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Directors: Amaru Villanueva Rance, Jack Kinsella, Xenia Elsaesser, Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic, Sharoll Fernandez. **Editors:** Xenia Elsaesser, Matthew Grace. **Web and legal:** Jack Kinsella.
Printing and Advertising Manager: Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic.
Social and Cultural Coordinator: Sharoll Fernandez. **Design:** Michael Dunn Caceres
Journalists: Helena Cavell, Patrick Dowling, Lauren Bell, Carina Tucker, Anthony Moore, Taj Davis Roisin Mendoca **Our Cover:** The BX crew **Marketing:** Jack Kinsella.
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EDITORIAL

On a high mountain crag, a lone silhouette comes gradually into view. He is bent low, stoutly built, and breathing steadily. He is one among countless runners who routinely travels thousands of miles to carry a message across the expanse of the Inca Empire. He is a chasqui, messenger of the Andes.

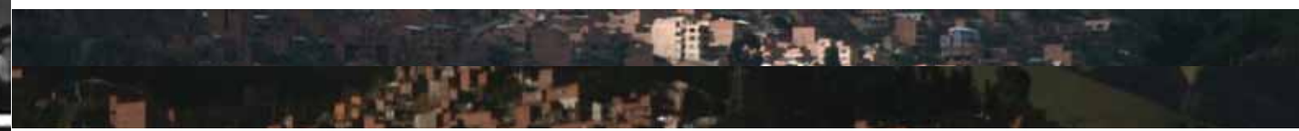
Centuries later, what remains of the chasqui is a young and heroic icon of mythic quality; no longer a physical reality, he runs non-stop through the imaginations of locals young and old. But beyond the legend, the chasqui heritage may even be imprinted onto the Bolivian genetic makeup. Studies from the 1930s to the present day suggest that Andean natives have larger chest structures than lowlanders, and it has also been proposed that those born and raised at altitude can cope better with the otherwise crippling lack of oxygen. Over the past two decades, altitude was believed to represent such a disadvantage to foreign teams that FIFA temporarily banned international football games in La Paz. This ban was lifted in 2008, and in a twist of irony the Bolivian team went on to immediately resurface the debate through a victory of unexpected proportions. In their first home game in La Paz they gave their mighty Argentinean opponents a resounding 6–1 beating. It was the first time Bolivia had experienced such a football victory over the Argentineans, and one which meant a great deal to a country whose history has been defined by the perpetual loss of wars, the sea, and Bolivian territory.

Upon these planes and valleys which rise to triple the height of Britain's tallest mountain peak, innumerable histories have been shaped by the thin and occasionally inhospitable air of the Andes. Like chasquis, this month we rush to bring you stories of sport, dance, and movement at altitude.

Turn the page and take it in. Race through the issue, but remember to catch your breath.

By Xenia Elsaesser

N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary



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GLOSSARY

ALBAÑIL	Builder, bricklayer
BORRACHITO	Alcoholic {+diminutive}
CHASQUI	Highly trained runners who delivered messages throughout the Inca empire
CHOLITA	Traditional Bolivian woman famous for her Andean elegance
CHOLITAS LUCHADORAS	Indigenous Aymaran female wrestlers
MALEANTES	Street crooks
PARTIDO	Football match
CANCHA POLIFUNCIONAL	Multi-purpose court (basketball, volleyball, handball, futsal)
CACHOS	Football boots (unlike European Spanish: “botas or tacos de fútbol”
CLEFEROS	Glue-sniffers (unfortunately a great number of lustrabotas sniff glue)
ENREJADO	Railings
FULBITO	Mini football, 5 players on each side
FUTBOLÍN	Table football
JOGA BONITO	“Pretty play”, (portuguese) in reference to technical skill at football, in particular of Brazilian players
K`OLO	Druggie
LUCHA LIBRE	“Free fighting” (Spanish), it is a form of professional wrestling which comes from Mexico, featuring colourful masks and high-flying acrobatic moves.
LUSTRABOTAS	Shoeshine boy
MILONGA	A social gathering where people come to dance tango, also the name of a specific style of tango dance
MOTOCICLISMO	Motorcycling

EARNING MY STRIPES

Text: Patrick Dowling
Photo: Ivan Rodriguez P.

I never expected animal crossings in downtown La Paz. But a walk past San Francisco church between 8 and 10 am would make anyone take a second look. In the heart of the city, young adults dressed as zebras direct traffic. They prance around in the middle of the street as motorists whiz by them. I was half-expecting Robin Williams to swing in on a tree vine with the rest of the animal kingdom in pursuit like something straight out of *Jumanji*.

No, this is not Bolivia's version of an African safari, but it is still probably best to keep your hands and feet inside the vehicle at all times. Traffic in Bolivia is chaotic to say the least, so the municipal government decided to do something about it. The idea of having young adults (typically aged 16–22) dress up in zebra costumes and direct traffic was conceived in 2001. The goal was to educate drivers and pedestrians alike about the importance of the use of the crosswalk in a playful and artistic manner. In 2005, the Department of Civil Culture was created and extended the mission of the zebras to include urban hygiene, risk prevention, protection of green areas, prevention of violence, and alcohol abuse, as well educating citizens about traffic laws. In 2007, the Department of Civil Culture gained more power, making it possible to increase the number of zebras in the streets. The zebras have been around for more than 10 years now, and are still very active. Their current campaign is called, "Zebra for a day" in which individuals can dress up like zebras and direct traffic for a day.

