

# MONSTROUS REGIMENT

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**On 6th February, Monstrous Regiment will present the BRITISH PREMIERE of MY SONG IS FREE by Chilean playwright Jorge Diaz.**

*CHILE Inside a detention centre belonging to the D.I.N.A. Four women face torture and the prospect of death.*

Why have they been imprisoned? What crime has any of them committed? They have joined the ranks of los desaparecidos! As they are taken out to endure interrogation, their fear turns to terror: there is a spy among them. Is it Rosario, the working class activist? The pregnant Jimena? Is the middle-class Olga really the innocent bystander she claims to be? What about the actress? Why is the flamboyant and famous Aurora in this cell? Or perhaps the spy exists in their minds, an idea planted by their torturers to sow mistrust and fear between them . . .

Based on a true incident, My Song is Free is part thriller, part study of psychological terror and shows there is nothing as terrifying as our own fears.

### JORGE DIAZ

Born in Rosario, Argentina in 1930, **Jorge Diaz** is the son of a Basque mother and Austrian father and spent his childhood and youth in Chile. Later on he studied architecture at the University of Santiago, graduating in 1955. He became seriously interested in theatre through the Teatro Ensayo of his alma mater and in 1959, abandoned his architects career to devote himself to the theatre.

Between 1959 and 1965 he worked in Chile with such notable groups as ICTUS — and here most of his earlier plays were premiered. In 1965 Diaz moved to Spain and established himself as a professional writer and founder of several companies.

Diaz has experimented with a wide variety of theatrical techniques, in search of new ways to express what has been the thematic constant in his work — The all pervasive violence of our times. His plays have dealt with the demeaning or dehumanising elements that prevent the realisation of a full life. Class conflicts and problems of communication impair the happiness of the individual and impede the acquisition of his goals. Discrimination and social injustices are recurring themes.

Diaz has also written four television plays and in just over twenty years has received seventeen prizes.

His work My Song is Free has been performed by companies in Norway, Sweden and Germany, but never in England. The piece has been translated and will be performed in English by Monstrous Regiment who will be touring the play throughout England until April after its Triangle premiere.

'THE TRIANGLE' publicity brochure — FEBRUARY 1986

Monstrous Regiment Limited  
4 Elder Street London E1 6BT  
Telephone: 01-247 2398

Registered in England number 1332483  
Registered Office: 49 South Molton Street London W1Y 1HE  
Charity number 274517

Directors: Ms C Bowler, Ms S J Bailey  
Ms G L Hanna, Ms M McCusker

# Dramatic coups

ANNE CABORN meets the cast of a women's political play: actresses who have almost lived the part in reality.

THE staging of "My Song Is Free" by the Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company at the Crucible in Sheffield this week is a success story on three levels.

One, it is a fine piece of drama, well revived in London, where it played the Drill Hall. Two, it offers four strong roles for women — itself a theatrical rarity. And three, it combines political awareness with entertainment.

The story centres on the political situation in Chile and is viewed by four women held in detention — an actress, a peasant, a trade union leader and a pregnant, middle-class girl. The roles are taken by Angela Bruce, Stella Maris, Maureen Morris and Yolanda Vazquez. "It is made up of arguments and dialogues between the characters," explains Stella Maris, who plays the actress. "The thread of the plot is that the people outside, the guards and the military, try to create mistrust between the people inside the cell. "They put in a piece of bread containing a message saying 'traitor — watch out' in order to create suspicion and weaken them psychologically. These women are trying to use all their strength and trying to think of a way out. Each one has the chance to talk about their background and the possibility of escaping."

For Stella, the play represents more than a dramatic challenge. It mirrors her own experience in Argentina, where she was born and brought up. Stella grew up in Trevin, in Welsh Patagonia, where her parents were teachers. As a young teenager, the family moved to Buenos Aires. Stella worked as both a teacher and an actress but her main involvement was in teaching literacy, using drama, in the slums of the city.

"When the coup happened in April '76 they banned a play I was appearing in, I was blacklisted and I went to Brazil because I thought they were going to carry out an investigation." When she returned six months later, most of her friends had disappeared. One of her cousins was eventually found hanging from a bridge on the outskirts of Buenos Aires with a notice tied to her, warning people that this was what happened to guerillas. "In fact, she was just a student leader. Another of my cousins is still missing."

Unable to work in her own country, Stella eventually managed to leave again, aided by the International Theatre Institute. From Romania Stella made her way to England, ostensibly to research a doctorate on Shakespeare but her main desire was to get in contact with Amnesty International. "I had lost my interest in theatre after such strong experiences in real life."

Stella got asylum in Britain and worked for both human rights and in the theatre. She now lives in San Paolo, Brazil, again teaching literacy in slum areas. "I came back here towards the end of last year to raise money for the project and to pick up

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the rest of my things. I was offered the opportunity of doing this play, which is so meaningful for me and something I always wanted to do while I was here."

