

Mexicans don't have a word for "teenager." They say jovenes for "young people," but that can mean anyone up to about thirty. The clinical term adolescente doesn't begin to describe the volatile "teenage" phenomenon that is so worshipped, pampered, feared, and despised in the United States.

To sustain the cadre of creative, self-absorbed, insouciant revelers we call "teenagers," a country must be rich enough not only to let young people slack off between childhood and work, but must also provide them prodigious amounts of pocket money. Even the United States couldn't do this on a grand scale until the post-war boom of the fifties and sixties. To the extent Mexico was ever able, it was during a brief window of prosperity in the early 1990s. Mexico began experimenting then with teenage culture, and the name of that experiment was Gloria Trevi.

Gloria Trevi was Mexico's first public teenager -- defiant, moody, confused, and powerfully sexual -- much the way James Dean was for the United States in the fifties. Trevi was primarily a pop star, singing of free love and insubordination in a way no Mexican ever had. But she also made movies about youthful rebellion and was given to brash public pronouncements on everything from abortion to the Zapatistas. She was even taken quasi-seriously as a potential presidential candidate. For a time, Gloria Trevi was Mexico's most exciting social critic.

Now, though, she's Mexico's most exciting fugitive. Because -- as her conservative critics predicted -- her uppity lyrics and bold sexuality seem to have led her to perdition. Under a cloud of appalling scandal, Trevi and her Svengali manager have disappeared, leaving Mexico's experiment with teenage culture suspended in awkward limbo.



Even before the 1990s, Gloria Trevi lived more like an American teenager than most Mexicans did. Born Gloria de los Angeles Treviño Ruiz in Monterrey on February 15, 1970, she was the first daughter of a comfortably well-off architect. Many Mexican children quit school after sixth grade to work; Trevi didn't even need an after-school job. She went to piano lessons and acting class after school, much like a middle-class American teen. Divorce is rare in this overwhelmingly Catholic country, but Trevi's parents split up when she was ten, adding a brushstroke of American-style angst to her cosmopolitan canvas.¹ The Monterrey angle is also significant. This sprawling clone of Houston, just 130 miles south of the border, is the most "American" of Mexican cities, both in the number of U.S. companies operating here and in its crass, strip-developed architectural vision. If you're going to learn to be a teenager anywhere in Mexico, Monterrey is a likely place.

Always theatrical and dreaming of stardom, Trevi – then still Treviño – won a national performance contest at thirteen and got her first taste of the Mexico City showbiz scene. She loved it. When her mother told her to come home, she refused, and blew off the rest of secondary school to keep auditioning for bands. Although a childhood friend says she lived with an uncle, Trevi has made much of those early years "on the street" in Mexico City. She says she sold

Unless otherwise noted, none of those below speak English.

¹ Details of her early life come from an interview with Hugo Gonzalez on 29 August 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-8-386 19 69.

chewing gum, sang in the subways, and begged tacos from street vendors. What is certain is that she banged on a lot of doors and at fifteen one of her mass auditions paid off. In 1985, Trevi became one of the original members of an all-girl, teen pop band, Boquitas Pintadas, or Little Painted Mouths.

Gloria Trevi is, as she likes to say, “an eyeball taco,” with a beauty that is distinctly Mexican. In this racially complicated country, the tone of Trevi’s skin hits all the right cues for pop stardom. It is a dusky shade closer to European white than to indigenous dark, placing her recognizably in Mexico’s upper-middle class – high enough on the caste ladder to be appealing without being so white that she seems inaccessible or foreign. Her smile is broad and luscious, her dark eyes and heavy brows telegenically wide-spaced. Her body – about which it’s fair to comment since she has drawn so much attention to it with a series of semi-nude calendars– is exaggeratedly curvaceous, ballooning in every direction like that of a cartoon Playboy bunny. North of the border, she’d appear softer and heavier of leg than the rosy American ideal, but on her home turf she’s considered lip-smackingly perfect.

Trevi was just a back-up singer in Little Painted Mouths, playing a pink plastic harmonium built into the shape of an electric guitar. But the band’s marshmallow music wasn’t the point. The point was that Little Painted Mouths was created by Sergio Andrade Sánchez.

Andrade was to Mexican pop in the eighties what Phil Spector was to American pop in the sixties. He is described by associates as “a son of 1968,” meaning his heart remains attuned to the student struggles of those tumultuous days. A short, heavily built young man with tight curly hair, Andrade was in the sixties a hard-working, brave, crazy guy with the soul of a rock-and-roller and a

passion for the writings of Gabriel García Marquez. But when the movement was crushed, he poured his musical talent instead into the kind of commercial, romantic sob songs Mexicans adore. In the seventies, Andrade became a jack of all trades in the Mexico City pop industry – songwriter, studio musician, and engineer. In the early eighties he broke out of the pack, writing the prizewinning ballad, “Suavemente” (“Softly”) for the blind singer, Crystal, and leveraging that fame to become a producer of singing acts. Crystal went with him, and then he signed up Lorena Herrera, another fabulously popular singer. Andrade took to driving a long black Lincoln, but dressing in the disheveled fashion of the old hippie some say he felt himself to be. He quickly displayed a rare genius for picking and cultivating winners. In addition to his headliner acts, he produced dozens of small-time bands to cultivate future stars and keep the cash flowing. These bands, like Little Painted Mouths, typically cut a record, performed once or twice on television, and then disappeared, to be replaced by the next Andrade band in the pipeline. Every now and then, though, they’d cough up a diamond. Trevi was one, though Andrade didn’t know it at the time. Little Painted Mouths had its fifteen minutes of fame and dissolved.



