de octubre de 1855.

[350] *La Pata de Cabra* no. 19, 12 de septiembre de 1855.

Anna, would be able to overcome the vested interests and corporate bodies that had influenced his predecessors.[351]

La Pata de Cabra lashed out at many conservative rivals, though it saved much of its vitriol for the conservative *La Espada de D. Simplicio*. Founded by the Spanish-born Niceto de Zamacois, *La Espada* peddled a counter narrative in a period dominated by a new coalition of radical and moderate liberals fighting for control over the power vacuum left by Santa Anna. The newspaper's subtitle alone, "the sword is the best form of reason," was a jab at liberals' attempts to hold dominion over reason. An avowed opponent of Santa Anna and openly critical of him, Zamacois nonetheless asked readers in one edition, "What have we gained with the change in government [following Santa Anna's resignation]?"[352] He found few deliverables promised by the liberal reformers and complained vehemently about salaries and pensions that went unpaid for months after Santa Anna's regime had crumbled. Much as the other editors, Zamacois found in the play and the world he inhabited ample material for satire. He packaged critiques as slaps (*cintarazos*), just as Don Simplicio had done while criticizing the way the portrait's figure held his sword at the end of Act II.

Selecting Don Simplicio's sword as his satirical weapon of choice was perhaps Zamacois' most clever move. Few things illustrated Don Simplicio's cowardice and effeminacy better than the sword rendered useless in his trembling hands. A Spanish literary periodical, *El Entreacto*, highlighted the sword's emasculating power when it depicted actor Antonio Gúzman handling a long, droopy instrument that appeared

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[351] *La Pata de Cabra* unnumbered, 1 de octubre de 1856.

[352] *La Espada de D. Simplicio* no. 13, 3 de diciembre de 1855.

remarkably phallic and flaccid (see Figure 8).[353] Zamacois' deployment of this sword, then, should be read as a figurative attempt to emasculate his liberal rival. It can simultaneously be read as a re-imagining of the sword's power. Wielded in the right (read: masculine) hands (in this case the hands of conservatives), it could once again serve as a formidable weapon.

Figure 8. Lithograph of Don Simplicio from Spanish periodical, *El Entreacto*, c. 1830s.

Transforming the cowardly, gluttonous cuckold—or his ass, in the case of *El Burro de D. Simplicio*—into a symbolic national protagonist produced intense irony by suggesting that this foolish, irrational cultural persona was more adept at leading the

[353] Lithograph reproduced in J. Alvárez Barrientos, J. M. Ferri Coll y E. Rubio Cremades, eds., *Larra en el mundo. La mission de un escritor moderno* (Spain: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, 2011), 260.

country than the politicians and generals who had actually taken the reins. But, it also did much more. Scholars have argued that the nineteenth-century press was the most effective means by which citizens attempted to influence the government.[354] Moreover, nineteenth-century literacy figures and newspaper circulation rates belie actual readership. Read aloud practices common on street corners, in reading rooms and in cafés enabled a wider circulation of ideas and broader engagement in politics and public life. Journalists who deployed satire understood this. Their use of stage language and imagery was thus multiply motivated. It afforded the men status by reflecting their knowledge of an engagement with the city's theater culture. In another register, however, we should read their efforts as a calculated move to broaden their readership. Not only were the men tapping into theater's popularity and city residents' knowledge of the stage, they also composed these newspapers knowing that the material would be read aloud. As such, they wrote with a flare and style to match the ways such news would be delivered (through dramatic read alouds in public spaces), hoping perhaps to increase their chances of capturing listeners' attention.

What made the cultural phenomenon that grew up around *La pata de cabra* so powerful and pervasive was the way the play moved back and forth between the playhouse, the press, and the public imagination. Returning for a moment to Diana Taylor's theorization of the relationship between performance and history is illustrative for the ways it can help us imagine how the process unfolded. For instance, after actress María Cañete's wildly popular 1863 performances as Don Simplicio, comparisons between contemporary

[354] Pablo A. Piccato, "The Public Sphere and Liberalism in Mexico: From the Mid-19th Century to the 1930s," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* (Aug. 2016), 2.

political figures and Grimaldi's bumbling protagonist became loaded with additional meanings; while equating any male figure with Don Simplicio had always been intended as a gendered slight, post-1863 comparisons brought to readers' minds actual female embodiment. The inverse was also true. Thus, when in November 1852, editors for the conservative *El Universal* criticized the federalist government for capitulating to a group of seditious rebels (*pronunciados*, or those who had issued a pronouncement) in Veracruz, they compared the government's response to "Don Simplicio's generosity toward Leonor…because she doesn't like him and she marries another."[355] For these conservatives, Don Simplicio stood-in discursively for the government and the nation, which in their view was weak and effeminate. We might imagine, then, that more than a few spectators at the performances of the play that followed this newspaper article read it as both an allegory for the nation and a dark prophesy for its future; Don Simplicio, as Mexico, was destined to lose.

Taylor's theorization also helps us understand the play's endurance. The play's box office success was unprecedented. By the mid-1870s, *La pata de cabra* was a mainstay of the repertoire in first-class and popular theaters alike, and performances continued until at least 1920. While its success in the marketplace alone merits attention and signals its importance, newspaper editors extended the play's world well into the 1870s. A writer for the satirical daily, *La Orquesta*, compared discontent from 1873 to 1875 under Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada's liberal government to a *comedia de magia*, likening it to "a type of

[355] *El Universal*, 22 de noviembre de 1852.

melo-mimo-drama, full of flights, illusions, and metamorphoses. A specie of *La pata de cabra*, in sum, not without its Don Simplicios, witches, and everything else."[356]

Editors also continued to suggest that a *lunático* government was more enlightened than Mexico's. In an article that appeared in *La Linterna* in 1877, a caricatured Porfirio Díaz responds to prodding about the recruitment of *lunáticos* to colonize northern Mexico, "I don't want lunar men…because if the moon gives us light [in the evenings], it's because the moon's town council is full of enlightened men (*ha de tener muchas luces*, a play on the word light/enlightened). If we leave it without these enlightened men, how will we see at night?"[357] A year later, editors for the liberal *El Combate* would remark about Porfirio Díaz's Plan de Tuxtepec, which overturned the political order and placed him in power for more than three decades,

> After so much blood, so much sacrifice, after more bitterness and suffering than we can measure…Doesn't it seem like we find ourselves in that scene from *La pata de cabra*, when the illustrious D. Simplicio Cabeza de Buey y Majaderano [sic], jokingly tells his mute sidekick, Lazarillo: 'Don't forget to remind me, man, that I have something to promise you.' Isn't it true that a similar thing has happened to the Plan de Tuxtepec? It promised the nation much, and however painful it is to say it, the plan hasn't kept its promise.[358]

Editors thus extended the play's world until it no longer needed to be extended. The play worked when uncertainty, instability, and angst were pervasive. It no longer worked in the same way once Porfirio Díaz established some degree of order and stability. The play's appropriations in the press virtually disappear in the 1880s, coinciding with the Díaz regime's blend of coercion, intimidation, pragmatism, and *realpolitik* that kept it in power

[356] *La Orquesta*, época 3, t. 8, no. 10, 3 de febrero de 1875.

[357] *La Linterna*, 7 de mayo de 1877.

[358] *El Combate*, 31 de enero de 1878.

until 1910.[359] Though the play remained a box office success, and doubtless many read Don Simplicio as a stand-in for Díaz, the cultural phenomenon had by 1880 come to an end.

Conclusion

Don Simplicio has long since disappeared from the stage and from history. But, in mid-nineteenth century Mexico City, and in places throughout the Spanish empire (Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, e.g.), he was a ubiquitous presence—a cultural persona and stock character that spoke to real or imagined realities.[360] In a way, Don Simplicio became a euphemism much like Carlos Hipólito Serán's *ceros sociales*—a stand-in engorged with meaning that could be readily deployed for various ends. More broadly, *La pata de cabra* became a shorthand for the ways that Mexicans tried to make sense of and cope with the angst and uncertainty they experienced throughout the 1840-1878 period. They immersed themselves in the play's zany world. They laughed at its absurdity, and they cried about it. They even re-imagined the play to critique their own topsy-turvy world. But, they were also stuck in it, unable to envision an escape.

The instability of the period, combined with serious concerns about the nation's viability, explains in part why the play worked—and worked well—for so long. Long after its popularity had dwindled in Spain, *La pata de cabra* continued to fill playhouses, captivate audiences, and inspire newspaper editors in Mexico. More generally, however, magical comedies found remarkable resonance. In an 1848 theater review, a critic remarked sardonically, "Between us Mexicans, few things are more frequent or more

[359] Paul Garner, *Porfirio Díaz: Profiles in Power* (New York: Longman, 2001), 69-70.

[360] A newspaper with the title *Don Simplicio* was published in Puerto Rico in 1871.

accepted than *pronunciamientos* (pronouncements) and magical comedies."[361] With some 1500 extra-constitutional pronouncements declared nationwide between 1821 and 1876 calling for meaningful political change, the critic meant to hammer home—however hyperbolically—the popularity of magical comedies.[362] Fantastical magical comedies found their greatest success and resonance in that seemingly farcical world of mimetic insurrectionism, frequent coups (including at least one *auto-golpe*, or self-overthrow), and economic insecurity that stage managers and newspaper editors came to think of as the national *melo-mimo-drama*.[363] Their emphasis on tricks, illusions, and spectacle paralleled events of the age in which daily life was theatrical and in which theatergoing increasingly became a focus of urban life. [364] This parallelism helps explain why contemporaries so often borrowed stage language—references to *tramoyas* (stage tricks) and *transformaciones* (set changes)—to describe and critique daily life. Put simply, it made the content and their critiques intelligible and digestible.

In addition to *La pata de cabra*, other magical comedies—often borrowing elements from Grimaldi's play—found their way from the stage into the popular

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[361] *El Siglo XIX*, 28 de noviembre de 1848, "Revista teatral."

[362] A team of researchers directed by Will Fowler has catalogued and reproduced more than 1500 pronouncements. See http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/pronunciamientos/

[363] I borrow the term mimetic insurrectionism from Will Fowler, by which he meant the ways that pronouncements were copied/re-issued with minor changes (the so-called *pronunciamientos de adhesion*) to show the extent of popular support nation-wide. See Fowler, *Independent Mexico*, 246-56.

[364] For an excellent study of the performance of urbanity (and theatricality) in daily life, see Conway, *Nineteenth-Century Spanish America,* chapter three.

imagination and the press.[365] The anonymous *El diablo verde* (The Green Devil), staged frequently in Mexico City the 1840s and 1850s, inspired at least two eponymous newspapers, one published in Querétaro (1849-50) and another in San Luis Potosí (c. 1855).[366] Don Junípero, the protagonist of Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch's popular magical comedy *Los polvos de la Madre Celestina* (Mother Celestina's Powders) which competed fiercely with Grimaldi's play in city playhouses in the 1850s and 1860s, crossed over into the widely circulating *calendario*-almanac genre.[367] Spanish playwright José Zorrilla's popular *Don Juan Tenorio*, a fantastical and romantic play that featured stage effects similar to those found in magical comedies, was staged frequently in Mexico City beginning in the 1840s, and it spawned a newspaper in 1850.[368] Starting in 1864, city playhouses staged the play every All Soul's Day season, a tradition which continues to the present.

This was also an era dominated by satire. As did everyone, satirists obsessed over social cohesion. In deploying satire, they clashed over national values and where to set social and class-based boundaries and borders. Appropriating a widely recognized a beloved cultural persona like Don Simplicio not only offered these middling urbanites a

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[365] For connections between popular magical comedies, see David T. Gies, "*Don Juan Tenorio* y la tradición de la comedia de magia," *Hispanic Review* 58, no. 1 (Winter, 1990): 8.

[366] Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to access either periodical.

[367] For more on this genre, see Edward Wright-Rios, *Searching for Madre Matiana,* 87-124.

[368] Michael P. Costeloe, "Mariano Arista and the 1850 Presidential Election in Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* vol. 18, issue 1 (Jan. 1999), 61. Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* sits somewhere between the romantic drama and magical comedy genres, though Zorrilla drew heavily upon the magical comedy genre to craft the play. See Gies, "Don Juan Tenorio," 1-17.

voice in the political process but it also allowed them to explore where those bounds and borders might be set and thus who was to form part of Mexico's body politic. Satire works insofar as audiences can peel back its layers and decipher (at least some of) its multiple meanings and referents.[369] For historians far removed from the period and place, this presents a daunting challenge. Contemporaries immersed in the capital's mid-century cultural, social, and political worlds would have had no such trouble reading meaning into Don Simplicio's many journeys through the unfolding social and aesthetic dramas.

Satire also exerted cohesive power. As an expressive mode open to all political persuasions, it offered a unifying discourse in the midst of increasingly polarized arguments. Here, I do not mean to suggest that most satirical attacks were apolitical (to the contrary, most were political) but rather that recourse to a shared expressive mode offered an effective way in which satire brought Mexicans together amid worry and polarization. By sharing jokes and poking fun at shortcomings, satirists helped strengthen collective identities. Mexicans, despite deepening political rifts, laughed at, with, and through Don Simplicio. In the process, they made the era's interminable instability and absurdity a source of shared humor and scorn.

[369] Steven E. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000), 9.

CHAPTER 4

THE AGE BROADENS: TANDAS, ZARZUELA, TEATRO FRÍVOLO, AND THE POPULARIZATION OF THEATERGOING

One of the most profound changes in theatergoing during the age of theater owed to an unlikely suspect, the itinerant showman-entertainer José Soledad Aycardo. Aycardo, who had gotten his start in 1840s Monterrey, Mexico, with the Olympic Circus, set off a revolution in theatergoing practices in the late 1860s by chopping up his pioneering variety shows and selling them cheaply in short pieces, or *tandas*. Aycardo initiated this revolution in a popular wooden theater constructed in the patio of the old seminary building located just east of the metropolitan cathedral. But the practice of offering tandas quickly spread to other theaters and performance halls. One of Aycardo's rivals began selling one-and-a-half hour-long shows at the Chiarini Circus in November 1868. The following year, tandas took over the first-class Iturbide and Principal Theaters during the months of November and December. A decade later, tandas were standard practice in all theaters during the winter season. Their popularity led one critic to remark, "Terror! Horror! The *tandas* are better attended than the 11am mass in any parish."[370] That same critic would later call tandas the "scandal of the century."[371]

Timing had nearly everything to do with the tanda's rise and popularity. Tandas became popular at the very same time that interest in the zarzuela peaked. A form of spoken and sung lyric theater that dated to the seventeenth century, the Spanish zarzuela

[370] *El Monitor Republicano*, 10 de noviembre de 1878. Article written by Enrique Chávarri, using the pseudonym Juvenal.

[371] *El Monitor Republicano*, 16 de octubre de 1881.

was revived in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its popularity in Spain translated to other parts of Latin America, especially places like Cuba, Buenos Aires, and Mexico, where it became the most popular theatrical genre. The one-act zarzuela in particular, with its comic skits and popular dance, was a perfect fit for the tanda format, easily squeezed in and not requiring first-rate actors.

Tandas popularized theatergoing in the city in unprecedented ways. With prices for seats as low as a *medio real* (1/16 peso), tandas allowed lower-middle and working-class people to attend performances in first-class playhouses rather then the small, wooden neighborhoods playhouses and ramshackle constructions they had grown accustomed to. For many, this was a first, since ticket prices had in the past made attending shows prohibitively expensive.

This chapter explores the origins of the tanda and traces its influence over the thirty-five-year period until the early 1900s and the rise of film. It also narrates several entangled stories: the rising popularity of zarzuela and the creation of the *teatro frívolo*, a music hall theater that combined spectacular elements of the Spanish *género chico* and French operetta while borrowing structurally from the circus and puppet theater.[372] Combined, tandas, zarzuela, and the teatro frívolo fomented a revolution in scenic representations. They changed the way theatergoers consumed theatrical spectacle and thus laid the foundations for later film-going and twentieth-century mass entertainment. More importantly for the present study, these revolutions broadened the age of theater, putting

[372] Susan E. Bryan, "The Commercialization of Theater in Mexico and the Rise of the 'teatro frívolo' [Frivolous Theater]," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 5 (1986): 1.

theatergoing within reach of more city residents. For ever larger numbers of urban dwellers, theater became a regular aspect of cultural and social life.[373]

The Rise of the Tanda

Perhaps the best way to understand the rise of the tanda in Mexico City is to follow—to the extent documentation allows—the career of Jose Soledad Aycardo, its pioneer. Aycardo got his start in northern Mexican capital of Monterrey, Nuevo León. Founder of the Olympic Circus, he petitioned authorities there in 1841 to offer circus shows.[374] Less than two years later, Aycardo and his circus act had migrated to Mexico City and were performing at the Teatro de los Gallos. He became a staple of the city's entertainment world. His troupe of performers amused city residents at bullfighting arenas, popular neighborhood theaters, and winter season tent shows into the 1880s.

