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HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ROMA THEATER IN SPAIN

By [Sonia Carmona Tapia](#)

This article is intended to be a historical overview of the work of Romani theater companies in Spain and theater makers of Roma origin, so that an accurate time frame, location and setting can be established for their work and activities.

Overview

It is [Mario Maya](#), (Córdoba 1937- Sevilla 2008) to the best of my knowledge, who was the first in Spain to call his theater company Teatro Gitano Andaluz (Andalusian Gypsy Theater). But he will do so only for a few years, changing the name afterwards to Compañía de Teatro Flamenco. In an interview done with Mario Maya and Juan de Loxa by Manuel Llanes and published in the theater magazine *Pipirijaina*¹, the

¹ Pipirijaina. Núm.7 (Junio, 1978), p. 26-28

interviewer asks specifically about the “space that they intend to cover with the creation of this group”, Mario Maya answers:

—MARIO.—La formación del grupo responde a una inquietud ante los problemas, ya conocidos en Andalucía, planteados ante la existencia de una minoría étnica (el gitano), que se encuentra marginada a todos los niveles. Responde a una inquietud social.

“The creation of this group responds to a concern about the problems, already known in Andalusia, of an ethnic minority (the Gypsy) that is marginalized at all levels. It is a response to a social concern.”

But in 1984 the name that appears in the theater and programs has already been changed to Compañía de Teatro Flamenco.

It is important to know that until July 1978 in Spain the following articles were in force in the light of the Civil Guard Corps regulation:

Article 4. The Gypsies will be scrupulously watched, taking great care to recognize all the documents they have, check their personal details, observe their costumes, find out their way of life and whatever leads to forming an exact idea of their movements and occupations, inquiring the point to which they are heading during their travels and the object of them.

Article 5. As this class of people do not generally have a fixed residence, they move very frequently from one point to another where they are unknown. It is convenient to take all the necessary news from them to prevent them from committing horse robberies or other kinds of crime.

Article 6. It is mandated that the Gypsies and ‘chalanés’ bring, besides the personal cell, the tax license that authorizes them to exercise the horse trafficking industry. For each of these they will carry a guide with the class, origin, age, iron and details, which will be delivered to the buyer. The annotations that are made in this document for changes and sales will be authorized by the mayors of the towns or by a public order inspector in the capitals, and by the municipal veterinarians for

mule cattle. Those who are not provided with these documents or whose examination or verification shows that it is not in order, will be detained by the Civil Guard and placed at the disposal of the competent authority as violators of the law.

Theater will play an important role in the derogation of these regulations.

Even though Mario Maya was born in Córdoba, he grows up in Sacromonte in Granada where he starts his theatrical work. Some of his most important plays include *Ceremonial* (1974), *Camelamos Naquerar* (1976), *¡Ay, Jondo!* (1977), *El Amargo* (1986), *El Amor Brujo* (1987) and *Requiem* (1994).

“Presented at the mythical Café de Chinitas (1974) with the title Ceremonial de cante, baile y guitarra, Mario Maya tried to analyze and reformulate the flamenco language in this work, searching a different approach to Flamenco. For this reason, the piece traces the history of this Spanish genre of music and dance, from its Arabic origins to the most innovative trends of the moment, such as, for example, the translation of Dada phoneticism to ‘tablao’.

The plot background is provided by a poem by [Juan de Loxa](#) in which we are presented with the history of the people of Granada in their struggle to recover the artistic values of their land. Throughout its multiple performances, a good number of great figures from the flamenco world collaborated, such as the singers Gómez de Jerez and Juan Montoya, or the guitarist Luís Habichuela.”²

In 1977, they premiered the show [Ay, Jondo](#) in Mexico, again in collaboration with Juan de Loxa, the poet from Granada. The performance was performed in over 30 theaters in South America, in the Sadler’s Wells Theater in London, in the Carnegie Hall in New York, in Japan before coming to Spain. “It is a work in which the story of marginalized, oppressed and persecuted people is told, and this is done”, in the words of Loxa, “by telling the truth, singing it, stamping it, spitting it out without regard, to the point that the people who attend get so involved into it, to the point of participating in the universal struggle of those who believe in freedom.” The speech of a narrator - the role that is given by an old Gypsy woman from Granada's Sacromonte - is a true novelty in flamenco theater, and throughout the entire play

