

Biography of Ariel Dorfman

Ariel Dorfman, the Chilean-American author of numerous works of fictions, plays, poems, essays and films in both Spanish and English, has been called a “literary grandmaster” (*Time*) and “one of the greatest living Latin American novelists” (*Newsweek*).

An expatriate from his country, Dorfman has been a human rights activist for many years, and has addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations and the main Forum of UNESCO in Paris on human rights issues.

As part of this human rights work, he penned the play, *Speak Truth to Power: Voices from Beyond the Dark*, based on the book, *Speak Truth to Power: Human Rights Defenders Who Are Changing Our World*, by Kerry Kennedy. The play premiered at the Kennedy Center with an all-star cast, including Kevin Kline, Alec Baldwin, Sigourney Weaver, John Malkovich, Rita Moreno, Hector Elizondo and Alfre Woodard.

Dorfman has recently begun to work with composers, writing the libretto for an operatic version of *Death and the Maiden*, which premiered at Malmö, Sweden, in September 2008. He is currently working on another opera, with the Scottish composer Nigel Osborne, based on a legend from the Hindu scripture the *Upanishads*.

Dorfman writes regularly for many influential newspapers and magazines in the US – including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Harper’s* and *The Nation* – and abroad (*El Pais*, the *Observer*, the *Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Le Monde*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *L’Unita*, *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera*).

His internationally acclaimed books have been translated into more than 40 languages.

Among his plays – performed in more than 100 countries – are *Death and the Maiden*, which has won global acclaim, including England’s Olivier award for Best Play.

Other Dorfman-penned plays include *Reader*, which opened at The Traverse at the Edinburgh Festival, and *Widows*, both of which have won Kennedy Center awards, and have been performed around the world.

Dorfman is the first foreign author to be commissioned to write a play for the New National Theatre in Tokyo. *The Other Side* premiered in 2004 in Japan and then opened at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York.

Other recently written plays are *Purgatorio*, which opened at the Seattle Repertory Theatre, and *Picasso's Closet*.

Among the films Dorfman has scripted – with his eldest son Rodrigo – is *Deadline*, based on his poems. *Prisoners in Time* won the Best Screenplay award in Great Britain for 1996. The short film they co-directed, *My House is on Fire*, was shown at the Toronto, Telluride and Edinburgh Film Festivals, among others.

Dorfman's fiction includes the novels *Mascara*, *Hard Rain*, *The Last Song of Manuel Sendero*, *Konfidenz* and *The Nanny and the Iceberg*. Nobel prize-winner José Saramago described Dorfman's novel, *Blake's Therapy*, as the novel Kafka would write if he were alive today. In 2003, he published a novel for young adults, *The Burning City*, co-authored with his youngest son, Joaquin.

His collected poems, in *In Case of Fire in a Foreign Land*, have inspired cantatas, picture exhibitions and been read publicly by Meryl Streep, Peggy Ashcroft, Vanessa Redgrave and many others. His memoir, *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey*, has recently been turned into a feature-length documentary; while *A Promise To The Dead: the exile journey of Ariel Dorfman* has been turned into a movie directed by Emmy Award-winner Peter Raymont. It opened at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2007, received numerous prizes, and was short-listed for an Academy Award.

His ground-breaking *How to Read Donald Duck*, co-written with Armand Mattelart, has sold millions of copies worldwide. In January 2010, a new edition of his essays on

cultural imperialism, *The Empire's Old Clothes*, will appear with an update and introduction.

Dorfman teaches for half the year at Duke University, where he holds the Walter Hines Page Chair of Literature and Latin American Studies. He's received numerous honorary degrees and is a member of The Académie Universelle des Cultures in France and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

His latest novel, *Americanos: Los pasos de Murieta*, is a historical epic about California and was published in Argentina and Chile in May of 2009.

He lives in Durham, North Carolina with his wife, Angelica, and travels frequently to Santiago, Chile.