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OBITUARIES

FERNANDO CASANOVA DIES



Actor Fernando Casanova, who appeared in Mexican films over seven decades, died on 16 November 2012 in a Mexico City hospital. Casanova had been suffering from prostate cancer for several years, and the disease apparently spread and caused his death.

Fernando Gutiérrez López was born on 24 November 1922 in Guadalajara. He originally wanted to be a bullfighter and spent several years as a *novillero* before moving on to acting. *El toro negro* (1959) was based on Casanova's experiences in the bullring.

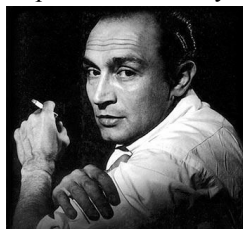
Casanova began appearing in films in the mid-1940s, rising from bit parts to supporting roles. In 1953 he was cast as the masked Western hero "El Águila Negra," eventually making 6 films in the series. Throughout the rest of the decade and the Sixties, Casanova had leading roles in a number of films, mostly Westerns and *rancheras*. Although he was off-screen for most of the 1970s, he returned to films in the 1980s, working in action pictures like *El Federal de Caminos*, *Pistoleros famosos II*, and *El secuestro de Camarena*. He continued to appear in films and *videohomes* until 2007.

Fernando Casanova is survived by his widow and 3 children.



TONY LEBLANC

Spanish actor Tony Leblanc died of a heart attack on 24



November 2012; he was 90 years old. Ignacio Fernández Sánchez Leblanc was born in Madrid on 7 May 1922. He made his acting debut in the mid-1940s, and achieved leading man status after a decade of smaller roles.

Leblanc appeared live, on television, and in films, mostly in comedy roles although he could also do drama when required. In the early 1960s he would produce and direct several feature films. After an auto accident in the early '80s, Leblanc retired from performing; in 1994 Leblanc received an honorary Goya Award for his long career. However, he returned to the screen in *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (1998—for which he won a Best Supporting Actor Goya) and 3 sequels, in addition to a long run on the TV series "Cuéntame."

Leblanc appeared in two Mexican-Spanish co-productions shot in Spain: *Mi noche de bodas* (1961), opposite Luis Aguilar, and *Cómo atrapar a un don Juan* (aka *El dinero tiene miedo*, 1970), in support of Mauricio Garcés.



EMILIO ARAGÓN "MILIKI"

Emilio Aragón Bermúdez, better-known under his artistic name "Miliki," died of pneumonia on 17 November 2012 in Madrid.

Born in the province of Sevilla on 4 November 1929, Aragón formed a comedy team—"Gaby, Fofó y Miliki"—with his brothers Gabriel and Alfonso and worked as clowns in the Circo Price (their parents were both in show business). They worked throughout Latin America for many years before returning to Spain in the 1970s, where they became very popular on television. After the team broke up, Emilio Aragón worked with his daughter and as a solo act. He wrote and directed the feature *Yo quiero ser torero* (1987). Miliki's last acting role was in *Pájaros de papel* (2010), directed by his son Emilio Aragón.



Gaby, Fofó y Miliki appeared (without clown makeup) in the Mexican film *El nieto del Zorro* (1947) in support of Adalberto Martínez "Resortes." They also starred in *Tres bárbaros en un jeep* (Cuba, 1955) and several Argentine feature films in the early 1970s.



LIZARDO DÍAZ

Colombian actor Lizardo Díaz died on 8 November 2012 in Bogotá, after a long series of illnesses. Lizardo Díaz Muñoz was born on 29 January 1928 and first entered the entertainment world as a musician, but in 1954 met

Jorge Ezequiel Ramírez and formed the comedy team “Los Tolimenses.” Díaz played “*compadre Felipe*” and



Ramírez was “*compadre Emeterio*,” rural Colombian types who sang and told jokes in multiple venues (live, radio, TV, film) to great acclaim for more than 40 years. Eventually, the team broke up (Ramírez, who had problems with alcohol, died in 2001) and Díaz forged a solo career, including a

significant career as a film actor, director, and producer. “Los Tolimenses” starred in two features, *Y la novia dijo...* (1964) and the spy spoof *Amenaza nuclear* (1981, edited by Mexican film veteran Carlos Savage). Díaz co-produced and appeared in *Un ángel de la calle* (1966), a Mexican-Colombian co-production starring Sofía Álvarez, José Elías Moreno, and Díaz’s wife Raquel Ércole.



ALEJANDRO PARODI (BELATED OBITUARY)

Actor Alejandro Parodi died on 26 August 2011, but I managed to miss this news (despite reading several Mexican newspapers every day), and only discovered it while looking at IMDB in conjunction with this issue’s review of *El Águila Negra*.



Alejandro Parodi Montañón was born in the state of Sonora in July 1929. A student of acting coach Seki Sano, Parodi appeared on the stage, in films, and on television in a career than spanned more than 50 years. His final movie was *Bodas de oro* (2005). Parodi was first nominated for an Ariel for *La mujer X* (1954), and won his first prize (for Best Juvenile Performer) for his role in *El buen ladrón* (’56). He eventually won 4 more Arieles-- *Llámenme Mike* (Best Actor), *Nocaut*, *El imperio de la fortuna* (both Best Co-Starring Actor), and *El misterio de Trinidad* (Best Supporting Actor)—and was nominated two additional times. He received the Ariel de Oro for his career in 2009.



FERNANDO CASANOVA FILMS

El Águila Negra [The Black Eagle] (Prods. Rosas Priego, 1953) *Prod:* Alfonso Rosas Priego; *Dir-Adapt:* Ramón Peón García; *Story:* Mario García Camberos, Alfonso Rosas Priego; *Photo:* Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Corrido de El Águila Negra:* Cuco Sánchez; *Prod Mgr:* Mario García Camberos; *Prod Chief:*

Guillermo Alcayde; *Asst Dir:* Jorge López Portillo; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez; *Decor:* Felipe Becerril; *Lighting:* Mariano García; *Camera Op:* Manuel Santaella; *Makeup:* Carmen Palomino; *Music/Re-rec:* Rafael Esparza; *Dialog Rec:* Eduardo Arjona

Cast: Fernando Casanova (*Raúl Zárate, el Águila Negra*), Perla Aguiar (*Carmen Maldonado*), Lalo González (*Piporro*) (*Pedro Artigas*), Nora Veyrán (*Lupe "La Generala"*), Víctor Alcocer (*Mario Moncada*), Miguel Inclán (*Ciriaco*), Alejandro Parodi (*Lagartija*),



Ricardo Fuentes (*Anselmo*), José Loza (*Armando Zárate*), Genaro de Alba (*Manuel Zárate*), Ángel Merino (*Fernando Zárate*), Celia Viveros (*Nana*), José Muñoz (*don Francisco Maldonado*), Jesús Gómez (*man with whip*), Victorio Blanco (*servant of Moncada*), Manuel Sánchez Navarro (*don Cosme, gold buyer*), Marina Camacho (*La Tejanita*), Mariachi México, Mariachi Pulido, Guillermo Álvarez Bianchi (*cantinerio-hotel mgr*), Ignacio Peón (*don Ramón*), Rubén Márquez (*man in cantina*)

Notes: this was the first of three *Águila Negra* movies made back-to-back in 1953, all directed by Ramón Peón and starring

Fernando Casanova and Piporro (who, although a young man, was somewhat stereotyped as an older comic relief sidekick in this period, due to his successful roles in



Ahí viene Martín Corona and *El enamorado* with Pedro Infante). Basically imitation B-Westerns, these films were apparently popular since the character returned for three more movies in 1956. Although the *Águila Negra* wasn't the first Mexican "Western" series (arguably, one could count the *Charro Negro* and *El Lobo* as predecessors--El Lobo even wore a mask--plus the two "Martín Corona" pictures), it was the first to closely emulate Hollywood B-Westerns by eschewing almost all "folkloric" traits (except for the *mariachis* in the musical numbers, Mexican-style outfits are only briefly glimpsed when some apparent *rurales* pursue Raúl as he flees town).

El Águila Negra is a fairly well-produced and – directed film, but the script is curiously disjointed, doesn't feature the masked hero enough, and contains some rather

odd aspects. There's a bit too much music, although to be fair several of the songs are tuneful—especially the *corrido* of El Águila Negra, heard over the credits and later



sung by some mariachis in a cantina. The Rosas Priego family (albeit another branch, under the "Rosas Films" banner) was also responsible for the long-running "Mauricio Rosales, el Rayo" series in the 1950s and the "Felipe Reyes, el Justiciero" series

in the 1960s—both were imitation B-Western series with similarly-catchy theme songs for their heroes.

