

Theater



And Now, Frida's Life Inspires a Play

Las dos Fridas (The Two Fridas) Directed by Abraham Oceransky Starring Diana Bracho and María del Carmen Fariás

Thirty years after her death, Frida Kahlo is in vogue in the contemporary Mexican cultural scene. Her life and her works are being examined in new biographies, art exhibits, a film, and now, in an extraordinary play.

Frida was a strong woman, a painter by trade and vocation, a person of deep roots, strong emotions and much love for Diego Rivera; a woman who cared about color combinations, about the libertarian struggles of her times, a woman shattered: Frida's life presents a wealth of angles. "The Two Fridas" is cut from that wealth, from the depths of the person, from the decisive moments that marked her path and an entire period of Mexican history.

On stage, Frida speaks through two characters, one young and the other mature. Polio, painting, her accident, Diego Rivera and her longing for social justice flow together to form the woman, and they interact, through the two characters, to shape the play.

Diana Bracho and María del Carmen Fariás, who play the young Frida and the mature Frida, respectively, carry the audience with them on a wonderfully fresh and tender excursion into the fantasies of childhood, the audacity of adolescence and the cruel passion of solitude.

Frida, totally *sui generis* in life becomes universal. Like a character out of a Greek tragedy, Frida transcends the

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limits of the individual. "I do not think life. I feel it; I live it," says the mature Kahlo. "I am not sick. I am shattered. But as long as I paint, life is lovely."

Born during the Mexican Revolution of a German father and a Oaxacan mother and proud of being Mexican, Frida becomes one with the very roots of the nation. She is the rough and unpolished Mexico, and she is the cultured Mexico, the Mexico whose development is marked by the daily consciousness of death, and thus, of life. "I am not afraid of death," says Frida, "but I want to live. It is the pain that I cannot tolerate."

Nonetheless, pain followed Frida throughout her life, playing with her as a cat with a mouse. From the time she contracted polio at the age of six, she knew the hospital's silence and its screams. Her childhood and her life were marked by the effects of her illness; her deformed leg accompanied her throughout her life. Her parents were overprotective, but she developed a tremendous desire to live fully.

In the play, the solitary and lame Frida returns to her childhood and recreates her enchanted games with an imaginary friend, her other self. The two girls delight in their play, savoring the moments of bubbling laughter, nurturing each other; the fantasized Frida feeds on the force of reality, and the real Frida on the freedom of fantasy. Reality and fantasy are interwoven in the construction of the painter's personality, and her fantasy becomes, as she says, "the best of what I know."

One September 19 (a very painful date for Mexico now after last year's earthquake on that day), when Frida was eighteen, she was riding a bus that was struck by a streetcar. The handrail pierced her body and damaged her spinal cord, leaving her a broken woman, split in two.

In the scene, the young Frida, covered with a sheet, becomes physical pain, the incarnation of the memories that the mature Frida recalls. She tells of her second meeting with death, while a thick, long chain is strapped to her leg; its metallic, thudding lashes continuously strike home the image of a broken woman, broken, but not

finished. "I have not died," said Frida, "and I have something to live for. That something is painting."

Frida painted Frida, her anxieties, her solitude, her fantasies, her torments, her identification with Diego, who was for her, "Diego, the prince, Diego, builder, Diego, my child, Diego, my lover, Diego, my husband, Diego, my father, Diego, my mother, Diego, I...". She painted from her very entrails and her divided heart, mixing the ethereal of fantasy, with the weight of reality. Her art also reflected a mixing of European surrealism with Mex-

and genial, tough and tender, takes on romantic love in the way that women are taught to live it. "I love you, Diego, more than I love myself." Frida built her adult life with that extraordinary and "horrible elephant," as she called him when she was angry with him. It was a life filled with passion, of love and hate, of artistic creation and of struggles on the side of the oppressed and exploited of the world.

He nurtured her with his energy and warmth, and at the same time, helped remove the weight of her troubled solitude. They accompanied each other



A shot from **Las Dos Fridas**

ican content. Frida Kahlo is one of a very few Mexican surrealists.

While Diego Rivera and others founded the Mexican muralist school, inspired by the great events in their people's history ("He paints big pictures so the people will enjoy them."), Frida stayed within the realm of the most intimate, within the rivers that flowed in her own veins. The colors of Indian Mexico and the expressive form of European fantastic realism are the heart of her work. Her woman's essence is expressed in blood.

The contradictory Frida, difficult

throughout twenty-five years, through the ups and downs between love and contempt, but Frida always knew the truth of what she once wrote, "You have never been mine, Diego, you are of yourself."

This is the stuff of which "The Two Fridas" is made. It was created with love and through a deep search into the pathways of Frida Kahlo's personality. Conceived and brought to life by director Abrahám Oceransky and the two original actresses, María del Carmen Farías and Bárbara Córcega, the material for the play was drawn from Frida's diaries. The work is a

odds and ends

collective creation that expresses the sensitivity and the contradictions of the main character, as well as of the dramatists who bring her to life. And in a special way, the play also expresses the very essence of Mexico. ★

Elizabeth Maier