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Editorial # 73:

Performances

By William Wroblewski

In 2014, the city of La Paz was named one of the Seven New Urban Wonders of the World by the New7Wonders Foundation. This global distinction came after a long and hard-fought campaign spearheaded by the city government and local citizens. It remains a badge of honour for us, as well as a central theme of the city's efforts to bolster tourism. This award is both a boon to, and result of, La Paz's emergence onto the world stage.

The attention given to the city is not unwarranted. The **teleférico** system has revolutionised transport here, for citizens and guests alike. The city's gastronomic reputation is gaining renown as new restaurants, cafés and bars are focusing on local ingredients to create a distinct modern cuisine. The arts in this city are gaining more and more support as musicians and theatres receive more recognition abroad and more support locally, and the walls of the city come to life with bright murals by local artists. The list of ways in which La Paz is evolving, both culturally and economically, sometimes seems endless.

Such recognition as bestowed on La Paz in the past few years does not come without work. While a city may grow and

improve organically in some ways, gaining attention from abroad does take planning and coordination. A lot of thought has gone into how La Paz presents itself, and what this presentation means. In some ways, its identity is carefully crafted, honed (albeit in a decentralised way) to put the city's best face forward. Much like a person carefully shaping their identity through edited posts and rehearsed smiles on social media, performance is the name of the game, as the city creates a more modern and trendy image and shares it with the world.

We want to look at performance as a way to understand the things happening around us. In La Paz, as anywhere, people are performing every day: in the street, on stages, in work meetings, at social functions. The clothes we wear, the words we use, the actions we take, all put forward representations of who we are, or at least who we want to be. In this issue of *Bolivian Express*, we take a look at the people, organisations, and places around us, and explore the relationships between who or what they are, how they present themselves, and how we see and interpret them. By looking at Bolivia in this way, we refuse to take things at face value and commit to digging deeper to make sense of why things are shown as they are.

We look at traditional performers, and what they put into their craft, from standup comedians to Bolivian K-pop fanatics. We visit the Conservatorio Plurinacional de Música to review the state of opera and classical music in Bolivia, and spend an afternoon with Juan Carlos Aduviri, a renown Bolivian actor honing his vision for a cinematic style that is purely **alteaño**. And we meet a group of homeless young people living on the street and changing their lives through hip-hop. We also learn about the performance of work, and hear from Bolivian entrepreneurs to understand how they use their experiences to present innovative ideas to local and international marketplaces. And a young bartender talks about his goals for reinventing La Paz's cocktail scene, using taste, smell (palo santo! tobacco!) and sight to create inspired and stunning drinks.

La Paz's ascent onto the international stage is undeniable. Plenty of international attention has been paid to this city as a cultural, culinary, and general tourist destination. Hopefully this issue of *Bolivian Express* helps spread the word on what La Paz and the rest of Bolivia has to offer, and to encourage everyone to stop and watch the show that is life here. It is one not to be missed. ▶

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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SUCCESS AND THE INNER GAME

JUAN CARLOS ADUVIRI'S RISE AS AN INTERNATIONAL ACTOR

TEXT: MOHAMMED JUNAID PHOTOS: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI



He's holding a metal frame he fabricated with screws and tape to stabilise a tiny GoPro action camera. I seem to be in the middle of nowhere, but actually I am in the far reaches of El Alto, in a young neighbourhood called Urbanización 31 de Noviembre. I don't quite know what I'm doing here, except that I've followed this man to this place and he is currently directing an action scene. We are in a partially built house. Powdered cement rushes to the air as two actors engage in a staged fight.

Juan Carlos Aduviri made his name acting in the acclaimed film *Even the Rain*, performing alongside Gael García Bernal. He has acted in several roles since, but is chiefly following his goal of becoming a director and cinematographer. Born and raised in El Alto, he says 'life itself is an adventure', and hopes to show the world 'this crazy city'. His coaching classes to young aspiring actors and directors seem to be an expansion of this vision. The fact that he's working on one movie that ends with the beginning, and another filmed entirely with GoPros, demonstrates his distinct style of filmmaking.

PEOPLE OFTEN GLANCE OVER THE MINDSET, THE 'INNER-GAME' OF THE INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS ACHIEVED SUCCESS.

Juan Carlos grew up in a poor family with eight siblings. His mother and partially disabled father often went to the countryside to work during the planting and harvest seasons, leaving him to look after his younger siblings. He recalls how in high school the teachers thought he had limited potential because, as he says, 'I suffered from dyslexia, so I was a bad student'. But growing up in an Aymara community in a semi-rural area outside La Paz, he was surrounded by a culture he describes as 'giving', in which young people shared this view. Now, he says the world, including the communities near where he grew up, are increasingly individualistic. I hear a recent example of how his wife was thrown off her seat on a bus by a woman who sat in it.

Given his difficulties in reading, Juan Carlos spent much of his high school years focusing for hours on the images of his brothers' comics. Around this time he bought a VHS player and watched whatever film he could. He says the comic books and movies, despite his challenges, were never an escape for him, nor a place to hide. 'I've never seen my past as something sad,' he points out. 'Films and TV helped me travel, but not escape reality.'

Today, Juan Carlos watches one movie a day, noting he recently watched *Interstellar* three times in one week – a clear sign of his obsession with cinematography. I ask him if he sees himself as an adventurer, an explorer. 'Not only physically, but also in the mind,' he responds. I tell him I view myself in a similar way, and we high five. It is apparent he has a rigorous determination to keep exploring, to achieve further success.

In May 2009, Juan Carlos received a call. He had the opportunity to audition for an international film shooting in Bolivia. *Even the Rain* was a telling of the very real events of the early 2000's in Cochabamba, when communities rose up against the privatisation of Bolivia's water supply. He got the role, playing the lead Bolivian character, and was nominated for the Goya Award for Best New Actor.

After the film's success, Juan Carlos was given a chance to leave and go to Canada, but chose to stay in El Alto. He feels he has much more to give. 'I want to show my Bolivia to the people of the world,' he says, and points out that he doesn't have dreams, he has goals – achievable things. He sees El Alto, and all its quirks, as a 'Wild West' of sorts, and firmly believes a distinct style of cinematography can come from the city.

Though he acts, Juan Carlos focuses on being a director and cinematographer. He surrounds himself with people who will help achieve this vision and, of course, they are chiefly from El Alto. His companions are not yet famous in the film community, almost underground, but Juan Carlos assures me they relish their craft, their talents are being nurtured, and they soon will be more prominent. He knows this symbiotic relationship will make him a better director.

When I ask him what one thing he would change in the world, he is not pensive, as if he has thought about this before. 'No borders,' he answers firmly. To him, the world is increasingly isolationist and the core of this problem is that it is borne out of fear, just as borders are. 'Borders are proof of human decadency and are breaking the links between people,' he elaborates.

People often marvel at actions and achievements, but glance over the mindset, the 'inner-game' of the individual who has achieved some success. Speaking to Juan Carlos it is evident that his mindset, his 'worldview' forms him. He has been forged by his life in the city of El Alto and the people that make up that place.

When he was young, Juan Carlos told his brother that he was going to be a cinematographer. The response was questioning, as he remembers his brother saying that such a goal was unachievable, and that Juan Carlos 'would always be an "Indian"'. Juan laughs as he recalls the memory. 'My brother was right,' he says, 'in the movies I do play the Indian!' But even back then his drive was persistent. Once he said aloud that he would be a cinematographer, he knew he had to do it.

And here we are, in El Alto, filming away with his makeshift equipment. The cement rushes to the air and Juan calls out, '¡Buenísimo!' He is happy with this take. ▶

'I'VE NEVER SEEN MY PAST AS SOMETHING SAD. FILMS AND TV HELPED ME TRAVEL, BUT NOT ESCAPE REALITY.'

