

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **An Old Christmas Play**

With 1960 Christmas still eleven months in the future, it may seem strange to hark back to the Merry Christmas of 1959 in February, but we feel prompted to do so before more time passes. We refer to a production of *Los Pastores* given in the main chapel at Fort Ord last December in a quiet, simple way, without fanfare or credit to any one person in particular, although there was one person whose dream it was to keep alive this old religious Christmas play.

Miguel E. Salazar II devoted many months to research, writing and training the children who took part in the charming production with the chapel as the setting. At one time Miguel Salazar served his army career at Fort Ord and during that time he and his chaplain, Father Peter S. Rush, (Col. U.S. Army), talked about and planned for the presentation of this ancient play "for the Greater Glory and Honor of God."

Miguel E. Salazar is of true Spanish descent. His parents are Sr. and Sra. Miguel E. Salazar of Benson, Arizona, and their son gave them appreciative credit for the help they gave him during his long period of research before *Los Pastores* was produced.

Miguel Salazar's interest began as a young boy when amongst family customs were the then simple Christmas celebrations based on "Los Pastores."

He remembers his parents singing "villancicos." Ever since a young age he soon began to be interested in "villancicquero" or a composer of small compositions to be sung in churches. Musical training began on the piano, but with a long desire to get at an organ. This soon was realized as his pastor, an old French Canadian priest at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Benson, caught him practicing at the church organ at the tender age of eight and one-half years. His feet could barely touch the pedal even after he had borrowed some bed springs to shorten the distance. The Father, very authoritatively informed the young man he would be expected to play the following Sunday to prove his value. Needless to say, Miguel informs us, he experienced a week of turmoil but he knew he must obey the challenge. This he considers his "big moment." It was soon followed by piano and vocal instruction given by various friends, since a music teacher was not available in Benson.

Full attention was given to Gregorian Chant, counterpoint, and the pipe organ throughout high school at St. Mary's in Phoenix and later at Arizona State University at Tempe. But music was "only a hobby" since it was chosen as a subordinate subject while studying at university level. His major, he explains, was concentration on languages; Spanish, Greek, Latin and French, as well as education. While stationed at Fort Ord three years ago he was in charge of music at the various Catholic Chapels.

Since the installation of the pipe organ at the new Post Chapel Center Miguel Salazar has devoted his time to music activities with the various adult and young Children's choirs.

Here and there around the world much has been taken away from the beauty of Christmas. The simplicity of the moving story of The Nativity has been put aside by the fast world of modern advertising and so much strain of the anticipation of Christmas has long since made it seem only as an anti-climax. We can celebrate the fact that there are groups who endeavor to capture that beauty and simplicity of that age old "Christmas Natus Est."

*Los Pastores* was not offered at Fort Ord as an original contribution to the subjects of Franciscana or California. Many a nook and corner, Mr. Salazar explains with humility, has been peered into to make the presented version as complete and interesting and as authentic as possible.

Taking part in the Christmas production which was also one of the charming happenings in Monterey in the early days, were young people of all nationalities and colors, serving as actors and in the choir. Interested friends loaned their jewels, beautiful fabrics, furs and silver. Allen Stein was the artist for the setting, Lawrence Brady, was the set designer and Col. H. K. Howell announced the program. Miguel Salazar expressed his indebtedness to Father Rush, Miss Maria Antonia Field and Harry Downie of Carmel Mission and to the 738 individuals who placed their signatures in his record as helpers.

We sincerely hope that the Christmas "Los Pastores" will be produced again, this year with all its charm sincerity, simplicity and the special organ accompaniment, played and composed by Miguel E. Salazar.