

CHRISTMAS SCRIPT

"PARTIES, PIÑATAS AND PLAYS"
(MEXICAN CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS)

MICKI

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS IN MEXICO HAVE THEIR ORIGINS IN THE RITUALS USED BY THE SPANISH MISSIONARIES TO CONVERT THE INDIANS TO CHRISTIANITY IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

EARL

TODAY, POPULAR AND TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS MUSIC IS COMBINED WITH PRE-COLOMBIAN AGRICULTURAL RITES.

JO

TO SPEAK OF CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS IN MEXICO IMPLIES A MIXTURE OF RITUALS AND CUSTOMS WHICH START ON DECEMBER 16 AND END ON FEBRUARY SECOND.

GEORGE

THE CHRISTMAS PLAYS AND PARTIES LAST NINE DAYS WHICH, ACCORDING TO SOME EXPERTS, SYMBOLIZE THE NINE MONTHS OF PREGNANCY. THERE ARE FORTY DAYS FROM THE START TO THE END OF THE CYCLE WHICH RELATES TO THE TRADITIONAL REST PERIOD AFTER GIVING BIRTH.

JO

ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY OF MEXICANS ARE CATHOLIC, IN THE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS, APART FROM RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, TOGETHERNESS IS EMPHASIZED - THE STRENGTHENING OF TIES BETWEEN RELATIVES AND FRIENDS - INVOLVES EVERYONE OF A SOCIAL GROUP AND SPECIALLY CHILDREN HAVING FUN.

MICKI

MEXICO IS A DIVERSE AND MULTICULTURAL COUNTRY. IN RURAL AREAS CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS HAVE BEEN MAINTAINED AS A COHESIVE FORCE OF THE COMMUNITY; IN BIG CITIES, WHERE THERE IS MORE COMMERCIALIZATION, THERE ARE NOW TRENDS TO BRING BACK THE ORIGINAL MEANINGS.

TO CELEBRATE THE CHRISTMAS FESTIVIES, THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS ARE PIÑATAS, "POSADAS" -THE PARTIES- AND " PASTORELAS -THE CHRISTMAS PLAYS-.

EARL

IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, SPANISH FRIARS OBTAINES PAPAL PERMISSION FOR SPECIAL MASSES FROM DECEMBER SIXTEENTH THROUGH THE TWENTY-FOURTH WHICH INCLUDED THE PILGRIMAGE OF JOSEPH AND MARY AND THEIR SEARCH FOR SHELTER. GRADUALLY, THESE PLAYS INCORPORATED THE ADVENTURES OF SHEPARDS WHO, FOLLOWING THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM, WISHED TO PAY HOMAGE TO THE NEWLY BORN JESUS. THE SHEPARDSALWAYS OVERCOME THE TEMPTATIONS THEY FACE.

GEORGE

IN THE BEGINNING, THESE WERE VERY SIMPLE PERFORMANCES STAGED IN THE COURTYARDS OF CHURCHES. LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE PEOPLE TOOK ON THIS FORM OF EXPRESSION AND ENRICHED IT WITH COSTUMES, MUSIC AND IMPROVISATION, ALSO ADDING HUMOROUS REFERENCES TO POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EVENTS.

JO

NOW, AT THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THE CHRISTMAS PLAY "THE PASTORELA" HAS MANY FORMS...

MICKI

IT COULD BE THAT GROUPS OF "CAMPEÑINOS" OR FARMERS WILL PREPARE, EACH YEAR, A SERIES OF "PASTORELAS"...

JO

A "PASTORELA" IS ALSO A THEATRICAL PLAY WITH CONVENTIONAL SCENERY, OR, LIKE THIS ONE, AN EXTRAVAGANZA PERFORMED IN THE COURTYARD OF A FORMER COLONIAL CONVENT BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF BOTH MEXICAN AND FOREIGN VISITORS.

MICKI

IN THE MEXICAN CAPITAL, THE CITY GOVERNMENT ORGANIZES "PASTORELAS" AND BIBLICAL SCENES IN PUBLIC PLAZAS.

GEORGE

IN THIS PARTICULAR TYPE OF POPULAR THEATER, THE CONTEST BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL IS EMPHAZISED. THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWNS WHICH STAGE THESE "PASTORELAS" INCORPORATE REAL LIFE LOCAL EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES.

