

# TEATRO DE CIERTOS HABITANTES

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## *MONSTERS AND PRODIGES:*

### *THE HISTORY OF THE CASTRATI*

March 20–22, 2009



Photo by Eugenio Cobo

Museum of  
Contemporary  
Art

CHICAGO

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# TEATRO DE CIERTOS HABITANTES—MONSTERS AND PRODIGIES: THE HISTORY OF THE CASTRATI

Written by Jorge Kuri  
Inspired by *The World of the Castrati*  
by Patrick Barbier  
Directed by Claudio Valdés Kuri

## CAST

*Jean Paré*, Raúl Román  
*Ambroise Paré*, Gastón Yanes  
*Il virtuoso*, Javier Medina  
*Sulaiman*, Kaveh Parmas  
*Baldessarre Galuppi*, Edwin Calderón  
*Chiron*, Miguel Ángel López  
*Napoleon Bonaparte*, Luis Fernando Villegas

Claudio Valdés Kuri, *director*  
Magda Zalles, *musical director*  
Jorge Vázquez and Igor Lozada, *executive producers*

Mario Iván Martínez, *costume design*  
Matías Gorlero, *lighting design*  
Carlos Guízar, *hair and makeup*  
Felipe Lara, *props*  
Mauricio Ascencio, *costume coordination*  
Fabrina Melón, *general coordination*  
Itzia Zerón, *international promotion*  
Carlos López, *director assistance*  
Miguel Ángel Guzmán, *general assistance*  
Víctor Hugo Moreno, *production assistance*  
Diego del Río, *technical assistance*

Performances of *Monsters and Prodigies: The History of the Castrati* are dedicated in memory of Jorge Kuri (1974–2005).

Produced by Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes, La Coordinación Nacional de Teatro/INBA, and Fundación BBVA Bancomer. Sponsored by México en Escena/FONCA and Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.



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CONSULADO GENERAL DE MÉXICO



Special thanks to Miller's Pub for its generous donation of stage props.



MCA backstage hospitality generously provided by Whole Foods Market

Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes is supported by México en Escena de CONACULTA-FONCA.

To increase appreciation of *Monsters and Prodigies*, the MCA organized these intimate opportunities for audience members to engage with the artists.

## Tuesday, March 17

Roundtable: *The Age of the Castrati: Music, Myths, and Medicine*

On March 17, featured soprano Javier Medina led a discussion on the lives of the castrati in history and opera with David Schrader, renowned harpsichordist, organist, and professor of music history at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University.

## Friday, March 20

First Night postshow talk

Join us for an insightful conversation with the artists immediately following the opening performance.

## Saturday, March 21, 2 pm

Roundtable: *The Baroque is Now: Brian Dickie and Claudio Valdés Kuri in Conversation*

Artistic Director Claudio Valdés Kuri and General Director of Chicago Opera Theater Brian Dickie discuss the enduring allure of the baroque and how it influences experimental theater and opera today. This conversation also draws from the directors' creative approaches to leading provocative artistic teams as well as reinterpreting overlooked works to reveal intersections between opera and theater. Beatriz Margain, Cultural Attaché for the Consulate of Mexico, facilitates the discussion.

## Monday, April 20, 6 pm

Roundtable: *Carmen: New Renderings*

Extending the MCA's investigation into the intersections of different art disciplines, director Andrew Eggert and conductor Alexander Platt of Chicago Opera Theater (COT) provide insight into their collaboration on COT's *La Tragédie de Carmen*, May 2–15, at the Harris Theater. For reservations, call the COT at 312.704.8420 ext. 23 or e-mail [education@chicagooperatheater.org](mailto:education@chicagooperatheater.org).

