

The Mexican Film Bulletin

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OBITUARIES ANA BERTHA LEPE

Actress Ana Bertha Lepe, one of the most popular Mexican film stars of the latter half of the 1950s and the 1960s, died on 24 October 2013 in a Mexico City hospital, following complications from a hernia operation. Ana



Bertha Lepe Jiménez was born in Tecotitlán, Jalisco on 12 September 1934. She began modeling and acting professionally in the early Fifties, and gained fame as the “Miss México” representative in the 1953 Miss Universe contest (which, coincidentally, was won by France’s Christiane Martel—Martel herself became a popular star in Mexican cinema shortly afterwards).

After a number of minor roles, Lepe achieved stardom opposite comedians like Tin Tan, Clavillazo, Piporro and Resortes, appearing as well in numerous melodramas, action films, and other genre works. Between 1953 and 1959 Lepe made 35 movies. Her career was seriously affected by a scandal which occurred in May 1960, when her father Guillermo Lepe shot and killed actor Agustín de Anda, son of producer Raúl de Anda. This affected the actress both personally and professionally: after a year on an unofficial blacklist, Lepe returned with a vengeance, making 17 features in 1961-62. But her career declined as the decade went on, and she was off-screen from 1969 until 1974, when she made two films for Rogelio Agrasánchez.

Ana Bertha Lepe appeared in 1 additional feature film (*El patrullero 777* with Cantinflas) and several TV series during the 1970s, then made a handful of television appearances in the next two decades. Her last acting work came in 2001. For much of the latter part of her life, Lepe was plagued with ill-health and lived a quiet life in Texcoco in the state of México.

IRMA LOZANO

Irma Lozano died of cancer on 21 October 2013; she was 69 years old. Susan Irma Lozano González was born

in August 1944 in Monterrey, Nuevo León, and studied acting at the Instituto de Bellas Artes. She made her professional acting debut in the early 1960s. Lozano was a popular performer in films, on television, and on the stage, also working in the field of dubbing (notably as the voice of Barbara Eden for the Mexican broadcasts of “I Dream of Jeannie”).



Lozano’s film career spanned about 20 years (although she later worked in several shorts in the 2000s), and included films such as *Gigantes planetarios*, *Don Juan 67*, *Sangre derramada*, *La derrota*, and *El hombre desnudo*. In the latter two movies she co-starred with her then-husband José

Alonso: their daughter María Rebeca began acting herself at a young age. Lozano later married Omar González and her son from that marriage, Rafael Omar, is also an actor.

AMPARO RIVELLES

Spanish actress Amparo Rivelles died in Spain on 7 November 2013; she was 88 years old. Rivelles, whose grandparents, parents, brother, nieces and nephews were all actors, was born in Madrid on 11 February 1925. She



made her acting debut in a play at the age of 13, and became a popular film actress in Spain in the early 1940s. In 1957, Rivelles visited Mexico to appear in a play, and remained there for more than 20 years, returning to her homeland to live in 1979. She resumed her film, TV, and stage careers there, finally retiring in 2006.

Rivelles’ work in Mexico included plays, *telenovelas*, and films. Among the latter (including co-productions shot in Spain) were *El esqueleto de la señora Morales*, *El amor que yo te di*, *Un amor perverso* (aka *La madastra*), *Los novios de mis hijas* and the sequel *Los problemas de Mamá*, *Cuando los hijos se van*, *Anita de Montemar*, and *Una vez...un hombre*.

JOHNNY LABORIEL

Singer and occasional actor Johnny Laboriel died of cancer on 18 September 2013. Juan José Laboriel López was born in Mexico City on 9 July 1942, the son of actor-musician Juan José Laboriel and actress Francisca López. Laboriel joined the group “Los Rebeldes del Rock” in the late 1950s, then became a solo artist with numerous hits throughout the following decade. He remained a popular musical performer until his death, appearing frequently in concert and other live venues.



Although not primarily an actor, Laboriel worked in a number of Mexican films as a musical guest, among them *A ritmo de twist*, *El dengue del amor*, and *La mano que aprieta*. He did have acting roles in a handful of films, including *La venganza de Gabino Barrera* and *Superzán el invencible*.

Johnny Laboriel is survived by his widow and two children, as well as his sister, singer Ela. His sister Francis died in 2008.

ADELA FERNÁNDEZ

Writer Adela Fernández y Fernández, daughter of director Emilio “Indio” Fernández, died on 18 August 2013. She was 70 years old. Fernández was born in December 1942, at which time her father was just becoming one of Mexico’s most famous film directors. Adela Fernández dedicated herself to writing stories, books, and plays, although she also studied and taught acting, and made several short films. She also spent time preserving her father’s heritage, hoping to convert his home “La Fortaleza” into a cultural center and museum in his honour.

GUSTAVO GARCÍA

Film critic and journalist Gustavo García died on 7 November 2013. García was born in Chiapas in 1954, and studied at UNAM before becoming a film critic, teacher, and journalist. His books on Mexican cinema include “La década perdida: El cine mexicano de los cincuenta,” “No me parezco a nadie: La vida de Pedro Infante,” and “Al son de la marimba. Chiapas en el Cine.”

NO SE ACEPTAN DEVOLUCIONES SETS BOX-OFFICE RECORDS

No se aceptan devoluciones, directed by and starring Eugenio Derbez, set box-office records in México and in the United States (where it’s known as *Instructions Not Included*). The film has earned over \$85 million internationally, nearly evenly split between Mexico and the USA. In Mexico, it lags



only slightly behind *Iron Man 3* and *Despicable Me 2* for 2013, even though it was released much later in the year than either of those Hollywood films. *Nosotros los Nobles*, another highly popular Mexican movie, currently occupies the 7th slot in annual Mexican box-office returns, with over \$26 million locally.

Annual Halloween Issue!

Sorry for the tardiness of this issue, but family issues took their toll on my “free” time for nearly the entire month of October. I will do my best to produce another issue of *MFB* before the end of calendar 2013. Thanks to everyone for their patience and support!



El ahijado de la muerte [The Godson of Death]

(Películas Anahuac, 1946) Prod: Oscar Dancigers; Dir:

Norman Foster; Scr: Norman Foster, Raquel & Luis Alcoriza; Photo: Jack Draper; Music: Manuel Esperón; Songs: Esperón y Cortázar; Prod Mgr: Federico Amerigo; Prod Chief: Alberto Ferrer; Asst Dir: Ignacio Villareal; Film Ed: George Crone; Art Dir: Gunther Gerzso; Makeup: Armando Meyer; Sound Engin: Nicolás de la Rosa; Titles: Saviur y Delgado



Cast: Jorge Negrete

(Pedro Ruiz), Rita Conde (Marina), Leopoldo Ortín (Dionisio Ruiz), Tito Junco (Carmelo), [Alejandro] Ciangherotti (Julio del Castillo), Emma Roldán (La Muerte), Francisco Jambrina (priest), Manuel Dondé (José), Juan García (El Coyote), Enrique Cancino (Macario), Carlos Múzquiz (El Cachorro), José Elías Moreno (El Norteño), Raúl Guerrero (outlaw), Ceferino Silva (?Santos), Chel López (El Chueco), Lupe Inclán (Nana), Aurora Walker (Sra. del Castillo), José Muñoz (leader of rebels), ?Trío Calaveras, Enriqueta Reza (old beggar woman), Leonor Gómez (woman who dances with Pedro), Ignacio Peón (man on hacienda), Daniel Pastor, Hernán Vera (cantinero), Margarito Luna (Carmelo’s henchman), Jorge Treviño (band leader)

Notes: Norman Foster had a relatively brief but fairly distinguished directorial career in Mexico between 1943 and 1946, after which he went back to Hollywood and continued making films until the 1970s. *El ahijado de la muerte* was his penultimate Mexican film (*El canto de la sirena*, an apparently lost fantasy film about a mermaid, was his final work there) and is considered one of his best. The photography and art direction (by Jack Draper and Gunther Gerzso, respectively) are especially impressive, grafted onto a *ranchera* tale with mystical and tragic overtones.

During the Revolution, a group of rebels camps overnight in a cemetery. They're warned of the presence of *federales* by an old man, who sits down to tell them a story that occurred on the *hacienda* some years before...

