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Dramatic Publishing

THE SUN SERPENT

A woman in a fringed, patterned dress stands in the center, holding a white object. She is surrounded by several white masks on a dark background. The scene is lit with dramatic, low-key lighting, creating a mysterious and theatrical atmosphere. The woman's dress is long and has a fringe at the bottom. The masks are arranged in a semi-circle around her, some hanging from a branch-like structure. The background is dark, with some architectural elements visible on the sides.

Drama by José Cruz González

THE SUN SERPENT

Drama. By José Cruz González. *Cast: 2 to 4m., 1 to 4w.* When young Anahuac's family meets the newly arrived Cortes, they believe he is the Sun Serpent come to usher in a new, better world. Anahuac's beloved elder brother eagerly joins Cortes' grand march to the capital, Tenochtitlan. But while Cortes promised a world of peace and plenty, the soldiers he left behind soon engage in a ruthless search for gold. Orphaned during one of their raids, Anahuac sets off through the jungle to find and warn his brother that the Spanish are not all they seem. Along the way, Anahuac discovers that the omnipotent Aztec ruler, Moctecuhzoma, is unable to protect his people against the Spanish. As the certainties in his world begin to crumble, Anahuac must physically and mentally navigate through the land of the familiar (Aztec prophecies, sky dancers, jungles) and the frightening but intriguing possibilities of the new (Spanish horses, guitars, ships). Faced with the realization that neither leader is divine, that neither culture is without merit, Anahuac watches as Moctezuma and Cortes come face to face for the first time. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 70 minutes. Code: S1X.*

*Cover: Childsplay, Tempe Center for the Arts, Tempe, Ariz.,
featuring Andréa Morales. Photo: Heather Hill.
Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.*

ISBN: 978-1-58342-968-6



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The Sun Serpent

By

JOSÉ CRUZ GONZÁLEZ



Dramatic Publishing Company

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(THE SUN SERPENT)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-968-6

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Grateful acknowledgment is made to:

Domnita Dumitrescu, PhD; John Sullivan, PhD; Dr. Manuel Aguilar-Moreno; and Victoriano de la Cruz, Instituto de docencia e investigación etnológica de Zacatecas, A.C., Mexico.

The Sun Serpent was originally commissioned by Childsplay, Inc., and premiered on Oct. 29, 2011, at the Tempe Center for the Arts in Tempe, Ariz.

Director Rachel Bowditch
Artistic Director David Saar
Managing Director Steve Martin
Composer David Valdez
Scenic Designer Carey Wong
Costume Designer Connie Furr-Soloman
Mask Designer Zarco Guerrero
Puppet Designer Jim Luther
Lighting Designer Tim Monson
Projection Designer Adam Larsen
Sound Designer Christopher Neumeyer
Stage Manager Amy Gilbert

Cast:

Young Anáhuac/Elder Anáhuac Ricky Araiza
Tlememe Andrés Alcalá
Anci Andréa Morales
Voice of Elder Anáhuac Daniel Valdez

“The Spaniards appeared to be much delighted, they seized upon the gold like monkeys, their faces flushed. For clearly their thirst for gold was insatiable; they starved for it; they lusted for it; they wanted to stuff themselves with it as if they were pigs. They went about fingering, handling the streamers of gold, passing them back and forth, grabbing them one to the other babbling, talking gibberish among themselves.”

Fray Bernardino de Sahagún,
General History of the Things of New Spain

“And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. These great towns . . . and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision . . . Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not a dream . . . It was also wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before.”

Bernal Díaz del Castillo,
The Conquest of New Spain

“On August 13, 1521, heroically defended by Cuauhtémoc, Tlatelolco fell into the hands of Hernán Cortés. It was neither a triumph nor a defeat. It was the painful birth of the mestizo nation that is the Mexico of today.”