THE PEOPLE ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE EITHER AS ACTORS, WORKING ON SETS AND COSTUMS, OR, DEPENDING ON LOCAL TRADITION, IN PUTTING ON FIREWORKS DISPLAYS.

MICKI

A UNIQUE "PASTORELA" IS PUT ON IN IXTLAHUACAN DE LOS REYES IN THE STATE OF COLIMA.

SINCE THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY "THE ADORATION OF THE KINGS" HAS TAKEN PLACE IN THIS VILLAGE. IT'S A PARTY ORGANIZED BY AND FOR THE TOWN'S FOLK ON JANUARY FIFTH WHEN THE WHOLE COUNTRY IS CELEBRATING THREE KINGS DAY.

ALONG WITH THE HOLY FAMILY, THE KINGS, HEROD AND HIS ARMY, THE "CHAYACATES" APPEAR.

THESE ARE MYTHICAL CHARACTERS FROM AN INDIGENOUS PRE-HISPANIC TRADITION.

IN THE NAHUATL LANGUAGE, "CHAYACATE" MEANS "MASKED".

EARL

ACCORDING TO LOCAL LEGEND, THE "CHAYACATES" OWNED THE ORCHARD WHERE THE HOLY FAMILY PASSED THROUGH AND THEIR MISSION WAS TO PROTECT THEM FROM HEROD AND THE DEMONS. IN THIS POPULAR FESTIVAL, EVERYONE KNOWS IN ADVANCE WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN. EACH YEAR TRADITION DICTATES THAT DURING THE FESTIVITIES ONE OF THE MASKED PLAYERS "KIDNAPS" THE BABY JESUS, WHO APPEARS A DAY LATER ON A IMPROVISED PLATFORM. THE NEIGHBOR ON WHOSE THRESHHOLD THE BABY IS DEPOSITED MUST WELCOME AND OFFER FOOD AND DRINK TO ALL WHO COME TO REVERE THE DOLL.

THE SHEPARDS AND "CHAYACATES" ACCOMPANY MARY AND JOSEPH -ALWAYS PLAYED BY VILLAGE CHILDREN- TO RECOVER THE BABY AND THEN TAKE HIM TO THE THREE KINGS.

BOTH "POSADAS" AND "PASTORELAS" ARE PART OF THE COMMUNITY CELEBRATION AND HAVE BEEN HELD FOR GENERATIONS.

MAKING THE PREPARATIONS FOR "POSADAS" IS A GOOD EXCUSE TO GET TOGETHER WITH RELATIVES, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS. THE PUBLIC FRUIT AND VEGETABLE MARKETS ARE NOW TRANSFORMED.

- EARL THEIR LITTLE SHOPS OFFER AN ABUNDANCE
OF FOOD AND GOODS OF THE SEASON.
- GEORGE - CANDIES AND SNACKS; TO BE USED AS "PINATA"
FILLERS...
- MICKI - THE HAY AND MOSS WHICH WILL ADORN THE
CRECHE TOGETHER WITH THE LITTLE PLASTER
FIGURES...
- JO - DRIED AND CANDIED FRUITS...
- EARL - LEMONS, SUGAR CANE, PEANUTS AND SMALL
FRUITS KNOWN AS "TEJOCOTES"...
- JO - TOYS AND CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS...
- MICKI - MULTICOLORED CANDLES, WHISTLES AND
SPARKLERS...
- EARL - AND, OF COURSE, "THE SOUL OF THE PARTY"
THE "PIÑATA" IN EITHER CLASSICAL FORM,
LIKE THAT OF A STAR, OR SHAPED AS MODERN
CARTOON CHARACTERS.
- GEORGE THE MEXICAN ARTISANS INGENUITY AND CREATIVE
HANDS ARE ABLE TO TRANSFORM A LITTLE
TISSUE PAPER, A CLAY POT AND SOME PASTE
INTO A WORK OF ART WHICH IS A MUST FOR
THE PARTY.
- YOU CAN'T HAVE A "POSADA" WITHOUT BREAKING
A "PIÑATA".