To understand Andrade’s power – and its limitations – it’s worth taking a look at the monopolistic nature of Mexican pop. Anyone lamenting the homogenized, corporate-controlled nature of American music need only look south to see how good the U.S. has it. Mexican mass culture is thoroughly

dominated by one company, Televisa, which has a 95-percent audience share of Mexico's TV-watching public and also reaches almost everybody in the country daily with its myriad radio stations, newspapers, and magazines.² The Azcarraga family, which owns Televisa, is a pillar of the political party that has ruled Mexico for more than seventy years; for all intents and purposes, the interests of Televisa and the state are one. "Imagine if CBS, NBC, and ABC were all departments of the FBI," says Mexico City journalist Claudia Fernandez Cardenas, who is writing a book about the Azcarragas. "That's Televisa."³

The Azcarragas, Fernandez says, use their network to promote a vision of Mexico where everybody is white, Catholic, virginal until marriage, and respectful of social order – a "family values" agenda that puts Dan Quayle to shame. Overwrought soap operas run nonstop from four in the afternoon to eleven at night six days a week, featuring people who look more Scandinavian than latinoamericano, and invariably climaxing with that highest possible moment in a woman's life: a wedding. Televisa's only competition is the other, much smaller, national media network, TV Azteca. But TV Azteca is, as Mexico City artist and critic Felipe Ehrenberg Enriquez puts it, "the fourth stomach of the cow," churning out bland formulas that Televisa has already created and digested.⁴ The uniformity of Mexican mass media is seamless.

In such a climate, Mexican popular music has never been permitted to evolve organically. Rather, it is manufactured and marketed like floor wax.

When Televisa's acting school produces a starlet for a Televisa TV show,

² Oppenheimer, Andres, Bordering on Chaos, Little, Brown & Co., New York, 1996, page 128, and interview with Claudia Fernandez Cardenas on 2 September 1999. She can be reached at 011-52-5-514-4683 and speaks excellent English.

³ Interview with Claudia Fernandez Cardenas on 2 September 1999.

Televisa's record label, Phonovisa, cuts the starlet an album which is then played endlessly on Televisa radio stations and hyped in Televisa magazines. Nine months later, typically, that starlet is gone as though she never existed and the next one has taken her place. Year in, year out, Mexican pop songs are identically insipid and romantic, and those who sing them interchangeably blond and immaculate. Few last more than a couple of years, and Sergio Andrade was one of half a dozen producers who routinely fed young starlets into the Televisa-dominated machine. It was a role never entirely satisfying for a "son of 1968."

But as for genuine rock and roll, forget it. Mexico's rock scene is huge, but invisible. Every Saturday morning in Mexico City thousands of people in leather jackets and black lipstick converge on an outdoor market devoted entirely to rock music. They swap homemade cassettes from an astounding number of local bands. But because it doesn't fit the family-values image exalted by the Televisa-dominated media, this entire rockero culture is almost completely absent from the radio and record stores. Well into the eighties, rock was virtually banned by the government. "Rockeros were associated with drugs, delinquency, violence, and rebellion," says Jairo Calixto Albarran, who writes about music for the Mexico City daily Excelsior. "You'd get ten kids together to hear a band and the police would show up."⁵ The country didn't see its first real rock concert until Rod Stewart came to Queretaro in 1988. Rock existed only in tiny, windowless clubs called "funky dives," where sweat rolled off the walls and the amplifiers

⁴ Interview with Felipe Ehrenberg Enriquez on 3 September 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-5-32-64-87 and speaks excellent English.

⁵ Interview with Jairo Calixto Albarran on 27 August 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-5-566-1561.

could peel paint. Funky dives were unmarked and tended to rove, to keep ahead of the police.

As late as 1984, there was no rock radio in Mexico. “Televisa was more committed to its vision of the world than it was to making money,” says Fernandez, the Azcarragas’ biographer. “After all, it already had a virtual monopoly.” Rock records weren’t imported except in peoples’ suitcases. “I remember hearing “Ghost in the Machine” by the Police in 1981 and it was like a signal from another planet,” says Luís Salas García, who in 1984 – at age 22 -- started Mexico’s first rock station and became the first to play the likes of REM, U2, and the Clash on the air. Like a lot of music enthusiasts, Salas was embarrassed by Mexico’s failure to cultivate its own rock scene. Spain, Argentina, and Puerto Rico all fielded Spanish-language rock bands that were hugely popular in Mexico and elsewhere. The most populous Spanish-speaking nation in the world was the great vacuum in Hispanic rock, and Salas tried to remedy that with a new station devoted entirely to Mexican rockeros. It failed within three years.