—JUAN CARLOS ADUVIRI

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SINGERS WITHOUT A STAGE

REGENERATING THE CLASSICAL MUSIC SCENE IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: YOLANDE ROWSON
ILLUSTRATION: HUGO CUELLAR

Even a cursory glance around the Conservatorio Plurinacional de Música will tell you that the classical music scene in Bolivia, in spite of all odds, is alive and kicking. The sound of a distant clarinet wafts through the open courtyards whilst students laden with instruments and scores dash between classes in the airy halls of the school. Notice boards are crowded with flyers for concerts, musicals and recitals. The enthusiasm is there, but where is the audience?

'It's more and more difficult to fill concert halls these days,' laments Weimar Arancibia, conductor of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Bolivia. 'Major productions, such as opera and ballet, have such extremely high costs that it is very difficult to cover them.'

Although the general crisis of classical music is apparent in Bolivia, it is not only a problem of funding. Another problem for young musicians is the lack of opportunities, particularly for those interested in opera. I spoke to Beatriz Méndez, Director of the conservatory in La Paz, who met me in the reception of the school, clearly straight from teaching and on her way to yet another class. 'The sad reality is that, as an institution, we can train people, but there aren't steps towards promotion,' she says. Attempts to provide opportunities, she adds, are 'personal, not institutional initiatives.'



This is not to say that there is nothing available for classical music enthusiasts here. For example, The National Symphony Orchestra has just completed a series of performances of Beethoven's 9 Symphonies over March, April and May. Additionally, for those looking for less formal classical entertainment, there's *Las Flaviadas*, a venue that holds small-scale classical music recitals in Sopocachi every Saturday. Outside of La Paz, there is the annual Baroque Festival in Chiquitania and the International Culture Festival in Sucre. However, back in the nation's administrative capital, **ópera** enthusiasts have had to be content with screenings of performances from places as far afield as the MET in New York in the absence of any live, large-scale productions.

That said, Susana Renjel Encinas, a soprano singer from La Paz and a former pupil of Beatriz Méndez's, is working to promote opera in the country. She has performed as a soloist with the Orquesta del Conservatorio Nacional de Música and the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional. Susana and her musical colleagues have taken it upon themselves to promote their art to a younger audience, given the lack of any formal government or institutional initiatives. 'Unfortunately,' she says, 'the classical music scene in Bolivia is still quite limited. There hasn't been a complete *ópera* in the country for many years. As singers, we must do it ourselves, find spaces for presentations, and funding.'

According to Susana, the solution to the funding crisis is publicity. Opera the world over has an unfortunate reputation for being inaccessible and elitist. In an attempt to remedy this, she and her colleagues organised a flashmob in a **Pumakatari**, with the support of the La Paz bus. 'We had a great acceptance by the public,' she smiles. 'The videos that were filmed of this performance went viral and were shared more than 100,000 times in a couple of days.' In line with her efforts, two years ago a group of young performers founded the *Compañía Lírica Boliviana*, precisely to promote the lyrical (opera and chamber music) in the country and in different social groups. 'We loved this idea,' she says. 'If it is beautiful to sing in a theatre, singing close to the

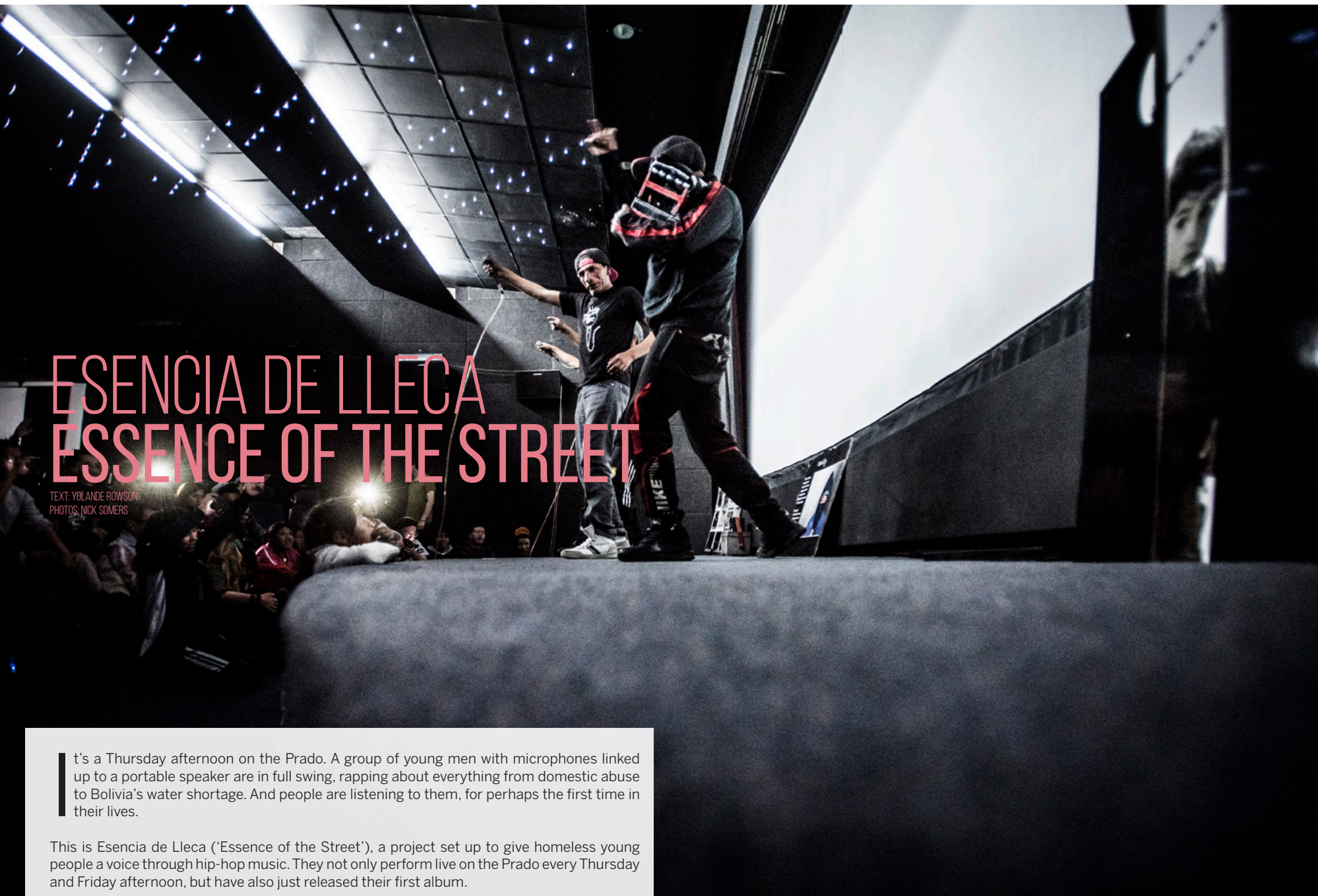
people has a magic of its own, the feedback is immediate and it generates some very exciting moments.'

It seems their shared vision is exactly what the industry needs to reinvent itself. Weimar Arancibia calls it the 'regeneration of classical music in Bolivia', and mentions other initiatives with the same purpose, such as the initiation programme at the Experimental Orchestra of Native Instruments and the School of Music in San Ignacio de Moxos, both of which are dedicated to training composers. 'These are projects of different visions and objectives, but all with a profound ideological aim,' Weimar explains. 'They educate musicians from our culture and our possibilities for expression.'

Back at the conservatory, the halls are still crowded with students and the staff is enthusiastic. They haven't given up on the future of classical music. It will be a few years before the results of Susana's initiative are evident and the pieces produced by young composers currently in training open to the public. But for now, looking closer at the notice board, a new flyer has appeared. It is for a brand new production composed by Nicolás Suárez called *El Compadre*, and it is Bolivia's first contemporary opera. It seems the aisles are slowly filling and the box-office is back in business. ▶

'AS AN INSTITUTION, WE CAN TRAIN PEOPLE, BUT THERE AREN'T STEPS TOWARDS PROMOTION.'

