21 YEARS!!

Yes, The Mexican Film Bulletin begins its 21st consecutive year of publication. Where did the time go? Thanks to long-time readers and “welcome” to those who’ve just discovered us.

NINÓN SEVILLA, 1929-2015

Dancer-actress Ninón Sevilla, one of the most popular stars of the *rumbera* era in Mexico, died in a Mexico City hospital on 1 January 2015; she was 85 years old. Emilia Pérez Castellanos was born in Havana, Cuba in November 1929. She performed in her native land as a chorus girl and dancer, and came to Mexico in the 1940s under the auspices of Fernando Cortés. Sevilla made her screen debut in 1946, and within a short time was elevated to starring roles in films produced by Pedro A. Calderón. Her films include *Perdida*, *Aventurera*, *Sensualidad* (all directed by Alberto Gout, who helmed 6 of Sevilla’s movies), *Víctimas del pecado* (directed by Emilio Fernández), and *Yambaó*. By the late 1950s, the popularity of the style of films Sevilla had been making—usually melodramas with heavy emphasis on dance sequences—declined, and she retired from the screen. She married Dr. José Gil and they had one son, Genaro Lozano.

However, in the early 1980s Sevilla resumed acting, this time in character roles, and won the Best Actress Ariel for her comeback role in *Noche de carnaval* (1981). She appeared in a handful of other films during the decade, and also began to work in *telenovelas*. Sevilla’s last acting role was in the tv series “Qué bonito amor” (2012-2013).

In addition to her Ariel, Sevilla received the lifetime achievement Diosa de Plata in 2009.

FRANCISCO CURIEL, 1950-2014

Francisco Curiel Defosse, a composer and the son of director Federico Curiel, died on 27 December 2014 after suffering a heart attack. Curiel was born in Mexico City in February 1950. He appeared in several films as a boy, most notably in *Santo contra el rey del crimen* (1961), directed by his father; in this movie, Francisco (at left in the photo, with Augusto Benedico and René Cardona Sr.) played “Roberto de la Llata,” who would grow up to become El Santo.

In later years, Curiel became a songwriter, and his music can be heard in several films, including the documentary about his father, entitled *Pichirilo* (2002). This movie was directed by Francisco Curiel’s son Álvaro Curiel, a TV and film director.

FIDEL GARRIGA, 1948-2014

Actor Fidel Garriga died on 10 December 2014 in Mexico City; he was 66 years old. Garriga had suffered a stroke in late 2013 but recovered from this and reappeared on TV in “Los Bravo,” but subsequently developed a fatal infection.

Fidel Garriga appeared in a number of films during his career, including *Morir de madrugada* (1980), *El sargento Capulina*, *Jungle Warriors*, *Licence to Kill*, *Así del precipicio*, and *Amor Xtremo*. He was perhaps best known for his television work: after appearing in numerous Televisa productions from the mid-80s until the mid-90s, including “El vuelo del águila” and “De pura sangre,” he switched to TV Azteca in 1997 and work steadily for that network until his death.

Fidel Garriga is survived by his wife, son, and a grandchild.
**HÉCTOR CARRIÓN DIES**

Héctor Enrique Carrión Samaniego, a long-time member of the musical group Los Hermanos Carrión, died of a heart attack on 30 January 2015; he was 75 years old. The Hermanos Carrión was formed in 1960, led by brothers Ricardo “Güero” and Eduardo “Lalo” Carrión. In 1961, when the group’s bassist left, third brother Héctor (in the middle in the photo above) left his job and joined the band. Los Hermanos Carrión were popular during the Sixties and Seventies, and continue to perform even today.

Although Ricardo “Güero” Carrión forged a solo acting career in addition to his music, Los Hermanos Carrión also appeared in a number of films as a group, including *Los malditos, El Texano, Las hijas de don Laureano, Por mis pistolas* (with Cantinflas), and *Lola la trailera*. Their uncle was prolific film composer Gustavo César Carrión.

Héctor Carrión is survived by his brothers, his wife, and two children.

**LORENA ROJAS, 1971-2015**

Actress Lorena Rojas died of cancer in Miami, Florida, on 16 February 2015. She was 44 years old. Seydi Lorena Rojas González was born in Mexico City in February 1971, and began her career as an actress in the early 1990s. In addition to working on numerous telenovelas and TV programs, she also appeared in a number of films, including *La quebradita* (1993), *Morena* (1994), and *Corazones rotos* (2000). Rojas was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008. Although she underwent chemotherapy and had a mastectomy, the disease returned in 2013 and spread to her bones and then liver, eventually causing her death.

Rojas is survived by her adopted daughter and by her sister, actress Mayra Rosas.

**MEXICAN CINEMA IN 2014**

The number of Mexican films released in Mexico declined from 107 in 2013 to 67 in 2014, and the number of tickets sold for these films dropped by a total of 3 million. However, according to IMCINE director Jorge Sánchez, two 2013 films (*No aceptan devoluciones* and *Nosotros los Nobles*) accounted for a huge percentage of attendance in that year, and no 2014 release achieved equivalent success.

The most popular Mexican film of 2014 was *La dictadura perfecta* (4 million tickets), followed by the comedy *Cásese quien pueda* and *Cantinflas*. Mexican movies accounted for 10% of the Mexican box-office. The most-viewed film in Mexico in 2014 was *Maleficient*, seen by more than 12 million spectators.

