

I like to tell silent stories.
The audience says that they
“sound good”.

A handwritten signature in white ink on a red background. The signature consists of a large, stylized capital letter 'C' that loops around and underlines the word 'Carlos' written in a cursive script.

CARLOS MARTÍNEZ
FROM THE
DRESSING ROOM

REFLECTIONS ON THE (SILENT) ART OF MIME

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Layout: Andreas Sonnhüter, Düsseldorf, Germany
Printed by: CPI books, Ulm, Germany
ISBN 978-84-614-8359-4

Silence decided to keep quiet so that
sound could be better appreciated.

The mime decided to speak so that
silence could be better appreciated.

PROLOGUE

I have met Carlos Martínez on a number of occasions, and he has always brought blessing to me. Apart from anything else, he has shown remarkable grace and patience in the face of my miserably disorganised and shambolic attempts to do the things that he has asked of me. This foreword is a very good example. I have always wanted to pay this tribute to an artist whom I admire immensely, but, and this is the wretched parable of my life, I am invariably busying myself with things that 'I must just get done' before I can turn to a task that is worthy of careful thought and commitment. Forgive me, Carlos, just as many others have forgiven me in the past, sometimes through gritted teeth.

I mention all this, not only to buy back the goodwill of my friend, but because these qualities of grace and patience may well be the major components of the genius that Carlos displays in his mime. At the centre of the performances that I have seen, both live and in recordings, there is a heart that is continually breaking and being mended, a dimension of pain and compassion that can allow audiences a new appraisal of their own experiences. Laughter and love can do that, especially when they are controlled and expressed through consummate technical skill. Kindness and movement and stillness and silence have a power all of their own, and the God who loves and likes Carlos Martínez inhabits any combination of these.

INTRODUCTION

As you read these pages you will undoubtedly encounter the wit and the warmth of this exceptional performer. Like all the people I have admired most in my encounters with those who get up and do 'stuff', he reveals a vulnerability that is essential to the creative process, and, thank God, a willingness to laugh at the absurd. If all else failed that might well be enough for me. My only complaint about Carlos writing humour is that he does it far too well. I am a little jealous. Read his description of a series of conversations with a stage technician who simply could not begin to understand the nature or purpose of mime, and you will see what I mean.

I am so glad that you are about to meet Carlos Martínez. You will like what he writes and you will certainly like him. May God bless you through his words.

Adrian Plass

While writing this book, it felt as if I were creating a mime show. Much of my time as an actor is spent working on new pieces. Some wake me up at night; others come out of the mirror. One was hiding beneath my keyboard, another jumped out of the remote control.

Every narrative in this book has in a sense become like a mime piece. Some stories are a nod to the lessons of life that I have wrestled with, others happened on stage with technicians, audience members, colleagues, students, or friends. Some were born while I painted my face white and others while taking off my makeup.

Nevertheless, these stories, like my pieces, cannot step out onto the stage until they have passed the test of the rehearsal process.

That is why I handed over my manuscript to Jonathan Gelabert, an artist of the written word. I gave him freedom to rewrite, to add or subtract.

Some of the stories lost words, but gained freshness. One was divided into two, and two were fused into one. The order of the chapters changed, like the pieces in a show, to give rhythm and tempo.

Jonathan, thank you for appreciating and respecting my work. Thank you for taking it seriously and enjoying it. Thank you for taking it into your dressing room to prepare it for the stage and an encounter with the audience.

Carlos Martínez

LITTLE MIRACLES

People keep coming into the theatre and, unbelievably, they choose to see a mime performance! It is a little miracle, just as much as when spectators of different ages, cultures and languages feel united by a show. And it is all the more miraculous if, on top of it all, the show is mine! What more can I ask?

For them to pay for their ticket?
This is another little miracle.

Silence waits patiently
for someone to let it
have the word.



CLEAN AND HEALTHY

The cleaner your skin, the easier it is to put on makeup and the easier it is to remove it later. I need to use moisturizing cream to keep my skin healthy, and in order to keep my face clean. But for the soul that it reflects, I know of no better cosmetic than honest self-reflection.

Maybe this is one of the reasons that I have written these pages.

MY FIRST DRESSING ROOM

I was alone, but I felt the warmth and assurance of my mother. She had the theatre running in her veins and was preparing me to make my entry on the stage of life.

Nothing was absent from the room: the perfect temperature, comfortable surroundings, and all the food that I could wish for. Perhaps that is why I came on the scene with a couple of extra pounds. On the inside my true mask was maturing. I didn't use creams or brushes, but my body was covered in a yellow, watery fluid that gave flexibility to my movements and at the same time protected me from any bumps or scratches.

The respect afforded to the artist was incredible. No one dared to go into the dressing room. Preserving my intimacy was something sacred. Occasionally I was contacted just to make sure everything was all right, but once I made it clear that my whole creative process was advancing normally, I was left in peace.

The deep silence in that place was such that I could even hear my own heartbeats.

Once in a while, I would tense up thinking about the moment when I would take the stage for the first time. Then my mother would speak tenderly to me from the other side of the door; she would calm me down and encourage me. She believed in me and knew that my debut would be a success.

And the moment arrived. The door to the dressing room swung open. The stage lights were blinding and I was overtaken by stage fright; but once I finally peeked my head out of the room, the rest was much easier. My mother's smile and the midwife's applause confirmed that I was born to be an actor.

EMBASSY

I'm seated in my dressing room, hundreds of kilometres from home, in a country where I barely understand the local language. I know that when I go out on stage, language will not be a problem, because everyone can understand the universal language of gesture. But now I am here, alone, and I allow myself a few nostalgic thoughts about home before concentrating on the show.

With a little luck, someone from Spain will be in the audience. When we shake hands at the exit, we will exchange a few words in Spanish and I'll probably invite the person to continue our conversation in my dressing room, as I've so often done before.

The newspapers I brought with me from the plane are stacked on the sofa. They are Spanish publications; my makeup and clothes come from Spain as well. I listen to a radio station from home on a short wave radio and receive text messages from my family telling me that they miss me and to come home soon.

I may be a long way from home, but for a few moments I feel as if I am on Spanish soil. The dressing room, which means so many different things to me, has also become a sort of embassy.



A mime is a poet of gesture
who fights against
the dictatorship of words.





NERVOUS AND SPEECHLESS

Before going out on stage, I go over my monologues, even though I don't have any texts. My pieces have scripts, but not words. My voices are faces and movements. I articulate without speaking. I say everything without talking. I use joints, muscles, tendons, nerves ... Nerves? Yes, of course. They are also a part of the show. I need them. They help me to create expressions, harmonize gestures, and transmit the emotions that the audience expects.

The lights go out. Eyes open wide. The curtain comes up. The time has come. It is my moment. You can breathe in the silence. And silence is exactly what I offer. Without words, but with implications ... and with nerves. The way it should be. If not, it isn't theatre.

THE IDEAL DRESSING ROOM

The dressing room of a mime actor is a place where the voice slowly fades out to give way to an inaudible language.

It's very important for the room to fulfil certain basic requirements: a large table, two chairs, fruit and drinks, a sink with warm water, clothes hangers, several mirrors, and plenty of light.

However, the most important thing is that it is close to the stage, so that I can hear the audience. I love to listen to their excited steps as they come into the hall, their comments as they page through their programmes, the sound of the seats as they fill up ...

The country doesn't matter. Neither does the language, the culture, nor the age. The sound of an expectant audience is marvellous. What actor would want to miss it?

In my dressing room,
the sound of words is displaced
by the silence of gestures.

