Welcome Back! Our 18th Year of Publication

Many thanks to all of our loyal readers (and new ones, too) as we begin the 18th year of The Mexican Film Bulletin, a bi-monthly newsletter about the past, present and future of Mexican cinema. The publisher, editor, writer, graphic designer, mail room clerk is David Wilt (www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~dwilt/cv.html). All contents ©2012 by David E. Wilt except for material already copyrighted, which is included under the Fair Use doctrine.

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Obituaries

Miguel Ángel Álvarez "El Men"

[I apologise for this belated obituary, but somehow I missing the passing of Puerto Rican actor-director Miguel Ángel Álvarez last January.]

Miguel Ángel Álvarez died in a Puerto Rican hospital on 16 January 2011; he was 69 years old. Álvarez was born in San Juan in August 1941 but grew up in Bayamón. He worked in radio, then moved into theatre, television, and motion pictures as actor, director, and producer. He was still active on the radio at the time of his death. Álvarez was sometimes billed as "El Men," after a nuyorican character ("Johnny El Men") he played on Puerto Rican television.

Equally at ease in comedies and dramas, Álvarez can be seen in Mexican films such as El señor doctor with Cantinflas, Pacto diabólico (a version of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," with John Carradine), Un largo viaje hacia la muerte (filmed in New York City and Mexico), and El crimen del Padre Amaro. His Puerto Rican (including co-productions) and Nuyorican movies include Arocho y Clemente and Natás es Satán (both of which he also directed), Bello amanecer, El satánico, and Maldeamores (his last film, made in 2007).

Miguel Ángel Álvarez is survived by his widow, Milagros Rivera, and three children.

Julia Marichal

Actress Julia Marichal was murdered in her Mexico City home on 15 November 2011. Her body was not discovered for several weeks. Two people, one of them a former employee of Marichal, were later arrested and charged with the crime, which was apparently motivated by robbery.

Julia Esther Antonia de la Concepción Marichal Martínez was born in 1944; her mother was Cuban actress Esther Marichal Peñate and her father was Mexican writer Juan de la Cabada, who worked on a number of Mexican films including Buñuel's Subida al cielo and La ilusión viaja en tranvía (some sources indicate de la Cabada was Marichal's step-father). Marichal studied acting at the Instituto de Bellas Artes and made her professional acting debut in the mid-1960s. In addition to theatrical work and telenovela roles, she appeared in films such as Fando y Lis, La muerte viviente, La mansión de la locura, and Maten al león. After retiring from acting in the late 1990s, Marichal spent her time teaching acting and promoting various social and cultural issues.

Joaquín Martínez

Joaquín Martínez, a Mexican-born actor who had a long Hollywood career, died in the Netherlands of pancreatic cancer (which, ironically, claimed the life of actor Miguel Courturier on the same day) on 3 January 2012. Martínez was born in Cozumel in November 1930. Originally a medical student, Martínez took acting classes from the famed Seki Sano and then changed his career plans. He appeared in a number of Mexican movies in the 1960s--among them Tlayucan, Alma Grande en el desierto, Los bandidos, and Pedro Páramo--before moving to Hollywood. He had a recurring role on television's "The High Chaparral," made guest appearances on many other programs, worked on stage in shows like "Zoot Suit," and also acted in features such as Jeremiah Johnson, Uzana's Raid, and Joe Kidd.
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Martínez can be seen in Volveré, a Mexican-USA co-production shot in the USA in 1982, as well as Revenge (1990), filmed in Mexico.

Martínez is survived by his widow and two children.

Miguel Couturier

Actor Miguel Couturier Pumarino died of pancreatic cancer on 3 January 2012; he was 61 years old. Miguel Couturier Pumarino was born in Mexico City in 1945. He appeared in numerous television programs, on the stage, and in a number of films of the '90s and beyond, such as El atentado, Novia que te vea, Sin ton ni Sonia, and Miss Bala. He is survived by his wife Cristina Manterola and his son, director Andrés Couturier.

Special Issue:
The Career of Juan Orol
Part One

El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol will premiere this March in Guadalajara. The film, directed by Sebastián del Amo and starring Roberto Sosa, is not a documentary, but rather a biography of one of the most maligned and, conversely, praised directors of Mexican cinema. So, MFB does its part by reviewing a large portion of the Orol filmography in this issue, and the rest next time.

The most detailed book on the director is Juan Orol, written by Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, which supplied the majority of the biographical information that follows. Orol was born in the province of La Coruña, Spain, in 1897 (although some suggest he may actually have been considerably older and later falsified his date of birth), but moved to Cuba with his mother at a young age. Growing up, Orol spent time in Mexico and Cuba, and worked at diverse occupations, including mechanic, auto racer, topero, secret policeman, and radio announcer. Through contacts made in radio, Orol became involved in films in 1933: he founded Aspa Films and produced Sagrario, a movie in which he also acted in a supporting role. The box-office success of this melodrama kept Aspa afloat, and in 1934 the company's second production, Mujeres sin alma, was made. This time, in addition to producing and acting, Orol also wrote the screenplay. The next logical step was directing, and Madre querida (1935) was Orol's debut in this role. Over the next five decades, Orol would produce, direct, write, and often appear in motion pictures made in Mexico, Spain, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the United States. After El tren de la muerte (1978), he "retired" (perhaps involuntarily) from directing, passing away in 1988.

Juan Orol is best remembered as the iconic director-star of numerous gangster/crime films, and for the succession of actresses (some of them his wives) who starred in his movies (his most prominent stars were, in chronological order, Consuelo Moreno, María Antonieta Pons, Rosa Carmina, Mary Esquivel, and Dinorah Judith). However, Orol also made a significant number of urban melodramas, tropical melodramas, rural melodramas, period melodramas, and even a traditional Western.

Although occasionally referred to as the "Ed Wood of Mexico," Orol had a far longer, more substantial, and more successful career than the late Hollywood cult director, and--at least until the 1960s--worked within the larger Mexican film industry, rather than on the margins. While his directorial style was rudimentary at first and never developed beyond a certain point of competency, Orol was capable of making reasonably slick, professional (if not always narratively coherent) and entertaining motion pictures.

Perhaps more importantly, he is the preeminent example of an independent filmmaker in the Mexican film industry of the Golden Age.

Juan Orol as Auteur

As early as the 1960s, when film scholarship was still in its infancy, Orol was honoured by retrospectives of his work. By any definition of the term, Juan Orol is one of Mexican cinema's true auteurs. Although the results weren't always perfect, it was easy to recognise a consistent style and world-view one might call "Orolian." The elements of Orolian cinema may be briefly summarised as follows:

Visual and narrative style: Orol was not known as a visual stylist. He favoured relatively long takes, often in master-shot (his films are filled with dialogue scenes in which people sit or stand around talking to each other, with few closeups or reverse-shots). On occasion he would move the camera, but these examples are rare enough to draw attention to themselves, with the exception of
panning shots across the width of a room (often a nightclub set), which occur with some frequency. Any sort of non-standard camera angle is extremely rare in an Orol movie.

Given the prevalence of musical performances in Orol's movies, it is somewhat odd that the standard Orolian musical number consists of static medium-long shots of the performer(s), intercut with shots of seated spectators looking on approvingly (or, in rare instances, looking on disapprovingly). Varied camera angles and/or dynamic editing are conspicuous by their absence.

The relatively flat photography and cramped "look" of Orol's earlier films can be attributed in part to the facilities and resources at his disposal. Later movies have a more professional appearance but the director's essential style is still very much in evidence, regardless of his director of cinematography or the studio/location where he shot.

Orol used stock footage not only in "standard" ways (to specify a geographic location, to add scope to a scene) but also as transitions and as integral parts of certain sequences. An off-screen narrator is another Orolian trait. Sometimes the narration merely opens the movie, at other times it is heard throughout. In some films, voiceover narration is also used to reveal the thoughts of various characters.

Themes: Orol was in many ways a proponent of traditional film melodrama, which focuses on interpersonal relationships that adhere to or defend a certain moral code. Some of his movies, especially the gangster films of the 1940s, do not follow this conservative morality: the protagonists are ruthlessly ambitious and are loyal only to themselves and a few trusted associates. They commit robberies and murders with no compunction nor do they attempt to justify their actions. Their victims are not only the rich or the corrupt, but also innocent people. In later years, Orol moderated the nature of his gangster "heroes" to an extent, giving them redeeming characteristics, showing solidarity with the working class, and so on.

In Orol's tropical and domestic melodramas, motherhood, the sanctity of the home, the value of happy marriages, etc., are all exalted. There are few "bad women" in Orol films--although sometimes women are inadvertently the cause of tragedy, for the most part men are the cause of the "perdition of women," to borrow a title from the director's oeuvre.

Several of Orol's films of the 1960s have overt anti-racism plots, which is interesting considering the relative lack of blatant social content in his earlier work. Despite this absence, while Orol's movies from the '30s through the '50s may feature some minor stereotyping, his films are for the most part "colour-blind," showing blacks, mestizos, mulatos and whites interacting socially with relative ease and equality. This may be partly attributed to Orol's previous Cuban residency--Cuba's colour line was never very distinct--but he also treats "natives" and Asians with a reasonable amount of dignity.

Personalisation: In addition to producing and directing, Juan Orol wrote the majority of his films and acted in more than 20 of them. Glimpses of Orol's personal life, past and present, show up a number of times. For example, Orolian characters work as auto mechanics, toreros, radio announcers, film directors, and secret policemen, all careers the director essayed in real life. Although Orol's Spanish heritage was not often referenced on-screen, both Guillermo Camacho and Florencio Castelló appear in multiple Orol films as stereotypical Spaniards, and Orol's character in Los misterios del hampa is said to have had a Spanish father.

Perhaps the greatest overlap between Orol's life and art can be seen in his choice of leading ladies. The vast majority of his movies starred Consuelo Moreno (his sister-in-law), María Antonieta Pons, Rosa Carmina Mary Esquivel, and Dinorah Judith (his wives). In more than one Orol movie, a male character says "in spite of the age difference" (we could get married, etc.), almost as if he were referring to his real-life penchant for "discovering" young women, marrying them, and making them into stars. On the other hand, in most of films in which this phrase is used, the relationship in question fails (or never begins).

The Cuban connection: Orol spent much of his youth in Cuba, and apparently developed a genuine liking for its people and culture. In addition to the films he actually shot in Cuba, Orol included Cuban performers in the majority of his Mexican-made movies--Maria Antonieta Pons, Rosa Carmina, and Mary Esquivel were all Cuban, and other Orol regulars from the island include Juan José Martínez Casado, Carlos Badías, Kiko Mendive, Juana Riverón, and others.

Stock company: one mark of an auteur is his/her "stock company" of collaborators, both behind and in front of the camera. Orol's "muses" are one obvious example, but the supporting casts of his films also feature the same names over and over again, including Arturo Martínez, Juan José Martínez Casado, José Pulido, Manolo Noriega, María Luisa Zea, Gilberto González, José Eduardo Pérez, Mario Sevilla, Salvador Lozano, José Luis Aguirre "Trotsky," Manuel Arvide, Jorge Arriaga, Victorio Blanco, José Escanero, Rafael Plaza Balboa (who worked in both cast and crew roles), Victor Alcocer, Stefan Berne, Joaquín Roche, and many others.

Orol's most frequent technical collaborator was Juan José Marino, who edited 26 of the director's movies (Alfredo Rosas Priego handled another 10, mostly the later features). Domingo Carrillo photographed a dozen Orol movies and Agustín Jiménez 9 (beginning in the mid-1950s), while Antonio Rosado was the music director on 12 entries in the Orol filmography.

Repeated motifs: Juan Orol frequently re-used or referenced elements of previous films (his own and others). Although he only officially remade one of his own movies (Madre querida, 1935 and 1950), the opening section of Bajo la influencia del miedo is based on Mujeres...
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El calvario de una esposa [The Calvary of a Wife] (Aspa Films, 1936) Prod-Dir-Adapt: Juan Orol; Orig Novel: Juan Orol ("La cantante del Wakiki");* Photo: Víctor Herrera; Orig. Music: Francisco Treviño; Descriptive Music: Max Urban; Prod Mgr: Luis Sánchez Tello; Asst Dir: Carlos L. Cabello; Film Ed: José Marino; Art Dir: Julio Cano; Script Clerk: M. González Jourdan; Sound Engin: José B. Carles

Juan Orol Filmography

1933: Sagrario prod, actor
1934: Mujeres sin alma prod, co-dir, scr, actor
1935: Madre querida prod, dir, co-adapt
1936: El calvario de una esposa prod, dir, scr, actor
1937: El derecho y el deber prod, dir, adapt, actor
1938: Siboney prod, dir, scr, actor
1943: Cruel destino prod, dir, adapt
1944: Los misterios del hampa prod, dir, scr, actor
1945: Pasiones tormentosas prod, dir, adapt
1946: Una mujer de Oriente prod, dir, adapt, actor
1947: Tania, la bella salvaje prod, dir, scr
1948: El charro del arrabal prod, dir, scr
1949: Amor salvaje prod, dir, addtl dialog
1950: ¿Qué idiomas son los hombres! prod, dir
1951: Madre querida prod, dir, adapt
1952: Perdición de mujeres prod, dir, adapt
1953: Hombres sin alma prod, dir, adapt
1954: Sandra (La mujer de fuego) prod, dir, adapt
1955: Bajo la influencia del miedo prod, dir, scr, actor
1956: Sandymar prod, dir, scr, actor
1957: Zona, el ángel diabólico prod, dir, adapt
1958: Thaimi, la hija del pescador prod, dir, adapt
1960: La Tórtola del Ahusco prod, dir, co-adapt
1962: Bajo el manto de la noche prod, dir, scr, actor
1963: Sangre en la barranca prod, dir, adapt, co-story
1964: El crimen de la hacienda prod, dir, scr
1965: La malición de mi raza prod, dir, scr
1966: La virgen de la calle prod, dir, scr
1966: Contrabandistas del Caribe prod, dir, scr, actor
1968: Organización criminal prod, dir, scr, actor
1970: El fantástico mundo de los hippies p/d, scr, actor
1978: El tren de la muerte prod, dir, scr

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sin alma (1934). Furthermore, in addition to his three
multi-film series
(Charros contra
gangsters and El
charro del arrabal, the
"Percal" trio, and
Organización
criminal-Historia de
un gangster), Orol also
linked Charros contra
gangsters with its
predecessor, El reino
de los gangsters: Orol's character has the same name in
both films, but is not supposed to be the same person.
Instead, the second "Johnny Carmenta" assumed the name
of the famous deceased gangster from Reino.

Orol used the last name "Cavalcanti" at least twice on-
screen, and other character names he repeated include
Tony (Tony Clark, Tony Florino--3 times--Tony Carpio,
Tony Larry, Tony Rizo, Tony Guarino), "Larry" (Tony
Larry, just plain Larry), "Rizo" (Johnny Rizo, Tony Rizo),
and "César" (César Morán, César Monti).

Orol also paid tribute to films by others. El reino de los
gangsters uses elements of the plot of Scarface (even
having one actor mimic George Raft's coin-flipping
sh t.) La m a de la del puerto is an uncredited
remake of Noches de ronda (which wasn't directed by Orol
but, perhaps coincidentally, co-starred his wife at the time,
Maria Antonieta Pons).

>>> Juan Orol Filmography

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Cast: Consuelo Frank (Inés), Consuelo Moreno (Irene Morel), Juan Orol (Pepe Luis), René Cardona (Sebastián Trujillo), Guillermo Camacho (Paco), Olga Ruiseco ("la amiga"), Icaro Cisneros (Pepito), Manuel Noriega (judge), José Campos (Joaquín Gómez Gallardo), Miguel Wimmer (the colonel), Joaquín Fábregas & Antonio La Madrid (men in cantina?), Sául Zamora (Raulito), José Eduardo Pérez (Irene's husband), Tito Novaro (man in cabaret)

Notes: El calvario de una esposa was the second feature directed by Juan Orol, and was--like Madre querida and indeed, most of Orol's films prior to the 1940s--a melodrama. Certain aspects of Orol's style are already present in this early work, including cramped visuals and a predilection for extending scenes long past their deserved length (this goes for the film as a whole as well--although it's just over 80 minutes in length, it reaches a dramatic climax at least 10 minutes prior to the conclusion, and the last section drags interminably).

Orol's personal life intersects with El calvario de una esposa in several interesting ways. For example, his character works as a torero and as a radio announcer for XEFO, two professions Orol exercised in real life. Additionally, his co-star in the film, Consuelo Moreno, was his sister-in-law (though Orol's wife had died a number of years earlier). Moreno appeared in 5 Orol movies before he moved on to Maria Antonieta Pons, and while she's not a bad actress, she hardly seems qualified as a leading lady: she has a sort of plain, bulldog-like face (at best she slightly resembles Charito Granados in the 1950s), and while her singing and dancing (in El calvario de una esposa she performs numerous times) aren't horrible, they're not memorable. [To be fair, Moreno is satisfactory in the leading role in Eterná martir, made for Orol the following year.]