— BEATRIZ MÉNDEZ,



ESENCIA DE LLECA ESSENCE OF THE STREET

TEXT: YOLANDE ROWSON
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS

It's a Thursday afternoon on the Prado. A group of young men with microphones linked up to a portable speaker are in full swing, rapping about everything from domestic abuse to Bolivia's water shortage. And people are listening to them, for perhaps the first time in their lives.

This is Esencia de Lleca ('Essence of the Street'), a project set up to give homeless young people a voice through hip-hop music. They not only perform live on the Prado every Thursday and Friday afternoon, but have also just released their first album.

And what stories they have to tell. With an age range of 18-28, the majority of the performers are long-term street survivors. They suffer doubly in that they are too old to receive the kind of assistance accessible to minors, and are at ages that are frequently mistrusted by the public. They are here for a variety of reasons. Some have been abandoned by their families, other have lost their parents and have been left vulnerable to extreme poverty and drug abuse.

In Bolivia, just as all over the world, homeless people are ignored and isolated. 'It's like they are invisible' explains Anke Snauwaert, the 24-year-old force behind the project. 'When you see them on the Prado in La Paz, it's like they don't exist. People don't notice them, they don't want to talk with them, they see them as crap, like people without an identity, as rovers and thieves. They see them in a negative way or they simply don't see them.'

Anke, a psychology student, came to Bolivia last year to study at the Universidad Católica Boliviana. Having previously played in an orchestra for people in vulnerable situations in her native Belgium, she had seen the beneficial effects of music first hand. In September, with the support of her mentor at the university, she decided to set up something similar here in Bolivia. 'I think in this way the project was really nice and really beautiful,' she says. 'They could express themselves through their music and a whole other dynamic was created on the streets of La Paz. People who usually wouldn't talk, wouldn't see them, wouldn't listen to them were standing still, talking with me to know more about them. They were listening to their lives.'



After bringing together a number of kids for the project, Anke drew on some friends who had a small recording studio. They gave her a special price and she was able to fund the studio time with the help of sponsors. She fondly recalls the recording experience and how much it meant to the performers.

These young artists had never had access to this kind of professional set-up before. She noticed that some of the girls were nervous about performing, so she took them for their own special recording session, making a girly day out. It is this kind of sensitivity, attention to detail, and warm-heartedness that characterises Anke and has been integral to the success of the programme. She has created an environment in which these young people feel comfortable enough to tell their stories.

One of the most powerful tales is that of 17-year-old América. In her song 'Madres Solteras' ('Single Mothers') she tells of her pregnancy at 15, and how she dealt with the discrimination as such a young mother, how she was judged and ignored. She goes on to say how this has not held her back, she kept positive, kept moving forward and 'her mistakes turned into love'.

Esencia de Lleca not only offers its stars a chance to write and perform, but also the opportunity to make friends, earn money through the sale of the CD, and break away from drug use. 'This was one of the aims we had,' Anke says. 'One of the rules is that whilst you are participating in the project, you can't be high. One of the goals of the project is to give them another perspective on life, outside of drug use and living on the streets.'

Setting up a project of this type was far from plain sailing for Anke and her team. The original plan was to rehearse in different locations around La Paz, including the Teatro al Aire Libre, a large outdoor venue in La Paz. 'I kept thinking this could be better because not a lot of them were coming to the project and I knew that a lot of them were interested,' Anke explains. 'I think it's an obligation for them to go out of their comfort zone. They didn't feel comfortable coming to the Teatro, so I changed the whole idea in January, moving the project to the streets. That changed the project a lot because on the one hand we had more trouble with other people and with the police, but we had a lot more young people that were interested, curious.'

Another problem was dealing with the police, who at first could not tell the difference between the participants of Anke's programme and other homeless people on the street. Although not all of the homeless people on the Prado use drugs, at times some drug users gathered around the performance and the police assumed Anke was responsible for them. As such, she found that she was being criticised by the local authority for condoning drug use. Fortunately, this struggle was only temporary. As Anke explains, 'It changed during the first month because they got to know us. We were there every week and they saw that we didn't make trouble.'

Anke and the boys and girls have come a long way since Esencia de Lleca was founded in September. Integral to its success has been the fact that it is completely different to any other project acting for this demographic. A few organisations are keen to give food and shelter to the homeless, but even these projects can ignore the personalities and stories of the people they are helping. They were nameless figures in the shadows of society, now they're in the spotlight, and their names are Choko, Chuki, Lustra MC, Adrian, Alan, América, Anahi, Ariel, Bengie, Daniel, Diego, Felman, Jorda, Jorge, Karla, Luis, Mayumi, Poncho, Rolando, Tony and Vlady, and they've got a message you ought to listen to. ▶

A MASTER OF HIS CRAFT

TEXT AND PHOTO: SOPHIE HOGAN

HUMO
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JOSUÉ
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LINO HAS HIS
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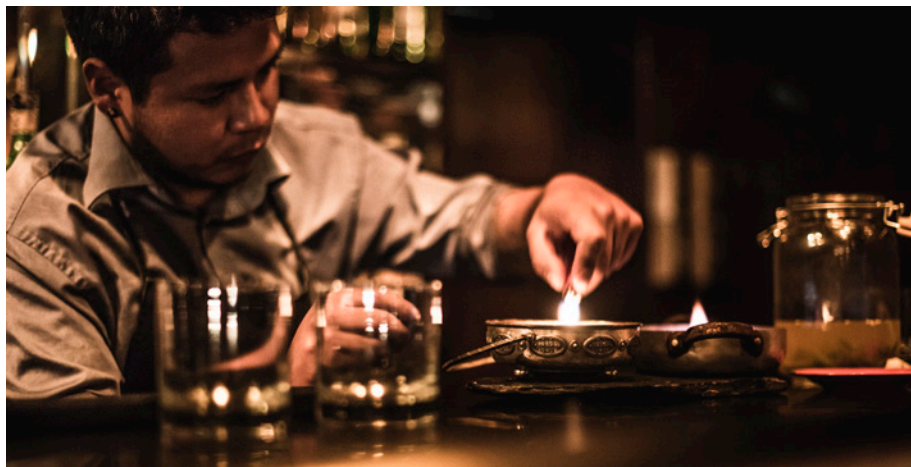


When I tell Josué Grajeda Lino, the bartender at Humo's bar - The Whiskería - that I'm just not sure what I want, he tells me to pick a spirit. Slightly perplexed, I pick cachaça, Brazil's crown jewel of liquor. For a moment, I see him ponder, searching his brain for just the right thing to make. Then, as if a light bulb has gone off in his head, he springs into action, grabbing his cocktail shaker and beginning to craft his newest creation.

The taste could almost be described as out of this world. As he explains what's in it, I begin to understand the flavour that is so intoxicatingly good: cachaça, egg whites, passion fruit juice, a touch of lemon juice, and the syrup of **huira huira**, a flower from the **altiplano**. It is clear to see why this place, attached to the restaurant Humo, tucked below the Montículo in La Paz's Sopocachi neighbourhood, has quickly become one of the most talked about bars in town.

'As a kid, I was desperate to be pilot,' Josué recalls. We are sitting in the restaurant as the cooks prepare for the night's dinner rush. 'Later, I wanted to dedicate myself to gastronomy, to be a cook, but it was during a time when my parents didn't really have the money to pay for the schooling.' To fund his dream, he began working nights as a security guard in nightclubs, while by day he attended Manq'a, a culinary social project in El Alto for low-income youth. As he began to learn his craft at the institute he had a small revelation. 'I realised that I like gastronomy - and I love working nights - so why not work in bartending?'