Sponsored in part by Instituto Cervantes of Chicago



Brian Dickie  
Photo courtesy of Chicago  
Opera Theater



Claudio Valdés Kuri  
Photo courtesy of Teatro de  
Ciertos Habitantes

## FROM THE DIRECTOR



Photo courtesy of Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes

There was a time when beauty was the highest value. It was considered a divine gift, and there were no limits to seeking it. In the 18th century, the castrati, those sacred monsters, those children whose voices were surgically molded, represented the pinnacle of artistic sublimation.

*Monsters and Prodigies* is about the development, plenitude, and decadence of the history of the castrati. This is a story of reflection and, at the same time, an acknowledgment of three centuries of human thought and action. We go from the succulent extremes of the baroque to the beginnings of the 20th century.

In an empty and austere space, the participants—recognized artists from different disciplines—fill us with the baroque spirit of ornamentation through a chronological narrative that recounts the internal contradictions, extravagances, and whims of these monstrous angels.

The production is created through the juxtaposition of artistic disciplines, routines, and languages—all of which touch the essence of the baroque period. The actors, using all resources at hand, challenge their ability to attract the attention of the audience. This is how the play openly shows the stories of these human beings, who constantly challenged all moral and reasonable laws, in their bodies as well as in their souls, to end in the impossible coupling of freak and angel, between monster and wonder.

Claudio Valdés Kuri  
*Director*

At the beginning of the 18th century, Italian theater audiences are privy to the shocking story of a Neapolitan, two-headed barber/surgeon who begins to practice castration in an effort to preserve the soprano tessitura in children.

Through historical recapitulation, we accompany the barber/surgeon, Jean Ambroise Paré, on a quest for the splendor of baroque art. The castrati of the Italian opera, baroque dance, and the tales and superstitions related to monsters come together to create a complex mosaic of this period in art history.

The labyrinths of the play explore the vicissitudes and adventures of the castrati, their romances and whims, and their turbulent affairs with composers and theater managers. The play culminates with the outbreak of war between beauty at the service of art and scientific reasoning. Alternating between dramatic scenes and musical interludes, the narrative, set during the French Revolution, captures the sublime mystery of the incomparable voices of the castrati.

#### “My Dear Child:

It does not surprise me that thou hath felt an invisible aversion for what you care most in the world. Rude and vulgar people have brutally told thee about the possibility of castrating thou; dimitted and hideous expression that would hath provoked nausea to a less delicate spirit than the one thou hath. As for me, I will try to pursue thy well being with less rude manners. And I will tell thee with less insinuating words that thou must make polish thee through a light surgery, which will ensure thee a long time delicate skin and the beauty of thy voice for the rest of your life.

Today, thou can speak to the King with familiarity; the duchesses spoil thee, all quality people praise thee. When the enchantment of your voice hath gone, thou will not be but Pompeii's comrade and thou will deserve, perhaps, the scorn of Stourton (respectively the Negro and the page of the Mazarino Duchess). Thou hath said that thou fear to be less loved by the ladies. Thou must loseth that apprehension since we are not anymore living the times of the imbeciles. Today it is much appreciated the benefit obtained

thanks to the surgery and, for a lover that Dery could have in his natural state, Dery, thou, will have a hundred, once thou hath polish thee. Thou can be sure that thou will have lovers, what a great luck, but thou will not have a wife, which means to be safe of a disgrace. Happy the one that does not have a wife! Much happier the one that has not children! A Dery's daughter will be pregnant, a son would be hanging in the hayfork and, most surely, his wife will be false to thee.

Be safe of all these harms with this prompt surgery. Thou will be only tied to thyself, glorious with a small sacrifice that will make your fortune grow and that will give thee the friendship of all and every men. If I live enough to see that thy voice hath changed and thy beard hath grown, thou will have to endure my reproof. Prevent all these and consider me the most sincere of all your friends.”