**YET MORE ‘BASED ON A REAL STORY’ FILMS**

*Gloria* (Universal Pictures, 2014) *Exec Prod*: Anthony Picciuto, Charlotte Larsen, Max Appedole, Glen Himes, Pedro Solis Cámara, Ángel Losada; *Prod*: Matthias Ehrenberg, Ricardo Kleinbaum, Alan B. Curtiss, Barrie Osborne, Christian Keller; *Assoc Prod*: Eduardo Gómez Treviño, Álvaro Vaqueiro, Braulio Arsuaga, Carlos García de Paredes, Yeoshua Syrquin, Elías Sittón, Salomón Sutton, Eduardo Sitton, Christian Carmona, León Levy, Vita Vargas, Salomón Helfon, Patricio Trad, Sergio Palacios, Stahou Sitto, José Asse, Alex Zitto, Pelo Suelto México Films, Río Negro Prods; *Dir*: Christian Keller; *Scr*: Sabina Berman; *Photo*: Martín Boege; *Music*: Lorne Balfe; *Line Prod*: Luis Díaz; *Film Ed*: Adriana Martínez, Patricia Rommel; *Prod Design*: Julieta Álvarez Icaza; *Vis FX*: Raúl Prado; *Sound Design*: Matías Barberis; *Direct Sound*:...
Gloria, directed by a first-time director from Switzerland, was scripted by the well-known author Sabina Berman. Although made with Trevi’s cooperation, the singer has since characterised the final result in rather unfavourable terms. The film focuses almost entirely on Trevi’s relationship with her producer/lover Sergio Andrade, to the exclusion of all else. Trevi’s life prior to her meeting with Andrade (in 1984, at age 16, according to the movie), her personality, musical ability, passions, thoughts, and so forth, are all either ignored or hugely subordinated to her almost slavish devotion to Andrade (and his callous mistreatment of her and others). “Without him I don’t know who I am,” Gloria says at one point. [As an aside, Trevi’s 3 feature films—two of which were directed by Andrade—are not mentioned.] Gloria includes a number of extended (and very well-produced) musical numbers, but these either support a particular plot point or feel extraneous. Obviously, Andrade’s influence over Trevi was the greatest factor in her life for several decades, but the Gloria Trevi portrayed in Gloria is an extremely passive puppet, manipulated and abused by Andrade yet constantly seeking his affection and approval.

In 1984, Gloria Trevi auditions for an all-girl musical group being formed by producer Sergio Andrade. He spots her raw talent as a singer/songwriter and hires her for the group. Despite married to another (young) woman (Mary Boquitas, who becomes Gloria’s best friend) in the group, Andrade has sex with Gloria, using it as a means of reinforcing his “don’t trust anyone” motto. Gloria leaves Sergio but returns to him several years later, signing a management contract which cedes virtually all control of her career and finances. Andrade gets Gloria booked on the popular TV program “Siempre en Domingo” in 1989. Her uninhibited performance (knocking over a plant, ripping her tights, making provocative gestures and facial expressions) receives an enthusiastic response from the studio audience, but she is blacklisted from media giant Televisa by the scandalised “El Tigre” Azcárraga. Andrade takes her to the rival TV Azteca and Gloria Trevi becomes a major star. Andrade controls her and the other young, female members of his “academy,” doling out sparing praise, punishing and criticising much of the time. [One of his favourite punishments is to lock a girl or girls in a closet; he warns the others, “I have a lot of closets.”] Andrade also sleeps with many of the girls, including an ambitious newcomer, Aline Hernández. Warned he may be charged with statutory rape, Andrade weds Aline. This breaks Gloria’s heart, but she stays with Andrade—at one point even climbing into bed with him and a group of girls and submitting to their sexual advances.
Learning of Aline’s infidelity, Sergio first punishes her (making her sit, naked, in a bathtub full of ice cubes), then divorces her. When Andrade takes Gloria Trevi back to Televisa, TV Azteca entertainment reporter Pati Chapoy convinces Aline to write a tell-all book about the “Trevi-Andrade Clan.” Andrade orders Gloria to announce that she’s retiring from singing to be with Andrade, who is suffering from cancer (which he wasn’t—he did have Guillain-Barré syndrome). They move to Brazil. Gloria has a daughter, and they’re joined by Mary Boquitas. Eventually, Andrade assembles a new “clan” of young girls who want to be singers. In 1999, the mother of one of the girls (Karina Yapor) files charges in Mexico against Andrade for rape and corruption of a minor, after discovering her daughter had abandoned her infant child in Spain. Meanwhile, Gloria’s own baby dies of accidental suffocation. The Brazilian authorities arrest Gloria, Andrade, and Mary Boquitas and send them to prison to wait for extradition to Mexico. Gloria is encouraged to separate her case from Andrade’s but she refuses. She trades sex with the prison warden for a conjugal visit with the wheelchair-bound Andrade, but he is self-centered and uncaring. Gloria is shown photos proving her dead child’s body was callously discarded at Andrade’s orders. Gloria attempts to commit suicide but is saved, then realises she is pregnant again. [The implication is that the child is the warden’s, but Andrade is named as the father in official papers.]

This inspires her to have her case separated from Andrade’s and she is extradited to Mexico, where she is eventually acquitted of complicity in his crimes. [A printed epilogue indicates Andrade testified that she was innocent.]

Gloria is very well-produced and acted. Whatever Christian Keller’s previous experience, he’s turned in a slick and professional product. As noted above, a number of live musical performances were recreated for the film, and these take place in front of large numbers of screaming fans (some music videos are also shown) and are generally quite effective. Sofia Espinosa bears a distinct physical resemblance to Gloria Trevi and her imitation of the star’s singing and dancing is excellent. Espinosa’s acting performance is also fine, although the passive nature of her character limits the range of emotions she is required to portray. Marco Pérez, an experienced actor but hardly a major star, turns in a good performance as Sergio Andrade. Everyone else is satisfactory, although only a few get the opportunity to do much “acting” (Tatiana del Real as Mary Boquitas, Ximena Romo as Aline, a couple of others).

An interesting (if deliberately limited in scope) “partial biography.”