After the birth of his son Pedro, Dionisio Ruiz visits the cemetery on the Día de la Muertos in search of appropriate godparents, since everyone from the *hacienda* is there for the holiday. Turning down the *patrona* as well as a poor beggar woman, he is



approached by La Muerte, death personified, who offers to take the position of *madrina*. "I have to ask my wife," Dionisio replies, but La Muerte says she has just spoken to the woman (uh-oh), so the deal is sealed. Dionisio's wife is dead when he returns home. Pedro becomes a daring young boy, convinced that he's invincible because he's "Death's Godson." Years pass, and adult Pedro is now the *caporal* (foreman) of the *hacienda*. He loves Marina, the daughter of the late owner, but realises their differing social statuses will always separate them. When Julio, Marina's brother, returns to take over the management of the estate, he orders everyone to work harder, cuts off credit to the *peones*, and institutes corporal punishment for those who break his rules.

Pedro intervenes to prevent Julio's henchman Carmelo from branding José as a troublemaker, and is branded himself instead. Thrown into a scorpion-infested dungeon afterwards, Pedro escapes with his father's help and flees across the mountains. He joins the outlaw band of Macario, and they prey on caravans leaving Julio's *hacienda*. Pedro also abducts Marina, whom he believes betrayed him to Julio earlier. He orders a kidnaped priest to marry them, but repents and agrees to release both Marina and the clergyman. However, Julio and his men attack the outlaws' hideout, killing or capturing most of



the band. Pedro and Marina flee, with Julio and the others in pursuit. Carmelo shoots and mortally wounds Marina; he's tossed off a cliff by Pedro, starting an avalanche that kills Julio and many others.

Pedro, who is the old man telling the story, joins the rebels in their fight for *tierra y libertad*.

El ahijado de la muerte is quite stylish, with lots of camera movement, odd angles, and other filmic effects. The sets are extensive and very well-designed, and the production values overall are substantial and slick. The script isn't quite so well crafted: it's essentially a standard dramatic-ranchera tale (as opposed to the lighter comedic-

ranchera sub-genre) of social conflict on a *hacienda*, with an unhappy ending (not unknown, eg *El peñón de las ánimas*) and references to the Revolution settling old scores and rectifying social injustices, along with numerous musical numbers.

The movie's overt mysticism isn't quite as common: while it's unclear if Pedro is actually invulnerable due to his *madrina*'s intervention or not (in one scene a bullet strikes his belt buckle and thus doesn't harm him, but in another scene he really does appear to be bullet-proof), it's clear in the context of the film that La Muerte does exist and isn't simply a figment of the alcoholic imagination of Dionisio. [In the scenes in which she talks with Dionisio she's out of focus, until he dies, and then they're both in-focus.] Pedro never sees her, although he does hear her (in voiceover) towards the end of the movie. This fantasy aspect, as noted above, doesn't play a major part in the actual plot (if completely excised, the story would be more or less the same), but it does contribute to the overall effectiveness of the film.

The performances are adequate, with Negrete in good form and voice.

Leopoldo "Chato" Ortín had semi-retired from performing a few years earlier due to health issues, but



made occasional screen appearances until his death in 1953. He's fine here, looking a bit thinner and older (some of it was the makeup, of course). Rita Conde, born in Cuba, made her screen debut in *El ahijado de la muerte* but spent most of her career in Hollywood, earning a rather sparse number of credits from the late 1940s through the late '80s. She's attractive enough, but her dialogue seems to have been post-dubbed (possibly due to a Cuban accent?). Emma Roldán dials it back a little bit as La Muerte, playing the personification of Death in a matter-of-fact manner (she's given some effectively witty lines, but doesn't overdo it). Everyone else is alright without being particularly noteworthy.

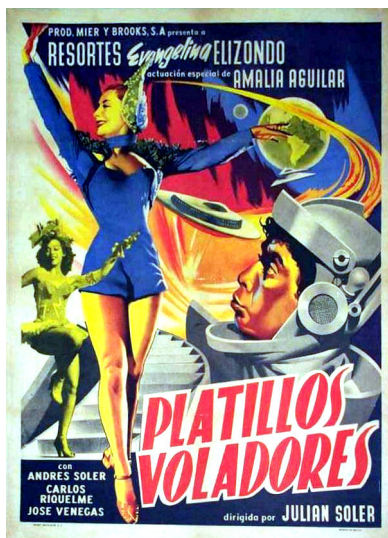
Visually quite stylish and generally interesting overall.



Platillos voladores [Flying Saucers] (Productora Mier y Brooks, 1955) *Exec Prod*: Ernesto Enriquez; *Prod*: Felipe Mier, Óscar Brooks; *Dir-Scr*: Julián Soler; *Adapt*: Carlos Orellana, Pedro de Urdimalas; *Story*: Carlos León; *Photo*: Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music*: Manuel Esperón; *Prod Mgr*: Eduardo Vega Lavín; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfin; *Asst Dir*: A. Corona Blake; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Art Dir*: Jorge Fernández; *Decor*: León D. Cabañas; *Lighting*: Juan Durán; *Camera Op*: Antonio Carrasco; *Makeup*: Elda Loza; *Music/Re-rec*: Enrique

Rodríguez; *Dialog Rec*: Rodolfo Benítez; *Sound Ed*: Abraham Cruz; *Spec FX*: Armando Stahl

Cast: Resortes [Adalberto Martínez] (*Marciano*),



Evangelina Elizondo (*Saturnina*), Andrés Soler (*Prof. Saldaña*), José Venegas (*Venustiano*), Amalia Aguilar (*musical guest*), Carlos Riquelme (*Saturnina's father*), Vitola (*Saldaña's daughter*), José Ruiz Vélez (*TV announcer*), Julián de Meriche (*Dr. Ivan*), Roberto Palacios (*Asian scientist*), Arturo

Castro (*municipal president*), José Chávez Trowe (*police chief*), José Pardavé (*village doctor*), Berta Lehar (*French woman*), Humberto Rodríguez (*"blind" beggar*), Hernán Vera & Emilio Garibay (*men at carnival*), Mirón Levine (*French scientist*), Roberto Corell (*scientist*), John Kelly (*Sammy from Chicago*), Rafael Estrada (*scientist*), Armando Velasco (*philanthropist*), Manuel Sánchez Navarro (*architect*)

Notes: *Platillos voladores* is an interesting--if flawed--film. Only marginally science-fiction, the picture contains too many musical numbers, and has a clunky, episodic script, but does contain some commentary about the nature of celebrity and the influence of famous people on the general public.

Marciano is a humble plumber engaged to Saturnina, the daughter of a fake "blind" beggar who would prefer her to marry their landlord Venustiano. On the night of a costume party in their *vecindad*, Marciano dresses up like a robot and Saturnina wears a sexy showgirl outfit. A



brawl breaks out between Marciano, Venustiano, and some other guests, causing Marciano and Saturnina to flee in his home-made automobile. The car has an airplane motor (Marciano hopes to win the Panamerican road race with it) and it

actually soars into the sky! Crashing near a small country village, the car is mistaken for a spacecraft and the unconscious passengers are assumed to be aliens.

Scientist Dr. Saldaña arrives and takes charge of the "bodies," which revive when taken back to his laboratory. Marciano, whose name means "Martian" in Spanish, tries to explain that he and Saturnina are humans, but his

fiancee convinces him they should pose as visitors from outer space. Over a period of time, Marciano and Saturnina become celebrities, speaking to assemblies of learned scientists and telling them of the utopia that exists on Mars. People are happy, there is no poverty, scientific progress has eliminated disease, and so forth. *Gringo Sammy* secures them a number of lucrative product endorsements.

Sneaking out one night incognito, Marciano and Saturnina realise they miss their former life, and confess their deception to Prof. Saldaña. He says he knew almost



immediately that they weren't aliens, but allowed the fiction to stand because their message of tolerance, love, and brotherhood gave humanity hope for the future. Marciano and Saturnina return to the *barrio* and hand out

presents to everyone (purchased with their endorsement money). However, as they drive away on their honeymoon (in a new car), they spot two strange creatures on a remote highway--real Martians?!