“It wasn’t the government that shut us down, it was the rockeros,” Salas says. “Except for a couple of bands, the rockeros withdrew.” A handful of Mexican rock bands have made it big in the Spanish-speaking world – Titan, El Tri, Los Jaguares, and Three Souls in My Mind are the four everybody mentions. “But El Tri are grandfathers,” grumbles Salas. “Young people want something new, and there’s nothing.” The reason, he says, is that even though the official hostility has ended, rockeros actually prefer to remain marginal and obscure. “It’s like, as soon as a band makes it to the radio, it loses its legitimacy,” Salas says. “They want to be off to the side, licking their wounds, enjoying their place

on the outside.” So with only a handful of exceptions, they don’t produce disks of high enough quality or free enough of obscenities to play on the air. Instead, they perform for their closed circle of fans at claustrophobic clubs like Mexico City’s Rockotitlan, one step up from a funky dive, but where the music is so good it’s hard to believe it isn’t on the radio – cross-pollinating, maturing, and influencing other types of music. The result of the rockeros’ bunker mentality, Salas concludes, is that “Mexican rock is not evolving. It’s stuck.”⁶

When Little Painted Mouths, predictably, disbanded within months of getting together, Andrade went off to create another clone band and Trevi went off to live with her boyfriend, a gynecologist. For the next three years, while Andrade churned out more of the same old stuff, Trevi stayed home in the kitchen, where her jealous lover thought she belonged. “I was in love once,” she later told interviewers, “and it was terrible.” In 1989, Trevi limped home to Monterrey, where she discovered a great-grandfather had left her an inheritance. She scooped it up, made an about face and showed up in Mexico City at the door of the man who had given her her first break. She told Andrade she would pay him handsomely to produce her an album.



Trevi had grown up since Little Painted Mouths. Maybe it was the years of professional frustration after her teenybopper band went nowhere, maybe it was feuding with her parents or living cooped up with a macho boyfriend, but

⁶ Interview with Luis Salas García on 2 September 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-53-27-20-14.

the Trevi who presented herself at Andrade's doorstep in 1989 had a very un-Mexican willingness to confront sex aloud. She'd tell anybody that she believed abortion should be legal in Mexico and that women should feel free to sleep with anybody they desire, and should marry only for love – outright heresies in this intensely Catholic country.

What Sergio Andrade apparently recognized in the sharp tongue and sexual combativeness of the now 19-year-old Gloria Treviño, was an opportunity to sneak some rockero sensibility past the Mexican media's ultraconservative radar and give the mainstream a naughty-but-safe taste of music's Other Side. He changed her name from Treviño to Trevi, which in Spanish suggests "insolent" or "daring," and for the cover photo of her first solo album ¿Que Hago Aqui? ("What Am I Doing Here?") dressed her in an artful combination of innocent and forbidden images: conservative hair and makeup, but wearing a black leather biker's jacket. With the mighty Andrade behind her, ¿Que Hago Aqui? got air time and Trevi signed a Televisa contract, giving the network exclusive rights to broadcast her performances.

"She definitely stood out," says Monica Frías Gil, who interviewed her on the radio early in Trevi's career. "She showed up (for the interview) without makeup, which was in itself unusual. She did something else I realized I hardly ever saw Mexican women do: she laughed out loud. She talked about sexual liberation, and used words like coger" -- fuck -- "in conversation. These weren't things you saw, especially in the prefabricated world of pop."⁷

What caught people's attention on the CD were the lyrics of the first cut, "Dr. Psychiatrist." "Just singing about a psychiatrist was somewhat daring," says

Guillermo Orozco López, a 55-year-old psychologist who has published prominently on the Trevi phenomenon and calls himself a fan. “Here in Mexico, we talk about magic and witches and sin, and take our troubles to the priest, instead of exploring the workings of the mind.”⁸ “Dr. Psychiatrist” is also full of rage against bourgeois values, predatory authorities, and high school. “The way this house is decorated makes me violent. I’m not crazy, I’m only desperate,” Trevi sang. “First they throw me out of school, then they won’t let me go. These four sad walls are prison for a girl in love.”

“It wasn’t much by the standards of the United States but it was very refreshing to us here,” Sarquiz says. “It was exciting that something -- anything -- was happening.”⁹

Mexicans, bored with corny ballads and romantic boleros, were hearing the seamy side of teenage angst sung on mainstream radio for the first time. “¿Que Hago Aquí?” the title track on the album, not only wasn’t romantic, it was anti-romantic. “At home, I can’t stop crying, my parents are at war, all they know how to do is yell. I can’t stand looking at their wedding photo; it’s like staring at a corpse.”