PHOTO: NICK SOMERS



Josué, an **alteño**, found his way to La Paz and was eventually able to take a place at the famous Gustu culinary school. 'I was studying there for two years,' he remembers, although much of his learning came from the people surrounding him throughout the years. 'At first I was teaching myself, and I learned many things from those around me,' he says. 'As time passed, people left and changed, so I began to really use what I'd learned from them, and in later years of course the internet was extremely useful.'

After his two years at Gustu, he was taken in for a job at the new restaurant in Sopocachi called Humo, which means

'smoke' in English. When The Whiskería opened in February, however, Josué got his first big bartending job as resident mixologist on the restaurant lounge. At the new job, he was able to do much more than at Gustu. 'I would like it to be the best bar in La Paz. At least, to make it a place with artisanal drinks for a fair price,' he says. 'I want to get along with all my clients. I do not spoil them. I do my job and sell them something good.'

In only four months, his vision for the bar is starting to materialise. Humo's resident bar has been hailed as one of the best in La Paz. Every night clients come from all over the city, locals and tourists alike. The classic cocktails, many of Josué's own creation, have been popular with many. Josué's personal favourite is the Humo 2.0, which includes cold coffee amongst its ingredients. It might seem risky at first, but it is actually a beautiful drink. 'The Negroni is my all-time favourite cocktail, but of my own creation, it has to be the Humo 2.0,' he says, laughing.

Although Josué's nameless, custom cocktails are not a common occurrence, I will never forget that first sip of the cachaça-based drink he made for me. He has more talent than some of the bartenders of Lima or Rio de Janeiro, and he tells me he would like to go to London some day. 'They have the best bars in the world, without a doubt,' he says. 'It would be a dream to visit them.'

Josué's work is simply extraordinary. Something tells me I will be imbibing within the dark wooden walls of Humo's Whiskería more than a few times in the near future. ▶

Humo is located on the ground floor of the Montículo Apart Hotel, Calle Macario Pinilla #580, La Paz.

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POTTER

PARADISE

TEXT AND PHOTO: SOPHIE HOGAN

With hundreds of thousands of websites, chat rooms and clubs dedicated to the saga, the famous magical world of Harry Potter is known the world over. Not to be left behind, La Paz has recently seen the grand opening of a new café in the Sopocachi neighbourhood dedicated to this incredibly popular book and film franchise. Avada Kedavra, as the café is known, takes its name from the series' infamous death curse. At first, that may not sound promising, but we here at *Bolivian Express* thought we'd try it out and see.

Even before one walks through the door, Avada Kedavra proves itself to be an admiring homage to the novels and films. Outside, a large dragon sits atop the small building, mouth open and baring its teeth, with the café's name written on a swinging cauldron above the door. Visitors are greeted by a towering life-size figure of Hagrid, Hogwarts's groundskeeper; across stands the slightly disturbing figure of Voldemort.

'My partner Citlali Rioja and I both adore the saga, and we wanted to pay homage to it in a unique way,' says Hugo Catunta, one of the café's two proprietors, as he leans over a counter displaying numerous themed mugs, badges and keychains for sale. 'The cafés here in Sopocachi are sophisticated, so we wanted to keep up with that as well.' He says that the drinks, for him, have a touch of magic. 'I really love the butterbeer, and the **multijugo** potion really tastes magical.'

Strewn across the walls is a mountain of paraphernalia – from a dementor bursting out of a wall to wands stacked behind the counter. Candles hang from the ceiling, and the bathroom is the spitting image of infamous villain Professor Umbridge's office. Quidditch books and other magical lore sit in glass cases. The pièce de résistance, however, must be the small dressing room in the middle of the café, where appropriate garments await the most fanatic customers; there are robes from each Hogwarts house. Visitors can try them on and take photos of themselves, and even don the famous 'sorting hat' to top the outfit off.

This place, without a doubt, is a haven for 'Potterheads'. But for those who aren't so enamoured with the franchise, there is a limited but growing menu. There are the usual suspects, the coffees and frappuccinos, but as a café dedicated to a magical world, more exciting things are on offer. Our personal recommendation is the Phoenix, a refreshing drink based on Professor Dumbledore's bird; listed simply as a juice of mango and forest fruits, it seems so much more, as a rich, cloudy mix of red, yellow and orange in the glass gives it a touch of magic. To top it all off, there is a small piece of dry ice on top of every goblet. (Yes, drinks are served in goblets.)

'Each recipe has its own unique little touch, to make it more fun. And of course, the theme makes it all the more unique,' Hugo says. And we agree. Although this café is still in its infancy, it is already a booming business; our first attempt at entering it was thwarted by a line for tables that was almost to the door. Avada Kedavra is magically satisfying the Harry Potter super-fans of Bolivia. ▶

THE PIÈCE DE
RÉSISTANCE MUST
BE THE SMALL
DRESSING ROOM IN
THE MIDDLE,
WHERE
APPROPRIATE
GARMENTS AWAIT
THE MOST FANATIC
CUSTOMERS.



Avada Kedavra Café is located on Calle Guachalla, between Avenida Sánchez Lima and Avenida 20 de Octubre in the Sopocachi neighbourhood of La Paz.

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TOTAL IMMERSION

THE BOLIVIAN CULT OF **K-POP** REVISITED

TEXT: ALEX WALKER
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS/ WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI /ADRIANA MURILLO

Back in 2014, I wrote about and investigated the curiously popular Korean pop scene in Bolivia for *BX41*. I spent time with a dance troupe called *Diamond Girls* and interviewed a radio expert in an attempt to get my head around how this niche, artificial and – crucially – Korean genre had permeated the millennial consciousness in La Paz so successfully. My conclusions were: marketing, sentimentality and idolism. But I never quite reconciled with a cultural import that had no basis in Bolivian language or lifestyle, and that had even led to extreme examples of **paceños** undergoing cosmetic surgery to appear more like their K-pop idols.

Three years on, I decided to go back. And to go big. In an attempt to understand this genre and its popularity in La Paz, I would have to *become* a Bolivian K-pop star.

My transition's enablers came in the form of María Isabel Huanca Azurduy and her team at K-SHIN who, perhaps misguidedly, agreed for me to perform as the halftime act in the 2017 K-pop World Festival Bolivia at the Palacio de Comunicaciones along La Paz's main avenue, El Prado. More excitingly still, I was to become the fifth member of an all-female dance group – the wonderfully patient *501% Double S*, whose name is a twist on *SS501*, one of the casualties of my 2014 vendetta, and the masterminds behind 'Love Like This', the song and routine we would be learning.

My only previous foray into dance training was when a male friend and I, despairing over our fruitless nightclub experiences, decided to shed all self-respect and learn the charleston in my university kitchen. I was not so much a fish out of water as a coy carp trying to rewire a plug socket. Yet, I was determined to dive into K-popping.

Our group's first rehearsal was in a mirrored studio at Academia Artistik on Avenida Arce, where Alexis Anahi Castillo Rodríguez was tasked with the herculean objective of leading my training. Her purple hoodie reading 'Wild Card' seemed painfully apt. Progress, inevitably, was slow. The delay on my moves compared to the rest of the group was reminiscent of the lag on a transatlantic FaceTime courtesy of GPRS internet.

In our initial meeting, Isabel had, incredibly, agreed to afford me a solo vocal performance as well. My rendition of Kim Hyung-jun's 'Sorry I'm Sorry' was set to be something of an apologetic homage to the man himself who, three years ago, had borne the brunt of my sardonic criticism, and had been the focal point of an excruciating cultural faux-pas when, arriving for a photoshoot with notorious 'Junus' fans *Diamond Girls*, it transpired that the images on my homemade placard featured Kim Hyun-joong; the star's arch-nemesis, no less. I blame Google. As it turned out, my attempt at learning the Korean lyrics to Kim's song looked certain to lead to an international incident. Best, we decided, that I stick to dancing.

