

Salvadoran group carries message of tears and joy

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Franklin Quezada sat back drinking an Old Milwaukee in Rachel Studer's kitchen, as his five bandmates strummed guitars and pounded conga drums in the room next door.

A cheer went up from the other room as the band, Yolocamba I-Ta kicked into the familiar strains of "La Bamba." The revelry of the night seemed to contrast strangely with Quezada's words as he talked about the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front, the FMLN, a leftist rebel organization seeking to overthrow the right-wing government of El Salvador.

"We are not members of the FMLN, but we sympathize with their ideas and their plans for a new government," Quezada said, speaking through interpreter Monteserrat Sanz.

Quezada and his bandmates were relaxing after their performance Sept. 27 following the Little Theatre's premiere of the film "Romero," whose soundtrack featured music by Yolocamba I-Ta. Proceeds from the premiere benefited Medical Aid to El Salvador and Radio Venceremos, a radio station operated by Salvadoran opponents of the government.

"My father and brothers were killed by the army in 1981," Quezada continued. "My father's face was destroyed by acid."

As the band played on and on, Quezada

explained that it was their music that drew the Salvadoran army's ire upon his family.

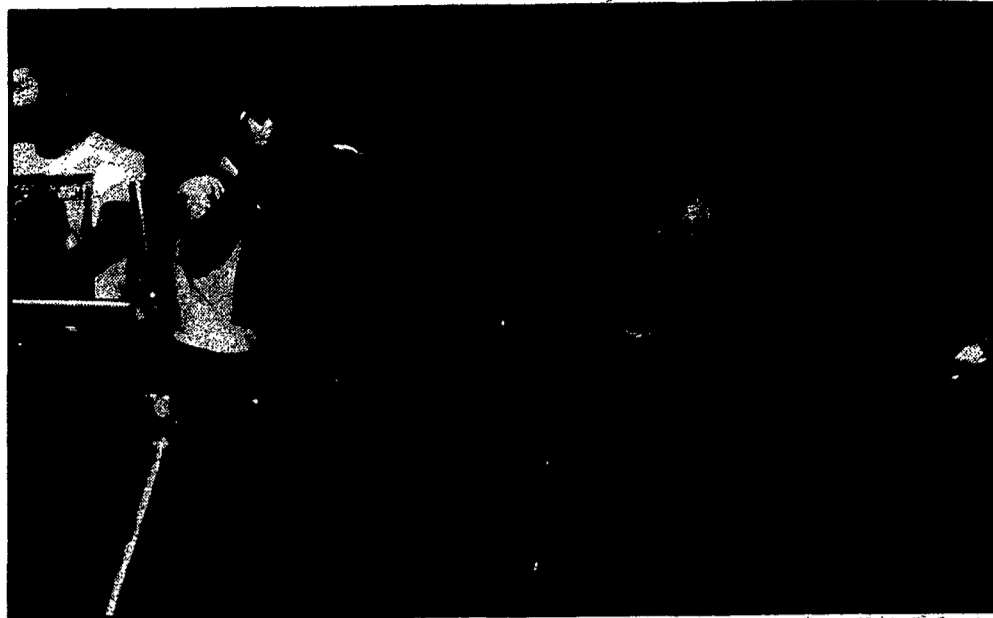
"From the beginning, we were different from other groups in El Salvador," he remarked, noting that his group played at student organizational meetings, Christian community gatherings and political protests.

The government also didn't look kindly upon the band's emphasis on Indian music. "We were trying to take out many roots we have in our traditional music," Quezada said. He explained that those roots were squelched following a government massacre of 30,000 Salvadorans in 1932, in which half of those killed were Indians.

For years after the massacre, Quezada said, Salvadoran Indians buried their cultural traditions so as to not attract government attention. Expressions of culture were taken as opposition of the government, he noted, and the Indians learned it was better to keep quiet.

But in the mid-1970s, the government attempted to create a more positive image with the Salvadoran poor. Such groups as Yolocamba I-Ta, formed in San Salvador in 1975, enjoyed a brief period of government approval. Quezada recalled that the national public television station even funded the production of shows featuring native Salvadoran music.

Making music soon became more dangerous as Christian critics of the govern-



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Members of the Salvadoran band Yolocamba I-Ta perform their festive music at the Rochester premiere of the Paullist film, "Romero," at the Little Theatre on Wednesday night, Sept. 27.

ment, including priests, began incorporating music as part of Masses and meetings designed to encourage Salvadorans to assert their dignity in the face of continuous poverty and repression, he said.

From 1977 on, Yolocamba I-Ta began playing at these "popular" Masses and meetings, some of which were presided over by Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was assassinated in 1980 after calling upon Salvadoran soldiers to disobey orders to kill.

The group also began incorporating lyrics that criticized the government through symbolic parables and, sometimes, without any disguise at all. The group was forced

to go underground and spent the next few years performing illegally wherever they went.

"Most of our performances, we couldn't take our instruments," Quezada said. "Other people took the instruments there. We had to wear sunglasses, white shirts. (We) changed our clothes to go out."

Eventually, life on the run turned into life in exile, and the band left El Salvador following Archbishop Romero's assassination. Yolocamba I-Ta is now headquartered in Mexico City, but the band has steadily toured in Europe and the United States, gaining in popularity each year.

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Julia's brilliant performance makes 'Romero' effective

By Henry Herx
Catholic News Service

"Romero" (Four Seasons) is a powerful movie about Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, El Salvador, whose life changed dramatically when he experienced first-hand the oppression of his suffering people.

The prelate became the target of an assassin's bullet when he applied church social teachings to the situation in El Salvador and condemned the human-rights abuses of its reactionary regime.

If this were fiction, few would find it credible. Yet the movie is based on events that took place a decade ago, in full view of the world press, in a country that has known no peace since.

More vivid than a news report, more personal than a documentary, this screen dramatization of the last three years of Archbishop Romero's life will not easily



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Raul Julia portrays Archbishop Oscar Romero in the film "Romero."

fade from the mind of viewers. Its portrait of a good but apolitical person transformed by the moral imperatives of his times offers a challenge to viewers' commitments to social justice.

The movie begins in 1977 with the Vatican appointment of then-Bishop Romero (Raul Julia) as archbishop of San Salvador. The conservative elements in El Salvador welcomed the choice, for the prelate was

regarded as a withdrawn scholar who would not interfere with the repressive policies of their autocratic government.

Regardless of Archbishop Romero's reputation as a bookworm, he proves to be a quick learner when one of his priests (Richard Jordan) — who is considered sympathetic to the rebels — is murdered in a roadblock along with an old man and a young boy.

The archbishop's education continues when he tries to arrange the release of political prisoners in exchange for that of a kidnapped government official. The arrangement fails and the official is killed because the regime refuses to acknowledge it has such prisoners. When a priest in a rural parish is arrested for subversion and his church is turned into military barracks, Archbishop Romero goes to remove the Eucharist from the premises. Physically abused and ejected by soldiers who rip the sanctuary with a machine-gun barrage, he later returns, leading the townspeople past the dumbfounded military and into the church where he celebrates Mass.

Finally Archbishop Romero himself is arrested when he tries to arrange safe passage for rebels who have sought sanctuary

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