Raúl Zárate and his 3 brothers live on a ranch in northern Mexico. Their father is away, somewhere, and writes for his oldest son Fernando to join him. While Raúl escorts Fernando to the train station, his younger brothers



booze it up in the local cantina. Ciriaco and Anselmo pick a fight with them, on orders of villainous Mario Moncada, and wind up shooting the Zárate brothers to death. Meanwhile, Raúl serenades Carmen

Maldonado, whose father opposes their romance, preferring the wealthy Moncada. On his way home, Raúl meets Sr. Maldonado and tries to convince him of his sincerity, but Moncada's henchman Lagartija shoots Maldonado from ambush and Raúl is blamed. He escapes but is later shot by Moncada's men and presumed dead.

However, Raúl is rescued by recluse Pedro Artigas and nursed back to health. Pedro withdrew from society after killing a rival for the love of Lupe "La Generala," a *mala mujer*. When Raúl recovers, he becomes the masked hero El Águila Negra, helping the poor and downtrodden and persecuting Moncada, while still attempting to clear his



name of the murder of Carmen's father. [This is presented in a brief series of scenes narrated by Pedro, and never really explains anything about the "origin" of the Águila Negra character.] Raúl eventually tricks Ciriaco

and Anselmo into killing each other, thus avenging the deaths of his two brothers.

Meanwhile, Moncada cosies up to Carmen and she agrees to marry him. The villain also learns Pedro, who comes into town once a month to buy supplies, has been paying with gold nuggets, so he summons femme fatale Lupe "La Generala" to help swindle the old recluse, unaware of her past relationship to Pedro. Lupe arrives at Pedro's cabin and meets Raúl. In a completely bizarre and

unbelievable scene, they fall in lust and spend the night together. The next morning, Lupe attempts to convince Raúl to betray Pedro, but he refuses and leaves. Pedro shows up but before he can kick Lupe out, the cabin is attacked by Moncada's men (who followed Pedro from town). Lupe is mortally wounded by a stray bullet, but the arrival of El Águila Negra drives the outlaws away. Pedro decides to turn himself in to the law for the killing of Lupe's former lover, but vows to meet Raúl again some day.



Raúl goes back to town (not wearing a disguise or anything) and thrashes Lagartija in a nicely-staged saloon brawl, forcing him to confess to murdering Maldonado. Raúl then drags the outlaw to the church, where Moncada and Carmen are emerging, having just been married! Learning the truth, Carmen apologises for doubting Raúl and drives off in a wagon, while Moncada is arrested. Raúl and Pedro reunite and ride off into the sunset together.

The conclusion of *El Águila Negra* confounds a number of audience expectations. The standard hero-villain confrontation is mostly absent, upstaged by the fight between Raúl and Lagartija: Moncada merely sputters and tries to pull a pistol, but is subdued by several wedding guests. Furthermore, Carmen's wedding with Moncada was *not* prevented at the last second, and Raúl and Carmen do *not* reconcile.

Actually, there are a number of curious things about the male-female relationships in *El Águila Negra*. The female characters are not sympathetic at all. Cantina singer La Tejana is the immediate cause of the brawl that concludes with the deaths of Raúl's younger brothers. Carmen instantly accepts Moncada's assertion that Raúl murdered

her father, and doesn't give him a chance to explain himself, suggesting their romance wasn't that serious on her part (at least she's chagrined enough to admit she was wrong, later). Lupe "La Generala" cheats on Pedro, which results in a gunfight; she throws herself at Raúl (and sleeps with him), then flies into a rage when he won't betray his friend; she also attempts to convince Pedro



to take her back (he won't), and subsequently shouts encouragement to the gunmen trying to kill Pedro!

In addition to these negative portrayals of women (and/or the consequences of falling in love with them), *El Águila Negra* contains multiple examples of close male partnerships: Raúl and Pedro, Lagartija and El Inquieto, and Ciriaco and Anselmo. In the first and third cases,

these two men live together as well, and Ciriaco and Anselmo argue and complain as if they were an old, married couple. I'm not saying *El Águila Negra* has some hidden homosexual agenda, just that it's oddly misogynistic.

As mentioned above, the film looks slick and professional, and director Ramón Peón adds a few nice touches (like tracking shots) that don't draw attention to themselves but make the picture move smoothly. The performances are solid, although Fernando Casanova doesn't receive as much attention as one would expect (I mean, considering he's the hero and everything). He also sings a couple of songs that sound like he may have been dubbed by someone else. Also, as mentioned earlier, he only appears in his Águila Negra costume briefly, and for no particular reason (as "Raúl Zárate," he could have given food and money to poor people, it might have even helped his public image).

The actors who stand out are villains Miguel Inclán and Alejandro Parodi: it's odd to see Inclán playing a supporting role in a B-Western, but he makes the most of the limited exposure he receives. *El Águila Negra* was a fairly early picture for Alejandro Parodi, who, unshaven and wearing a little hat, rather resembles



Cantinflas! It should be noted that Moncada's other two henchmen also have distinguishing quirks: Anselmo is a drunk who has a huge scar across his face, and El Inquieto constantly squints and blinks his

eyes.

The second and third Águila Negra adventures dispensed with most of the plot and characters from this one, although Piporro did return as sidekick Pedro. In 1956, the Águila Negra series was resurrected for three additional feature films, this time with the added advantage of Eastmancolor, but without the presence of Piporro (comic relief was handled by Fernando Soto "Mantequilla" and Pompín Iglesias).



El toro negro [The Black Bull] (Prods. Matouk, 1959) *Exec Prod:* Angélica Ortiz; *Prod:* Antonio Matouk; *Dir:* Benito Alazraki; *Scr:* Luis Alcoriza; *Orig. Idea:* Fernando Casanova; *Photo:* Enrique Wallace; *Music Dir:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* Paco Crow; *Prod Chief:* Fidel Pizarro; *Asst Dir:* Mario Llorca; *Film Ed:* Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir:* Jesús Bracho; *Camera Op:* Sergio Véjar; *Makeup:* Felisa L. de Guevara; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Rodolfo Solís; *Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio (Cruci); *Sound Ed:* Teodulo Bustos; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Fernando Casanova (*Gabino Torres*), Tere Velázquez (*Alicia Manzano*), Álvaro Ortiz (*Güero*), Beto el Boticario (*Mosco (Benito)*), Miguel Manzano (*don Pepe Manzano*), Manuel Arvide (*don Alberto "Don Verdades"*), Manuel Dondé (*municipal president*), Alejandro Parodi (*Gato*), José [Peña] Pepet (*taylor*), Florencio Castellot (*Rafael*); *toreros*—José Antonio Enríquez, Luis Ortiz, José Bañuelos, Enrique Alonso; *bandilleros*—Ignacio Valencia, Rafael Osorio, Zenón Romero, Pepe Vela; *picadores*—Jorge Contreras, Manuel Contreras, Sixto Vázquez, "Cometa"; Rubén Márquez (*Juan*), Mario Sevilla (*don Jesús*), Leonor Gómez (*Martita, food vendor*), Manuel Vergara and Regino Herrera (*meat cutters*), Armando Acosta (*villager*), Amado Zumaya (*butcher*)

Notes: films about bullfighters have a long history in Mexico and Spain, and while for dramatic reasons many (if not most) of these movies portray the struggle of a *torero* to achieve success in the bullring (and/or concentrate on his personal problems outside of the arena), there aren't a lot of movies about



failures, at least not on the scale of Luis Spota's novel "Más cornadas da el hambre" (The Hunger Gores You More). Fernando Casanova, a former *novillero* himself, came up with the original idea for *El toro negro* and Luis Alcoriza turned in an insightful script about bullfighting and the people involved in the *fiesta brava*. [Alcoriza would soon become a director himself, and his debut film in this profession, *Los jóvenes* (1960), features Tere Velázquez and Miguel Manzano from *El toro negro*.]