Bienvenida al clan [Welcome to the Clan] (Tintorera & Cinema Inc., ©2000) Prod: Rodolfo de Anda; Dir/Scr: Carlos Franco; Photo: Mario Becerra; Music: Federico Bonasso; Film Ed: Luis Fernando Aguayo, Carlos Franco

Cast: Manuel Ojeda (Humberto Nava), Isaura Espinoza (Isabel), Alejandro Bichir (Teodoro), Dulce Saviñon (Alishai), Mireya Gerónimo (“Milena”–María Elena Sandoval), Natalia Velasco (Venecia), Sharon Quintana (Lydieth), Rodolfo Acosta (Rubén), Nathán Chagoya (Jorge), Alejandra Goltás (Laurita), Mariana Castellanos (Miravella)

Notes: this made-for-TV movie is clearly based on the Gloria Trevi scandal, although the names are slightly altered. Gloria Trevi (aka Gloria de los Ángeles Treviño) becomes "Milena" (aka María Elena Sandoval); her manager, mentor, and lover Sergio Andrade is here called "Humberto Nava," and young performer Aline (who wrote a best-seller exposing Trevi and Andrade's abuses) is dubbed "Alishai."

The film is told in flashback, as Isabel, Alishai’s mother, denounces Nava and Milena to the police for brainwashing her daughter. Isabel is the single mother of high school student Alishai, who is spotted backstage at Milena's rock concert and invited to visit
the star's home later. Isabel and Alishai are convinced by Nava, Milena's impresario, that Alishai has a future as a performer. Isabel signs a contract giving Nava 35% of Alishai's future earnings, and the teenager begins attending classes at Milena's mansion after school.

Nava's strict, even excessive discipline prompts Alishai to ask her mother to cancel the classes, but the ambitious Isabel is easily convinced by Nava and Milena that her daughter is exaggerating. Nava also sends Alishai and some of his other young "pupils" out as prostitutes for wealthy businessmen. Alishai becomes pregnant and is forced to have an abortion. The child's father, a rich man, offers to help Alishai escape Nava's clutches; she goes to live on his country estate, but Nava arranges to have the man's business associates compel him to return her to him. As the film concludes, Alishai is living with Milena, Nava, and the other young women (and their infant children) of his "clan."

Bienvenida al clan is reasonably entertaining and fairly slick, although clearly made on a fairly low budget. Manuel Ojeda is good as the brooding, manipulative Nava, and Dulce Saviñon is quite cute in the Alishai role; Isaura Espinoza does a good job as the ambitious Isabel, but Mireya Gerónimo is rather colorless as Milena (perhaps to suggest she was merely a pawn of Nava).

The film was released on video in Mexico prior to its U.S. TV premiere in 2002 (it may also have been shown on Mexican television earlier). There are suggestions that some scenes may have been trimmed, although this may not be the case. There are several clear hints of lesbianism, and one surprising early scene in which Alishai (before she joins the "clan") lies in her bed at home, gazes at a poster of Milena, and discreetly but clearly pleasures herself (under a blanket). Nonetheless, the depiction of Nava's abuses is fairly tame and the picture as a whole isn't excessively exploitative or lurid.

Bienvenida al clan is very predictable for those with some knowledge of the Trevi-Andrade scandal, and its lack of a resolution is somewhat frustrating (but, since it was made in 2000, the real-life case was far from resolved at that point). However, it is decent entertainment.

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*NINÓN SEVILLA FILMS*

**Víctimas del pecado** [Victims of Sin] (Prods. Calderón, 1957) *Prod:* Pedro & Guillermo Calderón; *Dir-Adapt:* Emilio Fernández; *Story:* Emilio Fernández, Mauricio Magdaleno; *Photo:* Gabriel Figueroa; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Mgr:* César Pérez Luis; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Hernández; *Asst Dir:* A. Corona Blake; *Film Ed:* Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir:* Manuel Fontanals; *Decor:* Manuel Parra; *Asst Photo:* Daniel López, Ignacio Romero, Pablo Ríos; *Choreog:* Jorge Harrison; *Makeup:* Ana Guerrero; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *SpFX:* Jorge Benavides

**Cast:** Ninón Sevilla (Violeta), Tito Junco (Santiago), Rodolfó Acosta (Rodolfo), Rita Montaner (Rita Montaner), Poncianito (Ismael Pérez) (Juanito), Margarita Ceballos (Rosa), Arturo Soto Rangel (prison warden), Francisco Reigueru (don Gonzalo), Guadalupe Carriles (doña Longina), Jorge Treviño (shoe salesman), Pedro Vargas (himself), Pérez Prado y su orquesta, Inés Murillo (woman with child), Enrique Carrillo (policeman), Aurora Cortés (La Prieta), Lupe del Castillo (Señorita Montaño), Enedina Díaz de León (prison guard), Margarita Luna (barber), Chimi Monterrey, Luis Aceves Castañeda (Luis, cabaret emcee), Yolanda Ortiz (Raquel), Leonor Gómez (prisoner), Ignacio Peón (judge), Enriqueta Reza, Carlos Riquelme (Carlos), Ángela Rodríguez, Aurora Ruiz (woman with baby), Elena Luquín, Estela Matute, Hernán Vera (José, cook), Hilda Vera; *Rodolfo’s henchmen:* Agustín Fernández, Rogelio Fernández, Jorge Arriaga; *cabaret patrons:* Gregorio Acosta, Ricardo Adalid, Salvador Godínez, Carlos León, Álvaro Matute; *cabaretas:* Magdalena Estrada, Gloria Mestre, Acela Vidaurre.

**Notes:** this is an outstanding, stylish melodrama with music (as opposed to being a “Ninón Sevilla” vehicle, as most of her films directed by Alberto Gout were). Emilio Fernández, although perhaps best-known for his tales of rural and historical Mexico (Flor silvestre, María Candelaria, La perla, Enamorado, Pueblerina, Río Escondido), largely switched to “cosmopolitan” films in this era: Salón México, Acapulco, Las Islas Marías, Siempre tuya, and so on. Víctimas del pecado, like Salón México, is an entry in the cabaretera genre.

Although Ninón Sevilla performs 4 dance routines in this picture, these all take place in lower-class venues—the “Changoo” and the “Máquina Loca”
cabarets—rather than in luxurious nightclubs or theatres, and are staged and shot accordingly. Sevilla wears an elaborate costume in only one number, otherwise appearing in “regular” dresses. Curiously, this bare-bones presentation points out the fact that she was not an especially accomplished or athletic dancer, and this in turn makes her character seem more realistic: there’s little chance of her being “discovered” and turned into a star. She seems to have found her milieu in these working-class establishments. That said, several of her musical numbers are very interesting. In one, she has a “dance-off” with an Afro-Cuban man (Chimi Monterrey?), and in another she continues to dance even as she warily watches the arrival of her nemesis Rodolfo, recently released from prison.

