



Verónica Moraga in *Ina*.
Photo: Valentina Serrati



Ina, written and performed by Verónica Moraga and directed by Josefina Baez, has started its life as a performance. We are talking about continuation and life. We are talking about the death of Valentina, Veronica's first daughter.

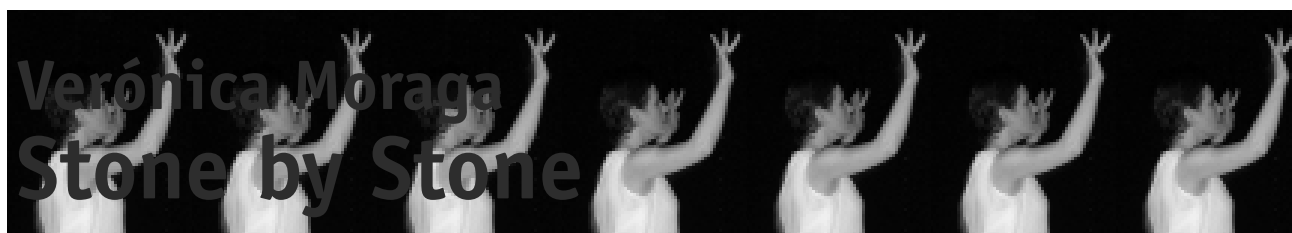
Given a theme where the actress is also the real life protagonist, the objective and challenge was always her mental and emotional sanity; the sanity of the person who lives with this performance 24/7/365. We packed and started our journey to our own Ithaca, with alertness as the only suggestion.

The piece's physicality demands the presence of the whole being. Thus the mind cannot be distracted by thoughts of pain or memories of days gone by. It is the present, the doing, which is important. Then, the story can be told without putting honey on top of molasses; or bitterness on sadness.

Our collaboration started in Bielefeld, Germany. We had our first rehearsal, after copious emails, at the Transit 3 Festival in Denmark. During the process we welcomed Salvador, Veronica's third child. The piece premiered at Ictus Teatro de la Comedia, Santiago, Chile, on November 22nd 2004.

Now we continue on the journey without missing the aroma, colour, shapes, seeds and juices of all the oranges spread on the path. Now we are willing and able to share our *Ina*.

JOSEFINA BAEZ (Dominican Republic/ USA) is an actor, writer and teacher, who has trained in classical dance in India and who writes her own texts in Spanglish, also performing them in private houses. She directs Latinarte's Ay Ombe Theatre International Theatre-retreat.



Twenty-one years have passed since theatre and I met on a beach in the north of Chile. It came into my life in a street version of the play *The Selfish Giant*. A lot of water has gone under the bridges of my life since then, and my search to find forms that will allow me to continue along the path of theatre has never stopped. Each occasion requires a long exploration to find a partner or a group with whom to crystallise a play, to find out what I want to say in the play and how I can convey it. This is never a short process and never easy.

In 2000, at a session of ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) in Bielefeld, Germany, I met Josefina Baez. We had a conversation that would orientate the next part of my life. On that occasion I told her about myself, of my wish to go on stage again, of the difficulty of creating a group and finding someone to work with. I also told her about something that I spoke about with very few people at that time: I told her about Valentina, my first daughter, who had arrived in this world to crown me as a mother, when I was not yet ready for this gigantic task.

During the conversation, I remembered my maternal illiteracy, since nobody had prepared me or talked to me about this task, or told me what it really means to have a child. As well as love, even though I struggled with it, I experienced a feeling of inevi-

table postponement. This small other being who demanded everything of me also took everything.

I explained to Josefina, during our first long conversation, how, in that state of astonishment and bewilderment, death surprised me by taking my daughter. While I was experiencing the brutality of being unprepared to be a mother, I was confronted with having to face something much more radical: an unexpected death that left me frozen for more than ten years.

Josefina listened to me generously and said: "This is what you must write about; this will be your play." Then I took out a pen and a small notebook, and I wrote down some questions that were the starting point for what would become my solo performance *Ina*. The performance would describe the feelings of a young woman falling in love, how she becomes pregnant and, deciding to keep her daughter, loses her career as a television actress. The woman marries a man she perhaps would not have married if she were not expecting the child, she is surprised by the responsibilities of maternity and then overtaken by reality when death snatches her daughter away.