Consuelo Frank, on the other hand, was a legitimate leading actress in Mexican cinema of the 1930s and early 1940s, before moving into "mature" character roles in the late 1950s and beyond (her career has several chronological gaps, possibly time off to have a family). Despite the title of the film and Orol's dedication--in a spoken prologue--to the self-sacrificing wives and mothers of the world--El calvario de una esposa spends more time on the characters played by Orol and René Cardona than on either of the Consuelos.

As the film begins, Juan Orol appears on screen and addresses the audience, saying "I feel honoured to have directed this film..." He also says his role might "provoke antipathy" on the part of spectators, but "that doesn't matter [since] it benefits all of the self-sacrificing [abnegada] and good wives." He narrates two brief vignettes: in the first, a "working man" gets drunk in a cantina while his wife feeds their two small children crusts of bread. "But not only the humble man is weak"--a businessman embraces his secretary while at home his faithful wife brushes his coat and shoes so he'll look his best!

The film proper opens as Irene's husband deserts her and their sick child. Some time later, torero Pepe Luis retires from the bullring, to the delight of his worried wife Inés. However, his wasrel friend Sebastián introduces him to nightclub singer Irene and they have an affair. When Pepe's money runs low, Irene shows him the door. Pepe goes to work at radio station XEFO but quits when he's assigned to be the announcer for Irene's program. Pepe goes on a bender but eventually straightens up and returns to the bullring to support his family, although he has to accept a lower status from Sebastián, now a promoter. Inés tells Pepe that Sebastián isn't a true friend, and when Pepe protests, she confesses that Sebastián informed her of her husband's affair with Irene and made improper advances to herself. Sebastián arrives and pulls a pistol when Pepe expresses his outrage and prepares to thrash his false friend; Pepito, Pepe's son, steps in to protect his mother and father and is fatally shot by Sebastián. In return, Pepe throws a knife at the villain. Before he dies, Pepito asks that his parents reconcile, and they do, moving to the country to raise fighting bulls. Meanwhile, Irene renounces her flamboyant show business career and enters a convent.

El calvario de una esposa goes on and on and on, not only piling up songs by Consuelo Moreno, but also prolonging virtually every sequence to ten times its "natural" length. For example, when Pepe Luis resumes his career as a torero, we not only see a long scene of his first encounter with a bull (he does poorly and is booed by the crowd), but also footage of a rival bullfighter, and then Pepe's next bull of the day, which he dispatches in a more artistic manner. The natural climax of the film should
have been the confrontation between Sebastián and Pepe Luis, followed by the death of Pepito. However, Orol refuses to let the movie end, adding a long sequence on Pepe's new farm, including a complete (and completely irrelevant) flamenco song! There is also a wholly extraneous sub-plot featuring Irene after she dumps Pepe Luis, which only serves to (after much stalling) depict her decision to quite "show business."

Some films are far too superficial, while others contain a more realistic, "slice of life" view. Orol seems to be attempting to provide more depth of characterisation and plot, but he mostly succeeds in making a film that feels extremely slow and padded. Surprisingly, however, El calvario de una esposa is still rather entertaining, largely thanks to the performances of Orol and René Cardona.

Honorarás a tus padres [Honor Thy Parents] (Aspa Films, 1936) Prod-Dir-Adapt: Juan Orol; Orig. Novel: Juan Orol ("A llá en los trópicos" [unpublished]); Photo: Ross Fisher; Music Arr: Max Urban; Prod Mgr: Ricardo Beltrán; Asst Dir: Carlos L. Cabello; Film Ed: José Marino; Art Dir: Jorge Fernández; Asst Camera: J. Gutiérrez Zamora; Script [Clerk]: Mario González

Cast: Victoria Blanco (Amparo), Juan Orol (Lt. Juan de Cavalcanti), René Cardona (Rolando de Villa Nueva, Conde de los Pinares), María Luisa Zea (Elvira), Manuel Noriega (don Fernando), Lucha Ávila (Lolita), Guillermo Camacho (Curro), Lolita Tellez Wood (Carmen), Jose Reyno (Francisco, el Gallego), Acerina (Nico), Roberto D. Garduño (majordomo), Max Langler & David Valle González (men in cantina)

Notes: Honorarás a tus padres is another of Juan Orol's pre-WWII melodramas, made slightly more interesting by its tropical setting (presumably Cuba, although I don't think this is mentioned specifically) and the presence of a number of attractive actresses (Victoria Blanco, María Luisa Zea, and Lolita Tellez Wood). The story works a few twists on the usual melodramatic tropes, but—as usual--Orol stretches it out interminably, particularly at the end.

Lt. Juan of the "rural guard" loves don Fernando's daughter Amparo. Don Fernando has heart trouble, and wants Amparo safely married off before he dies. However, Amparo tells Juan she won't care for her, because she loves someone else. Juan agrees, telling don Fernando he promised his mother he would remain single as long as she lived.

[In footage missing from the print I saw (which made things very confusing): Amparo is seduced by wealthy landowner Count Rolando and becomes pregnant. Don Fernando demands Rolando marry his daughter but the rich man throws him out of his house, and don Fernando dies. Amparo disappears.]

Time passes ("four and half" and "six" years are both mentioned in the dialogue). Rolando throws a masked ball; Juan crashes the party and warns Elvira, whom Rolando has targeted as his next conquest, of the other man's moral turpitude...

Meanwhile, Amparo is working in a cabaret, singing a lugubrious classical song that rightfully earns her the scorn of the audience. She brings her daughter Lolita to meet Rolando. Rolando refuses to acknowledge his paternity, but offers to provide a little money to make the problem go away. Juan arrives, crosses words with Rolando, gunshots ring out, and Rolando is mortally wounded (the set-up and execution of this sequence is extremely similar to the showdown between Orol and René Cardona's characters in El calvario de una esposa). Juan turns himself in and is sentenced to death by firing squad. Amparo tells the whole story to a high-ranking military official. Juan is saved after Amparo rides frantically through a storm to deliver his reprieve (because the storm has knocked out the telegraph).

However, the strain was too great and she dies a short time afterwards. Juan will adopt Amparo's daughter Lolita.

With so little actual "plot," Honorarás a tus padres fills the time with various songs and dances (including several excruciating renditions of Amparo's gloomy song), and extraneous comic interludes (including one between Acerina and José Reyno which appears to be some sort of "canned" routine, perhaps something they did on the radio or stage). The production values aren't bad, although most of the budget appears to have been spent on scenes of the masked ball at Rolando's house, which features about 20 costumed extras and a band, and on the cabaret scenes: otherwise, the drama unfolds among small groups of 2 or 3 people.

Orol's direction of individual scenes is adequate, even clever at times: for example, as Juan is telling don Fernando he can't marry Amparo, Amparo is framed behind them, peeking through a French door and giving Juan signs of encouragement. However, the overall pacing of the film is as slow as ever, and there are several false climaxes (Juan killing Rolando, Amparo riding to save Juan, Amparo's death). Even the legitimate end of the movie drags on: Lolita sees her mother is dead and says "What will become of me? I have no one!" and Juan says he'll care for her. Clinch and fade to black? No, Orol has to add yet one more scene at Amparo's grave where Juan
and Lolita reiterate what we already know, that she’ll become his adopted daughter.

The performances in *Honorarás a tus padres* are rather good, considering. In the first part of the picture Orol actually smiles once or twice, and he effectively conveys the pain of a man who loves a woman but is only considered her “friend,” and is exploited (albeit in a kindly manner) by her as a result. In the latter half of the movie he assumes his usual grim manner, and Victoria Blanco turns on the standard "suffering unwed mother" persona. Guillermo Camacho repeats his role as Orol's Spanish-accented sidekick from *El calvario de una esposa* and is mildly amusing. Lucha Ávila is quite professional as little Lolita, avoiding too much cuteness and displaying dramatic earnestness.

Slightly more palatable than some of Orol's other early melodramas.

Eterna mártir [Eternal Martyr] (Aspa Films, 1937)  
**Prod-Dir-Scr:** Juan Orol; **Photo:** Raúl Martínez Solares; **Music Arr:** Tomás Ponce Reyes; **Songs:** Chucho Monge, Wello Rivas, Rafael López, Roberto Solo Mejía; **Prod Chief:** Jesús M. Centeno; **Asst Dir:** Carlos L. Cabello; **Film Ed:** José Marino; **Art Dir:** Mariano Rodríguez; **Sound:** Bernardo J. Kroger

**Cast:** Consuelo Moreno (Griselda), J.J. Martínez Casado (Fernando Molina), Mary Carrillo (Paulina), Antonio Liceaga (Carlitos), Adria Delhort (Alcira), Manolo Noriega (Jaime), Chucho Monge (Pedro Sierra), Wello Rivas (Alfredo), Roberto Soto Mejía (Víctor), Mercedes Moreno (Susana), Clementina Morín (Sra. Molina), Alfonso Parra (don Carlos Molina), Ricardo Avendaño (don Gabriel), Timoteo Bolio (Chino José), Carlos L. Cabello (secretary), José Pulido (party guest), Juan Orol (himself)

**Notes:** the last film of Juan Orol's first Mexican period, *Eterna mártir* is another turgid melodrama. The copy I viewed ran approximately 107 minutes and still seemed to have some footage missing (possibly caused by print damage, although at least one credited character--"chino José"--didn't appear, or else I missed him). At least half the running time is taken up with songs (3 in the first 15 minutes alone) and a comic relief subplot about Pedro and his ditsy, insanely possessive, jealous wife. The film spans a period of about 20 years, which is rather ambitious for a Mexican film of this era, and Orol took pains to have the performers made up to look older in the latter scenes (except for Manolo Noriega, who reverts to his normal, elderly appearance after having his hair dyed jet black for the earlier section). As usual for Orol in this era, *Eterna mártir* features extremely protracted sequences: the finale lasts 15 minutes, an incredibly long period of time in a movie, especially since this sequence consists of nothing but two or three people in a room talking to each other.

After an on-screen prologue by director Orol (as in *Honorarás a tus padres*), the film introduces Griselda, a young woman married to medical student Fernando. They were both rejected by their families for daring to marry without parental approval, and now live in relative poverty with their infant son Carlitos. To make ends meet, Griselda and Fernando work as cashiers in the same shop. Fernando "borrowed" money from the business when Carlitos fell ill, hoping to replace it with a loan from his parents before the loss was discovered. However, don Gabriel learns of the theft and threatens Fernando with jail. Since Fernando would be more capable of providing for their child alone than she would, Griselda confesses to the crime and is sentenced to 5 years in prison. Fernando asks his father to use his influence to help Griselda; the older man arranges to have Griselda serve her sentence at a convent rather than in prison, but doesn't inform Fernando. Fernando thinks Griselda was freed and then deliberately disappeared.

Five years later, Fernando has re-married; his son Carlitos is fond of his step-mother Alcira. Griselda suddenly appears and tells Fernando what occurred. He offers to let her take Carlitos, or share custody, but Griselda understands Carlitos will have a better life with his father and step-mother. She departs for Europe, working as a paid companion to a wealthy woman. 14 more years pass. Carlitos is a young man and is studying medicine himself. Griselda visits the house posing as a patient so she can see her son. Carlitos feels a strange attraction to the elderly woman, and when his father arrives, he learns Griselda is his mother. They are tearfully reunited before Griselda dies of whatever illness (heart trouble?) she is suffering from.

Eterna mártir is a portrait of one of the most self-sacrificing mothers in Mexican cinema, and that's saying something! Griselda goes to prison for her child, then 5 years later decides not to exercise her right to at least partial custody, and returns 14 years later just to get a glimpse of her grown son before she dies. Interestingly enough, there aren't any real villains in *Eterna mártir*. Fernando re-marries, but in his defense he did search for Griselda, and since she had vanished, he followed her
instructions (pre-jail) to make sure their son grew up with a woman around to care for him. At no point does Fernando reject Griselda or try to deny her contact with their son: she is the one who makes the selfless decisions which spell sorrow for her but a better life for her child. The only characters in the movie who are even slightly unsympathetic are don Gabriel—but his anger is completely understandable, since two trusted employees stole from him, and it's not as if he framed them or went out of his way to persecute them—and Fernando's father, who saw to it that Griselda's prison sentence was served in a less-stringent environment, but at the same time used this to break up his son's marriage, for Fernando's own good (or so he believed).

Eterna mártir is a film in which good people suffer because of cruel twists of fate, not through their own weaknesses or sins. That's not a very uplifting outlook, since it suggests any one of us may be punished as a result of a chain of events beyond our control. Ironically, Griselda is the biggest loser in this, since Fernando's second marriage to Alcira seems to be very happy, and Alcira has a genuine affection for Carlitos. The film's sub-plot, mentioned earlier, is supposed to be historical reasons but only minimally entertaining. Formulaic and overlong, this is marginally interesting sets.

The production values are negligible, the humourous but is actually rather scary. Fernando's friend Pedro marries Paulina under false pretenses (his friends say he's an engineer and is descended from conquistador Pizarro, the founder of Lima, Peru); although she's wealthy, Pedro later complains to Fernando that Paulina is pathologically jealous and possessive, and we see this in evidence several times. Late in the film, Pedro demands a divorce but is mollified when he learns Paulina has purchased a new yacht for him.

The performances in Eterna mártir are variable. Juan José Martínez Casado is good, but Consuelo Moreno spends most of her time wringing her hands, gazing upward, and acting like (as expected) a martyr. Mary Carrillo over-acts wildly as Paulina, while the other supporting players are adequate. Of trivia interest is the appearance of José Pulido as an extra in one scene--Pulido would appear in a number of Orol's later films, including El charro del arrabal and Gangsters contra charros. The production values are negligible, the vast majority of scenes take place on nondescript interior sets.

Formulaic and overlong, this is marginally interesting for historical reasons but only minimally entertaining. 

Cruel destino (o Allá en la frontera)
[Cruel Destiny, or There on the Border]*
(España-Sono-Films, 1943)
Prod-Dir-Adapt: Juan Orol; Story: Abelardo L. Gómez; Photo: Ross Fisher; Songs: Chucho Monje, Nicanorro Casillo, Arnoldo Orol; Prod Chiefs: Luis G. Rubín, Enrique Morfin; Asst Dir: Moisés M. Delgado; Film Ed: Juan José Marino; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Camera Op: Jesús Hernández; Makeup: Enrique Hutchinson; Sound: "Kroger": Sound Op: Rodolfo Solís; Script Clerk: J. Cisneros Tamayo; Sound Ed: Lupita Marino
*this film was re-released under several different titles, including El bandido de la frontera (The Bandit of the Border).

Cast: Maria Antonieta Pons (Alicia Montalvo), Juan José Martínez Casado (Antonio Aguilera), J[osé] Eduardo Pérez (Armando Reynoso), Carolina Barret (Margot, maid), Florencio Castelló (Nicasio), Guillermo Familiar (chauffeur), Manolo Noriega (don Pedro Montalvo), Raúl Guerrero "Chaplin" (Tartamudo, bandit), Gilberto González (El Coyote), José Pulido (bandit from Jalisco), Chel López (bandit from Chicago), Alicia López, Joaquin Rochi [sic], Jorge Arriaga (man shot in cantina), Teté Dondé (?Alicia's daughter), Jorge Camacho, Trio Argentino, Los Plateados, Kiko Mendive, "Tabaquito," Agustín Sen, ?Gustavo Rojo (man at dance)

Notes: Juan Orol's first film in Mexico in 6 years, Cruel destino is full of familiar Orolian touches, and at the same time slightly more complex, both narratively and in filmic terms.

On the positive side, the script adds a few twists to the standard melodramatic situations: Alicia marries Antonio out of gratitude (he saved her father's ranch from foreclosure), but their marriage is unhappy, so she divorces him and marries the man she really loves! Such casual acceptance of divorce is rare for Mexican cinema of the period (indeed, Mexican cinema was morally conservative through the 1960s, and risqué situations were almost always resolved in favour of traditional values). Antonio's character is fairly complex, going from a decent fellow to an overbearing husband to a pitiful ex-husband to a bitter outlaw (who kills several of his own men in cold blood), only to regain his innate decency at the end. Though Orol still favours cramped compositions and excessively long
some of Orol's worst habits, including too many musical numbers, far too much extraneous footage and pointless sub-plots, and a "climax" that simply will not end until everyone involved has talked and talked and talked... The musical sequences include several "tropical numbers" by María Antonieta Pons, but José Eduardo Pérez also sings some songs (or is dubbed) by someone else, and there is even a bizarre sequence in which veteran character actor Chel López allegedly sings and then José Pulido does two songs! This latter mini-concert is part of a long section of the movie focusing on the internal bickering of Antonio's outlaw gang, a typical Orolian time-wasting detour.

Also in the "irrelevant" category is the comic relief provided by Florencio Castelló, Carolina Barret, and a third actor, who play servants involved in a "humorous" love triangle: Castelló loves Barret but she ignores him and fawns over the chauffeur, who isn't interested. These scenes are actually amusing because the performers involved are likeable, but that doesn't mean this sub-plot isn't beside the point.