Plaza de las Tres Culturas,
Tlatelolco, Mexico City

The Sun Serpent

CHARACTERS

ACTOR #1: Plays Young Anáhuac. Also plays:

Emperor

Priest

Teudile

Spanish Soldier #2, #3, #4, #10, #11

ACTOR #2: Plays Tlememe, Young Anáhuac's older brother. Also plays:

Conquistador

Advisor #1, #3

Lord #1, #3, #5

Native #2

Voices In His Head #1, #3

Spanish Soldier #1, #8, #9

Giant Shadow Figure

Old Porter

Parrot

Shrouded Body

Feathered Serpent

Refugee #1

Conquistador #1

ACTOR #3: Plays Anci, a blind Totonac woman. Grandmother to Young Anáhuac and Tlememe. Also plays:

Lord #2, #4, #6

Advisor #2, #4

Malintzin

Spanish Soldier #5, #6, #7

Voices In His Head #2, #4

Jaguar

Xochitl

Refugee #2

Conquistador #2

Native #3

Young Sword Sharpener

Aztec Dancer

ELDER ANÁHUAC: Recording or voice over.

SETTING

A space that can transport our audience to a world of the past making it transform before them.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play was originally created with only three actors in mind who would play over 30 characters using masks, costumes and multimedia, though it may be performed by more than three actors. The mature voice of Elder Anáhuac is a recording. Several languages are used throughout the play including Náhuatl, Spanish and English. Correct pronunciation is important in Nahuatl and Spanish. Scene titles should not be projected.

Production multimedia elements, masks and costumes created for the original production are available for rent from Childsplay. Please contact the production department at Childsplay (480) 921-5700 or email: info@childsplayaz.org.

A second production at Mixed Blood Theatre rented the original design work.

Producers and directors need not rent the original designs, etc. The challenge will be to incorporate many storytelling tools simultaneously, such as multimedia, masks, costumes, music and the use of multiple languages.

The Sun Serpent

Flights of Memory and Myth

(Our audience settles into a space that is a lush green jungle filled with the sounds of wildlife.

A conch shell is heard. Then another. Rattles and drums follow.

ELDER ANÁHUAC, a hooded priest appears onstage [ACTOR #1]. He is a middle-aged native scholar.

He opens a codex. It is a picture book with ancient Aztec pictograms.

ELDER ANÁHUAC's voice is heard speaking. It is majestic and noble. We first hear the language of Náhuatl [Aztecán], which overlaps into Spanish and finally into English.

The images appear on screen.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC. *Ahcicoh pan ce talli tlen nelmoixmati
itocah Aztlan,*

ce talli nelchipactic,

yahualtic atl huan ayohuitl

*Mexcoehuanih eliyayah macehualmeh tlen axquipyayah
tlalli huan*

quitemoyayah ininchan ...

*Llegaron de la tierra afamada llamada Aztlan,
un lugar de blancura,*

Rodeado de agua y neblina

Los aztecas eran gente sin tierra

En busca de un hogar ...

They came from a fabled land called *Aztlan*
A place of whiteness
Surrounded by water and mist
The *Azteca* were landless people in search of a home
Before their arrival
Stood great civilizations
Such as the *Olmeca*, *Tolteca* and *Maya*
On a giant lake-island
The *Azteca* built their empire
Upon seeing an eagle
With a serpent in its mouth
For centuries they would rule without rival
Conquering many of the city-states before them
They honored their gods
Creating magnificent architecture, literature and arts
But their warring ways
And their need for tribute and sacrifice
Brought them great hatred
Among the people across the land
Long ago,
When I was a boy,
I dreamed of being a sky dancer
Long ago,
When I was a boy,
I survived the Great End
Long ago,
When I was a boy,
My world would change forever
But I remember,
I remember ...

Strange Wonders

(A Mesoamerican flute and drum are heard.)

ACTOR #2 and ACTOR #3 remove the priest's robe from ACTOR #1.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC appears. He is a Totonac boy.)

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. My name is *Anáhuac*

My people are the Totonacs

I dream of being a sky dancer

(YOUNG ANÁHUAC looks up at the shadow of sky dancers spiraling to earth. YOUNG ANÁHUAC spins in circles. TLEMEME, YOUNG ANÁHUAC's older brother, enters.)