² Spain is culture. http://www.spainisculture.com/en/obras_culturales/ceremonial.html

it determines the action of the other interpreters' (dancers, singers and guitarists) works, in several simultaneous historical planes. According to Juan de Loxa, the dancer's feet are "battle tools that become flint to ignite the 'cante' and illuminate the black sounds of the guitar, as if they brushed against some howl of Allen Ginsberg or the carefree hope of an old *Hair*, with the permission of Federico García Lorca, at a crossroads between New York and the Gypsy Sacromonte³. The play urges the audience to "ask where the absents are".

But probably the play *Camelamos Naquerar* (1976) (In Caló meaning "We want to talk") is one of the most important references in Spanish Roma theater and fundamental for the social, legal and political changes it entails. The play was written by José Heredia Maya (Granada, 1947 - ib., 2010 and directed by Mario Maya. It was performed for the first time at the University of Granada in February 1976. Fermín Vilchez wrote in the newspaper *El País*⁴:

"With "Camelamos naquerar" it can be said that the Gitanos start walking along totally unknown paths. It seems that they want to speak out loud about how much their slavery has represented and they want to take the reins of the role that corresponds to them without being directed. This way, the work discovers unpublished paths and can undoubtedly be a starting point to provide flamenco with greater content that will serve to awaken the conscience of the people oppressed and vexed for centuries."

Camelamos naquerar

The play was "a work turned into an instrument at the service of the dignity of the Roma people," says Heredia's son. A service that had its costs; José Heredia Maya received coercion and death threats. One of the theaters putting on the play was burned down.

As Jesús Quintanilla Azzarelli concludes in his doctoral thesis, *Media impact of "Camelamos Naquerar" in the Democratic Transition Press* (Sevilla, 2015):

³ Castro, Eduardo.(September 27th, 1977) Teatro Gitano Andaluz escenifica un poema dramático flamenco. *El País*. https://elpais.com/diario/1977/09/27/cultura/244162804_850215.html

⁴ Fermín Vilchez. (May 16th, 1976) El martes se presenta en Madrid "Camelamos naquerar" *El País*. https://elpais.com/diario/1976/05/16/cultura/201045617_850215.html

“As a result of the representations of “Camelamos naquerar”, the restlessness for this Roma case expands throughout the country and is reflected in the press. The informative and opinion-making work of the journalists of the time allows us to understand the motivations of the Spanish Roma people’s struggle”.

“On June 7, 1978, the Roma people experience one of the great moments of the transition in Spain. Just one year after the first democratic elections, the first Roma deputy in the history of Spain, Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia, in the Congress of the Deputies defends a proposal not of law to repeal the articles of the Civil Guard that ordered the Gitanos to be scrupulously watched. In his speech before the Congress, the deputy stated that the defense of the human dignity of Roma as a minority could not be the patrimony of any political party. Víctor Márquez Reviriego dedicates one of his parliamentary chronicles to him in the magazine ‘Triumph’. It describes Ramírez Heredia's presentation and notes the unanimous support of the Congress. The title of his parliamentary chronicle could not be more significant: “Camelamos naquerar”. Still in June 1978 there will be many mobilizations of the Spanish Roma people.”

José Heredia Maya

Poet, playwright, essayist and university professor. [Heredia Maya](#) is the greatest exponent of Romani letters in the Spanish language. Graduated in Romance Philology from the University of Granada, of which he would later become a professor of Spanish Literature, he was the first Roma professor at the Spanish university. Founder of the Seminary of Flamenco Studies at the University of Granada, he was a benchmark of the cultural and artistic life of his city. *Penar Ocono* was his first collection of poems, written in 1973, followed by *Poemas indefensos* in 1974. In 1983 he published *Charol* and premiered his second theatrical play *Macama Jonda*, a work with which he once again resorted to flamenco music and dance, this time twinned with Andalusí music. *Sueño Terral* is his third play, in which jazz, flamenco and bullfighting are merged. In 1997, he writes his fourth dramatic work, [Un gitano de ley](#). This last work tells the story of Ceferino Giménez Malla, El Pelé, who, after being arrested by a group of militiamen in the Civil War,

was shot in 1936. El Pelé had tried to defend a priest and ended up shot dead. Later, he was beatified by the Catholic Church. The play was presented in the Cathedral in Sevilla. *Experience and Judgment* is a lucid collection of poems that he publishes in 1994. In parallel to his poetic and theatrical work, Heredia Maya also wrote essays and was editor of the magazine of thought *The Clean Look*.