Although director Orol doesn't deliver an on-screen prologue here (as he did in El calvario de una esposa and Eterna mártir), Cruel destino opens with a strange sequence in which an off-screen narrator (not Orol) introduces the audience to the characters and their past relationships: as children, Armando and Alicia were neighbors in Veracruz, but Alicia's father don Pedro moved to a ranch in Texas, Alicia became a professional dancer in Cuba, and Armando went his own way, eventually winding up as a ranch foreman near don Pedro in Texas. Years later, Alicia visits her father and is reunited with Armando, although they are only friends, because he claims he's not interested in love. But when Antonio Aguilería, a neighboring rancher, begins to court Alicia, Armando becomes jealous.

Don Pedro goes bankrupt and is not only going to lose his ranch, but may also be imprisoned for debt. Alicia dances in a border cabaret to pay the mortgage; both Armando and Antonio think this is beneath her, and Antonio offers to lend don Pedro enough money to save his ranch, no strings attached. When Antonio subsequently proposes marriage to Alicia, she feels obliged to accept--although, in a surprisingly rational scene for a melodrama, don Pedro urges her to marry only for love, but Alicia lies and says she wants to wed Antonio. Armando is upset by this and his constant presence makes Antonio jealous. When Armando gives up and moves back to Veracruz, Alicia realises she really loves him, and divorces Antonio, then departs for Veracruz to find Armando. A bitter and distraught Antonio goes on a bender and kills a man in a cantina brawl (in self-defense). He follows Alicia to Veracruz and confronts Armando, apparently killing his rival in a machete duel, then leaves. 6 years pass. Armando survived his wounds, married Alicia, and they now have two young children. They return to Texas to wrap up the estate of her late father. Meanwhile, Antonio has become the ruthless leader of a (not very successful) band of outlaws. [They rob the passengers on a bus, even though one of Antonio's men complains that people who travel by bus don't have anything worth stealing!] Learning Alicia and Armando have returned, Antonio and his men raid the ranch. Antonio intends to kill Armando and abduct Alicia, but the intervention of the couple's two young children changes the bandit's mind. He apologises to everyone and leaves, only to be shot down by the police outside the house. Alicia: "Poor Antonio, how cruel was his destiny." [Hey, she almost said the title!]

There are a number of aspects of this film which are reminiscent of past Orol pictures, or which prefigure his future career. Cruel destino, like Eterna mártir, spans a number of years in the lives of its protagonists (although this time it's only 6 years, so no one has to have their hair dyed gray). There is also a musical sequence in which "civilians" in a nightclub sing along with the song being played, echoing a similar scene in El calvario de una esposa. The cast includes performers who had been in prior Orol pictures--Martínez Casado, Manolo Noriega, José Eduardo Pérez--and those who'd figure more prominently in his later movies (María Antonieta Pons, José Pulido). Orol pays tribute to his Spanish roots by including sevillano Florencio Castelló here, just as he'd cast Guillermo "Curro" Camacho previously. The Cuban influence on Orol is seen here as well: Alicia is supposedly
Mexican but her *rumba* talents are explained by a stay in Cuba, and her musical numbers have a strong Cuban flavour, not to mention the presence of Kiko Mendive and Tabaquito.

*Cruel destino* is not as entertaining as many of Orol's subsequent films, but it is a step above most of his earlier melodramas. This may in large part be attributed to the cast, which features more familiar faces (even though Juan José Martinez Casado would soon descend to character actor status, and José Eduardo Pérez never again had such a substantial role); furthermore, the movie simply looks and feels more "modern" than the '30s melodramas.

*Note:* as with a great many of the films shown on the Cine Nostalgia channel, the broadcast copy of *Cruel destino* was in very poor condition. Oddly enough, though the main title was replaced with a video-generated title (this is usually due to print damage or possibly the fact that this was a re-release copy that had been re-titled), bootleg copies of the film with the original main title are available (I don't know if the film quality is any better overall, however).

Los misterios del hampa [Mysteries of the Underworld] (España-Sono Films, 1944) *Dir-Scr:* Juan Orol; *Photo:* Jesús Hernández; *Music/Music Dir:* Max Urban; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Morfin; *Asst Dir:* Valerio Olivo; *Film Ed:* Juan José Marino; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodriguez; *Sound:* "Kroger"; *Sound Op:* Francisco Alcayde; *Makeup:* Concha Zamora

*Cast:* Juan Orol (*Álvaro Rambal" aka Arnoldo Cavalcanti), María Antonieta Pons (*Florisa*), Antonio Bravo (*gangster*), Francisco Jambrina  

(Mario), Luis G. Barreiro (*don Roberto*), Roberto Banquells (*Álvaro's henchman*), José Eduardo Pérez  


*Notes:* although the eighth film directed by Juan Orol, *Los misterios del hampa* was the first in the genre most closely associated with the director, the gangster film. A bizarre, crude, yet not uninteresting work, *Los misterios del hampa* is amazingly uneven and disjointed.

For example, the vast majority of the many musical numbers are horribly cramped, as if they were shot on a sound stage no more than 10 feet wide (the dramatic scenes are similarly claustrophobic), and demonstrate no discernable style. But towards the end of the film, the nightclub set where these songs and dances are supposedly unfolding suddenly expands in size during an elaborate 8-minute musical production number entitled "Los pachucos." Using several dozen male and female dancers, dynamic editing, overhead shots, Orol pulls out all the stops for this sequence, which truly appears almost as if it were from an entirely different (and better) movie.

There are other startling inconsistencies as well: while most of the film is static and dull, with scenes lasting 10 times as long as they should, from time to time Orol will throw in a directorial flourish--such as a tracking shot in through the window of Arnoldo's home, or some traveling shots of speeding cars--to confound the viewer.

"In the suburbs of Chicago in 1944," gangster Álvaro Rambal is on Death Row. Dancer-singer Florisa visits him and apologises for indirectly being the cause of his incarceration (her erstwhile boyfriend Felipe snitched on Álvaro; a short time later, Felipe is gunned down by Florisa's brother--one of Álvaro's men--for his betrayal). Amanda, Álvaro's wife, arrives--she only knew him as honest businessman Arnoldo. Álvaro tells his story...

Some years before, Arnoldo lived in Mexico City with his mother; his father was working in Argentina (why they...
didn't join him is not clear), but regularly sends money. One day, news arrives of his death. Arnoldo's mother tries to find work, but soon she and her son are practically (and later, literally) homeless. Arnoldo turns to petty crime with his friend Mario, but he is unable to provide for his mother, who dies of poverty-borne illness. Arnoldo and Mario emigrate to the United States and become gangsters; Arnoldo changes his name to Álvaro Rambal, and becomes the leader of a band of criminals. Florisa, a popular singer and dancer, is Álvaro's protege. She lures wealthy male admirers to the nightclub where she works, then Álvaro's henchmen rob them. They also rob banks and run a protection racket. The police are unable to capture the criminals, despite frequent skirmishes. Rambal's mob also battles gangs led by Petrilli and "Gorila," and both of these rival gangsters are later killed.

Álvaro lives a double life as Arnoldo; he is married to Amanda and they have a young son. Florisa's jealous boyfriend Felipe identifies Arnoldo as wanted man Álvaro, and the police arrest him at his home. As the flashback ends, Álvaro asks Amanda to make sure his son never knows his father was a gangster. She promises, and Álvaro goes to the electric chair, content his son won't be ashamed of him.

Los misterios del hampa is not as coherent as the above synopsis suggests. More than half the film seems to consist of Álvaro and his gang sitting at a table in a nightclub, watching Florisa perform. Orol pads the picture mercilessly: scenes drag on forever, providing unnecessary (and uninteresting) detail. For instance, Arnoldo goes with his mother when she applies for a typist's job. We see her go in, take dictation, and leave; later, Arnoldo goes back to see if his mother was hired, but the office manager has hired an attractive younger woman whose typing skills are demonstrably poor. From the moment Arnoldo's mother announces her intention to apply for the position to the departure of Arnoldo from the office, four minutes elapse, but it feels like half an hour: everything is shown and explained in the flattest, most expository manner possible.

The script is also convoluted when it comes to the characters. Arnoldo is a dutiful son who turns to crime to help his ailing mother, then becomes bitter and ruthless criminal "Álvaro" when she dies: he's said to have killed 10 policemen, and in addition to various gun battles and bank robberies during the course of the film itself, he's depicted shooting rival gangster "Gorila" in cold blood. However, Álvaro is apparently also capable of being a kind husband and father, he tells Florisa's brother to get out of the rackets while he can, and he blames his life of crime on the unjust society that allowed his mother to die of hunger and illness. Juan Orol's acting abilities were limited, although satisfactory within a certain range, and he delivers his lines stone-faced throughout, perhaps unconsciously reflecting Álvaro's stoic attitude towards life. Orol conveys a degree of dignity and honour in the prison scenes, which is somewhat at odds with Álvaro's imperious and ruthless behaviour as a gang boss.

The other roles are less developed. Álvaro's relationship with Florisa appears to be platonic: she's a useful tool but Florisa later tells Felipe that Álvaro was always fair and kind to her. She's distraught when he's arrested--although, as mentioned earlier, part of this is because she feels responsible for Felipe's actions. After her brother shoots Felipe (in a restaurant's bathroom--this is probably one of the few films of the era in which urinals were shown on screen!), she's upset because she apparently loved him, although there's very little romantic chemistry in the scenes between the couple. Otherwise, Florisa's primary function is to sing and dance repeatedly. None of the other characters (other than Arnold's mother, played by actress-director Adela Sequeyro) has much personality or even clear identities: Felipe gets a few scenes; Mario is a complete nullity as an adult; Álvaro has one gringo henchman who is mocked for his incompetence (Álvaro even says at one point "When are you going to learn Spanish?" Hello? This film is set in Chicago, USA); Florisa's brother is "second henchman from the right" except for three early scenes (he visits Álvaro in prison, then kills Felipe, then consoles his sister); Amelia Wilhelmy, Fernando Soto "Mantequilla" and Pepe Nava appear in a weird and pointless sequence in an opium den; and Luis G. Barreiro is wasted as one of Florisa's admirers.

The musical numbers in Los misterios del hampa, alluded to before, come early and often. Curiously, María Antonieta Pons is showcased primarily as a singer in this movie: while she dances several times, none of these are the rumba style performances one associates with her (she does show some leg in the aforementioned "Pachucos" number, but her costumes are all very conservative). The songs range from tangos to boleros, with one catchy (and kitschy) number entitled "Nueva York"--heard over the credits and repeated in a production number later--written by Juan Orol himself (some of these songs were briefly heard in instrumental versions in Una
mujer de Oriente and other Orol movies). Orol himself dances with Pons in the tango sequence (she's paired with the zoot-suitied José Luis Aguirre "Trotsky" in two other scenes).

In spite of the cramped look of the movie, Los misterios del hampa doesn't seem excessively cheap. There is a nice balance between sets and actual exteriors (and the sets themselves wouldn't win any awards but they're sufficient and there are actually quite a few of them), and there are sufficient extras in some nightclub scenes (the rest of the time we only get to see about six or seven people in any shot). The major problem with Los misterios del hampa is the awkward, clumsy dialogue and Orol's insistence on milking every scene far beyond tolerance. However, the movie is not dull and has a certain wacky charm.

Una mujer de Oriente [A Woman of the Orient] (España Sono Films de México, 1946) Dir-Adapt: Juan Orol; Story: Abelardo L. Gómez; Photo: Ross Fisher; Music: Julio Brito; Prod Chief: Guillermo Alcayde; Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: José Marino; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Camera Op: Álvaro González; Makeup: Conchita Zamora; Sound Engin: B.J. Kroger, Francisco Alcayde; Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Sound Ed: Lupita Marino

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Loti; Naki), Carlos López Moctezuma (Count Amarú Saito), Juan Orol (Col. Randolph Campbell), Carlos Badías (Capt. Eddie Raymond), Clifford Carr (Sgt.), Raúl Lechuga, Stephan Berne (Kobi), Víctor Vázquez, Fernando Flaquer, Héctor Mateos (Charles Jackson)

Notes: One might suspect Juan Orol wrote the script for Una mujer de Oriente and couldn't quite afford to begin shooting it right away, since it's clearly a wartime spy film and yet didn't go into production until April 1946, nine months after the end of World War Two. [To be fair, Orol was busy making two other movies in the fall and winter of 1945.] Una mujer de Oriente acknowledges the war is over (even referencing the atomic bomb) but says Count Amarú Saito, and various Japanese military leaders are continuing the battle "on their own accord." This is clumsy exposition but presumably Orol didn't want to revise the screenplay further, making Saito a Communist or something. To add insult to injury, Una mujer de Oriente wasn't even released in Mexico City until June 1950, when it was even more out of date (although Rosa Carmina, who makes her screen debut here, had become a well-known performer in the meantime).

Una mujer de Oriente takes place entirely in the USA, with the exception of two brief flashback scenes, and none of the characters are Mexican or even Hispanic (Loti initially says her father was Mexican and her mother Japanese, but we later learn her father is Col. Randolph Campbell, an American). The 1940s was the only decade in which such situations would not be extremely rare in a Mexican movie--this was the "cosmopolitan" period when a number of works of international literature were adapted to the screen--nonetheless, the most obvious gringo (Cliff Carr) is used as semi-comic relief. In one scene, the villain shoots Carr in the hand and the sergeant says (in English) "You dirty brown son of a ----!" This sounds odd: even though "brown" was sometimes used during World War Two to refer to Asians (including the Japanese enemy), "yellow" was more prevalent (since it carried a double meaning, both in racial terms and as a reminder of Japan's "cowardly" attack on Pearl Harbor). "Brown" might more likely be employed as a slur against Mexicans (although of the major players in the film, only López Moctezuma was Mexican--Orol was born in Spain but grew up in Cuba and Mexico, and Badías and Carmina were Cuban).

Scientist Dr. Benson has promised to deliver the plans for his new secret weapon (a ray that shuts off airplane engines in flight) but is murdered by gangster Jackson and his mob, in the pay of Japanese master spy Saito. Col. Randolph Campbell, Capt. Eddie Raymond, and other U.S. agents are on the case. Campbell distrusts Raymond's wife Loti, who knew Saito in their native Japan. Saito returns the stolen plans so Loti won't be suspected of complicity, but vows to steal them again. Campbell tells Raymond that Loti is his daughter, the fruit of a romance he had while serving as a military attaché in Japan in the post-WWI period. The foreign agent captures Campbell and demands a safe-conduct pass so he can fly to Mexico and catch a ship for Japan, but Raymond and the others rescue their boss. The plans are destroyed--however, Loti explains that Saito has another copy and is planning to flee. Caught at the airport, Saito shoots Campbell then commits suicide to avoid arrest.

Una mujer de Oriente is filled with typical spy film shenanigans, including trap doors & secret rooms, bombs, disguises (Saito disguises himself as an old man, Campbell and Raymond disguise themselves with hats, glasses, and--
in the case of Raymond—a false moustache worn over his real moustache), stolen plans for a secret weapon, etc. There are also a few original touches, such as Raymond using sign language to speak with a "mute" Chinese servant (mute does not necessarily signify hearing-impaired, so this is odd), although after a short time Raymond says "my sign language is rusty," so he switches to writing notes (again, suggesting deafness rather than the inability to speak, yet he repeatedly says the man is *mudo*) and having the man answer him the same way!

The print of *Una mujer de Oriente* isn't quite as pokey and overly-detailed as *Los misterios del hampa*: the film moves along at a satisfactory pace. However, there are still plenty of scenes that go on longer than they should. Both Campbell and Raymond have extended flashbacks. Campbell's flashback takes place in Japan, and Orol actually found a rather elaborate Japanese pagoda and garden somewhere, which adds considerably to the versimilitude of this scene, in which he romances Loti's mother Naki (also played by Rosa Carmina). Raymond's flashback sequence depicts his initial meeting with Loti, in a San Francisco dive where she's performing as a singer and dancer (this is Rosa Carmina's only musical number in the film and is quite sedate): she's harassed by a drunken sailor and Raymond comes to her aid, love blooms, and so they are married. In contrast, Loti merely gets to *tell* her story: she was raised in a conservative Japanese home, trained to be a geisha, exploited by Count Saito, and finally ran away to live on her own, winding up in San Francisco where she met Raymond.

The performances aren't bad. Orol, as usual, never shows much emotion, but he does crack a smile in one scene—Saito has taken Campbell prisoner, and threatens to blow up the house they are in unless the intelligence officer signs a safe-conduct pass so the spy can leave the USA. Saito lights the 5-minute fuse and hands Campbell the paper, which Campbell tears to bits with his teeth! "I have another copy," Saito says, but Campbell calmly refuses to sign and smiles as Saito nervously watches the fuse burn down. Carlos Badías and Carlos López Moctezuma turn in smoothly professional performances. Badías, as Capt. Raymond, is believable as the intelligence officer who's astonished that his wife of 8 years is apparently a Japanese spy, which López Moctezuma is solid, as always, as Saito. This was Rosa Carmina's first movie and she's dull and stiff as usual, as Saito. This was Rosa Carmina's first movie and she's dull and stiff much of the time, but not horrible. As noted above, professional *gringo* Cliff Carr has a substantial role and is amusingly voluble and impetuous. Stephan (aka Stefan) Verne (aka Berne), who appeared in many Mexican films of the 1940s and '50s in bit "heavy" roles—his bald head makes him easy to spot—has a somewhat larger role than usual as Saito's henchman, although he has no dialogue.
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Trivia note: Col. Campbell refers to his organisation as the servicio secreto, which is not the same as the U.S. Secret Service (at the time a branch of the Treasury Dept.). The military ranks preclude this from being a surrogate FBI, yet it doesn't appear to be an official "military intelligence" group (furthermore, although Campbell is a "Colonel," he wears what appear to be Naval uniforms in several scenes). Actually, though the film is obviously set in the USA, no one says the country's name aloud, instead referring to it obliquely, as in "my duty is to my country," and so on.