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. *Tlememe*, you flew like a bird!

TLEMEME. Thank you, little brother!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. One day, when I'm old enough, I'm going to be a sky dancer like you!

ELDER ANÁHUAC. My older brother was the center of my universe.

TLEMEME. And I promise to teach you, *Anáhuac*, but first you must practice.

(TLEMEME hands a wooden flute to YOUNG ANÁHUAC.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC. And my grandmother

Whose sight had been taken

Was warm and bright

As the sun in the sky

(ANCI uses a walking stick.)

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. Grandmother!

TLEMEME. Grandmother *Anci*!

ANCI. My boys!

(They hug.)

ANCI *(cont'd)*. Today I'm a frog!

TLEMEME. I'm a bigger frog!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. No, I'm the biggest!

ANCI. Today I croak loudly!

TLEMEME. I croak louder!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. No, I croak the loudest!

ANCI. Today my tongue is long!

TLEMEME. My tongue is longer!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. No, mine's the longest!

ANCI. Today I can eat a fly!

TLEMEME. I can eat lots of flies!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. No, I can eat iguanas!

ANCI & TLEMEME. Iguanas!?!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. Today I win!

(YOUNG ANÁHUAC celebrates happily.)

ANCI. It's time for worship. *(They look up into the sky raising their palms open.)* We celebrate and honor *Quetzalcoatl*, the Precious Serpent.

TLEMEME. The Feathered Serpent.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. The Sun Serpent.

ANCI *(to TLEMEME)*. Why do we pray to *Quetzalcoatl*?

TLEMEME. He was the creator of heaven, earth and mankind.

The giver of corn, the inventor of learning and knowledge.

ANCI *(to YOUNG ANÁHUAC)*. Why did his brother, *Tezcatlipoca*, betray him?

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. Because he was jealous and wanted power. He sent his brother away to the east where his heart became the Morning Star.

ANCI. Very good.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. *Quetzalcoatl* promised to return one day.

ANCI. And he will.

TLEMEME. And life will be wondrous.

ANCI. We must be good— (*Turning towards YOUNG ANÁHUAC.*) Which means we finish everything we eat, including our vegetables.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC (*to himself*). Ugh.

A Magical Talisman

(*A Totonac village appears.*)

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. Grandmother *Anci*, tell me a story!

TLEMEME. We've got fishing to do, little brother.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. Just one! Please?

ANCI. Very well. Just one.

TLEMEME. But something new! He talks my ear off like a parrot!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. I'm not a parrot!

TLEMEME. Yes, you are.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. I'm not a parrot!

TLEMEME. Yes, you are.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. I'm not a parrot!

TLEMEME. I think you've proved my point.

(*TLEMEME sharpens his fishing spear.*)

ANCI. Did you know my father *Ichtaca* served the Totonac people by bringing trade to our land from other regions?

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. No.

ANCI. My father was so well respected and loved by the Totonac that they gave him this quetzal feather talisman.

This is no ordinary talisman.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. It's not?

ANCI. No. It's magical. It protected my father from the *Azteca*.

TLEMEME. I hate them.

ANCI. Their warriors ambushed *Ichtaca*, trapping him on the edge of a cliff.

TLEMEME. Did he stand and fight?

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. Great Grandfather was a man of peace.

ANCI. If he stayed, they would've killed him. If he jumped, he would've died in the great river below.

TLEMEME. What did he do?

ANCI. He held on to his talisman and prayed. He leapt off and transformed into a bird spiraling down until he splashed into the river and swam away like a fish.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. He did all that?

ANCI. Yes. This magic talisman protected him when there was no hope. It has great power if you believe.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. I believe. Can I wear it?

ANCI. It will go to *Tlememe* first.

TLEMEME. Come, little brother.

ANCI. When it is your turn, then you will wear it.

TLEMEME. *Anáhuac*.

ANCI. All good things are earned with patience.

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. But I'm patient right now!

TLEMEME. Let's go!

ANCI. Catch many fish!

(TLEMEME hands YOUNG ANÁHUAC a fish net bag. They exit.)