I WAS NOT SO MUCH A FISH OUT OF WATER AS A COY CARP TRYING TO REWIRE A PLUG SOCKET.



Our next – and final – two rehearsals, held in the all-too-public Plaza Bolivia, threw up no shortage of embarrassment, a variety of unwanted photographs, yet a surprising amount of improvement. One moment of panic came when I asked the group how long they had been dancing K-pop. Their answer – five years – made my four days look a tad on the under-invested side.

And so, all too soon, K-Day arrived. I had taken great solace from the words of Neil Jacobsen, an executive of the powerful Interscope Records, who ranks the qualities of a K-pop idol thus: 'First, beauty. Second, graciousness and humility. Third, dancing. Fourth, vocal.' Having very publicly failed at requirements three and four, it was time to invest in the first two.

After guru Alexis deemed that linen and paisley weren't sartorially Korean enough, on her instructions I was dressed somewhat akin to a once-popular children's party magician now bumped down the pecking order after an 'incident' with one of the mothers. The aforementioned Kim Hyung-jun, who incidentally has just signed up to the South Korean police force, clearly has a strong sense of justice, but an even stronger hairstyle.

So, borrowing his defining characteristic, and with the aid of an industrial quantity of VO5, I headed to the venue with an electrified mop protruding from my scalp. Beauty? Check. In terms of graciousness and humility, it was very clear that I had absolutely no right not to display either. So, out of unconscious obligation, I was resplendent in both.

Half an hour before kick-off, my nerves were done no favour by a line of expectant spectators stretching and weaving, literally, around the block. *Paceño* K-poppers, I discovered, had multiplied in the past three years as prolifically as myxomatosis in the rabbit community of South East England.

The first half of this wonderfully slick competition went all too quickly and, before I either knew it or was ready, it was time to perform.

The experience was a blur – partly thanks to my adrenaline, and partly due to the dizzying decibel levels in the auditorium. One particular jacket-flick I attempted brought about screaming until now only heard at a Justin Bieber concert. There was also a very hairy moment post-dance when, in an impromptu on-stage interview, I was asked to name my favourite K-pop artists. Racking my brains to remember more than one, I was forced into an integrity-compromising spiel about the merits of Kim Hyung-jun. Mercifully, the crowd agreed.

My performance, unexpectedly to say the least, came with a literal five minutes of fame: fan photos were not on my K-Pop bucket list, yet somehow I was swamped – relatively – in the moments after I came off stage. At the time of writing, I've had to retreat to a quiet café to escape my fans.

Three years ago, I concluded that K-pop seemed still to represent a taboo interest in Bolivia, but that *Hallyu* – the term used to describe the tsunami of South Korean culture that permeated the global pop scene in the early noughties – could prove to be a defining shaper of Bolivia's horizons. Never, though, did I consider that it might shape mine. Three years ago, I was a reluctant K-popper – like a shy voter unwilling to admit his pro-Brexit tendencies. Three years on, I have been converted. For this, for the generosity and good spirit of K-SHIN, and for the unyielding patience and humour of *501% Double SS*, and to Alexis in particular, I say 'Gracias', and 'Sorry I'm Sorry'. ▶

AT THE TIME OF WRITING, I'VE HAD TO RETREAT TO A QUIET CAFÉ TO ESCAPE MY FANS.



MALABARISTA FASHION

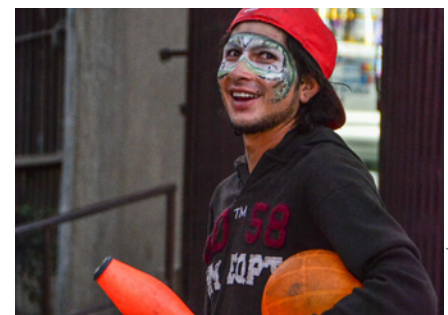
OR, HOW TO DRESS LIKE A HIPPIE

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS AND FABIAN ZAPATA



JOSÉ LUIS, 30, ARGENTINA

The closest thing to a halo is obviously a wheel that you wear upon your head. It might not protect you much from the rain – unless you can spin it really, really fast – but it gives you this innocent look that might dupe the unsuspecting driver. Let's not be fooled, the tattooed flames coming out of José Luis' sleeves are evidence of the growing theory that hippies come from the eighth circle of hell.



JONATHAN, 22, COLOMBIA

WILLIAM, 26, COLOMBIA

William knows that if you are wearing extravagant makeup you need to tone it down with a more conventional outfit, which he is totally doing with a little black hoodie and matching sweatpants. Another testament to his good taste is that he knows how to complement his red T-shirt with the colour of his cap. Unfortunately, the overall look (masquerade-ball makeup combined with that 'I'm a vagrant' look) remains a bit dubious, but I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt: maybe he just returned from one of the famous hippie masquerade parties thrown in Copacabana.

The 2017 guidebook on how to be a hippie is very clear:

- 1) Be from Argentina, Chile, or Colombia
- 2) Congregate in specific places in South America. In La Paz, you may find them at the corners of Plaza Abaroa (or Avaroa – how is this actually spelled!?)
- 3) Develop a craft: street performing or **juegos malabares** are common, or at least the most noticeable – juggling at street lights and tightrope walking without falling to a tragic death. The skills, I admit, are actually pretty solid.
- 4) Most importantly, shop or find your clothes and accessories at Hippie Outfitters – or the nearest bin.

Evidently, there is a sartorial code that hippies must adhere to or their syndicate would have to file a complaint. *Bolivian Express* set out to photograph these **malabaristas** out of their den:



JONATHAN, 22, COLOMBIA

Not the most loquacious being, Jonathan is wearing the standardised hippie uniform. Sporting an immaculate Florida Gators hoodie most likely retrieved from the innumerable piles of what used to be clothes from the El Alto market, he completes the look with the classic but unfathomable combination of shorts with leggings. Admittedly, it's cold in La Paz this time of year; the summer hippie look is usually just shorts and a lot of tattooed skin. Let's not forget the nose rings and dreadlocks which are provided to every new hippie in their welcome pack.



VANESSA, 26, ARGENTINA

Juggling with a magic wand and a sceptre (more evidence that hippies are not quite from this realm?), Vanessa wears an interesting combination of orange argyle leggings and a skeleton-printed jumper adorned with a matching headband. This look wouldn't be complete without some Beetlejuice shorts. The fashion statement here is strong, almost inexplicable, one could say.



ANDRÉS, 19, COLOMBIA

The youngest of our *malabaristas*, Andrés has much to learn. It looks like he hasn't fully opened his welcome pack, as there are no nose rings or tattoos to be seen (but then there is a strong chance that there are a few hidden from the sun – we weren't willing to investigate further). The clothes are a bit uninspired, and in another context we might not be able to fully recognise his hippiness. Fortunately, walking on a rope while juggling clubs in the middle of traffic is quite the telltale sign. ▶



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A FORCE FOR GOOD

PHOTO AND TEXT: SOPHIE HOGAN



After being ushered up to the third floor of the VIVA headquarters in Calacoto, a well-off neighbourhood in La Paz, we see Claudia Cárdenas, who has a strong and commanding presence. She is polite and confident in how she greets us, eager to talk about the work that is her passion. With the imminent annual photo contest, which is one of the biggest events of the year for the foundation, there is much to talk about.

Claudia came to VIVA in 2008 with ample experience in television and government, as well as a fresh flow of ideas for the mobile company's budding NGO. And so, that year, Fundación VIVA was created. She has kept the drive of the foundation focused on doing good in Bolivia and making the country better in ways that had not been undertaken before. 'I studied economics, and so I know my way around finances,' Claudia says, as we sit at her desk in the VIVA headquarters. 'I worked for the government for seven years in external financing. Television was always more of a hobby for me, and my plan was to do something surrounding social responsibility,' she continues.

