

PRODUCTION REVIEW

HUMAN RIGHTS (Profile Productions – 2005)A

CARLOS MARTÍNEZ ÁLVAREZ

The mime artist *Carlos Martinez* offers a DVD of his rendition “*Human Rights*” with audio commentary available for the whole show, which may be accompanied by subtitles in English, German, French or Spanish. Martinez offers eleven (11) pieces of mime as his vision of human rights, through a combination of satire and tragedy, which in his view results in hope for the future. Each piece of mime represents a particular human right or a combination of human rights, derived from the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The DVD also includes an interview with the artist himself, a bonus piece which is filmed at the end of the show, and a number of other bonus features.

The art of mime, which is the trade plied by Martinez, is interesting in itself in that, much as with many laws, it is open to interpretation but, unlike legal theories and practice, it is not constrained by language barriers. The mime artist has the ability to express emotions, concerns, rights and duties to a universal audience. When it comes to the sensitive topic of *human rights*, however, the mime artist himself may not have a deep knowledge of the intricacies relative to human rights practice. This entails that the mime artist, including Martinez in his DVD “*Human Rights*”, portrays the issue as understood by society which is somewhat interesting to note and act upon.

Carlos Martinez selects the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as the instrument upon which to base his performance. Whereas the Declaration is, undeniably, an extremely important document in the ambit of human rights, one may question Martinez’s

choice here. A “right” attains that status by the binding nature upon the State, be it pertinent to a positive or negative duty, imposed upon by law, in written or unwritten format. The universality of human rights then entails that the “rights” as enforced by the State are equally applied to all, in a universal manner, notwithstanding distinctions. In opting to use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as his grounding for the performance, Martinez, on occasion, ignores the reality of human rights practice. An example may be drawn by the ninth mime piece offered by Martinez, portraying article 24 of the Universal Declaration: “*Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay*”. This is an issue which has, certainly, garnered much attention in today’s practice even within the practice of human rights. Martinez himself however focuses on the matter of having periodic holidays with pay. As a lawyer, one may question whether the State then has a positive or negative obligation to ensure that all have periodic holidays with pay. It would be somewhat interesting, if that were the case, for all who are self-employed! It is presumed that Martinez selected the Universal Declaration as the basis for his performance, based upon the perception, within human rights theory, which is on occasion quite correct, that human rights around the globe should know no distinction and have one common application for all, irrespective of any difference existing between cultures. Undeniably though, whereas human rights practice may have evolved a domestic or regional application, several issues have a universal application without need for any form of written documentation and this is aptly shown by Martinez in his first two pieces which, all notwithstanding, are still of themselves open to interpretation.

The first piece begins, as with all other pieces, by way of a direct quotation from one or more of the articles set in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. In this case, the first piece begins by citing article 1, in its entirety, and the first part of article 2. The combination of articles is again somewhat pertinent. Human rights are closely inter-related and it has often been noted that rights are bound and held together by one another. That said, many a legal mind often cite and analyze human rights separately. To society however, as Martinez’s work notes, it is the substance behind the articles that matters and which indeed creates rights. It is quite interesting to note that, despite the initial quotation citing articles 1 and 2 of the

Universal Declaration, the audio commentary says that the piece is based on the right to life, which is directly referred to in article 3. The latter article is then quoted in the second piece, showing a possible link between the first two pieces.

The first piece is designed to leave the audience flabbergasted and conscious in regard to the serious nature of human rights. A conveyor belt is transporting babies whilst an individual examines each baby and discards as deemed necessary by himself. When a baby is found to be undesirable, per measurements, that baby is killed, without any form of compassion. Whereas the entire mime is, of course, silent, upon the killing of the baby, the audience hears a toddler's cry! Having heard articles 1 and 2 read out before the mime, one is led to believe that the piece represents a violation of the equality and dignity of human life. Rights are there for all human beings! This piece, it may be contended, is left open to interpretation. In making reference, by way of the audio commentary, to the right to life, one may question whether the conveyor belt can represent all the babies, seen as inanimate objects, destroyed during the process of abortion or termination of pregnancy, or whether the entire piece is reminiscent of eugenic selection.

The second piece, which is preceded by a reading of articles 3 and 5 of the Universal Declaration, appears to continue from where the first piece left. The audience is confronted by an individual behind bars, begging for food, and, as the audio commentary confirms, the audience may very well believe that justice has been served upon the individual who was killing the babies in the first piece of mime. Despite this presumption, all human beings, notwithstanding their own cruelty or disobedience to the law, have rights in the form of basic human rights. Hence, one may think back to Nazi prisoners of war in the post-1945 period or, more recently, to inmates at the American Guantanamo complex. The mime continues by seeing the inmate released and content only to realise that he was in fact heading to the gallows. Death row, by way of interpretation, comes to mind and, in particular, that imprisonment and death row can be tantamount to inhuman and degrading treatment contrary to basic human rights law. The mime ends by seeing the individual hanged and dying at the gallows. This then leads one to question whether the death penalty should be seen as being contrary to human rights and, consequently, that the death penalty be entirely abolished as part of the human rights regime. It is somewhat poignant to note that there

is irony in this piece being played by a Spaniard who is a subject of the Spanish Bourbon King, since much of the Bourbon family in France had been exterminated at the gallows. Again, this piece leaves one silent and shocked, though the entire act allows one to reflect.