In the same year that *Camelamos Naquerar* was premiered, the flamenco singer [Juan Peña, El Lebrijano](#) (Lebrija 1941 - Sevilla 2016), produces what can be seen as another milestone: the album [Persecución](#) with texts by the poet Félix Grande, where the story of the persecution of the Roma in Spain ever since their arrival in the XV century to the XVIII century is told in a heartrending and moving poetic cry against racism.

Almost two years later, Francisco Suárez, one of our most prolific and recognized Roma theater directors will do a theater adaptation of the «dramatic poem» that will be performed between November 13th and 19th, 1978, at the Lope de Vega Theater in Sevilla with the voices of Juan Peña, el Lebrijano, «Chiquetete» and Romerito de Jerez, with the dance of Farruco, Farruca, Pilar Montoya, Angelita Vargas, Joselito El Bienkansao, Juan Carrasco and Pilar Gómez, guitar-playing of Enrique de Melchor, Pedro Bacán, Ramón Amador and Carlos Heredia, plus the participation of actors such as Ana Galván, Juan Carlos Ramos, Joaquín Foncueva and Manuel Alcántara.

Francisco Navarro in his review for the *ABC* of Seville (November 16th, 1978) says:

*“Lebrijano got away with it. Persecución, serious, accomplished, quality, singing, sorrows edged with joy and hope, that is its definition. A packed theater at the premiere gave a standing ovation to the worthy work of three men: Juan Peña ‘el Lebrijano’, Francisco Suárez and Félix Grande.”*⁵

The performance was a total success and it revealed historical facts to Roma and non-Roma audiences, facts that had been systematically silenced. Both *Persecución* and *Camelamos Naquerar*, are clear examples of how theater can influence and impact society and even lead to social, political and legal changes.

⁵ Francisco Navarro. *ABC* (16-11-1978)

Francisco Suarez

[Suarez](#) was born in 1948 in Santa Marta (Badajoz), into a family of Roma blacksmiths and dealers. He studies theater directing in Barcelona from 1969 to 1972. He attends a workshop directed by Cristian Casares from the theater company Los Goliardos 1974 - 1975 and takes some courses with the Theater of Los Buenos Aires between 1976 - 1977. The basis of his productions lies in the conflict between reality and desire as well as his commitment to losers. His Roma imprint appears in his scenes as a magical puzzle between words, dance and music with a primitive symbolism of suggestive appreciation. The plays he has directed up till now are the following:

2020 - *Dialogue of the Bitter* (Diálogo del Amargo), by Federico García Lorca. Teatro Español (March 5th to 29th) – Main stage. Production: Teatro Español.

2019 - *The Island of the Slaves*, by Marivaux. Festival Teatro Clásico de Cáceres. Production: Las 4 Esquinas.

2018 – *La última batalla*. 39th Festival de Teatro de. Off Latina - Madrid. Guillermo Serrano.

2017 – *Las planchadoras*, by Manuel Martínez Mediero. Teatro López de Ayala.

2012-2016 – Dramaturge of *The Constant Prince* (El príncipe constante), by Calderón; *Agamemnon*, by Aeschylus - Pasolini; *Dialogue of the Bitter* (Diálogo del Amargo), by Lorca; rewriting of *Mama está entre las cerezas* and the novel *Los infieles*.

2011 – *The Persians*, by Aeschylus. Teatro Español.

2007-2010 – Artistic director of the Mérida Festival. Productions of the Festival: *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles. Director: Jorge Lavelli. *Medea*, by Euripides. Director: Tomaz Pandur. *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes. Director: Jerome Savary. *The Trojan Women*, by Euripides. Director: Mario Gas. *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare. Director: Andrés Lima.