One of the programmes she has developed is VIVO Seguro, a mobile app for emergencies. 'We work directly with the police to manage it,' she explains. 'If someone is in trouble, they can open the app and press the panic button, which alerts the nearest police officer using your GPS location. It can contact the nearest officer by telephone regardless of whether

you are on TIGO, VIVA or Entel.' The project is evidently thriving. There are already 300 lines across the country. The calls are paid for by the foundation and therefore completely free to the user. What's more, you can upload an emergency contact that you can call through the app. For those without actual phone credit, it could be lifesaving.

'By the end of April, we already had 66,233 downloads of the app, which is not only more than we hoped for, but a huge achievement in itself. And there is still more to do,' Claudia points out. Her challenge is to improve the living conditions of people through tools such as technology, citizen safety and species preservation. 'The reality is you have to give something away by doing these projects. We must help others develop abilities to look after themselves, and better the country as a whole through our assistance with these projects.'

However, the most current and exciting project for the foundation is its photo contest. In its seventh year, the competition entails taking photos of different species that dwell within Bolivian borders. The foundation selects four species per year for the contest. This year's competition includes the pink river dolphin, an emblem of the VIVA Foundation. 'In the previous versions, we have included more than 16 species in danger of extinction. We work with the Ministry of Environment and Water, and the NGO Conservation International, to choose the species,' Claudia explains.

'WE ARE SAVING LIVES WITH THE CITIZEN SECURITY PROJECT, AND OUR PHOTO CONTEST IS HELPING US SPREAD THE WORD AND SAVE THE LIVES OF ENDANGERED SPECIES.'

— CLAUDIA CÁRDENAS

The winning photos are then put onto the **tarjetas** that people buy to install credit onto their mobile phones. Putting the animals on the *tarjetas* is important to the cause, as many people do not even know that some of these animals exist in Bolivia. 'We receive applications from both national and international photographers who are residents in our country,' she says. 'The prize money has this year been raised to \$1500, and each winning photographer will have their name on the *tarjeta*, to recognise the rights of ownership, and spread their work throughout the country.'

The photos of species that are eligible this year are: the river dolphin, the black cayman, the eagle of Azara, and the Andean snake. Anyone can enter, but they must be within the country when receiving the prizes, and when the *tarjetas* are being issued. 'Last year, a boy from Peru was successful because his photo was taken right inside the border; the photos must be taken in Bolivian territory,' Claudia says.

'We are saving lives with the citizen security project, and our photo contest is helping us spread the word and save the lives of endangered species,' Claudia smiles. 'It brings me great joy to know we are helping the people of Bolivia.' It is clear that Claudia is completely committed to the foundation of her own creation, and it's easy to see she is passionate about the work she does. As she continues with her ongoing efforts, we hope there are many more exciting projects to come. ▶



LA MALDITA COMEDIA

CREATING COMEDY AND CULTURE

TEXT: ALEX WALKER PHOTO: SOPHIE HOGAN

Comedy strengthens us, it stresses us, it helps us, because when we create material we are analysing ourselves,' Yumi Roca tells me. Yet, as La Maldita Comedia, a four-piece standup group, starring Yumi, Mau Mendoza, Victor Ríos, and newest member Marcos Quevedo, explain to me, their experience has been as much about self-exploration as it has about analysing their environment.

Sitting in Café Blueberries while we wait for the second half of the quartet, I ask both Mau and Yumi about the group's origins. 'When we started there was essentially zero standup scene, no culture whatsoever,' Mau explains. Unlike many of their foreign counterparts, the biggest task facing these four has been not to create material but to familiarise their audience with the idea of it.

The group's name is a play on words of Dante's La Divina Comedia, translated, in PG terms, as 'Damn Comedy'. But when the quartet appear on mainstream television, they must shrug off their name and be referred to as simply 'a comedy group'. The irony of this is that La Maldita Comedia are, by any measure, *the standup* comedy group here in Bolivia. Tellingly, this kind of censorship is indicative of the difficulties faced, and overcome, by these comics.

'The **paceño** public is reluctant, timid to laugh,' Yumi laments. 'So for a joke where they might have to laugh at us, they feel guilty. They have to understand that this is standup: You laugh at yourself, at life, at any situation – particularly in such a chaotic city as La Paz.'

A few days after our brief meeting, I have the chance to see three-quarters of La Maldita Comedia perform, and I discover just how intrinsically specific their material is to their home city.

Towards the rear of Café MagicK, with candlelit, intimate tables facing the back of the room, the atmosphere is tailor-made for standup. Well, that is until Marcos emerges and realises that his giraffe-like height elides inconveniently with the stage's overhanging curtain. In a 25-minute show, the audience is treated to a medley of monologues, with styles that are distinct yet united by a brave stand-and-deliver-style narration, striving to shine a new light on quotidian issues of the city.

From minibuses and Morales to **cholitas** and Chumacero – a star football player for the Bolivian national team – the group explores what it means to be **paceño**. This is a city of contrasts and contradictions, 'a real mix', as Mau puts it. 'In the day you might work in a bank, and in the evening you might visit a **yatiri**.' Exploring these antitheses within *paceño* identity and lifestyle has provided a bottomless source of content.

'COMEDY STRENGTHENS US, IT STRESSES US, IT HELPS US – BECAUSE WHEN WE CREATE MATERIAL, WE ARE ANALYSING OURSELVES'

– YUMI ROCA

'This is the sort of material that people find difficult to accept, shocking at first,' Yumi explains. 'But it is something real. And it is not bad to laugh at reality.' Their routines are whimsical, well-constructed and – if not in content, then in style – reminiscent of Western standup comedians. Victor Ríos sheds light on this latter aspect: 'What I try to do, a little, is to take American standup styles and translate that into a local frame of reference.'

It is unsurprising that the group has had to take its inspiration from abroad. Before its formation, three years ago, Bolivia's standup comedy scene was something of a buccaneering one-man crusade. Javier 'Javicho' Soria, 37, has made a name for himself across the border in Argentina, gaining critical acclaim for his routines exploring Bolivian identity through a mocking, self-deprecating voice. While Soria has been looking out, La Maldita Comedia have been looking in.

The group has never performed outside La Paz, let alone Bolivia, and they admit freely that their material needs as much a translation as a tweak if they are to find success across the country. However, with a nationwide tour in the pipeline, more 'universal' routines are on the horizon.

Yet the group should not lose their essence. In Mau's words, 'We talk about themes that are not often talked about in comedy, themes specific to La Paz, heavy themes like religion, sex, abortion, politicians.' Now, these are very clearly not themes exclusive to La Paz, however when you give them a *paceño* context, whether that be their censorship, their illegality or their corruption, they take on a new importance. By addressing a subject as sensitive as abortion, as Yumi does in her routine, with a comedic frame, you are normalising a discussion around it. And only through discussion can society evolve. 'The advantage that a comedian has is this white flag that allows them to talk about whatever topic,' Yumi tells me. 'Not with a lack of respect, but with a sense of humour.'

Learning to laugh at yourself and your environment is a rehabilitative and restorative process. La Maldita Comedia, by creating both comedy about and a standup culture within La Paz, might just have more influence on their city's future identity than they realise.▶



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SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS IN BOLIVIA – WHAT'S THE SECRET?

STAY HUNGRY... STAY FOOLISH

TEXT: MOHAMMED JUNAID
PHOTOS: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

At first glance, the entrepreneurship scene in La Paz seems quiet. Meetup.com and Techstars groups barely meet, and a startup incubator is hard to find. The community almost seems underground. However, Jorge Velasco, Director of Innova Bolivia, a platform for connecting university startups and venture capitalists, sees things differently: 'Bolivia is one of the most enterprising populations in the world, according to the GEM Index by Babson College.' Indeed, according to the index, Bolivia ranks sixth in a survey of 70 countries with its rate of early-stage entrepreneurial activity.

