

TECLA – CULTURE



MARÍA ESTÉVEZ-SERRANO

Actress, poet, dramatist and director.

Holder of a degree in Philosophy from the Autonomous University of Madrid, she began her studies in Dramatic Art at the Cristina Rota Drama School, and later at EMAD (Municipal Drama School of Madrid). In London she frequently works in collaboration with the Young Vic and the Calder Bookshop Theatre. At the same time, she has used her Spanish Language expertise to teach Spanish, and “Spanish through Theatre and Cinema”. She is also a contributor to the cultural magazine *Ventana Latina*.

FesTeLón

FeSTeLón – The Festival of Spanish Theatre in London – is winning its battle tilting against windmills for the sixth year in a row.

Summer has arrived in the British capital and so too has FeSTeLón, the Festival of Spanish Theatre in London (www.festivalspanishtheatre.co.uk), which is holding its sixth season in 2018. As one would expect, the festival has brought over a small sample of the most outstanding theatre productions on the Spanish stage, and always accompanied by surtitles in English. This was one of the objectives that its director, Mariví Rodríguez-Quñones, a lecturer in Spanish at *King's College London*, has pursued right from the start: to create a bridge between two cultures, to link up the language of Calderón and Cervantes with that of Shakespeare and Marlowe, through the universal language of theatre.

This year the festival was launched on 6th June with the lecture, “Baroque drama and the humanist vision”, presented by Ignacio García, director of the Almagro Classical Theatre Festival, which was followed by two weeks of plays, seminars, audience Q&A sessions and workshops led by the companies performing in the festival themselves.

In the first week, which was dedicated to classical Spanish theatre, the *John Lyon's Theatre*, located in the heart of London's theatreland in Covent Garden, hosted the actor Daniel Albadalejo, directed by José Bornás, in *Malvados de oro* (*Golden Age*

Villains), a homage to the bad guys featured in the major works of Spanish Golden Age drama. Next up to tread the boards was the Jóvenes Clásicos company with *A secreto agravio, secreta venganza* (*A Secret Vengeance for a Secret Affront*), a free version of the Calderonian classic which won them the Almagro OFF prize in 2017.

The second week brought selections from the contemporary stage, which this year were *iQué raros son los hombres!* (*Men Are So Strange!*), written and performed by José Ovejero, winner of the Alfaguara prize in 2013 for his novel *La invención de amor* (*Inventing Love*); and *Me siento pulga* (*Fleas!*), a joint creation by the actresses Ascen López and Susana Hernández, who also directed the play, which offered a surrealist vision of the feminist imagination created by two major figures of the Generation of '27, Miguel Mihura and Jardiel Poncela.



Guyi, Guyi en la sección FeSTeLõn Kids (foto: Fran Vergara)



Marivi Rodríguez-Quinones, directora de FeSTeLõn

FeSTeLõn

Kids was added for the first time to this already tight schedule, featuring two plays aimed at introducing the youngest audiences to



Un momento de *Quijote* (puppets show)

theatre in Spanish, although we adults enjoyed them just as much. The first of these was a version of *La vida es sueño* (*Life's A Dream*) by Calderón de la Barca, adapted to the *bululú* (solo performer) technique by the El Aedo company. The second play,

Guyi, was a puppet show performed by Perifería Teatro, a company from Murcia, which made us reflect on identity itself through its protagonist: a crocodile, which just by chance is born into a family of ducks and grows up questioning itself constantly because it doesn't feel that it fits in anywhere.

And it's precisely for those of us who live over here but came from over there, that FeSTeLón is such a privilege, and for many of us an unmissable fixture which we look forward to every year. As a professional in the dramatic arts, it's a pleasure to be able to enjoy a sample of what our colleagues are doing in Spain and, at the same time, it also presents a marvellous opportunity to demonstrate the enormous talent existing in Spain to British professionals while financial support for the arts and to assist our theatre professionals to travel is scarce. For that reason, FeSTeLón provides an outstanding platform for Spanish companies to come and display their work in the United Kingdom.