2008 – *Timon of Athens*, by William Shakespeare. Mérida Classical Theater Festival.

2006 – *Ithaca*. Scenic proposal based on Homer's *Odyssey*, in a version by Félix Grande and music by Juan José Suárez. Mérida Classical Theater Festival. Teatro Español. Production: Teatro Español.

2005 – *Desire under the Elms*, by Eugene O' Neill. Teatro Lopez Ayala. National Tour Nuevo Cinema – Madrid.

2004 – *Gypsy Ballads* (Romancero Gitano), by Federico García Lorca. Teatro Español – Madrid. Bienal de Flamenco – Sevilla. Festival Temporada Alta – Gerona. Gira Nacional. Teatre Tívoli – Barcelona. Teatro Alcázar – Madrid.

2003 – *The Theater of Illusion*, by Pierre Corneille. Clásicos de Alcalá. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Cáceres. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Alcántara. National Tour.

2003 – *La Música del Cuerpo*. Dance show. Festival de Jerez y Madrid en Danza.

2002 – *Orestes in Lisboa*, by Francisco Suárez and Blanca Suñén. Bienal de Flamenco – Sevilla. National Tour. Teatro Español de Madrid.

2002 – *Desde Que El Alba Quiso Ser Alba*, by Miguel Hernández. Gala Internacional de la Danza – Teatro Albéniz.

2001 – *Caesar and Cleopatra*, by M. M. Mediero, based on the story by G. B. Shaw.

1999 – *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare. Centro Cultural de la Villa de Madrid. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro. National Tour.

1998 – *Blood Wedding*, by Federico García Lorca. Festival de Otoño Autumn Festival – Madrid. National Tour.

1997 – *Antigone*, by Sophocles. Mérida Classical Theatre Festival. Festival de Vitoria-Gasteiz. National Tour.

1997 – *Mama Está Entre las Cerezas*. Original script/screenplay by Blanca Suñén and Francisco Suárez.

1996 – *Plaza Alta*, by Blanca Suñén. Theater Albeniz – Madrid. Tour in Extremadura.

1993 – 1996 – Artistic director of the Mérida Classical Theatre Festival.

1994 – *The Bewitched Love* (El Amor Brujo), by Manuel de Falla. Theater Juan Bravo – Segovia. National Tour.

1993 – *Amargo*, by Federico García Lorca. Program: Paso a Paso -TVE2

1992 – *Seven Against Thebes*, by Aeschylus. Mérida Classical Theatre Festival. Festival of Classic Theater of Burgos (Teatro Clásico De Burgos.)

1992 – *Latcho Drom* (El buen camino). Directed by Toni Gatlif. (Winner of the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 'A Certain Look' category)

1991 – *Raquel*, by Vicente García de la Huerta. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Cáceres. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro. Tour in Extremadura.

1990 – *Memoria del Cobre*, by Francisco Suárez. Madrid en Danza. Tour in Extremadura, France and Belgium.

1989 – *Mirando al Mar*, by Miguel Murillo and M. M. Mediero. Teatro Bellas Artes – Tour in Extremadura.

1988 – *El despertar a quien duerme*, by Lope de Vega. Extremadura Enclave 92

1987 – *Mary Stuart*, by F. Schiller. – Barcelona. International tour: Moscow, New York, Chicago, London and Tel Aviv. Maya Pliséstskaya. Production: National Dance Company.

1986 – *¡Tierra a la Vista!*, by M. M. Mediero. Tour in Extremadura.

1986 – *Erinyes* (Las furias). Show based on texts by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, with dramaturgy by José Antonio Gabriel y Galán and choreography by José Granero. Mérida Classical Theatre Festival. Village's Summers – Madrid.

1985 – *¡Qué viva Salomón!*, by Diego Sánchez de Badajoz. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro. Festival de Teatro Clásico de Cáceres. National tour.

1984 – *Camino sin retorno*. Red de Teatros – Comunidad de Madrid. Antonio Márquez, Luis Ortega y Manuel Reyes.