“Nothing that hasn’t been said before,” wrote Carlos Monsivais, Mexico’s hippest public intellectual, who for a while was a big Trevi fan. “But never has it been said from the television entertainment industry, which is so conventional and timid.”¹⁰

⁷ Interview with Monica Frías Gil on 27 August 1999. She can be reached at 011-52-55-81-10-85.

⁸ Interview with Guillermo Orozco López on 28 May 2009. He can be reached at 011-52-5-5 19 61 03.

⁹ Interview with Oscar Sarquiz Figueroa on 27 August 1999.

¹⁰ “Protagonista: Gloria Trevi” by Carlos Monsivais

Trevi isn't necessarily much of a singer. Her songs are built around choppy phrasing that lets her shout as much as sing, and she couldn't hold a long note with a pliers. But there is a passion that is undeniably exciting in the way Trevi tears rough edges on the notes, much as Janis Joplin and Pat Benatar did. Unlike everybody else on Mexican pop radio, Trevi sounded angry, and that alone made her stand out.

"She might not have been accepted earlier," says Oscar Sarquíz Figueroa, the 53-year-old dean of Mexico's rock critics. "But (in 1990), times were good. (President Carlos) Salinas (de Gortari) was encouraging Mexico to open up to the world. There was a sense of change."¹¹

Trevi has often been called "the Mexican Madonna," because both singers challenged taboos. Part of Madonna's appeal, however, is that she is a capable businesswoman very much in charge of her own career. Fed up with the comparisons, Trevi once sniffed that while "Madonna is a businesswoman, I am more sensitive."¹² Maybe it rankled because Trevi clearly never was her own boss, but rather the protégé of Sergio Andrade. He was often photographed at her side, and though in 1991 he married another singer, 15-year-old Aline Hernandez, the tabloid press soon had Andrade and Trevi down as lovers. Though Andrade rarely spoke to reporters, he was always around, guiding Trevi from the limo to the concert hall, sitting quietly apart from her at press conferences and interviews. In the liner notes of each of her CDs, Trevi lavishly thanked him as the man who made it all possible. She claims credit for writing

¹¹ Interview with Oscar Sarquíz Figueroa on 27 August 1999. He can be reached at 011-52- 55-81-10-85, and speaks English.

¹² "Machisma To The Max," by Shelley Levitt with Meg Grant in San Juan, People, 27 September, 1993.

most of her songs, but even her biggest fans concede it's likely she at least had help from Andrade. Maybe it didn't matter. Madonna, though, never leaned so heavily on a male protector.

A word about Andrade's teenage wife: while marrying an underage nymphet killed the career of Jerry Lee Lewis and would itself be a scandal in the U.S., such economically advantageous teen weddings are more common in Mexico. Andrade and the beautiful Aline, as she is known professionally, stayed married for four years, and at the time no one thought much of it. There had been murmurings since the mid-1980s that Andrade had an unhealthy appetite for underage girls, but such rumors were rife in the entertainment world. Meanwhile, if anything strange was developing between Andrade and Trevi or any of his protégés, no one particularly noticed. Maritza López, a Mexico City photographer who helped design Trevi's image and created the first Trevi calendars, later told the Mexico City daily La Jornada, "I saw between Sergio and Gloria a very healthy relationship." Andrade wasn't "jealous or frightened or belligerent" and he "let (Trevi) express herself . . . After work he would go his way and she would go hers."¹³

Together, Andrade, López, and Trevi came up with the image that would set Mexico afire. First, they dressed the singer in wacky colors, patterns over patterns, with sparkles and ribbons and sequins – a wildly overdone look that appealed tremendously to pre-teen girls. Little girls love hair, and Andrade made the most of Trevi's formidable mane by teasing it out and leaving it loose, prompting the title for one of her hit songs and her first movie, Pelo Suelto, or

¹³ "Gloria Trevi, Entre El Miedo Y El Aislamiento," by Arturo Garcia Hernandez in La Jornada, 14 February 1998

“Loose Hair.” For the kid market, Andrade also ordered up a Trevi doll, organized Trevi lookalike contests, and had Trevi draw a series of campy autobiographical comic books in her childish style.

At the same time, Andrade and López turned Trevi’s childlike image on its head by making her a sex goddess. They tore teasing holes in her stockings and Andrade had her writhe suggestively on the floor in her kiddie outfit during concerts. Her trademark performance was to drag a man from the audience during a concert, strip him to his shorts, and whip him with his own belt. Andrade and López began producing annual million-selling calendars that offered Trevi’s spectacular figure nearly nude in a series of ironic poses. In one, for example, she posed as a housewife at the stove, her nudity barely covered by an apron, a jab at Mexican men’s image of a woman’s sum-total worth. In another, she is caught playing with inflated condoms, an item about which Mexico is ambivalent at best. Yet another has her riffing on Pancho Villa with sombrero and rifle, bandoleers of cartridges crossing her bare breasts.