Director Benito Alazraki had a curious career in some ways. His debut as a director came on *Raíces* (1954), a well-received, "serious" film, but his subsequent work was, for the most part, blatantly commercial, including Tin Tan comedies, Calderón horror movies and Westerns, and one-offs like *Santo vs. los zombies*, although he would occasionally toss in more ambitious projects like *El toro negro* and *Café Colón*. After spending a decade in Spain, Alazraki returned to Mexico and once again alternated dramas (*Balún canán*) and popular fare (*El rey de los taxistas*).

Alazraki's work on *El toro negro* is rather inconsistent. The early portions of the movie feature numerous striking camera angles and a variety of "strong" semi-documentary images (children gather around a dead bull and drink its blood), which are somewhat reminiscent of *Raíces*. Later, the film's style becomes much more conventional, although during the climactic bullfights there are frequent cutaways to "real" people in the stands, drinking and

shouting, more of the sort of *cinema verité* feel of the earlier sections.

Gabino Torres is 30 years old and still an “aspiring” bullfighter. He and his erstwhile manager, El Mosco, hang



around the Mexico City bullring, angling for a chance to *torear*, but are unsuccessful. Former *torero* don Pepe, now confined to a wheelchair as the result of an accident in the ring, disapproves of Gabino as a suitor for his daughter

Alicia and is angry when she slips Gabino money for food. Alicia flirts (and more?) with her boss and with neighbour Juan, but loves only Gabino.

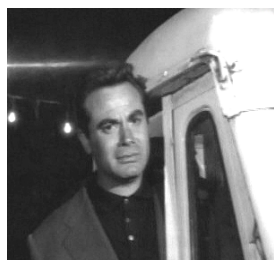
Young bullfighter José Antonio tells Gabino that he's going to participate in a charity bullfight during a small town *feria*. Gabino visits the municipal president and



offers to appear for free, bringing his own team of assistants, paying for posters, etc., but is rejected because he's not well-known. However, Gabino and El Mosco spin a tale for the town priest, claiming Gabino is fulfilling a sacred vow to his

late mother, and are given the job.

Gabino and his friends scrimp, save and borrow enough money to participate in the *feria*. Alicia asks her father to make sure bullfight journalist don Alberto attends the bullfight, hoping for good publicity for Gabino. During the bullfight, Gabino performs adequately but does not inspire the crowd; don Antonio tells Alicia that Gabino is brave but lacks the special quality that would make him a successful *torero*. In contrast, José Antonio is applauded by the spectators and the journalist, and is awarded the ears and tail of the bull he kills, the highest honour a *torero* can achieve.



Gabino, Alicia, her father, and the others board a bus to return to the city. Gabino's dream of

becoming a bullfighter has been definitively shattered.

El toro negro depicts both the bullfight establishment and Gabino as flawed. There are too many *novilleros* and the impresarios can pick and choose whom they want for the limited number of bullfights, effectively freezing out everyone else. It's not a merit-based system, but an arbitrary (and possibly corrupt, although the film doesn't address that) process. However, Gabino's reasons for wanting to be a bullfighter are relatively specious (he wants fame); he refuses to face reality, so he remains stuck in limbo, neither progressing in his career nor moving on with his life. In one scene, Alicia suggests Gabino could give up the idea of becoming a *torero* and they could get married and live together—“on what you earn?” Gabino

asks, unable to conceive of a mundane existence where he'd work for a living. Gabino is not an unsympathetic character—in some instances, the protagonist's stubborn refusal to realise he's not going to achieve his goal would be seen as admirable—and this makes the conclusion of the film more painful and touching. He didn't fail miserably, he wasn't gored, he didn't display cowardice, but he was upstaged by the younger and more talented José Antonio and his “big chance” is now gone.



The other main characters are Alicia, El Mosco, and don Pepe, each with a primary attribute or two which informs the plot, but only Alicia is developed in particular detail. El Mosco's relationship with Gabino isn't clear: were they childhood friends? What happened to his leg (he limps)? Where did he develop his shady, smooth-talking skills? Does he work or live hand-to-mouth like Gabino? Don Pepe serves two functions, as Alicia's father (who opposes her relationship with Gabino), and as the disabled ex-*torero* (who illustrates how fame as a bullfighter can translate into a poverty-stricken, handicapped post-bullring life).

Alicia is an interesting character. As noted earlier, she utilises her sex appeal to earn money and favours from men, but loves Gabino, who has no money at all. The



sexual chemistry between the couple is depicted rather frankly (Gabino takes money Alicia gave him for food, and instead takes her to a hotel), but the romantic attraction seems to be rather one-sided, with Gabino

focused on his “career,” to the exclusion of all else.

Although Alicia would like Gabino to drop his fantasy of fame and fortune, she cares enough for him to assist him any way she can, including convincing her irritated father to contact his acquaintance, bullfight journalist don Antonio. As José Antonio is performing in the bullring, Gabino jealously looks on, while Alicia is clearly perturbed by the crowd's (and don Antonio's) adulation of the younger *torero*.

The performances in *El toro negro* are all fine, and the production values are satisfactory. Much of the film was shot on location. It's difficult to determine how much of the bullring footage is actually Fernando Casanova, but the doubling is not obvious. The bullfight sequences are actually too long, since they aren't especially dramatic (Gabino is knocked down by his bull, but not gored), in either a bad or good way. It's sort of pointless to show the *picadores* and the *bandilleros* going through the motions, since the protagonist of the film—and thus the character around whom the plot revolves—is the *torero*. Bullfight

aficionados may disagree, but this section could have been trimmed significantly.



El Federal de caminos [The Federal Highway Patrolman] (Cin. Virgo, 1983) *Prod:* René Agrasánchez L.; *Assoc Prod:* J. David Agrasánchez L.; *Dir:* Fernando Durán; *Scr:* Carlos Valdemar; *Orig. Idea:* Reynaldo Martínez; *Photo:* Armando Castillón; *Music:* Gustavo Pimentel; *Prod Mgr:* René

Agrasánchez L.; *Film Ed:* Enrique Murillo; *Sound:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Álvaro Zermeno (*Javier Garza*), Rosenda Bernal (*Estela Cuevas*), Fernando Casanova (*Ramiro González*), Juan Valentín (*singer*), Los Broncos de Reynosa, Los Sepultureros, Gerardo Zepeda (*Trampas*), Toño Infante (*García*), Federico González (*Wally*), Elizabeth Dupeyrón (*Alicia de Garza*), Fabián del Valle (*Chato*), José Luis Fernández (*Pecas*), Nelson Velázquez (*Paco Pichardo*), Mariana Georges, Ramón Blanco, Carlos Poulliot (*Alonso*), Claudio Sorel (*Cmdte. Roque*), José Luis Llamas, Jesús Gómez (*man in restaurant*), Marcelo Villamil (*drug buyer*), Armando Duarte (*Cmdte. Aguilar*)



Notes: the 1980s was the Golden Age of the contemporary Mexican action film, with the Almada brothers, Valentín Trujillo, Álvaro Zermeno, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, and others battling *narcotraficantes* and other evil-doers in scores of

movies (even Antonio Aguilar stepped away from *rancheras* to make modern-dress pictures like *Lamberto Quintero*). Many of these films were well-made and entertaining, if not as spectacular as higher-budget Hollywood efforts. *El Federal de Caminos*, based on a popular *corrido*, is an adequate but not outstanding example of the genre, hampered by a cursory script and too little attention to character development.

Javier Garza is a Federal Highway Patrolman who transfers from Chiapas back to his home state of Tamaulipas. His brother Gerardo is also a *federal de caminos* and is married to Alicia; they have 4 young sons and Alicia is pregnant once again. However,

Gerardo and his partner are shot to death by Trampas and Chato, henchmen of smuggler Ramiro González. Javier and his partner García clash with Ramiro's gang; the gangster also dislikes Javier because the patrolman is

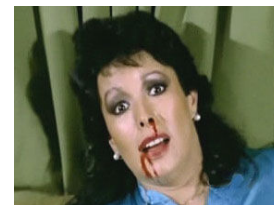
having an affair with Ramiro's estranged wife, singer Estela. Ramiro beats Estela severely, believing she's been giving Javier inside information about his illegal activities (well, she was). Javier and his fellow officers finally



corner Ramiro in the middle of a drug deal; Ramiro tries to flee, but is killed in a crash after a high-speed car chase.

El Federal de caminos doesn't elaborate on the characters of Javier, Estela, or Ramiro: Javier doesn't express

much emotion or drive, either in his quest to avenge his brother or to protect/avenge Estela from Ramiro; Estela doesn't have much personality at all (although at one point she tells Ramiro she only married him for his money); and Ramiro is a stereotypical *narcotraficante*.