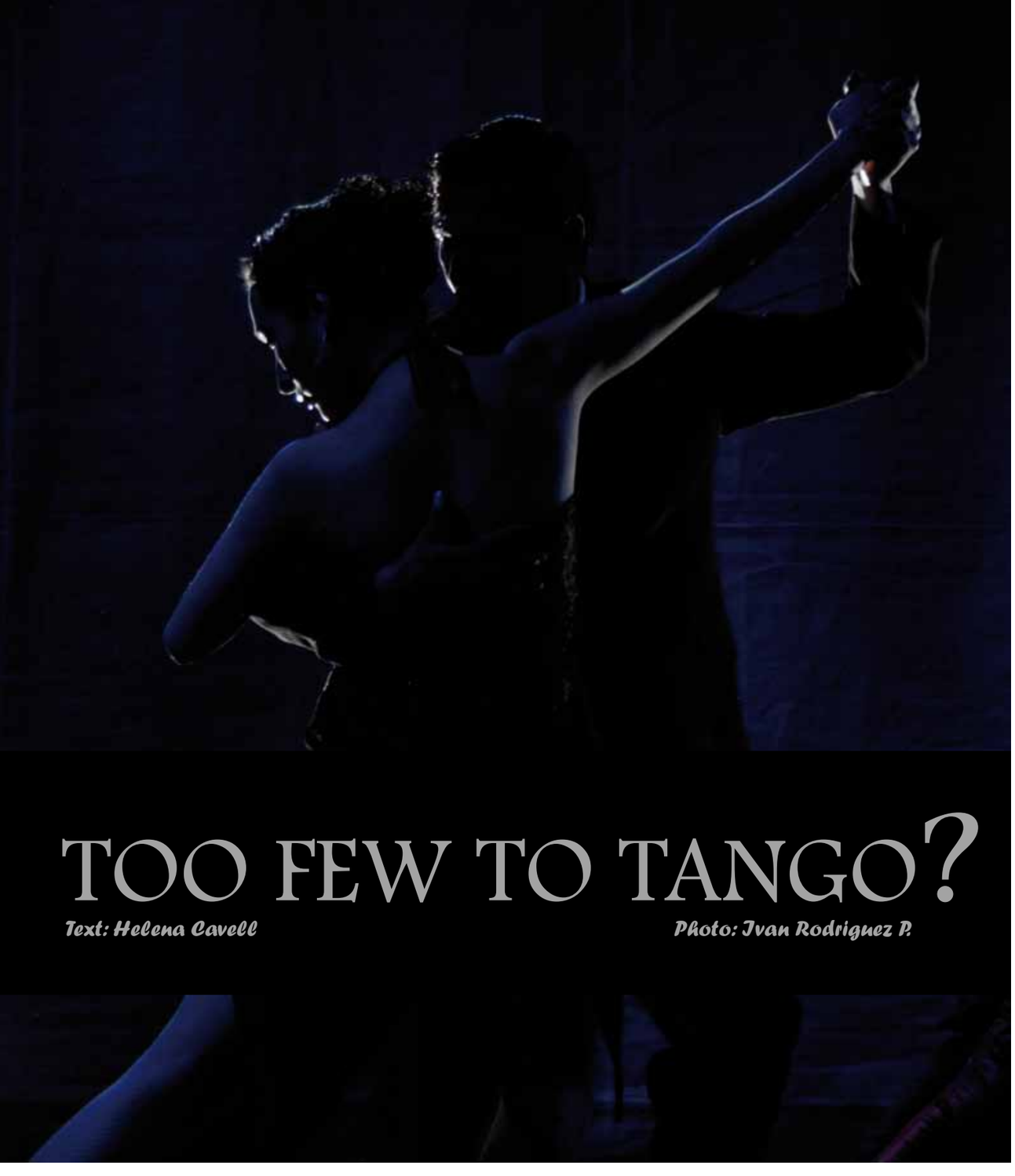
I decided that I wanted to get in on the zebra action, so I contacted the Office of Civil Culture across from the San Francisco church and asked to be a zebra for a day. They were happy to oblige my request. At 8am on a Wednesday morning, I met a group of grassland animals at their usual watering hole. I was given one of their prized zebra costumes, the tallest one they had. Have you ever seen a six-foot zebra?

After I was kitted out with my black and white stripes, I joined the group of experienced zebras and we began to stretch. Stretch? Yes, stretching is an important part of being a zebra because no one wants to see a zebra grabbing a hamstring after dancing in the street.

As I was doing my calisthenics, I was briefed on the "dos" and "don'ts" of "zebra-ing" by the director of the program, Kathia Salazar. I learned that a zebra can ask a citizen to stop when the light is red, but they cannot physically hold anyone back. They can only ask people to follow the rules; they cannot force them to obey. I was also repeatedly reminded to say everything in a friendly manner, because the zebra's conduct is paramount to

the success of the program. When asked what it means to be a zebra for a day, Kathia Salazar explained that being a "zebra for a day" means "to live the experience of helping people to improve their civic behaviours." Finally, she added that, "Each zebra walks differently. You need to find your individual step."

Now I was ready to step out into the dangerous streets of La Paz, and find my zebra walk. The light changed to red and the herd pranced out onto the crosswalk to entertain the stopped motorists and assist pedestrians across the street safely. Over the next two hours, I helped several people across the street safely and was even able to walk a little girl to her mother on the next block over. I covered my ears in dismay as drivers honked unnecessarily, and I danced in the middle of the street. But most importantly, I found my zebra step.



TOO FEW TO TANGO?

Text: Helena Cavell *Photo: Ivan Rodriguez P.*

When you think of tango, Bolivia is not the first country that immediately comes to mind. Instead, you think of Argentina, where the dance has evolved over the years into a source of national identity and pride. Yet, Bolivia being relatively close to its birthplace, it wouldn't be too presumptuous to think that throughout the years the dance might have diffused its way over here, much in the way that salsa arguably has. However, this is not the case. Tango in Bolivia can be seen as a niche activity, in which a select few participate, and even fewer master.

As a generalisation, in British clubs young people bob self-consciously around the dance floor, gyrating in circles whilst performing ironically cheesy dance moves. But in South America, this is not the case. In Bolivian clubs and at social gatherings, it is common to see couples vigorously dancing salsa; few of these dancers have had lessons, yet almost everybody, young or old, has a few moves to brandish, having learnt through imitation. And they do. Interestingly, very few people sit back and watch at social events where dancing takes place—if you are not participating on the dance floor, people will ask why not. Having been told by many Bolivians that "dancing is in our blood", and given what I have witnessed, I am inclined to believe this is true.

Why, then, is tango the exception to the rule? In other South American countries, and even Europe, tango thrives; "It depends on the city, but you can find **milongas** in other places almost every day of the week," Nina Kuehnel de Villalba, a German tango dancer, informs me. But not in Bolivia: in La Paz there are only three monthly milongas in existence. Why so? It cannot be argued that it is a case of origin, that tango emerged in Argentina and hence is not as popular. This is disproved by the fact that salsa, coming from Cuba and Puerto Rico, results in an instantly crowded dance floor. Instead, could it be a lack of interest on the part of young people? Are they more concerned with fun, less regimented dance? But neither does this seem to be the case: Although in the milongas of La Paz more mature dancers do hold the majority, there is still a strong crowd of young people that frequent the same gatherings.

