

Las Soldaderas

The Female Warriors of the Mexican Revolution

By Nelly E. Cuellar-Garcia

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DEDICATION

For my daughter, Christina, a true soldadera in the pursuit of life.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Set in the Sierra Madre Mountains, this historic drama follows the lives of an intrepid band of female guerilla fighters who choose to pick up rifles to defend the poor and disenfranchised from the clutches of the corrupt Mexican government and their soldiers. The play explores what it means to be a woman, known as a “soldadera” (female soldier), in the face of great adversity, for they battle not only the enemy but also their own memories of loss, love, family, and betrayal. Each character allows a different facet of womanhood to shine -- innocence, first love, motherhood, independence, commitment, and loss. “Las Soldaderas” is filled with the strength, love, and commitment women develop with each other when they must work together to achieve a common goal: to defend the people from the rich landed gentry and gain absolute freedom.

AWARDS

4A Texas UIL State Champions – April 12, 2017
Region 4- Advancing Play
Area 2- Advancing Play
Bi-District Advancing Play
District 32-4A Advancing Play

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 women and large ensemble of 15+)

CONCEPCION: The leader, called Concha by fellow soldiers.

ANGUSTIAS FARIAS DE ALMAGUER: Aristocrat and spy.

HORTENSIA: Drill sergeant.

FERNANDA: Her face is disfigured due to an explosion.

GUERA: Munitions expert.

PALOMA: Full of life, flirty, comedic.

CLEOTILDE: Mother figure of the group.

ADELITA: Ingénue, the most innocent of the soldaderas.

CRISITINA: Guitar player.

ENSEMBLE OF SOLDADERAS: 15 or more women.

TRANSLATIONS

Tierra y Libertad: Land and liberty

Andale muchachas! Vamonos!: Come on, girls! Let's go!

Bestia: Beast

Ve con Dios: Go with God at your side

Si Adelita se fuera a la guerra... si Adelita fuera mi mujer:

If Adelita wanted to be my girl If Adelita wanted to be my wife

Sientate, Sientate! Sit down; sit down!

No sirves pa nada: You're not good for anything

La Chamuscada me dicen donde quiera... porque la polvora quemó: When I hear this melody, I feel a great need to weep, but I suck it up, for I am the burned one who, for my bravery, rose to be a general

Muchachas: Girls

Andale muchachas: Go on, girls

Mi amiga: My friend

Campesinos: Peasant farmers

Callate: Shut up

Canten: Sing

Los muertos no hablan: The dead do not speak

Les digo que canten!: I tell you to sing!

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The ensemble in the show acted as the glue that held the piece together. It was their ensemble and the portrayal of daily life behind the main actors that enabled the piece to have a realistic feel. It is imperative that every ensemble member is believable in her actions.

The director should avoid stereotypical costume, dress, or mannerisms. This show is about war and the effects the war has on these women. This unit is a fighting unit that is on call at all hours of the night.

I encourage the director to use color-blind casting in this show. This piece is about strength, dignity, and sacrifice. These concepts know no racial or ethnic boundary. All should be encouraged to explore this historical drama.

All our music was organic and provided by a guitarist who created original ballads for the show.

SETTING

A camp in the Sierra Madre Mountains in 1912 during the Mexican Revolution. Lighting and projected photos help create the mood and time passing on the mountain. The original production incorporated projections into the show that depicted the women of the revolution. These images were quite effective in the soliloquy and monologue scenes. There are many black and white photos of the revolution that are in public domain that serve this purpose admirably. The show begins during dusk and ends the following day at dusk with a red glow of a setting sun on women who are about to face their death. We tried to depict the landscape of the Sierra Madre Mountains and created beautiful Cacti to accompany the changing sky.

SONG: "LA ADELITA"

The words to the song can be found at the end of the script.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: CURTAINS open to reveal a blue-hued tableau of SOLDADERAS standing on the crevices of a mountain top dotted with cacti. Their silhouettes reveal that each carries a rifle and that some have bandoleros draped across their chests. The morning mist slowly evaporates from the scene around them as they greet the rising sun by singing the lyrics to "La Adelita." They sing slowly, deep in reflection. As they sing, a lone woman, CONCEPCION, slowly makes her way through them. When she reaches center, she flicks a match which bathes her face in stark contrast to the rest of the stage. She lights a thin cigarillo, inhales, and slowly exhales a ring of smoke. The soldiers make their way down to her marching in formation and singing. They stop when they reach her.)