The script throws in some other people, such as crooked *judicial* Roque, henchmen Trampas and Chato, South American drug dealer Alonso, and—most notably—nightclub owner Wally, who plays both ends against the middle (this is one of actor Federico González's most substantial screen roles), but no one does much beyond the usual action-film stuff. Worse, the plot is simplistic and makes almost no attempt to present something different or even slightly complex: it's just a series of unmotivated, coincidental confrontations between Javier and Ramiro's men, interspersed with the usual time-wasting musical numbers.

On the positive side, the production values aren't bad. In one scene, Javier is driving after one of Ramiro's men, whose car plunges off a *high* cliff, exploding into flames



(for no reason) halfway down. The location shooting is satisfactory, but the score is odd (far too much *whakka-chikka* music). The

performances are adequate within the range afforded them by the script.

A couple of trivia notes: (a) *El Federal de caminos* was made during a period when childrens' dialogue was routinely dubbed, obviously and annoyingly, by adults speaking in "childish tones." (b) Fernando Casanova has two scenes seemingly designed to show how physically fit he was: in one, he emerges from a swimming pool and displays an impressive barrel chest and broad shoulders; in another, he vigorously smacks a tennis ball. (c) A sequel, *La muerte del Federal de Caminos*, was produced in 1985, with Zermeno, Bernal, and Casanova returning.



RECENTLY CABLE-CAST RARITIES

Marijuana (El Monstruo Verde)* [Marijuana, The Green Monster] (Prods. Duquesa Olga, 1936) *Prod:*



Duquesa Olga (Eva Limiñana), José Bohr; *Dir-Adapt:* José Bohr; *Dialog-Story:* Xavier Dávila; *Photo:* Alex Phillips; *Music Arr:* Max Urban; *Songs:* José Bohr;

Prod Mgr: Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir:* Roberto Gavaldón; *Film Ed:* José Marino; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Police Technical Adv:* Teddy González; *Sound:* B.J. Kroger

*re-release title *La caravana de la muerte*; shown in NY in 1938 as *El traidor*

Cast: José Bohr (*Raúl Devoto*; “*Daniel Offenbach*”), Lupita Tovar (*Irene Heredia*), Barry Norton (*Carlos*), René Cardona (*Antonio Pedroza*), Ángel Sala (*Domínguez*), Alberto Martí (*Dr. Luis Devoto*), Pilar Fernández (*Sra. Devoto*), Sara García (*Petra*), Maniel Noriega (*Dr. Bueno*), Emilio Fernández (*El Indio*), Carlos Baz (*El Sapo*), Carmelita Bohr (*Rocío*), Virginia Ramsey (*Rosa de Oriente*), Arturo Manrique (*Juan Lee*), Roberto Cantú (*Dr. Montes*), Billy De Negri [Guillermo Cantú Robert] (*El Nene*), Clifford Carr (*U.S. gangster*), Max Langler (*waiter at Juan Lee’s*), Consuelo Segarra (*elderly patient*), David Valle González (*policeman*), Juan García (*loud drunk*), Víctor Junco

Notes: *Marihuana* is an entertaining but odd jumble of a film, with at least one major plot hole and numerous other “what th--?!” moments. Unlike some of the independent Hollywood drug-scare movies of the era (including Dwain Esper’s *Marihuana* and *Tell Your Children*—aka *Reefer Madness*—both also 1936), *Marihuana* is primarily a crime movie rather than a cautionary tale about the dangers of drugs.

Marihuana begins with a montage of people smoking dope and newspaper headlines (in English and Spanish), revealing the discovery of marijuana growing in Los



Angeles, “Central Park,” Puebla, Mexico City, and other locations. Dr. Luis Devoto runs a sanitarium where he treats drug addiction. A cabaret dancer is brought to his clinic: the police gave her marijuana spiked with a chemical that made her ill, in an attempt to get her to reveal the secrets of the “Green Monster” drug gang. Now she is undergoing withdrawal, but Devoto—in conjunction with policemen León and Domínguez—refuses to give her any more dope.

Dr. Devoto’s son Raúl is a police agent working on the case. He cultivates Irene Heredia, a marijuana user who operates a newsstand nearby, and who has connections



with the Green Monsters. Irene receives some pills to give to the *cabaretera*: she thinks they are drugs to alleviate the withdrawal symptoms, but they are actually poison. Later, Irene tips

off Raúl to the location of the drug gang boss, an apartment in Puebla. But it’s a trap, and Raúl is abducted by the Green Monsters, thanks to the treachery of his family’s chauffeur Antonio, who pretends to have been injured in the assault.

El Indio, leader of the Green Monsters, has Dr. Bueno addict Raúl to drugs, and then forces the young man to join his smuggling gang by threatening to do the same to Irene. When El Indio is shot to



death in a confrontation with another group of criminals, Raúl is promoted to leader of the Green Monster organisation. On a flight carrying contraband, Raúl goes berserk and causes the plane to crash. He is mortally injured and dies in Irene’s arms.

Although José Bohr’s Raúl is the protagonist of *Marihuana*, much of the film focuses on other characters and their own sub-plots and actions. For example, Carlos—blackmailed into working for the Green Monsters—loves Rocío, the daughter of Chinese



restauranteur Juan Lee and his Caucasian wife Rosa. After Carlos is shot to death protecting Juan from gangster El Sapo—Juan was working with the authorities to combat the drug trade—Rocío commits suicide.

Considerable footage is also devoted to “El Nene,” a young newsboy who runs errands for Raúl and whose dog “Duquesa” (could this be an in-joke referencing producer “Duquesa Olga”?) is also pressed into service to carry messages. Comic relief is handled by Sara García as Petra, the Devoto’s hard-of-hearing servant, and René Cardona gets some attention as the treacherous chauffeur Antonio.

The biggest plot hole in *Marihuana* occurs after the death of El Indio (which takes place in a scene that was so dark I couldn’t tell *what* was going on), and Raúl—incomprehensibly—is elevated to leadership of the Green Monster gang. Maybe he was chosen because he was the only other member of the group who possessed reasonable intelligence, but it doesn’t explain why he accepted the job. He was involuntarily addicted to drugs and

blackmailed into cooperating with the gang, so all he has to do is surrender to the police! His own father runs a drug-treatment facility, so kicking the habit shouldn't be too difficult. Why would Raúl, who was previously just as



gang diversifies into smuggling other things (like jewels), but this isn't clearly stated.

There are various other strange bits in the film. In a very early scene at Irene's newsstand, Irene and Antonio (who haven't even been identified yet) converse with "Daniel Offenbach," apparently a German tourist (played by José Bohr), who makes a joke—in German-accented Spanish—while flirting with Irene. Is this supposed to be Raúl Devoto (whom we also haven't been introduced to, yet) in disguise? Why?

Irene's role isn't clearly defined. Raúl uses her to get information about the gang; she's used by the Green



Monsters to lure Raúl into a trap, and to murder the *cabaretera* in Dr. Devoto's clinic; she smokes marijuana but isn't an "addict" (or El Indio's threat to make her one would be useless). She professes her love for Raúl

and tries to get him kick the drug habit later in the movie, but never goes for help while he's being held prisoner (perhaps she's a prisoner too, but it's vague).

The title of the film and the opening sequence refer to marihuana, but Raúl becomes addicted to something else—heroin? opium?—first administered by Dr. Bueno in a drink, and later injected. In one sequence, Raúl and Dr.



Bueno visit a sleazy hotel in Calexico (in California, across the border from Mexicali) and pick up some drugs from the manager (Cliff Carr, the preeminent *gringo* of 1930s-40s Mexican cinema): it's difficult to see what they have, but the parcel is quite small and that amount

of marijuana would presumably have been worth very little. Later, the hotel manager has apparently become a big-time gangster, and we see him trading tubes full of white powder to Raúl for pearls and diamonds (which would make this an unusual example of a movie depicting drugs being smuggled *into* Mexico from the USA).

Late in the film, suspicion finally falls on chauffeur Antonio, and he's given the third-degree by the police.