Simultaneously childlike and sexy: if that isn’t the essence of teenage, what is? Teenagers are at once enviable and appalling precisely because they combine the carefree irresponsibility of children with the physiology and sexual desire of adults. Parents largely spend their time torn between wanting to kill their teenage children and wanting to be them. Which is much the way Mexico responded to Trevi -- especially as Trevi produced disk after disk, each pushing back farther the limits of popular broadcast music. In “Kiss Me Here” Trevi steamily insinuates where she wants her lover’s mouth. In “Virgin of Virgins” she mocks a friend who has “done it ten times” and “told each guy he was the first.” “Pregnant Girl” tells sympathetically about the plight of one, and adds, “I

forgot my pills, I couldn't have cared less about condoms, all for feverishly wanting to get some!"¹⁴ In Mexico, unmarried girls aren't supposed to know what sex is, let alone want "to get some."

Sex wasn't Trevi's only play; she rounded the bases of youthful protest. Los Borregos" ("Sheep") compares mainstream society to a brainless herd and, with typically teenage bravado, declares a war of resistance. In "One Day More," a worker throws coffee on her good-for-nothing boss. In "Financial Collapse," "the banks only loan to millionaires." In "How Lucky That I'm Not Lady Di," Trevi rejects the princess that Mexican song has always extolled, and she even attacks the idea of beauty contests, still a sacred rite in every Mexican town.

"Even the rockeros don't talk about the stuff young people want to talk about," teen fan-club leader Erika Morin says. "Gloria always did."¹⁵ Trevi's five CD's, released from 1990 to 1995, all shot to the top of the charts as soon as they appeared. Kids nationwide started dressing like Trevi and wearing their hair loose. They packed her concerts, usually with their parents or grandparents in tow. They made her amateurish movies – one a loose autobiography, the other a comedy-drama – the biggest-grossing films in the long and distinguished career of Mexican cinema. All her albums were recorded in Los Angeles, and by the third, "Zapatos Viejos," she was attracting backup from the likes of Vinnie Calaiuta (Sting's drummer) Jimmy Johnson (Allan Hollsworth's bassist) and Jeamie Gleaser (guitarist for Jean Luc Ponte and Chic Corea). Latin audiences from Madrid to Los Angeles to Buenos Aires were flocking to see what she was about.

¹⁴ "Chica Embarazada" by Gloria Trevi. Trevi's lyrics are available at her website: www.trevi.com

¹⁵ Interview with Erika Morin on 18 September 1999. She can be reached at 011-52-5-19-7103.

When Trevi's concerts were televised in Mexico, they were national events, hyped for weeks ahead of time. More than a hundred thousand people joined Trevi fan clubs.¹⁶ Half of Mexico's population is believed to be fifteen years old or younger, and Andrade scored a bulls-eye with that vast market.

What perhaps nobody expected was that Mexico's intellectuals went gaga, too, starting with Carlos Monsivais, who was tickled to find a "serpent in the Garden of Eden, dressed in a thong."¹⁷ The painter Jose Luis Cuevas conducted a scholarly seminar on the meaning of Gloria Trevi.¹⁸ Trevi became the pop world's first emissary to Mexico City's tweedy intellectual circles. Even if Andrade was managing her every move, she clearly wasn't an empty vessel; her wit was spontaneous. "I was at a small dinner with her, Monsivais, and a couple of others," remembers the artist Felipe Ehrenberg. "Andrade wasn't there. We were talking about modern art and she said, 'I don't know much about modern art, but I guess I am modern art.' I thought that was a very smart thing to say. She knew exactly what she was doing and in what context."¹⁹ Elena Poniatowska, another bigfoot of modern Mexican letters, marveled at the nation's appetite for the diva. "Her image is like the loaves and fishes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount," wrote Poniatowska after attending a Trevi concert with her kids. "It multiplies without any explanation whatsoever."²⁰ Even Zapatista Subcommandante Marcos is said to have been smitten with Trevi and

¹⁶ Interview with Hugo Gonzalez

¹⁷ "Intrigue Swirls Around Missing Mexican Diva," by Claudia Kolker, Los Angeles Times, 27 July 1999 and

¹⁸ "Intrigue Swirls Around Missing Mexican Diva," by Claudia Kolker, Los Angeles Times, 27 July 1999

¹⁹ Interview with Felipe Ehrenberg Enriquez

²⁰ "Las Glorias de la Trevi," by Elena Poniatowska, La Jornada, 26 January 1994

to have remarked, "If she comes here, the flowers of the jungle will embrace her."²¹

Trevi became an issue unto herself. Conservatives came at her with claws extended. "Gloria Trevi is a bad example for youth," the anti-abortion organization Pro-Vida declared when her first calendar came out. "She should apologize and the authorities should prohibit her actions."²² Priests denounced her from the pulpit and the Church got the sale of the 1994 calendar forbidden in Guadalajara – the Mexican equivalent of being banned in Boston. The mainstream response to Trevi had all the features of the American Establishment pulling its beard over "Youth Culture" thirty years ago: hardly anybody interviewed on television about the Trevi phenomenon was younger than about fifty, and all discussed her in very. . . grave. . . tones.