This level of entrepreneurship is evident when speaking with Camilo Eid, the COO of Ultracasas.com, an online real estate sales network, and Claudia Mendez of Orígenes Bolivia, a seller and exporter of handmade clothing and crafts. They offer insight into what makes entrepreneurs in Bolivia tick, showing what drives business owners, what impact they make and the secret to their success.

CAMILO EID, ULTRACASAS.COM

Camilo Eid co-founded Ultracasas.com, the largest property search engine and mortgage channel in Bolivia and, according to Camilo, the first tech startup in Bolivia financed with external venture capital. Camilo's journey as an entrepreneur is partially what you'd expect. As a teen, he had an interest in technology, and he studied computer science at Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico. He has what he calls 'a great founding team' – his brother, Esteban (who also studied computer science), and Carlos A. Jordan, who was admitted to Stanford University.

Ultracasas has had what Camilo calls 'hypergrowth', from 800 housing listings in March 2016 to 8100 in March 2017, and within two years more than 40,000 registered users. But what's more impressive is how Camilo's team analyses the numbers. They're obsessed with 'key performance indicators' such as user statistics and sources of online traffic. Camilo knows exactly how much it costs to get each customer to the website. 'Good marketing, SEO and stats,' he says, have been important to understand the markets. This core knowledge has

helped raise \$600,000 to fuel growth, because, Camilo says, the 'investors knew we would spend the money well'.

Entrepreneurs often talk of luck, but Camilo says Ultracasas.com had no lucky breaks. 'Sometimes things go wrong, you don't get a contract. But others work out,' he says. He also believes that travelling in countries from Rwanda to Haiti made him realise how lucky he is; people often complain about the lack of infrastructure and amenities in Bolivia, but there is much more here than in other developing countries.

When asked about key challenges, Camilo mentions 'access to funding, by far the biggest problem, and then living with bureaucracy... This is an extremely complicated country for doing business.' He



hopes that eventually the system and culture will change, but in the meantime, he says, 'we work very hard and long hours'.

Camilo offers sound advice for those looking to start their own endeavours: 'Take the first step,' he says. 'Sometimes it's better not to think too much: if you do all the calculations you'll think it's not going to work, it's too difficult, there's competition.' Camilo says he enjoys competing with traditional businesses with his technology-driven enterprise, but he's more concerned with making a positive impact. 'I want a business that leaves value to society,' he says.

CLAUDIA MENDEZ, ORÍGENES BOLIVIA

Claudia Mendez's Orígenes Bolivia has been in operation since 2003, selling clothing and crafts, but Claudia is not a typical entrepreneur. She describes herself as 'an economist by training, but an entrepreneur by chance'. Nonetheless, she has grown her business to current sales between US\$100,000 and US\$1 million yearly, with 50 percent of those sales in Bolivia. She studied economics at the University of Texas, Austin, and started on a PhD before she walked away with a master's degree.

Claudia says she works from 'wherever home is', collaborating with 45 Bolivian artisans at any given time. Chiefly working with mothers like herself, Claudia says that 'Anybody can do fashion – but I also want to follow my passion, to economically empower women.'

Orígenes Bolivia has survived over the years because Claudia is innovative. Three years after starting her business, the company had big accounts in New York. But in 2008 the global economy crashed. Claudia says that '90 percent of my market collapsed,

so I refocused the business and closed the airport shop in Santa Cruz.' She continues: 'By then, I felt, "What's the point?" I decided that I'm closing in October as I still have some orders from September.'

But Claudia got a lucky break when a Danish company reached out in need of a Bolivian producer. The business grew, and Orígenes Bolivia eventually opened a shop in the El Alto airport.

Claudia has entrepreneurship and creativity in her genes. Her father is a music equipment wholesaler who also plays the piano. He convinced Claudia to become her own boss. When asked about the challenges



she's faced as an entrepreneur, Claudia says that 'the market is not advanced enough to be online, as there are no good delivery methods, and the government is not helping textiles enough compared to countries like Chile, Peru and Colombia'. Nevertheless, she points out, 'There are always new customers; we have to show them we're the best option.'

Business-minded people often want a blueprint, a secret to create a large successful endeavor – the secret that will help 300x your results, instantly! – but Camilo's and Claudia's businesses, one new and one established, show that such secrets hardly exist. Both founders share similarities: Camilo has a great founding team, and Claudia had support from her father. Add to that a lot of hard work, and each is following their passion, in the high-tech field or with time-honoured artisanal crafts.

It's also clear 'luck' may occur, but cannot be relied on: hard work is required. Jorge Velasco reiterates this, saying about his projects, 'We knew groups with great ideas, with great talent, but after one month they disappeared into thin air.'

Apple founder Steve Jobs had great advice for entrepreneurs: 'Stay hungry... stay foolish.' Camilo and Claudia encapsulate this mentality, in starting their respective businesses, in trying new methods of engaging with customers and in operating within Bolivia's unique entrepreneurship environment. ▶

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STEPPING INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

BOLIVIA TAKES CENTRE STAGE ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

TEXT YASMIN RUFO

On 7 April, the Bolivian ambassador to the United Nations, Sacha Llorenti Solíz, condemned the United States' 'unilateral attack' on Syria during an emergency meeting of the Security Council, calling it a 'serious violation of international law'. This was the first of what is certain to be many outspoken speeches that will be delivered by the Bolivian delegation during its time as a nonpermanent member of the influential United Nations Security Council for 2017–18 and as chair of the 1540 Committee, dealing with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The power of the Security Council is immense. As of 1 January 2017, for the first time in nearly 40 years, Bolivia has a seat on it – and, for the month of June, its chairmanship – able to influence peace agreements, impose sanctions and authorise military force (although the five permanent members maintain veto power). Since joining the UN in 1945, Bolivia has already made use of its international role by introducing important resolutions on environmental policy and human rights. The Andean country, usually consigned to the chorus in international affairs, is finally taking centre stage – along with nine other nonpermanent members – for the next two years. Now, under the spotlight of the UNSC, Bolivia will also be able to illuminate what it considers to be pressing issues that the international community must address.

But Bolivia's star turn on the UNSC shouldn't detract from the work it's been performing over the last several years. In fact, Bolivia has mostly performed contrary to the desires of the United States. In 2015, it voted against the United States of America on eight out of 13 occasions at the United Nations. Many locals are proud of the fact that Bolivia can and does openly oppose the northern behemoth internationally on numerous issues. Felis, a bus driver in La Paz, says, '[The United States] has always controlled us, and I'm glad we are finally pushing forward our agenda and getting the recognition we deserve.' There is hope in La Paz that Bolivia's ambassador to the UN, Sacha Llorenti, will be able to continue standing up to the United States, fighting to ensure that Bolivia maintains its sovereignty and resists foreign interventions.

One of Bolivia's successes is its campaign to represent indigenous peoples and bring their issues to the world's attention. Not only does the Bolivian constitution enshrine equal rights for indigenous peoples, but their rights are also backed up by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Adopted in 2007, the declaration, which Bolivia played an instrumental role in creating, ensures that the rights of indigenous people are upheld and maintained. Bolivia furthered its commitment to indigenous peoples by co-hosting the UN World Conference of Indigenous Peoples in 2014. This advocacy comes naturally to a country in which not only is the president indigenous, but also a majority of its population. 'We will fight for everyone who has no voice locally, nationally or internationally,' says Adriana Salvatierra, a young Bolivian senator from Santa Cruz.

Bolivia has also led the way for important UN Assembly resolutions on the environment, specifically the creation of the International Mother Earth Day, in 2009, and the recognition of the human right to water and sanitation, in 2010. The country's UN delegation has also championed climate-change issues and ushered through resolutions ahead of the Climate

Conference in Paris in 2016, which ended in an international agreement. Furthermore, President Evo Morales has championed climate-change action and water scarcity as key global issues, particularly relevant to the many Bolivians who faced a water crisis that led to dry taps in La Paz late last year. Using Bolivia's specific water-supply problems to illustrate a global problem, Morales has also claimed that in '2050, four billion people will suffer from scarcity of water in the context of climate change.' Lately, he has condemned the recent US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement.