This consists of tying him to a chair, turning the lights off and on, and weighing him (?). Regardless, it works, and Antonio confesses to his complicity in the abduction of Raúl. But for whatever reason (hoping to catch the whole gang?), the authorities—with Dr. Devoto's agreement—decide not to rescue



Raúl right away. Raúl doesn't know this, of course, and his decision to accept the leadership role of the Green Monsters, and his subsequent suicidal breakdown are unmotivated by what one might expect to the the "usual" excuses (rage at being abandoned by the authorities and his family, etc.).

Despite (or, in some cases, because of) the incongruities and illogical aspects, *Marihuana* remains an entertaining film. Arturo Manrique is a ludicrous Asian stereotype as Juan Lee, but his character's banter with his wife is amusing. Earlier, there is an ironic running gag featuring newsboy El Nene: Raúl gives him the address of the Puebla residence of the Green Monster leader, but warns the boy not to reveal it until after 6pm (because Raúl wants the glory of capturing the criminal single-handed). Raúl vanishes, and El Nene keeps asking "what time is it?", refusing to divulge his secret until the proper time—and then discovers he's lost the slip of paper anyway! In another scene, Irene professes her undying love for the badly-wounded Raúl, only to have the rest of the Green Monster gang—who entered the room, unseen--burst out laughing at her impassioned overtures.

The performances are adequate, with José Bohr indulging himself a few times (the "Daniel Offenbach" disguise, his final insane rant in the airplane, etc.) and only singing one, extemporaneous song (to the hearing-impaired Petra in her kitchen). Billy De Negri is reasonably naturalistic as El Nene, Lupita Tovar is very lovely as Irene, and everyone else acquits themselves professionally. Production values are adequate, although the rough condition of the existing print shown on Cine Nostalgia—a re-release version entitled *La caravana de la muerte* (which does not appear to have been significantly cut, a pleasant surprise)—makes it difficult to adequately assess the photography, sets, etc.



Maravilla del toreo [Marvel of Bullfighting]

(CLASA Films, 1942) *Dir*: Raphael J. Sevilla; *Adapt-Dialogue*: Carlos Martínez Baena; *Story*: Pepe Ortiz; *Photo*: Ross Fisher, Raúl Martínez Solares, Álvaro González, Jack Draper, Víctor Herrera; *Music Dir*: Fausto Prieto Rio; *Prod Chief*: Ricardo Beltri, Luis Sánchez Tello; *Asst Dir*: Ignacio Villareal; *Film Ed*: Fernando Martínez Álvarez; *Art Dir*: Luis Moya; *Peruvian Decor*: Julián Pezet; *Conchita*

Cintrón's Costumes: Chardy; *Choreog*: Lettie Carroll; *Sound*: Consuelo Rodríguez, Edward H. Randall, José B. Carles, Jesús González G.

Cast: Conchita Cintrón (*Rosita de Peralta*), Pepe Ortiz (*Pepe Morera*), Pituka de Foronda (*Fernanda*), Florencio Castelló (*Curro*), Rafael Icardo (*Rerre*), Manuel Arvide (*don Pedro*), Alejandro Cobo (*Arturo*), Rafael Banquels [sic] (*"Chiclanero"* (*Manolo*)), Tony Díaz (*Ricardo*), Enrique García Álvarez (*don Roberto*), Francisco Jambrina (*Mairena*), Salvador Quiroz (*don Nacho*), Luis Berrondo (*Aunt Maria*), Manolo Noriega (*eye doctor*), Roberto Corell (*Ramírez*), Néstor Mesta Chaires, "Los Gitanillos," El Niño del Brillante, Francisco Millet (*guitarist*), José Pulido (*guest at party in Peru*), Roberto Cañedo (*man in Spain*), Marcelo Chávez, Alfonso Jiménez "Kilómetro"

Notes: Conchita Cintrón was the most famous woman bullfighter of the late 1930s and 1940s, appearing around the world to great acclaim. She retired before the age of 30, married, and spent the rest of her life (she died in 2009) in leisurely retirement, writing her memoirs and raising dogs and horses. Cintrón was born in Peru in 1922 to a Puerto Rican father and an American mother; she became an expert

horsemanship and trained as a bullfighter from an early age. She performed both as a *rejoneadora* (a mounted bullfighter, the same profession Gastón Santos exercised when he wasn't appearing in movies) and as a dismounted *matadora*.

Cintrón "doubled" for Gloria Marín (courtesy of stock footage) in *Seda, sangre y sol* (1941) which coincidentally featured Pepe Ortiz. Ortiz was a retired bullfighter who was also a singer, actor, rancher, and writer, and had appeared in a number of previous films (he was even married to actress Lupita Gallardo). In 1942, Cintrón was convinced to take the leading role in a film based on a

screen story by Ortiz, *Maravilla del toreo*. The script is entirely fictional, retaining only Cintrón's Peruvian origins and her bullfighting talent from real life.

Maravilla del toreo is an entertaining and intriguing film, but not a perfect one. It's far too long (nearly two hours): while a fair amount of actual and re-created bullfight footage is included, this is quite interesting, but the same cannot be said for the excessive number of songs and dances in the picture. The most egregious example occurs when the protagonists travel to Spain and attend a party at the home of another *torero*: there is a nearly 16-minute-long sequence that features one musical performance after another, with little or no dialogue/plot. This is absolutely unconscionable and pointless.

The other major problem with *Maravilla del toreo* is technical. Although the print shown on the Cine Nostalgia channel was (as is too often the case) in very poor shape, washed-out and damaged, there are also a number of early sequences which appear to have been shot by a camera with a smudged lens. This is annoying and difficult to accept in a professional motion picture. Although the film's action occurs in Peru, Mexico, and Spain, it does not appear any footage was actually shot in Peru or Spain, but it was apparently deemed to expensive to do re-takes, even on fairly simple dialogue scenes (the more

complicated scenes involving Cintrón, Ortiz, and live bulls would have been more difficult to repeat).

Rosita de Peralta lives on a ranch in Peru, and is an expert horsewoman. Her father, don Pedro, forbids her to come in contact with the bulls he raises, fearing for her



life, and orders Curro, a Spaniard who works on the ranch, to cease encouraging her. When Mexican *torero* Pepe Moreda visits the ranch, he shows Rosita the basics of bullfighting and she decides to make this her career, over her father's objections. Using money she won in a national riding competition, Rosita departs for Mexico; don Pedro



acquiesces, but sends his sister and Curro along to watch over his daughter. In Mexico, Rosita is reunited with Pepe, and is a success during a *tienta* at his ranch (a *tienta* is the "testing" of young bulls to determine if they have the temperament for the bullring). She's signed to a contract by impresario don Nacho; after a tour of the provinces, she debuts in Mexico City and becomes the darling of the *aficionados*.

Pepe is married to Fernanda: he's unaware she's having an affair with his manager, Arturo, but nonetheless finds himself attracted to Rosita. While watching Rosita in the bullring, Pepe suffers an attack of temporary blindness, caused by an old injury, but shrugs it off.

Pepe and Rosita are contracted to appear in Spain, and are accompanied by their retinue, including Curro, Fernanda, and Arturo. At a party hosted by fellow *torero* "Chiclanero"--who is clearly smitten with Rosita--Pepe is



about to declare his love for Rosita but she refuses to let him speak. Later, Pepe sees an eye specialist and is warned not to go back into the bullring: another goring or even "strong emotions" could affect his eyesight once more, perhaps permanently. Keeping

this a secret from everyone except his aide Rerre, Pepe tries to bow out of the *corrida* in Madrid in which Rosita will make her Spanish debut. She refuses to appear without him, so he finally agrees. Rosita is a huge success, but Pepe goes blind in the ring and is knocked down by the bull. He isn't injured by the horns, but when he regains consciousness, he is still blind.

Meanwhile, Fernanda and Arturo loot Pepe's bank account and decide to run off together, but are involved in an automobile accident and are both killed. Rosita resumes her tour of Spain but returns to Pepe, feeling both guilty for compelling him to *torear* (and thus being indirectly responsible for his blindness) and loving him. Pepe, not wishing to be a burden and unsure if a new operation can restore his sight, departs for Mexico without Rosita.