There does, however, seem to be a class divide. Tango is a hard dance to master. Teachers will inform you that women can become competent within a few months of biweekly classes, but men, on the other hand, are likely to spend most of their lives trying to master the complicated dance, due to the fact that they have to lead their female partners. This means that in order to become confident enough in the dance to stride your partner around a milonga, you will in all probability have to pay for a lot of classes. "On top of this there are shoes, and milonga tickets . . . It can be expensive", says Alfredo Villalba, a tango enthusiast who took four years of classes to reach his current level. This, it seems, is the issue: why would someone, unless they felt passionate about learning, pay all that money to learn tango, when tango music is very rarely played at social events? People tend to find salsa much easier, and therefore cheaper, to learn.

This may be the case, but, luckily, a tango community does exist in Bolivia. In fact, a very enthusiastic and welcoming one at that. When asked if tango was elitist, the overwhelming response from everyone, despite evidence to the contrary, was no. "It's not elitist . . . Everyone comes together. It joins classes and ages. The only thing that matters is that you can dance!", Patricia del Carpo says enthusiastically. And in that lies the hope—the community are willing to accept new faces, regardless of their level of skill. Yes, it may be a little more expensive to pick up as a hobby, but when the dance is so beautiful, passionate, and in all honesty an impressive skill to cultivate, the logistics behind it seem to hardly matter.

MILONGAS OF LA PAZ

CASA ARGENTINA

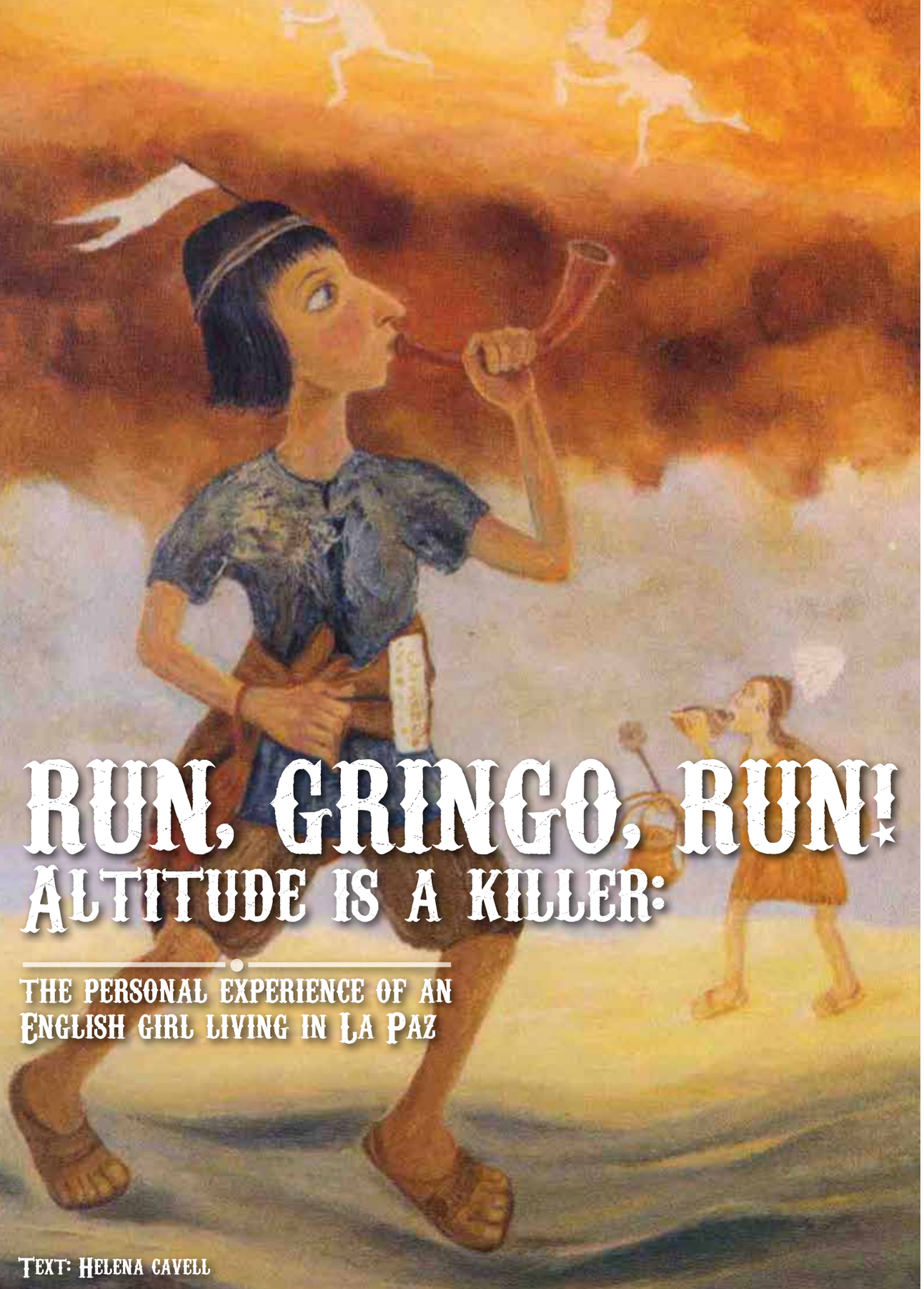
AVENIDA 6 DE AGOSTO 2535
SOPOCACHI
MONTHLY
FOOD AVAILABLE, RAFFLE INCLUDED IN TICKET PRICE.
DRESSCODE: SEMI-FORMAL ATTIRE

ACADEMIA DE TANGO TORINO

CALLE SOCABAYA 457
CENTRAL LA PAZ
TWO MILONGAS A MONTH
DRESS CODE: SEMI-FORMAL ATTIRE

CAZA DUENDE

CALLE BELISARIO SALINAS 380
SOPOCACHI
EVERY THIRD FRIDAY OF THE MONTH
DRESSCODE: SEMI-FORMAL ATTIRE



RUN, GRINGO, RUN!