Bolivia's work on environmental issues at the United Nations is notable, and is certainly nothing new. Since 2009, Bolivia has prioritised preserving the environment – evident in the country's constitution of 2009, which gives explicit rights to Mother Earth. In fact, Bolivia held the first-ever World People's Conference on Climate Change in 2010, in which the Law of the Right of Mother Earth was drafted; in 2012, that bill was passed into Bolivian law.

In all, over the past nine years, Bolivia's resolutions have been approved by the UN facing no opposition. In fact, Bolivia's foreign minister claimed that 'never before in the history of Bolivian diplomacy has the country had such an impact in the UN'. In the few months Bolivia has been on the Security Council, the country has already voiced its opinions on military action in Syria, as well as contributing to the debate on the issue of North Korea and nuclear security.

A former Bolivian minister of justice, Virginia Velasco, emphasises the importance of the environmental work that the Bolivian delegation to the UN is making headway on. 'It's great we are participating in the UN and getting our issues put down on the table and encouraging other nations to follow our lead on improving the natural world,' she says.

Beyond its role in these important resolutions, Bolivia is further expanding its international prestige by introducing new and innovative ways to address century-long problems, namely in response to the 'war on drugs'. One of those solutions, which stands in opposition to US-imposed crop eradication, allows poor farmers to grow small plots of coca for internal consumption. Salvatierra, the senator from Santa Cruz, says, 'We have developed significantly over the last 10 years, and now countries are looking to us to create solutions.' In fact, earlier this year, a Colombian delegation visited Cochabamba to assess Bolivia's regulation of coca and interdiction of cocaine production.

Bolivia has taken on a new international role, an important moment in the global spotlight. This increase in power and exposure could be the catalyst needed to help a country with economic potential to represent its people and the important issues affecting them, as well as to promote their prophetic voice on all matters of policy. At this exciting time for the country, Bolivia can make bold moves in the international diplomatic sphere. ▶

BOLIVIA IS AT THE HELM OF THE UNSC, WHICH CAN INFLUENCE PEACE AGREEMENTS, IMPOSE SANCTIONS AND AUTHORISE MILITARY FORCE.

TINDER IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: ALEX WALKER AND YOLANDE ROWSON

As you swipe to the right, a super-like, a winking emoji: these are the sonnets and perfumed love letters of a techno-literate generation. There is no environment with a higher pressure to perform, where snap decisions can trigger a romance of dubious origins but eternal swooning.

After hours of furious swiping, our thumbs were afflicted with suspected repetitive strain injuries and our souls were irreparably damaged. As we plunged into the deep end of La Paz's Tinder pool, we were introduced to a dizzying spectrum of characters, from the overly self-deprecating to the nauseatingly self-confident. Here is a snapshot of the pinnacle of said spectrum, a pseudo-guide so that you might find love and/or lodging in the Bolivian dating capital.

• THE LIFE COACH •



Esperanza, 30
Bio:

365 new days
365 new opportunities
(Unless it's a leap year 🤪🤪🤪)

Anthem:
'I Want To Break Free', Queen

• THE PASSIVE AGGRESSOR •

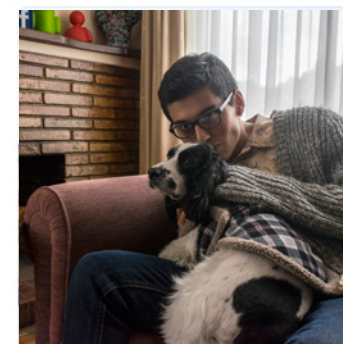


Odita, 27
Bio:

Whatever you wrote in your description, I disagree. I'm better than you, and you know it. If we meet and you don't look like you look in your pictures, you are buying the drinks until you do.

Anthem:
'Run The World (Girls)', Beyoncé

• THE SYMPATHY VOTE •

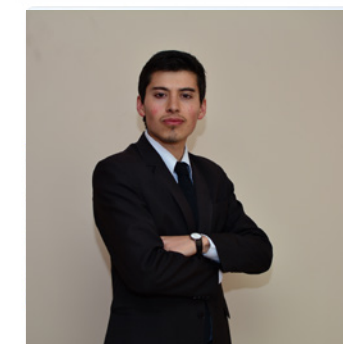


Erik, 28
Bio:

I'm looking for someone real so we can support each other. I'm not very good at sex – only had two intimate relationships in my life. Need a nice girl to show me the ropes. I promise I'll make you smile <3

Anthem:
'La Llorona', Chavela Vargas

• THE BUSINESSMAN •



David, 26
Bio:

Harvard Business School
Currently running my own startup.
Looking for a classy girl to take to business dinners

Anthem:
'Power', Kanye West

• THE LOST GRINGA •

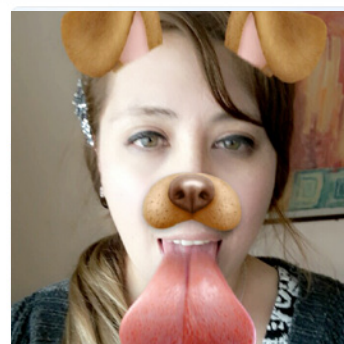


Hannah, 19
Bio:

Travelling in South America
Looking for a tour guide, maybe something more :)

Anthem:
'Wake Me Up', Avicii

• THE EMOJI OVERLOADER •



Luz, 20
Bio:

👉 + 🤪 = 🤪
🎓 🎓 🎓 🍄 🍄

Anthem:
'Despacito', Luis Fonsi

• THE CV CANDIDATE •

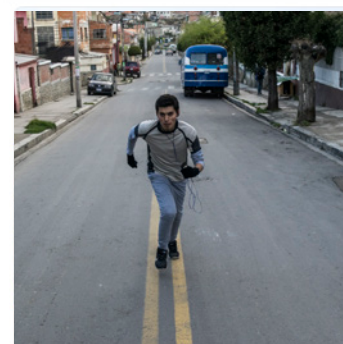


Regina, 24
Bio:

Intern at Deloitte
English, Français, Español, Italiano
Sports, art, music, gym
Grammar nerd

Anthem:
'White Noise'

• THE GYM BRO •



Carlos, 23
Bio:

Hey girl :) I'm into lifting heavy ass weights and eating as much protein as I can get my hands on. Love going out with the lads but not too late – gotta be pumping iron by 6am. This masterpiece takes a lot of maintenance. 6'2"

Anthem:
'Sweat', Snoop Dogg

• THE EXPLORER •



Ed, 22
Bio:

Adventurer and eco-enthusiast. I hate routine. 'Sometimes you find yourself in the middle of nowhere, and sometimes, in the middle of nowhere, you find yourself.'

Anthem:
Link to videos of his ukelele band

• THE WIDE BOY •



Diego, 25
Bio:

Baby why haven't you swiped right yet?

Anthem:
Anything featuring Pitbull

GLOSSARY BX73

BolivianExpress Magazine

ALTEÑO	Someone or something from El Alto
ALTIPLANO	'High plain'; a flat, high-altitude region of Bolivia
BUENÍSIMO	Great
CHOLITA	A traditionally dressed indigenous woman of Aymara or Quechua descent
HUIRA HUIRA	A flower native to Bolivia and Peru
JUEGOS MALABARES	Juggling
MALABARISTA	Street performer
MULTIJUGO	Multiple juices in one drink
ÓPERA	Opera
PACEÑO	Someone or something from La Paz
PUMAKATARI	The municipal buses of La Paz
TARJETA	A card with a code used to recharge phone credit
TELFÉRICO	Cable car public transport in La Paz
YATIRI	A traditional Aymara healer

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