

## Learning Lab-Planetarium Innovation

by Adele B. Hernandez, University of Maine

"How did you do it?" "An unusual experience!" "So this is what you were up to.....!" These and other exclamations and questions were recently addressed to our Planetarium lecturer, Mr. William Lowry, and myself after my Intermediate Spanish class saw/and heard the following program in our University Planetarium: what they heard was their own voices reciting a Spanish poem; what they saw was the interpretation of the poet's verses in the Planetarium sky. This is how it started: I happened to mention to Mr. Lowry one day that this class was memorizing one of Federico García Lorca's Poems this semester, and that it had to do with the superstitions of the Spanish gypsy as to the malevolent influence of the moon. When he heard that in a way it was related to one member of the solar system, he suggested that I have each student tape one stanza of the poem (coincidentally there were nine students in the class and nine verses in the poem) and send him the tape, along with one of Spanish guitar music. The students inquiringly taped the poem, **Romance de la Luna, Luna**, but they were not informed of the experiment. Mr. Lowry then prepared a program and invited us to attend his revelation: to the accompaniment of the guitar music the Planetarium sky slowly darkened to reveal the moon and one of constellations as interpreted in the first two verses of the poem which read

La luna vino a la fragua    The moon came to the forge  
con su polisón de nardos.    wearing a bustle of spikenard.

The first stanza of the poem was played, accompanied by the taped guitar music, and in the pause that followed Mr. Lowry drew our attention to the particular phase of the moon when it appears to be accompanied by the constellation Scorpio. Since the spikenard Plant is similar in shape to the body and appendages of the constellation (a cluster of stems projecting from a single root) it could have been what the poet had in mind when he referred to the moon's bustle. The rest of the poem was heard, and each time he paused our lecturer interpreted the different phases of the moon. The reaction of the students was enthusiastic.

We are fortunate here to have a Planetarium on our Portland campus, but even if one should not be as accessible, a program like this could initiate cooperation on the part of a museum sponsored Planetarium and the Learning Lab of any school or college. There are many poets who have written about the different members of the solar system. in all languages, and to see them interpreted in a Planetarium sky undoubtedly adds to the beauty of the poem.