Aycardo established a semi-permanent home in the early 1850s at the popular neighborhood Teatro del Relox located four blocks north of the metropolitan cathedral. It was here that Aycardo pioneered the variety show, with a typical afternoon performance featuring tightrope walkers, horsemanship, puppet theater, singing, dancing, and one-act comedies or lyric farces (*sainetes*).[375] Antonio García Cubas remembered Aycardo as the most popular and talented clown of his era. He was also a skilled acrobat, able troubadour, and entertaining emcee. Aycardo often played all those roles in a single evening. He greeted the audience and emceed during and between acts, sometimes starring in them. He

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[373] For an analogous process in eighteenth century France, see Clay, *Stagestruck*, especially chapter six.

[374] Julio Revolledo Cárdenas, *La fabulosa historia del circo en México* (Mexico City: CONACULTA/Escenología, 2004), 130.

[375] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México en la época de Santa Anna* 2:75.

was also the stage bard who told jokes about old women and mothers-in-law, who flirted with beautiful maidens, and who offered critiques of social vices—tenement houses, drunkards, poorly married women—drenched in satire.[376] Perhaps the most telling example of Aycardo's sense of humor could be found in the phrase painted on the stage curtain at the Teatro del Relox, which read: "With false brilliance and under many names, I give man moral lessons."[377] Aycardo's scorn for elites' beliefs in the moralizing power of theater was not lost on his patrons, most of who did not come to the Relox in search of such lessons.

Aycardo hired an orchestra to play overtures from operas and waltzes during intermissions. Performers sang arias. Puppets danced and sang duets. They also featured in adaptations of popular, if controversial, zarzuelas like *El Tío Caniyitas*, then being staged at the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Oriente. Especially fashionable were shows involving the puppet "el negrito poeta" (The Little Black Poet), Aycardo's reconfiguration of a historical eighteenth-century figure (José Vasconcelos, son of Congolese slaves) as the ingenious and happy *lépero*, a racially ambiguous, lower-class urban dweller. During 1855, for as little as 1 real audiences mused at a performance that saw the Little Black Poet go to heaven and another of a posada held at his house. The following year, audiences at the Relox watched him dance onstage a variant of the polka then later bid him adieu in a farewell performance that saw him depart for Martinique by way of the port of Veracruz.

Aycardo's shows drew large, diverse crowds. Journalists remarked on the *concurrencia elegante* (elegant audiences) and the *personas de buen tono* (people of good

[376] Antonio García Cubas, *El libro de mis recuerdos* (Mexico City: SEP, 1946), 254-8.

[377] Conway, *Nineteenth-Century Spanish America*, 111-13.

taste) who attended the best puppet show in the city.[378] An acquaintance of Aycardo's remembered the sad and tranquil street bustling with activity on performance evenings, filled with beautiful carriages and elegant women hurrying to take their place in the balcony.[379] The theater's popularity resulted in part from the originality and variety of Aycardo's shows but also from the ambiance. Rabble rousing, or *cocorismo*, was accepted, encouraged and expected. Audiences came to watch the *cócoras* hurl insults at the actors onstage. Relox theatergoer Antonio García Cubas remembered one rabble rouser in particular, a man known simply as One-Eyed Suárez, whose mischief and good-natured jokes kept audiences coming back for more. So popular were the shows, in fact, that the most select city residents reportedly paid up to two ounces in gold for box seats.[380]

Aycardo's success at the Relox led him to take on management duties at a second stage, at the Teatro de la Esmeralda about 10-12 blocks away on the other side (south) of the zócalo. It also bred criticism. City authorities had bemoaned the Mosso brothers' monopoly over the city's first-class playhouses in 1849. Indeed, those complaints had served as partial justification for the construction of the Teatro de Iturbide in the 1850s. In 1857, a city councilman criticized what he saw as the newest monopoly, Aycardo's control over the city's second-class establishments.[381]

Aycardo entertained city residents off and on at permanent and seasonal theaters throughout the 1860s. In the early part of the decade, he operated seasonal puppet theaters

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[378] *La Pata de Cabra*, no. 193, 2 de abril de 1856.

[379] García Cubas, *Libro*, 257.

[380] *Ibid*.

[381] *Diario de Avisos*, 7 de abril de 1857.

at the Alameda, the city's largest park, and in the zócalo.[382] In its middle years, he renovated the Relox (adding a fireproof roof) and directed companies there, selling seats for as little as a medio real.[383] Before the decade's end, he opened a provisional circus in the city's main square and rented the Teatro de América, constructed in the patio of the former seminary on the eastern edge of the zócalo.[384]

This was the specific milieu in which the tanda was born. Ignacio Altamirano, one of the century's most respected intellectuals and public men, pointed to Aycardo as the initiator of the practice. As he told it, Aycardo had always been an innovator, doing his best to stay a step ahead of brazen imitators who did their best to take away Aycardo's business. In the 1850s Aycardo had successfully pioneered the variety show. The following decade, he experimented with format and price, offering spectators shorter, cheaper shows. He chopped up shows into one and 1.5-hour segments called tandas. In the past, theater audiences had paid a set amount for an entire afternoon or evening's performance. At first- and second-class playhouses, shows would often run for four to five hours, sometimes longer.

Tandas caught on quickly. By November 1868—All Soul's Day season—the Teatro de América and the Chiarini Circus both offered shows by tanda. On Nov. 28, impresario Joaquín Carbajal offered three tandas at the Chiarini, each 1.5 hours long. The first tanda kicked off with an orchestral overture directed by a Sr. Campillo. Acrobatics by "the Mexican Alcides," Antonio Pérez de Prian, followed as did tricks and sleights of hand

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[382] AHDF, Diversiones Públicas, vol. 799, expediente 289, 1860; vol. 800, expediente 322.

[383] AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4016, expediente 73, 1866.

[384] AHDF, Diversiones Públicas, vol. 800, expediente 321.

by the magician Bonilla. The second and third tandas were double features. The second featured an orchestral overture, followed by Pioquinta Vega's performance of the popular song "La Paloma" ("The Dove") and a Scottish reel. Audiences then enjoyed a performance of the one-act zarzuela, "Goodnight, Mr. Simon," and four magic tricks. Pioquinta Vega's performance of "The Butterfly," a dance, closed out the second tanda. The third tanda opened with an orchestral overture and was followed by Bonilla's magic tricks and Prian's acrobatic stunts. It concluded with a national Spanish dance. Gallery seats for the first tanda cost ½ real. Balcony seats went for 1 real. Prices doubled for the second and third tandas.[385]

Manuel Payno offered a thick description of what it was like to experience a tanda at the Teatro de América. According to Payno

> We've found refuge in the shows at the former seminary…the theater is large but narrow. The stage, visible in the distance, is enveloped in tobacco smoke. Once the curtain is raised, the actors touch the ceiling with their heads and they appear to be ghosts or visions from a story; the smoke, the rouge, and the wigs, both natural and artificial, create an interesting and fantastical sight. Once the piece or sainete is finished, the curtain falls, and a veritable *pronunciamiento* begins. One group of young men shout: 'Chole, Chole, viva Chole! [Pilar Pautret]' The opposing group tries to shout over them: 'Florinda, Florinda! [Florinda Camps]' After a half hour, during which the smoke thickens, the light becomes more opaque, and the smell of smoke and sweat intensifies, the curtain lifts and Chole appears. Her supporters clap and shout while her detractors hiss and scream: 'Death to Chole! Get off the stage, Chole!' Chole, unmoved by applause or hisses, begins her pirouettes, spins, and dance steps to music that no one can hear. She performs mechanically, in the way a carpenter sands wood or a smith hammers iron. The curtain falls and the shouts begin again until the director of the theater, doing as governments that cede to public opinion, orders that the curtain be raised again. Florinda's appearance, light-skinned, interesting, splendid, the object of such fervent enthusiasm, causes a ruckus. Even her detractors cheer her on. The Florindistas create a tumult as the heroine begins to dance, enthusing her supporters, while raising her skirt ever so slightly. In addition, Florinda is sensitive: she gives thanks by bringing her hands to her heart, smashing hats that are thrown at her feet, and expressing her gratitude in a thousand ways. But even this doesn't calm the furor of Chole's fans, who

[385] *El Siglo XIX,* 28 de noviembre de 1868.

> interrupt and hiss her. Florinda cannot handle it any longer: tears well up in her eyes. Here we are presented with the sensitive and human character of the Mexican: the rabble rousers quiet. The dance and sainete finish as best they can. The bell rings to announce the end of the tanda and the dark, crowded mass of people begins to remove itself from the smoke-laden hall. Later, new spectators enter to enjoy the delicacies of the final tanda, which concludes after midnight."[386]

Aside from offering a vivid description of tanda-going in a seasonal theater, Payno's description of Florinda Camps's dancing—the raising of her skirt, for instance—introduces yet another layer to the story of the tanda's rise: the arrival, in Mexico, of the risqué French cancan. Following its debut at the Gran Teatro Nacional on June 22, 1869, cancan fever overtook the city. Parodies of the cancan-mania that gripped the capital appeared in short order, among them Enrique Gaspar's *La cancanomanía,* as did a dance review titled, *¿Quién va? El cancán. Atrás, paisano* (Who's next? The Cancan. Out of the Way, Friend). Before the year was out, the cancan featured in tandas at first-class playhouses. In November 1869, for instance, a tanda at the Teatro Principal featured two short comedies, *El secreto* (The Secret) and *Las malas tentaciones* (Those Malicious Temptations), and a performance of the cancan—all for a medio real, the price of a half-liter of milk.[387] Seeing box office revenues fall precipitously and seats go unfilled, stage managers at the Nacional, Iturbide, and the more popular Teatro Hidalgo followed suit; while initially they offered cancan performances at the conclusion of afternoon and evening shows, many changed their staple repertoires to include comic operas by Offenbach and Lecocq featuring the cancan in its many variants.[388] The cancan's immense popularity led Ignacio Altamirano to

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[386] *El Siglo XIX*, 27 de noviembre de 1870. Author's translation.

[387] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México en la época de Juárez*, 121.

[388] Luis Reyes de la Maza, *Cien años de teatro en México* (Mexico City: SEP, 1972), 89-90.

quip, "There is no longer any doubt; this century, which pedants have declared the century of steam power and the telegraph, should instead be called the century of cartooning and the can-can."[389]

Though the cancan captivated nearly all of the city's theatergoing set, its ability to excite audiences and push at the boundaries of acceptable social mores and manners was particularly well suited to the tanda. A journalist writing in early 1873 described the scene at the Teatro de América in this way

> Imagine this, Alfredo, a half dozen robust dancers, executing bodily contortions required by the can-can, with all imaginable and possible wantonness. Now imagine a hundred or more downtrodden *pollos* [young dandies], standing on benches forming a compact mass, while others climb up the support beams holding up the balconies like lizards…the bodies of the disciples of the dancing muse, Terpsicore, convulse, their skirts rise up to reveal soft forms. The *pollos*, frenetic, delirious, and desperate, shout, convulse, and howl frighteningly.[390]

A year later, in November and December 1874, the city counted seven permanent playhouses and eight seasonal (temporary) theaters. Known by contemporaries as *jacalones*, these seasonal venues—including the Teatro de América—tended to offer bawdier shows including the most risqué variants of the cancan. One, the Teatro de la Exposición, offered hourly tandas from 4pm to midnight for just ½ real. The evening's final show, which began at 11pm and was known as the "tanda de confianza," was apparently so bawdy that it made students and old men delirious. When the shows got out of hand, as they often did, stage managers would simply turn off the gas, leaving the stage and the audience in the dark.[391]

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[389] *El Renacimiento*, 1869, 372.

[390] *El Siglo XIX*, 2 de febrero de 1873.

[391] Reyes de la Maza, *Cien años,* 96-7.

By the mid-1870s, seasonal tent theaters offering shows by tanda could be found in parks and plazas across the city. Archival documents show these sites included the Plaza de la Constitución, the Plaza de Armas, the Alameda, and the Plaza del Seminario; many of these provisional theaters, like the Teatro de Novedades, offered at least five tandas per day, seven days per week.[392] Later that decade, even the Teatro Nacional, the republic's marquis theater, got involved, offering tandas in November and December for as little as ½ real.

The image of tandas as money-making ventures pervaded public discourse. Social critics claimed that "this custom [of seasonal tanda-going] had the power of law" and that "*reales* [currency] rained down into the pockets of entertainment peddlers like blessings from God."[393] Municipal authorities seemed to agree and sought ways to both control and capitalize on the popularity of tanda-going. In 1867, the city council required all entertainment peddlers to submit to a licensing procedure prior to staging shows. They also required a per show contribution—a type of municipal entertainment tax—valued at the price of eight of the show's most expensive tickets.[394] In 1872, the council increased the per show tax to the value of ten of the most expensive tickets and closed prior loopholes that allowed entertainment peddlers to petition for reductions to the contribution in exceptional circumstances.[395]

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[392] AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4019, expediente 79; see also AHDF, Hacienda, Vol. 2014, expediente 418, 1879.

[393] *El Monitor Republicano*, 3 de noviembre de 1878 and 10 de noviembre de 1878.

[394] AHDF, Hacienda: Contribucciones, expediente 217. Reference to November 28, 1867 decree.

[395] *Ibid.* Reference here to decree of February 14, 1872.

By the early 1870s, managers at provisional and permanent theaters alike petitioned city officials in growing numbers for reductions in municipal payments. These petitions offer a useful lens into the growing popularity of tandas, even if they do not clearly reveal all tandas to be successful economically. In 1873, two men, Sres. Masseron y Valle, requested a reduction for two provisional theaters located in the Plaza del Seminario on the eastern edge of the zócalo. The two men claimed they struggled to stay afloat when their rents doubled from one year to the next.[396] The following year, José Portilla requested a fixed daily rate of one peso regardless of how many tandas he offered at the small Teatro de Alarcón, one block from the Teatro Nacional.[397] In 1875, Aurelio Andrade, renter at the Teatro de América, claimed that his theater had been deserted in its first four days because the city's residents had instead been patronizing the provisional theaters operating in the Alameda.[398] Andrade attached to his petition a rudimentary ledger from November 2, 1875 citing his losses.

Andrade's ledger offers clues about the size and scale of production costs for tanda performances at seasonal theaters. He paid 7.5 pesos per day to rent the space, five pesos' worth of municipal taxes, 19.5 pesos for an orchestra, 4 pesos for a coat closet and clerk, and 10 pesos for electricity. The dramatic troupe at the Teatro de América consisted of thirteen actors making about 25 pesos per day. Based on the ledger, he claimed to have lost 76 pesos in two days. By late December, and despite being granted a reduction in municipal contributions, Andrade closed the operation having, in his words, gone bankrupt.

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[396] AHDF, Hacienda: Contribucciones, vol. 2022, expediente 217 (1873).

[397] AHDF, Hacienda: Contribucciones, vol. 2022, expediente 232 (1874).

[398] AHDF, Hacienda: Contribucciones, vol. 2023, expediente 240 (1875).