It has taken a lot of work, effort and dedication to enable this festival to grow gradually since it was first launched. The original idea occurred to Mariví, its director, who is passionate about theatre, in 2001, and she started to put in overtime and save money from her salary as a Spanish teacher, with the aim of getting this project off the ground. It would be another twelve years until, in 2012, during a trip to Madrid she decided to contact José Luis Gómez, director at the Teatro de la Abadía, who invited her to a meeting to present her proposal. 'Mariví, this is crazy,' he told her. It was true, and for many reasons: Mariví Rodríguez-Quiñones doesn't have a background in acting, had no reputation in the theatre world, and already knew that it was not going to be easy. However, José Luis Gómez trusted in her idea and suggested she read *El Diccionario de María Moliner (The María Moliner Dictionary)* by Manuel Calzada, the play that the Teatro de la Abadía was preparing at that moment. Mariví immediately fell in love with the script.





Vicky Peña en *El diccionario de María Moliner*

So, in December 2012, after seeing the play and following a meeting with the author and actors to make them aware of the limited funds available to the festival, everyone was captivated with the idea. That was how *El Diccionario de María Moliner* came to London with Vicky Peña in the lead role, laying the foundation stone for FeSTeLõn's first season. Since then FeSTeLõn, the Festival of Spanish Theatre in London, has brought over several winners of the Premio Max for Theatre.



Daniel Albaladejo en *Malvados de oro* (Foto: Ángeles Ródena)

In the second year the festival also had just one company: Ron Lalá and their play *En un lugar del Quijote* (*Somewhere in Don Quixote*), but by the third season the festival lasted a week with the performance of two plays: *Las heridas del viento* (*Wounded by the Wind*) by Juan Carlos Rubio,



Pepe Viyuela en un momento de *Encerrona*



Himmelweg, camino del cielo

with Kiti Mánver as the leading actress; and *La piedra oscura* (*The Dark Stone*) by Alberto Conejero, with Daniel Grao, now famous as “one of Almodóvar’s boys”, after starring in *Julieta*.

In 2016, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Cervantes' death, FeSTeLõn presented three plays, two of them dedicated to the creator of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (*Don Quixote*), for a duration of twelve days.

Last year, in its fifth season, the festival stretched to two weeks and two major works were presented: *Himmelweg – Camino del cielo* (*Stairway to Heaven*) by Juan Mayorga and *Encerrona* (*Lock-in*) by Pepe Viyuela, who since then has not been able to let go of the festival and has agreed to join an advisory committee, which also includes Juan Carlos Rubio and Mary Parker, Senior Press Officer at the National Theatre. Additionally, in 2017, with the aim of extending the FeSTeLõn spirit throughout the year, the festival organised workshops led by various professionals in the dramatic arts based in London, who are also very much on FeSTeLõn's radar. With them in mind, companies like ours who are based here but are closely connected with Spanish culture in one way or another, *FeSTeLõn Off* was created, an initiative intended to give visibility to companies based in the United Kingdom whatever their nationality, but who are working with Spanish texts. And we say "intended", in the past tense, because we are still waiting for this idea to materialise. The fact is that, although the festival is growing and consolidating thanks to the gradual expansion of the FeSTeLõn team, bringing the selected companies over from

Spain and providing a theatre in the heart of London, along with many other activities, has been achieved with limited resources, drawing on a great deal of effort and, literally, for the love of it. Federico García Lorca said, in his lecture *Charla sobre teatro* (*Talk on Theatre*), in 1935, that 'a country which doesn't help and doesn't promote



Cartel de *Me siento pulga*



FESTELÓN PERMITE DE FORMA EXTRAORDINARIA QUE COMPAÑÍAS ESPAÑOLAS PUEDAN SALIR A MOSTRAR SU TRABAJO EN EL REINO UNIDO

its theatre, is moribund, if not dead.' I sincerely believe that today Lorca would be proud of Mariví Rodríguez-Quñones and FeSTeLón for tilting at windmills with its small army of Sancho Panzas and making it possible for this dream machine of theatre to cross frontiers and continue raising the curtain for each season of FeSTeLón.

Translated by: Simon Deefholts and Kathryn Phillips-Miles

<https://spanishliterarytranslation.com>