

GOETHE MEDAL 2024

LAUDATORY SPEECH FOR CARMEN ROMERO QUERO

BY AMELIE DEUFLHARD

WEIMAR, 28 AUGUST 2024

- Check against delivery -

It is a great pleasure and honour for me, Carmen, to give your laudatory speech here in Weimar for the awarding of the Goethe Medal. We've known and cherished one another for a long time and our relationship has gotten even closer since your daughter moved to Hamburg and you've been a regular visitor, most recently to the International Summer Festival at Kampnagel, which just ended. In my short speech, I will focus mainly on the Chilean-German relationship in your festival programme, which is not to diminish the fact that your programme of the last 30 years reads like a who's who of the international theatre scene. You've earned respect for the great numbers of artists from all over the world you brought to Chile, how many Chilean theatre makers you have made internationally visible, how many people in Santiago you have been able to entice to go to the theatre...!

The festival was founded in 1994, just a few years after the end of the military junta. One of the founders' chief motivations was to contribute to reconquering democracy. The thirty-year history of the festival has been powerfully characterised by the resistance and persistence of the artists in denouncing human rights violations and raising questions about the social and economic impact of the dictatorship to this day. Art was also produced underground during the dictatorship. The idea of the festival was to internationalise this, produce critical art, take a position politically, and conquer large theatres.

It all began in a railway station that is still in use, a station opened in 1994 for three companies: Teatro de la Memoria, Teatro del Silencio, and Teatro la Tropa. Many of the projects took place outdoors and the audiences came in droves from the very first day. In the following years, theatres were added as venues. As the largest performing arts festival in Chile, Santiago a Mil combines various genres: theatre, performance, dance, opera, and many formats such as radio walks, workshops, and talks. It takes place in up to 30 (!) different neighbourhoods, is accessible to all, and free. In addition, there are always large parkours through the city, such as GIANT by Royal de Luxe, which attracted at least 1 million people to the streets of Santiago. The festival not only presents artists from all corners of the world; Platea, a programme for international colleagues, is a large showcase for artists from Chile and Latin America. In the evenings, artists and professionals come together at the festival

centre for drinks and music. Carmen Romero emphasises networking and international hospitality, which is why she occasionally invites people to her home.

What could be better than a festival financed by a foundation set up especially for it? Carmen, I've always envied you a little bit for that. "The foundation changed everything," reports Carmen Romero. Established in 2004, the foundation works to make contemporary art accessible to all citizens and tries to achieve the highest possible level with various tools, especially by promoting young talent. Workshops, school programmes, and the promotion of touring play decisive roles in this. In short: the foundation supports the festival's vision.

Romeo Castellucci, Pina Bausch, Robert Wilson, Ariane Mnouchkine, Robert Lepage, Lola Arias, José Vidal, and Manuela Infante are just a few of the many artists you've invited. Your favourites at the festival were perhaps two of the great female artists of their/our time: Pina Bausch and Ariane Mnouchkine. Pina Bausch also had a special, close personal relationship with Chile. Just a few months before her death, Pina called Carmen to say she wanted to come to Chile with her team for four months. Carmen spontaneously agreed. Quote: "You say yes and then you have a problem." I understand, because a trip like this needs to be financed. But who can do that if not you, Carmen? And so, Pina's last piece was the Chile piece "...como el musguito en la piedra, ay, sí, sí, sí ... (like the moss on the stone). "Pina gave us the last moments of her life," says Carmen.

A few artists' voices:

Stefan Kaegi, Rimini Protokoll

"She is for the Chilean scene what Frie Leysen was for the Belgian scene: a catapult into the world and a magnet for international inspiration. Today, her Santiago a Mil is by far the most important festival in South America ... Last time we were able to hold our workshop in an entire historic palace. Roger Bernat was able to hold something in parliament. This shows how well Carmen is networked in all the strata of the country. Her festival is a broad rainbow that shines both in high temples of art and for free in the middle of the street..."

Christoph Marthaler, director

I send an email to Christoph Marthaler, the analogue poet among German directors, the grand master of slowness. To be honest, I didn't think Christoph read emails at all. An hour later, I have him on the phone and he's raving about what an incredible woman Carmen Romero is. And that she invited one of his most complicated plays, *Protection from the Future*, and, as far as he remembers, held it in a former convent.

Jörn Weisbrodt, curator and festival director, New York

"Oh, how wonderful. I love Carmen. The thing I appreciate most about her is that she's still curious, a little anarchic. I love her humour and her zest for life and art. She creates an

atmosphere at the festival where not only does everyone feel like part of a family, but also extremely loved; artists and visitors alike.”

Mable Preach, director, Hamburg

“Although we hadn’t worked together before, Carmen gave me the confidence to organise the opening of the 2023 festival. I liked how tenaciously she burns for her cause: that’s hugely motivating and encourages you to give 100 per cent.”

Respect goes to you, Carmen, for your ground-breaking work, your knowledge of art, and your never-ending spirit of discovery. Your glamour, your energy to make the seemingly impossible possible. For your many urban projects that bring theatre to the people and create new access to theatre for many...! Carmen, you are one of the people – there are not many – who have shaped international theatre and continue to do so today. I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart – congratulations on the Goethe Medal!