

THE *FLOR Y CANTO* AND *CANTO AL PUEBLO* FESTIVALS*

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Concomitant to the development of new creative Chicano expression is the creation of national art and literature festivals entitled *Flor Y Canto* and *Canto Al Pueblo*.ⁱ The organizational beginnings take place at USC, under the auspices of the Chicano Studies Center during the Fall, 1973. Here a small cadre of Chicano writers plan and organize what will later be a broader more purposeful national festival. Still from this beginning, the first *Flor Y Canto* anthology of Chicano literature was published. The objectives were established in the first meeting: (1) to provide a national forum for all Chicano writers, affording equal time to all participants, (2) to create an atmosphere conducive to creative exchange as well as a critical environment for growth and development and (3) to promote the appreciation of Chicano literature extending it to the people of the community.ⁱⁱ It was with these objectives that the *Festival Floricanto II* was organized in Austin, Texas under the auspices of the Center for Mexican American Studies in 1975. Here, a number of important questions were raised regarding Chicano literature, the movement and the publishers. Since 1975 a third festival was organized in San Antonio, a fourth in New Mexico and a fifth in Arizona. The continuation of these cultural-literary festivals is seen in the birth of *Canto Al Pueblo* in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1977.

The creation of the new label, *Canto Al Pueblo*, had political and organizational implications. *Canto Al Pueblo* was both the continuation and the beginning of a new cultural-literary festival. It promoted dialogue and creativity as experienced with *Flor Y Canto* with the old constituency gaining new membership nationally. It retained the concept of *Canto* denoting creative expression and connoting the search for truth regarding the Chicano condition. The inclusion of the word *Pueblo* meaning "people" has political implications. It is an attempt to bring back the focus on the socio-political arena as opposed to purely aesthetic art for art's sake orientation. This concept and name properly belongs to Ricardo Sánchez who clearly saw the *Flor Y Canto* falling away from political consciousness. Originally, the idea of creating a national festival was discussed and planned on January 5, 1977 in the first meeting between Ricardo Sánchez and then Director of the Spanish-Speaking Outreach Institute of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Arnaldo Carlos Vento. At a later date a third figure, Reimundo Tigre Pérez will figure in the organizing of the *Canto Al Pueblo*.ⁱⁱⁱ The central focus was to be at the level of the worker and the community, to become the *pueblo*:

"No nos creemos capataces o dioses o sacerdotes. Somos gente que trabajamos con la cultura con el arte, para desarrollar pensamientos y presentárselos a la gente. Si lo quieren aceptar, bueno y si no, es cosa del pueblo."^{iv}

Canto Al Pueblo was not exclusively for Chicanos; its scope was pluralistic; the first *Canto Al Pueblo* included Puerto Rican artists and poets, Black, white and Native

American representatives. Beyond poetry, and critical literature, it featured muralism, theatre and musical groups, all with socio-political messages.

As a result of the first *Canto Al Pueblo*, held in Milwaukee April 29-May 8, 1977, a special issue of *Grito del Sol* was issued featuring the artists and writers of *Canto* and before the first national festival was over, the second *Canto Al Pueblo* was destined for Corpus Christi, Texas.^v *Canto* III originally scheduled for Pueblo, Colorado, was unfortunately canceled due to unforeseen conflicts;^{vi} however, a Midwest *Canto Al Pueblo* was created in St. Paul, Minnesota, bringing new life to its forgotten Chicano/Latino *barrio*. Documentation of this event was covered by *Nosotros* and a Minneapolis/St. Paul television station.^{vii} The fourth and final *Canto* (and perhaps the most integrated with Native Americans) was *Canto Al Pueblo IV* (1980) in Tempe, Arizona. While the Native-American element had been a part of all the *Cantos*, it is not until *Canto IV* that we have Native American representation in full force. Tribal representation was national: the Mohawk Nation (Mad Bear); the Lakota Nation (Leonard Crow Dog), the Pima Nation (Walking Beaver), Hopi, Navajo, Apache (Phillip Cazador). Moreover, Mexico (*Flakaelel Jiménez*), Central America and El Salvador (María E Angila Castro) are further represented. Here, the Chicano and brothers from the South will share in the sacred Native American rituals at the Fort McDowell Reservation. As noted in former *Cantos*, an anthology is published and coverage of the *Canto Al Pueblo IV* will extend to Europe as German visiting lecturer (U.T.-Austin) Frank Geerk publishes an anthology entitled, *Poesie Zeitzshrig für Literature* and an article in *Basler Magazin*.

1980 marks the end of the *Canto Al Pueblo* but it is also a marker for the beginning of a decade of conservatism in the United States with the Reagan-Bush administrations. As a consequence, Chicano Studies programs throughout the nation suffered from funding cutbacks if not total elimination. Funding sources for minority aesthetic festivals are to be severely reduced but the spirit and work of cultural artists continue in the respective Chicano/Latino populations in the United States. It marks the end of an era of great aesthetic productivity in the arts and literature; it provided a forum by which young writers and artists could develop. Moreover, it not only continued and contributed to the Chicano/Latino Movement, but created future literary, artistic and academic leaders: Dr. Ricardo Sánchez, Dr. Arnoldo Carlos Vento, Dr. Alberto Urista (Alurista), Dr. Tino Villanueva, José Burciaga, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Inés Hernández Tovar, Zarco Guerrero, Nephtalí Deleón, Tigre Pérez, Mario Acevedo Torero, Carlos Rosas, among others. We note, moreover, in the early *Flor Y Cantos*, the collaboration of Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Ron Arias, Luis Valdéz, Américo Paredes, Juan Gómez Quiñones, Bernice Zamora, José Flores Peregrino, Carmen Tafolla, Sergio Elizondo, Francisco Lomelí, Frank Pino, Raul Salinas, Luis Omar Salinas, Miguel Méndez and Gustavo Segade.

In the end, the *Canto's* philosophical objectives went beyond artistic and literary productivity; it was a movement away from Western philosophy and dominant United States culture. Poetry in the seventies was represented by the powerful protest verse of Ricardo Sánchez, the Pre-Columbian image and concept of Alurista, the peoples poetry of Abelardo, the *cholo* poetry of José Montoya and the *barrio* experience of Raul Salinas. Others instrumental in the movement were Reimundo Tigre Pérez, Tino Villanueva, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Evangelina Vigil, José Burciaga, Angela de Hoyos and Bernice

Zamora. Beyond the Cantos, in the eighties Pat Mora and Alma Villanueva voice the Chicana's soul while Gary Soto moves the political protest poetry to a more academic form while Jim Sagel retains the folkways of the small town *manito* of northern New Mexico. Of all the *movimiento* poets, Ricardo Sánchez stands out as the forerunner of Chicano protest poetry of the late XX century. His *Canto y Grito mi liberación* set the tone for the Chicano poetic movement in the beginning of the seventies.

Part of Chapter VII, Arnoldo Carlos Vento, *Mestizo: The History, Culture and Politics of the Chicano and Mexican* (Lanham: Unersivity Press of America, 1997) 237-242.