Charles de Saint-Evremond, 1685

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## **Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes**

was founded by Claudio Valdés Kuri in 1997 in Mexico City. The company is internationally acclaimed, and its members have received individual theater awards for their performances in productions of *Becket, or the Honor of God*; *Monsters and Prodigies: The History of the Castrati*; *The Grey Automobile*; and *Where Will I Be Tonight?* The company's signature creative process starts with simple principles and ends in complex effects, calling on the actors' range of multidisciplinary training. In preparation for each new production, the actors conduct research, take risks, ask questions, and debate—all in pursuit of new work that avoids repetition of former models and previous discoveries.

The company's international engagements have included the International Cervantino Festival (Guanajuato, Mexico), Wiener Festwochen (Vienna), In Transit at the House of World Cultures (Berlin), Festival de l'imaginaire (Paris), Les Translatines Festival (Bayonne, France), Grec Festival (Barcelona, Spain), Ibero-American Festival (Bogotá, Colombia), Cultural Carnival (Valparaiso, Chile), International Festival Teatro a Mil (Santiago, Chile), International Theatre Festival (Belo Horizonte, Brazil), Riocenacontemporanea Festival (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), International Arts Showcase (Puerto Rico), Festival of the Arts (Singapore), Expo-Aichi (Nagoya, Japan). In the United States the company has performed at the Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.), The Goodman Theatre's Latino Theatre Festival (Chicago), Time-Based Art Festival (Portland, Oregon), The Ford Amphitheatre (Hollywood, California), and The New 42nd Street Theatre on Broadway in New York, among many others.

*Monsters and Prodigies: The History of the Castrati* premiered in Spain in October 2000 at the Ibero-American Festival of Theatre in Cádiz, Temporada Alta 2000 at Gerona, and the Open Granada

Festival. Returning to Mexico City following its huge success, it played to full houses from November 2000 to March 2001 at the El Galeon Theatre as part of the inaugural season of the Artistic and Cultural Complex of the National Institute of Fine Arts. It has been performed as part of the Caracas Theatre Festival (Venezuela); Kunsten Festival des Arts (Brussels); Miami Hispano Theatre Festival (Florida); New York Hispano Theatre Festival; and International Arts Showcase (Puerto Rico) before this year's return to the United States at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theatre (Los Angeles); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco, California); and, in its final engagement, at the MCA, Chicago. For more information about the company, visit [ciertoshabitantes.com](http://ciertoshabitantes.com).

## **Claudio Valdés Kuri**

is an internationally recognized director for the stage. In 1976, at age 11, he began his career training to be an actor under Susana Wein and participated in countless productions with her company for the next 17 years. He graduated with honors in film directing with a specialization in documentary from Mexico's Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica. He is recognized in Mexico and elsewhere for his work in theater set design and lighting. He is a former member of Austria's Carpa Theater (1996–99) as well as the cofounder and former bass voice of the early music ensemble Ars Nova, dedicated primarily to the rediscovery of Renaissance and Latin American baroque music. Over the last fifteen years, he toured with Ars Nova throughout Mexico, Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, South America, the United States, and the Caribbean.

As director of Teatro Ciertos Habitantes, Valdés Kuri has earned significant federal support for

commissions from the National Theatre Company (Mexico City), National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), International Cervantino Festival (Guanajuato), House of World Cultures (Berlin), Kunsten Festival des Arts (Brussels), and Wiener Festwochen (Vienna). He was selected to develop the Translation and Contextualization project for Arts International (New York) and took part in the Artist in Context program sponsored by the John Hope Franklin Center of Duke University and Arts Management program at the Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.). The monthly publication *Mexican Leaders* included him in its top 300 most influential leaders in the country.