Una mujer de Oriente is an example of Juan Orol branching out a bit into the spy genre. However, given the apparent lack of commercial success the film had, it's not surprising he would spend most of the next several decades on tropical melodramas, urban melodramas, gangster films, and various permutations and combinations thereof.

El reino de los gangsters* [The Kingdom of the Gangsters] (España Sono-Films, 1947) Prod-Dir-Scr: Juan Orol; Photo: Domingo Carrillo; Music: Max Urban; Songs: Armando Valdespi; Prod Chief: Guillermo Alcayde; Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: José Marino; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Decor: Rafael Suárez; Camera Op: Enrique Wallace; Makeup: Sarita Herrera; Sound: B. J. Kroger, Paco Alcayde; Re-rec: Enrique Rodríguez; Sound Ed: Lupe Marino

*misspelled on the film itself as El reino de los gansters

Cast: Juan Orol (Johnny Carmenta), Rosa Carmina (Helen Morris), Manuel Arbide [sic] (Eddie Bernadotti), Lilia Prado (Mary "Brent" [Bernadotti]), Enrique Zambrano (Mike Romero), Juanita Riverón (Alicia "Melton" [Morris]), Francisco Jambrina (defence attorney), Eduardo Vivas (prosecutor), Roberto Corel (Guido Sarmiento), Jorge Camacho, Roberto Cañedo (Carlos Volpi), M. Casanueva (? Crocetti), Jorge Arriaga (Martino), Ramón Vallarino, Rafael Plaza, Ramón Larrea (Belmar), Pedro Ibarra, Álvaro Matute, Ignacio Peón (judge), A. Martín del Campo, Carlos Pastor, Joaquín Roche, Victorio Blanco (Crocetti's secretary), José Negrete, Víctor Vázquez, José Slim, Manuel Jarero, José Pardavé (man outside courtroom), José Escanero, Samuel Moreno, Mariano Requera, Alfonso Alvarado, G. Villegas, Cecelia Leger (Sra. Macedonia vda. de Bernadotti), Kiko Mendive (handleader)

Notes: if Los misterios del hampa was Orol's first tentative venture into gangster films, El reino de los gangsters was a full-fledged leap into the genre. He would still make non-crime films, but with El reino de los gangsters he found his ticket to cinematic immortality.

Reino is a vast improvement over Orol's earlier work in many ways: the production values are better, the cinematography is better, the cast is better, even the script is better. And Orol's direction is also more professional and assured. He even broke his traditional habit of excessively-long scenes and interminable conclusions--so much so that Reino goes almost to the other extreme, with very short scenes, particularly in the first half of the movie. Unfortunately, this has its own drawbacks: in a number of instances, Orol ends a scene and begins another one in the same location (for example, Carmenta will talk to someone in his office, and in the very next scene Carmenta is talking to someone else in his office) or repeats and elaborates the same content in several different scenes, as if he wanted to continue his "style" of very long scenes, but had been convinced to chop them up into shorter chunks rather arbitrarily. Still, his directorial technique actually approaches standard filmmaking style here, with various shots and angles within scenes, etc.

El reino de los gangsters begins with a printed disclaimer informing "the authorities and the general public" that the movie takes place in an "imaginary country." This apparently seemed necessary because one basic premise of the film (which is mentioned, then forgotten about until a throwaway scene later in the movie) is that a highly-placed government official is shielding a criminal gang, leading to lawlessness and making the city "the kingdom of the gangsters." Hinting at government corruption was frowned upon, unless it was clear it's not
Johnny and the sexy Helen Morris are teamed to assassinate Giardoni: Johnny shoots the gangster in a nightclub when the lights are low and people are dancing. However, this doesn't solve the problem, because Giardoni is replaced by Guido Sarmiento, who continues the mob's policy of extortion and murder. The "good" gang gets a new leader when Crocetti retires: Johnny Carmenta is chosen. The two groups battle until the government official who backed the Sarmiento gang is fired. Belmar tells Johnny that he'll no longer be paid to fight the Sarmientos, but by now it's personal and both gangs continue their rivalry. Eddie Bernadotti is named chief of detectives.

Meanwhile, various hidden family entanglements complicate matters. Helen's sister Alicia is the girlfriend of Guido Sarmiento, although Johnny doesn't know this. Johnny's henchman Mike (who constantly flips a coin) is the boyfriend of Mary, Johnny's sister. Johnny catches Mike and Mary in a hotel room together and shoots Mike to death, only afterward learning the couple had been married. (Orol had obviously seen Scarface) Johnny is charged with murder but claims self-defense and is acquitted (thanks to jury intimidation). Mary later tries to poison Johnny but fails: he tells her Mike was a killer and would have been a bad husband, but doesn't reveal that he is her brother. Helen, unaware of the truth, suspects Johnny is having an affair with Mary.

Johnny, Helen, and the rest of his gang go to a nightclub where a masked ball is being held; Sarmiento is there (in a clever touch, Johnny is costumed as an angel and Sarmiento as a devil), and a gun battle erupts that leaves many dead, including Sarmiento and Helen's sister Alicia. Alicia's death and unwarranted jealousy of Mary prompt Helen to betray Johnny to the police (although she later reads Johnny's diary and learns Mary is his sister). Johnny and Eddie confront each other: Johnny refuses to shoot his brother and Eddie—who doesn't know Johnny's true identity—kills him.

El reino de los gangsters is over 2 hours long and with its complex, interlocking family relationships, could have qualified as something of an "epic," but...it doesn't. Orol has a very narrow focus and avoids almost any discussion (or depiction) of the bigger picture. As mentioned above, the "corrupt government official" appears just once—after the initial meeting of the Belmar commission, this topic is ignored until mid-film, when the official is fired, Belmar relieves Johnny of his responsibilities, and then the plot continues, virtually unchanged. The "why" of the conflict between Crocetti-Carmenta and Giardoni-Sarmiento isn't relevant, it's basically a pretext to set the two mobs in opposition to each other and have the gang war begin.

Johnny's relationship with Helen occupies most of the film's attention. He's smitten with her but she remains cool, agreeing to move in with him for a month on a trial basis, and even afterwards acting ambivalently towards him (which makes her sudden attack of jealousy late in the movie difficult to swallow). Rosa Carmina's performance is either very bad or very subtle: sometimes she just stares blankly at the camera in response to a comment or question from Johnny, as if she'd forgotten her lines. When she is called upon to express stronger emotions, she does it in a clumsy manner, either because she isn't capable of doing it properly or because she's attempting to demonstrate Helen's enigmatic, calculating mind at work. Orol devotes significant footage to glamorous closeups of Rosa Carmina (in an interesting touch, Helen has a pet squirrel on a leash in several scenes, including one in which the animal crawls all over Johnny), although curiously her only two dance scenes are impromptu—she's dancing in a crowd of people then suddenly gets "inspired" and goes into a solo performance—whereas Lilia Prado as Mary has two "official" dances as a nightclub performer.

Orol himself is somewhat more animated and human than usual, particularly in the early scenes of Johnny's relationship with Helen. There is considerable use of voiceover narration of different characters' "thoughts," which allows a little more insight into Johnny's feelings. He even indulges in a bit of comic byplay with Victorio
Blanco, cast as Crocetti's (and later Johnny's) secretary. Lilia Prado doesn't have much dramatic footage until the sequences of Mike's death, Johnny's trial, and the aftermath, but she is quite good in these sections, alternately angry, pleading, belligerent, and pouting. The rest of the cast is satisfactory.

While a number of Orol's earlier movies are fairly short yet seem longer than their running time, *El reino de los gangsters* is long yet moves along nicely, seeming shorter than it is.

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**Gangsters contra charros**

[Gangsters vs. Charros] (España Sonor-Films, 1947)  
Prod-Dir-Ser: Juan Orol;  
Photo: Domingo Carrillo; Music: Antonio Rosado G.; Prod Chief: Luis G. Rubin;  
Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: José Marino; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Decor: Rafael Suárez; Camera Op: Enrique Wallace; Makeup: Evangelina Garibay; Sound: B.J. Kroger, Paco Alcayde; Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Sound Ed: Lupe Marino

**Cast:** Juan Orol (César Monti aka Johnny Carmenta), Rosa Carmina (Rebeca aka Rosa Carmina), José Pulido (Pancho Domínguez, "El Charro del Arrabal"), Roberto Cañedo (Julio), Manuel Arvide (Felipe), Florencio Castelló (Paquiro), Raúl Guerrero (Murielago aka Pepe el templao) Rafael Plaza, José Negrete, Kiko Mendive (Kiko Mendive), Silvestre Méndez, José Slim, Jorge Camacho, Ramón Randall, José Escanero (Tiburcio), Ricardo Avendaño, Chel López (Pablo, mechanic), Victorio Blanco (beggar-rober), Stefan Berne (wrestler)

**Notes:** Gangsters contra charros is one of Juan Orol's best-known films, chiefly because of the culture-clash nature of the title. In fact, however, the conflict isn't--as one might surmise--between pernicious foreign influences (the gangsters) and traditional Mexican values (the charros), because both groups are lawbreakers, operating in similar fashion in the same geographic location, and neither has a clear moral advantage. The gangsters are the protagonists and the charros are the villains, although all are criminals.

Another curious point about Gangsters contra charros is that a "prequel" was produced afterwards: *El Charro del arrabal*. Standard reference works indicate El reino de los gangsters and Gangsters contra charros both started production in December 1947 and El Charro del arrabal went before the cameras in May 1948, but it is difficult to believe Gangsters... and El Charro weren't shot back-to-back. The technical credits are the same, and Rosa Carmina, José Pulido, Florencio Castelló, Manuel Arvide, and Raúl Guerrero play the same roles in both movies, but for some reason Castelló, Arvide, and Guerrero weren't credited on Gangsters contra charros.

Gangsters contra charros begins with the return of Pancho and Rosa from a trip (a trip they departed on at the end of El Charro del Arrabal). Pancho's aides Felipe and Pepe tell him municipal president Tiburcio won't cooperate, but his political rival Filemón is on their side. In short order, Pancho and his men reestablish their dominance over the town and begin collecting protection money from the merchants once more. Rosa returns to her job dancing in a nightclub. One evening, Johnny Carmenta spots a poster advertising her appearance, and recognises her as "Rebeca," a woman he'd known years before "up north." He tells his henchman Julio (in flashback) his story:

Johnny was formerly an honest mechanic named César, but his wife left him and took their life savings. After repairing a disabled car, refusing payment, and thrashing three onlookers who grumbled about this ("that's why we are the way we are," one says, "a working man does a job and doesn't charge for it"), César is befriended by the auto's owner, an Italian gangster. Offered a variety of lesser criminal occupations (including "blind" beggar and gigolo), César chooses pistolero as his new career. [In an amusing albeit overlong scene, César is
"trained" by a wrestler and a boxer, but defeats them both. Director Orol obviously enjoyed displaying his martial prowess--no doubles are used as he flips and punches his opponents.] He falls in love with dancer Rebeca, who disdains his attentions until he has enough money to attract her attention. He eventually becomes the "King of the Gangsters." After knocking down the chief of police who rudely attempted to dance with Rebeca in a nightclub, César becomes a target for persecution. When imprisoned, he's subjected to the ley fuga (the "shot while trying to escape" execution tactic): he is presumed dead but actually escaped and left the country. He assumed the name of "the famous Johnny Carmenta, who died at the hands of his own brother" (i.e., the protagonist of El reino de los gangsters). [All of the latter action is described, not seen.]

Almost half of the film's running time is consumed with the opening sequences and this flashback, leaving the actual confrontation between charros and gangsters for the latter half of the movie (although far too much of the remaining time is taken up with Pancho singing various maudlin songs). Johnny reveals himself to Rebeca (now Rosa Carmina), and she abandons Pancho immediately. Pancho becomes frantic. Johnny and Julio kill one of Pancho's chief lieutenants, and strike a deal with the local businessmen to eliminate "El Charro del Arrabal" and his gang. After various confrontations between the groups, Pancho and Johnny exchange shots personally: both are mortally wounded, as is Rosa, struck by a stray bullet.

Orol returns to his old stylistic manner--to a certain extent--in Gangsters contra charros, eschewing the staccato-scene form of El reino de los gangsters. However, the longer scenes are not as tedious as in previous movies, partly because the film technique is better within the scenes, and partly because the actors are better. Other than the aforementioned songs sung by Pancho, which really do slow down the pace, most of the picture moves along at a decent clip. Rosa Carmina performs several energetic dances (and looks good, but definitely has a slight "spare tire" around her waist, something not visible in her later movies) and Kiko Mendive (a frequent Orol cast member, and evidence of the strong Cuban flavour of much of Orol's work) gets a solo song of his own this time.

Orol continues to expand his acting range, this time playing a member of the working class (complete with baggy clothes and a battered hat) who decides honest work is for suckers (to be fair, he's starving due to lack of employment) and turns to a life of crime. César's early scenes with Rebeca are believable, although he is from first to last a tough guy (his signature move is to knee an opponent in the groin, then slug them, often following up with multiple gunshots to finish them off). Rosa Carmina is much more lively here than she was in El reino de los gangsters, but José Pulido mostly acts glum and morose. The supporting roles are adequately filled although Roberto Cañedo and Florencio Castelló have little to do (Raúl Guerrero is more prominent).

The production values of Gangsters contra charros are satisfactory, although the final gun battle between Johnny and Pancho unfolds in long shot on an "exterior" set with a very obvious painted background.
El Charro del arrabal [The Charro of the Slums] (España Sono-Films, 1948) Prod-Dir: Juan Orol; Scr: Enrique Carrillo; Photo: Domingo Domínguez and Julu Cahero; Enrique Rodríguez; Domínguez and 18 "Chaplin" (Monti, reportedly shot to death by the police "up north").

in the movie, she identifies this man as gangster César (another man in her life and she'll always care for him (later she isn't sure she can love Pancho, because there was to Rosa Carmina, a beautiful nightclub dancer. Rosa says many ways. Almost nothing of dramatic interest occurs, there is no real conflict, no action, and no particular half to avoid another two-hour-plus feature (eg, los gangsters Monti aka Johnny Carmenta, so this theory actually makes the rest of his story. Pancho "el Maldito" is a cattle rustler but henchmen Felipe and Murciélago convince him to take up an easier line of work: running a protection racket among small businesses (especially cantinas) in the arrabal (the poor part of town). Pancho agrees, once he's introduced to Rosa Carmina, a beautiful nightclub dancer. Rosa says she isn't sure she can love Pancho, because there was another man in her life and she'll always care for him (later in the movie, she identifies this man as gangster César Monti, reportedly shot to death by the police "up north").

However, they become friends (presumably "friends with benefits"). Although Spanish cantinero Paquiro becomes a trusted confidant of the Charro and his gang, some of the other merchants resist paying protection money. Filemón, one of the candidates for municipal president, promises to rid the neighborhood of the charros, but Pancho and the others disrupt the election and help don Tiburcio win the post. Although he acknowledges Pancho's help, Tiburcio suggests the Charro move on to greener pastures and leave his constituents alone. Pancho bristles but as the film concludes, he and Rosa depart on a trip. [This is referred to in passing as a "honeymoon," but is apparently only a figure of speech, since there is no clear indication they actually get married.]

El Charro del arrabal contains numerous musical numbers (by Rosa Carmina, Pancho, and Kiko Mendive), a bit of minor romantic conflict (between Rosa and Pancho, as well as Felipe and his mercenary girlfriend Doris), but very little action (a couple of fistfights) and little else. The production values and acting are satisfactory, but the script is simply too thin. Shorn of some of the songs and dances, the rest of Charro could have been spliced onto Gangsters contra charros to make a single, long (but not excessively so) work. However, as it stands, this is a very minor film in Orol's oeuvre.

Amor salvaje [Savage Love] (España Sono-Films, 1949) Prod-Dir-Scr-Additional Dialogue: Juan Orol; Adapt/Story: José G. Cruz; Photo: Domingo Carrillo; Music Dir: Antonio Rosado; Prod Mgr: Jorge Cardeña; Asst Dir: Julián Cisneros Tamayo; Film Ed: José Marino; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Camera Op: Felipe Mariscal; Sound Engin: Francisco Alcyade; Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Sound Ed: Antonio Marino; Makeup: Carmen Palomino

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Alma Luz), Víctor Junco (Manuel), Dalia Iñiguez (Antonia), José Pulido (Julio López), Wolf Rubinsky (sailor), Juanita Riverón (Alma's friend), Ignacio Peón (priest), Tony Flandes, Victorio
Notes: Perhaps it was the influence of José G. Cruz, who wrote the original story and adapted it to the screen, but *Amor salvaje* is one of the most conventional movies Juan Orol had directed to that time. Orol's directorial technique is smoother, the production values are satisfactory (although most of the movie takes place on two or three sets, plus exteriors), and--most notably--the plot and dialogue are actually coherent (if melodramatic).