1983 – *Ay, Jondo*, by Juan de Loxa. (Assistant director). Director: Mario Maya. Théâtre de la Ville, Paris. Festival de las Naciones. – Sofía (Bulgaria). Festival of Asti, Italy. Carmen Cortés and Mario Maya.

1983 – *Amargo*, by Federico García Lorca. Director: Francisco Suárez. The Sitges Film Festival – Güito and Carmen Cortés.

1982 – *The Kiss of the Butterflies* (El beso de las mariposas), by Jorge Márquez. Tour in Extremadura. Berta Gómez and Leandro Rey.

1982 – *El sueño de Me-Liao*, by Armando López Salinas. Tour in Extremadura and Castilla La Mancha. Company: Diego Sánchez de Badajoz.

1981 – *The Love of Don Perlimplín with Belisa in Their Garden*, by Federico García Lorca. Tour in Extremadura. Company: Diego Sánchez de Badajoz.

1980 – *Persecution* (Persecución), by Félix Grande. Teatro Lope de Vega - Sevilla. Tour in Andalusia.

1979 – *Sacrilego*, by Valle Inclán. Tour in Extremadura. Company: Diego Sánchez de Badajoz.

1978 – *¡Qué viva Salomón!*, by Diego Sánchez de Badajoz. Tour in Extremadura. Company: Diego Sánchez de Badajoz.

The play *Persecución* has been recently produced, directed by [Miguel Ángel Vargas](#) with the choreography of Belén Maya, Mario Maya's daughter, for the Flamenco Biennial, Sevilla.

Another important milestone is [Oratorio](#) (1969) by Alfonso Jiménez performed by the Teatro Estudio Lebrija, directed by Juan Bernabé. It was crucial for the work of another of our most important Roma directors: [Salvador Távora](#) (Sevilla 1930 -2019), for his company [La Cuadra](#) and his first production: [Quejío. Visceral protest of a marginalized people](#). (1972)

Salvador Távora tells us about *Quejío*:

"I knew, because I was in them, almost all the environments in which Andalusian cante and dance were given or sold. I asked myself a thousand times why the songs and dances did not reflect the specific realities of the Andalusians who did them. Little by little, not doing studies on it, but looking into my own reality, I came to the discovery that, due to a powerful channeling phenomenon, our songs and dances were on one side, and our

needs on the other. I searched, day after day, for an authentic way of expressing our current realities, and I came to the conviction that our present was strongly falsified and hidden by solid clichés: a traumatizing current had made of everything Andalusian, and of the Andalusian themselves, both the ones that sang and those who did not sing, an instrument usable to put a happy and colorful mask on sad and colorless people. (...) Then I considered the need to investigate the past, not how our great-grandparents sang, but "why"; and I came to see very clearly that a woe (¡ay!), their woe (¡ay!), before being a usable product, was the vague, fearful, resigned and conformist cry that, to the extent possible, denounced the crushing socio-economic situation in which they lived. (...) I started from a theatrical idea that was born in my mind, I don't know, perhaps because of my ignorance of conventional theater studies, perhaps to avoid falling into a hackneyed and cold "talkative" theater that I had never been interested in, and perhaps, also, due to the influence of my participation in "Oratorio", a play by Juan Bernabé and the Lebrijano Theater of a text by Alfonso Jiménez Romero. The thing is that what I wanted was born: a tough scheme open to the contribution of individual experiences. Joaquín, Pepito, Juan, Angelines, José, Miguel, and now, all united in the extreme physical dedication that the idea demanded of us, and putting aside flamencologists, academicians and mummifiers from past cultures, we went looking for "Inside" the most authentic mode of expression inherited: singing and dancing. This is how the show arose, without words, without times or acts calculated by conditioning, with the necessary elements to provoke confession, and thus, we changed the theatrical need to represent for the - conscious - desire to "show."