### Jorge Kuri (1974–2005)

received a bachelor's degree in dramatic literature and theater from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and graduated from the Writer's School in Mexico (SOGEM). He studied playwriting with Jesus Gonzalez Davila and performance with Juan Jose Gurrola, and won a scholarship from Mexico's National Fund for Culture and the Arts and the Mexican Foundation for the Arts to the program Jovenes Creadores (Young Creators). His writings have appeared in the cultural supplement "Sabado" of the newspaper *UnomasUno*, and he contributed articles and research to the Theatre Research Centre (CITRU). His award-winning plays include *La amargura del merengue* (The Bitterness of the Meringue); *Ya chupaste faros* (Dead as a



Photo by Eugenio Cobo

Doornail); and *El escritor tiene la culpa* (The Writer is the Guilty One), which premiered at UNAM. His final play, *Monsters and Prodigies: The History of the Castrati*, directed by Claudio Valdés Kuri, received critical acclaim for its stage performances as well as for radio series versions across Mexico and abroad. His New York debut was with *La amargura del merengue* in 2004. The first anthology of his writings, edited by the Mexican Foundation for the Arts, is forthcoming.

# THE PERFORMERS

## **Javier Medina**

has a degree in vocal performance from the Music School of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and has studied with Nigel Rogers, Charles Brett, Joseph Cabrè, Bradley Bookshire, Richard Luby, Wermer Compes, Licdio Heather Kunston, and Gerardo Trejoluna. In 1997 Medina joined Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes as vocal coach for the production *Becket, or the Honor of God*, written by Jean Anouilh. He received a grant for performance from the National Fund for Culture in the Arts in 1998/99 and made his theatrical stage debut in 2001 with Ciertos Habitantes in *Monsters and Prodigies*. Medina is vocal coach and director of the Coral Mexicano CFE and a member of the early music ensemble Ars Nova as well as other acclaimed choruses.

## **Raúl Román**

studied at the Music School of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and received advanced vocal training with a scholarship from SIVAM-México. He has appeared in the operas *Despertar al Sueño* by Federico Ibarra, *Elixir of Love* by Gaetano Donizetti, and *Mujercitas* by Mark Adamo. He has also appeared in the contemporary and multidisciplinary works *La Muerte y el Hablador* by Leopoldo Novoa; *Use vías alternas* and *Opus Si*, an improvised concert series with the Mexican Improvisation League; and Gilbert and Sullivan's musical *Pirates of Penzance (or, The Slave of Duty)*. He has been a featured actor with Compagnia Italia and joined Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes in 2001 for *Monsters and Prodigies*.

## **Kaveh Parmas**

was born in Tehran, Iran, and has lived in Germany and Austria, where he studied acting in Vienna at the Max Reinhardt Conservatory and the Actor's

Studio of George Tabori. He has appeared as an actor and singer with various theater companies in Europe in works by William Shakespeare, Alan Ayckburn, Bernard-Marie Koltès, Jean Genet, and Samuel Beckett, among others. He has worked with the Iranian directors Mamnoon, Rahnama, and Ibrahimzadeh, as well as with the Mexican director Miguel Ángel Gaspar at the Carpa Theatre in Austria on the play *De memoria* in 1997. He has collaborated on music theater projects with musician Mahomoud Tabrizi Zadeh, who was featured in *Mahabaratha* by Peter Brook.

After moving to Mexico in 2000, Parmas, along with lutist Manuel Mejía and percussionist Francisco Bringas, founded the trio La Giralda, whose recordings include *The Arabic Deserts* (2002) and *The Seven Beauties*. Parmas joined Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes in 2001 for *Monsters and Prodigies* and in 2006 performed in the company's production of Ximena Escalante's *The Skin*, directed by Miguel Angel Gaspar.

## **Miguel Angel López Delgado**

is a graduate from the CAPDEC-ANDA theater school and has studied advanced acting with Ludwik Margules, José Caballero, Victoria Gutiérrez, and Gerardo Trejoluna. Since 1996 he has appeared in more than 16 dramatic roles, including *Corre la voz* by Lady Gregory, *Una cita con la muerte* by Carlos Haro, *Cuando veas la cola de tu vecino arrancar* by Tomas Urtusuástegui, and *Fuga en mí* by José Acosta Navas. He joined Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes in 2001 for *Monsters and Prodigies* and *Where Will I Be Tonight?* by Maricarmen Gutiérrez and directed by Claudio Valdés Kuri as well as the company's 2006 production of *The Skin* by Ximena Escalante and directed by Miguel Ángel Gaspar. With his brother, Carlos López, he runs a theater company based in Puebla, Mexico.