Despite individual failures like Andrade's, tandas became a defining feature of theatergoing life by the turn of the century, and the Teatro Principal served as their unofficial home. In January 1890, a theater critic remarked about the tanda's popularity at the city's oldest playhouse:

> At the Teatro Principal, tandas continue to benefit from a florid spring. On Saturday, Sunday, and Wednesday of last week, people arrived in a closed battalion to see the tandas there. The theater was filled, stuffed, overflowing once more; in the portico a dense crowd was demanding tickets as the workers in the ticket box yelled back, 'Ladies and gentlemen, there's no room, not even for a cricket.' And this is precisely the biggest incentive for the respectable public: take part in the jokes and the banter, enter the theater even though they wouldn't fit, experience the moment. The piece being performed mattered little, or not at all; what mattered was that the seats had been sold out, and the patrons still wanted in…[399]

Tandas at the Teatro Principal that year stretched into March. The following year, a zarzuela company led by Isidoro Pastor at the Teatro Principal offered shows by tandas in March, July, and September. That decade, tandas featured beyond the standard All Soul's Day season at permanent playhouses such as the Teatro-Circo Orrin, the Teatro Arbeu, the Teatro de Variedades, the Teatro Nacional, and the Teatro Principal. As the new century dawned, one critic quipped, "No one eats dinner at home anymore preferring instead to go to the tanda."[400] Another wrote that "the public descended *en masse* upon the tandas at the Teatro Principal as if they had been summoned by the ringing of church bells."[401]

Tandas in/and the Entertainment Marketplace

The tanda emerged as part of the city's growing entertainment marketplace. Though city officials and theater critics did their best to draw clear distinctions between playhouses

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[399] Enrique Chávarrí (Juvenal) writing for *El Monitor Republicano*, 5 de enero de 1890.

[400] *El Cómico* 20 de agosto de 1899. Reproduced from Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo* 2:385.

[401] *El Diario del Hogar*, 6 de diciembre de 1901.

and types of shows (tandas and puppetry versus opera, e.g.), this task proved futile. Spectators traveled freely between venues and shows. As historian of British theater, Jeffrey Cox, reminds us, nineteenth-century theater was characterized by a complex range of performance spaces, genres, and styles. Thus, he writes, "much as we think of radio, broadcast television, cable, videos and DVDs movies, and the internet and pod-casts as all part of a media system in which each outlet bids for our attention, so should we see the major theatres offering tragedies and comedies, pantomimic stages, circus rings, street fairs, and even poetic plays in print as all connected in a performance system that helps shape each part."[402]

In Mexico City, this performance system included an ever-increasing number of permanent playhouses and a constellation of temporary venues dedicated to spectacles of various sorts. In the late 1860s, the city counted six permanent playhouses (see figure 9). By 1880, that number had grown to nine with the construction of the Teatros de la Democracia, de los Autores, Arbeu, and Morelos and the demolition of the Teatro de Nuevo México. By 1902, there were fourteen permanent theaters (see figure 10). Estimating the number of seasonal and temporary entertainment spaces is far more difficult since most did not advertise the ways permanent theaters did. License requests to city authorities point to a large number of geographically disperse entertainments that stretched from the poorer neighborhoods to the south, north, and east of the city center to the more

[402] Jeffrey N. Cox, "The Death of Tragedy; or, the Birth of Melodrama," in *The Performing Century: Nineteenth Century Theatre's History*, eds. Tracy C. David and Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 162-3.

populous and well-to-do east-west axis that ran between the zócalo and the Alameda and beyond.[403]

[403] Lorenzo Río, María Dolores, "'Entre el vicio y el beneficio': Segregación social y espacios de entretenimiento en la ciudad de México, 1810-1910," in *Problemas de la urbanización en el Valle de México, 1810-1910: Un homenaje visual en la celebración de los centenarios*, eds. Mario Barbosa and Salomón González (Mexico City, UAM, 2009), 244-5.

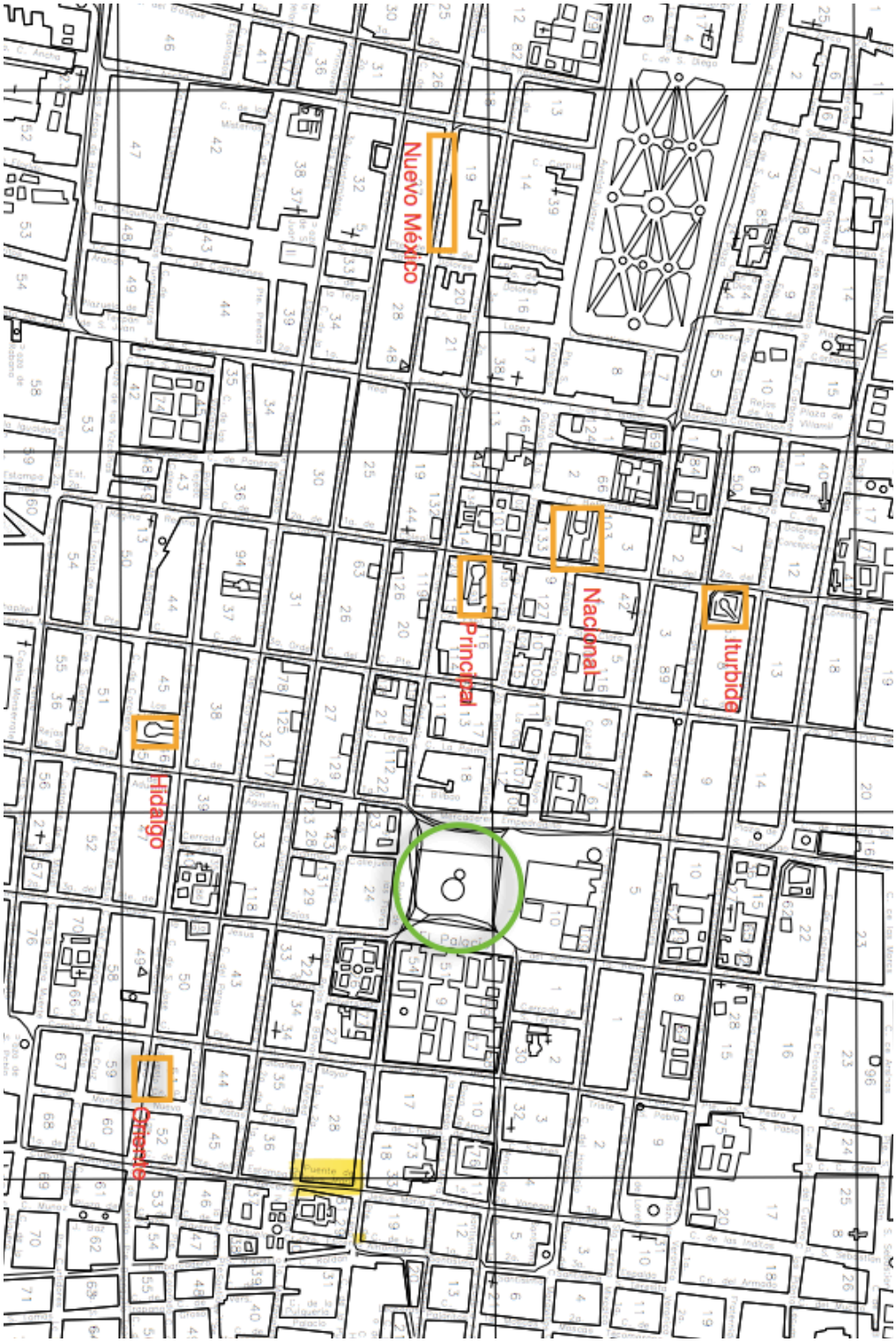

Figure 9. Permanent Playhouses, c. 1868

Figure 10. Permanent Playhouses, c. 1902

By focusing on a particular moment, one can better appreciate the scope and texture of the city's entertainment options. Easter Sunday in March 1875 was a busy day for city residents in search of entertainment. Those seeking grandly staged romantic dramas could choose between *La plegaria de los naufragios* (The Prayers of the Shipwrecked) at the Teatro Nacional, *Don Sancho el bravo* (Sancho the Brave) at the Teatro de Nuevo México, and *Matilde o Las dos reinas en batalla* (Matilde or The Queens in Battle) at the Teatro de la Democracia, the first playhouse in the city to feature hydrogen gas lighting. The zarzuela-going set found refuge at the Teatro de la Exposición, still standing following its construction for the 1874 municipal exhibition, and at the recently inaugurated Teatro Arbeu, while opera aficionados could enjoy Charles Gounod's grand opera, *Faust*, at the Teatro Principal, performed by the latest touring Italian company. Those searching for lighter fare had at least two options: an acrobatics and pantomime show at the Teatro de los Autores or a touring Japanese circus at the Plaza de Santo Domingo whose performance included animal tricks, juggling on horseback, and sundry gymnastics and balancing acts.[404]

This decade, and the era more generally, witnessed a profusion of spectacles and entertainments. Cosmoramas and panoramas continued to draw large numbers of spectators, as they had for decades. In November 1875, a wax museum and panorama opened down the street from the Teatro Nacional. Though it was not the city's first, this particular exhibit featured more than fifty wax figures from Mexican and world history, including the Pope, Alexander the Great, George Washington, Mexican independence

[404] *El Monitor Republicano*, 28 de marzo de 1875. See also Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México con Lerdo y Díaz,* 142-6.

heroes and former presidents.[405] Between 1874 and 1875, city officials received requests from city residents to lower municipal quotas for the exhibitions and entertainments they offered to the public; among the entertainments they offered were stereoscopic panoramas, silfo-ramas, children's games, and a request to display a young giant (*un joven colosal*).[406] The city's first skating rink opened to the public in the Tivoli de Eliseo park in 1877. In the 1880s, the number of license requests for public entertainments such as these nearly tripled.[407]

Urban growth, rural-urban migration in particular, propelled and helped sustain this expanding marketplace. Around 1860, the best estimates place the city's population around 200,000. By the mid-1880s, that number climbed to between 290,000-300,000. At the turn of the century, the city counted about 370,000 residents.[408] The city's territorial footprint also grew. Between 1856 and 1910, the city's total acreage nearly quintupled, from 8.5 to 40.5 square kilometers.[409] For entertainment entrepreneurs and aspiring profiteers, such growth smelled of potential for more spectators, greater ticket sales, and the need for new venues. Five permanent theaters were constructed in the 1870s, three in the 1880s, and two more in the 1890s.

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[405] *El Monitor Republicano*, 28 de noviembre de 1875.

[406] AHDF, Hacienda: Contribucciones, vol. 2022, expedientes 233 and 234 and vol. 2023, expedientes 269, 273, 274.

[407] Lorenzo Río, "'Entre el vicio y el beneficio,'" 238.

[408] Lear, "Mexico City: Space and Class," 464. See also Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, *La experiencia olvidada. El ayuntamiento de México: política y gobierno, 1876-1912* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1996), 81-5.

[409] Rodríguez Kuri, *La experiencia olvidada*, 85.

Zarzuela, Tandas, and the Género Chico

This tanda's rise also coincided with broader changes in consumer tastes. Chief among those was the resurgence and spread of the zarzuela, a form of spoken and sung lyric theater that originated in seventeenth-century Spain. Though it had fallen out of favor in the late eighteenth century, the zarzuela surged in popularity in the 1850s. Soon thereafter, it found its way to Mexico where it quickly won over audiences. The debut of Luis Olona's four-act *Por seguir a una mujer* at the Gran Teatro de Santa Anna (Teatro Nacional) in 1854, followed closely by *Don Simplicio Bobadilla en México. Un año después de La pata de cabra*, a Mexican parody of a zarzuela adaptation of Juan Grimaldi's popular *La pata de cabra* (the subject of the previous chapter), ushered in an era in which zarzuela increasingly dominated productions on the Mexican stage.[410] The frequent arrival of touring zarzuela companies, primarily from Spain, meant that by the turn of the century, zarzuelas ranked among the most popular and frequently performed genres in Mexican playhouses.

In the mid-nineteenth century, most zarzuelas were two-, three-, and four-act dramatic, music-laden productions focused on serious subject matter. Known more commonly as *zarzuela grande*, these zarzuelas were structurally related to French *opera comique*, Italian *opera buffa*, and Viennese *operetta* and their resurgence in Spain owed much to a new generation of Spanish composers and the actions of the Sociedad

[410] Unfortunately, we know very little about this Mexican-authored, parodic zarzuela, only that it likely drew upon Grimaldi's original magical comedy and an 1853 zarzuela adaptation composed by Manuel Tamayo y Baus titled *Don Simplicio Bobadilla*. For more on the 1853 zarzuela, see Pilar Quel Barastegui, "Don Simplicio Bobadilla de Manuel Tamayo y Baus, o la segunda parte de la pata de cabra," in *Teatro di magia,* v. 2, ed. Ermanno Caldera, 33-53 (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1991).

Artística.[411] A handful of zarzuelas grandes dominated stage directors' and touring companies' repertoires in Mexico until the late 1860s, when political and economic instability in Spain following the 1868 revolution created a financial crisis that led to the emergence of lighter and more satirical one-act zarzuelas—an emerging genre that became known as the *género chico* (minor genre). Spanish-authored one-act zarzuelas parodied character sketches and scenes of Spanish life. They poked fun at, alluded to, and often included fashionable dances such as the cancan. In short, the género chico held great popular appeal. One-act zarzuelas were also shorter and cheaper to produce; performances generally lasted an hour or less, which allowed stage managers to sell three to four times as many tickets.[412] The género chico was particularly well suited to the tanda format, and it flourished in Mexico as tandas became popular.

The arrival of touring zarzuela companies led by José Albisu and Joaquín Gatzambide bolstered zarzuela's popularity in Mexico City. These companies offered full-price performances of zarzuelas grandes at the city's first-class playhouses much to the delight of the city's well-to-do residents. But, seasoned zarzuela artists like Florinda Camps, Pilar Pautret, José Poyo, and Manuel Areu who formed part of these companies also branched out, performing in the city's many seasonal theaters. This willingness to crossover between venues helped them achieve local celebrity status. It also popularized zarzuela and helped make it, especially the one-act variant, a staple of tanda performances.

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[411] McCleary, "Popular, Elite, *and* Mass Culture?," 2-3; on zarzuela's resurgence in mid-century Spain, see Rafael Lamas, "Zarzuela: High Art, Popular Culture, and Music Theatre," in *A History of Theatre in Spain*, 200; on zarzuela's elasticity as a designation, see Janet Sturman, *Zarzuela: Spanish Operetta, American Stage* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000), 22.

[412] Sally Joan Bissell, "Manuel Areu and the Nineteenth-Century Zarzuela in Mexico and Cuba," (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Iowa, 1987), 246-9.

Tracing the performances in Mexico of artists like Camps, Pautret, Poyo, and Areu offers insights into the ways these artists crossed over fluidly between stages. All four arrived to Mexico in 1869. Areu and Poyo got their start at the Teatro de Iturbide with the company under the direction of José Albisu. When Albisu's company disbanded, Areu took over the company's management and merged with the company at the Teatro Principal, which included Camps and Pautret. The reformed company under Areu's direction remained at the Teatro Principal for about a year, before a power struggle with former Albisu company representative José Joaquín Moreno led all four to part ways; Areu and Poyo integrated into another company at the Teatro de Iturbide while Camps and Pautret spent November and December (1870) entertaining raucous crowds at the Teatro de América. By early 1871, all four were together again for a short time at the Teatro Principal offering a series of one-act zarzuelas as tandas. In early 1872, Poyo plied his trade quite successfully at the Teatro de América before forming his own company at the Teatro Nacional; later that year, Poyo's company would spend a month or two at the Teatro Calderón in Zacatecas. Poyo and Areu returned to the Teatro Principal and the company under the direction of José Joaquín Moreno in 1873. They performed with Moreno's company at the Teatro Principal and the Teatro de Variedades in Mexico City that year before setting off on a tour that would take them to Querétaro, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas.[413] In November 1874, Poyo, Areu, and Pautret reunited briefly at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in the plaza in front of the former seminary, on the eastern edge of the metropolitan cathedral.

[413] Performance histories come from Bissell, "Manuel Areu," 77-103 and author's database.

Named after the theater in Madrid where zarzuela made its comeback, the Teatro de la Zarzuela appeared among Gothic pavilions, a crystal palace with a grand rotunda, and pagoda-style structures erected for the 1874 municipal exhibition. The exhibition, modeled on the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851 London, was a major event designed to celebrate the country's intellectual, gastronomic, technological, and scientific achievements while also serving as a barometer of the nation's progress.[414] The event drew large crowds to the city. It also garnered the attention of entertainment entrepreneurs. Hoping to capitalize on the increased foot traffic the exhibition generated, entrepreneurs erected at least eight seasonal theaters that November and December. The Teatro de la Zarzuela was among these theaters and its name carried symbolic weight, especially given the immediate context of the exhibition. It signified, very publicly, zarzuela's growing popularity in the city. Its name alone beckoned passersby. At the same time, its status as a seasonal theater specializing in tandas revealed zarzuela's increasingly intimate identification with this format.