"Quejío" is, in short, the result of some experiences or the sum of a whole process of experiences. It is the presentation or recreation of an anguished climate, in which the singing, dance, lament or complaint of the Andalusian people take place. Seven cantes and three dances have been studied or dealt with, listed in ten Rites or ceremonies, through an approach in which it is almost possible to merge cante and dance with the possible or almost certain situation of an oppressed community; in which the complaint or the tragic cry of their individuals have only served, through a premeditated channeling, to amuse those who were responsible for the oppression." (Távora, 1975).

Other works by Salvador Távora are:

1975 – *Los Palos*, (1975-1976). Manifestation of a nascent historical consciousness. Production: La Cuadra. Premiere: World Theater Festival, Nancy.

1977 – *Herramientas*, (1977-1978). An attempt to elevate the instruments of manual and daily work to cultural values of communication. Production: La Cuadra. Premier: World Theater Festival, Nancy.

1979 – *Andalucía Amarga*, (1979-1982). A physical and sound poem about emigration. Production: Kaaitheater.

1982 – *Nanas de Espinas*, (1982-1985). Based on *Blood Wedding*, an encounter with García Lorca, in a ritual of tragic feelings. Production: La Cuadra. Premier: Flamenco Biennial, Sevilla.

1985 – *Piel de Toro*, (1985-1987). Show based on the sensitivity generated by certain Iberian rites. Production: La Cuadra.

1987 – *The Bacchantes*, (1987-2008). A version inspired by Euripides' text, showing the affinity between ancient tragedy and the contemporary world. Production: Teatro Español. Premier: Teatro Español, Madrid.

1988 – *Alhucema*, (1988-1989). Poetic and epic painting of Andalusia through the cultures that left their traces there. Production: Mérida Classical Theater Festival – I.N.A.E.M. – Junta de Andalucía.

1990 – *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (*Crónica de una Muerte anunciada*), (1990-1991.) Adaptation of the novel by Gabriel García Márquez, in an attempt to show the affinities that unite the men of Southern Europe with the men of South America. Production: CAT-Junta de Andalucía – Bayonne Festival.

1992 – *Picasso Andaluz o La Muerte del Minotauro*, (1992-1994). An attempt to place Picasso in the cultural environment of his birthplace. Production: EXPO'92 – Summer Festival of Perpignan.

1994 – *Identidaes*, (1994-1996). A plastic, musical poem about cultures, identities and solidarity between people. Production: Junta de Andalucía-Consejería de Cultura, Generalitat de Catalunya-Consellería de Cultura, Mercat de les Flors-Ajuntament de Barcelona, Les Estivales de Perpignan-Région Languedoc-Roussillon.

1996 – *Carmen, Òpera Flamenca de Cornetas e Tambores* (1996- today). Andalusian opera with horns and drums, according to the legend told by old cigar makers from Tirana. An attempt to claim the dignity of an Andalusian myth. Production: La Cuadra de Sevilla.

1998 – *Los toros en 1830*. Show with bulls on the history of the art of bullfighting. Recreates the history of bullfighting in its different fortunes until culminating in the 1830s. Production: FIBES.

2000 – *Don Juan en los Ruedos*, (2000–2006). Popular opera of horses, bulls and cantes. A peculiar consideration of this very Sevillian myth through the art of bullfighting and 'rejoneo', trying to reveal seduction in all its facets. Production: Festival Castell de Peralada – La Cuadra de Sevilla.

2002 – *Villalon, ganadero y poeta*. Fantasy of horses, bulls and cantes. A dreamlike approach to the rancher-poet, forerunner of Lorca and Alberti. Production: FIBES.

2003 – *Imágenes Andaluzas para Carmina Burana*, (2003-2006). Theater show about the music and choir of Carl Orff. The daring of the imagination: the musicality of the cantata carried along a path of sound vibrations to images without the conditioning of the original medieval lyrics. Production: Festival Castell de Peralada, La Cuadra de Sevilla.

2004 – *Mayorales*. A dream of lights and shadows in livestock fields. Show that aspires to present unusual pictures of the bull during his life in the field and to pay tribute to those anonymous heroes that are called 'the Mayorales'. Production: FIBES.

2005 – *Yerma, Mater*, (2005-2006). Between the pain of flamenco and Berlioz's *Requiem*. Based on the text of *Yerma* by Federico García Lorca. Production: Festival Castell de Peralada, La Cuadra de Sevilla.