ALTITUDE IS A KILLER:

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF AN ENGLISH GIRL LIVING IN LA PAZ

TEXT: HELENA CAVELL

I was told that the **chasqui**, relay runners used by the Inca as messengers, threw themselves across mountain slopes at death-defying altitudes. After having shortly just arrived in La Paz, I listened to this story in disbelief, wondering how it was possible, whilst feeling like my lungs had collapsed after walking the short distance from my apartment to the shops. However, further research confirms this tale; so why is it so hard for me, an active runner at sea level, to do anything here without feeling like I'm suffocating? Is altitude a real issue that needs to be overcome in order to be successful in sport (or just walking to the corner), or is it merely an excuse that I'm using to make myself feel better about being unfit?

Even after having ploughed my way through numerous guide books prior to my arrival in La Paz, each one telling me that I was likely to suffer with the altitude, I stubbornly refused to believe what I was being told. Fair enough, maybe the middle-aged men writing these books did suffer, but I, on the other hand, am 21 years young, with a high level of fitness; my lungs are strong enough to cope with a little less oxygen. In fact, I was looking forward to the altitude, embracing it, reasoning that when I went back to sea level my body would be so strong that running would cease to be hard work and I would impress my fellow joggers with my superior stamina and speed. No, unfortunately this was not the case. I took my first steps through El Alto airport feeling like a brick was weighing down on my chest, watching as a tourists turned dizzy and a little girl ran to the toilets to vomit. Welcome to La Paz, the highest (de facto) capital city in the world—we hope you enjoy your stay! Three days later and I was still feeling out of breath. Running to answer the door became a cardiovascular workout equal to doing an hour of aerobics. Why was I feeling like this? I am a runner! The possibility of jogging, however, even after 34 days of living in this fascinating yet oxygen-deprived city, still seems like a very remote possibility.

Running at altitude is an age-old activity in the Andes, I was told—have you never heard of the chasqui? The chasqui were the men that made up the Inca communication system in the Andes mountain range; effectively, they were a cross between marathon runners and postmen. Like members of a relay race, but at a really high altitude, they took parcels and letters instead of batons. The chasqui could deliver a message from Quito to Cusco, a path of 1,230 miles, in five days. From a palace in Cusco, fortunate royalty could dine off fresh fish from the coast, 200 miles away over the high Andes in a mere two days! Impressive feats. The chasqui must have been mythological creatures with super powers, able to defy the problems of altitude, lucky things. But apparently not—they were young boys who trained for their task, working hard to develop their lungs so they could breathe properly in the thin atmosphere to keep on running. So, altitude can be overcome? Will I ever be able to run the hills of La Paz city centre, or am I fighting a losing battle?

In need of an answer, I went to visit the professionals. Dr Gustavo Zubieta Sr. and Dr Gustavo Zubieta Jr., of the High Altitude Pathology Institute in Miraflores, have spent 45 years investigating the effect of altitude on the body. If anyone can tell me how to conquer this inconvenient affliction, it'll be them. They explained the science behind my new-found inability to run. I'll try to put it simply: La Paz sits between 3,000 and 4,100 metres above sea level. This is very, very high. Coming from sea level, your body has a panic attack, wondering why it can't find oxygen, and then realises it needs to adapt. At low altitudes, the blood is composed of 30 percent red blood cells, which zip oxygen around your body, allowing your muscles to move. When you get off the plane, your body, clever thing that it is, immediately starts creating more red blood cells, realising that this 30 percent is just not enough. Eventually, your blood will be made up of around half red blood cells. So, the guidebooks were wrong! Lung capacity can help, but the key is your blood. "You can't run like at sea level", Dr Zubieta Jr. tells me, "but as time goes by, red blood cells increase, and in 40 days you will have adapted . . . "

Forty days? You must be kidding . . . "Unless you go to El Alto," interjects Dr Zubieta Sr., "t--hat's higher". All right, so no more El Alto trips for me then. Turns out there's a formula for this sort of thing, and the higher you go, the longer it'll take you to adapt. I bet the chasqui never had problems with this: They were born at high altitude, they have a genetic advantage—please tell me they had an advantage, I ask, looking for an excuse. No, not really, anyone is capable of adaptation, genetics aren't really involved (although some people do sustain that Andes people have larger lung capacities so can breathe in more oxygen). However, it turns out I do have one advantage: "women tolerate altitude better. There is a tolerance for hypoxia"—a fancy word for altitude sickness—"that women have. They have to carry a baby and split the oxygen they have with this other body they have growing in their womb. So they have this extra capacity to tolerate hypoxia. This gives them extra strength", Dr Zubieta Jr. casually mentions. Yes! I am a woman! A medical expert is telling me I am stronger than men! Oh, it smacks of feminism and I love it.

I TOOK MY FIRST STEPS THROUGH EL ALTO AIRPORT FEELING LIKE A BRICK WAS WEIGHING DOWN ON MY CHEST...

However, I may be a woman, but I'm still not a chasqui. I may cope better then my male counterpart would do, but I still have 40 days to wait until my body is completely adapted. At least now I know I'm not just making excuses for being unfit. In fact, the doctors told me there's no point trying to run until after these magical 40 days, I'll only make it worse. So, the running is on hold for another week. Problem is, after all this waiting, the urge to run and be active is waning. My body is enjoying its time as a couch potato and feels reluctant to get back to exercise of any kind . . . Maybe I'll start slowly and by the end of my time here I'll be running up to El Alto with the runners I see now, smugly jogging past, smirking at the gringo girl who can't drag herself up a slight incline without breaking a sweat. Yes! I will defeat the altitude! Although, no, you will not see me running alongside Paula Radcliffe back in Britain; apparently it only takes 20 days for your body to turn back into its sluggish sea-level self once you descend back under the clouds. Devastated.

GET YOUR MOTO RUNNING

TEXT AND PHOTO: TAJ DAVIS

The motorbikes came on the backs of pickup trucks, towed behind taxis, and ridden from towns and villages both nearby and far away. From rattling, rusting Honda 125s that wouldn't be allowed on the road in any Western country to gleaming KTM 450s that would be the envy of serious motocross riders all over the world, they arrived in the hundreds. The small town of Comarapa in Bolivia's central highlands filled with their smoke and noise, with the smell of gasoline and engine oil, with riders, spectators, dust, beer cans, and cigarette butts, as over 200 competitors converged for the start of the 11th annual Rally de **Motociclismo**, Bolivia's national motocross rally.