Starting in the late 1870s, zarzuela companies occupied permanent and provisional playhouses in the months of November and December and most offered zarzuelas by tanda. In the final months of 1878, audiences raved about the seasonal tandas offered by zarzuela companies at the Teatro Principal, Teatro Nacional, Teatro de Novedades, and Teatro de América. A decade later, zarzuela companies staged tandas at the Teatros Principal, Arbeu, and Nacional during nearly any month of the year, and as the new century dawned, at least

[414] Alexander, *City on Fire*, 80-81.

five permanent theaters in the city were dedicated exclusively to the *género chico*; all five offered this entertainment via tandas.[415]

The late historian Susan Bryan attempted to quantify the growing influence one-act zarzuelas, or *género chico*, exerted over the Mexican stage from the 1870s until 1910. Using data collected from Luis Reyes de la Maza's multivolume compilation of theater chronicles, Bryan notes that between 1873 and 1879, one-act zarzuelas represented just more than four percent of total theatrical production in Mexico. Between 1900 and 1910, Bryan finds that one-act zarzuelas comprised thirty-five percent of total theatrical production, and almost ninety percent of total zarzuela production.[416] The spotty nature of Bryan's data set requires that we view with skepticism the actual numbers and percentages that result from her analysis.[417] My own research has revealed that theater chroniclers underreported performances of one-act zarzuelas and tandas (part of so-called "low brow" entertainment) while they over-reported on tours and performances of celebrities. Nonetheless, Bryan's analysis is useful for identifying trends and shifts in theatrical production. One-act zarzuelas in Mexico City never came to dominate the stage as they did in places like Buenos Aires where, at the turn of the century, they constituted nearly 75 percent of total theatrical offerings.[418] Even still, the género chico exerted considerable

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[415] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo* 3:30.

[416] See Tabla A in Susan E. Bryan, " Teatro popular y sociedad durante el porfiriato," *Historia Mexicana* 33, no. 1 (July-Sept. 1983), 162.

[417] Based on theater chronicles (and thus what chroniclers chose to write about) transcribed from extant newspapers, Reyes de la Maza's multi-volume set is a rich but incomplete resource.

[418] McCleary, "Popular, Elite, *and* Mass Culture?," 4.

influence on theatrical life in Mexico City at the dawn of the twentieth century. Half of the city's fourteen permanent playhouses were dedicated exclusively to the género chico.

Theatergoing and Tanda-going public(s)

To this point, little has been made or said of the theatergoing public whose patronage propelled the rise of tandas and the género chico. In part, this is because it is difficult to ascertain the composition of spectators. Nineteenth-century theater critics wrote little about theatergoers unless they formed part of the upper crust of society. As a result, much of what we can discern about theatergoing publics draws on anecdotal and circumstantial evidence such as shows' ticket prices. The underlying assumption, that one's ability to afford a ticket equates to theater attendance, is inherently problematic. Nevertheless, when triangulated with anecdotal evidence from theater critics about the composition of audiences and broader wage statistics and purchasing power trends, ticket prices remain useful indicators of the composition of theatergoing publics and the changes such publics underwent in the second half of the nineteenth century.

One way to think about the possible theatergoing is to broaden out to society as a whole. In examining Mexican society between 1853 and 1876, historian Carlos Illades has shown that large landowners, large-scale merchants, loan agents, the high bureaucracy, and parts of the military and clerical hierarchies sat atop the social hierarchy. Below them, comprising a middle sector, were professionals, including doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, and public employees. Artisans, agricultural laborers, factory workers, day laborers, and other unskilled workers (water carriers, muleteers, domestic servants, and so forth), made

up what he terms the subaltern class—the lowest rungs in society.[419] The 1849 municipal census offers clues about the relative distributions of these groups within the economically active population. According to an analysis of the census, unskilled laborers comprised approximately 23 percent of the city's population. About 38 percent were skilled laborers, mapping on to what we might consider a lower-middle class. Middle and upper-middle class groups—an amorphous category that included wealthy families living off rental incomes to lowly clerks in merchant houses—made up between 20 and 26 percent of the population, while elites comprised 13 percent.[420]

In terms of nominal wages, unskilled laborers and servants who worked and lived in the homes of others typically earned between three and five pesos per month. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers earned wages of about 10 to 12 pesos per month, though gender disparities were significant. Seamstresses, for instance, earned just two to six pesos per month, while washerwomen earned between four and twelve pesos monthly. Skilled artisans like tailors, carpenters, weavers, and smiths could earn up to 36 pesos per month; however, their average monthly wages hovered near 12 pesos, similar to unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Female cigar factory workers earned about five-and-a-half pesos monthly whereas their male counterparts earned twelve pesos. Female supervisors at cigar factories earned between twenty-nine and thirty-eight pesos; their male counterparts earned

[419] Carlos Illades, *Hacia la república del trabajo: La organización artesanal en la ciudad de México, 1853-1876* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1996), 26-7.

[420] Analysis of 1849 census data comes from Shaw, "Poverty and Politics," 48-9 and 373-6.

up to fifty pesos monthly.[421] Research shows that for much of the nineteenth century average daily nominal wages in Mexico remained constant at about 3.25 reales.[422]

Estimates of subsistence and poverty-level wages in the second half of the nineteenth century are more difficult to ascertain. Articles that appeared in *El Siglo XIX* in the early 1840s estimated daily subsistence (in Mexico City) at 1.5 reales per person, or about 67.5 pesos annually.[423] More recently, economic historians Amílcar Challú and Aurora Gómez-Galvarrieto have argued that real wages generally improved from about 1870 to 1910. Their research on wages and prices in Mexico City shows that on average workers could afford two barebones baskets in 1850 and nearly 2.5 such baskets in 1900; these baskets allowed for minimal heating, lighting and clothing needs and they included food items (beef, maize, beans, and lard) required for basic human subsistence. Their research also offers a poverty index in the form of a "respectable" basket made up of fourteen items, which were more appealing to urban workers. So named to reflect a very limited but respectable lifestyle, these baskets included greater allotments of meat and beans and additional items such as bread, tortillas, and *pulque* (a popular fermented alcoholic beverage). Around 1850, households on average could almost afford about 9/10 respectable basket; after 1875, they could afford one with a tiny fraction leftover (between 1 and 1.1 baskets).[424] In sum, Challú and Gómez-Galvarrieto conclude that across the period, an urban laborer generally earned sufficiently to meet a nuclear family's basic

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[421] Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit,* 88-90. See also Shaw, "Poverty and Politics," 115.

[422] Challú and Gómez-Galvarrieto, "Mexico's Real Wages," 97.

[423] Shaw, "Poverty and Politics," 113. See also *El Siglo XIX*, 14 de noviembre de 1841.

[424] Challú and Gómez-Galvarrieto, "Mexico's Real Wages," 90-95, esp. Tables 1 and 2.

needs. A good number earned enough to stay at or above the poverty line, though theirs was always a precarious existence.

As real wages and thus purchasing power increased, ticket prices for theatrical entertainments decreased. At Soledad Aycardo's Teatro del Relox, in 1852, tickets in the gallery—the cheapest section—sold for 1.5 reales apiece. Ticket prices for gallery seats at first-class theaters such as the Teatro Principal and the Gran Teatro Nacional around that time typically sold for 2 reales. By the mid-1850s, however, stage managers at the Teatros Relox and Esmeralda reduced prices for gallery seats to 1 real. Standard fare at either theater might include a performance of a popular short comedy, individual feats by an actor-cum-horseman and showman extraordinaire like José María Piñeda, and popular dances. Clowns and sideshow acts filled the intermissions.[425] Prices fell intermittently at the first-class theaters as well. At the recently constructed Teatro de Iturbide, in 1858, high gallery seats for a Sunday afternoon performance of the zarzuela, *El duende* (The Ghost), sold for 1 real.[426]

With the exception of opera, ticket prices continued their downward trend in the 1860s and 1870s. Theatergoers could attend a performance of José Zorrilla's popular *Don Juan Tenorio* at the Teatro del Pabellón Mexicano or Manuel Bretón de los Herreros's five-act comedy, *Un cuarto de hora* (A Quarter-Hour), at the Teatro Hidalgo for ½ real.[427] Gallery seats for a performance of the grand drama, *Un soldado de Napoleón* (Napoleon's

[425] Highlights from shows offered on Aug. 12, 1855 at both the Teatro de Relox and Teatro de la Esmeralda. From author's database.

[426] Vanderbilt University, Special Collections, Theater Poster, 28 de noviembre de 1858.

[427] CEHM-CARSO, Fondo LXI-1 Impresos Armando María y Campos. Programas de Teatro, Serie 5, Legajo 617, 1861.

Soldier), sold for 1 real at the Teatro de Oriente.[428] At the first-class Teatro de Iturbide, gallery seats started at 1 real in the early 1870s.[429]

By the middle of the 1880s, theatergoers could purchase tickets for most shows and entertainments for 1 real or less. In January of 1886, for example, theatergoers could attend for ½ real performances of zarzuelas and dramas at the Teatros Principal, Hidalgo, and Merced Morales. For 1 real, they could spend an evening at the Teatro Arbeu, an afternoon at the circus or at an eight-act variety show (at the Patio Provincial) featuring gymnastics, juggling, human pyramids, bullfighting, dancing, and magic tricks. They could also visit the panorama and optical museum in the bottom of the Hotel de la Gran Sociedad, whose exhibitions changed every two days.[430]

While reductions in ticket prices theoretically put theater attendance within reach of a large number of city residents, affordability alone is a poor measure of consumption practices. People did not necessarily go to the theater simply because they could afford it. Nevertheless, it appears they did. Anecdotal evidence from theater critics suggests that theatrical audiences became increasingly diverse in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, Ignacio Altamirano described the low prices at Soledad Aycardo's tanda shows, in 1870, as "permitting day laborers, even the poor, some relief from a difficult, work-filled life in the form of a comedy…"[431] The following year, the future *científico* Francisco Bulnes identified Sunday afternoon theatergoers as consisting of

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[428] *Ibid.,* Serie 4, Legajo 587.

[429] *Ibid.,* Serie 7, Legajo 961.

[430] AHDF, Administración de Rentas Municipales, vol. 4897, enero 1886.

[431] *El Siglo XIX*, 13 de noviembre de 1870.

middling merchants, children, and rural migrants wanting to be entertained and frightened by shows such as *La pata de cabra* and *Don Juan Tenorio*; tickets to these once-weekly shows typically sold at discounts of up to fifty percent.[432] Later that decade, a stage manager at the Teatro Hidalgo requested a reduction in municipal tax payments. As he explained to the city council, "the moderate ticket prices, set so as to be within reach of the middle-class, artisan families that attend performances there, were not sufficient to cover his costs."[433]

Frequent theatergoers and chroniclers like Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera noted differences between regular theatergoers and tanda-goers, suggesting that the tanda's popularity broadened the theatergoing public. After attending his first tanda at the Teatro Principal in 1880, Gutiérrez Nájera wrote of his fellow tanda-goers

> They smelled of false pretenses [*gente cursi*]. The public gesticulated and stomped as they had in the golden age of the *jacalones*, and obscene jokes were received with rude laughs. This is not the same public that goes to see comedies or zarzuelas. It is a special public, very similar to that which can be seen in the zócalo on festival days. This public laughs boisterously at everything. These are the same belly laughs of men who only go to the theater when it costs them one real.[434]

In Gutiérrez Nájera's eyes, then, this was a new public who did not subscribe to—or were simply ignorant of—the norms and behaviors of more regular theatergoers.

Theatergoing as a marker of status and distinction became more pronounced when the colonial era monopoly that had held prices artificially low (and thus made theatergoing a more socially diverse activity) dissolved in the 1820s. Yet, while most observers—and

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[432] *El Domingo*, 12 de febrero de 1871.

[433] AHDF, Hacienda: Contribucciones, vol. 2022, expediente 292, 1876.

[434] Manuel Gutíerrez Nájera, "La tandas del Principal," in *Obras, t. III: Crónicas y artículos sobre teatro* (Mexico City, 1974), 302-5.

some theater historians—believed theater bifurcated into two separate spheres (a *teatro culto* and a *teatro del pueblo*), in reality, neither theater- nor opera-going was ever as exclusive as elites believed or wanted them to be.[435]

The performance of status was at the heart of spending an afternoon or evening at the theater. Elites went to the theater primarily to socialize and be seen. The wealthiest families rented boxes in the central balconies at first-class playhouses where they were visible to nearly everyone in attendance. They paid accordingly, with subscription prices for eight seats at 12-18 shows fluctuating between 100 and 250 pesos.[436] They paid even more handsomely for the most select shows; when Italian soprano Adelina Patti came to town, eight seats in the central balconies sold for 70 pesos per performance.[437] Even then, the content onstage was secondary to the performance of status. As one theater critic aptly described such a performance

> …good taste in the theater, so you know, means arriving at nine [for a show that started at 8pm], using your binoculars to admire all the beautiful young women in the balconies, make alluring gestures toward them, smoke a cigarette making a cloud of smoke come out of your mouth, fix your tie, critique the company's director, the actors, theater staff, staging, and lighting (in this last one there is good reason) and anything else as you see fit. Thirty minutes before the play is set to end, the fashion is to make a lot of noise with your cane and boots, and leave the auditorium proclaiming: 'tonight's comedy is nothing more than a *sainete*.' My god! And even if it's one of Bretón's best works, you continue saying: 'Bretón is gracious and spirited but with this piece he has made an absolute mess.[438]

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[435] Hammeken, "La república de la música," 65-91. On theater's supposed bifurcation see Frank N. Dauster, *Perfil generacional del teatro hispanoamericano (1894-1924): Chile, Mexico, El Río de la Plata* (Ottawa: GIROL Books, 1993), 62.

[436] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el Segundo Imperio*, 206.

[437] *El Diario del Hogar*, 14 de diciembre de 1886.

[438] *El Museo teatral* no. 3, "Diálogo entre mi vecino y yo," 134, 1842.

For middle- and working-class individuals, theatergoing was also a performance of identity and a public marker of status, albeit a performance that was more aspirational—and one that for many came at significant financial cost. City residents turned to pawning as a creative financing strategy not only to secure basic necessities, as historian Marie Eileen Francois has shown, but also to maintain the appearance of affluence and status.[439] This was especially true among the middle class, for whom maintaining fashionable wardrobes and taking carriage rides figured centrally in the daily performance of identity.[440] But, editors at *El Monitor Republicano* also believed pawnbrokers preyed on the aspirations of the working classes, noting how urban entertainments increased loan operations in the city's pawnshops "The people pawn to go out and enjoy themselves," one editorial read, "not to calm some supreme necessity. This forms part of our national character."[441]

Gutiérrez Nájera's observations about tanda-goers at the Teatro Principal implied that the rise of tanda-going muddied the performance of identity by disturbing the hierarchies and decorum that reigned in the first-class theaters. At the tanda, the onstage performance was only part of the show. Spectators also came to enjoy the second show, the chanting, whistling, and hissing of the audience that was part of the tanda-going experience. Describing how tandas operated at the Teatro Principal, historian Susan Bryan writes

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[439] Francois, *Culture of Everyday Credit*, 92.

[440] *Ibid.*, 98-9.

[441] *Ibid.*, 171; Originally from *El Monitor Republicano*, 6 de enero de 1887 and 12 de enero de 1887.

> …the *tandas* gave an opportunity for untold liberties and the complete abandonment of courteous and 'decent' behavior. More tickets than seats were sold and consequently many women were forced to stand. Caught in the pushing and shoving, they risked being crushed against the walls and railings. The men thought nothing of smoking their cigars throughout the entire performance and many felt free to walk into a box occupied by women and sit wherever they chose, with the excuse that their tickets were as good as anyone else's. On Sundays, the Principal turned into a free-for-all. The rush at the door gave way to a stampede once inside. The guards could do nothing, the theater inspector even less, and general chaos reigned.[442]

If on one level tandas blurred the neatly defined sectional hierarchies that separated theatergoers in the first-, second-, and third-class balconies from one another and from theatergoers on the floor and gallery, on another level the low ticket prices diminished barriers to entry and thus the price someone from the lower or middle class paid to perform their own (aspired) identity. Put differently, the tanda transformed how status was enacted inside theaters without fully diminishing the importance of such performances, especially for city residents whose livelihoods were economically precarious.

