



PEPE CORZO

Inventor of scenic universes.

Pepe Corzo likes to invent universes, to escape from reality in order to create new worlds in which characters naturally pass through, with stories that could certainly be more soberly narrated, in a manner rather more buttoned-down. Yet Corzo is neither moderate nor conservative, but quite the opposite and even something more. He is restless in the creative process, a constant innovator, a bold inventor of parallel universes.

Being creative and audacious is not enough to forge an international career. It necessitates work, a lot of work, and Pepe Corzo is also an indefatigable toiler. His profession defines his *raison d'être*, his life is dedicated to the creation of these worlds that aspire to being perfectly credible. To transform imagination into reality requires a great deal of endeavour, as he well knows. For this, for the child he once was, doodling in his notebook of blank pages, he now lives in his studio surrounded by piles of books, an immense library of art that over time he has built, by virtue of numerous travels and to which he continuously adds on his return from each trip. Because Corzo travels a great deal, traversing Peru's diverse regions and travelling the world in search of information, references and sources of inspiration. Pepe Corzo is self-taught, and as such his affinity with learning is enlivened with each new project.

Twenty is the maximum grade that a student in Peru can achieve. Pepe Corzo always strives – like a diligent student – to attain that mark of twenty, whether it be for an initial presentation of ideas and

sketches or for the final result when staging a new show. He is indeed an assiduous student. I believe that success and the recognition he receives from each project is largely due to this. The combination of talent and dedication is a hallmark of Pepe Corzo's designs. Whenever he receives the call for a new show, he immediately delves into all the information he can find that can aid him in the creative process. It is not about a search for information on a superficial level. He probes, he reads, travels, visits and enquires, he questions, searches, studies and designs. Corzo doesn't stop at merely reading the text, at listening to the music. He really does immerse himself in the world to which the story belongs and his mind travels to the time period in which it was created, to the place in which the story unfolds. In much the same way, he devotes time to seeking all those references that are of interest to the director that hires him.

More than one director or producer has remained surprised at his presentations during the initial meeting to brainstorm ideas. He may even turn up dressed in a prototype of one of his ideas and surprise everyone at the table as an inventor of a world that he has begun to create, into which are gradually drawn all those who are involved in the project as if they were accomplices. Pepe Corzo scores a clear twenty. He works for this.

His professional life began in fashion design in the mid-eighties. His first collections won awards and even represented design in his country in various parts of the planet. "My work as a fashion designer was highly experimental. I soon realized that, rather than fashion, I was really cut out for design for live performance," he recalls.

Those beginnings were undoubtedly the prophetic prelude to his future calling as a costume designer, scenographer and art director. His travels have always been a constant in Corzo's professional life. There are those who think that he lives in Lima and that he travels a great deal, and there are those who suppose that he has moved to Madrid and that he returns home from time to time. I think that Pepe resides in both places; he lives in his studios and workshops, wherever he needs to work on a project. He is pretty close to ubiquity, given his ability to shift from one place to the next, to make his debut and capitalize on the accolade, to teleport to a meeting on a new project on the other side of the ocean. The teleporting is not a gratuitous reference: Pepe possesses a toy robot in a privileged spot in his studio-workshop. His inner child dreams up strange worlds, places in which to live adventures, where imagination takes on a credible form and where as mere mortals ensconced in our theatre seats we allow ourselves to be seduced by his creative invention. One needs to be a bit of a child to play and a great deal of an adult in order to do this kind of work. Corzo's maturity in his chosen profession is evident in a boundless career on the rise comprising dance, theatre, zarzuela, opera, musical, multidisciplinary events, exhibitions and a long *et cetera* with the ken to draw upon his innate talent.

In the early 1990s, Grupo Uno, the Lima-based dance company hired Pepe Corzo for his first stage project: *Crónicas Imakinarias* (1992), to design the costumes for a new production, the first of almost a hundred or so shows in his portfolio. He then worked with a number of leading Peruvian theatre directors who recognized that his special talent would contribute greatly to that which they had in mind: Ruth Escudero, Edgar Saba and Jorge Guerra. "With Jorge it's a fascinating experience, a challenge, he's a director that surprises you and encourages you to surprise him in turn," and Rocio Tovar, with whom there exists a close friendship, "Rocio understands me better than I can myself. From that early period in Lima a number of theatre productions stand out: *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Ruth Escudero), *La vida es sueño*, *King Lear*, *Las tres hermanas*, *Waiting for Godot* and *El otro lugar* (Edgar Saba), *Fausto*, *Don Juan vuelve de la guerra* and *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (Jorge Guerra), *Pataclau* (July Naters), *Antígona* (Miguel Rubio), *Perú JaJa*, *Muérete cupido*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Chaska y Puro Cuento* (Rocío Tovar). Titles to which should be added collaborations with choreographers and dance companies such as the above-mentioned Grupo Uno, Integro, Karin Elmore, Danza Viva and Morella Petrozzi. Corzo's fascination with dance, for the movement of the bodies that give life to the costumes, was to have new outlets in which to develop.