I happened to be at the rally, held on the 5th and 6th of November, 2011, purely by chance. The day before the start of the race I was hitchhiking unsuccessfully west from Santa Cruz on Bolivia's desolate Highway 4—much more hiking than hitching, you could say—when a beat-up Toyota Corolla finally stopped. It was going my way, so before I knew it I was crammed in the back seat next to a guy wearing no trousers, chewing coca leaves, passing around a bottle of rum, and sharing bad Bolivian cigarettes. "We're on our way to a motorbike rally tomorrow," the three occupants managed to tell me in Spanglish. Why of course I'd like to join you, *mis amigos*! So we sped towards Comarapa, past the dusty villages and the old donkeys, as the sun set over the Bolivian Andes and turned the towering cacti a brilliant gold.

After I presented myself at the starting line as a journalist from Australia, I rode with the rally organisers to the town of Chilon, where they would be setting up the finish line at the end of the second leg. From the back of the pickup truck I had a view of the harsh landscape the competitors would be facing: a cactus-dotted desert, rising in every direction into isolated mountains as it baked under a relentless, inescapable, blistering sun. Daunting as it may have seemed, the landscape is just one reason why this rally is the best in Bolivia, organiser Grover Vargas Párraga told me. Párraga, in his second year as organiser of the event, said that you can find everything on the 250-kilometre, six-leg route. "There is a huge change in elevation over the 250 kilometres, from 1,800 metres to over 3,000 metres," he said. "The highest point, through Siberia on the second leg of the race, is usually cold and very foggy, while at lower altitudes it can get extremely hot." Having both bitumen and dirt tracks to ride on, rivers and bike-sized potholes to navigate, and stray dogs, goats, and over-eager spectators to dodge, this rally certainly provided its fair share of unusual challenges.

Faced with such a gruelling rally course, it's no surprise that, out of the 219 competitors that started in the four categories this year, less than 150 crossed the finish line on the second and final day. When one also considers that the competitors ranged from first-time entrants to the top riders in Bolivia, from age 16 to well into their thirties and forties, and that bikes in such various states of repair were ridden, the numbers make even more sense. But Párraga says that as the event receives more publicity both nationally and internationally, there's hope for an even greater number and variety of competitors. "Last year we had only one woman enter, this year we had two, and next year we hope for many more," he said. "As the rally becomes more widely known, hopefully we can have more competitors and open more categories in the race."

As we travelled from town to town setting up start and finish lines, I noticed how the rally breathed life into otherwise quiet, poorer parts of the region, into towns and villages that would usually have little attraction to tourists or visitors. Hotels filled with people, bars and restaurants stayed open late into the night, and dusty streets turned into vibrant markets selling local fruit wines and liquors, honey, and hand-woven fabrics. Locals set up barbeques in the town squares and sold street food, and bands played traditional music as spectators flocked in to cheer on the riders. "This is one of the great things about this race," the organisers told me. "The small towns help with money, prizes, or meals for the people working at the race, and in return they get in influx of people who stay in their hotels, spend money, and boost the local economy. It's really a win-win situation."

IN SPITE OF THE RALLY'S REMOTE LOCATION IN THE POOREST COUNTRY IN SOUTH AMERICA, IT'S ALL MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH A GREAT LOVE OF THE SPORT.

What struck me the most about Bolivia's Rally de Motociclismo, however, wasn't the beautiful landscape or the incredible rally course. It wasn't the transformation of small towns into places crowded with food stalls and markets, or the images of exhausts tied on to ageing motorbikes with rope and string, of hasty repairs made on the side of a dusty track. What struck me was how, in spite of the rally's remote location in the poorest country in South America, it was all made possible through a great love of the sport. Whether it was hundreds of competitors travelling from all over the country—and even the USA and Europe, Párraga told me—to compete for a maximum prize of 2,500 bolivianos (or approximately AU$350 and US$360); or whole families of spectators lining the track, climbing on top of boulders, and seeking shade under trees to watch the riders pass; or the more than 30 volunteers, including the directors of the rally, who squeezed into overcrowded taxis and endured freezing rain in the back of pi-pickup trucks just to get to the end of the leg, this rally wasn't made possible by huge corporate sponsorship or international interest, but by the determination of those involved.

And so, as I drank and danced and talked with the winners after the finish in Comarapa, they seemed remarkably uninterested in the money and trophies they would receive. Instead, they spoke of Bolivian motocross becoming more popular internationally, and of the Rally de Motociclismo hopefully attracting more competitors, spectators, and media coverage in the years to come. "I don't care about winning or losing, or about prizes," one competitor told me. "But I would do almost anything to tell the world about Bolivian motocross."

A NEW BEGINNING FOR BOLIVIA'S DISABLED?

TEXT: ROISIN MENDONCA

A group of Bolivia's disabled population has been exposed to a totally unique experience in which heavy medication has been replaced with stimulation and motivation. This distinctive space, a multi-sensory project run by Para Los Niños (PLN) at a residential centre for disabled people in La Paz, is the first and only treatment of its kind in a state-run home in Bolivia. The concept of multi-sensory treatment, which originated in Holland, is something that is widely used in Europe. It currently seems unlikely, however, that it is something that will be adopted into standard health practice in Bolivia.

At the time of writing this article, groups of disabled Bolivians from all over the country are staging a protest in the capital, La Paz. In many ways, their story is one that is defined by movement: by their march across the country towards the presidential palace; by the greater social and political movement for disabled rights; and indeed, for many, by a lifetime of limited mobility imposed upon them by their disabilities. This complex tale of protest has as its base one fundamental driving force: the desire amongst the people for a better standard of living. Anybody who has interacted with much of Bolivia's disabled population cannot fail to notice, however, the disparity between such aspirations and the day to day reality that they face. The use of innovative treatment such as is used by PLN is undoubtedly progressive. Sadly, the Instituto Departmental de Adaptación Infantil (IDAI) is the only government funded home that boasts these kinds of facilities. Further to this, everything that goes on inside the five treatment rooms is privately financed. Project founder, Siobhan Farrelly believes that work such as that done by PLN should be "encouraged by the government to ensure there are more services to enable the disabled of Bolivia to achieve personal goals at all levels no matter what type of disability they live with."