The conclusion of *Maravilla del toreo* is pretty shocking, especially for the time. Not only is there no *happy* ending (i.e., Pepe miraculously regaining his eyesight), but there isn't even a *bittersweet* ending (for example, Pepe and Rosita getting married despite his infirmity), or *tragic* ending (Pepe dying nobly in the ring or something). Actually, *Maravilla del toreo* isn't a very melodramatic movie at all. The sub-plot of Fernanda and Arturo's affair is hardly central to the plot--there's no

conflict, Pepe doesn't even seem to notice it, Fernanda and Rosita get along well, Fernanda isn't demonised (Arturo is, to some extent), and for all that it really matters, Pepe could have been single or a widower for the whole movie (except, presumably Rosita doesn't give in to her romantic feelings for Pepe because he's a married man, though it's not really clear if she loves him "that way" at all). [There is a suggestion in García Riera's *Historia documental...* that Cintrón didn't want to do "love scenes" on film, and the script may have been written to accommodate her in this regard.]

Conchita Cintrón is remarkably natural on screen. She's not a great actress, but she's perfectly adequate throughout. She's also quite attractive: although she has a bit too much chin to be classically beautiful, she's certainly more than acceptable by film-star standards of attractiveness (which are generally pretty high), and her athletic build and movements (in and out of the bullring) are unusual for an actress of the period. Pepe Ortiz is also fine, but since he'd been in movies since the early Thirties, it's not a surprise. The supporting cast is also good, although Pituka de Foronda and Alejandro Cobo are given short shrift due to the negligible nature of their subplot, as noted above. Florencio Castelló plays his standard, stereotypical *sevillano* character and is his usual engaging self, although his allegedly "humorous" byplay with Rafael Icardo's character gets old rather quickly.



The aforementioned technical issues aside, *Maravilla del toreo* is a well-produced motion picture. Raphael Sevilla mixes actual locations, studio sets, and stock footage effectively, and there are sufficient extras, decent sets and costumes, etc., to make the film look substantial and slick. There is also a curious but interesting attempt to depict Peru, Mexico, and Spain's cultural differences: there is an elaborate recreation of a Peruvian party, with lingering shots of different types of local food, discussion of food and drink, "folkloric" music and dance, and so on. The party at Chiclanero's house in Madrid isn't as effective, since it's held in a fancy mansion and the music is stereotypical *flamenco* and other overly-familiar "Spanish" themes.

Of special interest in *Maravilla del toreo* are the scenes of Cintrón in the bullring: this is documentary footage (i.e., not re-staged for the film) but is much clearer and better-integrated than the usual such shots in bullfight pictures. It's possible, even probable, that a professional crew was sent to film Cintrón's actual performances. There was always the risk that she'd be seriously injured or even killed in the ring, but the verisimilitude of this footage shines through, something that wouldn't happen if it had been faked. Obviously, the *tienta* sequences and other

such scenes of Rosita "training" (as well as her riding, both for pleasure and in competition) were created specifically for the movie, but even here it is eminently clear that it is *really her* in close proximity to bulls. [In contrast, since Pepe Ortiz was retired, the footage of him in *actual* bullfights must have been archival, and his final confrontation in which he goes blind and is tossed by the bull is a combination of newly-shot closeups and documentary footage of *someone* being hit by a bull.]



Maravilla del toreo also includes shots of bulls actually being killed by Cintrón. This is not unprecedented, but it is slightly rare for a bullfight film to actually show the *matador* plunging the sword into the animal—more frequently, the film cuts away before the actual thrust and then a shot of the dead bull is shown. In this picture, one

sequence depicts Cintrón stabbing the bull, after which the animal stands still briefly, then collapses to the ground, all in medium-shot. It's conceivable some might find this offensive, although the bull wasn't killed *for* the film (since the footage is of an actual *corrida de toros*).

Overall, a fascinating movie for its glimpse of the career of a legendary figure in bullfighting, and a relatively decent movie on more objective (dramatic, filmic) grounds.



Chistelandia [Joke-land] (Prods. Barbachano Ponce,



1958) *Prod*: Manuel Barbachano Ponce; *Dir*: Manuel Barbachano Ponce, Carlos Velo Cobelas, J. M. García Ascot, Fernando Marcos; *Photo*: Ramón Muñoz, Alejandro Velázquez,

Ernesto Martínez, Emilio González, José Torre, Marcelo López, Roberto Sánchez U., F. Vega Gil, Luis Morales; *General Mgr*: Jorge Barbachano Ponce; *Prod Mgr*: Federico Amerigo; *Prod Chief*: Evaristo Mares, Carlos Rincón Gallardo, Roberto Jaramillo; *Film Ed*: Luis Sobreya S.; *Sound*: Adolfo de la Riva; *Sound Op*: Rodolfo [sic] Quintero; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Pancho Córdova, Humberto Cahuich, "Cuco Pelucho" [José Vidal García], "Silvio Pinole," Carlos Robles Gil, Giovanni Korporeal, Manuel Vergara "Manver," Guillermo Álvarez Bianchi

Notes: Manuel Barbachano Ponce, born in the Yucatán in 1925, studied at Columbia University before returning to Mexico and entering the film industry in the early 1950s as a producer of newsreels like *Tele-Revista*. This weekly series contained the usual newsreel fodder (actual news, sporting events, beauty pageants, etc.) and was also spiced up with brief bits of humour. Barbachano Ponce added

feature film production to his resumé in 1954 with *Raíces* and *Torero!* in 1956, utilising the services of his *Tele-Revista* collaborators. In 1958 he produced three additional "features" consisting of comic bits from *Tele-Revista* and some newly-shot footage: *Chistelandia*, *Nueva Chistelandia*, and *Vuelve Chistelandia*. Although Emilio García Riera indicates these three films were not released

in Mexico City, they did receive theatrical distribution elsewhere.

It's difficult to ascertain how much new material was created for *Chistelandia*, but the opening sequence was certainly among this footage. Pancho Córdova



speaks directly to the audience, informing us we're going to see an unusual "film" (using the pretentious English term, which is translated via sub-title to the Spanish *película*) that doesn't use the common formats like

"widescreen,"

"Cinemascope,"

"VistaVision," or

"television." The screen

aspect ratio changes as

Córdova mentions each of

these, and he contorts his

body to fit the new

dimensions. *Chistelandia* is

presented in a "thousand

shades of gray," he adds. In

another fourth-wall-breaking

moment, as he mentions the

"realistic" settings of the

movie, we get a reverse shot

of Córdova, a young woman,

and the furniture in the

"office" where they're

standing, revealing the falsity

of the costumes and sets

(their clothes are front-side

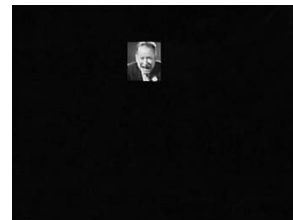
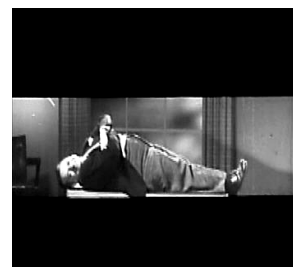
only, the "chair" is a mockup,

etc.). He also tells the viewer

that instead of one, two,

three, or even four different

stories, this film will feature over 100!



This clever and inventive sequence utilises film form for humour, but most of the rest of the picture eschews this method—with the exception of a bit of speeded-up footage, a comedy staple—in favour of predictable comic situations. Many of these scenes last less than a minute, and are visualisations of *very* old jokes whose punch lines can be predicted a mile away (although, to be fair, a number are still actually rather amusing). Like other scattershot comedies—*Hellzapoppin'*, "Laugh-In," and so forth—the theory seems to be "throw out one hundred jokes at a rapid pace: the audience will laugh at a certain

percentage of them and the bad ones will pass so quickly that they'll be forgotten."

There are a number of recurring topics and gag segments in



segments in *Chistelandia*. Perhaps the most notable is the five-episode film-within-a-film entitled "En el pérjido oeste," a spoof of B-westerns/serials starring Pancho Córdova as "Flecos Bill." This segment

begins with a parody of the MGM logo: instead of a lion, it's Córdova wearing a wig and whiskers and growling at the camera; instead of



"Metro Goldwyn Mayer," the company is listed as "Centímetro Gómez Majer," and "Ars Gratia Artis" (Art for Art's Sake) becomes "Churros Gratia Artis" (Cheap Films for Art's Sake). These episodes

have some sound effects and post-dubbed dialogue, but are mostly narrated by Eulalio González "Piporro."