A later encounter with Spaniards Juan Sanz and Miguel Angel Coso, partners in Antigua Escena, during an intensive workshop which took place in Lima in 2000, led to his first collaboration with them in Madrid: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (2000), directed by Cecilia Rota. Sanz and Coso, generous mentors, found in this Peruvian not only a smart pupil, but also an ideal accomplice with whom to embark on new adventures. They brought Pepe to Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid and together with him formed a team that has worked on several shows, such as *El rey que rabiò*, directed by Luis Olmos, and *Fiesta barroca en el Madrid de los Asturias* (2017), for which they were hired for the celebrations marking the quatercentenary of the Plaza Mayor in Madrid.

The huge success of the staging in Spain of *El rey que rabiò* in turn led to a series of projects, some of particular note: *La paz universal* (2008) a baroque opera for the Festival de Música Religiosa de Cuenca and the Festival de Teatro Clásico de Almagro, directed by Juan Sanz; *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (2009), directed by Mario Pontiggia for Ópera de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria; *Celebración* (2010), directed by Carlos Fernández de Castro for the Centro Dramático Nacional; *The Rake's Progress* (2015) for Teatro Nacional de São Carlos in Lisbon, directed by Rui Horta, and productions for Teatro de la Zarzuela, such as *Marina* (2013), directed by Ignacio García; *Black el payaso / I Pagliacci* (2014), a double bill also directed by García; *Trilogía de los fundadores* (2014), directed by Álvaro del Amo, and *Pinocchio* (2016), directed by Guillermo Amaya, among other titles.

One noteworthy figure from Pepe Corzo's experience in Spain, specifically at Teatro de la Zarzuela, is that of Margarita Jiménez, head of production of the nation's lyric theatre. "Marga is the personification of the type of producer that recognizes and believes in your work, who waits to understand how your talent can enrich a production." This is how a stranger in a strange land gets ahead, with toil and talent combined with the largesse and vision of those who accept him and call him up.

Whilst nothing stops us seeing Corzo's productions staged in Lima, dedicated to scenic arts in Europe and to advertising art direction in Peru, a fresh opportunity presented itself in Lima, for his country the ideal place in which to exploit his talents in the best conditions. In 2012, he began his tenure at the Gran Teatro Nacional de Lima, a venue with the ideal conditions in which to stage the world's most remarkable shows on the playbill in the Peruvian capital, but also to showcase the best of the nation's talent in conditions never before seen. People assumed that in our country there weren't any professionals qualified to cover any managerial or creative incumbency; a mistaken belief, because the talent is there and with the same level of expertise as Corzo. He was nominated Director of this our first national venue, and prior to the consultation on which international talent to consider ideal to take the helm for a new production for the National Choir opera season, I didn't hesitate to put forward Pepe Corzo, our international designer, given his wealth of experience. He was the ideal person to integrate the first creative teams that we were forming. "Working at the Gran Teatro Nacional was the opportunity to work in a super-robot," recalls Corzo, again referring to those futurist worlds and to the possibilities that technical resources can offer an artistic director. The title in question was *The Magic Flute* (2014), with Brazilian director, Walter Neiva; the outcome superb, as Corzo once again worked his magic in Peru, in the best scenario possible. Then followed the operas *Carmen* (2015), also directed by Neiva, the ballet *Alice in Wonderland* (2016), choreographed by Humberto Canessa for the Ballet Nacional, and the *Gala de Navidad* for Elenco Nacional de Folclore. Corzo knows how to navigate the seas of the most diverse genres, whether it be reaffirming his identity or creating new universes.

Each scenic adventure has contributed to the professional development of the one whom we have come to know as artistic director.

Corzo has never ceased to be a costume designer, but he has simply added to this skillset that of scenographer and all-round creator coupled with his ability to strike a balance in the dialogue between costumes, sets and audiovisuals, thus truly earning the title of art director.

Pepe also has a human side to his character that makes working with him so special. He spreads sunshine in his wake. Happiness – even if this may sound simplistic. In his work he is as happy as a child that has been given a brand new set of coloured pencils, he is in a state of play with his new friends; wherever he works he hands out coloured paper and scissors so that everyone can join in the fun. He is able to suffuse his creative team with enthusiasm and a sense of complicity on the few occasions that I have been able to witness. Yet Corzo transmits a sense of calm, like the child who tells you that everything will turn out fine because he possesses a machine invented by him that has unique powers. The child in him together takes up the challenge with the mature adult – the self-taught art director and they work tirelessly in tandem to find a solution. Corzo beams smiles and professionalism, he is a master at this, in this creative environment, just as he is in human relationships, something that in the present-day is greatly appreciated.

Pepe Corzo doesn't stop at stage productions. He is also, as we have said, a well-known art director in producing television advertising, a parallel career that he actively maintains, fully conversant with current trends and new technologies. The state-of-the-art resources employed in communications are cleverly incorporated by Corzo into his theatre projects. Directing mega-events is another activity that enthuses the designer turned art director; the chance to give free rein to his imagination generates opportunities that he does not let slip. In all this fusion of work, of combined creative experience, he harvests information. Like an alien or a humanoid from science fiction who accumulates imagery, stories, information he then converts this material into future projects that are at times strange in origin, but with his creative ability he succeeds in integrating all this naturally, with total ease. Corzo is capable of directing an event for an international summit of leaders, shooting a spot in a river deep in the Amazonian forest or staging a baroque opera in Spain. All so different, just as Corzo himself is. Where does he see the connection between one and the other? Springing from that same notebook of snow-white pages this undoubtedly gives them a common unifying thread. A notebook that he fills with creativity, intuition, research, experience and systematic hard work.

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