The treatment area, funded through sources in Ireland and Sweden, sees over seventy residents from the IDAI regularly get treated according to a specific programme, which is based on their personal needs. The therapy aims to reduce frustrations amongst the residents of the home and provide spaces within which they can find new ways of expressing themselves. Each of the different rooms boast coloured lights, musical instruments, textured walls and a ball pool, amongst other things, designed to make the resident more aware of themselves and their surroundings.

This colourful project appropriately encapsulates the key problems faced by disabled people in Bolivia: it encourages freedom of expression and movement, yet is only able to serve a very small number of people. At a wider level, the basic needs of the disabled population have not been sufficiently addressed, and this is only underscored by the current protests. In addition, local Andean topography provides a natural hurdle to freedom of mobility. Bolivia's capital city La Paz, nestled in the Andes at 3,352 metres, can be particularly restrictive for those with certain physical disabilities. Steep inclines, busy streets and inaccessible buildings are all part of the fabric of the city. Without a full-time assistant it is arguably near impossible to navigate the streets here. Farrelly and those at PLN believe that "Bolivia is ready to look at the needs of disabled people differently." Clearly the drive for greater disabled rights has been set in motion; the question remains as to whether the g overnment will respond to the movement in the coming months and years.

GIVING THE GAME AWAY

Fulbito in Bolivia and South America

Text: Anthony Moore Bastos

In Bolivia there is no such thing as a "No Ball Games" sign. Consequently, Bolivian windows are criss-crossed by **enrejados**, preventing both burglars and footballs from breaking and entering. But these balls are not from ordinary football games. For reasons of financial and organisational economy, many a Bolivian child defaults not to football, but to the lesser-known **fulbito.**

Known as Futsal (fútbol de salón) in Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela, and as fulbito in Peru and Bolivia (fútbol cinco or calcio de cinco apply as well) the game was invented in Uruguay in 1930, when the country hosted the first FIFA World Cup. The international community was living out its first global football fever, an entertaining distraction from the world economic crisis. On the streets of Uruguay, children took to improvising football games under whatever circumstances they could. One day, watching a small football game played on a Montevideo basketball court, the imagination of a local PE teacher was set alight. He realised that these improvised games could become a legitimate form of football with rules of its own. And so Uruguayan "futsal" was born. It soon expanded to other countries. The first rulebook of "futebol do salão" appeared in 1956 in urbanised Sao Paolo. Brazil was eager to secure a champion title for the new game, and in 1982 hosted and won the first Futsal World Cup. The second FIFUSA world cup was held in Spain, and the Brazilians retained their champion status.

The game is not very different to football. It is played by two teams composed of 5 players, on a court a third the size of a football pitch. A game is divided into two twenty-minute periods. This compact football demands a faster pace; fewer, shorter and quicker passes, as well as, most importantly, a greater dexterity to dodge, weave and dummy the opponents. In a nutshell: more technique, creativity and improvisation. The ball tends to be played with at ground level. Above-waist passes are the exception and not the rule, especially because the ball, despite being smaller than a football, is slightly heavier and bounces less. The use of either concrete or wooden floors means that specialised sports gear, such as **cachos**, are not necessary. The reduced size of the court allows it to take place in a more urban setting. This last factor alone has allowed the spread of fulbito.

Very few schools in Bolivia can afford the expense or space for an official 120 x 90 m football pitch. Instead they install **canchas polifuncionales**, also to be found in many parks and plazas. Although canchas are primarily designed for volleyball or basketball games, in practice, fulbito is played on them far more frequently. In absence of any court at all, **partidos** de fulbito will be improvised on streets or on any patch of land, whilst keeping the rules of the game. In the mornings at break in schools, paralelos play against one another, at midday **albañiles** play it after their lunch, in the afternoons and evenings, everyone from **cholitas** to the utmost unprecedented school dropouts, young single parents, unemployed, **k'olos**, **lustrabotas**, **cleferos**, **borrachito**s and **maleantes** enjoy the game. In short, football is a privilege compared to fulbito. Even though football is more successful in the public eye, socio-economic factors, namely infrastructure, tell a different story about which sport Bolivians play more and are better at.

In 1965 a South American federation was established and organised futsal championships. Bolivia hosted one of these events in the year 2000 and came out subcampeón. In the semi-finals it beat Russia 8–2 and passed onto the final with Colombia, who had defeated the Argentineans. The Colombians only won the final match in penalties (3–1). Despite the near world champion title for the Bolivians, fulbito hasn't gained the visibility and popularity football has. In addition, FIFA, FIFUSA and the AMF gone down a bumpy managerial road in which football always was their main agenda and futsal was on the back burner. Hence Bolivians have hitherto had patchy knowledge about fulbito narrative. Its players' names resound much weaker than football's "stars". Albeit Bolivians play fulbito more often and are better at it than at football, it is the game on the big pitch that has been cannonised. Even in face of defeat, pride and hope in la selección nacional has been prevalent. But times are changing. In 2013, Colombia will take the first step to officially recognise fulbito at the World Games in Cali.

In Bolivia meanwhile, fulbito, football and even **futbolín** tables are not only ubiquitous but synonymous. Little attention is paid to fulbito as a sport because most players don't understand it as a separate ability to football. Nevertheless, a specialised skill it undoubtedly is. Countries that play fulbito or futsal generally play a more skilled football game, often referred to as "**Joga Bonito**". The Brazilians are a prime example of sportsmen whose technical expertise in football is outstanding, and this feature of their game is often attributed to their childhood futsal games. The nimble and precise movement necessitated by futsal has turned it into a kindergarten for future top-level Joga bonito football players. Perhaps that is the reason why it is so little spoken of or recognised. South American champions, proud of their football prowess, don't want to give the game away.