Platillos voladores begins as a typical urban *barrio* comedy, with plumber-inventor Marciano defending his claim on the curvaceous Saturnina against the wealthy braggart Venustiano. This section is followed by the "discovery" of the aliens by the residents of a small village, and resembles a rural comedy, with the typical stereotypes of that genre. Once Marciano and Saturnina are taken back to the city by Saldaña, the film imitates a more sophisticated urban comedy--possibly inspired by the then-recent *Living It Up* (1954), the Martin & Lewis remake of *Nothing Sacred* (1937), another movie about someone who becomes a celebrity under false pretenses--mocking the press, scientists, and so on. This gives way to rather Capra-esque preaching in the sequences in which Marciano and Saturnina (but mostly Marciano) obliquely criticise Earth's political and social systems by pointing out the superiority of the Martian way of life. Each of these disparate elements is periodically interrupted by song-and-dance sequences, including one long "fantasy" number and another lengthy "dancing in the street" sequence. The musical sections aren't bad but they certainly add to the fragmented feel of the movie.

As mentioned earlier, the science-fiction content of *Platillos voladores* is minimal. Marciano's car rather improbably flies (not something he'd planned), and its flight is represented by a crude optical effect. The "real" Martians in the final scene appear out of nowhere (would it have killed the filmmakers to include a shot of a crashed flying saucer?) and look odd (like children in costumes) rather than alien.

There are several flaws in the film's plot. The first, which is briefly addressed then ignored, is: why doesn't anyone recognise Marciano and Saturnina after they become famous? On several occasions (Marciano's TV

broadcast, the couple's "night out" in the city) I was certain the script was going to have them "outed" by Venustiano or someone else from the *barrio*, but this never occurs (or is even threatened). Another, perhaps more fundamental yet understandable, is the relative ease with which Marciano--a working-class plumber, albeit one who's clever with machinery--slips into the role of an alien



savant. To be sure, much of the philosophy he spouts is double-talk and the eagerness with which it is

accepted by others is more a reflection of their credulity than his intelligence, but Marciano is just too glib to be believable.

The political content of the movie is curious. For some reason, the script chooses to identify the various countries represented by foreign scientists with sound-alike names: a "Russian" is identified as a "Trusiano," for instance. This seems sort of pointless, since the characters are blatant stereotypes and serve no particular purpose in the plot, for good or ill, with one exception: Julién de Meriche plays a Russian (excuse, *Trusian*) scientist who is ordered to bring back Marciano's head for study, and tries to cut it off during a sabre dance!

The production values of *Platillos voladores* are satisfactory, with substantial sets, costumes, and extras. The minimalist special effects don't really harm the movie, since they appear so briefly. Some of the musical sequences are rather elaborate. The performances are adequate, although the script doesn't allow for much character development.

Entertaining but possibly disappointing if one was expecting a true science fiction film.



Dos fantasmas y una muchacha [Two Ghosts and a Girl]

(Prods. Sotomayor, 1958)

Exec Prod: Heberto Dávila G.; Prod: Jesús Sotomayor

Martínez; Assoc Prod:

Alberto Hernández Curiel;

Dir-Scr: Rogelio A.

González [Jr.]; Adapt:

Fernando Galiana; Story:

Alfredo Tato; Photo: Raúl

Martínez Solares; Lighting:

Carlos Nájera; Camera Op:

Cirilo Rodríguez; Prod Mgr: Fernando Méndez Jr.; Prod Chief: Enrique Morfin; Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: Carlos Savage; Art Dir: Javier Torres Torija; Music: Sergio Guerrero; Makeup: Román Juárez; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Sound Dir: Galdino Samperio; Dialog Rec: Javier Mateos; Sound Ed: Reynaldo Portillo; Special



FX: Juan Muñoz Ravelo; Choreog: Ricardo Luna;

Costumes: Armando Valdés Peza; Union: STPC

Cast: Germán Valdés "Tin Tan" (*Germán Pérez*), Ana Luisa Peluffo (*Ana "la Tobillera"*), Manuel "Loco" Valdés (*Manuel López*); bank robbers: Luis Aldás, Miguel Manzano, Tito Novaro; Ana's parents: Marcelo Chávez, Virginia Manzano; Arturo Correa (*Armando*), Alejandro Reyna (*policeman with tic*), Carl-Hillos (*newspaper editor*), Mario Zabadúa [sic], Fernando Chehuán [aka Fernando Yapur] (*policeman in jail*), Rogelio A. González Jr. (*director of "Torero" sequence*), Antonio Valdés, ?Daniel Tellez Wood, ?Socorro Bastida

Notes: a generally amusing film, helped considerably by the teaming of brothers Tin Tan and Loco Valdés. The optical effects are sub-standard and hurt the picture a bit, but this movie is pleasant enough overall.

In the early part of the 20th century, Germán Pérez and Manuel López are rivals for the love of performer Ana "la



Tobillera" (the daring highlight of her act is showing her ankle, or *tobillo*). An impromptu duel in the theatre results in the deaths of the two men, who turn into ghosts and are sentenced to haunt the premises until they become

friends. 50 years later, Pérez and López discover they *have* become friends, but the Chief Ghost (heard in voice-over) says they must pass one final test to prove they're sincere. They will also be allowed to leave the theatre briefly, but will lose their ghostly powers from 8-9pm each night.

The "test" comes in the person of Ana, the lookalike granddaughter of La Tobillera. Ana, a reporter, visits the now-closed theatre. Pérez and López rescue her from the amorous attentions of her photographer Armando.

However, three bank robbers have also chosen the derelict theatre as their hideout. The ghosts steal the loot from a robbery and the crooks invade Ana's home (they heard her giving Pérez and López her address) to recover

it. Pérez and López use their ghostly powers to defeat the gangsters and earn their release from Earth, going off to join the spirit of Ana "La Tobillera" in Heaven.

Although—as one would expect—*Dos fantasmas y una muchacha* features a number of musical sequences, these do not really impede the progress of the plot very much. In fact, these are about the only real digressions from a straight linear narrative: in other words, there aren't any truly extraneous scenes to pad the running time. The songs & dances themselves are acceptable for the most part.



Perhaps the most entertaining is a long production number of "Torero," which begins with Ana in an abbreviated *torera* costume and segues into a comedy-musical routine featuring Manuel and Germán. Each of the brothers also gets a solo number, a bizarre version of "Witch Doctor" for Loco Valdés and a fairly straight rendition of the international hit "Volare" by Tin Tan.

One interesting bit (which I'd completely forgotten about until I re-viewed the movie) is a "film within the film" scene featuring a blonde in a tattered dress menaced by the Frankenstein monster, the Gill-man, the Mummy, and a werewolf. The actress speaks a bit of English and then the director *also* speaks English ("That's all for today") to the cast and crew (before changing to Spanish). Since this sequence is supposed to be taking place in a Mexican film studio, the suggestion that the female performer and the director are from the USA is a bit puzzling. In any case, *Dos fantasmas y una muchacha* needs to be added to various checklists of appearances of classic monsters in the cinema.

The production values of *Dos fantasmas y una*



muchacha are satisfactory, although most of the movie takes place on a handful of sets. As mentioned earlier, the optical effects are not very effective, with some split-screen

work looking very crude (at other times it's passable). The performances are adequate, with the Valdés brothers meshing well together but most of the other actors suffering from sketchy characterisation (the 3 bank robbers don't even have names, although in one scene Luis Aldás is apparently referred to as "Barón"—one source lists this as "Aarón"). Director Rogelio A. González Jr. has a cameo as an exasperated film director whose scene is "ruined" by the appearance of López and Pérez.

The reasonably logical and straight-forward plot, along with the amusing chemistry between Tin Tan and Loco Valdés make *Dos fantasmas y una muchacha* decently entertaining.



