

Patricia Alves

About a Woman - Nitis Jacon

Nitis Jacon was my first contact with the theatre world. I met her while I was studying law at Londrina's university during one of the festivals which she organised. I came through the office doorway and half an hour later was on the phone trying to contact somebody to help a theatre company invited by the Festival which had been stopped by the customs in São Paulo. After that point it was difficult to leave Nitis and not to get involved in the world she opened up before me.

Nitis Jacon, fifty-six years old, is a doctor, actress and director. She divides her life between the hospital in Araçongas, Brazil, where she works as a psychiatrist, the university in Londrina where she is the Vice Dean and the office of the International Festival of Londrina, of which she is artistic director.

Nitis was born in Lençóis Paulista, where the increasing number of tuberculosis patients, dying in poor neighbourhoods due to the lack of medical assistance, gave her the fantasy of becoming a doctor who would "cure everyone free of charge". There Nitis also began organising presentations of performances played by her colleagues on improvised stages built up in the back yards of family houses. Her quarrelsome nature which often surfaced during such endeavours, earned her the nickname "The Small Angry Spanish" from her friends.

She moved to Curitiba in 1950 and began her studies at the Federal Medical University. Very quickly she became engaged with the Students Theatre of Paraná. By 1957 she was considered to be one of the best actresses in Paraná. When one of the plays in which she acted was presented in Rio de Janeiro, a jury named her the best amateur actor of Brazil. Nitis was then invited to stay in Rio de Janeiro, but preferred to follow the Brazilian theatre director Pascoal Carlos Magno's advice: "Go back to Curitiba girl, and finish your studies".

In Curitiba Nitis met and fell in love with a medical student, Abelardo Moreira. For him she abandoned everything and moved to Araçongas, a small village with 60000 inhabitants, 36 km away from Londrina.

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She worked as a teacher while her husband worked as a doctor at his father's hospital. Here in the tranquillity of northern Paraná, she gave birth to four children. A domestic life however did not prevent her from saying yes to a group of students from the region who wished to create a theatre group - Gruta. The military coup came in 1964, it brought with it anxiety, fear, and tension in the years which followed. Gruta was very active during the dictatorship. They created their own tactics of guerrilla warfare and their members were twice expelled from Londrina's university - one time on account of performing *Antigone!* Because of Nitis' involvement in the student movements she was seen as a "dangerous member" of the university. According to Nitis herself she was accused of spreading rebellious feelings to the elite. A specific incident that earned her this notoriety was when she recited a Vincinius de Moraes song called *Operario em Construção* during a Rotary Club meeting - the song is about the lives of construction workers.

Nitis and Abelardo were anonymously denounced during this time and were supposed to face eventual questioning by the Military Police Inquest Commission. They left their children with the grandparents and when the commission arrived in Arapongas, the couple went from bar to bar drinking coffee to show that they were ready to be questioned. They carried toothbrush, toothpaste and clean underwear with them, in case they were suddenly arrested and taken away. Nothing happened though and the family travelled to London, where they lived for one year. When they returned Abelardo was arrested - no reason given, they thought maybe because he was married to Nitis ... Due to a lack of evidence he was set free.

During the years of repression Nitis was invited to direct the University Festival of Londrina. Through her passion, which contaminates all those around her with energy and will power, she catalysed and transformed the festival. By gathering

together every two years theatre groups and companies from all over the world and bringing them to a small provincial town away from the Rio-São Paulo area, Nitis, along with her theatre company Proteu, created the International Festival of Londrina - one of the most important theatrical events in Brazil.

Working with Nitis is not always easy. "The Small Angry Spanish" sometimes overdoes it with her dynamism and energetic authoritarian attitudes, justifying herself by saying afterwards "I attack only to defend myself". People who worked with her left for different reasons but all of them are still in close contact with Nitis and Proteu, and are now developing the work or skills they started under Nitis' wings.

Brazil is a democracy but still the governmental mechanisms do not completely satisfy cultural needs. Nitis carries on her struggle with the same tenacity as she began it. Through constant demands to local authorities and to the university she creates in Londrina an oasis for people searching for a place to gather and work with what they believe in.

PATRICIA ALVES (Brazil) studied psychology and law at Londrina's university. At the age of fifteen she started working at organising medical congresses, in 1987 she became a part of Proteu, the university's theatre company, where she worked until 1990 as executive producer for the company's productions and the International Festival of Londrina organised by Proteu. Patricia is now living in Denmark and is tour manager for Odin Teatret.