PERFIDIA

A FILM BY RODRIGO BELLOT

TEXT: CARINA TUCKER

Released internationally in 2009, Rodrigo Bellot's latest film, *Perfidia*, had been eagerly awaited in Bolivia long before its first screening in the country in early March 2012. Bellott's justification for this delay was his desire to be present during the film's premiere, to show his appreciation for the support that his compatriots have given him throughout his career. The director is regarded as something of a national treasure in Bolivia. While he went to film school in New York, he is originally a camba and

is best known for writing, producing and directing the independent films *Sexual Dependency* (a coming-of-age drama, 2003) and *Who Killed the White Llama?* (an on-the-road comedy, 2007).

Perfidia stars Gonzalo Valenzuela, whose acting debut in *En la Cama* was a tribute to Bellott. Interestingly, it was this actor himself who inspired the director to write *Perfidia*. Either Valenzuela was the protagonist, or the film wouldn't be made. Fate was on Bellott's side. Back in 2007, when he was approached with the script, Valenzuela had just experienced the same emotional state that Bellott wanted to put on screen. His four-month-overdue decision to accept the offer is something that not only Bellott is extremely grateful for, but that we too, as audience members, appreciate. What Bellott originally wrote as a personal exorcism, on screen provides emotional catharsis for his audience.

As the title suggests, *Perfidia* is a tale of amorous treachery. We follow the protagonist to one night in a hotel room, where he aims to put an end to his pain in bidding a final farewell to his lover. One man, one location, one desire. The simplicity of the piece is impressive: there are two minutes of dialogue in the entire film, with just three songs accompanying the otherwise sparse natural sounds. The film opens with the penetrating lyrics: "No one understands what I suffer". With this, we are transported into Valenzuela's inner world, experiencing his desolation, his solitude, his tormented sorrow. We see the road opening in front of us, the stark white of the snow-covered landscape, and see it as though we were the passenger in the bus. The power of the opening negative haunts us, staying with us as we are faced with the steady raindrops which blur our vision, the sense of death implied in the view of winter, the winding road which leads to an unknown destination . . . The director's use of pathetic fallacy is clichéd but effective: we become the protagonist.

We soon learn that nothing, with Bellott, is an accident. A dance scene, made resonant with Luis Miguel's "Ahora te puedes marchar", could superficially be interpreted as comic relief in a film which is intense and often quite laboured in its real-time movements. The lyrics, however, belie such a false reading: they are essential to the telling of the story. In what is one of the most unexpectedly powerful scenes of the film, its dark irony immortalises the protagonist's poignant sincerity. Bellott's achievement comes in exposing the protagonist's vulnerability in a profoundly sensitive way, yet he manages to portray it as a form of bravery. Valenzuela's masculinity is an ironic foil to his childlike weakness, something which is ultimately transparent despite his humorous posing to the camera. What shocks us most, however, is the realisation that Valenzuela is not the only vulnerable person in the room: we too are confronted with our innermost vulnerabilities, and this can be an uncomfortable identification to make.

Whilst addressing the audience at his film's premiere, Bellott cited Gandhi: "Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it." For Bellot, it was imperative that he make this film: it prevented him from "drowning in desperation and solitude". The film was a deeply personal and emotional release for Bellott, but even as he himself asserts, "the film is not mine". When released onto that cinema screen, the film becomes the spectator's. In its space of silence and reflection, the viewers project their own perfidies onto the screen. As the critic Lucía Querejazu explains, the viewer is not required to bring any prior knowledge to the cinema, it suffices to simply bring your own personal story. Indeed, in this sacred cinematic space, Bellott forces us to question and search using the same zeal and desperation that characterises *Perfidia*. In pushing the resources at his disposal to their limit—by deliberately forging a dialectic relationship with his audience—Bellott gives us the tools to make the film our own and, in doing so, arguably gives the film the profundity that so marks it. This is the greatest irony of Bellott's *Perfidia*: it is presented as the director's most personal film, yet it has transcended his biography to become his most universal. The emotion imparted is deeply entrenched in all human experience—fundamentally, the desire to love and to be loved.

Bolivian Express
Grupo Express Press

Cultural Calendar

Cultural Calendar March-April 2012

Folklore with Ana Maria y Los Juliaqui.
Typical songs from different regions of the country (cuecas, huayños, taquiraris and others), will be performed by the renowned singer, who on this occasion will sing with the winner of the Festival de Aiquile. A night that takes you back to the roots of national folklore.
Tues 20th March. 7.30 pm

Photography Exhibition.
"Todays South Africa" by French photographer Greg Eleze, includes portraits and various reports about his experience in Africa (Mali and Mauritania) and Apartheid. It includes images which reflect the tragic period in African history.
Museo Costumbrista "Juan de Vargas", Sucre esq Jaén
Thursday 1st March - Saturday 24th March.

Carnaval masks.
El Museo Costumbrista "Juan De Vargas" returns to exhibit its collection of patrimonial masks to show them in an imaginary environment of festivity, full of colour and movement.
Sala Temporal. Calle Sucre esq. Jaén.
Friday 16th - Sunday 25th March

The Art of Various Generations.
Works showing the different themes, techniques and tendencies of the artists Ricardo Perez Alcalá, Keiko Gonzales, Fabricio Lara, Olga García, Remy Daza, Fernando Antezana, and Reynaldo Chavez. The show opens in the Galeria 3SArte.
Calle 11 Nro 99, Achumani.
Thursday 1st - Saturday 31st March.

Young Artists.
A collection of up and coming artists open the exhibition in the new cultural space "Azafran". The public will be able to appreciate works of diverse techniques and themes.
Av. Camacho 1367.
Thursday 1st - Friday 30th March.

Historic buildings of La Paz.
The urban architecture of La Paz from the XIX and XX centuries, recorded by Julio Cordero and Fotos Gismondi, forms part of the show that will take place in the temporary gallery of the Museo Tambo Quirquincho. Components of the historic houses let you step back in time.
Thursday 8th March - Saturday 31st

Auction of pictorial works.
For the benefit of the psychiatric hospital "San Juan de Dios", there will be a show and subsequently an auction of the works of renowned national artists. All the proceeds are destined for the aforementioned hospital.
Calle Paucara 1002 sequin 21 de San Miguel.
Wednesday 28th March - Tuesday 3rd April.

Free concert.
In honour of the Francophone month, the Alianza Francesa is hosting a concert of Jean- Marie Olive, singer of the street.
Tuesday 20th March

A traditional karaoke competition.
Taking place in the auditorium of the Alianza Francesa, in order to celebrate the Francophone month.
Friday 23rd March.