Nightclub performer Alma Luz leaves Panama to visit her aunt Antonia in Venezuela. It's later revealed the "tragedy" she is trying to forget is the murder of her boyfriend by a former suitor (shown in flashback). Antonia is happily married to Manuel, who runs a tobacco and sugar plantation.

However, Alma almost immediately disrupts the household. Immediately after her arrival, Manuel accidentally sees Alma taking a bath (and takes a good, long look too, doesn't apologise, and then goes to a bar and gets a drink!). Manuel attempts to battle his attraction to Alma by being brusque and distant; his mood darkens when their neighbour Julio starts to court Alma. Antonia, upset at the dischord in her home, urges Manuel and Alma to make up--they do, and more, beginning a torrid love affair. Alma is guilt-stricken but breaks off her friendship with Julio, telling him she loves someone else.

Later, a drunken Julio overhears Manuel and Alma discussing their relationship, and threatens to reveal the truth: Manuel strikes him, then Julio falls into a shallow ravine and hits his head on a rock, killing himself. Manuel becomes more possessive of Alma. He beats up a sailor who makes a passing remark about her; then, when the sailor seems to be making progress in becoming Alma's friend, Manuel shoots him to death. This is the last straw for Alma, and she leaves, under the protection of the village priest. Antonia finally realises the truth, but Manuel stabs her to death with a broken bottle (off-screen), then goes to the church to try and reclaim Alma. The priest asks Manuel to respect the house of God; repentant, Manuel kills himself.

*Amor salvaje* is one of those films in which the arrival of a sexy young woman disrupts a seemingly-happy household (Luis Buñuel would soon address a similar topic in *Susana*). Alma Luz has already indirectly ruined the lives of several men (her murdered boyfriend and the man who jealously shot him), and she's the reason Julio, the happy-go-lucky sailor, Antonia, and Manuel all die. She's not evil nor manipulative, she doesn't flirt with Manuel, she isn't looking for a husband or boyfriend, but her mere presence precipitates the violence.

This is fairly standard melodrama. Orol includes the usual ration of musical numbers: Rosa Carmina dances and sings in the nightclub scenes and also performs at Julio's party; at the same party Julio sings a song, and there is a "group" performance (even the gaunt Victorio Blanco gets into the act) of the catchy "El amor de Carmina"; later, the sailor and a trio serenade Alma (it's worth the price of admission alone to see Wolf Ruvinski singing a romantic song, although he's clearly dubbed). The brawl between Manuel and the sailor is effectively staged, and as noted above, the rest of the movie is directed in a professional, zero-degree-style manner.

There are two brief scenes which warrant comment. Early in the movie, Alma tells a friend she is departing for Venezuela. The two young women, each wearing a flowered dress, are seated on a flowered sofa, with a vase full of flowers on the table in front of them. So...many...flowers...

Later, Orol shows the growing attraction between Manuel and Alma by intercutting between shots of them in their separate beds, hammering home his point by superimposing an image of Alma's face on the pillow next to Manuel (and then, over Antonia's face!), and inserting an image of Manuel next to Alma's pillow. This is about as close as one can get in a film to comic book "thought bubbles."

Speaking of Venezuela, there is absolutely nothing other than a line of dialogue which would identify the setting of this movie at that country (as another writer has noted, it could very well be Cuba or the Gulf coast of Mexico).
The performances are generally satisfactory, although "Julio" seems to have been written for a relatively young, "sensitive" male ingenue, not the robust José Pulido. The other major players are fine, and Ignacio Peón, a familiar face in bit parts for many years, has one of his larger roles here.

*Amor salvaje* is a reasonably entertaining melodrama, but it is one of the least "Orolian" of Juan Orol's movies.

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**Cabaret Shanghai**

*(España Sono-Films de México, 1949)* Prod-Dir-Scr-Additional Dialogue: Juan Orol; Story/Adapt: José G. Cruz; Photo: Domingo Carrillo; Music: Antonio Rosado; Prod Mgr: Jorge Cardeña; Asst Dir: Julián Cisneros Tamayo; Film Ed: José Marino; Camera Op: Felipe Mariscal; Makeup: Carmen Palomino; Sound Engin: Francisco Alcayde; Re-rec: Enrique Rodríguez.

*Spelled "Shanghay" on the main title*

**Cast:** Juan Orol (Tony Guarino), Rosa Carmina (Mary Ruth), Roberto Romañá (Alfredo), Manuel Arvide (Insp. Arriaga), Ampara Arozamena (Eva Romagnoli, streetwalker), Salvador Quiroz (comisario), Juanita Riverón (Rita), Tana Lynn (gringa), Amelia Wilhemy & José Pardavé (drunk couple), Rafael Icardo (doctor), Tony Flandes (club maitre d’), Armando Arreola (Polilla), Roberto Corel (barber), Carlos R. Gallardo, Marco de Carlo (Marios), Genaro Alba, Pedro Ibarra, Victorio Blanco (ejected drunk #1), Luis López Somoza (rich young man in comisaría), José Luis Aguirre "Trotsky" (dance partner), Víctor Alcocer (waiter-henchman)

**Notes:** the second Orol-Cruz collaboration of the year (after *Amor salvaje*), *Cabaret Shanghai* is once again more Cruz than Orol. A slick, good-looking film, *Cabaret Shanghai* is a melodrama rather than a gangster film—the picture opens and closes with some mild action, but the entire middle section is strictly dramatic dialogue between the principals. This doesn't mean *Cabaret Shanghai* is a poor or un-entertaining film, but the Orolian style appears in the small things rather than in overwhelming doses.

Tony owns the Cabaret Shanghai, with his lover Mary Ruth as the star singer-dancer. However, in addition to fleecing customers, serving them cut-rate liquor, and inflating the bills, Tony also carries out robberies with his handsome young friend Alfredo and the wimpy Polilla. Inspector Arriaga suspects Tony and Alfredo but can't prove anything. Nonetheless, Alfredo decides to get out of town for a time until he "cools off." Mary Ruth doesn't love Tony--she's actually attracted to Alfredo, who refuses to betray his friend. When Alfredo goes away, Mary Ruth seizes the opportunity to leave as well, signing a contract to appear at the Ritz nightclub.

Alfredo returns and compels Mary Ruth to come back to the Cabaret Shanghai, even though Tony claims he doesn't miss her and has hired a new performer, Rita, who is "better in every way" than Mary Ruth. Tony refuses to accompany Alfredo to rob the home of a wealthy family: the job goes bad, Alfredo kills a night watchman and is badly wounded himself. Tony hides Alfredo in the club. Mary Ruth and Alfredo fall in love. When Tony finds out, he orders them to go to Veracruz and sail from there for Cuba. Insp. Arriaga arrives to arrest Alfredo, but Tony holds the police at gunpoint all night to give his friend time to escape. Arriaga deduces Alfredo and Mary Ruth are headed for Veracruz: Tony flies there to warn them, but arrives too late to save Alfredo from capture, and is shot to death by the police himself.

There are several sub-plots and/or digressions in *Cabaret Shanghai*. For example, late in the film a young man shows up at the club and professes his love for Mary Ruth (before being chased off by Tony and his henchmen). This character hadn't appeared previously and it's not clear exactly who he is (although he obviously already knows Mary Ruth); Mary
Ruth is already sweet on Alfredo, yet she doesn't automatically reject this fellow's advances. Similarly, several scenes depict Alfredo in the company of a blonde gringa and her bespectacled husband (?) in the Club Shanghai: the older man flirts with various bargirls while his wife dances with Alfredo (who subsequently steals her bracelet and uses her money to pay the tab for their drinks). This does reinforce Alfredo's criminal persona, but there is no set up for these scenes and it makes the viewer feel something has been omitted.

Tony also has an "outside" relationship, with a streetwalker named Eva Romagnoli. As he passes by, she frequently asks him for a cigarette, tells him Mary Ruth doesn't love him, warns him when two thugs try to ambush him (this is a nice bit--after he chases the men off, Tony salutes Eva and she waves to him in reply), and later calls him when she's locked up. This final contact leads to the film's most perplexing sequence, set in the local comisaría (a combination police station and magistrate's court):

Various people pass through the comisaría, including 4 effeminate men (presumably homosexuals) under arrest, a barber and two men who were fighting in his shop, a wealthy young man who struck another guy, and two shabby drunks. The latter--played by José Pardavé and Amelia Wilhemy--go through a carpa-style routine discussing why they've been brought in by the police.

Finally, after all this is over, Tony appears to pay the bail for Eva--but we don't see her then and in fact we never see her again! This sequence is strongly reminiscent of Comisario en turno (1948), and may have even been inspired by that film's popularity--particularly since it has literally no relevance to the rest of Cabaret Shanghai!

The performances in the film are satisfactory. As Tony, Orol is mostly his usual stoic self (except when he chastises the cowardly Polilla or punches Marco, who's trying to convince Mary Ruth to return to the Ritz), but there are times when he hints at emotions buried beneath the surface. Roberto Romaña "acted" in a number of the fotomontaje magazines published by José G. Cruz--basically posing for photographs --yet turns in a decent performance as the conflicted Alfredo. Rosa Carmina smolders as the unsatisfied Mary Ruth, exuding resentment and hostility in her scenes with Tony, although she's less convincing when she expresses her unrequited (until the end) love for Alfredo. Amparo Arozamena stands out among the supporting cast as the hooker who loves Tony from afar.

Not prime Orol, but a smooth and generally entertaining melodrama.

El infierno de los pobres [The Hell of the Poor]
(España Sono-Films de México, 1950)
Prod-Dir: Juan Orol; Scr: no credit; Orig. Story: José G. Cruz ("Percal" comic series); Photo: Domingo Carrillo; Music: Antonio Rosado; Prod Chief: Paul Castelain; Asst Dir: Julián Cisneros Tamayo; Film Ed: José Marino; Camera Op: Felipe Mariscal; Makeup: Dolores Camarillo; Sound Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Sound Ed: Antonio Marino

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Malena), Luis López Somoza (Rubén Argüelles), Arturo Soto Rangel (don Rodrigo), Beatriz Ramos (doña Rosa), Amelia Wilhelmy (drunk woman), Jorge Mondragón (lawyer), Conchita Gentil Arcos (doña Cristina), José Pardavé (Simón, man in jail), Carmen Manzano (?Lupe), José Escanero, Joaquín Roche, José Muñoz (judge), Laura Álvarez, Lucrecia Muñoz, Abelardo Gloria, Enedina Díaz de León & María [Cecilia Lager [sic] (neighbors), Elba Del Villar, Pedro Ibarra, Lauro Cabrera, Guillermo Ramírez, Lupe del Castillo (Khala), Eduardo Martínez, Guillermo Fierro, Mr. Trotsky [sic], Juanita Riverón & Jorge Atristain (dance team), Trío Urquiza

Notes: for their third collaboration, Juan Orol and José G. Cruz decided to adapt Cruz's comic strip "Percal" to the screen. Cruz proposed a single film (a number of his other comics had been or were later made into movies), but Orol--who had previously directed long pictures such as El reino de los gangsters and linked features like Charros contra gangsters-El Charro del arrabal--recommended a multi-film series. In the end, the story of innocent village girl turned prostitute Malena accounted for over 4.5 hours of screen time in three films (El infierno de los pobres, Perdición de mujeres, and Hombres sin alma).
Unfortunately, *El infierno de los pobres*, despite the undeniably powerful impact of certain scenes, is seriously padded with irrelevancies and the conclusion is a throwback to early Orol melodramas: at around the 73 minute mark, Malena makes up her mind to sell her body to provide food for her baby and medicine for her ailing mother, but the movie goes on for nearly another 20 minutes. Malena leaves her apartment and goes out on the street, then stops in a cabaret to watch two consecutive musical numbers (Orol's trademark—to be fair, these are both quite entertaining) before finally picking up a "date" and heading off to a hot-sheets hotel. After a few more nights of such action, Malena decides to move her base of operations to the big city, and the film *finally* comes to an end.

There is padding earlier as well. Ironically, although Malena's father refers to a previous meeting between himself, Malena, and doña Rosa, this scene does not appear in the film itself. Instead, we're treated to *three* scenes with Amelia Wilhelmy as the "funny" drunk she played in *Cabaret Shanghai* (and, not coincidentally, in *Nosotros los pobres*). The first two of these have no bearing on the plot, and the third is only peripherally relevant. There is also an extended sequence as Malena and her boyfriend visit the circus, which features a *lot* of stock footage (the extent of Orol's new circus footage is a shot of the entrance to the tent, then Malena, Rubén, and about 4 other people sitting on some bleachers, reacting to the stock shots).

In a provincial town, not-quite-16-year-old Malena lives with her parents, doña Cristina and don Rodrigo. They are poor but honest, but Cristina resents their poverty and dreams of a better life. Her boyfriend is 20-year-old Rubén, the son of wealthy doña Rosa, who owns the building in which Malena and her family live. Malena visits fortune-teller Khalía, who delivers a frightening forecast:

"Many disagreeable surprises await you. Your girlish dreams will be converted into painful reality. Many times you'll curse the fact that you're still alive. When you've obtained everything you desire...you'll be like a mummy, richly dressed and sealed in a golden tomb, cold and alone."

After Rubén gives Malena a ring that belonged to his grandmother, doña Rosa decides to send him to Mexico City to keep him away from Malena. Instead, Rubén and Malena run away together. The police are called in, and eventually discover the two young people in another town, in a...hotel. (How shocking.) Although Malena's parents could legally compel Rubén to wed their "dishonoured" daughter, doña Rosa's imperious and hostile attitude convinces don Rodrigo to forego any further contact with the woman or her son. Naturally, since this is a melodrama, Malena *immediately* becomes pregnant. Before she gives birth, don Rodrigo falls ill and dies. Malena has a baby girl; her mother is cool towards her daughter and granddaughter, but works diligently as a seamstress to support them. (She also secretly lavishes affection on the baby when Malena is out.) Overwork and stress cause doña Cristina to fall ill. Desperate for money so she can buy food and medicine, Malena turns to prostitution. Shamed by her actions, she leaves the money she earned for her mother, but spends the rest of the daylight hours locked in her room with the baby. Finally, Malena decides she is "not worthy" of her mother or child, and departs for the capital, promising (in a note) to continue to send money home.

*El infierno de los pobres* utilises some of the standard melodramatic tropes, but varies others slightly. For example, Rubén is weak and spoiled, but he appears to sincerely care for Malena and intends to marry her. He's not a typical slick seducer (holding hands and a peck on cheek are as physical as he gets, at least until he and Malena "elope"). Malena's descent into prostitution is a reasoned decision, not something she's tricked into or physically compelled to do (she must have been convinced by the fact that she is repeatedly propositioned by men on the street throughout the film—even though she's a plain-looking young girl wearing shapeless clothes, and in one instance is visibly pregnant!).

While the snobbish and evil doña Rosa is a stereotypical figure (well played by Beatriz Ramos), the character of Malena's mother is interestingly written. She is shamed by her daughter's "sin," probably blames her husband's death on the family's dishonour, treats Malena coldly after don
Perdición de mujeres [Perdition of Women]  
(Embán Sono-Films de México, 1950) Prod-Dir: Juan Orol; Scr: no credit; Orig. Story: José G. Cruz ("Percal" comic series); Photo: Domingo Carrillo; Music: Antonio Rosado; Prod Mgr: Paul Castellain [sic]; Asst Dir: Julián Cisneros Tamayo; Film Ed: José Marino; Camera Op: Felipe L. Mariscal; Makeup: Dolores Camarillo; Sound Engin/Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Sound Ed: Antonio Marino  

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Malena), Tito Junco (Gustavo Alonso), María Luisa Zea (Avelina), Juan Orol (Tony Rizo), Arturo Martínez (Burton), Manuel Arvide (Dandy), José G. Cruz (Andrés Ramos), Tana Lynn (Bianca), Salvador Lozano [billed but does not appear until the next film], Gilberto González (Buenrostro), Marco de Carlo (Cuchillo, Tony's henchman), Victor Alcocer (Rulo, Burton's henchman), Jorge Arriaga (Santo Niño), Queta Lavat (Norma, Tony's girlfriend), Salvador Terroba (Pocaluz), Vicente Peña, Maria Smith (Sra. Ramos), Lily Aelemar, Lupe Carriles (Petrita), Nemorio Mejía, Rosa Rodriguez, Miriam Levy, Mr. Trotzsky (Burton's henchman Ronchas), Juanita Riverón & Jorge Atristain (Ana y Héctor, dance team), El Trio Urquiza, Víctor Blanco (Simón, drunk on train), Conchita Gentil Arcos (doña Cristina), Carlos León (henchman), ?Myron Levine (Hauss)  

Notes: the second in the "Percal" series, Perdición de mujeres picks up where El infierno de los pobres left off, and advances the story of Malena...slightly. It suffers from "middle-film syndrome," in which the first movie sets up the story and the last movie resolves the plot, leaving the second picture as little more than filler. Perdición spends much of its 2+ hours on unrelated sub-plots, and concludes with many, many loose ends dangling (to be resolved in Hombres sin alma, certainly, but still...).  