In the third mime piece, which is preceded by a reading of article 12 of the Universal Declaration, Martinez introduces a certain amount of satire by portraying an individual having a shower only to realise that an entire audience is observing him 'naked', or so it would seem, and in his most intimate. This, Martinez hypothesises, represents an infringement of one's privacy. Whereas the humour is now appreciated by the audience after two deeply profound pieces, a legal mind may well be disappointed by this piece as so much more could have been done in relation to privacy which is cited in some of the most controversial issues involving human rights such as cases of professional confidentiality, clinical consent, and, most poignantly, a woman's bodily rights and duties in pregnancy in relation to all third parties. That notwithstanding, this third piece of mime offered by Martinez also displays the artist's capacity as the audio commentary divulges a point concerning a backstage fault. A technician was meant to stop the accompanying music at one point but instead kept it rolling, leaving Martinez with the arduous task of improvising in front of a live audience which he does, unbeknownst to the audience, spontaneously, receiving a roaring applause at the end of the piece.

Carlos Martinez proceeds by portraying his vision, in mime, in respect of other articles in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* including, inter alia, freedom of movement and the right to a nationality, the right to own property, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to take part in the government of your country, and the right to work. Each piece displays an interesting viewpoint of the matter concerned which, despite being, on occasion, legally incorrect as to the proper use and application of the article involved, is still able to convey a note of interest in relation to modern society. An example may be drawn from the fourth mime piece, involving articles 13 (1) and 15 (1) of the Universal Declaration where Martinez opts to make his passport the "star" of the piece. The passport is of course, to many, one form of proving nationality and, in the piece, it is used in its literal context so as to pass through ports of call in each State. The mime has a touch of the arrogance of modern, developed, society that a passport can see you through anywhere. A passport is indeed important in modern travel

and the character portrayed becomes a docile individual when he believes that he has lost his passport. The piece, subject to interpretation, allows one to reflect on a particular arrogance by certain individuals who may take their own nationality for granted. On the one hand, it is not certain that, holding a passport, one is simply allowed to cross borders freely. A State is only limited in its sovereignty by its international obligations and there are several reasons why a State may, rightfully, object to allowing a particular individual to cross its borders despite bearing a passport. Moreover, one may also take for granted the rights which give one nationality and a passport, and that may be deprived to others less fortunate who are not protected by a fair regime of human rights.

One other interesting aspect that Martinez brings to light is the point that time cannot be made up for and certainly cannot be turned back. Indeed, a violation of a human right is immutable. Even though the right may be restored to the individual, there still may have been a violation of one's rights which time cannot efface. In portraying the right to own property, Martinez introduces a burglar who is then himself robbed. The mime artist then, masterfully, rewinds time to show the original burglar backtracking on his own steps and opting not to take on thieving as a practice. The impossibility of this action is clear to the audience and, moreover, that some mistakes cannot truly be made up for. That said, the audio commentary, presented by Martinez himself, says that there is a wish to have another right added to the Universal Declaration: that is the right to make a mistake, which in itself means "the right to be human".

Yet another aspect of Martinez's art is his ability to portray galleries of possibilities, such as displaying an individual wading through a fair of religions, or showing different forms of labour and work by way of hand mime, or, quite intriguingly, displaying various aspects and possibilities to democracy which is utilised as the mime to represent article 21 (1) of the Universal Declaration. Again, the question may be raised, by way of the mime, as to whether one has the right to vote away a democracy or whether, on the contrary, a population can be forced into a democracy. Indeed, it may be noted that one character in the mime represents an apparent fascist ripping apart a vote which the artist states, by way of the audio commentary, to be a violation of the right. However, an integral part of several democracies, and the rights that go therewith, also includes a right not to take part in the vote, be it in protest or otherwise.

Carlos Martinez is quite clever in wrapping up the show by displaying a piece which represent duties. With rights come duties and responsibilities!

The performance, even though seen on DVD, still succeeds in certifying Carlos Martinez's abilities as an artist. He is a true master of the art of mime! The viewer is left bedazzled by the reality which the show succeeds in conveying, also ideally aided by an appropriate use of sound, light and music. Carlos Martinez, as a master of the universal language of mime, hence provides a display which is laden with deep thoughts, sarcastic humour, tragedy, satire, emotions, and feelings which result from the universal concern for human dignity which, in itself, resulted in the creation of a body of human rights.