2006 – *El sillón vacío*. A bullfighting equestrian memory to the promotion of the World Bull Fair. Production: FIBES.

2007 – *Flamenco para Traviata*. Some musical fragments from Giuseppe Verdi's opera *La Traviata*. Production: La Cuadra de Sevilla.

2008 – *Diez años de emociones taurinas*. A journey through the ten years that the World Bull Fair has been celebrating through the shows created on this occasion. Production: FIBES.

2009 – *La mujer y el toro*. The importance of women in bullfighting rituals, both in mythology and in bullfighting. Production: FIBES.

2009 – *Andalucía entre la Leyenda y la Historia*, (2009-2010). An attempt to unify theater and cinema in a disturbing dramaturgy in which there is a desperate search to find, with a more visual dimension compared to other shows, the unequivocal poetics of the social nuance that must be inherent in all artistic practice. Production: La Cuadra.

2010 – *Rafael Alberti, a commitment to the people*. A dreamlike, musical journey through the poetic work of Rafael Alberti and his social commitment. Recording: Teatro Salvador Távora, Sevilla 2010.

2012 – *Memorias de un caballo andaluz*. Horses are part of the history of the towns, and we approach the aesthetic relationship of the Andalusian horse with its most popular environment: its relationship with the bullfighting festival, channeled through flamenco routes, the popular music of the 'pasodoble', and aesthetic sensations. Co-production: Junta de Andalucía – AAIICC (Agencia Andaluza de Instituciones Culturales) Premier: September 2012: Teatro Romea – Barcelona.

AAIUN

In 2018, our theater company AAIUN PRODUCCIONES premiered the play *De Profunda Dignitatis* at the II. International Roma Heroes Storytelling Festival in Budapest. The play portrayed, among others, the figure of Gabriela Ortega. Gabriela was born in Seville, on August 15th, 1915. An artist and creator of staged poetry, she is considered the universal rhapsode of bullfighting, inimitable in the art of uniting poems with the rhythm of flamenco dance. She was Roma, in her family there were six generations of flamenco singers, flamenco dancers and bullfighters of the highest prestige at the time.

Her father was the bullfighter Enrique Ortega (El Cuco) of the famous bullfighting dynasty of the Ortegases, and her mother was Gabriela Gómez, of the equally famous

bullfighting dynasty of the Gallos: Fernándo Gómez El Gallo, her grandfather and her three uncles: Rafael, El Divine; Fernando, El Teórico and Joselito, El Gallo.

But Gabriela also brought dancing and singing in her blood: her grandmother was La Señora Gabriela Ortega Feria and her great aunt, Carlota Ortega Feria, well-known 'bailaoras' - just like her aunts and cousins. Among the singers of her family, we find Enrique El Gordo, Curro Dulce, Espeteta and the Caracoles Dynasty, of which the best-known was undoubtedly her cousin, Manolo Caracol.

Her brothers were also bullfighters, Rafael Ortega, Gallito and José Ortega, Gallito Chico.

Her uncle was the bullfighter who Federico García Lorca immortalized in his lament, Ignacio Sánchez-Mejías.

Gabriela studied dramatic art at the University of Seville, becoming the first actress of the Spanish University Theater in Sevilla (TEU), representing classical Spanish and European theater in classical verse, with works such as *El Gran Teatro del Mundo* by Calderón de la Barca and *The Landlady* by Goldoni, presenting classic theater, in the Maria Luisa Park in Seville for the first time.

She was sent to the wedding of the Counts of Barcelona in Rome by the City Council of Seville, representing the School of the Irish, where she was a study partner of Doña María de las Mercedes.

In her youth, her family moved to Madrid, for professional reasons of her brothers who had already been bullfighters and there, she remained related to the art world attending literary gatherings. She met many of the poets of the Generation of '27, they gave her their poems to read and seeing her acting qualities, her deep voice, her figure and her talent, encouraged her to perform them on stage. She was hired as a declaimer in the shows presented by her cousin Manolo Caracol and was also requested by Conchita Piquer and El Príncipe Gitano, who took her to perform throughout Spain.