On the train to Mexico City, Malena is accosted by a bothersome drunk but is rescued by Santo Niño, a henchman of gangster Gustavo. Once in the city, Malena meets friendly cab-driver Andrés, who helps her get a room in a boarding house, and drives her around to look for jobs. However, she can't find work, and prospective employers attempt to take advantage of her. A loan from Gustavo helps Malena send some money to her mother and daughter, and a chance encounter with alcoholic bargirl Avelina brings Malena back into the world of vice which she thought she'd left behind. Andrés proposes marriage to Malena but she turns him down because she's attracted to Gustavo, although he is a notorious womaniser. Malena convinces Avelina to contact her old boyfriend, now a doctor: if they reconcile, Avelina can get out of "the life." However, Avelina's boyfriend has since married a "woman of his own class," and only offers her the opportunity to become his mistress. Avelina commits suicide. The End.
In addition to the main Malena plot, *Perdición de mujeres* depicts a gang war between Tony Rizo's mob (including Gustavo) and the group led by Burton. Burton tips off police detective "Dandy" to the location of Tony's smuggled merchandise (cigarettes and drugs); later, Tony foils Burton's attempt to blame a jewel robbery on him, stealing both the jewels and the money a fence had just paid Burton for the stolen property. Burton and Tony have a gun battle: Burton is wounded but escapes. Later, three of his men ambush Tony and kill him.

Malena is only peripherally connected to the Tony Rizo-Burton story: they all hang out at the same cabaret, Burton continually attempts to seduce Malena, and he also forces her to temporarily hide the stolen jewels, but otherwise Malena is not involved in the conflict between the two mobs at all.

Despite the disjointed nature of the narrative, *Perdición de mujeres* is not confusing or dull, though it's not as dramatically powerful as *El infierno de los pobres*. The gangster scenes are reminiscent of Orol's earlier crime films, and Tony Rizo is a worthy successor to Johnny Carmenta (although he is slightly more sentimental: in one scene Tony beats up a man in a restaurant because the man was rude to a shoeshine boy and a lottery ticket vendor!). One long sequence shows Tony shooting various targets with a pistol and a machine gun, he indulges in several gunfights, and late in the movie he is convincingly tough with several captive henchmen of Burton, slapping and punching them and even poking them with a knife to make them talk.

The friendship between Malena and Avelina is effectively depicted, although one might suggest Malena indirectly causes Avelina's suicide by encouraging her to hope for a better life: before this, Avelina is bitter and drinks too much, but seems resigned to her lot. It's only when she learns her ex-boyfriend is married—effectively ending her fantasy of marrying him—and when he offers to make her his mistress—reinforcing Avelina's self-image as basura (trash), that she takes a fatal dose of poison.

*Perdición de mujeres* doesn't delve too deeply into the lives of fallen women, who (in this movie at least) are ficheras (bargirls) rather than streetwalkers, but Gustavo repeatedly urges Malena to get out of the business before it's too late: "All that's the most rotten, dirty, and lowest of a city lives and moves in the underworld. Whoever falls into its clutches never gets out." Later, he points out some of the more shopworn ficheras and says they were all once young and fresh, now they're old before their time.

*El infierno de los pobres* and *Perdición de mujeres* each contain several musical numbers (the well-known tango "Percal" is heard twice in *Perdición*), although consistent with the demands of the plot, Malena herself does not participate. Instead, the Trio Urquiza, dancers Juanita Riverón, Jorge Atristain and Mr. Trotzky [sic], and another singer (possibly Marco de Carlo) handle these interludes. "Trotzky" (José Luis Aguirre) has some dramatic (well, comic relief) scenes as well, portraying an ineffectual gangster wannabee.

The performances are generally sincere, although the script doesn't always help. Orol's Tony Rizo is underwritten: he's not the center of attention and (as mentioned above) seems peripheral to the Malena plot. José G. Cruz gets to play a sympathetic character and does so in a satisfactory manner, even though Andrés Ramos is rather naive for a big-city cab driver. He takes Malena to the boarding house of Mamá Clarita (who's never seen), knowing she's an innocent girl from the provinces. It isn't a bordello, but the residents are hardly angels (in one odd scene, various people come stumbling home, drunk, including one couple accompanied by a dog!). Tito Junco is good, and his henchmen (played by Gilberto González and Jorge Arriaga) have some amusing scenes (the comedy quotient of their relationship is ramped up in *Hombres sin alma*).

The production values are adequate. Most of the film, including exteriors, was shot on sets at the Azteca studios.
Hombres sin alma [Men Without Souls]  
(España Sono-Films de México, 1950) Prod-Dir: Juan Orol; Scr: no credit; Orig. Story: José G. Cruz ("Percal" comic series); Photo: Domingo Carrillo; Music: Antonio Rosado; Prod Mgr: Paul Castellain [sic]; Asst Dir: Julián Cisneros Tamayo; Film Ed: José Marino; Camera Op: Felipe L. Mariscal; Makeup: Dolores Camarillo; Sound Engin/Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Sound Ed: Antonio Marino

**Cast:**  
Rosa Carmina (Malena), Tito Junco (Gustavo Alonso), José G. Cruz (Andrés Ramos), Arturo Martínez (Burton), Manuel Arvide (Dandy), Tana Lynn (Blanca), Salvador Lozano (René Alonso), Gilberto González (Buenrostro), Marco de Carlo (Francisco de la Cruz alias Cuchillo), Jorge Arriaga (Santo Niño), María Smith (Sra. Ramos), Víctor Alcocer (Rufo), Salvador Terroba (Pocaluz), Conchita Gentil Arcos (doña Cristina), Antonio Galicia, Ricardo Avendaño, Felipe de Flores, Ignacio Peón (comisario), Acela Vidaurri, Nemesio Mejía, Queta Lavat (Norma), Mr. Trotzky (Ronchas), Juanita Riverón & Jorge Atristain (dancers), El Trío Urquiza

**Notes:**  
The final film in the "Percal" series (the title comes from a 1943 tango, and refers to the cheap cotton material used for women's dresses--in contrast to silk or other more expensive fabrics), *Hombres sin alma* spends even less time on the putative protagonist, Malena, than the previous two pictures. Gustavo Alonso is the focus of this film, which has a typical Orolian false climax, followed by an extended (some might say interminable) "closing section." Also, since Rosa Carmina is finally allowed to sing and dance in this movie, there are frequent interruptions for these sequences, further delaying resolution of the plot.

After the death of her friend Avelina, Malena becomes a singer and dancer rather than a bargirl. Meanwhile, Gustavo has taken over Tony Rizo's gang, and continues the rivalry with Burton. However, Gustavo's older brother René, a lawyer, moves to the capital. He's initially unaware of Gustavo's criminal activities; when he learns the truth, he breaks off contact with his brother. Gustavo refuses to commit to his girlfriend Blanca, so she marries a wealthy man (but continues to love Gustavo). Gustavo and Malena fall in love and decide to leave the city and live honestly, but Malena is kidnapped by Burton and held prisoner by the rival gangster. Cabbie Andrés is badly wounded trying to prevent the abduction.

Gustavo, thinking Malena deserted him, goes on a bender. However, when he's framed by Burton for robbery and drug dealing, he challenges Burton to a knife duel to settle matters. Burton is badly wounded; Gustavo is also injured, and is arrested. Blanca convinces René to take over his brother's defense. Malena, freed, tries to visit Gustavo but he refuses to see her; it's later reported (but never shown) that she has moved to San Antonio and is being "kept" by an older man. A year passes, and Gustavo is still in prison, although his brother continues to work to free him. Malena sends Gustavo a letter explaining what occurred, and he is frantic to find her. Unable to wait for the legal process, Gustavo attempts to escape from prison but is killed in the attempt.

[Oddly enough, although the outbreak of the prison riot and escape attempt is depicted in extensive detail, news of Gustavo's death comes only over the radio. The same radio broadcast indicates Burton was also shot to death in the riot, yet he was never even shown in the prison with Gustavo at all!]

Malena, learning of Gustavo's death, returns to Mexico City and becomes a streetwalker. [Why? She seemingly had at least two other options, staying in San Antonio or resuming her career as a singer-dancer.] She had earlier visited the home of Andrés--who survived his wounds but was an invalid for a year, and only made ends meet by virtue of money Malena sent anonymously--but was turned away by his mother, who castigated her for ruining her son's life. One night, Malena is approached by Andrés who says he's not just looking for a "good time," but wants her to accompany him somewhere. They visit a house where Andrés says he'll soon be living with his wife. In the backyard, Malena's mother doña Cristina is playing with Malena's little daughter. Doña Cristina says Andrés is going to marry Malena. A happy ending at last!

*Hombres sin alma* is the shortest of the three "Percal" movies yet drags on and on, especially the last third (after Gustavo's knife duel with Burton). Orol never uses one when he could use two virtually identical scenes to convey the same information. To make matters worse, he often
chooses to have characters describe action rather than show it. This can't entirely be budget-related: for instance, the prison riot scenes are elaborate and extensive, yet Orol doesn't include a pay-off closeup shot of Gustavo's death (not to mention Burton's), conveying this information to Malena, René, and Blanca via a radio broadcast! How much trouble would it have been to shoot 10 additional seconds of footage?

To be fair, the knife duel between Gustavo and Burton is effectively shot, with both men moving rapidly and nimbly in a darkened street (it's even better than the machete duels in other Orol movies, which are generally decent themselves). Indeed, Hombres sin alma is technically satisfactory in most ways, with most of the problems resulting from the script and various editorial choices.

For example: as noted above, Malena visits Andrés in his home, but is turned away by his mother. Sra. Ramos returns to the living room, where Andrés is waiting, and tells him who the visitor was. Andrés is upset, because he still loves Malena and he (though not his mother) is aware that Malena has been financially supporting him through his recuperation. Does he get up and run after her? (She's only been gone 30 seconds) No, he just sits there. There's no indication he's still an invalid: he's not in a wheelchair or anything of the sort. It's like, "me...she's gone. Guess I'll just sit here and moan about it."

The sudden metamorphosis of Malena from bargirl to headline dancing-singing attraction at a nightclub is odd. It's like, "meh...she's gone. Guess there's no need--for sub-plots galore, since it's impossible to fill so many hours with the "main" story and one or two protagonists. Unfortunately, feature films--even a three-film series--aren't the best vehicle for this sort of narrative, except in rare circumstances. Ensemble films such as Earthquake or Mecánica nacional come to mind, but their multi-character plots are constructed much more effectively than the "Percal" series. Here, the digressions seem just that--costly detours that delay the resolution of the story.

Hombres sin alma and the other "Percal" movies are entertaining and interesting up to a certain point, but only the first movie is a satisfactory dramatic entity.

Sandra (La mujer de fuego) [Sandra: the Woman of Fire] (España Sono-Films de Cuba, 1952) Prod-Dir-Adapt: Juan Orol; Story: Felipe Montoya; Photo: Rosalío Solano; Music Dir: Obdulio Morales; Prod Mgr: Manuel de la Pedrosa; Film Ed: Mario González; Art Dir: Roberto Miqueli; Camera Op: Lupe García; Asst Camera: Enrique Bravo Jr.; Makeup: Sara Mateos, Israel Fernández; Dialog Rec: Paco Alcayde, Manolo Solé; Re-rec: Enrique Rodríguez

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Sandra), Arturo Martínez (Maló), César del Campo (Jorge), Manuel Arvide (don Miguel Olzábal), Lupe Suárez (housekeeper), Luciano de Pazos (Dr. Horacio), César Garbo, Virginia Codina, Celina Reynoso, Yeyo Arias, Nelsa Elina Báez, Doris de Goya, René Socarrís

Notes: this is an interesting film, if only for the fact that most of the principal characters are rather unsympathetic.

Miguel is a rich, middle-aged man who pursues and marries nightclub performer Sandra, despite the fact he has a fatal illness (heart condition?). Sandra is puzzled when he makes no effort to consummate their marriage on their wedding night (or next...or the next...). Miguel departs for his plantation in the jungle, leaving Sandra behind. However, Miguel's health (and disposition) worsen, and he sends for Sandra to join him. She dislikes the heat and isolation of the plantation, and the bestial nature of the men working there, especially Maló, the lecherous foreman. However, Sandra is favourably impressed with Jorge, Miguel's plantation manager. Sandra and Jorge fall in love, but Jorge is too loyal to Miguel to run away with her. Miguel finally keels over and dies from the constant
aggravation; Maló and Jorge fight a machete duel for the right to romance Sandra, and Jorge wins.

What a bunch! Miguel weds Sandra although he knows he is dying (why he doesn't consummate their marriage isn't clear, however). As his housekeeper constantly reminds him, Miguel is selfishly ruining Sandra's life by insisting she join him in the jungle, while still refusing to explain the situation (about his health) to her. On the other hand, Sandra marries Miguel for his money and social position (and makes no secret of it), although she does wait patiently for him to return after he abandons her, turning by Maló, the foreman has to

better than the norm (it should be noted that Orol brought promises Jorge that some day they will fight to the death

portentous comments from time to time.

They're all dead "there's no one left to stand between us!" (Yes, because husband dies and Jorge kills Maló, all Sandra can say is there at all?) and flaunts her desire for Jorge. After her attempts at reconciliation (then why did she bother to go once Sandra arrives at the plantation, she spurns Miguel's down offers to go back to her career as a nightclub dancer.

The film contains several highly amusing scenes. When Sandra first arrives on the plantation in a jeep driven by Maló, the foreman has to literally beat back the sex-crazed workers with a club! And it takes a long time, too! Later, Sandra rather foolishly decides to help Jorge make up his mind (re: running away with her), so she goes to a gathering of the workers (the same bunch that has repeatedly tried to rape her, remember) and dances in front of them, wearing a black negligee! Unsurprisingly, the whole gang jumps her when the dance ends (she's saved by the timely arrival of Jorge).

Sandra is well-produced and photographed: it's one of the most professional-looking of Orol's movies filmed outside Mexico (it was made in Cuba). There is extensive location shooting, but even the studio work is somewhat better than the norm (it should be noted that Orol brought most of his technical crew from Mexico for the shoot). The dialogue—as is usual for Orol—is florid and melodramatic, with an off-screen narrator making portentous comments from time to time.

As mentioned earlier, Arturo Martínez walks away with acting honours: unshaven, sunburned, he constantly and openly ogles Sandra, insults Miguel and Jorge, and promises Jorge that some day they will fight to the death over Sandra (and he's right, even though the outcome—he loses—isn't what he'd hoped).

Not as campy as many of Orol's films—his "tropical melodramas" tended to be more conventional than his gangster movies—but entertaining.

[reprinted with minor editorial emendations, from The Mexican Film Bulletin Volume 3 Number 2]  

La diosa de Tahiti (Los chacales de Isla Verde) [The Goddess of Tahiti (The Jackals of Isla Verde)] (España Sono-Films de México, 1952)  

Prod-Dir: Juan Orol; Adapt: Juan Orol, J. Cisneros Tamayo; Story: Ícaro Cisneros ("El compadre Silvestre"); Photo: Rosalío Solano; Music: Antonio Rosado G.; Prod Mgr: Pedro Montalbán; Asst Dir: J. Cisneros Tamayo; Film Ed: Juan José Marino; Art Dir: Fco. Marco Chilet; Lighting: Antonio Solano; Camera Op: Felipe Mariscal; Dialog Rec: Rodolfo Solis; Music/Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Sound Ed: Antonio Marino; Design & Decor: Ángel Quiros

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Paula), Arturo Martínez (Silvestre), Marco de Carlo (Alfredo), Salvador Lozano (Cndte.), Acela Vidaurri (Esmeralda), Gilberto González (Pancho), Guillermo Calles (Mestizo), Rafael Plaza, Mario Sevilla (Palomo), Pepe Nava (Narices), Salvador Pulido, Gregorio Acosta, Leonardo Castro, Cuarteto Armónico, Ignacio Rivera, Trío Aguillillas, Stefan Verne (sailor in cabaret), Regino Herrera (man at fiesta); dancers: Juanita Riverón, Mister Trotsky, Ma. de los Ángeles Guerrerro, Sergio Corona

Notes: After the collaboration between Orol and José G. Cruz ended in 1951, the director used "third-party" stories for Sandra and La diosa de Tahiti, before returning to self-penned scripts. La diosa de Tahiti was a collaboration between Orol and the Cisneros family: Ícaro Cisneros appeared as a child actor in Orol's El calvario de una esposa (1936), and his father Julián Cisneros Tamayo wrote the story for Orol's directorial debut (Madre querida, 1935), and was Orol's script clerk on Cruel destino (1943), moving up to assistant director with Amor salvaje (1949).