Sevilla looks noticeably different in Víctimas del pecado, younger and thinner than one remembers her from other films of the same era. She’s clearly the protagonist but is definitely not the whole show: Rodolfo Acosta, Tito Junco, Margarita Ceballos, and (in the last section) “Poncianito” all have substantial footage away from Sevilla’s character.

Tito Junco is, for a change, a sympathetic character but isn’t given a lot of development. Acosta, the first person seen in the movie, has a very complex role. He’s a pimp and the head of a robbery gang who shoots a cinema cashier for no reason, orders his former lover to dump her infant child in a trash bin, and savagely beats women and children—a heinous villain, but not a simplistic cartoon. He’s characterised as vain, selfish, a good dancer, cowardly, vengeful. None of these are positive traits, but his role is more fleshed-out than anyone else in the film, Ninón Sevilla’s included.

Violeta, recommended by her friend Rita Montaner, is hired by don Gonzalo as a dancer at his “Changoo” club. Pimp Rodolfo hangs out at the club, where he is confronted one night by Rosa, his former lover, and her infant. Rodolfo refuses to acknowledge the child is his. He informs Rosa he’ll take her back, but only if she discards the baby in a trash can! Amazingly, she does, then accompanies Rodolfo and his men as they rob a cinema and murder the cashier. When Rodolfo and Rosa return to the Changoo, Violeta demands to know where the baby is—told it’s in a trash can, Violeta runs to rescue the child (just before the trash is collected— although there’s no real suggestion the infant would have been dumped in the garbage truck or otherwise harmed) and decides to adopt it. However, her refusal to give up the baby results in her dismissal from her job.

Violeta becomes a prostitute to support herself and the baby. One night she meets Santiago, who discovers the child and tells Violeta to look him up at his club, “La Máquina Loca,” if she ever wants to change her life. But Rodolfo also finds Violeta and tries to get her to join his stable of whores; he threatens to dispose of the baby and savagely beats Violeta when she resists. However, numerous nearby prostitutes hear the commotion and rush to Violeta’s aid, detaining Rodolfo in time for the police to arrive. Rodolfo is arrested and sent to prison based on Violeta’s testimony.

Hired by Santiago as a bargirl, Violeta soon becomes the featured dancer in the cabaret, which is in the railyards and is frequented by railway employees. Santiago and Violeta become a couple and raise the infant Juanito as their son. When he is old enough, they send Juanito to a boarding school, so he won’t know how they make their living (shades of Salón México).

However, when Juanito is 6 years old, Rodolfo is released from prison. He shoots Santiago and tries to force Juanito to become a youthful accomplice in his...
crimes, but Violeta tracks them down and shoots Rodolfo to death. She is sent to prison.

Juanito becomes a newspaper boy and a shoeshine boy, visiting his mother faithfully each week. For Mother’s Day, he buys her a pair of shoes but arrives after visiting hours and is denied entrance to the prison. The kindly prison warden spots him and—aware of Violeta’s unjust conviction—arranges to have Violeta freed and reunited with Juanito.

The script of *Víctimas del pecado* is somewhat unusual, structurally. The film opens with Violeta already employed at the Changoo club, but as a newcomer. So we don’t get the typical scenes showing her pre-cabaretera “decent” life, yet she’s not yet established in the demi-monde. We don’t know what precipitated her “fall,” but her status in the Changoo is above that of bargirls: she’s a performer. She falls even further, into pure prostitution, then rises again when she goes to work at Santiago’s establishment (first as bargirl, then as a dancer), only to fall once more after his death, going to prison for the killing of Violeta, then as a dancer), only to fall once more after his death, going to prison for the killing of Violeta, then as a dancer), only to fall once more after his death, then as a dancer; and rise” plot

Consequently, *Víctimas del pecado* doesn’t follow the standard “fall and rise” plot of many *cabaretera* films: Violeta’s life is a constant roller-coaster of multiple highs and lows.

*Víctimas del pecado* is filled with some of the most outrageously melodramatic moments ever filmed. These include Rodolfo demanding that Rosa prove her loyalty by leaving her infant in trash bin (and she does!); Violeta crashing through a window like Batman and shooting Rodolfo as he slaps Juanito; and Juanito giving his tearful mother some flowers, candy, bread, and money on visiting day at the prison. However, perhaps the most sustained and florid sequence occurs when Rodolfo arrives at Violeta’s shabby room to “recruit” her as a whore: when he threatens the baby, Violeta flies at him in a rage, they battle fiercely until Rodolfo gets the upper hand and savagely beats her. Violeta’s screams summon a crowd of prostitutes from the street, who surround Rodolfo and attack him, until the police finally arrive and take everyone to the delegación.

The film features some excellent Gabriel Figueroa photography. While Figueroa is perhaps best-known for his “people silhouetted against the sky” shots in natural locations—which at times feel like excessive pictorialism for its own sake—he was also capable of creating striking images in an urban environment. A few of these do seem self-consciously arty (notably the scene in which Violeta walks on a railroad bridge as smoke from locomotives billows into the sky), but *Víctimas del pecado* is still clearly the work of a master of cinematography (credit should also be given to director Fernández and art director Manuel Fontanals for the film’s overall look).

*Víctimas del pecado* was nominated for two Ariel Awards, but neither Gabriel Figueroa (Best Photography) nor Ismael Pérez “Poncianito” (Best Juvenile Actor) received the prize.

This is really an excellent film in almost every way.