El fantasma de la opereta [The Phantom of the Operetta] (Prods. Brooks, 1959) *Prod*: Óscar J. Brooks, Ernest Enríquez; *Dir*: Fernando Cortés; *Adapt*: Gilberto Martínez Solares, Juan García; *Story*: Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo*: Jack Draper; *Music*: Manuel Esperón; *Prod Chief*: Julio Guerrero; *Asst Dir*: Manuel Muñoz; *Film Ed*: Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir*: Jorge Fernández; *Camera Op*: Urbano Vásquez; *Lighting*: Luis García; *Makeup*: Margarita Ortega; *Dialog Rec*: Luis Fernández; *Sound Ed*: Abraham Cruz; *Music/Re-rec*: Enrique Rodríguez;

Recordist: Armando Bolaños; *Special FX*: Armando Stahl; *Union*: STPC

Cast: Tin Tan [Germán Valdés] (*Aldo Valdez*), Ana Luisa Peluffo (*Lucy*), Luis Aldás (*Marcucci*), Marcel Chávez "Marcelo" (*López*), Vitola (*Gertrudis*), Antonio Brillas (*Juan*), Julián de Meriche (*Vladimir*, *choreographer*), Armando Sáenz (*Ramos*), Eduardo Arcaraz [sic] (*don Quique*), Francisco Reiguera (*Jeremías*), Ramón Valdés & Guillermo Hernández "Lobo Negro" (*policemen*), Armando Acosta (*spectator*), José Pardavé (*Bravo Sosa*, *actors' agent*), Manuel Sánchez Navarro (*man in theatre*), Jorge Zamora (*man in theatre*)



Notes: Gaston Leroux's novel "The Phantom of the Opera" has not only been officially adapted to the screen numerous times, it has also "inspired" various imitations and *homages* around the world. The title *El fantasma de la opereta* had already been used for an Argentine horror-comedy in 1954, while Mexican films following the same general concept included *Teatro del crimen* (1956) and *Variedades de medianoche* (1959, also directed by Fernando Cortés and starring Tin Tan).

The 1959 Mexican version of *El fantasma de la opereta* is slightly amusing but is not even as serious as the similarly-themed *Teatro del crimen* (in which the villain actually kills people). There are also numerous continuity and logical errors which are somewhat bothersome, and of course the plethora of musical numbers slows down the pace to a crawl.

Waiter Aldo has a crush on nightclub singer Lucy, but accidentally causes a brawl that results in her dismissal. He vows to make her a star, and decides to stage a musical revue at the long-shuttered Teatro de la Opereta. Aldo, Lucy, and her assistant Gertrudis learn the theatre closed in 1914 when a mysterious "Phantom" appeared and began murdering performers on stage. Regardless, Aldo rents the building from Marcucci and begins hiring (on credit) performers, designers, and other personnel for the show.

The Phantom appears from time to time, leaving threatening notes and wooing Lucy with his violin. Aldo periodically finds "dead" bodies backstage, but these vanish when he returns with witnesses. On the night of the premiere, the Phantom abducts Lucy: when she rejects his romantic overtures, he sets a time bomb to explode at midnight. Lucy discovers the basement of the theatre is filled with contraband (such as French perfume), and deduces that the Phantom is the leader of a gang of smugglers trying to keep people away. After a musical

finale featuring a score of masked Phantoms, Marcucci is exposed as the head of the gang, with various others (prompter Juan, critic Ramos) as his accomplices. The film concludes with the appearance of the *real* Phantom, sitting in a chandelier: he says he's going to find another theatre to haunt, and vanishes!



Like *Platillos voladores*, *El fantasma de la opereta* has a false fantasy premise but includes a coda in which a real fantastic element appears. Unfortunately, *El fantasma de la opereta*

confusingly mixes real and fantasy elements with no particular rhyme or reason. For example, Aldo sees the murdered bodies of Juan and Marcucci several times during the movie, but they're gone when he brings back others to see them. This can be explained by the final revelation that Juan and Marcucci are in on the plot to scare Aldo away from the theatre. However, in another scene, Aldo discovers the hanged body of elderly (and insane) theatre manager Jeremías, which similarly disappears (and Jeremías shows up later, alive). But Jeremías is *not* a member of the smuggling gang, so he wouldn't have participated in a fake-death scenario.

The existence of the "real" Phantom isn't revealed until the final scene, but he shows up at least twice earlier: in one scene, Lucy unmasks the Phantom (all of the



Phantoms wear rather featureless face masks) and is shocked by the bestial face underneath (she rather inaccurately describes it as "burned"); later, Gertrudis does the same thing when she

confronts a Phantom. This might have been explained in the context of "fake" Phantoms by suggesting the horror-face was just makeup, but in the last scene the *real* Phantom removes his mask and he has the *same* face. Also, most of the time the Phantom wears a slouch hat and plays a violin, but in one sequence he's shown with a top hat and sings: in the last scene, the real Phantom wears the top hat and references his desire to sing, but in the earlier appearances of the real Phantom he wears the same hat as the fake Phantoms! Finally, the Phantom's romantic attraction to Lucy—a detail borrowed from previous versions of Leroux's story—appears to be a trait of fake-Phantom Marcucci, but in the aforementioned "real-Phantom sings" scene, he does sing a romantic song to her.

One of the odd things about *El fantasma de la opereta* is the lack of characterisation. Everyone is too busy running around to have much personality, and this includes Aldo, Lucy, and Gertrudis, but *especially* the various supporting characters. Most of the chief red herrings (Marcucci, Juan, Ramos) turn out to be guilty; otherwise, only choreographer Vladimir, dotty Jeremías (who still thinks it's 1914 and rants against the Kaiser), and creditor López have much to do, and precious little at that. (Tin Tan's brother Ramón Valdés has a small role as a policeman and is given one brief scene in which he attempts to call for assistance but can't get the other party to understand the word "opereta"). The performances are generally satisfactory, however.

The production values are adequate, although there isn't much style or atmosphere on display here. Since this isn't really a thriller, but rather a frenetic comedy with an extensive musical component, the lack of "horror" visuals can be excused, but the overall flat look of the film cannot. [*La casa del terror* is far superior in this regard, although it isn't burdened by the musical numbers so perhaps the comparison is unfair.]

On the whole, this is very mildly amusing but is neither (a) one of Tin Tan's better movies (even in this phase of his career), nor (b) a very interesting variation on "The Phantom of the Opera" story.



Los fantasmas burlones [The Ghost Jokers]

(Prods. Sotomayor, 1964) *Exec*

Prod: Heberto Dávila Guajardo;
Prod: Jesús Sotomayor Martínez;
Dir: Rafael Baledón;



Scr: Fernando Galiana, Francisco Córdova; *Photo:* Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music Dir:* Sergio Guerrero; *Orch Arr & Music Adv:* Rubén Fuentes; *Prod Supv:* Miguel Sotomayor Martínez; *Prod Chief:* Julio Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir:* Américo Fernández; *Film Ed:* Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano; *Spec FX:* Antonio Muñoz Rabelo [sic]; *Choreog:* Magdalena Sotomayor; *Camera Op:* Cirilo Rodríguez; *Lighting:* Miguel Arana Dávila; *Makeup:* María del Castillo; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Sound Dir:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:* Javier Mateos; *Union:* STPC

Cast: Antonio Espino "Clavillazo" (*Manitas*), Germán Valdés "Tin Tan" (*Sir Ludovico Churchill*), Adalberto Martínez "Resortes" (*Ojitos*), Manuel Valdés "Loco Valdés" (*François*), María Eugenia San Martín (*Gloria*), Sonia Infante (*Lucha*), María Victoria (*musical guest—cut?*), Marga López (*Berta Sandoval*), Armando Soto la Marina "El Chicote" (*Crescencio Godínez*), Marcelo

Chávez (*carpa manager*), Ramón Valdés Castillo (*carnival employee*), Joe Carson, Manuel Alvarado Lodoza (*judge*), Carlos León (*editor*), Armando Acosta (*magistrate*), Carlos Suárez (*telescope man*), María Cecilia Leger (*Dorotea Ramírez*)

Notes: although cheap and slipshod, *Los fantasmas burlones* is fitfully entertaining despite its many faults. It should be noted, however, that the potentially powerful



teaming of 4 major comedians—Tin Tan, Resortes, Clavillazo, Loco Valdés—falls rather flat, since Resortes and Clavillazo are cast in essentially straight-men

roles in support of the Valdés brothers. At least Resortes and Clavillazo get some screen time, which cannot be said for most of the rest of the performers (aside from Marga López), who flit on and off the screen without making any real impact.