As a result, La diosa de Tahiti, like Sandra, has a reasonably linear narrative, not free of melodramatic incidents but at least coherent, albeit with a typical Orolian protracted conclusion. The film is set on "Isla Verde" in the "South Seas," but it's difficult to understand why
possibly Venezuela (the concept of a hidden village of particularly distinctive. The plot would also have worked join Silvestre's band of outlaws. He earns the bandit struggle isn't common usage in the South Seas as far as I know) or possibly Venezuela (the concept of a hidden village of smugglers and bandits is somewhat reminiscent of Canaima and other works). There are no "South Sea natives" in evidence (everyone looks Hispanic) and there is no attempt to make the geography "Isla Verde" seem particularly distinctive. The plot would also have worked as a straight Western. However, Orol was most identified with gangster films and "tropical" melodramas, so this probably influenced the final form of La diosa de Tahiti (which is the nickname of the female lead, but doesn't indicate she is actually from Tahiti or anything of that sort).

The film opens with a long sequence in which an off-screen narrator discusses Isla Verde and the people who live there. In a shabby town on the island, a cabaret caters to sailors, bargirls, and other rough customers, who enjoy the singing and dancing of Paula, "The Goddess of Tahiti." Shots are heard outside--Alfredo, fleeing the police, enters the club and, on the orders of a mysterious man, is hidden in a secret closet in Paula's dressing room. The next day, Alfredo is taken into the jungle to the village where smuggler and bandit el compadre Silvestre reigns. Silvestre is the man who'd saved Alfredo the night before. Alfredo says he's been accused of murder and agrees to join Silvestre's band of outlaws. He earns the bandit leader's trust by informing him of the true value of some stolen merchandise.

Silvestre warns Alfredo that Paula is much beloved and is not to be trifled with, but Alfredo falls in love with Paula and on the night of a fiesta in Silvestre's village, they make love. However, Alfredo is actually an undercover police agent, and he tips off the Comandante to a planned raid by Silvestre's gang: in the ensuing battle, the bandit leader is mortally wounded. He dies in Paula's arms. Alfredo doesn't know Paula was Silvestre's sister, and when he proposes marriage to her, she bitterly rejects him. Furthermore, she assumes leadership of the outlaw band, disguising herself as "Silvestre." Alfredo falls off a cliff and is presumed dead by the bandits (he survives but is hospitalised for a long time). Paula is captured and sentenced to be shot, then gives birth to Alfredo's child and receives a temporary stay of execution. Her men attempt to rescue her but are all caught or killed. Before they are shot, henchmen Pancho and Mestizo confess to the crimes committed by the band after Silvestre's death, clearing Paula's name. Alfredo and Paula reconcile and will raise their child together.

The happy ending of La diosa de Tahiti is difficult to swallow in several ways. First, Paula's hatred of Alfredo for causing her brother's death--vehemently expressed several times, the most recent instance about one minute before--suddenly and inexplicably evaporates in the final moments. There's no explanation for it (I thought one of Silvestre's gang was going to confess to killing him, even though we saw him shot in the battle with the police) and it's horribly unbelievable and illogical. Additionally, Paula's pardon is dubious: her men claim their actions were without her knowledge or consent, but we saw her leading the outlaws, giving them their orders, etc. (although she did discourage them from needless bloodshed). Possibly her henchmen's confession was intended to be understood by the audience as false, a mere fiction to save her life, but that would be giving Orol credit for subtlety he rarely displays.

The production values of La diosa de Tahiti are surprisingly good without being elaborate. The main action sequence--the bandits attacking a chiclero caravan and in turn being ambushed by mounted police--features at least 20 or 30 men on horses, and while the scene isn't filmed in an especially exciting manner, the simple existence of that many riders on screen lifts the picture to a greater scale than usual for Orol. The music numbers even seem slightly over-produced for the scale of the club in which Paula is working--back again from the "Percal" series are dancers Juanita Riverón and Mister Trotsky, with the addition this time of a young Sergio Corona, and Marco de Carlo is given the opportunity to sing as well. Rosa Carmina, as mentioned above, has several opportunities to chew the scenery as she castigates Alfredo and vows revenge for her brother's death, but has little to do otherwise (aside from singing and dancing). Arturo Martínez is solid as usual, and Marco de Carlo makes a
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satisfactory hero. De Carlo had a long but minor career in Mexican cinema, repeatedly popping up, then vanishing from the screen for a decade or so (although he obviously worked in non-film venues as well, which are less easy to document).

Predictable but adequately entertaining.

El sindicato del crimen o la antesala de la muerte [The Crime Syndicate or the Waiting Room of Death] (España Sono-Films de México, 1953) Prod-Dir-Scr: Juan Orol; Photo: Minervino Rojas; Music Dir: Obdulio Morales, Max Urban; Prod Mgr: Manuel de la Pedroza, Rafael Plaza Balboa; Film Ed: Juan José Marino; Camera Op: Roberto Ochoa; Makeup: Juanita Riverón, Ramón Méndez; Dialog Rec: Alejandro Caparrós; Re-rec: Enrique Rodriguez; Recordist: Mario Franca

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Nelly Digan), Juan Orol (Tommy Larry), Arturo Martínez (Johnny), José Elias Moreno (Kelly), Virginia Codina, Víctor Alcocer (Giovanni), Roberto Romaña (Joe Cartí), Raúl Celis, César Carbó, Luciano de Paz (police official), Doris de Goya, Jorge Guerrero, Mario Sevillas (Mario Salgari), Isabelita Elías, César Pomar, Jorge Martínez, Rafael Plaza, Enrique Montañó, Arturo Robles, Felina Varela, Isolda Mello, Hilarío Ortega, Israel Camús, Rafael González, José R. Llorens

Notes: Orol went back to Cuba at the end of 1953 to make El sindicato del crimen, a sketchy and technically "rough" feature film. Sandra, his previous Cuban-made movie, had a crew largely composed of personnel from the Mexican film industry, which may have contributed to a more polished "look" in contrast to Sindicato (although one high-angle shot is repeated several times in an interior sequence, something very unusual in an Orol movie). Sindicato was probably post-produced in Mexico but the crew was largely Cuban. This is not to denigrate the work of Cuban filmmakers, but their experience, facilities and equipment could not compare with Mexico. For instance, the sound recording quality is especially weak at times in Sindicato.

After 5 years making films co-written by others, Juan Orol was left to his own devices once more, and El sindicato del crimen exhibits many of the usual Orolian narrative problems, compounded by a superficial, almost schematic plot structure. The majority of the movie is set in New York City (Orol's character even makes a reference to the U.S. presidential election and his own income tax problems), with a brief digression to Cuba to showcase the outdoor floor show at the Sans Souci nightclub.

The film begins and ends with an odd framing sequence: a group of young people in a restaurant loudly discuss their plans to become gangsters (?!), but are interrupted by an older man who warns them that crime doesn't pay, and illustrates it with [in flashback] the tale of Nelly Digan and Tommy Larry... Nelly is a taxi dancer who's picked up by gangster Johnny. She ingeniously asks "what's a gangster?" and is told it's a "professor of physical culture." [What is she, an idiot?] On their way back to Johnny's apartment, Nelly is accosted by one of Johnny's former girlfriends. There is a scuffle, and a shot is fired. Nelly wakes up later and is told the other woman was killed, and Nelly faces jail time if she's caught. This is untrue, of course, and when Nelly learns she was deceived (some days later), she smashes an ashtray over Johnny's head and flees. Her next stop, for some unexplained reason, is the apartment of Giovanni, a gangster/nightclub owner. Admitting she can't sing or dance, Nelly is nonetheless hired as a cigarette girl, though of course Giovanni would like her duties to include...other things. After various confusing circumstances too complicated to explain, Nelly winds up in jail (basically, Johnny shot a policeman in the presence of Nelly and Giovanni, handed her the pistol and fled) and refuses Giovanni's offer to bail her out. She does, however, allow complete stranger Tommy Larry (another gangster) to do so, especially after he (a) points out Giovanni is waiting outside the jail to kill her, and (b) has one of his men throw a grenade that blows up Giovanni's car!

Nelly and Tommy fall in love. One day, he's reported to have been killed in an ambush and his lieutenants reluctantly allow Kelly to assume command of the syndicate. Kelly tries to "take over" Nelly as well, but she resists strenuously and when Tommy arrives (he survived the attempt on his life but let the news of his "death" be disseminated so he could determine who was loyal) Kelly pays for his ambition with his life.
Although Nelly had confessed to having no musical talent (or perhaps, just no training), now she wants to become a star. Tommy decides to take her to Cuba where he knows a famous impresario (and because the U.S. government is investigating him for tax fraud). He hires Charles Olsen to stage her show at the Sans Souci; Olsen falls in love with Nelly, but she is loyal to Tommy. Back in the USA, Olsen teams up with Johnny and some other gangsters, who ambush and kill Tommy. Nelly avenges him by gunning down Tommy's killers at his funeral, but is fatally shot to death herself.

The framing story ends as the man telling the story—a police official who knew Tommy and Nelly—urges the young people to forgo the excitement of crime. They agree.

_El sindicato del crimen_ is a muddled combination of the absurd and the outlandish. When Nelly first appears, she is working as a taxi dancer (someone paid to dance with single men) and yet she's apparently so naive she doesn't know what the word "gangster" means? Within a very short period of time, she vamps her way into a job with Giovanni (by promising to "be nice" to another hood, then reneging), flirts again with Johnny, goes back to Giovanni (in a curious coincidence, "Giovanni" is Italian for "Johnny"), then takes up with Tommy Larry. She subsequently uses her appearance and veiled offers of sexual favours (always denied in the end) to deal with numerous other males. Almost to the very end—to the film's credit, whether it's inadvertent or not—Nelly's true feelings remain ambiguous (and her inconsistent actions and comments keep them that way).

However, she finally commits—once Tommy is dead—seizing a tommy gun (apt choice of weapon) and mowing down Johnny and the other mobsters who are hypocritically acting as Tommy's pall-bearers!

The film's setting moves from New York to Havana and back again (although it was shot entirely in Cuba), without worrying too much about verisimilitude. "New York City," for example, has palm trees on the street (in the scene when Giovanni's car is blown up) and a fancy casino. The latter is the setting for an incredibly bizarre sequence in which Nelly is treated royally and gambles away all of her money, until Tommy arrives and coerces the dealer into letting her win. He then complains to the casino manager (who buys his liquor from Tommy's organisation) that the games are crooked, and this offends him! The scenes of the Sans Souci outdoor show are impressive (the Tropicana also had an outdoor stage for its nightly shows), but since Orol doesn't make much effort to distinguish New York from Havana, the audience doesn't care either. (For those who grew up after 1960, however, a world where people can travel freely from the USA to Cuba and vice versa seems quite unusual.)

Arturo Martínez, Víctor Alcocer, and José Elias Moreno are fine in their roles—Martínez and Alcocer were Orol stalwarts, but Moreno makes his only appearance in an Orol movie. Two more members of the stock company, Roberto Romaña and Mario Sevilla, show up: Romaña's film career was brief and generally undistinguished, while Sevilla had supporting roles in a lot of pictures. Neither man is particularly noteworthy here.

Two trivia points: Rosa Carmina wears a dress in this film that she also wears in _Sandra (La mujer del fuego)_ and this is stretched over nearly two hours in the most haphazard manner ever.

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**La mesera del Café del Puerto** [The Waitress of the Port Café] (España Sono-Films de Cuba, 1954)

*Prod-Dir-Adapt:* Juan Orol; *Story:* Manuel de la Pedroza; *Photo:* Minervino Rojas; *Music:* Rosendo Ramirez; *Prod Mgr:* Manuel de la Pedroza, Rafael Plaza Balboa; *Film Ed:* Juan José Marino; *Art Dir:* Roberto Miqueli; *Camera Op:* Enrique Bravo; *Makeup:* Israel Fernández; *Sound Engin:* Manuel Solé; *Re-rec:* Enrique Rodriguez; *Recordist:* Roberto González

**Cast:** Bertha Montesinos (Glória del Campo), Julio Capote (Ricardo Santillán), Martha Rams (Adelita Sáenz), Elisa Araujo (Berta Salcedo), Juan J.M. Casado (Andrés de Montevede), Augusto Martín (?Enrique Yáñez), Chino Wong (José), Julio Martínez A., Rafael Plaza Balboa, Armando Bringuier, Alicia Rico, Leopoldo Blum, Gladys
probably went something like this: "watch Noches de ronda (1942), copy down everything that happens, write "La mesera del Café del Puerto" on the first page, and boom! You're done." Mesera is an extremely close imitation of the earlier movie, making only the slightest changes to the story (the female lead goes from a hunchback to having a slight limp) and rearranging the chronology of a few of the events in the film. It's difficult to understand why this fairly blatant plagiarism didn't cause Orol any legal problems when the film was released in Mexico in 1957 (unless the rights to the story were actually paid for, which is possible but doesn't seem likely).

Ricardo, an impoverished composer, is befriended by Adelita, a waitress at the Café del Puerto. She convinces café owner José to rent a piano and allow Ricardo to sing and play; his music attracts the attention of Enrique, owner of the upscale nightclub La Campana. He brings star performer Gloria del Campo to the café and she is impressed by the young composer. Ricardo is soon successful, but has to fend off the romantic advances of Andrés: he prefers Adelita. Gloria visits Adelita and says the waitress—who limps—is holding back Ricardo's career. This angers Ricardo, who refuses to work with Gloria any more, and signs a contract to perform on the radio in New York. Adelita decides to go ahead with a dangerous operation that may cure her disability. After the treatment, Adelita fears she is dying and telephones Ricardo, who interrupts his broadcast to speak with her. He flies back to Cuba for her "funeral," only to discover she's made a miraculous recovery. They will marry, and a repentant Gloria asks to be matron of honour at their wedding.

The very minimal drama of La mesera del Café del Puerto—even less goes on than in the other versions of Noches de ronda in 1942 and 1991—is padded out to feature length with various musical numbers. The dances are moderately entertaining (La Campana has an all-woman orchestra and an attractive chorus line, and the songs themselves are catchy and upbeat), but Ricardo's solo performances are lugubrious at best (he even tells a music publisher "I can write happier songs but this is what I feel"). There are a couple of scenes of mild comic relief featuring Lupita, the elderly but feisty "administrator of the edifice" where Adelita lives, who clashes with the imperious Gloria and belabours her husband with a broom for flirting with the flamboyant performer.

Despite it all, La mesera del Café del Puerto is actually a decent film. The performances are all fairly good: Bertha Velázquez (though, Lorena hadn't even started her career at this time) and flaunts her impressive figure in skimpy costumes, Martha Rams is attractive and sincere as Adelita (although the script makes her seem rather neurotic—her disability is barely noticeable and yet she dramatises it as if she's hideously deformed), and Julio Capote is sturdy as Ricardo. The supporting players are also competent. The production values are satisfactory, with adequate sets (although the supposedly low-class Café del Puerto looks roomier than the upscale La Campana) and especially good photography in a few scenes.

As noted earlier, Orol's direction seems different than usual, there is some discreet camera movement and the dialogue scenes are less static (and shorter) than one might expect.

Not bad, but not prime Orol. (Some might even say that's why it's not bad)

Bajo la influencia del miedo o Gangsterismo en el deporte [Under the Influence of Fear, or Gangsterism in Sports] (España Sono-Films de México, 1954) Prod-Dir-Scr: Juan Orol; Photo: Agustín Martínez Solares; Music: Manuel Esperón; Prod Mgr: Rafael Plaza Balboa; Prod Chief: Paul Castelain; Asst Dir: J. Cisneros Tamayo; Film Ed: Rafael Ceballos; Art Dir: Manuel Fontanals; Camera Op: José A. Carrasco; Lighting: Juan Durán; Makeup: Dolores Camarillo; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Rodolfo Benítez; Music/Re-rec: Enrique Rodríguez; Sound Ed: Abraham Cruz

Cast: Rosa Carmina (Marbella), Juan Orol (Tony Carpio), Arturo Martínez (El Bronco), José Pulido (Malato), Victor Alcocer (Pantoni); Salvador Lozano
Mr. Trosky

Notes: until the ridiculous "happy ending." Bajo la influencia del miedo is practically unique in the Orol œuvre, since Rosa Carmina has an unequivocably unsympathetic role. No pretending, no ambiguity: she's a selfish, greedy, domineering villain. As others have noted, Bajo la influencia del miedo borrows its opening premise from Mujeres sin alma. Orol's second film (which he wrote and acted in, but did not direct), so it's not as if he was deliberately casting his star in a bad light (although the Orol-Carmina professional relationship would last only one more movie, and their personal relationship was also coming to an end).

Bajo la influencia del miedo brought Orol back to Mexico and reunited him with many familiar faces in the cast and crew. The production values are adequate: a fair amount of the movie was shot on location and real exteriors, a practice which was becoming more prevalent in Mexican cinema, particularly on the lower end of the budgetary spectrum.

Another interesting facet of Bajo la influencia del miedo is the film's focus on Orol's character rather than the role played by Rosa Carmina. Although she has substantial screen time, Carmina is definitely subsidiary to Orol: the movie is about him for the first time since Gangsters contra charros.

On the eve of his release after serving a 5-year prison term, Tony Carpio tells his cellmate the circumstances of his incarceration. Tony, a delivery-truck driver, is married to the self-centered Marbella, who constantly demands more money for her personal use. Unbeknownst to Tony, Marbella begins an affair with Pantoni, Tony's boss. Pantoni and his henchmen, including El Bronco, frame Tony for robbery, and he is sent to prison.