**Noche de carnaval** [Carnival Night] (Prods. Águila, 1981) Exec Prod: José Aguilar B.; Prod: Antonio Aguilar; Dir: Mario Hernández; Scr: Xavier Robles; Photo: Raúl Domínguez; Music: Manuel Ortiz; Music Adv: Antonio Aguilar; Prod Mgr: Marco Contreras; Asst Dir: Javier Durán; Film Ed: Sergio Soto; Art Dir: Oliverio Ortega; Camera Op: Alberto Arellano; Makeup: Marcela Meyer; Sound Engin: Manuel Rincón; Union: STIC

**Cast:** Carmen Salinas (Panchita), Manuel Ojeda (Diablo), Sergio Ramos "El Comanche" (Zangarrón), Ninón Sevilla (Ninón), Rebeca Silva (Rebecca), José Carlos Ruiz (Jincho), Jaime Garza (Pepe’s friend), Noé Murayama (union official), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (Pepe), Alejandro Parodi (Jorge), Gerardo Vigil (Chipujo), Juan Ángel Martínez (Manica), Tina Romero (Irma), Rodrigo Puebla (Romualdo García), Luis Manuel Pelayo (emcee), Leonor Llausás (Tulia’s mother), Jorge Reynoso (hunchman), Jorge Zamora "Zamorita" (Zangarrón hanger-on), Eric del Castillo (police captain), Carlos Riquelme (Mustafá Mansour), Carlos Villareal, Norma Mora, [Luz]

**Music:** Antonio Aguilar; Sound Engin: Marcela Meyer; Union: STIC

**Cast:** Carmen Salinas (Panchita), Manuel Ojeda (Diablo), Sergio Ramos "El Comanche" (Zangarrón), Ninón Sevilla (Ninón), Rebeca Silva (Rebecca), José Carlos Ruiz (Jincho), Jaime Garza (Pepe’s friend), Noé Murayama (union official), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (Pepe), Alejandro Parodi (Jorge), Gerardo Vigil (Chipujo), Juan Ángel Martínez (Manica), Tina Romero (Irma), Rodrigo Puebla (Romualdo García), Luis Manuel Pelayo (emcee), Leonor Llausás (Tulia’s mother), Jorge Reynoso (hunchman), Jorge Zamora "Zamorita" (Zangarrón hanger-on), Eric del Castillo (police captain), Carlos Riquelme (Mustafá Mansour), Carlos Villareal, Norma Mora, [Luz]

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**Cast:** Carmen Salinas (Panchita), Manuel Ojeda (Diablo), Sergio Ramos "El Comanche" (Zangarrón), Ninón Sevilla (Ninón), Rebeca Silva (Rebecca), José Carlos Ruiz (Jincho), Jaime Garza (Pepe’s friend), Noé Murayama (union official), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (Pepe), Alejandro Parodi (Jorge), Gerardo Vigil (Chipujo), Juan Ángel Martínez (Manica), Tina Romero (Irma), Rodrigo Puebla (Romualdo García), Luis Manuel Pelayo (emcee), Leonor Llausás (Tulia’s mother), Jorge Reynoso (hunchman), Jorge Zamora "Zamorita" (Zangarrón hanger-on), Eric del Castillo (police captain), Carlos Riquelme (Mustafá Mansour), Carlos Villareal, Norma Mora, [Luz]

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**Music:** Antonio Aguilar; Sound Engin: Marcela Meyer; Union: STIC

**Cast:** Carmen Salinas (Panchita), Manuel Ojeda (Diablo), Sergio Ramos "El Comanche" (Zangarrón), Ninón Sevilla (Ninón), Rebeca Silva (Rebecca), José Carlos Ruiz (Jincho), Jaime Garza (Pepe’s friend), Noé Murayama (union official), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (Pepe), Alejandro Parodi (Jorge), Gerardo Vigil (Chipujo), Juan Ángel Martínez (Manica), Tina Romero (Irma), Rodrigo Puebla (Romualdo García), Luis Manuel Pelayo (emcee), Leonor Llausás (Tulia’s mother), Jorge Reynoso (hunchman), Jorge Zamora "Zamorita" (Zangarrón hanger-on), Eric del Castillo (police captain), Carlos Riquelme (Mustafá Mansour), Carlos Villareal, Norma Mora, [Luz]

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Notes: Mario Hernández was Antonio Aguilar’s “house director” during the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to helming many of Aguilar’s starring vehicles in this era, Hernández was also given the opportunity to direct “specials” produced by Aguilar but starring others, such as Las noches de Blanquita (which tried to make a movie star out of Antonio Aguilar Jr.), Que viva Tepito! and Noche de carnaval, all written by Xavier Robles.

Noche de carnaval is particularly notable as the comeback film of Ninón Sevilla, who hadn’t appeared in a movie since the late 1950s (she had a small role in Las noches de Blanquita, also shot in 1981, but Noche de carnaval was filmed first). The role was tailored for Sevilla: her character is a bar-girl named “Ninón,” after her youthful resemblance to the movie star, and posters and photos from Sevilla’s earlier films adorn the bar-girl’s bedroom. [Presumably, if Sevilla hadn’t been available, the script could have been changed to accommodate some other former star.] Sevilla won an Ariel Award as Best Actress for her performance (the film was nominated for 5 additional prizes, including Best Film, Director, and Screenplay, but did not win), and was inspired to resume her acting career in films and television.

The film takes place at carnaval time in Veracruz: during the days prior to Ash Wednesday, numerous parades and other events take place, similar to Mardi Gras in New Orleans or the famous carnivals of Brazil. Noche de carnaval features footage shot on location in Veracruz, although the majority of the drama unfolds in a single cabaret (which may very well have been a studio set). Various groups of people come together to celebrate in the nightclub:

--Middle-aged bargirls Ninón and Panchita, who get paid by the number of drinks their companions order. Their first “client” is drunken poet Jorge, a visitor from Mexico City. Ninón’s proudest moment was being named queen of the carnaval as a young woman: she met Ninón Sevilla, who remarked on their physical resemblance.