In the year 1950 she gave her first solo recital at the Teatro Lara in Madrid, with the assistance of great personalities of culture, gaining great success. The poet Gerardo Diego of the Royal Spanish Academy, published in the press of Madrid:

"The art of Gabriela Ortega is singular, does not seem to embody poetry like any actor or rhapsode, especially when she interprets poems of bullfighting

themes. The old bullfighting blood of her lineage and a new impetuous torrent flows through the veins of the verse, which vibrates and snakes with a deep sense of rhythm; rhythm said, sung, danced, bullied and sculpted, with a truth that only Gabriela Ortega has been able to merge in boiling spirituality and matter."

Admired by Gregorio Marañón, she was the muse of Rafael Alberti. Many poets and personalities of culture praised the interpretive qualities of Gabriela, recognizing her many merits.

The artists and writers Gerardo Diego, Agustín de Foxá, Gregorio Marañón, Gines Liébana - the first to immortalize Gabriela in his many paintings, Fernando Mígnoney, and Antonio Mingote, placed the Gold Medal in Art of Interpretation around her neck in Madrid, 1958.

She is condemned to exile by the Franco government; the Minister of Education Lora Tamayo sends her a letter signed also by the sculptor of the Valley of the Fallen, Juan de Avalos and the director of the Institute of Hispanic Culture, with the indication that she was not allowed to recite in the Spanish theaters, since poets such as Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, Miguel Hernández, Juan Ramón Jiménez and the Machado brothers were prohibited by the Regime.

Gabriela leaves for America, reaping great triumphs in Argentina where she was given an armchair with her name engraved in gold at the National Theater of Buenos Aires. In the 60s she took flamenco poetry to many countries of America: Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Cuba, Panama, Ecuador. Her performances were broadcast by the American Televisions of the countries where she performed. In Mexico, she recorded for three months and organized a Holy Week, which was very celebrated.

The day of her presentation at the Fine Arts Theater of Mexico was broadcast by the National Radio of Spain and she was awarded the most important trophy: El Azteca de Oro. Also, there she intervenes in the movie *Échame la Culpa* with Lola Flores and Miguel Aceves Mejías, where she interprets in declamation and dance, the poem *Uno, Dos y Tres* of his contemporary, Manuel Benítez Carrasco.

She alternates her performances with teaching Spanish classes and declamation at the University. After suffering an unfortunate accident on stage and fracturing an ankle, she is granted a chair in Colombia, teaching there for three years. During

these years she also writes a screenplay for a film, *Café Cantante* and *Toast Dynasties of Andalusia* published in 1996, posthumously.

When she returned from exile, she made some appearances on the Andalusian television, alternating with sporadic performances in Peñas Taurinas. She performed in Granada at the Palacio de Congresos, with Cristina Hoyos.

The reciter Doña Gabriela fell into oblivion, never left creation and until the end of her life, she dedicated herself to painting and writing.

She died on August 11, 1995, in a nursing home in Aznalcázar. She rests in the pantheon of José Gómez Ortega, her uncle (Joselito, el Gallo), in the cemetery of San Fernando in Seville.

I find it important to let you know that in 2007 the "[Instituto de Cultura Gitana](#)" was founded in Spain as a Public Foundation attached to the Ministry of Culture whose objectives are the development and promotion of Roma history, culture and language, and the dissemination of their knowledge and recognition through studies, research and publications. Through the organization of academic and cultural events, as well as support for artistic creation, the Institute of Roma Culture aims to achieve that the contribution of the Roma to the common cultural heritage and the value of the Roma as one of the backbones of Spanish culture would be recognized.

The prizes of the Instituto de Cultura Gitana has been awarded since 2008.

One of the categories is Literature and Performing Arts and the award has been given to:

2008: José Heredia Maya

2009: Francisco Suarez Montaña

2010: Rajko Djuric

2011: Tony Gatlif

2012: Joaquín Albaicín

2013: Alexandre Romanes

2014: Pilar Távora

2015: Lita Claver / Emilia Giménez

2016: Hiba Abouk

2017: José Maya Cortés

2018: La Chana

2019: Salvador Távora