

El Evento

All day in my neighborhood there seemed to be random, very disruptive preparations. More noise than usual. As I walked up *Calle Revolución* towards *El Torito*, eighteen wheeler trucks, enormous and blocking all traffic on this short street from the *Carretera*, I stopped a young man to ask a question.

On one side of the street is a *futbol* field and a stadium....occasionally, I am told by this young man, huffing and puffing as he unloads huge audio speakers, just trying to be polite...a bull fight. Whoa, I thought. Never been to one. So what is going on today, I ask? A bullfight?

“*No, señor. Un evento.*”

A production of some sort, I presume. “*Que evento?*” I ask.

“*No se,*” he lies to me, trying to get his job done, presumably so he can go to the event with his girlfriend.

A noisy woman comes out of a house across from the stadium, wild, frantic, gesturing, yelling. One of the enormous trucks has knocked down a power line. She apparently is going to have many guests for dinner soon, she says, in at least three languages, and can’t get the microwave to work, waving her arms, shouting at the workers who are very preoccupied with unloading all the equipment, smiling, polite, “*Si, señora,* we will take care of it” and rushes with their loads to the stadium entrance. The Woman throws up her hands and rushes back to her entrance to, presumably, light the barbecue after this disaster.

The event turns out to be a musical rock extravaganza. It started around five PM. I live here, have heard countless expressions of mariachi invasions at all hours of the night. But I have never attended one. So I decide to stand in line with everyone else, a block long ahead of me, everyone laughing, boogieing, telling stories, waving arms, already having a great time.

So I buy a snack, a tortilla concoction while I wait. I wonder what is in this snack, while I inch towards the ticket window. This street, *Calle Revolución*, is the location of the weekly open market here in Ajijic. *La tienguis*, stalls with *pescados, frutas, legumbres, otras estuffas....stuff....* I am told by a knowledgeable vendor. This street is more or less in my front yard, so I feel a certain fondness

and even possessive pride about this bustling and buying and selling neighborhood.

There is a blind man who always gives me a Spanish lesson when I meet him at the weekly open market. Somehow he senses who I am and says in English, picked up in southern California years ago, “How are you?”, he asks. “I’m fine,” I answer. Then I say, “*La lluvia esta bien, verdad?*” Rain is good, right?

He answers, “*Si, esta importante por las plantas y El Lago, tambien.*” The rain is important for the plants and the lake, too. This is always a good deal. He gets a short lesson in English, and I get mine in Spanish. “Que la vaya bien,” he says to me as I depart, and in English, “God bless you.” “*Equalmente,*” I say with a pat on his shoulder. “*Hasta Mañana.*”

But now I am waiting for my entrance ticket, inching forward to the ticket window. I feel I am a grateful guest in this country, and for all I know and can observe, I may be the only gringo in this entire *evento musical*. Nobody pays much attention to me and I don’t feel much like a foreigner in the crowd. I go through the entrance, *Policia* with huge shotguns everywhere, I guess they are protecting the entrance money, but having just too much fun to be serious, joking to each other as they fondle their gun stocks. I recognize a couple of them, I wave, but then they get serious, frown, give a very politically correct salute of acknowledgement. As I go up the stairs, I look back. Again they are joking with each other, no serious, nefarious intrusion on their horizon.

Up the stairs to the arena. Mostly, I see, everyone is young. Of course, most people on the planet is younger than I now, but couples, groups of teenage girls, some parents, a few older people are dancing to the music, and they seem to be just jumping up and down to my undisciplined dancing eyes. Dancing? I can do that, I think.

I make my way to the top of the stadium, swaying to the music, some young lady yelling at the top of her lungs on the stage. As I get to the top, a young man with his girlfriend make room for me, each give me a giant “*Hola!!!*” as if to welcome a stranger to their home, then pay no further attention to me except when I yell or whistle to a song I like. At one point, I get a high five from the young lady, whacking my open hand. I think how cultures export their products. By now this is a universal sign of approval from my native country.

While the groups are singing I look down on the stadium floor. Guys on horses prancing to the music, the horses dancing, their riders giving secret signals to the flanks of these fine, well groomed *caballios*, and then at the crescendo of a raucous blast of music with incomprehensible lyrics, the horse rears, his rider waving a *sombrero* to the crowd, everyone going nuts applauding, me too, high fives to the young lady and her boyfriend.

Then a door opens at the bottom of the arena, and out comes a bull, I mean a big damn bull, horns and all, snorting and charging, and I wonder, is this going to be a tragic ending to a wonderful evening, will it hit a horse or knock a rider off?

But this poor bull has obviously been to shows. It does what it is told, lassoes around its neck, perhaps it thinks of the good ol' days when bulls were fearsome creatures, terrorizing *toreros*, but if so, this one does it only in his dreams. He runs around having a good time, knowing what is expected of him, a little playtime in the arena, bouncing up and down, clowning with the horses and *caballeros*.

A man comes by with roses. Would I like to buy some, he asks, and of course I must take a few home with me when I leave.

The music is louder now. The featured group has a tuba player who must be among the most well conditioned of human beings, ooooooompah-ing his *tracero* off, song after song. I am too far away to see him, but he must have enormous lungs.

I need to go home to fix dinner now, so I say to the young lady and her boyfriend, *Permissio...necessito ir a casa.*" They look at me as if I have taken leave of my senses.. "Noooo!" he shouts over the noise of the singers, the bull now dancing with the horses in a sort-of contrived choreography, maybe they all like to play together for all I know. "*Importante por quedarse para despeus.*" Stay until later.

But I must go. What a great time everyone is having, me too, with my roses for home. I'll be back another time.

On the way out I watch couples in the aisles jumping up and down against each other to the music, the guys for obvious reasons, the ladies putting up with it. What a great dance routine. Just jump up and down against a good looking woman to the tempo of the music. I remembered my father telling me why I

needed to learn how to dance. He said it is the only way you can get that close to a woman without getting your face slapped.

I think to myself as I leave the arena, it was excellent advice and culturally universal.

That evening after fixing smoked trout salad with cranberry/horseradish dressing, garlic bread with tomato and goat cheese “bruschetta,” I lay back on my chair outside and listen to the rest of the concert. I would love to meet the tuba player, playing hour after hour, lungs blasting.

“Gratias,” I think to my adopted country.