Carnival spiritualist Ojitos bilks unwary customers with the technical assistance of Manitas. Seeking to spice up his spiel, Ojitos reads a “magic” spell from a book and conjures up the ghosts of British knight Sir Ludovico Churchill and French Revolution-era fop François. The two spirits initially suffer culture shock upon transplantation to the 20th century, but soon adjust and begin enjoying themselves. This enjoyment includes



playing pranks on mortals, flirting with the girlfriends of Ojitos and Manitas, and performing spectacular, supernaturally-enhanced musical numbers on the *carpa* stage.

Ojitos and Manitas convince the ghosts to give them tips on future events so they can establish a reputation as real clairvoyants: they successfully predict the outcome of a horse race, an earthquake, and a jewel robbery.

These predictions make Ojitos and Manitas famous, but attract the attention of investigative reporter Berta Sandoval, who has the men arrested as frauds and possibly accomplices of the jewel thieves. Sir Ludovico and François romance Berta and she changes her mind; Ojitos and Manitas, with the help of their ghost pals, capture the jewel thieves and all is well. Berta joins Sir Ludovico and François in the spirit world.

Los fantasmas burlones borrows two musical numbers from *Dos fantasmas y una muchacha*, but—to its credit—modifies each one. A duet between “López” and “Pérez”

in the first movie becomes a duet between Sir Ludovico and François here, with an entirely different song (“Un sueño es sólo un sueño”) and some added closeups of Tin Tan and Loco Valdés singing. Unfortunately, all of the long shots depict the men as they appear in *Dos fantasmas y una muchacha*, and these don’t match their new appearances at all (in the original movie, both men had large, handlebar moustaches, while in *Los fantasmas burlones* Tin Tan has his usual moustache and Loco Valdés is clean-shaven). There is also a reprise of Loco’s “Witch Doctor” number from the earlier film, which doesn’t appear to have any new footage, but has been trimmed to a shorter running time.

There are several new musical numbers, including one with Tin Tan as a cowboy, a dance by Resortes, and a horribly protracted production number with Tin Tan, Loco Valdés and Marga López, shot in double exposure to make them appear “ethereal.”

[María Victoria is credited as a guest star, but I didn’t see her—possibly I fast-forwarded through her appearance?] Marga López doesn’t show up until a substantial portion of the film has gone by, and chiefly (and awkwardly) fills the role played by Ana Luisa Peluffo in *Dos fantasmas y una muchacha*, i.e., the love interest of the two ghosts. At one point one of the spirits asks Berta to commit suicide so she can be with him forever, and she replies that suicide is against her religion; nonetheless, at the end of the movie the ghosts apparently *kill* her, because she turns into a ghost herself and they leave together! [It’s unclear exactly what they do—Sir Ludovico and François inhale and Berta is suddenly incorporeal.]

As usual, the special effects are not very impressive, with heavy reliance on double exposure and stopping the camera so the ghosts can vanish and appear. The practical effects are minimal, and mostly wire work, although a fake head is used on one scene to simulate the effects of the guillotine on François. A significant amount of footage was shot at what appears to be a real carnival (or else a carnival set up on the studio’s back lot), but this mostly results in arbitrary shots of rides and the midway and doesn’t play any major role in the action.



In addition to the sub-par special effects, *Los fantasmas burlones* also features some sloppy continuity: in one scene, Ojito and Manitas are

in court, wearing regular clothes, but in the next scene they're in a jail cell wearing their "spiritualist" costumes. The chronology of the trial and Berta's conversion (via the time she spent with the ghosts) is also muddled. On a broader scale, the movie changes direction several times, with the spirits originally presented as mischievous practical jokers (and thus a sort of menace) and later becoming the allies of Ojitos and Manitas (who eventually discover a spell to send them back, but don't use it).

Tin Tan and Loco Valdés work together well but don't have the same chemistry they did in *Dos fantasmas y una muchacha* (in one scene in *Los fantasmas burlones*, they call each other "López" and "Pérez" and then mumble, "right, that was another movie"). Tin Tan uses an affected "British" accent and mixes English and ungrammatical Spanish for the entire film; this is annoying at first but one becomes accustomed to it. Neither he nor Loco Valdés has much character beyond the superficial trappings of their costume/accents (and when they don contemporary clothing, they lose even the first part of that distinction).

Los fantasmas burlones is short enough and lively enough to deliver some mild entertainment, although it's certainly not a "good" film by most standards.



Enrique Torres Tudela

Enrique Torres Tudela was born in Peru in 1923. After a career as a pop singer under the name "Ricky Torres," Torres Tudela turned to filmmaking in his native South America in the mid-1960s. One remnant of his previous life can be seen in the frequent use of Les Baxter music in his films: in the early Sixties, Ricky Torres recorded an entire album of Baxter compositions, and even sang a Les Baxter song in the Argentine movie *Los viciosos* (1962).

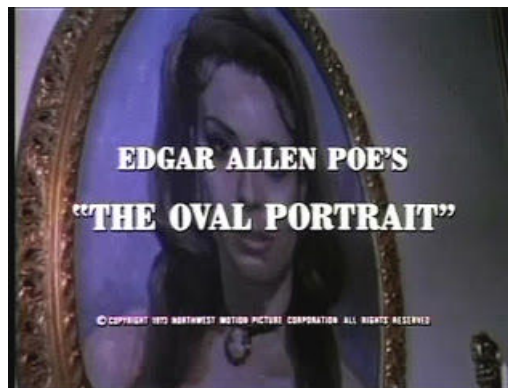
Torres produced and often wrote a number of films shot in Argentina and Peru in the '60s and '70s, including *Un viaje al mas allá*, *La ruleta del diablo*, *Terror in the Jungle*, and *Boda diabólica*. In 1972 he collaborated with Rogelio A. González Jr. on two films shot in Canada with mostly Canadian casts but many Mexicans behind the camera: *The Oval Portrait* and *One Minute Before Death*. Among his financial backers were several wealthy Mormons from the Pacific Northwest. In the late 1970s Torres Tudela produced another handful of films in Argentina, including *Seis pasajes al infierno*, *Allá donde muere el viento*, and *La casa de las sombras*, which featured such former Hollywood stars as Yvonne DeCarlo, Tippi Hedren, John Russell, John Gavin and Mala Powers. Torres Tudela reportedly had Mormon investors on these films as well (although whether it was the same group as on the Canadian-made films is unknown).

Information available about *The Oval Portrait* and *One Minute Before Death* is often confused and the two films are sometimes listed as alternate titles for the same movie (which is incorrect). Curiously, director Rogelio A. González Jr. returned to Canada in March 1973 to shoot another movie, *El hombre desnudo*, but with a different crew (although some of the same cast members), two

Mexican performers (Irma Lozano and José Alonso), and without the participation of Enrique Torres Tudela.

Note: most of the information in this article came from the invaluable Argentine website "Cinefania" here:

<http://www.cinefania.com/terroruniversal/index.php?id=165>



Edgar Allen Poe's "The Oval Portrait"

(Northwest Motion Picture Corp. & Maple Leaf International Pictures Ltd., ©1972) *Prod:* Enrique Torres Tudela; *Dir:* Rogelio González Jr.; *Scr:* Enrique Torres Tudela; *Orig. Story:* Edgar Allan Poe; *Photo:* León Sánchez; *Music:* Les Baxter; *Orch Dir:* Julio Jaramillo; *Song:* Enrique Torres Tudela ("Haunted Love"); *Assoc Prod:* Herman Allenbach, Verland Whipple; *Prod Mgr:* Ron Hudson; *Asst Dir:* Scotty Maitland; *Film Ed:* Dick Legrand, Sigfrido García; *Art Dir:* Victor Tudela; *Stunts:* John Wardlow; *Spec FX:* Dax Logan; *Sound Rec:* Enrique Rodríguez

Cast: Wanda Hendrix (*Lisa*), Barry Coe (*Joseph Hudson*), Gisele Mackenzie (*Miss Warren*), Maray Ayres (*Rebecca*), Barney O'Sullivan (*The Major*), Doris Buckinham (*Mrs. Buckinham*), Pia Shandel (*Regina*), Doris Goldrich (*Doris, cook*), Bill Braden, Ivor Harris, Graham Crowell, Allen Anderson, Dax Logan, Jack Ammon, George Spracklin, Jack Bowdery, Shanna Dickson

Notes: although attributed to "Edgar Allen[sic] Poe," *The Oval Portrait* borrows very little from Poe's story of that name, other than...an oval portrait. Much of the film is a thinly-veiled *pastiche* of Daphne DuMaurier's "Rebecca," where Lisa = the unnamed protagonist, Mrs. Warren = Mrs. Danvers (albeit a much friendlier one), and Rebecca = Rebecca (except in *The Oval Portrait* she actually appears and has a major role in the story).