--A group of dock workers, including El Diablo, Jincho, Manica, and Chipujo. A corrupt union official had ordered them to work a double shift so a ship could be unloaded; Diablo and his friends felt this was an imposition on them, and walked off the job. They’re joined by Romualdo, a displaced campesino who’s been unsuccessfully trying to get work on the docks. The dock workers make friends with Ninón and Panchita; Ninón and Diablo become especially close in a short time. Rebeca and some other, younger bargirls disparage Ninón and Panchita, who reply in kind. At one point, during a dance contest, Ninón and Rebeca get into an actual brawl. As Kramer would say, “Yeah, yeah, cat fight!”

--The current queen of the carnaval, Tulia, and her mother. They’re accompanied by members of her “court,” as well as wealthy “Arab” businessman don Mustafá. Although he’s many years older than Tulia, Mustafá has lustful designs on her (and his money and power will guarantee his success in this area). Also seated at the head table are influential businessman Zangarrón and his henchmen.

--Pepe and his wife Irma, along with Pepe’s friend and his girlfriend. Pepe flirts and dances with his friend’s date, which throws Irma and the friend together. At one point, the latter couple disappears from the cabaret. When they return, Irma asks the young man if he wants to dance, but he claims his leg hurts. “I told you we shouldn’t have done it standing up,” she replies.
--Three university students who get progressively drunker, fail to pick up any women, and argue about politics. One of the young men’s father is supposedly in the film industry, and this leads to a discussion of the sad state of Mexican cinema: bad movies are advertised hasta la sopa (literally “even in the soup,” but meaning “everywhere”), but the good ones are hidden in flea-pit cinemas and don’t even appear on the listing of films (cartelera). Similarly, “good Mexican novels” are rare, while trash literature sells hundreds of thousands of copies.

The corrupt union official and his thugs arrive. Zangarrón, learning the client was angry that his ship wasn’t completely unloaded, tells them to punish Diablo for causing the walkout. When Diablo goes into the men’s room, he’s assaulted by the gangsters and dragged outside to the beach. Beaten and kicked, he’s finally stabbed to death. Tulia and don Mustafá, having sex nearby, spot his corpse. The police are summoned, and everyone in the cabaret is questioned. Zangarrón and don Mustafá use their influence (and bribes) to avoid being taken into custody, leaving only Ninón, Panchita, and Diablo’s hapless friends to take the blame.

Noche de carnaval is quite entertaining, although the cabaret sequences (which are the bulk of the movie) fall into a fairly predictable pattern, alternating musical numbers with dialogue scenes (hopping around the room from group to group in the latter case). The dialogue alternates between melodramatic conversations about personal issues and somewhat stilted socio-political diatribes. Over here, Irma complains about her husband Pepe to his best friend! Dance break! Over here, Diablo bitterly explains the exploitation of workers! Dance break! Over here, Tulia’s mother sucks up to don Mustafá as he gropes her daughter under the table! Dance break! Over here, Ninón says the greatest moment of her life was being named queen of the carnaval, and it’s all been downhill from there!

The performances are all solid. Ninón Sevilla isn’t glamourised in her role, looking every bit of her 51 years of age (and then some), although her legs (exposed in the cat fight) are still pretty good. She’s a sad and sort of pitiful person, whose sole claim to fame was her youthful resemblance to a star, and the honour of being chosen queen of the carnaval, once. Now she lives in a cluttered apartment with Panchita and a little dog, scraping by on money she earns as a bargirl. Carmen Salinas is well-known for her recurring role as “La Corcholata” in numerous fichera films and sexy-comedies, but plays it mostly straight here, without the exaggerated “drunk” act. Manuel Ojeda, despite his rather villainous appearance, had sympathetic lead roles in a number of films—including this one—and is ably supported by José Carlos Ruiz, Juan Ángel Martinez, etc. Alejandro Parodi unfortunately overdoes his “drunken poet” routine, spouting verses, staggering around, passing out, then repeating these steps again and again. Everyone else is fine.

A bit more serious in intent than similarly-formatted films (for example, Burlesque), Noche de carnaval is generally interesting and entertaining, with a strong cast.

More Carnaval-Time in Veracruz

Trágico carnaval [Tragic Carnival] (Prods. Panamericanas, ©1991) Prod: Roberto Moreno Castilleja; Dir: Damián Acosta Esparza; Scr: Carlos Valdemar; Photo: Raúl Domínguez, Raúl Jiménez; Music: Capitol Records (The Professional) (Old Georg); Prod Chief: Carolina Fuentes, Adolfo Moreno González; Film Ed: Julio Ruiz Álvarez; Spec FX: Arturo Godínez; Stunts: Raúl Lópeez; Sound: Roberto Martínez, Joel de la Rosa Cast: Hugo Stiglitz (Col. Damián Treviño), Ana Patricia Rojo (Claudia Treviño), César Sobrevals (Cmdte. Sobrevals), Lyn May (dancer), Norma Herrera (Sra. Treviño), Mario del Río (Carlos...
Notes: this is an adequate crime-genre videohome, although there is nothing particularly outstanding about it. The first part of the film includes footage shot during the carnaval at Veracruz—and the actors interact with the parade, so it's not simply stock shots—but the majority of the action takes place in a nondescript location in the state of México (it's described as a cabin but more closely resembles a closed, rustic roadside café, right off the highway). Director Acosta (who has a cameo role as a hotel clerk) maintains a decent pace, helped by the melodramatics in the script and the scenery-chewing performances of the cast. The hero's role is split between Hugo Stiglitz and César Sobrevals, which gives them both short shrift: far more time and attention is lavished on the relatively large gang of criminals (6 people) and their victims.

During carnaval, Claudia—the daughter of wealthy ex-military man Col. Treviño—is abducted from a parade float by a gang of kidnappers. Claudia's boyfriend Ricardo is also taken. The criminals hide out at a rural cabin in the nearby state of México. The gang is led by young petty crook Carlos, and includes his girlfriend Sara, another young woman (Iris), slightly older Roberto (who's wounded during the abduction), Gerardo (who planned the crime, hoping to gain enough money to pay back what he'd embezzled from his uncle's company), and Pedro, the loose cannon brother of Carlos.