(TECH: Historical photos are slowly revealed on the cyclorama of the actual people and events Concepcion introduces.)

CONCEPCION: In 1911, Emiliano Zapata, one of the greatest revolutionaries Mexico has ever known, stood before a crowd of thousands who were starving and homeless and uttered these iconic words... *(Takes a puff of her cigarillo.)*

ENSEMBLE: It is better to die on your feet than to live life on your knees.

(SOLDADERAS take a defiant stand. They sing and move in to new formation.)

CONCEPCION: *(Nodding.)* And so the Mexican Revolution was born.

ENSEMBLE: Viva la Revolucion! *(Rifles and pistols are raised to eye level.)*

CONCEPCION: Thousands of displaced, disenfranchised, and destitute men and women, yearning for land and liberty, joined the cause.

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ENSEMBLE: *(Becoming animated and waving their weapons around.)* Our motto, "Tierra y Libertad!" Land and liberty, became the battle cry of the new emerging Republic.

(TECH: Photos of the actual Soldaderas of the Revolution.)

CONCEPCION: Then the women, who came to be known as the soldaderas, chose to pick up rifles...

(ENSEMBLE sings and forms a new marching pattern and comes to a halt. CONCEPCION inspects them as they march.)

CONCEPCION: *(Cont'd. Standing between the two formed lines.)* The men who fought alongside them viewed them as...

ENSEMBLE: *(Make a beat sound with their feet as they move out across the stage.)* ... women warriors *(Beat.)*, part goddesses *(Beat.)*, part tribal defenders. *(Beat.)*

CONCEPCION: It imbued us with a mysticism that lent us a higher purpose...

ENSEMBLE: To defend the people from the rich landed gentry ... and gain absolute freedom! *(Weapons raised in the air as if in victory.)*

CONCEPCION: *(Taking out her pistol and waving it in the air.)* Andale, muchachas! Vamonos!

(WOMEN yell a loud battle cry and follow CONCEPCION into battle; CLEOTILDE stops ADELITA.)

CLEOTILDE: Adelita! Adelita!

ADELITA: I'm here, Cleotilde...

CLEOTILDE: *(Taking the rifle away from ADELITA.)* Stay! No, don't argue -- you're not ready.

(CLEOTILDE exits running to follow the other women. A wistful ADELITA looks after them. TECH: New black and white photos on the cyclorama.)

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ADELITA: Last night as I sat watching the night sky, I saw a red star fall and lose its glow. My heart fluttered as a great dark shadow descended upon it. How I wish my mother were still alive to interpret the signs of the universe. She used to tell me, "God is always watching, and if you look around carefully, you will see the omens that will help you on your journey." But God has fallen asleep and left us alone to face the revolution. People of the same faith and with the same descendants fight and grapple for control of what could be a great and wondrous nation. Mama, where are the signs to guide me? The mountains are silent... oh night, pity me; grant me a moment of peace in a world of violence.

(TECH: Photos turn into colorized gobos that reflect dusk. We hear singing offstage. CONCEPCION and SOLDADERAS enter. They carry their camp with them, bringing in barrels, food, supplies, etc.)

ADELITA: *(Running toward THEM.)* Concha! Concha! How did it go?

CONCEPCION: We were lucky that we found a ledge from where we could drop our explosives. It was over very quickly.

ADELITA: *(Slightly bothered.)* Many died?

CONCEPCION: Si. War is not pretty, Adelita, its tribute flows dark and red on both sides. Today, it was their turn to pay it. The next time, it may very well be ours. You have to learn to harden your heart if you want to survive in this fight.

ADELITA: I don't mean to imply that what we do is wrong, Concha.

CONCEPCION: It's fine, Adelita. We're all tired. It's been a long day. *(Starts to eat.)*

(LIGHTS dim to indicate evening. Off to one side, CRISITINA starts playing her guitar. TECH: gobos reflect evening.)

End of Freeview

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