FIRST STONE: BREAKING BORDERS

I was very grateful for the meeting at ISTA in Germany, since it resulted in the first stone to begin a building that continued for

the following months thanks to the internet. Josefina was in New York and I lived in Spain at that time: we communicated every day. I wrote to her about my solitary rehearsals, inspired by her ghostly presence and that of masters and techniques I had got to know recently.

To find a rhythm of research alone is difficult. I overcame my reluctance only thanks to the images in my memory, to the tasks and methods for building physical scores that inspired my creative process when I discovered and gave shape to them.

Josefina wrote giving me suggestions, encouraging me to look for the book *The New Moon* by Rabindranath Tagore, and for the music of Rachmaninov. I sent her a CD by Violeta Parra, a Chilean folk singer, with the *Rin del Angelito*, the initial inspiration for the work and the text.

Distance included the promise of moving closer: our next crucial meeting would be in Denmark, in the context of the Transit Festival, three and a half months after we had begun the work in Germany.

SECOND STONE: HOLSTEBRO

In January 2001 we were surrounded by women who were full of life. I was nervous, too nervous. I would almost have preferred to receive the news that Josefina was not coming because of some last minute problem, but luckily that didn't happen.

We met for the first time in Odin Teatret's white room. When I began to explain about the work I had done, Josefina interrupted me, saying with her characteristic sense of humour: "Are you going to tell me or show me?" I took a deep breath, went to the stage and showed her everything that I had prepared.

Paradoxically during the rehearsals in Spain I had been impregnated by the topic of maternity - as often happens to actors confronting a character - and I had

reconciled myself so deeply with the theme that I arrived in Denmark pregnant. Later, becoming a mother again during the process of creation helped us to restructure the text.

THIRD STONE: CREATING BONDS IN CHILE

In September 2002, Josefina landed in my country. I had returned because I preferred to give birth to Salvador there, since, like his siblings, he would be born by Caesarean. I was waiting for Josefina with my son, partly the fruit of our work. At eight months old, he already allowed me to alternate some hours and return to work.

First came the dramaturgy: Josefina took the poems of Rabindranath Tagore, my autobiographical text and some unsent letters that my partner, Pedro, had written to his distant friends when our little girl was born. Assembling all this material, Josefina proposed a new text.

Then we began to work with physical actions that would narrate the story in a non-linear form and with the props that could support us. Only the music was not present at this month long third meeting.

FOURTH STONE: THE WILL TO CONTINUE

In 2003, Chile was again the meeting place. This time we had two months to finish our montage. Roberto joined the work. He is a wonderful trumpet player who enveloped us in the melancholy of bossanova, creating the atmosphere of the performance.

We polished our initial proposal and dispensed with all the props. We left only about a hundred oranges that make the scenery, being the plastic element that records what is left behind as the story unfolds.

At the end of the two months we felt ready to share our creation, to offer it to the world. We were proud, although the lighting design was only starting to be



Verónica Moraga in *Ina*. Photo: Josefina Baez

realised, thanks to the contribution of Eduardo Jiménez, a notable stage designer and person.

FIFTH STONE: NEW ZEALAND

In February 2004 we met to give the work to others. The meeting was in New Zealand, within the context of a workshop given by Josefina. The piece was presented in Spanish, even though the audience was mainly English speaking. Josefina had taken this decision because my English pronunciation isn't good and it would be wrong for the performance to be judged for that, rather than for its rigorous staging. I was surprised by the result, how in spite of the language barrier the spectators understood, were moved and thanked me - and I them.

SIXTH STONE: FINALISING THE FORM

In 2004, I met my director twice; the second time here in my long country at the end of the world. We took up the work again and incorporated some new elements that gave it

its final shape.

We had the premiere in the Sala de la Comedia, a small theatre that remained above water during the seventeen years of dictatorship in Chile, raising its voice through the courage of its actors in the Ictus group. For us it was symbolic to present *Ina* in this space, to speak now of pain usually kept in silence. The work moves the spectator and during the performance allows me to experience the meaning of terms like "organic presence", the "rhythm" of each part, the "movement" of the spectator's eye, as Meyerhold said - all terms that had been solely theoretical for me previously.

My deep desire is to continue to discover the pleasures of having a piece of work that allows personal growth and makes me wish to share it in different countries and with different audiences. This will be the seventh stone.

Translated from Spanish by Julia Varley

VERÓNICA MORAGA (Chile) is a seasoned theatre, television and film actress. She teaches theatre and works with Downes syndrome children. After moving back to Chile from Spain, Verónica is now preparing to tour her new solo performance *Ina*.