Police commander Sobrevals asks Treviño to leave the investigation to the authorities, but Treviño says he'll personally retrieve his daughter if she isn't rescued soon. Sobrevalls soon discovers the Ramírez brothers are behind the crime (Pedro had bragged to his erstwhile girlfriend, a dancer) and trails Treviño when Carlos instructs him to come to a hotel in México and wait for instructions. However, Carlos and Sara abduct Treviño and try to kill him, but—in the manner of bumbling movie criminals everywhere—push him down a steep embankment before they try to shoot him. Then they simply assume he's dead, and drive away.

Meanwhile, Pedro makes a pass at Claudia; Ricardo tries to defend her, and is shot to death by Roberto. Gerardo, feeling guilty, kills Roberto, but is unable to prevent Pedro from raping Claudia. When Carlos returns, he has Claudia cleaned up and taken to a quarry so her father can see her and then turn over the ransom. A gunfight breaks out, but Treviño triumphs—with the assistance of Sobrevals and his men, who arrive via helicopter and automobile at the last minute—and all of the kidnappers are killed.

The performances are...energetic. Aside from deadpan Hugo Stiglitz and more or less naturalistic César Sobrevals and (believe it or not) Lyn May, most of the rest of the cast seems to have had a good time shouting their lines while pulling faces. The most notable of these is the actor playing the manic Pedro, but almost everyone else does it, too, laughing evily (all the villains) or screaming and/or crying hysterically (Claudia, Ricardo, Claudia's mother).

Oddly enough, while Carlos and Pedro’s previous criminal careers are mentioned (pickpockets and car thieves), the only character whose back-story is revealed (in a strange flashback sequence) is Gerardo. Gerardo embezzled money from his uncle and devised the kidnap plan to recuperate the lost funds: suddenly, there’s a flashback showing the uncle browbeating Gerardo and threatening to send him to prison unless he repays the money in a few
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days. This is apparently when Gerardo thought up the scheme, but it certainly took more than a matter of days to (a) pick a victim (which Carlos indicates he did), and (b) arrange for the execution of the plot (which apparently required the potential abductee to be riding on a float during *carnaval*). The sequence of Gerardo and his uncle could easily have been omitted, since it provides no additional information and stands out like a sore thumb. While Gerardo is one of the more sympathetic members of the gang (he and Iris are slightly less psycho than the others), he doesn’t change sides and in fact is shot down by Treviño and the police like all the rest at the climax.

A mildly satisfactory time-waster: nothing special, but not boring.

MORE HUGO AND HIS HATS

Las garras del vicio* [The Claws of Vice] (Prods. Cinematográficas ARSA, 1989 © 1990)

*Prod: Raúl Ruiz Santos, Felipe Pérez Arroyo, Lázaro Morales George; Dir: Ángel Rodríguez Vázquez; Scr: Patricia Fuentes Calderón, Ángel Rodríguez Vázquez; Photo: Febronio Teposte [sic]; Makeup: Jenny Benezara

*aka Seducción y muerte

*Cast: Hugo Stiglitz (Cmdte. Nava), Ana Luisa Pelufo [sic] (La Soñadora aka Amelia Santos), Olga Rios (Iris Zabaleta), Bruno Rey (don Ernesto), Salvador Julián (José Luis), Dora y Angélica Infante, Rosario Escalante, Julia Patricia, Tibero y sus Gatos Negros (band), Candy y el Principio, Mel y su Show, Celfo Sánchez, Alida Canales, Adriana Winkler, Zully Zindell, Bárbara Fox, Yolanda Infante, Roberto Ortiz "El Cora," Félix Moreno, José Luis Cervantes, Lázaro Morales

*Notes: this is a bad direct-to-video production, shot in murky 16mm, padded with boring musical numbers, scripted in a slapshod fashion, and starring one of the least likely leading actresses in screen history. Generally, I try not to criticize the appearance of screen performers, but I find it extremely hard to accept Olga Rios as the heroine of this movie. She has a rather lush body and is not reluctant to display it in its entirety in various dance scenes, and in fact she is not a horrible actress (which is not to say she's good), but Rios facially resembles a strange hybrid of Lyn May and Sasha Montenegro, drawn in the broadest possible strokes. When I saw her in a film made a few years earlier, I was certain that she had had (very bad) plastic surgery and , she is even less attractive in Las garras del vicio. On the other hand, if the leading actress in Las garras del vicio had been the most beautiful woman in the world, the film would still be awful: awful with a beautiful star, but awful nonetheless.

Four young women live in a provincial town. They are sisters, and orphans (curiously, 3 are blonde and one has black hair, while their mother had red hair). The oldest, Iris, decides to go to the capital in search of their long-lost mother, who abandoned them years before to seek her fortune as a star. Iris has an idea of becoming a star as well. In the capital, she visits a friend from their village, now working as a maid. Iris gets directions to a nightclub whose address had been found in her mother's possessions.

Naturally, this nightclub is exactly the one where Iris's mother now lives: she is a befuddled drunk known as "La Soñadora" (the Dreamer), who has to be locked up or she'll steal drinks from the tables of customers. The club is owned by don Ernesto. When Iris comes looking for her mother, Ernesto says he will help her find the older woman, but instead drugs Iris and rapes her (in a long, creepy scene with inappropriately romantic music playing on the soundtrack). Iris is rather easily brow-beaten into working for Ernesto. However, even though she has a very good picture of her mother, she doesn't recognize La Soñadora as the same person (don Ernesto does, immediately, when shown the photo)--but La Soñadora, who presumably hasn't seen any of her daughters for a number of...
years, instantly recognizes Iris. To spare her daughter's feelings, she is rude to Iris and insists the new dancer stay out of her way.