Additional evidence about the locations of theaters, the makeup of theatergoers, and their multiple uses suggests a similar broadening of the public. Theaters like the Hidalgo, often described as "modest" or "humble," drew spectators primarily from the immediate neighborhoods in which they were situated. This meant the bulk of the theatergoing public at the Teatro Hidalgo drew from the ranks of small-time merchants, shopkeepers, public employees, and a variety of tradesmen and artisans including silversmiths, cobblers, and carpenters that lived on the streets of Corchero, San Geronimo, Aduana Vieja, and Monzón surrounding the theater.[443] Writing in 1870, Mexican playwright José Tomás de Cuellár

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[442] Bryan, "Commercialization of Theater," 12.

[443] AHDF, Ayuntamiento de México, Sección Elección de Poderes Federales, vol. 874, expediente 46 (1877), fojas 5-6.

remarked that residents of these streets descended on the Hidalgo on Tuesdays and Sundays to socialize and enjoy the plays of Spanish playwrights Luis de Eguilaz and Luis Mariano de Larra.[444] The theater featured plays like *El artesano* (The Artisan) whose subject matter catered to neighborhood audiences, and it hosted meetings of mutual aid societies like the Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de Impresores (The Printers' Mutual Aid Society).[445] Indeed, for nearly its entire seventy-year existence, the Teatro Hidalgo maintained a reputation as a theater that offered wholesome entertainment for working- and middle-class families. A journalist for *El Imparcial* observed in 1902 that the majority of the audience included working families, only partially educated, who loved honest diversions.[446]

The Teatro Hidalgo was not alone in staking its claim as a working- and middle-class space. The Teatros de Oriente, Nuevo México, de la Democracia, and Guerrero in the city, and the Teatro Apolo in the nearby municipality of San Angel, forged similar identities. These playhouses served as meeting spaces for mutual aid societies and other groups. The Teatro de la Democracia near the Colonia del Carmen, a neighborhood of tailors, tinsmiths, cobblers, and seamstresses, hosted the first anniversary celebration of The Coachman's Society and gatherings of the Railroad Workers' Proletarian Society.[447] Working-class leaders in the early 1890s opposed to the re-election of Porfirio Díaz held planning meetings of a group they called Soberanía Popular at the Teatro Guerrero that

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[444] *El Siglo XIX*, 18 de diciembre de 1870. Cuéllar wrote under the pseudonym, Facundo.

[445] Bryan, "Teatro popular," 136-9.

[446] *El Imparcial*, 25 de junio de 1902.

[447] *El Monitor Republicano*, 6 de septiembre de 1873.

bordered the Carmen and Tepito neighborhoods north and northeast of the zócalo.[448] The Workers' Circle (Círculo de Obreros) held meetings at the Teatro Apolo in San Angel.[449] These playhouses also staged plays, for 1 or ½ real, about the mistreatment of artisans and workers—forming what one scholar has labeled an incipient "workers' theater." One play in particular, Alberto G. Bianchi's *Martirios del pueblo* (Martyrs of the People), which debuted in 1876 at the Teatro de Nuevo México, caused an uproar.[450] Bianchi's play tells the story of a modest laborer who, upon leaving the workshop one day, is jailed and pressed into military service through the *leva*, or draft system, implemented by Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada's government (1872-76). Sent into combat, the laborer dies, leaving behind a wife and a sick daughter who, unable to fend for herself, dies. Audiences raved about the play on opening night, interrupting the onstage action at various points to call Bianchi to the stage. Authorities, fearing the play's potential ramifications, censored future productions and sent Bianchi to prison for one-year for disturbing the public order.[451]

Neighborhood theaters also drew city residents into their orbits by hosting independence day celebrations and festivities. Patriotic committees, or *juntas patrióticas,* in each of the city's jurisdictions set their own agendas for these celebrations, and most of the time, events were free and open to the public. On 1880, the Teatro de la Democracia offered a play on the afternoon of September 16 and a dance that evening, which ran from

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[448] *El Monitor Republicano*, 3 de mayo de 1892; see also Florencia Gutierrez, *El mundo del trabajo y el poder político. Integración, consenso y resistencia en la ciudad de México a fines del siglo XIX* (Mexico City, Colegio de México, 2011), 164-5.

[449] AHDF, Municipalidades, Sección San Angel, Serie Festividades, Caja 94, expediente 27, 1873.

[450] Bryan, "Teatro popular," 135-9.

[451] *Ibid*.

9pm until 5am the following morning.[452] The following year, in 1881, the Teatro Hidalgo played host to one of the city's official celebrations. A patriotic speech, poetry performances, and a choreographed reading of the declaration of independence highlighted the events that took place on the evening of September 15 at the Hidalgo. The following day, the Teatros de la Independencia, de los Autores, Guerrero, and Merced Morales offered free afternoon performances; the Teatros Nacional and Hidalgo offered free evening shows; and the Teatros de la Independencia and Merced Morales hosted popular dances.[453] Such events lured even more residents into playhouses, perhaps some for the first time.

However anecdotal, this evidence suggests that more and more people entered theaters in the final decades of the century. They did so in part because there were more playhouses and because ticket prices fell, making an afternoon or evening's entertainment—or even just an hour of diversion—increasingly attainable for broader segments of the city's population. They were also increasingly likely to venture into these multiple purpose spaces, whether to participate in public meetings, celebrations, or other civic activities.

Changing Consumer Tastes and the Teatro Frívolo

One of the most visible shifts toward tanda-going crystallized in early 1881 at the Teatro Principal. That winter the tanda season extended from November (1880) into the early months of 1881. Those months had been good to the company at the Principal. One critic wrote, in early January, that the theater was a sea of people on weekends and

[452] AHDF, Festividades: 16 y 27 de septiembre, vol. 1069, expediente 102.

[453] AHDF, Festividades: 16 y 27 de septiembre, vol. 1069, expediente 103.

holidays. "As always," the article read, "the playhouse was filled from the high gallery to the stage-level seats; the public there does not abandon its favorite entertainment…Judging impartially, it is not a theater where stars shine; however, it is more than enough what they offer there for 1 real; it is, rather, scandalously cheap."[454]

In February 1881, Manuel Areu took over as impresario. Relying on the same cast of tanda performers who had been working at the theater since November, Areu offered what he called *funciones corridas*. Though these shows were similar in nature to tandas in that they were composed of one- and two-act zarzuelas, they were really double and triple features; Areu offered short zarzuelas sequentially. Prices for these shows ran four and five times the price of traditional tandas, and spectators who had filled the playhouse in prior months simply stopped attending. The explanation was simple, at least according to a theater critic writing for *El Monitor Republicano.* The critic explained, "The theatergoing public will not now pay 62 centavos (5 reales) for what had the previous month cost just 12 centavos (1 real). Besides, tandas have the advantage of allowing people to spend what they want, offering something for everyone…if the company was sufficient for the tandas, and if for 1 real it was a good deal, for formal shows costing 5 reales spectators find the entertainment overpriced."[455] Areu's fortunes quickly turned south. In mid-March, Areu ended the season early and returned subscribers' money for the shows the company did not stage. As one critic put it, the company had succumbed to consumption, the gradual wasting away that resulted from the desiccation of its lifeblood—paying audiences.[456]

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[454] *El Monitor Republicano*, 16 de enero de 1881.

[455] *El Monitor Republicano*, 6 de febrero de 1881.

[456] *El Monitor Republicano*, 27 de marzo de 1881.

The failure of Areu's company revealed emerging fault lines in public entertainments. It also signaled the formation of a new class of consumer that sought affordable and convenient entertainment, for entertainment's sake. The tanda's rise had created a new set of expectations among the theatergoing public. Flaneur and critic Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera identified these expectations as "a bit of can-can, a little spice, and lots of cheap fare."[457] For other critics, the tanda's endurance owed to the convergence between convenience and price. "The tanda retains its public," posited one such critic, "because it offers opportunities for one hour of nighttime diversion, at the hour of the spectator's choosing, for a low price."[458] Tandas did not entirely displace other theatrical entertainments, but they grew in frequency and attracted an increasingly heterogeneous clientele. Hectór Azar, a towering figure of the twentieth-century Mexican stage, characterized the nineteenth-century playhouse as "…an artistic space where members of diverse classes rubbed shoulders; a meeting point, a space of social encounters, the theater welcomed—from the curled boxes and the pit to the popular galleries, everyone that formed part of the urban stage…"[459]

Spanish actors/composers-turned-impresarios, Pedro and Luis Arcaraz and the Moriones sisters were among the format's greatest purveyors. The Arcaraz brothers had arrived to Mexico as performers in the 1870s. The following decade they set out on their own, competing fiercely with José Joaquín Cleofas Moreno, a man known as one of the

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[457] Ageeth Sluis, "City of Spectacles: Gender Performance, Revolutionary Reform, and the Creation of Public Space in Mexico City, 1915-1939," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 2006), 85.

[458] *El Mundo Ilustrado*, 29 de Julio de 1906.

[459] Azar, "Introducción," in *Obras completas* 10:9.

shrewdest and most successful theater impresarios in Mexican history—"the P.T. Barnum of Mexico" and the "czar of the zarzuela."[460] Genara Moriones and her sister Romualda, a stunning, seductive, and wildly popular actress, arrived to Mexico City via Cuba in spring 1881. Genara married Pedro Arcaraz; her sister, Romualda, performed for audiences at the Teatro Arbeu for nearly two years until she married her stage director, Moreno, and retired from acting. By the 1890s, the Arcaraz brothers had built the most celebrated and successful company in the country that was a year-round fixture at the Teatro Principal. Specializing in the género chico, the company created what one critic labeled a tanda empire.[461] According to another, "[the Arcaraz brothers] mandate, and the other shows obey. They give us what they want, how they want, and when they want. The zarzuela has us glutted, zarzuela during all seasons, zarzuela nightly. They push away drama, they send the [Teatro] National to jail and they dispossess the [Teatro] Arbeu. We now belong to the tandas, and they have made it so. The Arcaraz brothers have established their business; they are holders of a monopoly, absolute owners of the theatergoing public, without rival, assassins of good taste…"[462] Following Pedro's death in 1901, Genara Moriones and Luis Arcaraz purchased the Teatro Principal for 225,000 pesos, and when Luis left to take a position in Spain soon thereafter, Genara asked Romualda to join her in managing the

[460] *El Domingo*, 17 de septiembre de 1871; Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo* 2:19.

[461] *El Cómico*, 10 de octubre de 1899.

[462] Luis G. Urbina, "Los Arcaraz," in *Ecos teatrales*, pról. Gerardo Saenz (Mexico City: INBA, 1963): 145-51.

city's oldest playhouse. The two women converted it into the *catedral de las tandas*—the tanda cathedral.[463]

Though they originated in Spain, the tanda and the género chico merged with Mexican popular culture and traditions to form what became known as the *teatro frívolo*, or frivolous theater. Teatro frívolo as a category is difficult to pin down. Most scholars agree that the teatro frívolo included one-act zarzuelas that formed part of the popular género chico, though as Janet Sturman has argued, zarzuela as a category was especially elastic after 1880 including works designated by their composers as *juguetes*, *revistas*, *sainetes*, *parodías*, *humoradas*, *apropósito*, *écloga*, and *pasatiempos*.[464] Theater historian Luis Reyes de la Maza postulated connections between the teatro frívolo and the género chico mexicano, a Mexican variant of the Spanish género chico that emerged around the turn-of-the-century and dominated the stage until about 1940. According to Reyes de la Maza, the género chico mexicano included one-act zarzuelas, musical *sainetes*, and music-laden revues.[465] Historian Susan Bryan identifies teatro frívolo as a subgenre of the género chico that drew upon its progenitor, the Spanish género chico, as well as French operetta, circus performances, and puppet theater.[466] For Bryan, the teatro frívolo was picaresque, explicitly sexual (some would claim pornographic), and participatory. Performers and audiences shouted at one another and joked using *albures*, sexually charged double

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[463] Mañon, *La historia del teatro principal de México,* 231; Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo* 3:47.

[464] Sturman, *Zarzuela,* 22.

[465] Armando María y Campos, *El teatro de género chico en la revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: INEHR, 1956), 27.

[466] Bryan, "Commercialization of the Theater," 1.

entendre. Frivolous theater was also light-hearted, improvisational, and cheap. It thus stood in marked contrast to the serious and moralizing fare that had once dominated the stage.[467] Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor traces the origins of the teatro frívolo to several different forms and genres that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among these Taylor notes the teatro de revista (revue), teatro de carpa (itinerant theater), cabarets, sketchs, and street theater; however, the revue (especially the political revue) and cabarets did not gain traction until the start of the revolution.[468]

Teatro frívolo in Mexico drew heavily on Spanish compositions. One of the earliest and most popular plays of the frivolous theater in Mexico was a Spanish *revista*, or revue, titled *La Gran Vía* (The Great Thoroughfare, Madrid, 1886). Revues, unlike other plays and genres, were not structured around unifying narratives. Instead, they were organized around looser, more disparate conventions common to print journalism. These plays relied on easily identifiable stock characters that reflected local realities of social and urban transformation. They used humor, song, and dance numbers to comment on current events and debates, fashions, and urban life more generally.[469] In *La Gran Vía*, beautiful women

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[467] Bryan, "Teatro popular," 139-41.

[468] Taylor places particular emphasis on the revue, which brought to the stage satirical dramatizations based on real events (present or past) and generally lasting an hour or less. Comic in tone and parodic in form, this type of theater alternated music and dance while serving up portraits of local customs, fashions, and traditions. In contrast to its more "classic" or "dramatic" counterpart, teatro frívolo intended simply to entertain, and audience participation was an integral part of the show. See Diana Taylor and Roselyn Constantino, "Unimagined Communities," in *Holy Terrors: Latin American Women Perform,* eds. Diana Taylor and Roselyn Constantino (Durham: Duke University, 2003), 1-24. See also Juan José Montijano Ruiz, *Historia del teatro frívolo español (1864-2010)* (Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 2010), 21-2 and Alejandro Ortiz Bullé Goyri, "Orígenes y desarollo del teatro de revista en México (1869-1953)," in *Un siglo del teatro en México*, ed. David Olguín (Mexico City: FCE, 2011), 40-53.

[469] Sluis, "City of Spectacles," 87-8.

cast as city streets, neighborhoods, and fountains engaged in witty dialogues and seductive dances, complaining vociferously about the city's plans to re-route or destroy them to make way for grand boulevards—la gran vía of the play's title. Memorable tangoes, jotas, and waltzes moved the action forward, and, later, they featured frequently in city salons and dance halls.[470] *La Gran Vía's* success led to its widespread exportation to Europe (Vienna, Paris, Prague, and London) and the Americas (Cuba, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, and New York among others).[471] In 1890, it was the hit of the tanda season at the Teatro Principal in Mexico City, in part because the theater's stage managers, the brothers Guerra, reversed the standard roles. Comic tenor Manuel Iglesias performed Menegilda's tango, a role generally played by an attractive and alluring female. Julia Aced was cast as the Caballero de Gracia, who boasted of his amorous conquests while dancing a waltz.[472]

La gatita blanca (The White Kitten) was another work of the Spanish frivolous theater that made a splashy Mexico City debut, though it was far more risqué than *La Gran Vía*. The play debuted at the Teatro Principal in 1907, with the beautiful Spanish actress, María Conesa, in the lead role as Luisa. The play featured alluring songs with plenty of sexual undertones. In one, Conesa as Luisa sings playfully

> A mischievous male cat,
> who wanted to play with me
> made me so nervous
> that I had to scratch him.
> But, so sweet,
> was he

[470] Enrique Olavarría y Ferrari claimed that the jota de las ratas, a dance popularized in *La Gran Vía*, could be heard for months in the city and surrounding towns by instruments "of all known classes and types." Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica* 2:1217.

[471] McCleary, "Culture and Commerce," 181-2.

