

Carlos Alberto Cremata: "Fulfillment of duty not in order to earn merit, but because it is ingrained in us."

By Amelia Duarte de la Rosa, May 3, 2016

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Translator's note: Carlos Alberto Cremata founded the children's theater group La Colmenita (Little beehive) together with his mother Iraida Malberti in 1990. Many U. S. visitors to Cuba with solidarity delegations, such as Pastors for Peace and others, have departed from presentations by the theater troupe ecstatic about what they have seen. Theater performers were on both sides of Carlos Alberto's family. On October 6, 1976, Carlos Cremata Trujillo, 41 years of age, an actor and Cubana Airlines employee, was a passenger on Cubana's flight C-455 as it left Barbados. That day a bomb exploded inside the plane, brought it down, and killed all 73 passengers. His son Carlos Alberto Cremata was 16 years old at that time. Luis Posada, one of the crime's two intellectual authors, had been, or was, a CIA employee and lives freely today in Miami.

Granma interviewed the very distinguished artist after more than two decades at the head of the children's theater company La Colmenita

Carlos Alberto Cremata Malberti gives off energy. And we say that about various types of people, the kinetic, the inward-focused, the radiating. His tireless capability of movement, of force, of making things work well and, above all, of affecting others around him shows that it's possible for someone past 50 years of age to preserve the impetus of youth. When one sees him working, the impression is gained that the word fatigue doesn't exist in his dictionary. His work at the head of La Colmenita Children's [Theater] Company for more than two decades shows this, and that's why he has just attained the status of National Hero of Labor. We are speaking with Tin – as many of us affectionately call him – about this and other subjects on the occasion of his being awarded the honorific title which he received from the hands of General of the Army Raúl Castro Ruz

- You have just received a recognition that I know means a lot to you. How do you feel about being a National Hero of Labor?

I respond to you with help from Martí: "They did open my chest! I must now have a beautiful heart!"

- You created the company on February 14, 1990, in one of our most difficult times, the special period. Is it true that company members worked for free for eight years?

Yes, the first eight years (from 1990 to 1998), we young people, 22 in all, were together and getting by in La Colmena (the beehive) and La Colmenita. Then in '98, by luck, we converted into an official project of the Cuban Ministry of Culture, something that has no precedent in any other part of the world, the idea that an institution with children as performers could be a professional project of a Ministry for adults.

- To direct a Company like La Colmenita implies a high degree of professionalism and responsibility. Speak to us about your teachers, your idols within Cuban theater.

First of all, my teacher Berta Martínez together with Vicente Revuelta and Roberto Blanco. Then there was Flora Lauten, Raquel Carrió and José Milián. I much admire Carlos Díaz, Raulito Martín, Celdrán, my unbelievable brothers of the Teatro de Las Estaciones (Theater of the Stations), Teatro Tuyo (Your Theater), Silverio and his magical Mejunje (Mixture), the Teatro Guiñol (puppet theater) of Guantánamo and the tremendous [Teatro Cruzadas](#) (Crusades Theater) there. There are also [Juan González] Fife of the Teatro Andante (walking theater), the Guerrilla de Tearers (guerrilla theater people), the puppet theater of Remedios, and the unforgettable Fidel Galván, Pálpito, the Morón Theater, the Elementos (elements) theater de [José] Oriol [González], and of course the Escambray Theater, and the huge Manuel Porto of the Korimakao [Cultural Project] in Cienaga de Zapata.

- How many children are part of La Colmenita these day?

We have multiplied a lot. In Havana alone there are now 11 Colmenitas, and each one has between 30 and 70 children. In the central La Colmenita we have 114 boys and girls.

-How many La Colmenita studios are there in the world?

Presently there are 17 Colmenitas in nine states in Venezuela, three in Argentina, one in Colombia, one in San Luis Potosi (Mexico), and 14 in various departments in El Salvador.

Unfortunately those in Seville, Tenerife, and Cantabria in Spain, in Winnipeg (Canada), in Querétaro and Chiapas (México), in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic are no longer functioning, all after having existed for many years,. We are presently working vigorously with President Juan Carlos Varela in Panama to revive La Colmenita of Panama. And there are proposals for the United States, Russia, Barbados, Costa Rica, and Kuwait. But the great dream of La Colmenita is still to be able to form a Colmenita in Haiti.

- The program for the recent visit of the Presidential Committee for the Arts and Humanities of the United States included a session with La Colmenita. What can you tell us about that visit?

It was quite beautiful, because all those people of the arts in North America “let loose” and danced with the children — as if they were waking up to their own childhood — while the La Colmenita orchestra, as if possessed, played Van Van, Adalberto, Matamoros, Sindo Garay, Compay Segundo y Rosa Campo.

- And also, is there any talk about the possible creation of a Colmenita in Washington?

We’ve been in the United States three times. In 2003 we were in California, in 2011 in Washington, New York, and San Francisco, and in 2013 in Tampa. It’s interesting that when we were in Washington in 2011, a congresswomen, Ileana Ross Lehtinen, the Ferocious She-wolf [as designated by the Cuban press], labeled us in the Congress as “a threat to U. S. security,” and now in 2016 it’s been agreed through the President’s Committee that we can try La Colmenita in the United States for the pleasure of North American and Cuban children.

- What does Fidel mean for La Colmenita and especially for you?

A father, an example, or as Martí says, someone for whom fulfillment of duty is not in order to earn merit, but because it is ingrained in us.

I remember the first time I spoke with Fidel, in the middle of the 1990s after a show at the Karl Marx [Theater]. He left in quite an emotional state because the presentation had finished with a disturbing chorus of children who were deaf or hearing-impaired. He asked me, “How is it that you can do this?” I was quite nervous and only managed to tell him: “It must be because I had the good luck to be born in 1959 [the first year of the Cuban Revolution].”

Martí prophesied: “I want to live afterwards more than I want to live now.” Luckily Martí and Fidel are always going to live, more afterwards than now – and look at their lives now!

Translated by Tom Whitney.

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