

Margi Curtis

COLD TURKEY & CLOWNS

Now come the region of the yearly cycle which prompts those of us with short-term amnesia to make the proverbial 'New Years Resolution' January 1st that magical day which holds itself out to the forever innocent as the grand beginning of a clean slate, a fresh start, the promise of better days, more self control and an absolute reversal of 'Murphy's Laws'.

When I am tempted to indulge in some form of resolving at this time of year, a New Years party I attended several years ago comes to mind.

It was a really fun party, with lots of lively banter, and everyone getting rather loose, as is the custom on New Years Eve. Throughout the evening I found myself in deep conversation three separate times with a person confiding, in a somewhat pleasant drunkenness, but nonetheless sincere honesty, their New Years Resolutions, to me. All three told me, separately, that they were, once and for all, going to quit smoking. The looks on their faces reminded me of a student who is trying to impress the teacher with the right answer. They each vowed to smoke their last one at midnight and then - COLD TURKEY I tried to offer cheering, parental, coach like words to them, and if I could have, I would have made their tasks easier.

This all took place in a small town, where everyone sees everyone at intervals, if only in the grocery store. So it was not two weeks before I came upon each of my stalwart COLD TURKEY friends. Each time I ventured to ask the outcome of their New Years resolutions, the results were as follows: One had lasted two days, one had lasted one and one half days, and one had forgotten they had ever mentioned it.

(This of course, having nothing to do with alcohol.) None of them had any plans to begin again, and I sensed the magic of a New Year had somehow dissipated.

The question looms - What does motivate people to change? And how can we use the natural cycles of the calendar or environment to give us the inspiration we need to combat daily tedium and human inertia?

I remember a resolution I made when I was sixteen, ah, one glorious year before my life got serious on me. I told everyone I was going to become a clown and join the circus when I turned eighteen. At least it made them laugh. Twenty years later, that memory surfaces and I am left wondering who that person was. Yet something, deep inside me, have not changed. I wanted, and still do to make people happy. I realize, even now, this is still possible.

Anything is, at some level possible, and at some level we are all clowns in a huge, complicated circus. So, if I resolve anything, it is to be a better clown this year, than last year, and to pay more attention to the side shows.

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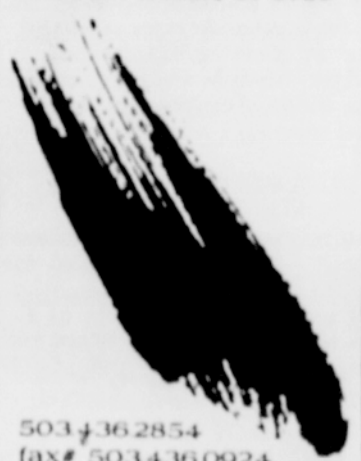
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DR. KARKEYS cont. from page 1
or the adjoining ones, and folks do have their problems.

Somebody convinces them that it's better to talk about the problems than keep them corked inside, and word has gotten around after nearly a generation that Dolly is just maybe the best listener you could imagine. Runaway kids, abusive parents, depressed widows... "troubles are troubles" Dolly says, and she listens so well that people come right out and tell themselves the truth. Dolly says most folks already know what they have to do to make things better. She just goes along with them while they explain it to themselves.

Anyway, this particular government type didn't say any more about the good of the community, or the Visitor's Information Center. Sure, there was a hubub -- there are some folks here who get hungry for more money, but they're folks who always have more than enough to get by. So, the hubub died down, and a couple of months later, Dolly got a little surprise at the Post Office.

Now there's a very fancy certificate in a very nice frame on the wall by the phone in the Rainbow. Dolly is the Director of the State's Department of Peace and Good Will. And her office was funded with just enough to buy a snug little three bedroom house just a bit past the viewpoint that Dolly'd been saying would make a wonderful "safe house" for people who couldn't or shouldn't go home.

And that's this month's snapshot from Camera Bluff.

Dance and Remembrance

By Coco Fusco

I knew before I dialed her number that to have a good conversation with Mexico's leading woman director about her new film, *Danzón*, it would be good to draw a distinction between a feminine perspective and a feminist one. South of the border (and sometimes here), the latter term resonates with separatist connotations. "I prefer to say my film presents the feminine side of things," María Novaro quickly answered, referring to her story about a Mexico City telephone operator and *danzón* contest champion who takes off to Veracruz in search of her dance partner.

