



THE NEW YORKER

JULY 13, 1992

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

OVER the past several years, American audiences have had steady exposure to the finest of Brazilian musicians, from Antonio Carlos Jobim and Gilberto Gil to Margareth Menezes and Marisa Monte. The same, unfortunately, cannot be said about Brazilian actors. Yes, we know about Sonia Braga, but few Brazilians with ears as well as eyes would place her in the top category. Instead, they might mention Marília Pera, whom Americans are likely to recognize from a handful of film appearances ("Pixote," "Mixed Blood") but whose greatest performances have taken place on the stage. We count ourself lucky to have witnessed one of these, in Rio, on an occasion when the actress, who was playing a passionate radio-era musical personality, tried to stop a performance because of her dissatisfaction with the quality of her own singing voice, and sparked a near-riot in the process.

Fernanda Montenegro, another of Brazil's treasured actresses, inspires a similarly fierce devotion. People love her earthy interpretations of classical roles and her airy turns on television soap operas. They also love her for her willingness to speak out against oppression. Though her politics have never been extreme, she suffered greatly during the years of Brazil's military dictatorship. Ironically, a subsequent government—democratically elected—asked her to become Minister of Culture. She declined. She apparently has no desire to become another Melina Mercouri; it is acting that drives her. Miss Montenegro and her daughter, Fernanda Torres, will appear for the first time in the United States on July 14-15, at Alice Tully Hall, as part of a Serious Fun! English-language presentation of "The Flash and Crash Days." The piece, which was conceived and directed by Gerald Thomas, and has been seen by more than a hundred thousand people in Brazil since its première in Rio, last November, is about a mother-daughter relationship. "The piece evolved naturally because of the extraordinary human material I had in my hands," the director says.