EARL

THE PARTY BEGINS. THE GUESTS ALREADY KNOW THE RITUAL. THERE ARE TWO GROUPS: THOSE WHO ASK FOR, AND THOSE WHO GIVE SHELTER TO THE PILGRIMS. EACH GROUP IN TURN SINGS ITS OWN PART AND THOSE WHO ASK TO BE LET IN FOLLOW THEIR ROUTE HOLDING LIGHTED CANDLES. AT THE HEAD OF THE PROCESSION ARE THE HOLY TRAVELLERS CARRIED ON A PLATFORM.

AFTER SEVERAL APPEALS, THE DOORS ARE OPENED.

JO

ONCE INSIDE, THE GUESTS PARTICIPATE IN THE FESTIVITIES.

THE HOSTS PREPARE THE "PIÑATA" WHILE ROCKETS -AND SOMETIMES VERY INTRICATE FIREWORKS-ARE SET OFF.

EARL

CONCERNING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAKING THE "PIÑATA", THERE ARE MANY INTERPRETATIONS. BUT THE BEST KNOWN SAYS THAT THE SEVEN POINTS OF THE STAR REPRESENT CHRISTIANITY'S SEVEN DEADLY SINS AND THAT THE STICK WHICH BREAKS THEM IS MAN'S FIGHT TO CONTROL HIS PASSIONS.

MICKI

IN EACH REGION OF MEXICO, THE FESTIVALS HAVE DIFFERENT FEATURES.

IT'S A WAY OF IDENTIFYING WITH YOUR OWN SOCIAL GROUP.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE "POSADAS" IN XOCHIMILCO.

IN THAT TOWN, JUST SOUTH OF MEXICO CITY, THE DECEMBER FESTIVITIES ARE CLOSELY LINKED TO AN OLD POPULAR CULT DEDICATED TO A FIGURINE REPRESENTING A CHILD GOD: "EL NIÑO PA".

IT DOESN'T HAVE A SHRINE, IT'S A RELIGIOUS FIGURE THAT BELONGS ONLY TO THE PEOPLE OF XOCHIMILCO.

GEORGE

THE "MAYORDOMOS" OR HOSTS, WHO TAKE CARE OF THE FIGURE ARE DESIGNATED BY INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN. THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR LOOKING AFTER IT FOR A YEAR.

OF COURSE, YOU HAVE TO BE PATIENT IF YOU WANT TO BE A "MAYORDOMO" -IT'S AN HONORARY HIGH STATUS POSITION IN THE COMMUNITY.

THERE'S AT LEAST A 15 YEAR WAITING PERIOD AFTER APPLYING.

JO

DURING THE PROCESSION AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOODS THAT COMPRISE XOCHIMILCO, THERE IS MUSIC, DANCING, FIREWORKS AND RELIGIOUS SINGING. NINE HOSTS OF "POSADAS" ALONG THE ROUTE COMPETE TO GIVE THE BEST PARTY AND TO BUILD THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ALTAR.

GEORGE

BIBLICAL SCENES ARE ONE WAY TO PRESENT THE HOLY BIRTH. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE STATE OF MICHOACAN ON MEXICO'S SOUTHWEST COAST, THESE REPRESENTATIONS ARE VERY POPULAR INTERPRETED BY HUMAN BEINGS OR WAX FIGURES MOLDED BY SKILFULL LOCAL CRAFTSMEN.

MICKI

THERE ARE NO LIMITS TO CRECHES -WHETHER IN SIZE, USE OF DIFFERING MATERIALS OR THE IMAGINATION FO THEIR CREATORS - WHETHER PROFESSIONAL OR PURELY SPONTANEOUS ARTISTS. IN MEXICO, THE NATIVITY SCENE CAN BE ADMIRIED IN A MUSEUM... A STORE... AN OUTDOOR MARKET OR A FAMILY HOME...

JO

THE TRADITION OF PORTRAYING THE HOLY BIRTH WAS BROUGHT TO THE AMERICAS BY THE FRIARS WHO WERE TO CONVERT THE NATIVES TO CATHOLICISM. IN TIME, BOTH INDIANS AND "MESTIZOS", THOSE OF MIXED BLOOD, WERE INVOLVED IN NOT ONLY THE NATIVITY PLAY BUT ALSO IN THE DEPICTION OF CURRENT EVENTS.

EARL

THE NAIVE DISPLAYS OF SHEPARDS, COAL PEDDLERS, VILLAGERS, AND FARM ANIMALS ALONG WITH SACRED FIGURES GIVE A VERY MEXICAN FLAVOR TO THE SCENE.