[472] *El Monitor Republicano*, 5 de enero de 1890.

that in the end, convinced,
I played with him.
While we played
he was so wily
and without any shame,
that he made me swell up (*me hizo a mi un chichón*).
And when the swelling
finally went down,
with other cats
we played.[473]

The passage loses some of its libidinous double meanings in translation. Contemporary audiences, however, had no trouble reading between the lines. In another famous scene, Luisa sings about making *chocolate* in the presence of Servando and Periquín. She rubs a *molinillo* (whisk) provocatively between her palms, singing about taking it in and out (she repeats the phrase "entra y sale el molinillo") to see if it's thick enough and ready to pour into her cup or vessel. She then instructs the men to wet some sponge cake in her cup ("Moja un bizcochito / en mi pocillo / que está calentito / y te va a gustar") while it is still warm. Servando and Periquín do as instructed, commenting about how "rich" it is. Luisa responds, "this chocolate never tastes bad."[474] Here again, wordplay is at the center of the song and scene's popularity; *molinillo* and *bizcochito* operate as phallic symbols or stand-ins, Luisa's *pocillo* could be read doubly as a reference to her genitalia, and words such as *calientito* referred at once to both warmth (as in the temperature of the chocolate) and

[473] Original passage reads: "Un gatito travieso, / quiso conmigo jugar / y me puso tan nerviosa / que le tuve que arañar. / Pero tan meloso, / se llegó a poner, / que al fin, convencida, / yo jugué con él./ Y tuvo unos juegos / él muy picaroon / que él muy sinverguenza / me hizo a mi un chichón. / Y cuando aquel bulto / llegó a deshinchar, / con unos cuantos gatitos / nos pusimos a jugar." Author's translation from http://josejacksonveyan.blogspot.com/2010/02/la-gatita-blanca.html. One can listen to a performance of this couplet at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsQrjHg3LcY.

[474] Author's translation from text found at http://josejacksonveyan.blogspot.com/2010/02/la-gatita-blanca.html

sexual excitement. Conesa's provocative performances won her the nickname, la gatita blanca, and made audiences delirious with excitement. Chronicler Luis Urbina described his shock at seeing "decent women and respectable men" in attendance applauding voraciously at these most pornographic, indecent, and dirty moments.[475]

After about 1900, Mexican playwrights began to test their talents at the genre more seriously, experimenting with the turn toward more explicitly sexual and risqué material. Because the teatro frívolo was a capacious category, works that formed part of the genre varied widely. Most offered up a menagerie of stock characters and subject matter. *El registro civil* (The Civil Registry, 1904), for example, captured daily life inside a government bureaucracy from the perspective of menial office laborers. *El rosario de Amozoc* (The Amozoc Rosary*,* 1907), offered a penetrating look at the customs, ideas, and beliefs of the upper middle class through an analysis of parties and masquerade balls held at private residences. *El Tenorio de Huarache* ([Don Juan] Tenorio of Huarache*,* 1909), a Mexican parody of José Zorrilla's famous play, *Don Juan Tenorio*, captured the experiences of rural migrants to the city. Its creators transformed the nun, Inés, into the prostitute, Chencha, who had arrived from Veracruz to a second-class brothel in Mexico City. They also converted the convent from Zorrilla's play into a brothel. *Agencia de matrimonios* (The Marriage Agency, 1899), which featured a broken-down actor and his retired actress-wife, prostitutes, and businessmen, took place inside the space of the theater; to help support a failing business, the couple formed the agency to offer not engagements and marriages but rather illicit sexual escapades.[476] Despite differences of subject matter,

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[475] *El Imparcial*, 22 de noviembre de 1907.

[476] The most complete analysis of the teatro frívolo mexicano, including the plays mentioned here, is found in Aurelio de los Reyes, "Una lectura de diez obras del género

these works shared some common elements. Most were written hastily, sometimes in the space of a single night. All featured some combination of music, song, and dance, which was festive and mocking in tone. *Agencia de matrimonios* featured a waltz, a *danza serpentina*, and a French can-can. *El registro civil* included three songs, a jota, and a cakewalk, a popular dance that had recently arrived from the United States. In both *El rosario de Amozoc* and *El Tenorio de Huarache*, scantily clad women performed insinuating dances; the latter contained scenes composed of nothing but dances.[477]

The works comprising the teatro frívolo mexicano did not attempt to reform the conduct of theatergoers by offering positive examples or instruction. According to Aurelio de los Reyes, this was what most distinguished the genre from others. The characters who appeared onstage were believers; they were loyal Catholics, not heretics or sinners. But, they also believed that loving, drinking, and cavorting—even in excess—were rites of good living. Some even posited that hell, with its alluring pleasures, was preferable to what was certainly a boring existence in heaven. The message conveyed by the frivolous theater was clear: life should be enjoyed with gusto, without regrets and certainly without guilt. The characters onstage thus reflected the audience without censoring their actions.[478]

In addition to re-shaping how and what spectators consumed, the teatro frívolo also influenced how impresarios and investors conceived of theatrical space. By 1902, the Teatros Principal, Riva Palacio, María Guerrero, Apolo, Zaragoza, Mignon, and Guillermo Prieto—seven of the city's fourteen theaters—specialized in the teatro frívolo. A close look

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chico mexicano del porfirismo," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Aestéticas de la UNAM* XIII, no. 54 (1984): 131-76.

[477] *Ibid.*

[478] *Ibid.*, 161.

at the blueprints of the Teatro Guillermo Prieto, a playhouse constructed in 1902 that specialized in the género chico, illuminates important shifts in the ways impresarios and investors conceived of playhouses, which, in turn, shaped the ways audiences interacted inside them.

Civil engineer and owner of a house on the Plazuela de la Palma, Gabriel Oropeza wrote to the city council in October 1902 requesting permission to open a *sala de espectáculos*, the Teatro Guillermo Prieto, in part of the residence (see figure 11).[479] The blueprints he included with the petition for the structure-in-progress reveal a playhouse whose interior design was distinct from many of the first-class theaters constructed during the nineteenth century. Both the Gran Teatro Nacional, which opened in 1844, and the Teatro de Iturbide, which opened in 1856, were large venues arranged in a horseshoe design. This arrangement put theatergoers in the boxes in full view of nearly everyone inside the auditorium and thus better allowed for the performance of status and wealth. The Nacional, the city's largest theater, boasted three levels of boxes, with each level consisting of twenty-one boxes; each box, moreover, could hold 8-10 spectators.[480] In total, the Nacional had a capacity for about 2400 spectators, the Iturbide approximately 1800. Both were also situated prominently; the Iturbide was offset at a diagonal on a corner while the Nacional stood at the end of Cinco de Mayo, a central avenue that connected the theater to the zócalo. The Teatro Guillermo Prieto, by contrast, was rectangular in shape and removed

[479] AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4017, expediente 128.

[480] Hammeken, "La república de la música," 72.

from the city center. It was also far smaller. City inspectors estimated its capacity at less than 600 individuals.[481]

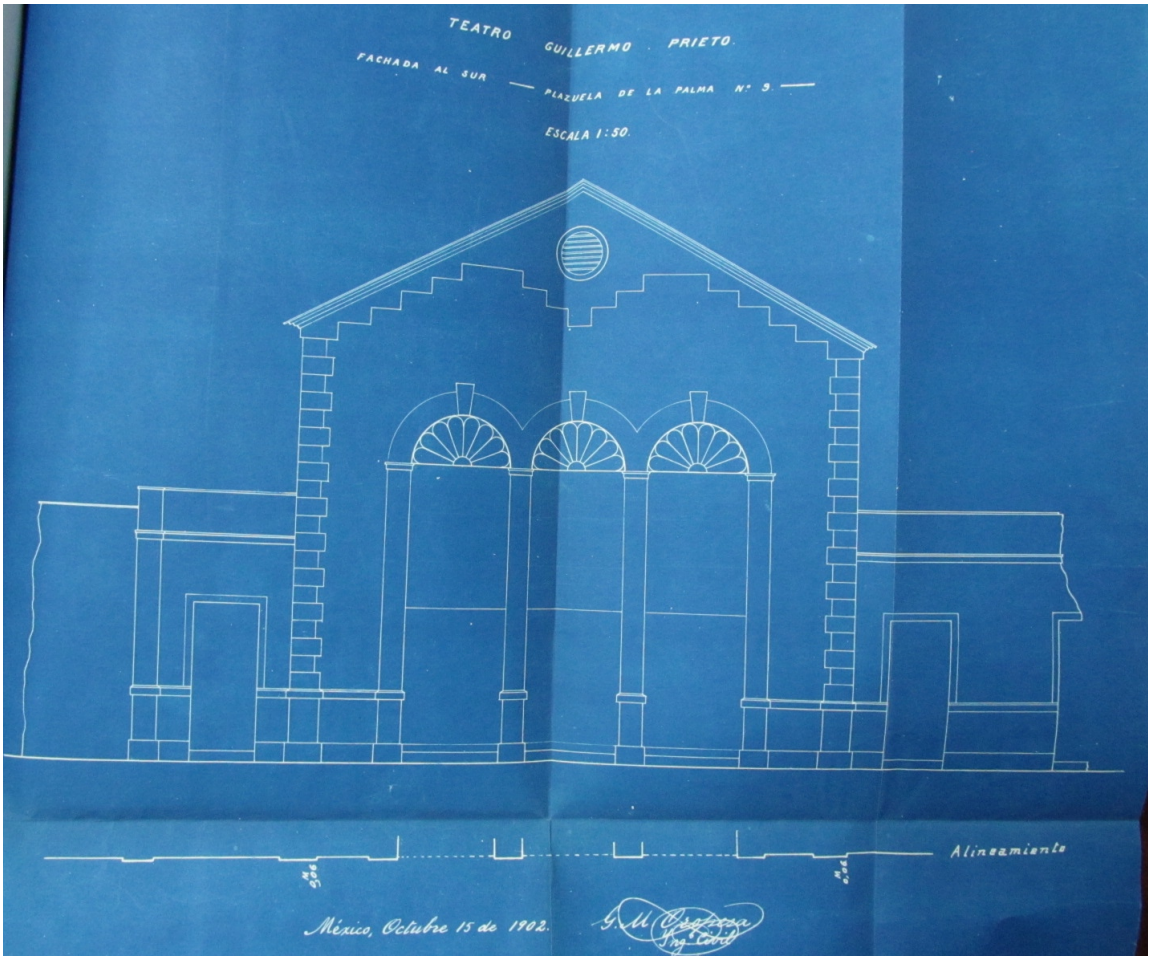

Figure 11. Façade of Teatro Guillermo Prieto

[481] AHDF, Administración de Rentas Municipales, Vol. 5464, t. 2. City inspectors estimated in 1906 that the Guillermo Prieto could hold 594 spectators.

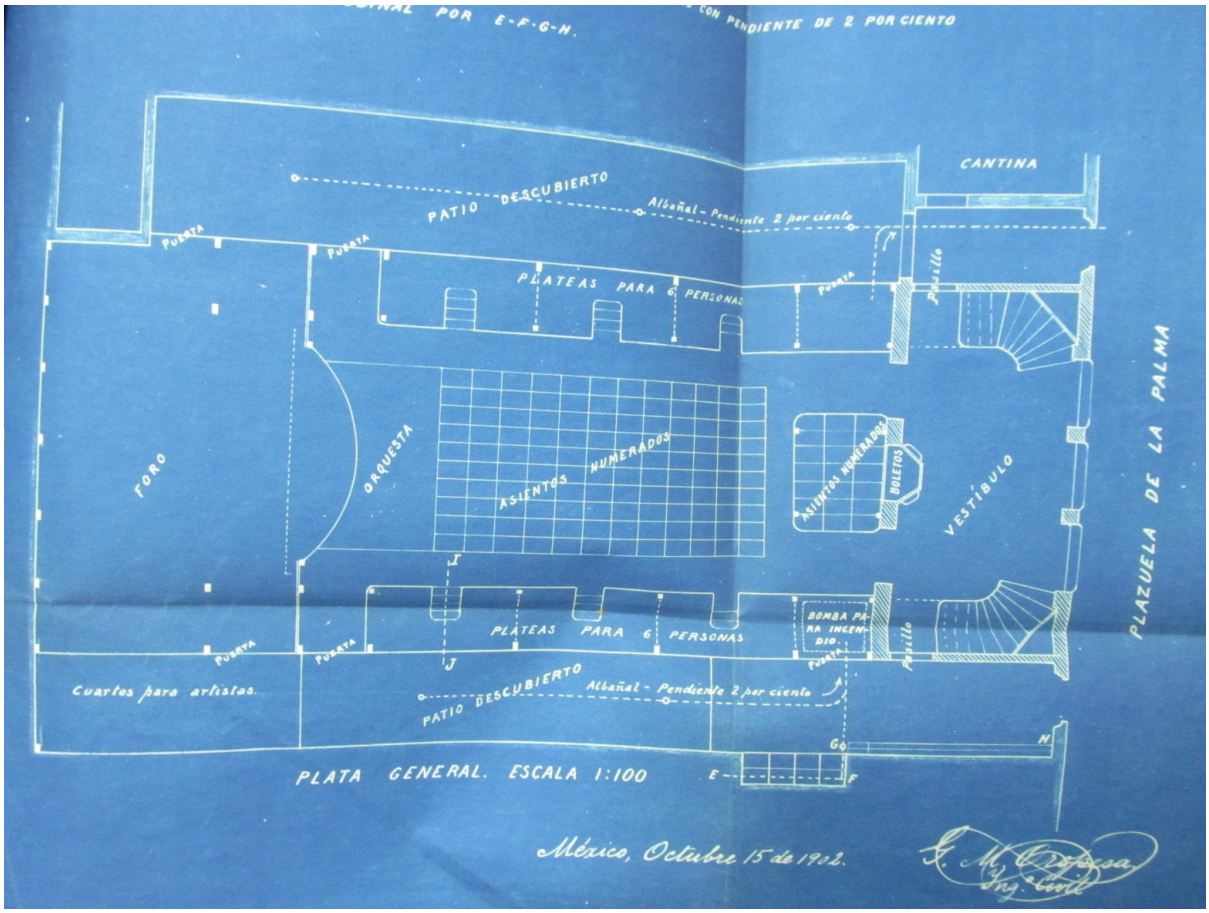

Figure 12. Bird's Eyes View, Patio Seating, Teatro Guillermo Prieto

Figure 12, which offers a bird's eye view of the Guillermo Prieto's first level, shows only eight small boxes, or plateas, that sat somewhere above the patio seating and below the height of the stage. Each of these boxes was capable of holding just six spectators. Figure 13 offers a look at the theater's second level seating. It depicts just two balcony boxes close to the edge of the stage. The remainder of the second-level seating was reserved for numbered and general admission gallery seats. The total number of box seats at the theater, then, was approximately sixty. Also taking into account the theater's distance from the city center, this was not a place frequented by the city's elite or aristocracy. Sitting in a box at the Guillermo Prieto was a performance of identity on a vastly different

(and smaller) scale than doing so at the Teatro Nacional or another first-class theater. Moreover, the space was intimate; the patio of the Teatro Guillermo Prieto (the seating area below stage level) measured just 6.6 meters across, or approximately 21.5 feet.

