

The Venues Of the International Cervantes Festival



Just like every year since 1972, the Mexican city of Guanajuato is preparing to offer up three autumn weeks of music, dance, theater, opera, visual arts and academic fora to art and culture devotees during the Twenty-Fifth International Cervantes Festival.

With more than 30 participating countries, the festival continues its tradition of bringing together the best Mexican and international performers and art in both modern and historical venues in a city that differs from other Mexican colonial cities in its history, its lay-out and the grandeur of its architecture.

Originally founded in a glen, the town's buildings

and roads are nestled on inclines and hillsides with no traditional urban lay-out. After the first ore deposits were discovered in 1548, Guana-

juato became Mexico's foremost mining district and an unending source of wealth for the Spanish Crown. With the riches extracted for centuries, churches, monuments, plazas and buildings were erected sparing no expense. The most important old buildings, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are representative of the Mexican churriguesque and baroque styles. Their splendor fully deserves the UNESCO's classification as "the most beautiful examples of baroque architecture in the New World," when it declared Guanajuato a World Heritage Treasure in 1988.

Every year some of these buildings and plazas boast their splendor by becoming part of the Cervantes festival celebration. Such is the case of the Juárez Theater, in the heart of the city, where the most important performances



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and world premiers take place. Built at the end of the nineteenth century, it is one of Mexico's architectural masterpieces. The interior surprises the eye with its carved wooden screens, its iron latticework, its floor of colored tiles cut octagonally and the different wood in its ceiling, the Italian works of art, its exquisite Renaissance upstairs hall and, above all, the main auditorium's splendid Moorish reliefs.

Two important open spaces are the San Roque Plaza and the Alhóndiga.

The former, flanked by a seventeenth century Jesuit church, is important to the festival because it is there that, since 1955, Guanajuato University drama students have performed Cervantes' *Entremeses* (Interludes), a tradition that would contribute to the city's being selected to host the festival. The Alhóndiga, though not particularly attractive, is probably one of the most important historically and the one that makes the festival truly a community event,

since all performances there are free. Its esplanade can hold the largest audience of all the venues, and thanks to this arrangement, thousands of ordinary people have had the opportunity to watch artists of the stature of B.B. King, the Bolshoi Ballet and the Beijing Circus.

Two majestic examples of churrigueresque art built in the eighteenth century are the La Valenciana Church and the Church of the Company of Jesus. The two facades

Captions, read clockwise.

1. Overlooking the city, the State Auditorium.
6. The Main Theater, one of Mexico's first theaters and Guanajuato's very first.

2. The exquisite Renaissance upstairs hall of the Juárez Theater.
5. The Alhóndiga, famous for being the site of the first victory of Mexico's independence forces over the Spanish army in 1810.

3. The Cervantes Theater, named after Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes.
4. The San Roque Plaza, flanked by a seventeenth century Jesuit Church.



of La Valenciana have outstanding pink stone reliefs and carved wooden porticos. In the interior, the visitor can admire the mortar decorations, the exquisite altars ornately carved in wood and gold-leafed and the magnificent pulpit decorated with wood and bone inlay. The Church of the Company's interior boasts an altar the lateral doors of which give onto a splendid single-nave vestry with

two interior facades, today a picture gallery. Both places host concerts to delight music and art lovers. The San Gabriel de la Barrera Ex-Hacienda, sober, simple and of excellent architectural design, is today a museum and is used as a magnificent open-air theater. Its large, well cared for gardens can be visited after performances. The Main Theater, the Cervantes Theater, the Auditorium and the

Mines Theater, several museums and university facilities complete the picture and contribute with their own history and charm to giving festival goers a splendid backdrop for performances, exhibitions and lectures that make this one of the most important international events in Mexico. **VM**

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Below: The Church of the Company of Jesus, built in the eighteenth century, a splendid backdrop for musical performances.



Below: Two views of the San Gabriel de la Barrera Ex-Hacienda, where open-air concerts are held.



Below: The Valenciana Church, another majestic example of churrigueresque architecture.

