

*Adios Cha-Cha* by Sidetrack Theatre, 1985.

*Adios Cha Cha: A Show of Strength.* Made in Marrickville by Sidetrack theatre.' *Adios Cha Cha* is Sidetrack's major production for 1985, and represents a new scale of work for the company. It involves eight performers, extensive use of live amplified music, uses a large (8 metres by 5) stage space, seating the audience on three sides of a playing arena, and it has developed a distinctive theatrical language for its subject. There is both in acting style and construction a sense of an epic procession of images, and of large and powerful issues and feelings.

For *Adios Cha Cha* the writing and production team included the director, the cast - many of whom perform both as actors and musicians - the dramaturg and musical director/composer. The piece is the first show by Sidetrack not set in Australia since *Minimata-Drink the Mercury*. Research, work-shopping, writing and production took three months - February to April, 1985.

The characters in *Adios Cha Cha* live in a town called St. Alyossa in an imaginary country we've constructed from aspects of many actual countries of the so-called 'under-developed' world. In St. Alyossa the people are kept docile and obedient by the traditional teachings of the Church, by the exhaustion of heavy physical work, and at the time we see them by the increasing harassment of the military. The characters represent the townspeople amongst whom a girl called Cha Cha grows from about ten to sixteen years of age. The Patron (Spanish for The Boss) owns the mine the people work in. The Patron is also growing carnations for export to richer countries (a symbol for the cash crops which include coffee, tea, tobacco, coconut and in Colombia in fact, carnations, now being cultivated on land on which essential food crops were once grown). Others include Sergeant Costa and his off-sider, Cha Cha's mother Cruz, One-Eye and Lina, Simon, Snake, George and Weazel, exemplifying a variety of responses to the basic problems of survival.

These villagers are joined by a new kind of priest, Father Pavlo. Father Pavlo is a worker-priest, inspired by the new 'liberation theology' - an important influence for change in many so-called 'Third World' countries. Father Brian Gore, recently released from unjust imprisonment in the Philippines, and the priests who hold office in the Sandinista revolutionary government in Nicaragua are examples of such clergy whose words and actions we studied.

In *Adios Cha Cha* we see the necessity for social change. We see that many of the basic problems of life could be solved if the people could control their own lives, if the army did not treat ordinary people as criminals, and if the land was used for the good of the many instead of enriching the few. As the people of St. Alyosha begin to see their situation more clearly, they have to make many difficult choices, including whether there is a way to put a stop to violence without using it oneself. They have to face and overcome the pervasive fear and sense of powerlessness these conditions produce. This story is told in *Adios Cha Cha* in scenes of powerful realist dialogue and through pageant and tableau, music, dance and a specially developed style of grotesque pantomime. The style is vulgar, comic, vigorous and involving. *Adios Cha Cha* is not a documentary, or dramatised history. We have taken facts and impressions from novels, songs and photographs from many countries, from the reports of international bodies like the Brandt commission, from newspapers and journals and the experiences of actual people. But the show presents all levels of the people's experience, psychological and personal as well as economic and physical. We have created a distinctive style for the play, involving 'epic' structure and characterisation (in Brecht's sense of 'epic') and a 'reported' acting style with which characters become more than particular individual portraits. Behind each figure we would like the audience to see the image of thousands.

-Tom Burvill, Dramaturg

(Text edited from Tom Burvill. 'Adios Cha-Cha-Sidetrack's Theatre for the People', *Aspect-Art and Literature*, No.32-33, 1985, Paddington, NSW)