

Croatia - Chile

# "THE RAIN OF POEMS" OVER DUBROVNIK

A hundred thousand poems rained on Dubrovnik that night, from a helicopter that circled over town

Last spring in Chilean Embassy in Zagreb I found out about an interesting project. Casa Grande, a group of young Chilean poets, decided to come to Dubrovnik and "bomb" it with poems. Verses of 35 poets - all under 35 years of age - needed to be translated into Croatian. Then, the same number of Croatian poets needed to be found and their poems translated to Spanish. The idea was to bury Dubrovnik under verses printed on bookmarkers. And it happened on August 2002.

Let us say a few words about the organisers of this project. Julio Carrasco, José Joaquín Prieto and Cristóbal Bianchi are the poets gathered under the name Casa Grande. During four years they have organised several interesting projects in Santiago de Chile. They have also published eight issues of the group's magazine. This is an urban magazine, dedicated to art and culture, financed by the incomes from their projects, and published in 500 copies. For the purposes of one of their projects they had enlarged pages of the eight issue of their magazine on the 3.30 x 1.80 meters format and spread it all over the underground stations in the Chilean capital. They have also organised poetry evenings in front of Pablo Neruda's house. They always chose important places in the city to realise their ideas - underground, city ports, main squares - thus they become like a thread binding all citizens, creating new ways of communication in this alienating society. They have drawn special attention of the public on March 23rd, 2001 when they "bombed" presidential palace La Moneda with poems of young Chilean poets printed on leaflets. Several thousand people gathered on that occasion, and this "bombing" of the palace with

verses (instead of with bombs, like in 1973), had a very good response in Chilean public. That was the first part of the project, later to include Dresden, Guernica, Nagasaki and - Dubrovnik.

When they asked me to translate poems of young Chilean authors to Croatian, I accepted gladly and, together with my colleague Jordan Jelić started in an interesting adventure (translations haven't been published yet). However, 35 poems by Croatian authors under the 35 years of age needed to be selected, and I, myself could only find just a handful of them. Problem was solved when I was directed to a particular issue of Quorum magazine, where Branko Čengec and Miroslav Mićanović have published a panorama entitled Passion of diversity, dark sound of emptiness, Croatian poetry of the eighties and the nineties (5/6, 1995) (Strast razlike, tamni prizvuk praznine, hrvatsko pjesništvo 80-ih i 90-ih). I have selected poems from that collection, and Casa Grande entrusted translations to professor Andrija Rajević.\*

Project was realised on August 12th, 2002 in the middle of the tourist season, thanks also to kindness and understanding of Dubrovnik local authorities (especially to the Mayor Dubravka Šuica) and the Organisational board of Dubrovnik Summer Festival. A hundred thousand poems rained on Dubrovnik that night, from a helicopter that circled over town. It rained over the Old Town - main street Stradun, illuminated walls of the town, narrow alleys and the Saint Blaise church. Whole Dubrovnik was looking towards the sky, and children were running to collect as many bookmarkers as they could. More than two thousand people read poems by Croatian and Chilean poets. There was delight and happiness, and not without a

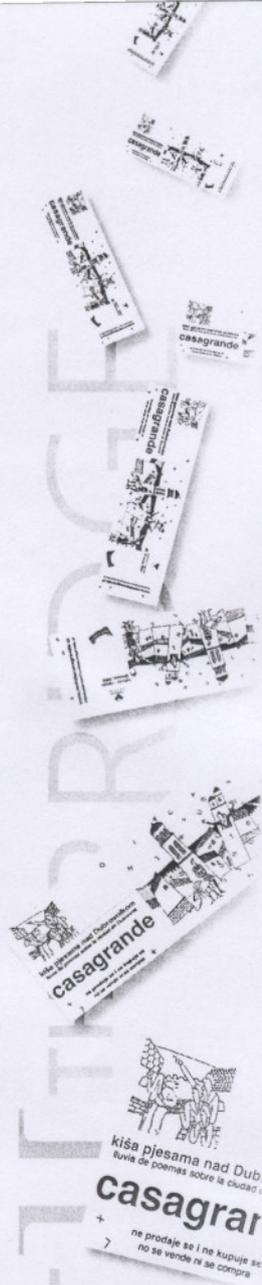
reason. On the town on which, not so long ago, bombs use to fall, bringing death and sorrow, now it rained verses dedicated to the joy of life.

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With summer long gone, "rain of poems" over Dubrovnik fades away in the memory. In Santiago they are still watching footages recorded by Francisco Vargas, cameraman who accompanied Casa Grande group during their staying in Dubrovnik, and here in Zagreb, we are remembering the project that united Croatia and Chile with poetry. This far away South American country, celebrated by Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, is also known for the fact that it received a large number of Croatian emigrants. It is said, not without reason, that the entire island of Brač has moved to Chile. Today Chileans of Croatian origin belong to all classes of Chilean society, taking some respectable positions in the society. Let me mention some of them - Andrés Morales Milohnic, poet and university professor; Ramón Díaz Eterovic and Nicolás Gligo, writers; Domingo Mihovilovic Tessier, dramatist and actor; Lily Garafulic, sculptor; Carlos Mladinic, member of Parliament and former Minister; Baldo Prokurica, member of Parliament; Esteban Tomic, son of the presidential candidate Radomir Tomic, today Ambassador of the Republic of Chile in the Organisation of American States, and others. In Chile and other South American countries I also had the opportunity to meet and socialise with many of Croatian descendants, and partially thanks to them and their interest in the country of their origin, I decided to translate works of Chilean authors to Croatian. I also believe that Croatian literature should be presented to a greater extent in the Spanish speaking countries.

This project of Chilean group of poets could be the first in a series of such joint endeavours. Young Chilean poets managed to engage in their project the two Embassies - Chilean in Zagreb, and Croatian in Santiago, along with Dubrovnik local authorities, Karlovac Brewery and other institutions. This joint project, among other things, is a proof that Chile and Croatia, although geographically far away, are by the warmth and friendship of their people actually very close.

|| Željka Lovrenčić



\* These poems are published in the current issue (*Poetas a Dubrovnik 2002*)