MICKI

IN MEXICO, IT'S POSSIBLE TO FIND THE EXPRESSIONS OF DIFFERENT CULTURES SIDE BY SIDE, IT ISN'T UNUSUAL TO DISCOVER, BENEATH A CHRISTMAS TREE, OF OBVIOUS NORTHERN EUROPEAN ORIGIN SYMBOLS AND SCENES DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE MEXICAN TRADITIONS .

JO

SNOWFLAKES AND FROST ARE MADE OUT OF ALUMINIUM FOIL AND TINSEL...

GEORGE

THE LITTLE JESUS OR AN ARCHANGEL OF PLASTER CAN BE SEEN WITH GLASS ORNAMENTS AND MULTI-COLORED LIGHTS WHICH WILL DECORATE A PLASTIC CHRISTMAS TREE MADE IN TAIWAN.

EARL

AFTER DECEMBER TWENTY-FOURTH, THE SAME PLAZA WHERE SCORES OF SANTA CLAUSES HAD PREVIOUSLY ENTERTAINED YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE, NOW HOSTS "MELCHOR", "GASPAR" AND "BALTASAR", THE THREE KINGS OF CHRISTIANITY.

MICKI

THE UNIQUE MIXTURE OF DEVOTION AND REVELRY, AND REVIVAL OF FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP ARE ALSO SEEN WHEN MEXICANS TAKE WALKS TO ADMIRE THE DECORATION OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON.

EARL

IN MEXICO CITY, YOU SHOULDN'T MISS A STROLL AROUND THE "ALAMEDA" PARK WITH ITS OPEN STANDS OF TYPICAL MEXICAN SNACKS AND SWEETS ALONG WITH BALLOONS, TOYS SOAP BUBBLES AND COTTON CANDY.

JO

"LET'S GO SEE THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS", IS A COMMON SUGGESTION DURING THOSE DAYS. EVERY YEAR THERE ARE DIFFERENT -WHEN THERE IS AN ECONOMIC BOOM THEY MAY BE MORE ELABORATE, WHEREAS IN HARD TIMES, THEY WILL BE MORE AUSTERE.

WHAT MATTERS IS THAT PUBLIC LIGHTING REMINDS US OF DAYS GONE BY WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN ANXIOUSLY AWAITING CHRISTMAS.

MICKI

IN MEXICO, IT'S AN OLD CUSTOM TO LIGHT UP BOTH HOUSES AND STREETS. SINCE THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TORCHES WERE LIT AROUND THE CHURCHES.

BUT LIGHTS AREN'T THE ONLY ORNAMENTS; FLOWERS, TOO, HAVE A VERY IMPORTANT PLACE.

GEORGE

THIS FLOWER, NOW KNOWN WORLDWIDE, IS ORIGINALLY FROM MEXICO. IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, MR. POINSETT, AN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO MEXICO INTRODUCED THE FLOWER TO HIS PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES.

THUS, IN ENGLISH IT IS CALLED A POINSETIA OR POINSETIA.

JO

THE FLOWER'S NAME IN NAHUATL IS "CUETLAXOCHITL" WHICH MEANS "FLOWER THAT WILTS".

FOR THE AZTECS THIS BEAUTIFUL PLANT, WITH ITS INTENSE SCARLET HUE, SIGNIFIED THE PURITY OF BLOOD WHICH, IN HUMAN SACRIFICES, THE INDIANS OFFERED TO THE SUN TO REVITALIZE ITS STRENGTH.

TODAY THE FLOWER IS WIDELY USED TO DECORATE ALTARS, HOUSES, PUBLIC PARKS AND MAIN AVENUES.

MICKI

THE SPANIARDS CALLED IT THE "CHRISTMAS EVE"
FLOWER FOR THE SEASON IN WHICH IT BLOOMS
AND NOW IT SYMBOLIZES THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS
IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD...

GEORGE

NEXT YEAR, LIKE THE CHRISTMAS EVE FLOWER,
THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS WILL BLOOM...

JO

THE PARTY SPIRIT WILL BE REBORN WITH A JOYOUS
EXPLOSION OF SOUNDS, AROMAS AND COLORS...

EARL

WE WILL RENEW THE CEREMONIES AND ONCE
AGAIN OPEN OUR HOUSES AND OUR HEARTS...