

THE DURANGO FAIR—MORE THAN JUST A BOOK FAIR

Azokaren irekitze ekitaldiko ardatz nagusia hitzaldi bat izan zen, Buenos Aireseko Ekin argitaletxearen izenean Maria Elena Etxebarri doktoreak egin zuena, hain zuzen. Hitzaldian argitaletxearen sortzaileek proiektua gauzatzeko izan zituzten gorabeherak azaldu zituen, baita ere egun bizi duten modernizazio prozesua ere.

Every December for the past 36 years, the Biscayan town of Durango has become the Basque cultural mecca, and place of pilgrimage for thousands of Basque-speaking "euskaldunes".

The Basque Book and Record Fair of Durango has come of age alongside the Basque people themselves. Back in 1965 eight tables were set up in the portico of Santa María church with barely a hundred titles; today the city comes alive with a huge selection of books and records. The figures from last year's event say it all: a total of 900 new book and record titles, mixed in with the entire production of Basque material, and spread out over 245 tables; eleven tables set aside for new technology products, together with a cyberspace zone where visitors could surf the net to their heart's content, and a special children's area. And all of it topped off with a variety of festivities and cultural performances. All together Durango welcomed some 225,000 visitors over the course of five days.

Jon Irazabal, director of the last twenty editions of the Book Fair, explains the reason why the Durango based organization, Gerediaga Elkarte, decided to start up the Basque Book and Record Fair 36 years ago: "To provide a public platform to disseminate Basque literature and material that was marginalized during the Franco regime." Today the same goal stands, and the Book Fair has grown into a veritable showcase of Basque literature.

Publishers and record companies wait until December to launch their best books and new releases. It has become a tradition for the most representative publications and CDs to see the light of day at this time of year.

Now the organizers are facing a new challenge: to design and put up a new building which will serve as the permanent infrastructure for the so-called 'City of Culture'.

Key dates

A lot of water has passed under the bridge in the last 36 years. Below are some of the more important events in the history of the Basque Book and Record Fair:

1965. The Fair is born. Members of the organization Gerediaga Elkarte introduced an idea new to Euskal Herria. The Franco regime was clamping down hard, but



María Elena Echeberri, with the mayor of Durango and book fair organizers standing beside the plaque dedicated to Astarloa.

not hard enough to keep from the organizers from presenting a few books, and fewer records, related to Basque culture to the public. Eight display stands were set up in the portico of Santa María church in Durango.

1977. The transition to democracy opens the door to a veritable outpouring of all things Basque. There was no longer enough space in the portico for all the Basque literature enthusiasts. The event had to be moved to a larger area. The marketplace was the most logical solution.

1996. The Book Fair also outgrows the marketplace. The aisles, barely two and a half meters wide, could no longer hold the hundreds of display stands and thousands of visitors. The only solution was to put up a giant circus tent. That year it was set up in the former Berrio parking lot and later moved to a large empty lot known as Landakosola, where the fair is still held today. The changeover to the tent also brought with it a major change in the quality of the fair—wide aisles, assembly hall, press room, heating, exhibition hall, cyberspace zone, children's playroom, cafeteria... The fair became a small city!

2003. At the end of next year the Book Fair will have its own permanent structure with an eye to the future. The Provincial Council of Biscay and the Durango City Council have pledged to build a permanent home for the

fair by 2003, as there is simply not enough room in the tent for 200,000 fair-goers.

The new building

A module-style building made of wood and glass will house the Durango Fair as of 2003. The walls of the new building will open and close on all four sides and the structure will even be expandable should the occasion call for more space.

The new building will be constructed on the nearly five acre stretch of land that lies between Avenida Landako and the Mañaria river. This multi-purpose space, in addition to housing the Basque Book and Record Fair, will also incorporate the old slaughterhouse with its original 1885 façade. The historic building will be used as an assembly hall, cafeteria and office space, in addition to 850 square meters for businesses. The new facility will also include a 215 car underground parking lot.

The multipurpose building will be known as Landako, and will become the largest entertainment center in the Durango municipal district. The company that won the bid for the new building project was Marcial Etxenike y Compañía (Mecsa).

The official Gerediaga Elkartea website, the association sponsoring the Basque Book and Record Fair, allows visitors to find out about and purchase any of the more than 20,000 Basque books and records available.

www.durangokoazoka.com

The website, created three years ago, includes news, reviews and articles connected with the literature and musical recordings published in Euskal Herria. Visitors will also find information on authors, publishers, musicians and recording companies.

While the fair is actually under way a special section is added so that people can join in on the event online. From the latest books and records presented at the fair, to new activities and events, photographs, schedule of events and even a map of the fairgrounds...it's all included in the virtual Basque Book and Record Fair of Durango. ■

IZASKUN ELLAKURIAGA



Anton Mari Aldekoa-Otalora, María Elena Etxeberri and Jose Antonio Azkorbebeitia.



Alberto Irigoyen, member of the Basque Center of Durazno, Uruguay, was one of the writers present at the fair. His book *El bastardo* is a novel based on a true story. Set in 1782, the book tells about the events that led to the extramarital affairs of princess Maria Luisa of Parma.