Other repeated sections include "Así son ellas/ellos" (jokes about women and men), "Pepito" (a mischievous little boy, dubbed with an annoying *faux*-child's voice), "Esos ávaros" (jokes about tightwad *norteños*), "Don Humberto" (Humberto Cahuich, playing a dim-witted *yucateco*), and segments featuring comedians "Cuco Pelucho" and "don Silvio Pinole" (a stereotypical *ranchero*). These vary in effectiveness—extended sequences with Cuco Pelucho playing golf, demonstrating bad/good table manners, and performing modern dance are weak, but Cahuich is fairly consistently amusing in his bits.



One of the most interesting non-"series" segments is entitled "Amor X," and alternates footage of a love scene between two people and x-ray footage of the same scene: this isn't especially funny, but it

is definitely weird and interesting to watch.

There is very little political, social—or even topical—humour in *Chistelandia*. *Gringos* are featured in several bits, and at least 3 or 4 segments contain "funny" references to gays, but the majority of the humour is either based on hoary, universal stereotypes and tropes (women vs. men, stinky *norteños*, stupid people, bodily functions, sexual attraction and so forth). Consequently, *Chistelandia* is actually a more "universal" comedy (aside

from the fact that it's in Spanish) than other, more "localised" films.

The majority of the footage in *Chistelandia* was shot silent and post-dubbed (the introductory sequence may have had sync-sound), either with dialogue or voice-over narration. Some actuality footage (beauty pageants, body-building contests) is turned into humour via funny narration. The film looks odd: the location shooting, use of unfamiliar performers for most roles (many of these people were probably non-actors—certainly some of them were even employees of Tele-Revista pressed into service in front of the camera), non-sync sound, and so on contribute to the overall strange atmosphere of the picture, which doesn't resemble a traditional Mexican feature film at all.

Reasonably entertaining but perhaps a bit too long and repetitive.



Nueva Chistelandia [New Joke-Land] (Prods.

Barbachano Ponce, 1958) Prod: Manuel Barbachano Ponce; Dir: Manuel Barbachano Ponce, Carlos Velo Cobelas, J. M.

García Ascot, Fernando Marcos; Photo: Ramón Muñoz, Alejandro Velázquez, Ernesto Martínez, Emilio González, José Torre,

Marcelo López, Roberto Sánchez U., F. Vega Gil, Luis Morales; General Mgr: Jorge Barbachano Ponce; Prod Mgr: Federico Amerigo; Prod Chief: Evaristo Mares, Carlos Rincón Gallardo, Roberto Jaramillo; Film Ed: Luis Sobreya S.; Sound: Adolfo de la Riva; Sound Op: Rodolfo Quintero; Union: STIC

Cast: Humberto Cahuich, Pancho Córdova, "Cuco Pelucho" [José Vidal García], Carlos Robles Gil, Manuel Vergara "Manver," Chabelo, Ramiro Gamboa, "Alonsito," Lalo González "Piporro"

Notes: the second *Chistelandia* film follows the same general format as the first, although the pre-credits introduction is handled by *yucateco* comic Humberto Cahuich—periodically distracted by an attractive actress walking across the set—who tells the story of how he financed the movie (robbing cash from a safe), and found the actors (releasing them from a mental hospital). When the *real* director and crew arrive, Humberto picks up his



broom and resumes his usual duties...

Some of the segment categories and performers from the first film reappear, but others are dropped.

Chabelo and Ramiro Gamboa show up in several brief bits, and "Alonsito" replaces Cuco Pelucho and Silvio Pinole as a featured comedian (although Cuco Pelucho can be seen

in various scenes, he's not billed separately). Pancho Córdova returns as "Flecos Bill" in the five-part "Flecos Bill contra El Charro-Asqueado," another Western-movie spoof narrated by Piporro. Córdova also has a short segment in which he mentions the "new satellite" (which then swoops into the frame, causing him to duck), an obvious reference to the launch of Sputnik in October 1957.

New repeated gag segments include "Loquilandia" (humour about a psychiatrist and his patients) and "Hans y Fritz" (two German-accented characters). It is worth noting that one bit—about beautiful actresses—features several portraits of María Félix and an extremely short clip of Ana Bertha Lepe in a bathing suit.

Nueva Chistelandia is, like its predecessor, sporadically amusing but 80+ minutes of "blackout" gags is a bit too much to take at a single sitting.



Vuelve Chistelandia!
[Joke-Land Returns] (Prods. Barbachano Ponce, 1958) Prod: Manuel Barbachano Ponce; Dir: Manuel Barbachano Ponce, Carlos Velo

Cobelas, José Miguel García Ascot, Fernando Marcos; Photo: Ramón Muñoz, Alejandro Velázquez, Ernesto Martínez, Emilio González, José Torre, Marcelo López, Roberto Sánchez U., F. Vega Gil, Luis Morales; General Mgr: Jorge Barbachano Ponce; Prod Mgr: Federico Amerigo; Prod Chief: Evaristo Mares, Carlos Rincón Gallardo, Roberto Jaramillo; Film Ed: Luis Sobreya S.; Sound: Adolfo de la Riva; Sound Op: Rodolfo Quintero; Union: STIC

Cast: Humberto Cahuich, Pancho Córdova, "Cuco Pelucho" [José Vidal García], Chabelo, Ramiro Gamboa, Giovanni Korporaal, Manuel Vergara "Manver," Carlos Robles Gil, Federico González?

Notes: *Vuelve Chistelandia!* is the third and least of the three *Chistelandia* features. The performers and content is mostly the same as the first two films, but the material seems tired, somehow. Some of the "jokes" don't seem to

even be trying: for example, a man enters a dark room to replace a light bulb, accidentally sticks his finger in the light socket, then twitches in pain as the light bulb (in his other hand) lights up. That's funny?

As before, *Vuelve*

Chistelandia! opens with a pre-credits sequence that breaks the fourth wall. In this instance, Pedro Córdova addresses the unseen "cinema" audience, sends an attractive woman to sit with a single man, hands a woman a baby to hold, and tells the viewers this is a film about

"absolutely nothing." He then introduces a newsreel which occupies almost the first 15 minutes of the movie, *before* the credits! The newsreel consists of old footage with "comical" narration; the most amusing parts are the inter-titles which consist of rather clever word-play in English and Spanish. For example, "Modern Home Runs for Dodgers" and "Tecnología para el hogar moderno" [Technology for the Modern Home].

In place of Pancho Córdova's multi-part "Flecos Bill" movie spoofs, *Vuelve Chistelandia!* features 6 mini-spoofs of older films and plays:

"Carmen Ole!", "La dama de las camelias," "El Sheik Junior," "Rasputin," "Yo también Colón" [a spoof of the 1953 play "Yo Colón" which starred Cantinflas; the Teatro de los Insurgentes, where the play was presented, is credited on *Vuelve Chistelandia!* for providing the sets], and "Marco Toño y Cleopetra." Each of these begins with a *faux* production company logo, including "Calumnia [Columbia] Pictures," "Centímetro Gómez Meyer"

[MGM], "Paramontes Aquí" [Paramount Pictures], and "J. Arturito Clank" [J. Arthur Rank].

There are also multiple segments—but not as many as in the previous entries—starring Humberto Cahuich and the team of Chabelo and Gamboa, in addition to

repeated "themes" such as "Cosas que pasan" and "Viva Herodes" [a phrase used when referring to badly-behaved children, since King Herod ordered the deaths of infants in his attempt to kill the Christ child].

Vuelve Chistelandia! adds an additional gag format, whereby a single joke is spread over a series of 4 or 5 segments (with the punch line not appearing until the final part). For example, in "Gran Jefe Apache," a stereotypical Indian chief is taking a train ride. He repeatedly asks his assistant (another be-feathered Native American) for a cup of water to drink. The final time, his aide returns and says he couldn't get any water: "A pale-face is sitting on the white bowl where I've been getting your water."

The film, like its two predecessors, features a number of gay jokes—in one, a newspaper heading referring to





"Sex Change Operation in Denmark" (i.e., Christine Jorgensen) gives way to footage of an effeminate man preparing to board an airliner—as well as at least one black-face gag about African "cannibals."

Although there are a few amusing bits—notably Pancho Córdova's movie spoofs—*Vuelve Chistelandia!* scores much lower on the humour and inventiveness scale than the other two films in the series.



