

Chile And Argentina Shine With International Theater Festivals.

'Santiago a Mil' and the 'Buenos Aires International Festival' support Southern Cone theater as never before.

> By Ada Letelier. Published On: Tue, Jan 5th, 2010.

Following the success of Buenos Aires' international theatre festival, held toward the end of 2009, Chile's Santiago a Mil festival kicked off this week, continuing the celebration and showcasing of the region's strong thespian community.

If you are a lover of theater, dance and/or performing arts, as I am, then you really don't want to miss either of these two theater festivals, if you live in or can visit either city during the time these festivals take place.

For the past two years, I have attended both the Santiago a Mil festival and the Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires (FIBA), in nearby Argentina.

Santiago a Mil is the first major cultural event of the new year for Santiaguinos, who generally leave the city in droves the following month of February. The event is organized and run by the Fundacion Festival Internacional de Teatro a Mil, every January, whereas FIBA occurs every two years.

Chile's Santiago a Mil theater festival burst onto the scene in 1994 with a total of five plays. Since then it has grown significantly with this year's festival hosting close to 50 plays—both national and international productions.

Buenos Aires' international theater festival followed suit, beginning three years later, in 1997. While it usually takes place in September, after a change of leadership this year, the festival was held in October.

Both festivals are usually held over a period of three weeks. However, this year's theater festival in Buenos Aires ran for only two weeks (October 5-18), packing in as many performances as possible during this short period of time.

While making a list of plays I wanted to see in Buenos Aires this year, I had to ensure that my selections were in theaters close to one another, as I sometimes had to see two plays in one day in order to be able to see everything I wanted.

Both festivals not only highlight diverse artistic expressions (theater, dance, music and visual arts) from each country, but from those around the world as well. International companies come from as far away as Poland, Russia, Israel, Germany, Belgium, France, Spain and countries as near as Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay and Mexico.

Translations are provided for productions performed in languages other than Spanish, although for musical or dance performances they are rarely needed.

Both festivals are complemented by a series of cultural events that are usually free to the public, including movies, readings, roundtables and workshops where it's possible to meet and speak to authors, screenwriters, producers, directors and performing artists who are part of the festival.

There is also a mix of mainstream, experimental and street theater performances staged in various locations throughout the city, also free of charge.

Last year in Chile, the play long considered one of Chile's theater classics – La Remolienda (The Bordello) – gave four free street performances during the Santiago a Mil theater season, after it had a hugely successful run (for profit) at the Antonia Varas theater.

This year's Santiago a Mil Theater Festival runs until January 31. I have secured 14 tickets for plays that are of interest to me, as well as those that have been recommended by friends in the theater world.

I am looking forward to this year's festival as I was completely overwhelmed and pleased with what I saw in Buenos Aires and can't wait to see what Chile is going to do this year.

In 2010 the theater festival will be but one of the many activities being planned to help celebrate Chile's bicentennial. Be sure to read my review of this year's best and worst of both theater festivals at the end of January. Until then, to all the theater enthusiasts out there reading The Santiago Times: Happy theatergoing!