Christian Music Concert.
The Mexican Christian group, "Rojo", are widely popular in their country for messages that they put across with their songs. Particularly aimed at young people, the concert will have as special guests The Happy No Bodys, Nathan y Vinilo from La Paz.
Theatro Al Aire Libre "Jaime Laredo"
Wednesday 21st March.

"Hamlet de los Andes".
Theatro de los Andes. Directed by Diego Aramburo.
Theatro Municipal "Alberto Saavedra Perez"
Monday 26th and Tuesday 27th. 8pm

Surreal Art Exhibition.
Santiago Ayala and Marco Alvarado will open the exposition together, providing a diverse subject matter, but both focusing on drawing.
Museo de Arte Comtemporaneo "Plaza".
Av 16 de Julio 1698.
Wednesday 14th - Tuesday 27th March

"Baghdad Theatrical dance."
Compania Kamal. Directed by Kamal Al-Bayaty.
Teatro Municipal "ALberto Saavedra Perez"
Saturday 31st March and Sunday 1st April. 8pm.

House of the Spirits.
Compania Teatro de Camara. Directed by Jose Zayas.
Teatro Municipal "Alberto Saavedra Perez"
Wednesday 4th April. 8pm.

Cholitas luchadoras: the strapping heroines of El Alto's weekly **cholita** wrestling. Every Sunday tourists and locals alike pack the Multifunctional Centre in El Alto to watch the ladies pound their way to victory. As queues advance well beyond the entrance and the stadium fills up, it is clear that this activity has become an ingrained part of the culture and society of El Alto, with many families attending religiously each week. But cholita wrestling is difficult to define. Beautiful and brutal, should we understand it as a competitive sport or a staged circus act?

The idea for fighting cholitas originated from the "Titanes del Ring", a popular group of male Bolivian wrestlers that fight in El Alto. Their sport is an example of professional **lucha libre** wrestling, which has developed throughout a number of Spanish-speaking countries and has been taking place in Bolivia for over 50 years. In 2001, as the audience began to fizzle away and show numbers took a blow, Juan Mamani, president of the Titans and wrestler himself, began to think of creative ways to recapture his fans. It is these beginnings that can cast doubt on the authenticity of the show as a sport. Mamani first thought of introducing fighting dwarves, then moved on to wrestling women. This somewhat bizarre progression indicates little respect for dwarves or women: the vision was of a popular freak show. Nevertheless, Mamani's open audition call was surprisingly well received, bringing in around 60 respondents. With the introduction of indigenous Aymaran women, Mamani's aim to attract more fans to watch professional fighting proved successful.

Several years have passed and the event now sees over 1000 fans enter its doors each week. People from all over the world come to witness the immaculate fighting cholitas, dressed in their many tiered skirts, flat shoes and colourful shawls, balancing bowler hats on their plaited hair. Audiences find the choreographed acts of the lucha libre fighters entertaining, especially when the fights involve a "good" cholita versus a "bad" cholita, and the crowd has the opportunity to become involved and take sides. The show's popularity is evident in regular attendance of local Bolivians from El Alto. They too are indigenous and suffer from the daily hardship associated with living in an impoverished area. For these spectators, the lucha libre performance is a form of cheap diversion, allowing them to forget about their problems and daily struggles, relax with their family and come together as a community.

Nonetheless, to some the idea of women wrestling remains totally incomprehensible, especially when they engage in fights against men twice their size, something that is often described as grotesque and unwatchable. So why do the cholita women choose to become involved in these physically demanding and violent stunt fights? After having visited the cholita spectacle twice it became evident to me that these women enjoy the experience just as much as their laughing audience. Although cholitas are paid around $13 per fight, this is not sufficient for them to wrestle full-time and the women are obligated to work in other fields. Most are out all day and every day selling their goods, and often have a family to look after back at home. Perhaps it is precisely because there is no living to be made from it, that being part of the Titans is always a passion and never a chore. Training and preparing for the shows allow the women to relax, have fun, and above all, feel that they are more than simply housewives and street vendors. Likewise, it is difficult to watch cholita wrestling without admiring their immense skill and physical strength. Of course the disparity in size between male and female fighters can sometimes be distressing. But it is impressive to witness those women who have reached an equal or greater skill level than the men, and are able to fight back just as hard. Nowadays in El Alto, the male fighters are just a warm-up act for cholita wrestling. Whatever dubious preconceptions female wrestling may have sprung from, the women have made a male-dominated profession their own, and are popular for it.

But it does not end with popularity. The pride and earnestness with which cholitas are motivated to partake mark its passage from freak show to serious sport, it seems likely that this phenomenon will continue to grow. Both times I experienced the fighting craze a cholita woman emerged from the fight with her face covered in blood. It is difficult to make out which of these wounds are real or part of the entertainment. But it is clear that the women recognise this sport as a physically tough activity: injuries are expected. When asked why she decided to become a wrestler, Chela la Maldita replied "I like all sports but wrestling is my favourite." She admits that it could be seen to be grotesque at times, but ultimately it's part of the game. Like any other professional sport it is competitive, and requires intensive training.

Aspects of the wrestling still retain the circus show characteristics that it began with: the costumes, the story characters, and most importantly the pre-determined fight outcomes. But the concept has come a long way since Mamani's dwarf dreams, and cholitas are now admired as true professionals. Not only are they respected by the audience in the same way that male wrestlers are, but by wearing their indigenous and overtly female outfits they also distinguish their form of wrestling. Rather than competing in a male field, they have carved a new niche for themselves, demonstrating how they can fight hard, win fights and become cholita champions.

The lucha libre performances in El Alto are without doubt the largest and most famous examples of the cholita sport. However, the security guard of the event confirmed that currently it takes place throughout La Paz. I was also able to find evidence that the National Wrestling Alliance holds events with the fighting cholitas in Potosí. Cholita wrestlers have attracted great attention to the wrestling scene in Bolivia, and their popularity is spreading throughout the country. With increased interest from world media, and the introduction of leaflet distribution and other forms of advertising, it seems likely that this phenomenon will continue grow. From its birth as a whimsical experiment ten years ago, we may be witnessing the escalation of an important part of future Bolivian sporting culture.

Photo by Taj Davis