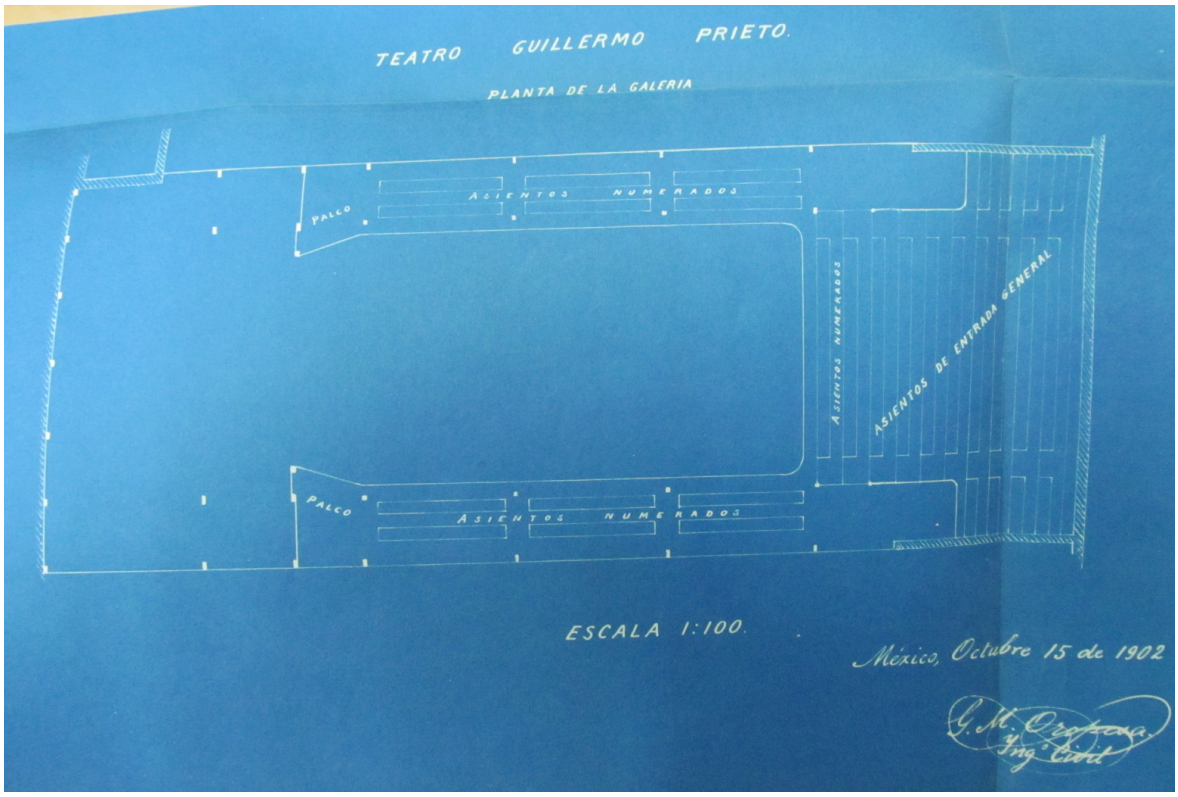

Figure 13. Second-level seating, Teatro Guillermo Prieto

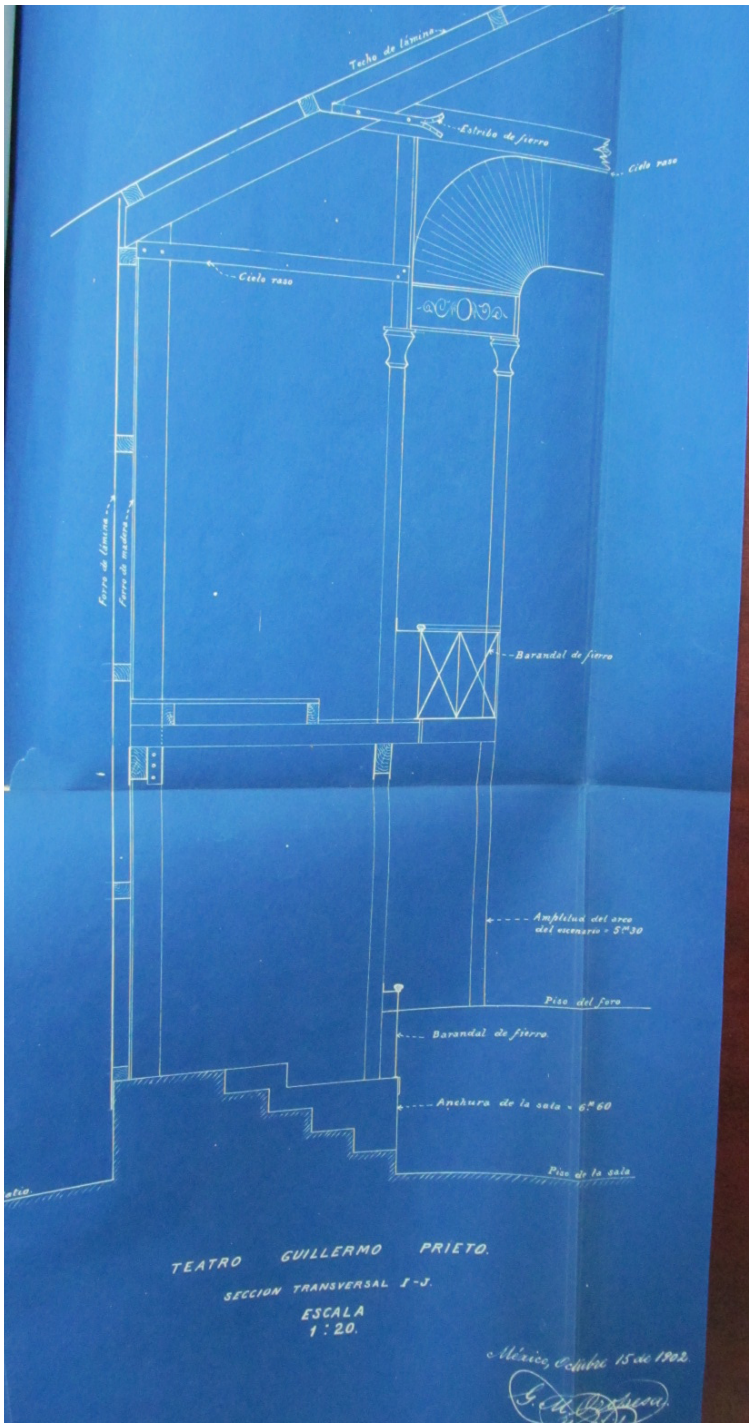

Figure 14. Transversal view. 1st and 2nd level seating, Teatro Guillermo Prieto

A second petition yields additional clues about the motivations of impresarios who constructed theaters expressly for the género chico and the teatro frívolo.[482] Much as Oropeza had done, the petitioners included blueprints for the planned Teatro Le Moulin Rouge, a playhouse that, although never constructed, would have been similar in size to the Guillermo Prieto, with a capacity for about 400 theatergoers. Unlike Oropeza, they included a description and justification for the project. Their theater would fill a niche, they claimed, being neither a large coliseum nor a humble jacalón. Because of its reduced dimensions—the patio of the theater measured about 25 feet across—the petitioners planned to stage zarzuelas de género chico in tanda format. The Moulin Rouge was slated to have 14 boxes, or plateas, in a horseshoe-shaped arrangement, all located on the first level at stage height. There were 148 patio seats (the Guillermo Prieto had 141), arranged on benches to facilitate conversion of the theater into a dance hall. Three rows of graded gallery seating comprised the second level; the back two rows served as general admission seats.

With their reduced dimensions, locations distant from the city center, lack of ostentation, and ease of conversion (into dance halls, for instance), these so-called teatros frívolos—theaters designed for the género chico and teatro frívolo—transformed the theatergoing experience. The construction of theaters in more distant neighborhoods broadened theater's reach. The design of new teatros frívolos also reshaped what it meant to spend an evening, or an hour, at the theater. In these spaces, theatergoing became less a display of status (whether attained or aspirational) and more an experience to be consumed—one among many "goods, practices, and spaces of urban consumer culture

[482] AHDF, Teatros, vol. 4017, expediente 118, 1900.

[city residents used to] construct meaning and identities in the rapidly evolving social and physical landscape of the capital city and beyond."[483]

Conclusion

Changing theater design tells only part of the story. The transition toward teatro frívolo was part and parcel of larger, lasting transformations in urban life marked by the production and consumption of increasingly inexpensive and undifferentiated consumable goods, be they machine-rolled cigarettes or a night out at the tandas. Advertisements bombarded city residents at every turn, in newspapers, on posters that littered street corners and on newly constructed advertising kiosks, on stage curtains and handbills inside playhouses, and on paperboard signs inside pulquerías, cafés, and streetcars. Product advertisements equipped with phonographs could be seen—and heard—circulating through city streets, pulled along by horse-drawn carriages, and, later, automobiles. One particularly creative engineer designed a mechanical dog that walked through the city playing music while dispensing ads from his mouth. New technologies also meant that promotions for new products could also be delivered on electrically backlit billboards and projected onto the sides of buildings in the city center at night.[484] Advertisers' messaging often drew on themes found in the teatro frívolo. Among its multiple strategies, the cigarette company La Tabacalera published stories in the penny press in an effort to sell their machine-rolled cigarettes to the working classes. In one such story titled "La Mansión de Luzbel" (Lucifer's Mansion), two company agents traveled to hell to pitch their brands to moneylenders, drunkards and thieves. After the sale was made, the mansion transformed

[483] Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture*, 3.

[484] *Ibid.*, esp. 46-47 and 62-75.

into a palace of light and opulence. The agents' new customers sang while dancing *cuadrillas*, cake-walks, and polkas. And Lucifer relented, allowing his minions to smoke cigarettes one hour per day.[485]

The expansion of the teatro frívolo around the turn of the century changed what was required of performers. According to chronicler Luis Urbina, it took "little talent to triumph and make a career in the género chico…a performer needed only an average voice, the ability to dance and sing couplets with intentionality, and humor."[486] The sheer number of theaters dedicated to the genre opened greater opportunities for aspiring performers. But, it also lowered the artistic bar, resulting in a more undifferentiated entertainment. The teatro frivolo valued physical beauty and allure over the range or quality of a performer's voice. This made distinguishing between tiples, or singer-showgirls, more difficult and less important to the theatergoing experience. Reminiscing about theatergoing during the early twentieth century, Armando María y Campos remembered being able to walk to three theaters in under thirty minutes; all three specialized in the género chico, especially the teatro frívolo. He could be at the María Guerrero (the María Tepache as he called it) in just three minutes, the Teatro Apolo in ten, and the Teatro Briseño (constructed in 1908) in just over twenty-five. To his mind, differences between the theaters were negligible. All three offered the same general fare performed by comparable singer-showgirls whose names he

[485] *Ibid*., 27-8. Story originally published in *La Guacamaya*, 8 de febrero de 1906.

[486] *El Imparcial*, 2 de noviembre de 1907.

did not mention. The distinctions he made were by degree. The Apolo he remembered to be the most "colorful" (read: risqué) while the María Tepache was the most popular.[487]

Low prices, frequent performances, simultaneous stagings, and the risqué content that carried teatro frívolo shows (regardless of performers' artistic merits) transformed theatergoing into a product for consumption that was increasingly undifferentiated. In fact, it was common for works in this genre to feature at multiple theaters on the same night. On November 5, 1906, for example, companies at both the Teatro Moderno and the Teatro Apolo offered tandas of José F. Elizondo's *Chin-chun-chan*, the first work of the género chico mexicano to eclipse 1000 stagings. Two years later, an especially picaresque work of the género chico español, *Las bribonas* (The Rascals), featured in tandas at the Teatros Principal, Lelo de Larrea, and Briseño the same evening.[488] The major variations in consumption, then, related not the product itself but rather the amount spectators consumed and where they consumed it. Some theatergoers chose the occasional hour at the theater while others spent several hours per night several nights per week. That latter group might also purchase sheet music and songbooks made popular in the theater for future use.

This revolution in theatergoing involved city residents partaking in a shared culture of consumption and in urban life more generally. In consuming teatro frívolo, they engaged creatively in the broader Porfirian project that sought to transform Mexicans into a consuming people.[489] As one scholar recently put it, "frivolity was not just a subject matter,

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[487] http://resenahistoricateatromexico2021.net/. Originally from Armando María y Campos, *Veintiún años de crónica teatral*, edited and introduced by Martha Julia Toriz Proenza (Mexico City: CONACULTA / INBA-CITRU, 1999).

[488] Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo* 3:293 and 391-2.

[489] Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture*, 5.

but a mode of perception" that helped galvanize Mexico's emerging mass culture industry.[490] Tandas and the teatro frívolo established both the material and aesthetic conditions favorable to the rise of film.

Theater and film competed fiercely for expanding publics in the first decades of the twentieth century. Theater owners retrofit playhouses with projection booths. The Teatro Riva Palacio's owner decided to fully convert his theater into a cinema after the playhouse failed to pass a city inspection.[491] Other enterprising individuals established cinematographic salons and offered silent films by tandas for just five centavos each.[492] Swept up by the surging popularity of the moving image in the city, Juan José Tablada joyously wrote, "the film projector, like David, has slain the Spanish Goliath [the género chico español]…the tanda is dead; the evenings are now illuminated by the light of cinematic projectors."[493] Tablada's proclamation, albeit preemptive, would eventually come true. Though not by itself, the rise of film helped bring the age of theater to a close.

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[490] Paulina Suárez-Hesketh, "The Frivolous Scene: Cosmopolitan Amusements in Mexico City's 1920s," *The Global South* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 104-5.

[491] AHDF, Gobierno del Distrito Federal, Serie Diversiones (1904-15) vol. 1382, expediente 45 BIS, 1906, foja 43.

[492] Reyes de la Maza. *El teatro en México durante el porfirismo* 3:75.

[493] *Ibid.*, 53.

CONCLUSION: THE END OF THE AGE

Though certainly not noted by contemporaries, four events coalesced to bring the age of theater to a close. The first took place on December 10, 1894, when the city council passed a new *reglamento* governing city playhouses. Such reglamentos were not new. Bourbon colonial administrators enacted the first comprehensive reglamento in 1786 in an effort to create a standard body of rules and guidelines that would govern all aspects of the theater's operation (then the Coliseo). The 1786 guidelines subjected all plays to prior censorship, prohibited inappropriate conduct by theatergoers, and governed the behavior of actors and actresses onstage. The reglamento took a particularly harsh stance toward actors and actresses, prohibiting them from talking to one another onstage, forcing them to attend rehearsals, and fining them for forgetting their lines. The penalties of disobedience were strict; fines or jail time awaited violators. Historian Juan Viqueira Albán has called this set of regulations "boldly modern and markedly repressive," and perfectly appropriate for a theater that sought to correspond to the ideals of the Enlightenment.[494] By that, he meant a shared belief among eighteenth-century elites that changing the habits and customs of the poor required strict paternalism and a strong interventionist state. Nineteenth-century elites adopted a number of updated reglamentos during the century (1813, 1833, 1844, 1853, 1855, and 1864, e.g.), and while each had its own distinct tone (reflecting the policy priorities of particular powerholders), the 1894 reglamento was the first to markedly break from Enlightenment ideals. The new requirement no longer penalized actors and actresses for forgetting lines, and it put forward few serious restrictions on theatergoers, requiring

[494] Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness*, 49.

only that they observe in silence, maintain proper decorum, and refrain from yelling insults at actors or throwing chairs.[495] More importantly, the 1894 reglamento's softer stance toward regulating behavior and maintaining order reflected significant shifts in city officials' attitudes toward theater, in particular its power to moralize, educate, and transform the lower classes. Divested of these powers, theater became just one among a host of public entertainments.

The second event took place just over a week later. On December 18, 1894, city councilman Manuel Sierra Méndez proposed to the council the construction of the *Teatro Metropolitano*, a municipal theater that would offer patrons security, hygiene, comfort, and elegance.[496] A powerful earthquake had recently caused structural damage to the Teatros Nacional and Principal, forcing both to close for repairs. Apart from the recent damage, the city's existing theaters, according to Sierra Méndez, were in a "ruinous state, old constructions plagued by all types of inconveniences and dangers; they were drafty and full of bad smells, poorly kept and lacking all comfort." His petition went on, "Possessing a theater that united comfort, security, and convenience…that we could subject to certain rules and privileges is absolutely necessary. With this we would not contribute to frivolous pursuits; to the contrary…we would aid in the cultivation of culture in our capital…in the progress of arts and letters, which are the principal elements of civilization and a country's aggrandizement." The councilman acknowledged the difficulty in executing such a project

[495] For text of 1894 reglamento, see Adolfo Dublán y Adalberto A. Esteva, eds. *Legislación Mexicana o Colección completa de las disposiciones legislativas expedidas desde la independencia de la república*, t. XXIV (Mexico City: Imprenta de Eduardo Dublan, 1898), 458-62.

[496] AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4017, expediente 105.

given the scarcity of municipal funds. Nevertheless, he believed his proposal would be easy to put into action. Once contractors submitted their bids, the municipality would pay for the project by directing 80% of playhouse rents, 80% of sales from rights to boxes and orchestra seats, and an annual subvention of 25,000 pesos. Per Sierra Méndez's proposal, The Metropolitano would open on September 15, 1896, just in time to celebrate independence. Ownership of the playhouse would transfer to the city once construction debts had been repaid.