He Who Frowns Like a Lord

(The City of Dreams, the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, appears. On screen, it is a magnificent city surrounded by a lake and mountains.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC. In the City of Dreams

Ruled a powerful Emperor named *Moctecuhzoma*

“He Who Frowns Like a Lord,”

His law was absolute

He commanded his subjects

With an iron fist

And people bowed and trembled before him

(Drums are heard. LORDS rush in, addressing our audience. They wear a mask and carry masks in their hands.)

LORD #1. He’s coming!

LORD #2. He’s arrived!

LORD #3. Don’t look at him!

LORD #4. Don’t you dare!

LORD #5. You’re not worthy!

LORD #6. Bow your heads!

LORD #1. You’ll be punished!

LORD #2. I see you!

LORD #3. He arrives.

(EMPEROR enters. He is royal and imposing. He wears a quetzal-feathered headdress and robe. He carries a staff. LORDS bow before him.)

EMPEROR. Where’re my fish?

LORD #4. Oh, no!

LORD #5. How could you forget!?

LORD #4 (to EMPEROR). Forgive me, your high—

(EMPEROR strikes LORD #4 down with his staff.)

Blue Waters

ELDER ANÁHUAC. An army of fishermen and porters

From the coast

Were required to bring

Fresh fish to *Moctecuhzoma*

To eat daily

My brother and I

Would fish each morning

Paying the tribute required of us

The Emperor loved his fish

(TLEMEME and YOUNG ANÁHUAC run in. They climb up to the edge of a cliff.)

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. *Tlememe*, slow down!

TLEMEME. I'm going to beat you!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. No, you're not!

TLEMEME. You're slow as a turtle!

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. No, I'm a dolphin!

TLEMEME. I win! Let's give thanks. *(They look up into the sky raising their palms open.)* Thank you, Great Creator, for the food we are about to catch. Let's go!

(YOUNG ANÁHUAC and TLEMEME dive into the waters. An underwater world emerges. Schools of fish dart back and forth. TLEMEME captures a fish as YOUNG ANÁHUAC places it in the fish net bag.)

Floating Mountains

(An ominous sound is heard, disrupting the peaceful waters scattering our sea life in many directions. The silhouette of a 16th century Spanish galleon hull appears on screen. It begins to slow down. Rattling metal is heard. Splash. A giant anchor descends from above, landing on the sea bottom. Thump.

TLEMEME and YOUNG ANÁHUAC swim to the surface.)

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. *Tlememe*, what are they!?

TLEMEME. I don't know!?

YOUNG ANÁHUAC. Where did they come from!?

TLEMEME. I don't know!?! Come on! Hurry!

(They exit.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC. In the year, *Ce-Acatl*

Good Friday, 1519

We saw in the great sea

Floating mountains

Surrounded by giant white clouds

(The wind swirls, and a giant fabric piece drops, swelling with air. It transforms into a square rig sail on the deck of a Spanish ship. CONQUISTADOR's giant shadow appears on it. He wears a Spanish Morion helmet, chest armor and a sword at his side. He carries the flag of Spain with an emblem of the cross.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC (*cont'd*). We saw strange men

Dressed in iron for war

Their skin white

As if made of chalk

Their beards long

CONQUISTADOR. *¡Plegar velas! (Drop sail!)*

(The sail falls to the ground.)

Terra Firme

(The fabric begins to ripple into small waves. CONQUISTADOR carries the flag onto shore.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC. Their leader came from the East

From where the sun rises

Dressed in black

Like our Lord *Quetzacoatl*

(CONQUISTADOR surveys the new world.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC *(cont'd)*. An army of angels followed him

With beasts and armor never before seen

He stood on *terra firme*

And named the land—

CONQUISTADOR. *¡Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz!*

(CONQUISTADOR plunges the flag into the earth. A loud cannon is heard firing.)

News From the Coast

(The City of Dreams, the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, appears.)

ELDER ANÁHUAC. In the City of Dreams

News from the coast

Brought alarm and terror

Moctecuhzoma summoned his lords

And advisors