Photo by Eugenio Cobo



### **Edwin Calderón**

majored in piano and opera at the National Conservatory of Music in Mexico and studied voice with Encarnación Vázquez, Eva María Santana, Leszek Zawadka, Ann Elgar Kopta, and Zeger Vendersteene. He has appeared as a soloist with several orchestras and in several national and international festivals, notably in the role of Tamino in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, among others. He is the 2005 winner of the National Conservatory of Music's voice competition and continues his voice studies with Alicia Cascante. He is deputy director of Pro-Música Chorus.

### **Luis Fernando Villegas**

majored in classical Spanish horseback riding and studied with Don Pedro Louceiro and Enrique Fraga at the Lusitan Equestrian Art School as well as the

Jump Equestrian School, La Cañada. His equestrian prizes include National Champion of the Marlboro Price and Metropolitan Champion at the III National Championship (1996); Champion and Sub-champion of the Superior Category at the Metropolitan Championship (1994); First place in the Newly Horse Category and First and Second place in the Superior Category of the Spanish Classic Category (1993); First place in the Superior Category at the Internacional Horse Fair Texcoco, Mexico (1992); First and Third place in the Superior Category in the First Championship of the Spanish Horse in America (1991); and First place in the Intermediate Category of the Lusitan of the Equestrian Art School (1988). He has been featured in numerous equestrian exhibitions as well as in operas, including *Cavaleri Rusticana* and *Carmen*.

# THE DESIGNERS

Photo by Eugenio Cobo



## **Matías Gorlero**

has designed lighting for theater, dance, and opera productions at some of Mexico's major cultural institutions and festivals, notably for the classic opera *Elixir of Love* by Gaetano Donizetti and the contemporary plays *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce; *Faust/How I Rose* by Martín Acosta; *1822, Year We Were an Empire* by Flavio González Mello; *The Ogreling* by Suzanne Lebeau; and *Auto-Confession* by Rodolfo Obregón.

## **Magda Zalles**

was trained in piano and vocal performance in Germany and Mexico in the Orff-Schulewerk method, a system of music education developed by Carl Orff. Zalles is founder and director of Ars Nova and the Convivium Musicum Chorus. He directed the Ars Nova recordings of 16th- and 17th-century Mexican and Latin American music, the latter in collaboration with the Chilean instrumental ensemble Sintagma Musicum. He has been music director for a number of theater productions, including Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes's *Becket, or the Honor of God* as well as *Othello*, *Monjas coronadas*, *Orpheus Britannicus* by Henry Purcell, *D'amor cantado*, and

*La hija del Rey* with the Canadian group La Nef. His awards include a grant in 1989 from Mexico's National Fund for Culture and the Arts.

## **Mario Iván Martínez**

studied at the Dramatic School of Music and Art in London with a scholarship from the British Council. He designed costumes for and acted in the Teatro de Ciertos Habitantes productions *Becket, or the Honor of God* and *Luzbel el Impostor*. He has acted in works by Molière and William Shakespeare; modern classics such as Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Albert Camus's *The Stranger*; and contemporary works such as *Mi vida es mi vida*, based on Bob Rafelson's film *Five Easy Pieces*, and *Los veraneantes* by Diego Betancor. He was the countertenor in Ars Nova. His film credits include *Original Sin*, *Perfect Target*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *The Harvest*, *Resort to Kill*, *Death and the Compass*, *Like Water For Chocolate*, *Otaola*, *El grito*, *Cronos*, *Sucesos distantes*, *Pueblo viejo*, *Vudú*, and *Viejos ritos*. Iván Martínez was named Best Actor by Mexico's film critics in 1997 and Best Actor of New York in Cine Latino in 1991. He has also received various other acting awards.