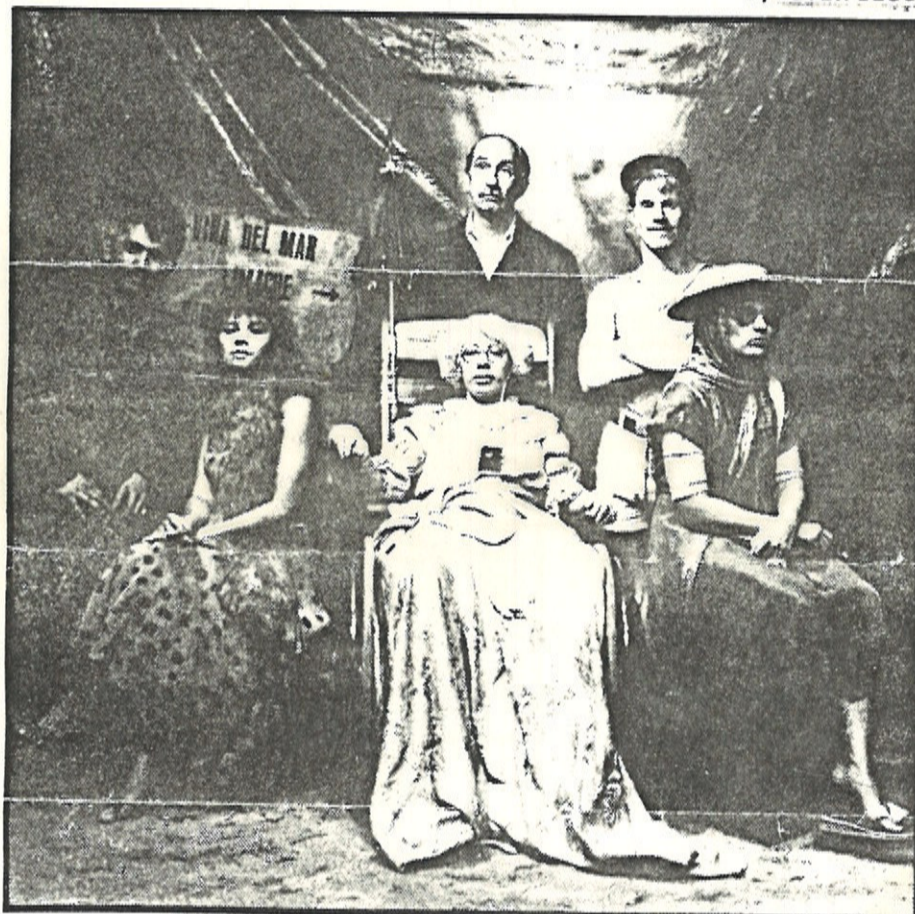


CANALES

ARTS CLOSE-UP

By PETER BLOCH



"Viña" at El Portón: Michael Yañez, Yanet Rodríguez, Rodolfo Díaz, Glenn Halladay, Aminta de Lara and Dagmar Stanec (Photo: Rafael Llerena)

VIÑA, presented by L.A.T.E.—El Portón, is a trilogy of one-act plays set at Viña del Mar, Chile's foremost seaside place. Its author is Sergio Vodanovic, one of Chile's leading playwrights who studied in 1957-58 at the universities of Yale and Columbia and whom I met in April on his most recent visit to this country where his best-known play "Let The Dogs Bark" was first performed in Dallas and where "Same As Ever" and "Viña" have been published in English. A number of theatre companies in the U.S. have produced "Viña"... Vodanovic liked El Portón's excellent production (in English) under the direction of Victor Acosta (cultural award "Palma Julia de Burgos" 1980). He remarked that the best staging of the second play in the trilogy that he had seen was the one at El Portón.

"I never interfere with the director's work," says Vodanovic. "There always is more than one way of doing a play. I have noticed that Latin actors in New York perform in the American manner. I believe that we find in the United States the best performances of realistic plays, but that the American theatre tends to fail when it comes to staging

poetical ones." (I added in our conversation that this may well be the reason why quite a few of Tennessee Williams' plays, which are highly poetical, have been rarely presented and have actually been underrated by American critics, especially his later works...) Vodanovic is also a lawyer, a journalist and a critic and currently writes for television... In "Viña" he contrasts traditional attitudes of the Chilean bourgeoisie, which still seem to be largely rooted in a Victorian outlook but without its optimism, with very different "modern" lifestyles: Hypocrisy and frustration on one side, unscrupulous cynicism and heartless emptiness on the other. True love does not appear in any of the three biting plays of the trilogy: "The White Uniform," "People Like Us," "The Exiles," and the third is particularly bitter and cruel. Yet this is a worth-while, exciting evening of theatre, and El Portón's cast is sparkling: Rodolfo Díaz proves his thorough professionalism in his fine portrayals of a middle-aged and of an elderly bourgeois and of a very old chauffeur-butler; Dagmar Stanec, Glenn Halladay, Michael Yañez are entirely convincing in their parts; Aminta de

Lara is perfect as the unsatisfied bourgeois wife and, despite her being young, amazingly impressive as the paralyzed old lady in "The Exiles." As for Yanet Rodríguez, I had already noticed her unquestionable talent and enchanting personality in "Tiempo muerto"; and in "Viña," too — as a humiliated maid taking her revenge and as a none-too-successful stripteaser—her gift of electrifying projection makes an impact. Glenn Halladay's sets deserve special praise... If you are looking for intellectually and artistically stimulating plays you rarely will find them these days on over-commercialized Broadway where the relations between individuals and society hardly interest producers and backers catering to the tastes of conformist suburbanites from Scarsdale... The professional Hispanic theatre companies (five or six) frequently offer meaningful plays with first-rate directors and actors at a fraction of the admission price you pay on Broadway. Why not give them a try?...