In post-Civil War America, Lisa and her mother, Mrs. Buckinham, arrive at a large country house occupied by Mrs. Warren. They are there for the reading of the will of Mrs. Buckinham's brother, the Major, who recently died; others will also attend. Lisa is strangely affected by the oval portrait of a young woman that hangs over the mantle; she later encounters Joseph, who first berates her for driving "Rebecca" away, and later mistakes Lisa for Rebecca when the former dons one of Rebecca's gowns,

found in a closet. Mrs. Warren relates the story of Rebecca and Joseph to Lisa (in flashback):

During the Civil War, Rebecca lived in the mansion with her father, the Major, who keeps her shielded from the world: her mother ran off with another man, and the Major doesn't want Rebecca exposed to immoral ideas. Joseph Hudson, a Confederate officer, flees from a battle (stock footage) and, wounded, takes shelter in the mansion. Mrs. Warren and Rebecca conceal him from the Major (a Union officer) and from other Union soldiers searching the



neighbourhood for the fugitive. When the Major returns to active duty, Joseph emerges from hiding and paints the portrait of Rebecca, with whom he has fallen in love. However, a clergyman procured by Mrs.

Warren to marry the young couple instead betrays Joseph to the Union authorities. He is arrested and taken away. A pregnant Rebecca goes into labour just as her father returns: he locks her in a room and forbids Mrs. Warren to provide assistance, resulting in the death of Rebecca's child. The Major has a stroke and is committed to an asylum. A short time later, Joseph returns but Rebecca has just died, a result of her miscarriage. He digs up her corpse. [end flashback]

Mrs. Warren reveals the Major's will left the mansion to her. Lisa is possessed by the spirit of Rebecca. She and her mother depart. Mrs. Warren catches Joseph making out with Rebecca's dessicated corpse. Admitting she is Joseph's mother, Mrs. Warren shoots her insane son. In death, Rebecca and Joseph's spirits are reunited. [Wait, I thought Rebecca's spirit went into Lisa's body?]

The Oval Portrait isn't a bad film, but it's far from a good one. The problems mostly result from the pacing and structure, although there is one major flaw in the basic premise as well.

The character of Rebecca is problematical: she's a sympathetic character in the flashback sequence, but for some reason is portrayed as a vengeful, evil ghost in the opening and closing sections. As noted earlier, she apparently possesses Lisa's body and leaves the mansion (bidding Joseph "farewell forever"—why wouldn't she try to reconcile with him, convincing him that her spirit was in another body?) but then her spirit is reunited with Joseph after he dies, a seeming contradiction.

The pacing of the film is uneven. The extended flashback that consumes the middle section of the picture is strictly melodrama, not fantasy: most of the "supernatural" content occurs in the final sections, with one brief sequence of poltergeisty phenomena, as well as double-exposed ghosts, possession, and corpse-hugging. The final section—after Lisa and her mother leave the mansion—is also padded mercilessly with pointless, time-wasting footage, including fantasy scenes of a dance, just to get to the twist ending where Mrs. Warren kills her

necrophiliac son. You'd think she'd have noticed that dried-up corpse in a wedding gown before this, but I suppose not.

Wanda Hendrix, cast in a role seemingly intended for a much younger woman, had a more age-appropriate part in *One Minute Before Death*, and the photography of *The Oval Portrait* frankly does her no favours (Gisele Mackenzie, a year older than Hendrix, actually looks younger in the film). Hendrix performs adequately but has a smaller role than in *One Minute Before Death*, while much more footage is given this time to Mackenzie and Maray Ayres (who plays Rebecca).



The production values are adequate. Shot in the same house as *One Minute Before Death* with the same cast and crew, *The Oval Portrait* looks alright, although (as one reviewer commented) the high-key photography is not at all atmospheric or spooky. "Haunted Love" is heard frequently on the soundtrack (in an instrumental version), and the rest of the score—by Hollywood veteran Les Baxter—is decent.

The Oval Portrait (or, to give it the full on-screen title, *Edgar Allen Poe's The Oval Portrait*) is nothing special, but it manages to hold the viewer's attention for most of its running time.



One Minute Before Death

(Northwest Motion Picture Corp. & Maple Leaf International Pictures Ltd., 1972) *Prod*: Enrique Torres Tudela; *Dir*: Rogelio González Jr. *Scr*: Enrique Torres Tudela; *Photo*: León

Sánchez; *Music*: Les Baxter; *Orch Dir*: Julio Jaramillo; *Song*: Enrique Torres Tudela ("Haunted Love"); *Assoc Prod*: Herman Allenbach, Verland Whipple; *Prod Mgr*: Ron Hudson; *Asst Dir*: Scotty Maitland; *Film Ed*: Dick Legrand, Sigfrido García; *Art Dir*: Victor Tudela; *Spec FX*: Dax Logan; *Props*: Jack Loholt; *Sound Rec*: Enrique Rodríguez; *Makeup Supv*: Jim P. Nielsen; *Stunts*: John Wardlow

Cast: Wanda Hendrix (*Genevieve Howard*), Barry Coe (*Paul Howard*), Gisele Mackenzie (*Adelaide*), Maray Ayres (*Eda*), Ty Haller (*Robert*), Pia Shandel (*Laura*), Doris Goldrick (*Myra*), Terrance Kelly, Doris Buckinham (*Sara*), Leanna Heckey (*Jenny*), Pamela Allen, Jack Ammon, Dax Logan, Ivor Harris, George Spracklin, Shanna Dickson, Allen Anderson

Notes: *One Minute Before Death* is a not very interesting period drama with a final "twist" ending that

makes no particular sense (not that much of the preceding footage is very sensible, either).

Genevieve Howard is startled by a mysterious figure in black and falls down a staircase in her home, apparently killing herself. But no, she's actually in a catatonic state, and can see (because nobody bothered to close her eyes) and hear everything that goes on around her, but is unable to move or speak. Placed in a coffin (eyes still open, and fortunately not subjected to embalming), Genevieve watches as her relatives parade in and out prior to the funeral, discussing what they think about her and each other.

Genevieve had married Steven, a much older man, but didn't love him. After Steven's death, she married Paul Howard. Paul, however, is having an affair with the maid, Eda. Genevieve had two stepsons, David (decent fellow)



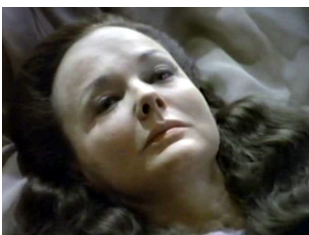
and Greg (money-hungry). Greg is married to Laura, who is in the process of divorcing him and flirts with Paul. Also present are Genevieve's sisters Adelaide and Myra, mostly interested in Genevieve's jewels and

other possessions, and housekeeper Sara and her granddaughter Jenny.

Paul murders Laura and hides her corpse, after she threatens to expose his relationship with Eda. Jenny's cat causes the allergic Genevieve to sneeze and blink, but no one believes Jenny's story. Paul sees his "dead" wife shed a tear, but seals up the coffin and has her buried anyway. Later, he has visions of both Laura's body and Genevieve, which cause him to become hysterical and confess his crime. Genevieve reappears: Jenny had convinced Sara that she was alive, and the housekeeper



ordered Genevieve to be exhumed and revived. Everyone apologises for their bad behaviour. Then--



in an illogical and pointless twist ending--Genevieve wakes up in the night, is frightened by several black-clad figures, and falls down

the stairs to her death! Paul and Eda remove their black cloaks and congratulate themselves on her murder. Wait, what? So everything we saw was...a dream? A flash-forward? Something Genevieve "saw" in her "one minute before death?" This is really confusing and stupid.