El satánico [The Satanic One] (Filmica Vergara-Jorge García Besné-Pels. Portorriqueñas Inc., 1966) *Prod.*: Jorge García Besné; *Dir.*: José Díaz Morales; *Adapt.*: Jorge García Besné, Raúl Portillo; *Story*: Raúl Portillo; *Photo*: Orlando Jiménez Leal; *Music*: Jesús Rodríguez; *Songs*: Los Hermanos Rigual; *Prod Mgr.*: Eduardo de la Torre; *Prod Chief*: Oswaldo Sánchez; *Asst Dir.*: José de San Antón; *Film Ed.*: Raúl Portillo; *Asst Cam.*: Carlos López; *Lighting*: Miguel Lavilla; *Makeup*: Carmen Morales; *Music/Re-rec.*: Salvador Topete; *Dialog Rec.*: Jesús Saldívar

Cast: Libertad Leblanc (*Norma*), Miguel Ángel Álvarez (*Roberto*), "El enano Santanón" [Rafael Muñoz] (*Tony Rojas*), Gladys Rodríguez (*Alicia Ponce*), José Yedra (*Mario Suárez*), Juan Batista (?*Gómez*), José de San Antón (*police inspector*), José M. Bonilla (?*Detective Bonilla*), Vicky Hernández, Iris Figueroa, Alicia Moreda (*Alicia's aunt*), Tino García, Ondina Canibano, Oswaldo Sánchez; *flamenco troupe*: Ballet Ramón de Cádiz; Ramón de Cádiz (*director & choreographer*), Maruja Heredia (*principal dancer*), Juanita Acevedo & Esperanza Cordero (*dancers*), Luis Bargaz (*cantaor*)

Notes: the most famous little-person performer in Mexican cinema was probably René Ruiz "Tun Tun," who appeared in numerous films between 1949 and his death in 1993. However, during the 1960s and '70s Rafael Muñoz "Santanón" worked in a number of films which made him

very well-known, even (albeit mostly in retrospect) internationally. Muñoz apparently made his film debut in the mid-1940s, but he was elevated to feature-player status playing "Zorrillo" (skunk) in the 3 "Caperucita" movies directed by Roberto Rodríguez in 1959-60. Ironically, Muñoz's face was not seen and his dialogue was post-dubbed by Eugenia Avendaño.

Santanón, as he was usually billed, also worked for Rodríguez in other childrens' films such as *El Gato con botas* and *Los espadachines de la reina*, and appeared *sans* costume in pictures like *La cámara del terror* and *La muerte viviente*, both with Boris Karloff, and *Santo y Blue Demon contra los monstruos*.



Most of Santanón's roles were supporting parts (or less), but he was prominently featured in at least two films, *El satánico*—where he's essentially the protagonist—and *Padre nuestro que estás en la tierra* (1971), in which he is third-billed but has a major dramatic part as the loving father of Manuel López Ochoa. Both of these pictures utilise Santanón's little-person status as a major plot point—that is, he isn't cast as "just another guy"—but both are far more sensitive and sympathetic to his character than routine genre films where his physical appearance is used as a grotesque or scary aspect of the movie.

El satánico is actually a rather good crime drama, shot on location in Puerto Rico, with decent acting and a clever plot. The cast and crew is a mix of Mexicans, Argentines (Leblanc), Puerto Ricans, ex-patriate Cubans, and Spaniards. The

production values are satisfactory, with well-chosen locations. Orlando Jiménez Leal's photography is interesting, because he (and/or director José Díaz Morales) frequently shoots from a low-angle (even including the ceiling in many shots), which tends to place Santanón's character on an equal footing (even subliminally) with the others, despite the height disparity.

As the film begins, Roberto, Norma, and Tony—a little person disguised as a child—enter a large department store. Tony hides in a large box; after the store closes, he emerges and steals a quantity of jewels from the safe. Gómez, a "fence," purchases the hot jewelry and Tony pays off Roberto and Norma, who are his accomplices. He also gives Norma a diamond necklace for herself. The police are puzzled by the robbery, one of a number of similar crimes committed in the past several years in the city.

Tony, who also owns a nightclub, is on the beach one day when he meets Alicia, a young woman who was blinded in an automobile accident. He befriends her, and decides to pay for an operation that will restore her sight.



[Shades of *City Lights* meets *High Sierra*.] In the meantime, he asks her aunt not to tell Alicia “how I am.”



Gómez informs Tony and Roberto that a valuable, gem-studded statue will soon be on exhibition in San Juan (it's currently on display in NYC). They plan the robbery. Meanwhile, a drunken Norma seduces Mario, a young man who runs Tony's club. Tony catches them in a heated embrace and stabs

Mario to death; he orders Norma to leave and “go back to that place I took you from.” In flashback, we see Norma working in a brothel (Roberto is also employed there as a bookkeeper or something). Tony gets a job as a waiter; one day when business is slow and the prostitutes are bored, they play a game that concludes with Tony having sex with Norma. He falls in love with her. When he gets a lucrative job as a specialty “dancer” in a nightclub, Tony proposes marriage to Norma but she scorns him. Roberto introduces Tony to Mario, and they embark on a career of crime. Later (we're told), Tony returned to the brothel and lured Norma away with promises of money.

Alicia's operation is a success, but Tony vanishes from her life. She discovers his address and visits his apartment, but arrives too late: Tony and Roberto have departed for New York, where the valuable statue is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The statue is crated up for its journey to Puerto Rico: Tony hides inside a specially-designed trunk, emerges in the cargo hold during the flight, and removes the gems from the idol.

However, when the plane lands in San Juan, Roberto doesn't free Tony. Tempted by the fortune in jewels, he takes the trunk to Tony's apartment and submerges it in a bathtub full of water, drowning his former boss. The police, following up on Mario's murder (his body was found on the beach), have arrested Norma; they arrive at the apartment in time to capture Roberto and discover Tony's body.



The version of *El satánico* I've seen (on the Cine Nostalgia channel) has at least one very obvious cut and is apparently missing some other scenes, although it's unclear if these were present in any released version of the movie. In one sequence, Norma accepts a large amount of money to do a strip-tease at the brothel, but the scene cuts just as she starts to play a song on the jukebox. Additionally, Tony's career as a “dancer” is never shown, not even his audition or any hint of what his act might possibly involve. Roberto takes him to a club and introduces him to the director of the floor show, and the next thing we know Tony has a lucrative contract and says he's a big hit.

Otherwise, the film is a satisfactory “caper” film/drama, with decent acting and dialogue. Santanón's dialogue was probably post-dubbed, but he turns in a good performance nonetheless. The script cleverly alludes to things without blatantly smashing them in the viewers' faces. For instance, Alicia says her parents were killed in the car accident that blinded her, and asks about Tony's family. He says his mother died when he was born and his father died when he was 16 years old. “But up until then, [your father] was your friend and support, right?” Alicia asks. “Yes,” Tony replies, “my friend and support,” but his facial expression and tone of voice indicate quite the contrary. We never get any further information about his childhood, but it certainly wasn't carefree and happy.



Tony's infatuation with Norma—and her barely-disguised disgust when she's in his presence—are more familiar stuff, but not badly done. Additionally,

Tony and Roberto's relationship is fairly believable. Tony says he's never had a friend before, and while Roberto is using the other man's “talents” (his size and agility) for his own financial purposes, he seems to be genuinely appreciative of this (and since Tony, for unexplained reasons, becomes the “boss,” Roberto is apparently content to take orders). Norma offers herself to Roberto but he puts her off, saying he prefers Tony's money to her physical charms. Later, he succumbs when they are alone on a boat, but this does not develop into any sort of romance: at the end, Roberto says he's betraying Tony for the money (not because he's in love with Norma). Miguel Ángel Álvarez plays Roberto as money-hungry but not a caricature, and his murder of Tony comes as a surprise as a result of this well-modulated performance. Libertad Leblanc is, if not outstanding, at least satisfactory in what is really a subsidiary role: she's adequately repulsed, lustful, frightened, angry when the script requires her to be. Gladys Rodríguez is attractive and does a bit more with her role as the “poor blind girl” than one would expect. The script also avoids a maudlin or awkward confrontation between Alicia and Tony after she recovers her sight, cleverly having them miss each other by a matter of minutes when Alicia tracks down his address. Instead, she'll never know the true identity of her benefactor (unless she reads the newspaper the day after Tony's body is discovered in the bathtub).

El satánico was a pleasant surprise, a more accomplished and entertaining film than I'd expected from the rather sleazy ad campaign, complete with a nice, lurid poster by Ruiz Ocaña.



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