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## *Ay, Carmela!*

An elegy of a civil war in two acts and an epilogue

by

José Sanchis Sinisterra

Translated by

Nilo Cruz and Catalina Botello

A theatrical tour-de-force of heartbreaking poignancy and dark hilarity, *Ay, Carmela!* is one of the Spanish-speaking world's most spectacular successes of the past twenty years. This remarkable award-winning play has been produced in eleven countries, translated into seven languages and in 1990 became a film directed by Carlos Saura. Presented in a startling new English language version, this production is directed by the acclaimed Scottish theatre director Gerry Mulgrew.

**The opening of *Ay, Carmela!* by José Sanchis Sinisterra in Zaragoza in 1987, marked the beginning of one of the most spectacular successes in Spain both with critics and audiences alike of the last twenty years. It has been produced in Madrid, Valencia, Bilbao, San Sebastián and Barcelona where it won the Barcelona Theatre Critics Award. In 1988 it opened at the Latin American Theatre Festival Bogotá, and the International Theatre Festival Caracas, again a huge success at**

both festivals. Since then it has been produced in Lima, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Costa Rica, Havana, Santiago de Chile, Rio de Janeiro, Florence, Paris, Greece, Italy, Sarajevo and Berlin, where it was produced by The Berliner Ensemble, directed by Alejandro Quintana. The play has been translated into German, French, Greek, Swedish, Italian, Turkish, Hebrew, Serbo-Croatian and English.

In March 1990 the film version of *Ay, Carmela!* premiered in Madrid with a script by Rafael Ascot, directed by Carlos Saura. The actors were Carmen Maura and Andrés Pajares. In the same year Sinisterra won the National Theatre Prize.

## **THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR 1936 - 1939**

In November 1996 four hundred men and women all in their eighties and nineties, gathered in a ceremony near to Madrid to pay homage to friends and comrades who

had died fighting in the Spanish Civil War. These were the surviving members of the International Brigades, volunteers from around the world who had gone to Spain to fight for the Republic against fascism.

Spain in the 1930's was riven with inequalities. The Republic that had replaced the monarchy in 1931 was a fragile affair, caught between the intransigent elite of Church, Army and Landowners, and a desperate agrarian working class who were depending on the new Republic to alleviate their suffering. Attempts by the new government to tread a path between the two opposing forces only really succeeded in infuriating one and disappointing the other. Thus, the years between 1931 and the republican collapse in 1936 were marked by continual outbreaks of political violence and increasing polarisation between an uneasy alliance of socialists, communists and anarchists on one side and fascists, monarchists, conservatives and Catholics on the other.

The elections of 1936 were won by a small margin by the Popular Front, a collection of left wing parties, though the ensuing government did not include either Anarchists or Communists. The level of political violence increased further and rumours of coups and revolutions were rife. Following the killing of a prominent Rightist Politician, few can have been surprised by the military rising, which began in Morocco on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1936.

Quickly assisted by Germany and Italy General Franco was able to fly the Army of Africa from Morocco into mainland Spain. They rapidly swept north towards the capital of Madrid unleashing a wave of terror on any they considered to be enemies. The poet Federico Garcia Lorca, was one such victim.

By November 1936 the Rebels had reached Madrid's outskirts, but here they were held - by the people of Madrid and by a new force for the republic; a legion of foreign volunteers, the first of the International Brigades.

Between 1936 and 1939 over 35,000 people from some 53 nations left their homes to join the Republican forces. A large number came from Germany and Italy; countries who had experienced fascism first-hand. This influx of volunteers into Spain came

despite twenty eight countries signing the non-intervention treaty, initially proposed by France, championed by Britain and blatantly ignored by Russia, Italy and Germany.

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