One Minute Before Death is mildly entertaining at times, although it's essentially just a melodrama with various scheming family members acting badly as

Genevieve looks on, helplessly (why her eyes were left open is never explained, and why her eyeballs didn't dry out after at least a day or two without blinking is also a great mystery). The performances range from amateurish to slightly less-amateurish to passable. Wanda Hendrix was in her early forties and looks it, but is satisfactory; Maray Ayres and Pia Shandel are too similar in appearance; Gisele Mackenzie, primarily a singer, has little to do (her role in *The Oval Portrait* is much more substantial). The production values are adequate: the majority of the film takes place in a single house, but it looks sturdy enough. The cinematography by León Sánchez is much too high-key to generate any atmosphere, but since this isn't really a horror movie (or even much of a thriller), that's not a serious flaw. Les Baxter's score is alright although the theme "Haunted Love" (by producer Torres Tudela) is heard too often.

A very slight effort, with nothing special to recommend it.



La metralleta infernal [The Infernal Machinegun]

(Pels. Mexicanas en Video-Victor Films,



©1990) Exec Prod: Javier Garza; "Carlos Vasallo presents"; Dir: Juan Manuel Herrera; Adapt: M. Cárdenas; Story: Julián Garza; Photo: Juan Manuel Herrera; Asst Dir: Ana Virginia

López, Yolanda Álvarez; Film Ed: Francisco Chiu; Mkup: Esther Álvarez; Dialog Rec: Daniel García; Sound Engin: Efrén Rojas; Re-rec & Sound: René Cerón; Union: Técnicos y Manuales

Cast: Edgardo Gazcón (*Román*), Luis Aguilar (*Cmdte. Luis*), Claudia Guzmán (*Nancy*), Hilda Aguirre (*Diana*), Julián Garza (*Juan el Tahir*), Jesús González "Chis Chas" (*La "Cuachanga"*), Luis Garza, Juan Martínez, Octavio Castillo, Lombardo Higuera, Jaime Luna, Jaime Garza, Rubén Doria, Rodrigo Nuñez, Roberto Cardona, Silvestre Muñoz, Los Tambiroleros de Linares, Hnos. Hinojosa, Los Grandes de Linares, Claudia Nely y sus Norteñitas, Javier Rios of Los Invasores de Nuevo León

Notes: although this film pays lip service to being a fantasy film, it's not. In the framing sequences, police commander Luis shows some reporters a "cuerno de chivo" (an AK-47 assault rifle), won't let them touch it because it's "cursed" and holds a strange power over anyone who uses it, and tells them the story of Román...which has



no fantasy aspects at all! At film's end, the diabolical AK-

47 vanishes from its spot on the wall of the police station...ooh, spooky.

Nothing particularly "fantastic" occurs when Román gets the weapon: he's just emboldened to finally stand up against people who were mean to him, but his personality



doesn't change, he physically doesn't change (I *thought* I remembered his facial scars vanishing but they don't), and he never acts as if he's "possessed" by the weapon. When his step-brother Julián has the gun, he doesn't act any differently either. I call

shenanigans on Cmdte. Luis and his story of the "curse" of the AK-47.

Román is a young man whose face was scarred as a toddler in a kitchen accident. He works as a janitor in a bank, brings a rose each day to bank clerk Nancy, and plays the guitar. Román lives with his overbearing step-brother Julián, a gambler who inherited all of the family's wealth and never misses a chance to insult or berate Román. Julián has a girlfriend, Diana, who also mistreats the hapless Román. One night, Julián takes an AK-47 from the corpse of a mysterious (Asian?) man killed in an



accident while pursuing Julián's truck. Julián uses the assault rifle to shoot some men he believes have cheated him in a card game.

However, Román gets the

gun and shoots Julián, then drives to the bank where he kills several guards who'd previously mocked him, steals some money, and abducts Nancy. Julián is only wounded, and he and Diana set out to catch Román; the police also pursue him. Eventually, it is the police who find him first, shooting the young man to death.

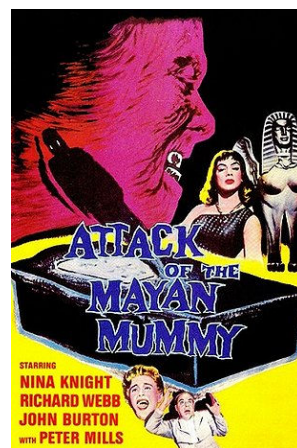
La metrallera infernal is a poor film overall. Fans of *norteño* music might enjoy the numerous musical numbers, but otherwise there is little to recommend it, no sleaze, no outrageous unintended humour, no suspense or thrills. The performances of the principals are adequate but not much more than that: Edgardo Gázquez is mildly sympathetic as Román but the script doesn't develop his character enough. Román's relationship with Nancy is odd: in the first part of the film she seems to appreciate his devotion but has no romantic interest in him, then she's (mildly) frightened when he kidnaps her (after shooting several people in cold blood), and eventually shows some fondness for him during their flight, but none of this is very clearly delineated. Julián Garza and Hilda Aguirre play their roles very broadly, as does Luis Aguilar (the latter two displayed some acting talent in previous films,

but don't seem especially inspired to work hard in a film of this quality). The plot is threadbare and doesn't create any sympathy for anyone. The production values are minimal; nothing is particularly amateurish, but the whole movie looks cheap and crude.

Something better (not necessarily good, but better than the existing result) could have been created from the source material, but it appears no one was interested in (or capable of) doing more than making a cheap and simple-minded film.



Attack of the Mayan Mummy (ADP Productions, ©1964) "Jerry Warren presents..." Dir: Jerry Warren;



Scr: Gilbert Solar [sic], Alfredo Salimar [sic]; Photo: Richard [Enrique] Wallace; Music Dir: Anthony [Antonio Díaz] Conde; Prod Des [sic = Prod Mgr]: Luis de León; Unit Mgr: Joseph Alcalde; Prod Asst: Michael Delrod; Film Ed: Jerry Warren, Jorge Bustos; Set Design: Mala Winter; Makeup: Lester Andre [George Mitchell]; Lighting: Richard Knox; Sound Rec: Guy Stafford

Cast: Nina Knight, Richard Webb, John Burton, Peter Mills [note: these names are probably pseudonyms for Rosita Arenas, Ramón Gay, and others from the original film], Steve Conte (*hired thief*), Jorge Mondragón (*head of scientific association*), Emma Roldán (*does not appear*), George Mitchell (*Dr. Frederick Munson*), Chuck Niles (*Douglas Bank*), Bill White, Fred Hoffman (*Det. Hammond*), Bruno VeSota (*newspaper editor*); unbilled cast from original film (with new character names): Ramón Gay (*Dr. Edmund Redding*), Rosita Arenas (*Ann Taylor*), Crox Alvarado (*Redding's ass't.*); conference attendees: Luis Aceves Castañeda, Julián de Meriche, Salvador Lozano; Jaime González Quiñones (*Timmy*), Ángel di Stefani (*Popoca-mummy*), Estela Inda (*Aztec singer*)

Notes: Another of Jerry Warren's cut-and-paste versions of a Mexican film. Slightly more than half of *Attack of the Mayan Mummy's* running time is new footage



featuring George Mitchell, Chuck Niles, Bruno VeSota, and a handful of other actors employed by Warren, while the rest of the scenes are from *La momia azteca*. Only in the final 10 minutes of

the picture is there any attempt at intercutting the new/old

footage: otherwise, Warren alternates long chunks of dialogue scenes shot in a "newspaper office," a "TV studio," a "malt shop," and someone's house, with the more elaborate Mexican footage. The result is a somewhat boring movie, which inexplicably downplays the titular monster in favour of extended conversations about politics and double-dealing in the scientific community. Perhaps Warren didn't think the original movie contained enough "monster" footage, but the material he inserts instead is not exactly compelling.

[New footage, almost 8 minutes' worth:] Dr. Frederick Munson tells his shocking (yeah, right) story to a newspaper editor. Deposed as head of the Cowan Research institute in Pasadena after the death of his sister, Munson was replaced by Dr. Edmund Redding. Redding also took over the case of Ann Taylor, the subject of a past-lives regression study. **[Mexican footage, although narrated by Munson:]** Dr. Redding infuriates a group of scientists at a conference when he refuses to discuss his research. **[New footage:]** Munson and his colleague Dr.