Upon his release, Tony forms a gang with various acquaintances of his cellmate. He learns Marbella now performs as a singer and dancer in a cabaret she owns; she is still Pantoni's mistress as well. However, after Tony guns down Pantoni, Marbella takes over his criminal empire, which rigs boxing matches to win bets. Tony and his men begin threatening boxers themselves, and soon ruin Marbella's racket. Tony also tracks down and kills those among Pantoni's gang who helped frame him.

His next step is to destroy Marbella's cabaret business by sending thugs to start brawls there and scare away customers. His job done, Tony confronts Marbella and tells her, "now we're even."

Marbella has killed a gangster who was trying to rape her, and when the police arrive to arrest Tony for his crimes (they overheard him explaining everything to Marbella), Tony takes the blame for this death as well. He also turns over his fortune to Marbella. He is sent back to prison, for 15 years this time. Marbella visits every visiting day, and when Tony is released, she's waiting for him at the prison gate. They walk off together.

Although Tony is not a career criminal, and late in the film offers to send a shoeshine boy to a boarding school for a good education (demonstrating his good heart), his actions at the film's end are virtually incomprehensible. It's not as if he still loved Marbella (if he did, why did he deliberately run her life by stripping her of her wealth?), and yet on the spur of the moment he takes the rap for a killing which more than likely would legally have been considered self-defense on Marbella's part. He makes the point that one more murder on his account wouldn't increase his jail time, but that is hardly relevant: he's not supposed to even be indifferent to Marbella, he's supposed to hate her, and thus shouldn't be doing her any favours, even if it costs him nothing. Conversely, Marbella's sudden change of heart could be construed as gratitude for Tony's gestures, but visiting him for 15 years and reuniting with him when he's released seems more like the product of true love rather than payback.

Bajo la influencia del miedo is a relatively linear film--particularly in Orolian terms--with a familiar revenge plot. Although there aren't many serious digressions from the story arc, too much time and detail is spent on the crooked boxing racket. There is also an extremely curious scene in the "Pachuco Place" cabaret, which begins with Juanita...
Riverón, Mr. Trotsky, and another actor (possibly Jorge Atristain, who was Riveron's partner in several previous Orol movies) speaking an odd slang (pachuco-talk?), only to be interrupted by a Cantinflas imitator, who adds his distinctive manner of speech to the babel. They begin to dance, but it's not clear if—in the context of the film—this has all been part of a performance, or if these people are simply eccentric patrons of the nightclub.

The penultimate section of the movie is typically protracted in Orol style, brief dramatic scenes of Tony and his gang alternating with musical numbers featuring Marbella in her nightclub. As a result, everything goes on much longer and at a slower pace than necessary. Still, this is a rare Juan Orol movie that gets from point A to point B in a predictable, even logical manner.

Plazos traicioneros [Treacherous Terms] (España Sono-Films de México, 1956) Prod-Dir-Scr: Juan Orol; Photo: Agustín Jiménez; Music: Manuel Esperón; Prod Mgr: Rafael Plaza Balboa; Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: Juan José Marino; Art Dir: Ramón Rodríguez; Camera Op: Sergio Véjar; Lighting: Gabriel Castro; Makeup: Carmen Palomino; Sound Supt: James L. Fields; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Dialog Rec: Manuel Topete

**Cast:** Juan Orol (César Morán), Mary Esquivel (Yadira Sandoval), Sonia Furió (Lilia del Mar), Arturo Martínez (Tony Braco), José Pulido (Rafael Reynaldi), Jorge Mondragón (Licenciado), Salvador Lozano (police inspector), José Luis Rojas (Dosamantes), Lee Morgan (Lawrence), José Muñoz (rancher client in cabaret), Roberto Meyer (Dr. Méndez), Ángel D'Stefani (Vittorio), Francisco Reigueru (doctor), Martha Meyer, Viki Codina, Alex González, Ramón Bugarini, Jesús Rodríguez C., Héctor Mateos (club owner Irabén), Trió Corinto, La Perla Tapatía, Armando Acosta (film extra), León Barroso (waiter), Jesús Gómez & Jorge Arriaga (cabaret clients), José Loza (emcee in Vittorio's club), Ignacio Peón (ambulance doctor)

**Notes:** although this is one Juan Orol's lesser-known films, Plazos traicioneros is a key entry in his filmography, a movie which contains a significant number of references to Orol's actual life and career, and perhaps provides some insight into his attitude about the various "muses" he worked with over the years. Plazos traicioneros was the only movie Orol made between 1955 and 1962 based on his own original screenplay, and thus presumably reflects his ideas and feelings more fully than his adaptations of other authors' work.

Orol plays a much-married film director who also works in radio (professions he held in real life). He turns several women into stars and (at their request) marries them, only to be betrayed by both of them to the extent that not only does he lose their professional services but is also sent to prison (twice!). His own career goes from rags to riches several times as well.

Plazos traicioneros revives one of Orol's favourite formal techniques, the protracted conclusion. There are at least 4 or 5 points in the last section where the film could have ended in a satisfactorily dramatic manner, but Orol goes on and on, adding incident after incident and stretching out scenes interminably.

As the film opens, soft-hearted waitress Yadira provides a free meal (and then another, and then another...) to the penniless César Morán. Morán wants to repave her kindness, and tells her his story [flashback]...

Morán is a successful director of films and a radio program producer. Ambitious Lilia del Mar approaches him and he makes her a star in movies and on the radio. They wed, but Lilia has an affair with Dosamantes: catching them in the act, Morán punches the other man, then is forced to shoot him in self-defense when Dosamantes reaches for a pistol. However, Lilia testifies against her husband and he is sent to prison for 5 years. [end of flashback]

Although his own career has been ruined, Morán offers to help Yadira become a star. He makes a bargain with Irabén, owner of a failing nightclub, to have Yadira replace the current performers (the Trio Corinto are shown performing to a sparse and openly bored crowd, which seems like a bit of an insult to them) and she is a hit. Morán is protective of Yadira, but "agents" Tony Braco and his associate Reynaldi offer her better contracts. They are actually recruiters for a white slave ring run out of Vittorio's bordertown club. Despite Morán's warnings, Yadira falls in love with Tony and leaves with him.

Working in Vittorio's club as a singer, Yadira is also expected to entertain the customers and encourage them to
buy drinks. Tony claims this is only temporary, until they save enough money to retire, buy a house, and get married, but the constant drinking takes its toll on Yadira and she collapses with acute cirrhosis of the liver. Morán comes to her rescue, pays for medical treatment, and takes her back to Mexico City when she recovers. In gratitude, she marries him. Tony and Rafael, learning Yadira is still alive and has become a star again, decide to eliminate Morán and get her back; however, the ex-movie director is faster on the draw and kills both procurers in a gunfight. Although Morán flees to avoid another legal entanglement, he is soon caught and sent to prison once again, this time for 12 years!

Yadira gives birth to Morán's child, a girl. After 6 years, she tells Morán she has met Mr. Lawrence, a generous gringo who thinks her husband is dead. He will marry her and provide for the little girl. Although Morán knows he's due to be released early, he doesn't tell Yadira this, and gives her permission to marry Lawrence. A short time later, he wanders by Yadira's house and watches his daughter play the piano--she's playing a song Morán wrote for Yadira. [The piano music is horribly dubbed, sounding more like a music box than a real piano.] The little girl and the old man become friends, and Yadira eventually discovers her child's elderly admirer is Morán. He thinks Yadira should remain married to Lawrence, since he can't support them, but the generous gringo not only steps aside so the family may be reunited, he even hires Morán to manage his factory.

The opening of Plazos traicioneros is a very slight revision of the beginning of La mesera del Café del Puerto--the major difference is that in Plazos it is the waitress who becomes a musical star, rather than the hungry man, as in Mesera. The conclusion of the film is a variation on the end of Orol's El derecho y el deber (1937): in that movie, a man returns from the Mexican Revolution to discover his wife thought he was dead and has married another man, who is raising their child as his own. Although his marital rights are affirmed by a court (he was compelled to join Pancho Villa's forces), the first husband realises his wife and child will have a better life in their current situation, and commits suicide.

As noted in the introductory section, a repeated motif in Orol's films is a scene in which a "mature" man refers to the "age difference" between himself and a young woman. This occurs three times in Plazos traicioneros: César tells both Lilia and Yadira this, and Mr. Lawrence also reminds Yadira that he's "old enough to be her father." Of course, neither Lilia nor Yadira accept this as a reason why they shouldn't marry César or Lawrence (although their motivations for marrying these older men are suspect in any case). Orol adds a bit of semi-autobiography when he agrees to marry Lilia and says he's "falling into the trap for the fifth time" (in real life, Orol was married 5 times, although he hadn't yet reached that milestone in 1956).

Curiously, Yadira Jiménez had appeared in several of Orol's earlier films (starring in one, El amor de mi bohío in 1947): perhaps he named his "good" (and I use that term advisedly) female character in this film after her (it would have been too obvious if he'd named one character "María Antonieta" and the other "Rosa," wouldn't it?). Lilia and Yadira are not really two sides of the same coin: Yadira is a much more sympathetic character. Lilia is extremely manic, pushing herself on Morán, insisting he make her a star, proposing marriage to him over his (mild) objections, then betraying her marriage vows and turning on Morán with a crazed look after he kills her lover. Exactly why Lilia married Morán isn't clear: he's already made her a star, and he hasn't been making any romantic advances towards her. The whole thing seems to be her idea (and Lilia hardly seems the type to marry simply out of gratitude).

Yadira, on the other hand, is depicted as a kind person who is grateful to Morán for his efforts on her behalf--making a singing star out of a waitress (who has shown no prior musical talent, so it's not as if she was a struggling performer he rescued from obscurity--at least Lilia is supposed to already be a professional when she meets Morán) is a pretty good return on her investment of the price of a few meals (assuming she paid for them out of her own pocket rather than stiffing the restaurant for them). But she has no romantic feelings towards Morán, and while he is somewhat over-protective of her, it's a fatherly attitude rather than jealousy. When Yadira ignores Morán's warnings and goes off with Tony Braco, it's slightly ungrateful on her part, but Morán is concerned about her well-being, not angry because she's (allegedly) going to work for someone else. Later, after Morán has rescued her, Yadira marries him out of gratitude, and her later cold-blooded arrangement with her "admirer" Mr. Lawrence is shockingly callous (and ludicrous).

However, these odd characterisations and narrative absurdities don't detract from the entertainment value of Plazos traicioneros (if anything, they enhance it). Audiences unfamiliar with Orol's style might find the glacial pace of the conclusion a bit hard to take, though.
The film could have ended with Morán seeing his daughter through the window, then walking away forever (sort of a *Madame X* finale), or with Morán revealing himself to Yadira and walking away forever, or with some sort of melodramatic confrontation with Mr. Lawrence, but Orol reaches each of these points and keeps on going until he has a completely happy ending: Morán gainfully employed and reunited with his wife and daughter. Given the film's parallels with Orol's real life, this happy ending seems like wish fulfillment, i.e. that he would find a lasting relationship with one of his "muses." (In real life he apparently did, but it wasn't with Mary Esquivel, but rather his final wife/star, Dinorah Judith.)

The performances in *Plazos traicioneros* are adequate. Sonia Furió plays her role with barely-suppressed frenzy: Lilia is so tightly wound that she appears on the brink of hysteria in every scene. Mary Esquivel tries hard, but her character is written in a curious manner, making her appear alternately naive, stubborn, listless, passive, and even calculating (although never really a bad person). Arturo Martínez is his usual villainous self, although Tony's not quite as bad as he could be: when Yadira falls ill, Tony discards her but does leave some money with the hospital for her medical treatment. Lee Morgan most often appeared in Hollywood Westerns in villainous roles; he showed up in a number of Mexican films in the mid to late '50s, then wrapped up his career in some of Pat Boyette's low-budget Texas films (Morgan was a Texas native) in the early 1960s. He speaks accurate albeit accented Spanish in *Plazos traicioneros*.

Juan Orol is the dramatic center of attention here, although Mary Esquivel runs a close second in terms of screen time (especially when her musical numbers are taken into account). Orol looks convincingly beaten and frail in the opening and closing sequences, but at other times he perks up and proves he's still quite *macho*, slugging and shooting his enemies efficiently in an *homage* to his earlier gangster roles. He's also very lively and competent when playing a film director, radio producer, or nightclub impresario.

If *Plazos traicioneros* had been Juan Orol's last film, it might be considered a self-reflexive swan song to his life and career. As it turned out, he'd go on directing movies for another 20 years. Still, *Plazos traicioneros* remains one of the more interesting works in the Orol filmography.

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**Te odio y te quiero** [I Hate You and I Love You] (España Sono-Films de México, 1956) *Prod-Dir-Adapt*: Juan Orol; *Story*: Marcia del Río; *Photo*: Agustín Jiménez; *Music*: Gustavo C. Carrión; *Prod Mgr*: Rafael Plaza Balboa; *Prod Chief*: Paul Castelain; *Asst Dir*: Mario Cisneros; *Film Ed*: Juan José Marino; *Art Dir*: Ramón Rodriguez; *Camera Op*: Sergio Véjar; *Lighting*: Gabriel Castro; *Makeup*: Sara Herrera; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec*: Rodolfo Solís

**Cast**: Mary Esquivel (*Elena del Valle*), Antonio Badú (*Fernando Silva*), Alicia Rodríguez (*Ana María del Valle*), Arturo Martínez (*Roberto*), José Pardavé (*drunk*), Felipe de Flores, Nemorio M. Callejas, Trio Los Trineros

**Notes**: *Te odio y te quiero* is one of the least Orolian of Juan Orol's movies, in both form and content. It's a slick, linear, zero-degree style melodrama that--aside from the presence of Mary Esquivel and Arturo Martínez--contains little or nothing that would identify it as the work of Juan Orol. The film is competent and coherent, but conversely is not quite as entertaining as less "polished" movies directed by Orol.

The screenplay was written by Orol, based on a story by someone else. Orol's adaptations of others' writing were generally more conventional in a narrative sense than his original scripts, and that's very evident here. The basic
story of Te odio y te quiero (the title comes from a popular song) is reminiscent of "The Bride Wore Black"--a woman avenges the death of a loved one by making the killer(s) fall in love with her (although in Te odio y te quiero the protagonist doesn't actually murder her target, she merely destroys his happiness, humiliates him, and reinforces his guilt so that he commits suicide). Everything is quite straightforward, there are no plot twists, and the only interruptions to the smooth flow of the film are the numerous musical interludes. However, these "time outs for singing/dancing" are not unique to Orol by any means: popular Mexican cinema has always been overloaded with songs and dances (not to the Bollywood level, but the tendency is still noticeable).

Orol's directorial style is also smoothed-out here, with more closeups, shot-reverse shot editing, and camera movement. There are many fewer extended dialogue scenes, minimal use of stock footage (except for a scene in which Elena is singing to Fernando on a "beach"--they're clearly on a set, but stock footage of waves, palm trees, etc., are intercut to convince us they're really outdoors--it doesn't work), etc.

Elena is courted by cabaret owner Roberto, who wants to make her a star and/or marry her, but she says she has put her own life on hold until her sister Ana María finishes university: the sisters are orphans and Elena has become a surrogate mother for Ana María, paying for her education and providing an "adult" presence in her life. [Shades of Salón México, although Elena doesn't work as a prostitute to support her younger sister.]

Ana Maria is a fan of singer Fernando Silva. The much-older Fernando seduces, then discards Ana María. After confessing her sin to Elena, Ana María commits suicide. Fernando, on his friend Roberto's advice, leaves Mexico City for an extended tour. Elena vows revenge on her sister's "murderer," and confides in Roberto. He's torn between his love for Elena and his friendship with Roberto, but chooses the former, and helps make Elena a singing star. [This is different than Plazos tracioneros, because Elena has already been introduced as musically talented, she simply didn't want to make her living that way.] When Fernando returns to the capital he--as Elena had planned--tries to seduce her, but falls in love with her instead. Elena begins to develop feelings for him (and thus sings the appropriate theme song, "Te odio y te quiero") but finally reveals her true self to Fernando, expressing her anger and hate in a virulent rant. Fernando, stunned, deliberately walks into traffic and is struck by a car and killed. Elena, her mission accomplished, feels empty but is consoled by the faithful Roberto.

Te odio y te quiero has no surprises, but the actors turn in convincing performances. Mary Esquivel is a fairly good singer and has a María Victoria-like hourglass figure, highlighted in extremely tight gowns (Orol also includes two titillating shots of Esquivel undressing, just short of actual nudity). Elena's bitter speech to Fernando at the climax is vicious and effective. Antonio Badiú and Alicia Rodríguez are also fine, while Arturo Martínez at last gets his reward for playing villains in many previous Orol movies: he's a sympathetic character for a change!

The production values are adequate, but the film is very small-scale and unambitious in terms of its cast, settings, and so forth. Gustavo C. Carrión's music score at times veers a little too close to his future horror-movie soundtracks, an inappropriate tone for a melodrama.

If Juan Orol's name didn't appear on the credits, it'd be very difficult to identify Te odio y te quiero as his work. It's not a bad movie, but it's definitely lesser Orol.

To Be Continued Next Issue!