Semantics aside, for a Latin American woman to complete a feature film, receive acclaim at Cannes, and see that movie released in commercial theaters at home is a true rarity, even in the '90s. Novaro's second feature has been heralded as nothing less than a national phenomenon—there wasn't a respectable paper in Mexico that didn't have something positive to say about *Danzón* when it opened there in late June, and local audience turnout puts the film in competition with the Hollywood imports that dominate Mexican screens. Novaro seems to be handling her success with aplomb. When I reached her in her hometown of Mexico City,

where she was taking a brief break between trips to festivals in Italy and New York, Novaro sounded neither fatigued nor daunted by having to answer questions about her movie for the umpteenth time. In fact, she likes to hang around theaters where *Danzón* is playing to watch the response and talk to her audience.

In the course of our conversation, Novaro explained how her politics and filmmaking had evolved in the decade since she began her career as a member of the Cine Mujer collective. There was a period in the '80s, she noted, when many women filmmakers in Mexico, including herself, saw it as their mission to render the lives of urban working-class women as tales of unparalleled heroism. This led to several hagiographic documentaries about seamstresses, prostitutes, and other Mexico City female lumpen. "But times have changed," she said, "and I'm not interested in mystifying women, but rather in exploring how we live. I want to deal with the contradictions we face in life and in ourselves."

The world of the *salones de baile* (dance halls) turned out to be the perfect place to explore those contradictions. Novaro and her sister Beatriz researched the script they cowrote by immersing themselves in that nostalgia-laden world found throughout Mexico, where a largely working-class eli-

entele regularly gathers to display dance steps that have remained unchanged for generations. According to Novaro, she was purposely looking for a popular cultural space steeped in tradition—to show how much latitude and complexity could be found if the rigid surface were scratched. So from inside those dance halls Novaro shows how modern women despite their independence still long at times for the chivalry of the past.

Novaro's protagonist, Julia (María Rojo), loves following the romantic, traditional rules of masculine and feminine behavior that the *danzón* dictates. Outside the dance hall, however, she is a single mother of an adolescent daughter, and manages her independence and her social life with skilled restraint. Her dance partner is only a dance partner, not a lover, maintaining a practical split between art and life.

Julia's trip to look for her partner, who's disappeared mysteriously—the first time she's traveled alone in her life—takes her into a female-centered universe that allows her to look at herself and her own desire. Those she befriends along the way are Novaro's minideconstructions of classic female stereotypes: Doña Ti (Carmen Salinas), the motherly hotel manager, Chocolate (Blanca Guerra), the warm-hearted prostitute, and Susy (Tito Vasconcelos), the sympathetic transvestite.

When the prostitute tries to figure out if she knows who Julia's looking for by asking how quickly he gets an erection, you know this isn't just any Mexican movie. And when Susy-in-drag gives Julia a makeover and then pleads with her to teach her how to dance like a woman, not like a man, it's clear Novaro is subverting gender roles not just for her character, but for Mexican cinema.

To provide a backdrop for Julia's adventure, Novaro zeroes in on vestiges of Mexican popular culture of the '40s and '50s, lingering on photographs of the movie stars, sentimental ballads and dance music and even the graphic design that are identified with her country's last golden age. The supporting characters who serve as Julia's confidants are invariably connected with that past—the restaurant where her dance partner worked is a veritable shrine to famous singers and actors of old. Doña Ti warbles Tonia la Negra songs in her room. And Susy bases her onstage characters on tropical bombshells like Carmen Miranda and La Tongolele.

"My sister and I constructed the film around the idea of nostalgia," reflected Novaro. "Not simply a nostalgia for the heyday of the dance halls and the music, but for a Mexico that is being lost—thanks to the process of Americanization we are undergoing. I believe that it's Mexico, and a pride for what is Mexican, that must be defended."

"For the women in the film, there is also a nostalgia for a time when they might have felt protected, for the romanticism of that culture... the *danzón* dancers have a saying—that in life, as in the *danzón*, the man leads and the woman follows. It may be that way in the dance, but no longer in life."



Director María Novaro

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Why should you come to this event? Here are a few reasons: because you have never done anything like this before; your voice is needed to make a difference; participating in the process of change is rewarding and fun! Together we can make a difference. Now is the time to send a clear message to our country's leadership specifically regarding the wants and needs of Clatsop County. Be a part of the solution - not just a portion of the problem!

The party is scheduled for Saturday, January 9th, 4 - 8 p.m.

It is a potluck of hors d'oeuvres - "finger food" - please bring your favorite appetizer to share.

It is located at: The Seaside Community Center
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