John Janney discuss Redding and Ann Taylor, and conspire to regain control of the experiment, which may very likely result in the recovery of a fabulous amount of ancient treasure.

[Mexican footage, narrated by Munson:] Redding decides to press on with his work, despite the dangers. **[New footage:]** Munson visits a malt shop (his horrified and uncomfortable reactions to the various dancing teenagers are hilarious to see) to meet with Timmy, his nephew (and Redding's stepson), who is his "mole" in Cowan Research. But Timmy has been grounded and so Munson has a conversation instead with Timmy's girlfriend and her pal. **[Mexican footage, some of which is actually dubbed:]** Redding hypnotises Ann and regresses her to Aztec days. **[New footage:]** A newscaster reports on the Redding expedition's departure for Yucatán. **[Mexican footage; this is the longest continuous piece of original footage, over 17 minutes:]** Redding, Ann, and an associate enter the pyramid; Ann has a flashback to her life as an Aztec princess; the treasure room is discovered; the mummy revives and grabs Dr. Redding. **[New footage:]** Redding is reported dead, but the mummy was subdued by gas and brought to Pasadena for study (none of this is seen, of course). Dr. Janney hires a thief to steal the mummy, with Munson's tacit agreement. The police interview the Cowan Research staff and Munson. The thief enters the lab and is confronted by the mummy, runs away, falls down, and knocks himself out. **[Mexican footage:]** The mummy leaves the lab, goes to Ann's house, grabs his artifacts and abducts Ann. **[New footage intercut with Mexican footage:]** The thief wakes up, drives down the street wildly, and (apparently) hits the mummy and Ann.

[New footage:] A newspaper headline screams "ANN TAYLOR DEAD; MUMMY DESTROYED," but editor Bruno tells Munson they don't have enough proof to run the story, even though the newspaper spent \$200 (!) on making up the front page. Luckily, he adds, you can melt down the lead print and use it again.

Attack of the Mayan Mummy is boring but the Warren-shot scenes have their own bizarre charm. George Mitchell is actually rather good as Professor Munson, as is whoever plays Dr. Janney (Bruno VeSota is adequate). To be sure, their conversations are often senseless and are never in any way appropriate for a movie about reincarnation and/or a murderous mummy, but this is part of their attraction: anybody could have thrown together some scenes with people making inane comments about the "monster" footage, but Warren comes up with a completely different plot involving Munson and Dr. Edmund Redding's scientific rivalry. Some of their dialogue is so convoluted and odd that it almost becomes amusing.

The two biggest problems with the film are (a) it's not really any good as a horror movie, and that's how it was sold, and (b) the cheat ending (the mummy and Ann Taylor hit by a car off-screen) is so colossally stupid that I wouldn't blame audiences if they rioted in the cinemas.

Speaking of this, the poster for the movie is "adapted" from the poster for *The Pharaoh's Curse* (1957), which seems a little daring on the part of Jerry Warren, but perhaps he simply didn't care. Warren's filmography is one of the strangest in Hollywood: he seems to have gone to a lot of unnecessary trouble to embellish the foreign films he purchased (or perhaps he looked at it as the foreign scenes supported his footage), with notably poor results.



El Fantástico vs. El Nahual (FDI Cinema, ©2009)

Prod-Dir: Christopher Luna; *Scr:* Alejandro García; *Story/Orig. Idea:* Christopher Luna; *Photo:* Aram Díaz Cano; *Music:* Esteban "Crunchy" López (Primitiv Records); *Assoc Prod:* Erick Villanueva, José Sarro; *Prod Mgr:* Cristián Gijón; *Asst Dir* Marcelo Rubio Quintal; *Film*



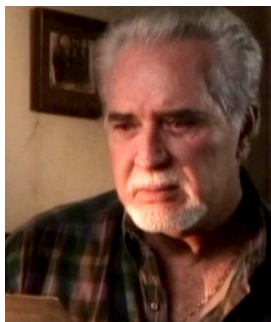
Ed: Alejandro García; *Art Dir:* Noé Díaz Quintero, Ariel Chávez; *FX:* Óscar Tello; *Audio:* Galileo Galaz; *Makeup:* Ricardo Martínez, Aldo

García; *Mechanical Nahual:* Iván Castillo Gómez, Ricardo Chávez Soriano; *Digital Nahual:* Óscar Tello

Cast: Rogelio Guerra (*don Angel*), Ivonne Montero (*Yadhira*), Julio Casado (*Dionisio*), Roger Arroyo (*Chema*), Raymundo Pastor (*Juan*), Moisés Iván Mora (*Julio*), José Antonio Coro (*Padre Miguel*), Rubén García Barreda (*El Fantástico*), Osvaldo Estrella (*Mini Fantástico*), María Barracuda (*first woman in danger*),

Lulú Giner (*second woman in danger*), Joaquín Sanz (*vampire*)

Notes: *El Fantástico vs. El Nahual* has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, it's about a retired masked wrestler/movie star and features some amusing re-created clips (in sepia-tone) from his old films. On the negative side, this is a "fake monster" story and not even a very good one at that (it's more like a rural-



romance *telenovela*, and the senior citizen-wrestler doesn't put on his costume until the last 10 minutes). The film was shot in a small town in the state of Hidalgo but the majority of the scenes take place in a mere handful of nondescript locations, and there's not much real sense of place, nor any especially picturesque buildings or scenery. Production values are minimal: although there are no

special technical flaws, this looks like what it is, a *videohome* shot entirely on location on a very limited budget (I'd guess Rogelio Guerra and Ivonne Montero's salaries were the biggest items). The performances are adequate: Guerra and Montero are the main "names," but Julio Casado, Roger Arroyo, and Raymundo Pastor are also satisfactory in their roles. The music score is quite



good, consisting of "surf music" style instrumentals.

Don Ángel, formerly masked *luchador* "El Fantástico," and his little-person assistant Chema ("Mini Fantástico" in their

previous life) live in a small Mexican town and run the tiny "Cine El Fantástico," which shows 16mm copies of the masked wrestler's old movies to the town's children. Yadhira, a young woman whose late mother was don Ángel's neighbour, returns to town after a failed attempt to succeed in the "big city." Her former boyfriend Juan gives her the cold shoulder—later, it's revealed he visited the city and saw her working as an exotic dancer.

The town fears the depredations of the legendary *Nahual*, a shape-shifting monster. Juan, his pal Julio, and don Ángel believe someone is taking advantage of the villagers' superstitions to commit crimes like cattle rustling. The chief suspect is Dionisio, the crooked police chief. After Dionisio abducts Juan and Yadhira, intending to burn them alive, don Ángel dons the costume of El Fantástico (and rolls his stylish

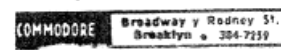


vintage sports car out of the garage, a nice touch) to save his friends and the town.

So, basically, there is no *nahual* in the film, except Dionisio posing as one (and one in a brief dream sequence with Chema). This is kind of a rip-off. *El Fantástico vs. el Nahual* makes up for it (slightly) by what seems to be a genuine fondness for the *lucha*-film genre. Still, a lot more could have been done with the basic premise.

This was copyrighted and released on DVD in 2009, but it was apparently made in 2006, since a teaser trailer was posted on YouTube by the director in early 2007 (there is also a "Making Off" [sic] video available there).

Rogelio Guerra was not a major *lucha* film star, although he did appear (but not always as a wrestler) in *Los leones del ring*, *Los leones del ring contra la Cosa Nostra*, *Una rosa sobre el ring*, *La corona de un campeón*, *Las momias de San Ángel*, and *Ángel del silencio* in the 1970s. He's pretty good in *El Fantástico vs. el Nahual*, although the script unfortunately spends more time on other characters. For much of the 2000s, Guerra's legal battles with TV Azteca were legendary: he initially won a breach of contract lawsuit against the company, then was counter-sued and ordered to pay a huge sum of money and was even prohibited from acting under his own name! These issues have finally been resolved and the actor has been quite busy working on *telenovelas* over the past several years.



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