Sierra Méndez's plan echoed in many ways earlier proposals to construct the Gran Teatro Nacional and the Teatro de Iturbide. In particular, the backers of all three projects shared the belief that grand performance halls could transform the behaviors and values of a people. They also agreed on the symbolic power of such monumental structures, on their ability to index a society's advancement. However, as the 1894 reglamento hinted, much had changed in the half century since the construction of the city's most grandiose theaters. Perhaps nowhere was this more visible than in the city's late-nineteenth century entertainment marketplace, dominated by the tanda, the género chico and the teatro frívolo. Increasingly heterogeneous audiences went wild for this light-hearted, improvisational, cheap, and sometimes lewd entertainment. Even the so-called respectable public found itself drawn to the atmosphere of the tandas. As critic Enrique Chávarri observed, they too wanted to take part in the banter and the jokes, to experience the theater full to overflowing, to be a part of this shared urban culture.[497]

Fellow councilmen acknowledged this sea change that was afoot, even if Sierra Méndez did not. The proposal for the Teatro Metropolitano made its way through

[497] *El Monitor Republicano*, 5 de enero de 1890.

committee, and the council received a bid for a theater and hotel in mid-January 1895 from a French engineer J.V. Delpierre.[498] But, the project never took shape. Public debates quieted and the council returned to business as usual, with neither the theater nor the proposed hotel coming to fruition. Repairs concluded at both the Teatros Principal and Nacional, and both playhouses re-opened to the public later that year.

A year and a half later, in August and September 1896, the Lumière brothers' projector made its Mexico City debut in the heart of the city's commercial district on the Segunda Calle de Plateros. With the projector, motion pictures had arrived, and thus the third event that augured the end of the age. The agents who brought the projector stayed in the city just two months before setting off for Guadalajara. When they returned, they set up shop around the corner on the Calle de Espíritu Santo.[499] The following year, in 1897, an Edison projecting kinetoscope opened to the public on the Calle de Escalerillas, directly behind the Catedral Metropolitano on the northern side of the zócalo. It sold motion pictures by tandas, charging 10 centavos apiece.[500]

In the years that followed, motion pictures spread. In the capital, they showed at the Teatro Nacional, the Skating Rink, and at the bottom of the Hotel Gillow. When a shop opened in 1899 that rented and sold projection films, the number of cinematographic salons multiplied rapidly. Between 1899 and 1900 alone, at least thirty cinematic salons opened in

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[498] CEHM-CARSO, Colección Fondo José Y. Limantour, CDLIV.1a.1883.17.4581, 14 de enero de 1895.

[499] Aurelio de los Reyes, "Como nacieron los cines," *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* XIII, no. 50 (1982): 287-8.

[500] Aurelio de los Reyes, *Cine y sociedad en México, 1896-1930. Vivir de sueños, t. I (1896-1920)* (Mexico City: UNAM / Cineteca Nacional, 1981), 21-27.

the capital. These new spaces were widely distributed, found not only in the city center, on main streets such as Cinco de Mayo, but also in more distant working-class neighborhoods such as Tepito, La Lagunilla, and La Merced. They offered motion pictures for as little as three centavos (roughly the equivalent of a *cuartilla* under the old currency regime).[501] Traveling agents and entrepreneurs took motion pictures on tour outside the capital, using a growing network of railways to show off their wares. While some traveled with their own tents, many rented local theaters to show their films. By the first years of twentieth century, motion pictures had featured in Mazatlán, Culiacán, Guaymas, Hermosillo, Santa Rosalia (Baja California), Nogales, Cananea, Chihuahua, and Ciudad Juárez in the north and northwest; in Mérida and Progreso on the Yucatán; in Campeche, Villahermosa, and Veracruz in the east; Tehuantepec and Tapachula in the south; and in the central zones including Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Morelia, and Puebla.[502]

Outside of Mexico, the scope of the conquest of motion pictures was even more impressive. Within two years of its global debut at the Gran Café de Paris in February 1896, agents had taken Lumiere's invention across Europe, to England, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Serbia, and Russia. The projector had traversed the Mediterranean to Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey. It had crossed the Atlantic, arriving in Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and the United States. Lumiere's projector had traveled eastward as well, to India, Indochina, Japan, and Australia.[503]

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[501] Reyes, *Cine y sociedad*, 31.

[502] *Ibid.*, 42-6.

[503] *Ibid.*, 21.

The fourth and most symbolic event that signaled the age's close took place in 1900-1: over a six-month period, the Gran Teatro Nacional, the city's—and the republic's—flagship theater was reduced to rubble. The theater's demolition appears to have surprised many city residents. The federal government purchased the theater and the adjacent hotel for 450,000 pesos in June 1900 under the auspices that it would oversee a project to "expand and renovate" the theater.[504] *El Imparcial* hailed the proposed renovation, speculating that the former site of the Hotel would include new meeting spaces for artistic and literary *veladas*, expansion of backstage dressing rooms, and a modern foyer.[505] Neither the auction of the Hotel de Vergara's furniture nor the initial demolition work started in December 1900 raised eyebrows; many expected this as part of the building's promised overhaul.

Few, it seems, expected what came next. *El Imparcial* switched course in mid-January, explaining that the National Theater would soon be demolished, a story *El Diario del Hogar* confirmed.[506] A photograph taken in May 1901 shows the playhouse in a pile of rubble; only its four iconic columns remain standing in the foreground.[507] By July, there was nothing left of Mexico's once-grandiose performance hall—that monumental and

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[504] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica* 3:2012-15.

[505] *Ibid.*, 1985-6.

[506] *Ibid.*, 2033-4. See also Clementina Diáz y de Ovando, "El Gran Teatro Nacional Baja el Telón (1901)," *Revista de la Universidad/UNAM* 462 (Julio 1989): 13.

[507] Manuel Mañon, *Historia del Viejo Gran Teatro Nacional de México, 1841-1901*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes / Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2009), 516.

imposing symbol of the performing arts its patrons hoped would establish Mexico's place among modern, prosperous, civilized nations.

Deeper digging suggests that the plan to demolish the Gran Teatro Nacional probably took root in 1895, in the bid French engineer J.V. Delpierre submitted in response to Sierra Mendez's failed proposal to construct the Teatro Metropolitano. In an letter written to Finance Minister José Yves Limantour that accompanied the bid, Delpierre claimed that "the execution of my project depends on the demolition of the National Theater and the extension of the Avenida Cinco de Mayo to the Avenida de Juárez and the Calle San Juan de Dios; this will double the flow of traffic, which has become perilous…[my project] would also give a big impulse to the construction industry and become a new source of revenue for the state"[508] Four years later, in 1899, a rumor circulated in the magazine *El Arte y la Ciencia* that efforts to reactivate Delpierre's plan to elongate the Avenida Cinco de Mayo to the edge of the Alameda had been set in motion.[509] That same year, J. Figueroa Doménech wrote in his 800-page compendium and guide titled *Guía general descriptiva de la república mexicana*: "we believe the Teatro Nacional's disappearance will be called upon so that the beautiful avenue [Cinco de Mayo] can extend to the Alameda. Mexico would lose its best theater, but it would gain a splendid avenue and

[508] CEHM-CARSO, Colección Fondo José Y. Limantour, CDLIV.1a.1883.17.4581, 14 de enero de 1895. Author's translation from letter written in French, with assistance from J'Nese Williams.

[509] Diáz y de Ovando, "El Gran Teatro Nacional Baja el Telón (1901)," 12-13.

one that is necessary to ease the oppressive traffic on the Calles Refugio, Plateros, and Tacuba."[510]

Interior Minister Manuel González echoed these ideas in his attempt to justify the theater's demolition to city residents in 1901. The Teatro Nacional would be torn down, he claimed, so that Avenida Cinco de Mayo could be extended to the plaza abutting the southeastern corner of the Alameda. Once Cinco de Mayo had been extended, the Minister added, "there would be two parallel throughways [Cinco de Mayo and Plateros], helping to divert the traffic and movement that are today overburdening this principal artery of the city."[511] What to many theatergoers and arts patrons must have sounded like an afterthought, the Minister declared the government's desire to erect a new Teatro Nacional on the plaza at the southeastern edge of the zócalo.

Delpierre's bid, Doménech's ruminations, and González's justification for the Gran Teatro Nacional's demolition—to improve traffic flow—reflected a significant change in the ways elites conceived of the structure and functioning of the city. As historian Mauricio Tenorio has argued, Porfirian elites in Mexico City sought to create an "ideal city"—an imagined if never realized urban landscape marked by comfort, modernity and cosmopolitanism, centered spatially on an axis that linked the Paseo de la Reforma to the Alameda and the zócalo via the Avenida Juárez and the extension of Cinco de Mayo (the

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[510] J. Figueroa Doménech, *Guía general descriptiva de la república Mexicana: historia, geografía, estadística, etc., etc., con triple directorio del comercio y la industria, autoridades, oficinas públicas, abogados, medicos, hacendados, correos, telégrafos y ferrocarriles, etc.* (R. de S. N. Araluce, 1899), 153-5.

[511] Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica* 3:2073-5.

latter made possible by the theater's demolition).[512] At the heart of this project were elites' concerns to promote more satisfying urban aesthetics, improve sightlines, and enhance traffic flow.[513] They were also widely shared. The author of an article titled "La Avenida Cinco de Mayo. México futuro," which appeared in *El Mundo Ilustrado*, allowed that "…opening streets, even if it erases the footprints of tradition; aligning them properly, making them what they should be," was probably necessary given the city's immense transformations. The article continued, "Efforts to make life longer, happier, and more comfortable required these types of mutilations and sacrifices."[514]

More importantly, however, the implementation of this ideal signaled a concomitant shift in the place of theater in the minds of the city's fin-de-siècle elites. The realization of the "ideal city" received its greatest impetus from the celebration of Mexico's centennial in 1910, which elites hoped to use to document—both to Mexicans and foreign observers—the country's progress and modernity. Preparations had begun three years earlier, in 1907, and in the days leading up to the official three-day celebration (September 14-16), government officials inaugurated dozens of monuments, official buildings, institutions, and streets.[515] The new Teatro Nacional promised by González in 1901 was not among them.

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[512] Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the *Centenario*," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (Feb., 1996): 75-104.

[513] The project to construct the ideal city drew heavily on the planning principles of Georges-Eugene Haussmann. See Jorge E. Hardoy, "Theory and Practice of Urban Planning in Europe, 1850-1930," in *Rethinking the Latin American City*, edited by Richard M. Morse and Jorge E. Hardoy (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1992), 31-5

[514] Díaz y de Ovando, "El Gran Teatro Nacional," 14.

[515] Tenorio Trillo, "1910 Mexico City," 76-77.

Though initial construction had begun in 1904, the project stalled (that building, now known as the Palacio de Bellas Artes, would not be completed until 1934).[516] The government's failure to complete this project in time for the momentous 1910 celebration highlighted on a grand scale that theater (grand performance halls in particular) was no longer the marker of modernity, civilization, and progress it had been in the minds of the city's nineteenth-century elites.

Considered together, these four events illuminate tectonic shifts in the ways urban dwellers conceived of theater and its place in city life, both real and symbolic. By the turn of the twentieth century, Enlightenment-inspired ideas about theater as a civilizing power and a school of morals and virtue seemed out of date. Put differently, elites began to question the very ideas that had given birth to the age of theater. Thus, if theater was simply entertainment for entertainment's sake—something that tanda-goers and aficionados of the teatro frívolo already believed—then there was no longer a need to impose strict regulations on theatergoers, actors, and dramatic companies. Likewise, if grand performance halls were no longer the quintessential symbols of modernity and progress, then there was no reason for the already debt-ridden city to fund the construction of an ornate municipal playhouse.

The meaning of theatergoing for theatergoers had also changed. While that process had begun with alterations to the format and content of live shows, the introduction of motion pictures sent the entertainment marketplace into a veritable frenzy. Residents found in motion pictures inexpensive and novel ways to engage in the city's urban culture. Though they continued to attend theatrical productions, they came to see motion pictures as

[516] The city council attempted to jumpstart the project in 1915 to help struggling workers, but the attempt was short-lived. See AHDF, Teatros, Vol. 4017, expediente 138, 1915.

modern and new. As the growth in projection spaces revealed, entertainment peddlers responded to demands in the market; film was easy to transport, and, once purchased, it could be shown repeatedly at no extra cost. Proprietors of theaters did too, retrofitting their playhouses to show film or converting them into cinemas altogether.[517] The practice of theatergoing continued and a few modest, privately funded performance halls opened. But, by the dawn of the new century, theater was no longer unrivalled. Its influence on city life diminished, the age of theater had come to a close.

[517] AHDF, Gobierno del Distrito Federal, Diversiones, Vol. 1382, expediente 45 BIS.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF THEATERS IN MEXICO CITY, 1830-1901

Theater Name	Year Opened	Year Closed
Teatro Principal (Coliseo Nuevo)	1753	1931
Teatro de los Gallos/Teatro de la Ópera	1823	1844
Teatro de Nuevo México	1841	1878
Teatro de la Unión/Teatro del Puente Quebrado	1839/40	1851
Teatro de la Calle de Amargura	1839/40	??
Teatro del Puesto Nuevo/Teatro del Progreso/Teatro de Oriente	1843/44	1877
Gran Teatro Nacional/Gran Teatro de Santa Anna/Gran Teatro del Imperio	1844	1901
Teatro del Relox	1849	1867*
Teatro del Pabellón Mexicano	1849	1861*
Teatro de Iturbide	1856	1872#
Teatro la Esmeralda/Teatro de la Fama/Teatro de Hidalgo	1856	1910s
Teatro de Arsinas/Teatro de la Democracia	1872	1891
Teatro de Novedades/Teatro de América	1872	1896*
Teatro de los Autores	1873	1879*
Teatro del Conservatorio	1873*	1895*
Teatro Arbeu	1875	1960s
Teatro de Guerrero	1875	1895*
Teatro Morelos/Teatro Merced Morales	1880	1889
Teatro Angela Peralta	1886	1895*
Teatro de Invierno	1886	1896*
Teatro Mignon	1891*	1903*
Teatro María Guerrero/Teatro Lelo de Larrea	1891	1915*
Teatro Nava	1899*	1901*
Teatro del Renacimiento/Teatro Virginia Fábregas	1900	1950
Teatro Colón/Teatro Eslava	1900/01	1924
Teatro Riva Palacio	1901	1905
Teatro Apolo/Teatro Rosa Fuertes	1901/02	1916

* - first or final extant reference I have found
# - converted into the meeting space of the Chamber of Deputies

Information contained in this table originates from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including: archival documents in the AHDF and AHN; Magaña Esquivel, *Los teatros en la ciudad de México*; Mañon, *Historia del Teatro Principal*; Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro durante el porfirismo*; Vásquez Meléndez, *Fiesta y teatro en la ciudad de México, 1750-1910*; *El Diario del Hogar*, 1 de enero de 1901; and *El Teatro Nacional*.

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AGN – Ayuntamientos
AGN – Civil Volumenes
AGN – Gobernación
AGN – Justicia
AGN – Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Distrito Federal (1822-99)

AHDF Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal (Mexico City)
AHDF – Administración de Rentas Municipales
AHDF – Ayuntamiento de México
AHDF – Diversiones Públicas
AHDF – Festividades: 16 y 27 de septiembre
AHDF – Gobierno del Distrito Federal
AHDF – Hacienda: Contribucciones
AHDF – Municipalidades
AHDF – Teatros

AHN Archivo Histórico de Notarías (Mexico City)

BLC Benson Latin American Collection (Austin, Texas)
BLC - Carlos Villalongín Dramatic Company Records

CEHM Centro de Estudios de Historia de Mexico – CARSO (Mexico City)
CEHM – LXI. Impresos Armando María y Campos
CEHM – CDLIV. Colección José Y. Limantour

DEG DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University (Dallas, Texas)
DEG – Mexican Newspapers, Tlaxcala and Mexico City

HN Hemeroteca Nacional – UNAM (Mexico City)
HN – Fondo Reservado

VUSPEC Vanderbilt University Special Collections (Nashville, TN)
VUSPEC – Mexican Theater Posters

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