It was Trevi's performance offstage, as much as her concerts, CDs and calendars, that made her a figure of such fascination. For she is brilliant in a TV interview – warm, sexy, open, daring, and smart. Talking on television, her eyes flashing and her lips a-sparkle, she reached millions of Mexicans who didn't see her concerts or listen to her music.

In one interview, Trevi declared that she was thinking of trying to become "la primera presidenta de Mexico." Just hearing the word for "president" used in the female form was a thrill, and people took her seriously. "Who is more in touch with the problems of this country?" Trevi demanded of an interviewer. "One of those guys who goes off to Oxford or to that University of Yale –

²¹ Interview with Jairo Calixto Albarran on 27 August 1999.

²² "Protagonista: Gloria Trevi" by Carlos Monsivais

whatever they call those things – or someone who has lived in buses, in the Metro, in the street? You know what I’m saying?”²³

She likewise castigated the American Drug Enforcement Administration for kidnapping a Mexican suspect on Mexican soil and expressed tolerance for homosexuals, who are particularly reviled in macho Mexican society. In a typical tirade on one popular talk show she defended prostitution, saying it isn’t for men to judge the severity of a woman’s circumstances and besides, it’s a woman’s right to do with her body what she chooses despite “all these male-invented values.”²⁴

“She was very expressive, contrary to the submissive Mexican woman who puts up with it, puts up with it, puts up with it,” says Guadalupe Loeaza, a feminist and member of the “Group of One Hundred” environmental activists. “Gloria never put up with it. And while it might have been contrafeminista to pose that way for men,” Loeaza continues, “in the context of her speaking out on sexual liberation for women, Gloria was saying she could do what she liked with her body, and that included showing it off.”²⁵

Trevi was Mexico’s precocious teenage daughter, saying shocking things at the national dinner table -- and doing so with such savvy, charm, and beauty that the country couldn’t bring itself to send her to her room. For one thing, there was always some truth in her outbursts. For another, Trevi never went too far. Her support of the Zapatista rebellion always included kind words as well for the soldiers of the federal army. Even in her raciest interviews Trevi was always

²³ Gloria Trevi: ¿In Excelsis? By Richard Rocca, interview of 19 September 1993

²⁴ “Intrigue Swirls Around Missing Mexican Diva,” by Claudia Kolker, and Gloria Trevi: Mexico’s Madonna?; ‘I Don’t Want That! Never!’ Says Hot Singer, By Elena Oumano, Los Angeles Times 29 April 1993

careful to genuflect while declaring her faith in the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's holiest icon. On December 20, 1994, Mexico's brief brush with prosperity ended in a crushing currency devaluation and ensuing recession – a calamity widely blamed on the corruption of former president Salinas, who has since fled the country. Trevi talked tough about Salinas, who is probably Mexico's most hated man, but never said a word about his successor, the current president Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León.

“There are three things you don't make fun of in Mexico: the Virgin of Guadalupe, the president, and the army,” says poet and novelist Homer Aridijis. “You watch her interviews and you see she has her eye on that line and knows not to cross.”²⁶ It was as though Andrade was whispering in her ear: thus far shall you go and no further.



But by 1995, something was undermining Trevi's image, at first only among those who worked closely with her. Maritza Lopez saw the relationship between Trevi and Andrade slide from professional to weird. Andrade became “authoritarian,” according to Lopez, bellowing commands and expecting Trevi to jump. A swarm of aspiring singers was growing around them, pathetic little girls dirty and tattered as street urchins but who seemed charmed to be carrying cell phones, getting into limos, and orbiting Trevi.

²⁵ Interview with Guadalupe Loaeza on 30 August 1999. She can be reached at 011-52- 55-20-86-24

²⁶ Interview with Homer Aridijis on 27 August 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-5-40-73-79 and speaks English.

“He had a whole court of, like, 14 or 15 girls,” Lopez told La Jornada. The girls “had an impressive terror” of Andrade, López said. They weren’t allowed to talk or eat and Trevi had to sneak out for chips and Twinkies, which they would wolf hungrily. López poked fun at Andrade, calling him “the last of the sultans,” but privately she worried he was cracking up. Andrade was diagnosed with prostate cancer around this time, which may have helped touch off his peculiar behavior. Whatever, by the end of 1995, López couldn’t stand the vibe, and stopped shooting the Trevi calendars. (López has since stopped speaking to the press about Andrade.)

