

# LAS Noticias

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## 'A Single Numberless Death' Premieres

by Roger Ellis (SOC)

A gripping drama, "A Single Numberless Death" probes the atrocities suffered in the 1970s by thousands at the hands of the Argentine military government.

Based on the memoir of Nora Strejilevich, a former Grand Valley State University Spanish professor, the play recounts Strejilevich's experiences in Argentina in the late 70s when she and her brother Gerardo were captured by the junta's secret police.

Nora was released only to be rearrested. Incarcerated in a special prison for political prisoners, she was tortured by electric cattle prod and raped by her torturers. Released a second time months later, she fled Argentina and has lived abroad ever since. Nora has never located her brother.

Like many more arrested in Argentina's decade-long "Dirty War," Gerardo is among the thousands "disappeared" by the military during its reign of terror. The play provides a brief history of this disturbing period in Argentina's past.

Along with Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay, Argentina experienced a prolonged period of civil war brought on by a combination of internal political conflicts and Cold War tensions. To maintain control, some Latin American governments developed a national security code of intimidation. Nora and her brother fell victim to this brutal code.

Playwright Bob Mayberry, a founding member of GVSU's Writing Department, adapted the memoir for the stage. The play makes its world debut

Friday, November 9 as part of Grand Valley's international "Beyond Boal" conference (see below).

Strejilevich's experience as an actress prompted her to adapt the memoir and when she shared the book with Mayberry, he took an interest in the project.

"I was moved by her story, by the lyric



quality of her language, and by the unspeakable horror of her experiences," says Mayberry. His enthusiasm for the memoir and its real world themes led him to work with Strejilevich in drafting script after script until they discovered theatrical techniques capable of depicting the violence of being

"disappeared" without driving audiences from the theater.

The device that worked best was to present the violence abstractly. All stage violence is artificial, even the simplest slap is an optical illusion. Actors create the illusion of violence through precise choreography, and the audience participates in the pretense by suspending disbelief. "I wanted to make the illusion transparent, remind the audience of the artifice, and invite them to consider how truly brutal electrocution and rape are," says Mayberry. "So brutal, they cannot be dramatized."

In Scene 7, for example, the torture is not enacted but recalled by the actors. In another scene, the cattle prods utilized to electrocute victims are used as props in a grotesque dance around an empty chair, a ritualization of violence. But they're never realistically employed onstage, never used as they were historically, on Nora and countless others.

Mayberry's intent in adapting the play was not to recreate a realistic torture scene but to dramatize the effects of torture on the characters and, by extension, on Argentina itself.

## Beyond Boal

by Karen Libravit (SOC)

Caribbean and Latin American theatre traditions get a boost as Grand Valley hosts the international conference, "Beyond Boal: Art and Community Development Theatre for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" on the weekend of November 9.