The play itself reflects the precarious situation of the underprivileged majorities in countries throughout Latin America. An estimated 30,000 people have disappeared in Argentina, another 8,000 in Chile and 35,000 in Guatemala. "In Argentina, there were 340 concentration camps." In England, it can be very hard to understand political repression. Indeed, the occasional theatregoer has turned up to "My Song Is Free" assuming it was a musical.

It is actually the title of a song by Chilean singer Victor Jara, himself a victim of the regime. The role of the young pregnant woman is played by Yolanda Vazquez, who is Spanish, whose family moved to Britain when she was ten — "for economic, not political reasons."

But again, it is probably easier for Yolanda to relate to the play than many members of its British audience. "My



brother was involved in political struggle during Franco's time, which made me become involved in politics."

This year is also the tenth anniversary of the Monstrous Regiment, which was formed to present plays based on women's experiences and in which there were strong roles for women to play. Previous productions include "Origin of the Species — A Love Story" and "Enslaved By Dreams," which was inspired by Florence Nightingale.

Above, Yolanda Vazquez (left) and Stella Maris. Below, Stella in a scene from "My Song Is Free" by Jorge Diaz.



# MONSTROUS REGIMENT

FROM THURSDAY 27 FEB 8PM

MONSTROUS REGIMENT PRESENTS

MM  
SONG  
IS FREE



BY JORGE DIAZ

WITH ANGELA BRUCE · STELLA MARIS  
MAUREEN MORRIS · YOLANDA VASQUEZ

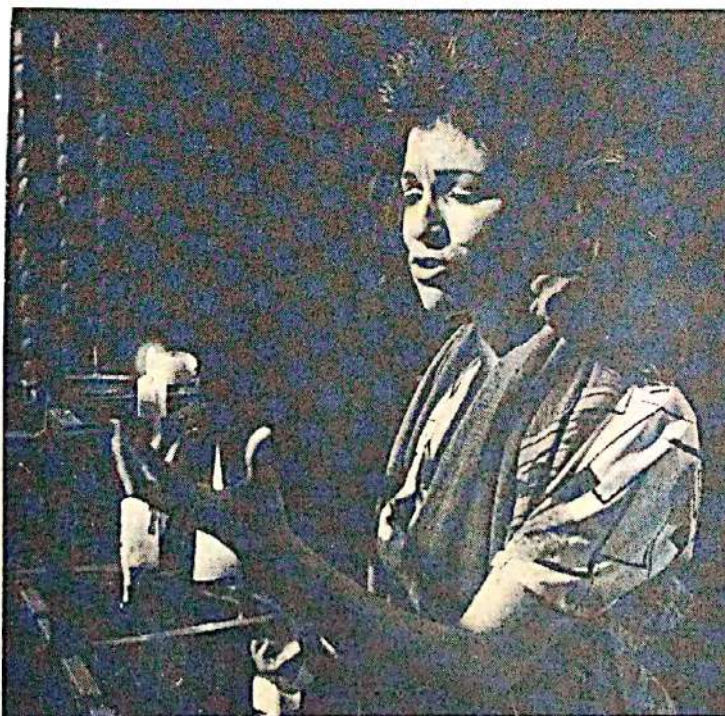
DIRECTED BY SUSAN TODD

MY SONG IS FREE IS BASED ON A TRUE  
INCIDENT, AND BEARS WITNESS TO THE  
NEED FOR POLITICAL CHANGE IN LATIN  
AMERICA

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ARTS CENTRE**

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It is the year after the USA backed coup in Chile which replaced Salvador Allende and the elected Popular Unity government with a military dictatorship... Four women activists are shut up in a secret place of detention. Forced to live in an atmosphere of mistrust and fear bred by a regime which labels all opposition as 'subversive', the women look for a traitor in their midst. Monstrous Regiment's production of Jorge Diaz' MY SONG IS FREE (Drill Hall) marks its English language premiere. 'The play is based on fact' say the company. 'It traces the history of the women and their relationships with each other under conditions of 'enforced disappearance' when they are supremely vulnerable. These women have been 'disappeared', deprived of any legal, civil or human rights. Diaz' play demonstrates the all pervasive effect of political terror as it distorts the psychology of those who oppose. All depressingly familiar territory to one performer in particular. Stella Maris, who plays Aurora, left Argentina when the military junta banned the play she was appearing in, declaring it 'subversive'. Described as 'unlovely but compelling' 'My Song Is Free' bears witness to the need for political change in Latin America. (Karen-Anne Skaife)

• C I T Y L I M I T S 28 FEB-6 MAR 1986

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THEATRE COMPANY

**IN SISTERHOOD  
AND GOOD WISHES  
TO ALL WOMEN  
WORKING  
FOR PEACE**

*Details of MY SONG IS FREE tour  
ring 01-247 2398*

20 SANITY March 1986

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For details of shows,  
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38 SANITY July 1985