López wasn’t the only colleague disturbed by the Trevi-Andrade relationship in the mid-1990s. Jose Luís Villarreal, who was artistic director and then director of marketing for BMG Ariola Mexico, Trevi’s label, from 1992 to 1996, can’t pinpoint a change but remembers their relationship at the studio as bizarre. Trevi would sparkle in front of the cameras, with her tough talk about liberation, “but the minute the lights would go off she’d be a different person,” Villarreal says. “She talked to nobody – nobody – but Andrade, and it was all ‘yes sir, no sir,’ with her eyes down.”²⁷ Bryan Stott, a Los Angeles sound engineer who recorded Trevi in the mid-nineties, recalled later that “whenever I asked her a question she would talk only to Sergio and never to me.” Colleagues in film, TV, and music puzzled over the contrast between the brash feminist of the public image and the cowering servant of studio life. But at the time, nobody was talking to the press about it.

Gloria Trevi’s career fell apart two ways, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde: gradually and then suddenly. In 1995, as Mexico’s financial crisis was beginning,

Trevi announced she was leaving Televisa for its arch-rival, TV Azteca. After flirting with the smaller network for a few weeks, she allowed herself to be retaken by Televisa – for a \$6 million contract. The same year, she released her fifth CD, Si Me Llevas Contigo. . .” (If You Take Me With You), and her second movie, Papas Sin Catsup (Fries Without Ketchup). So far, so good. But all Televisa could think up for her was to host a moronic game show called XE-Tu Remix that bombed in a season.²⁸

Then: poof. In January 1997, Andrade and Trevi disappeared. Someone floated a rumor that Andrade was in Italy for cancer treatment. During their absence, Andrade’s ex-wife, Aline Hernández, blew the whistle on him. She published a lurid account of her marriage, describing Andrade as a vicious pedophile obsessed with raping and abusing the young girls who flocked around him. The book, whose pun title, La Gloria por el Infierno means either “To Heaven through Hell” or “Going through Hell for Gloria,” accused Trevi of helping Andrade lure the girls and sometimes joining Andrade and the nymphets in bed. Aline described being flogged, locked up, deprived of food, and forced to cower under Andrade’s desk writing “I will not lie to Sergio Andrade” a thousand times.²⁹ Aline said she knew of at least a hundred girls who had auditioned for Andrade and had some kind of relationship with him, and she wanted to warn their parents, some of whom, in their eagerness to see their daughters become stars, had signed over legal custody of their daughters to Trevi.

²⁷ Interview with Jose Luís Villarreal on 3 September 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-5-420-9160

²⁸ Interview with Magda Elena Fueyo of TV Azteca on 2 September 1999. She can be reached at 011-52-5-420-1313, ext. 5626

The book – whose garish cover featured Trevi’s face in a ring of fire – was publicized madly by TV Azteca, whom Trevi had jilted a couple of years earlier. It turned out Aline had a singing contract with TV Azteca. A TV Azteca personality wrote the forward to her book. All in all, the whole thing looked to many like a TV Azteca hatchet job. (Hatred between the two networks is so intense that when Paco Stanley, a popular talk show host who’d recently gone from Televisa to TV Azteca, was machine-gunned in his car in June, many people jumped to the conclusion that Televisa had ordered the hit. Police haven’t yet figured out who did.)

So few people took Aline book seriously. But then other girls came forward with tales that were as horrifying as they were similar. “I was locked in a room and not allowed to go to the bathroom or use the phone,” says Delia Gonzalez, now 25. “Andrade stole my virginity. He beat me up. And Gloria helped him. She’s a victim, because for her he is God. But she’s guilty, too.” Gonzalez says she spent a year as Andrade’s prisoner in the early nineties. “I said nothing until now for fear and embarrassment. Besides, who would have believed me? But lots more girls could tell you the same.”³⁰

Lots more have. Seven young women or their families, by latest count, have come forward with nearly identical accounts. They’ve told of being locked up, beaten with belts, forced to have sex with each other while Andrade watched and took pictures, denied food, forced to eat till they vomited and then punished for wasting food, deprived of clocks so they wouldn’t know what time or day it

²⁹ Hernández Ponce de León, Érika Aline, *La Gloria Por El Infierno*, Editorial Grijalbo, Miguel Hidalgo, 1998

³⁰ Interview with Delia Gonzalez on 31 August 1998. She can be reached at 011-52- 73-71-11-56 or 011-52- 73-18-07-57

was, and called by the names of objects such as “telephone” or “shoe” instead of their names. One, still missing, gave birth to and abandoned a child when she was fifteen. For some, the ordeal began when they were as young as twelve.

For conservatives, the scandal was proof that lascivious lyrics lead to perversion. Radio stations that once played Trevi’s songs wall to wall started playing them backwards and insisting they heard “you must obey Satan” in the mumblings. Trevi’s mother and fans began holding masses in cathedrals around the country to pray for her soul.

