

Scenes from *Nuevo mundo* in La Florida, 2011-2012

Viva Florida 500 – the Sunshine State’s official move toward commemorating 500 years of contact between Spain and La Florida – marks the cutting edge in a major wave of milestone anniversaries poised to sweep across North America. For fans of classical Hispanic theater, this opens golden opportunities for connecting *Comedia* in performance with the USA in the 21st century.

Theater with a Mission (TWAM) is proactively approaching Florida’s Quincentennial (2013) through Lope’s *Nuevo mundo* (c. 1600). A consortium of actors, community activists, dramaturgs, educators, and entrepreneurs loosely affiliated with Mission San Luis in Tallahassee and occasionally underwritten by the Florida Humanities Council, TWAM has developed new translations for a series of target scenes from Lope’s play, prepared them for performance in a wide variety of settings and styles, and presented them as part of festive public gatherings, business conferences, historical reenactments, and educational explorations in Tallahassee, Tampa, St. Augustine, Panacea, and Carrabelle.

This report shares findings from three aspects of TWAM’s experience with *Nuevo mundo* which seem particularly ripe for replication by other *Comedia*-performing groups working with other Golden Age plays:

1. a model for making target scenes the impetus for launching an extended exploration of a *comedia*
2. methods for recruiting general-public personnel into the process of putting target scenes onstage
3. strategies for connecting scene showcases with general-public audiences

TWAM selected scenes to perform – and built its actor base – through a series of public readings that slowly worked their way through *Nuevo mundo* act by act. The company has followed translation and staging practices that echo this collaborative, incremental approach to text selection, exploring collective insights into scenes’ meanings and encouraging group ownership of scene performances.

Working with busy volunteers as performers, in a setting only tangentially connected to any university, has proved an unexpected boon to TWAM. Triple-casting roles has opened up new interpretations of scenes and enriched the play of English and Spanish in rehearsals and performances. Aggressively reaching out to community-based Hispanic interest groups has built multicultural perspectives on *Nuevo mundo*’s Old and New World characters. And presenting performances script-in-hand has allowed scenes to profit by audience input as they grew.

The vast majority of TWAM’s audience members have been “accidental” – citizens who bumped into a scene from *Nuevo mundo* in the process of attending a festival, conference, reenactment, or committee meeting. This condition of production has underscored *comedia*’s power to delight and challenge everyday Americans, and taught TWAM useful lessons about maximizing performance impact through combining intimacy with historic distance, local color with exotic foreignness, and the immediacy of a specific moment with the cumulative momentum of a long-drawn performance arc.

We hope this wealth of experience with *Nuevo mundo* will encourage others to launch long-term, commemorative explorations of other *comedias* – and to join the ongoing experiment in Florida.

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