Liberals leapt to defend her as Andrade’s victim, which didn’t do her reputation as a rebel feminist much good. With her blood in the water, former associates began circling to rat her out, describing her tough-girl act as a sham. “Andrade was Trevi’s Dr. Frankenstein, her Obi Wan Kenobi – she the body and the face, and he the mind,” says former publicist Villarreal. “She’s a robot. Without him, she’s nothing.” (Villarreal now works for TV Azteca’s music division.)

With breathtaking speed, Trevi fell from being a symbol of hard-boiled, independent womanhood to being portrayed as a marionette to the sexual whims of a perverted man. The only way she could rehabilitate herself, went the buzz, was by denouncing Andrade. But without Andrade, it wasn’t clear that Gloria Trevi even existed.

“We all really thought something interesting was happening,” laments Arturo García Hernández, the journalist for La Jornada who has covered Trevi more thoroughly than anyone. “The feminism, the open sexuality, the playful criticism: we thought Trevi was the start of something. Then it turned out she was a puppet of Andrade in the worst way. We’re disappointed.”

She appeared one more time. On August 15, 1998, Televisa aired a long interview with her to discuss the charges. She sat gorgeously cross-legged on the arm of a couch, breaking into spontaneous song, punching her chest as she described her faith in the Virgin of Guadalupe, wiping away tears as she begged her innocence and professed her respect for Sergio Andrade's genius. In classic Trevi style, she became herself the accuser. Eyes blazing, she spat, "I never bought a stick of gum with a single peso from Raul Salinas de Gortari" (the ex-president's brother, now serving a fifty-year sentence for ordering the murder of a political opponent). "I don't have a hundred and how-many-thousand appliance stores in all of the Republic," she said, referring to the ex-president's chain, allegedly bought with ill-gotten gains. "I have my talent and creativity to make songs," Trevi said. "That's all." Why on earth pick on me, Trevi seemed to be saying, when our top politicians are corrupt and the whole country is going down the tubes?

It was a spectacular performance, which is a good thing because it might be her last. Trevi finished the interview by saying, "I have my conscience clear. I've been here these last days in Mexico and here I'm going to stay. I'm not hiding."³¹

She's hiding. In March, the parents of one missing girl filed a criminal complaint against Trevi and Andrade, alleging kidnapping and corruption of a minor. The two have been ordered to appear for questioning. The face that once pouted from CD covers now graces a Wanted poster. But the government has not

³¹ Videotape of the 15 August 1998 special was made available for me to watch at Televisa's studios. I took notes but do not have a copy of the tape.

issued arrest warrants. "We are investigating," the prosecutor's spokesman says,³² which makes the missing girl's father furious.

"How many witnesses do they need?" he asks.³³ Yet he knows how it is in Mexico; even Carlos Salinas de Gortari was allowed to visit in the spring without fear of arrest. Sergio Andrade's brother is a ruling party senator (who got his start as a Televisa sportscaster.) Andrade and Trevi haven't even bothered to hire lawyers; they've simply vaporized.

"Mexico is the number-one most cynical and corrupt country in the world," says Mexico City reporter Felipe Morales Martínez, who covers the scandal and believes Trevi's and Andrade's wealth and power will keep them out of jail, no matter the charges. "We hold the world cup for cynicism and corruption."³⁴

Late in August, if BMG Records is to be believed, a "plain white envelope appeared at reception." Inside was a digital audio tape of Gloria Trevi singing "No Soy Monedita de Oro," (I'm Not a Little Gold Coin) a traditional ranchera tune.³⁵ Was it a peace offering from Gloria Trevi, a reminder that she is still a daughter of Mexico? Was it a cynical ploy by BMG to squeeze another peso out of its discredited star without appearing to have a contract with her? Was it a signal that they are bringing her back? Whatever, it doesn't seem to be working. The new tune was greeted with a collective yawn and many record stores are refusing to stock that song or any of her CDs. "Sex with children; we don't like

³² Interview with Victor Gonzalez Castro, press officer for the Chihuahua prosecutor, on 27 August 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-14-29-33-00, ext. 1457

³³ Interview with Miguel Yapor Ollervides on 10 September 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-14-199-438

³⁴ Interview with Felipe Morales Martinez on 1 September 1999. He can be reached at 011-52-57-09-13-13 ext. 4410.

it," a hip young employee of a Mexico City record store says with a sniff. Trevi's name is mud.

The ferocity with which Mexico turned on Gloria Trevi indicates more than revulsion with the nature of the charges against her. A small group of aging men still hold the reins of pop culture in this country and the Trevi-Andrade scandal may have been just what they needed to turn back the clock. What looked and sounded like genuine youthful rebellion and feminine defiance now looks like nothing more than one man's scheme for exploiting Mexican youth for sex and profit. Now as then, nobody approaches stardom but through Televisa. And no flamboyant wisecracker has been invited onto the airwaves to take Trevi's place. If Gloria Trevi ever was blazing a trail for women and teenagers, that trail has gone cold.

End

³⁵ Interview with Mari Lopez of BMG on 1 September 1999. She can be reached at 011-52-5 341 70 92, ext. 180