Iris's sisters get brief, cryptic notes from her. When Iris's sweetheart José Luis returns from a long absence, he heads for the city to track her down. Instead, he's waylaid in the nightclub and killed, and his body is dumped in a vacant lot. This draws the attention of police officer Nava, who interviews Iris and breaks the news to her. Iris and La Soñadora finally get together and admit/discover their mother/daughter relationship. To get them out of the way, Ernesto has them sequestered in a house. Iris's other three sisters show up looking for her. Ernesto and his henchmen decide to wipe out the whole family; La Soñadora steps in front of a bullet intended for Iris and is mortally wounded. The police, led by Nava, crash in and arrest the villains. Iris and her sisters mournfully view their mother's corpse.

Las garras del vicio is loaded with so many coincidences and illogical turns that listing them would be an unjustified waste of paper. In addition to those mentioned previously (i.e., Iris's strange inability to recognize her mother), here are just some of the most blatant:

--is there only one nightclub in Mexico City? Neither Iris nor José Luis nor her sisters have any trouble finding don Ernesto's cabaret, where La Soñadora has been working or hanging out for many years.

--if don Ernesto is so ruthless (and he is), why does he keep La Soñadora around? (the answer to this might be that he has some affection for her, but he doesn't show it)

--after she has been drugged and raped (or at least fondled) by Ernesto, Iris makes no attempt to escape from the nightclub, and quickly becomes a headliner (under the stage name "Olga Rios," to explain the real-life advertising photos seen in the film). She apparently still believes Ernesto can help "find" her mother (as if he were to be trusted).

The performances are marginally acceptable. Bruno Rey is a little too avuncular to be really believable as the ruthless satyr Ernesto, but he's OK; Ana Luisa Peluffo gives it the old melodrama try as the tipsy but self-sacrificing mother; Hugo Stiglitz only has a few scenes and displays no particular personality or emotion but he's satisfactory. Olga Rios, as mentioned above, is not a very good actress but she's adequate for the level of melodrama we're mired in here; her "sisters" are also barely acceptable.

One might note that despite the sleazy subject matter, the nudity in this movie is restricted to the various "dance" numbers: I put "dance" in quotes, since the opening cabaret sequence features a blonde who doesn't even attempt to dance as she leisurely and disinterestedly removes all of her clothing. At least Olga Rios does a minimal bump and grind as she strips. The cabaret sequences also include a few comedy bits which are mildly amusing and mercifully brief.

The production values are marginal, but not horrible. As usual for this type of thing, real locations were used so there were no "sets" to build; the photography is not especially good, and the music score is mediocre.

Very low-grade melodrama.

Women over the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown

La gota de sangre [The Drop of Blood] (Procimex, 1949) Prod: Rafael Baledón, Chano Urueta; Dir-Scr: Chano Urueta; Photo: Agustín Jiménez; Music: Jorge Pérez H.; Prod Mgr: Guillermo Cramer; Prod Chief: Enrique Morfín; Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: Juan José Marino; Art Dir: Jorge Fernández; Camera Asst: Sergio Véjar; Makeup: Felisa L. de Guevara; Dialog Rec: Luis Fernández; Music/Re-rec: Enrique Rodríguez; Lilia Michel's Costumes: A. Valdéz Peza

Cast: Lilia Michel (Alma), Rafael Baledón (Rodolfo), Tito Junco (Juan José), Olga Jiménez
Notes: this is a moderately entertaining thriller, loaded with Chano Urueta's usual camera tricks and melodramatic bombast. Ludicrous and overblown at times, La gota de sangre is buoyed by good (if florid) performances and a sublimely ridiculous happy ending.

A mystery woman has murdered seven men in Mexico, killing each a few days after marrying them. The police have no clues—even descriptions of the killer are vague. Meanwhile, Rodolfo meets his former girlfriend Elena and informs her that he has met someone else and is engaged. Elena urges Rodolfo to wait until he knows this new woman better, citing the case of the serial murderer as an extreme case of the danger of getting married too soon. Rodolfo refuses and weds Alma; the couple returns to her isolated family mansion for their honeymoon.

Rodolfo almost immediately gets nervous. He asks why Alma (whose face is not seen until 16 minutes of the film have elapsed) wore a pair of dark glasses at the wedding ceremony: she replies with odd gibberish about not wanting the judge to see the happiness in her eyes, or something. Rodolfo is also disturbed by the weird modern paintings hung on the walls of the mansion, and by Alma’s sudden changes in mood, from joyful to morbid. When Rodolfo spies a spot of blood on the staircase and brings it to his wife's attention, she screams and faints. The servants--Abelardo, Ramona, Juan José, and Julia--carry the unconscious Alma away. Abelardo warns Rodolfo never to say "blood" in his wife's presence, but won't explain why.

That night, Rodolfo sees Alma go downstairs and remove a diary from a hidden wall safe. After she's returned to bed, he searches her purse and finds (a) a pistol, and (b) a notebook with the safe combination written in it (how convenient!). The diary contains Alma's confessions to the "husband murders," and indicates she plans to cut Rodolfo's throat with a straight razor the next night at 11:30pm!

The next morning, Rodolfo (as one might expect) decides to leave, hoping to depart before Alma returns from her morning walk. However, he's delayed by a strange man who appears in the house, speaks cryptically, then departs. Alma shows up and Rodolfo is compelled to stay. She repeats her pattern of mood swings, at one point claiming that it would be a good deed to murder someone who only wants peace and tranquility, since being dead is very peaceful! Later, as Rodolfo sits, brooding, Alma comes up behind him with a razor, and...

Rodolfo clutches his wineglass and it shatters, cutting his hand. Alma sees the blood and faints. The mysterious man from that morning appears and orders the servants to take Alma to her room. He then explains everything (in a nearly ten-minute long sequence):

Alma developed a split personality after her father's tragic death. Her "other" self believed she was the husband-killer, and obsessively followed news of the case. When the real Alma was in control, she had no memory of what had occurred. The strange visitor is her psychiatrist--Juan José and Julia are a doctor and nurse, respectively, and the other two servants were aware of the situation. The psychiatrist decided the only "cure" was for bad-Alma to actually murder her husband (Rodolfo)--of
course, the razor she was given was harmless plastic, and when Rodolfo accidentally cut his hand, the sight of the blood completed the illusion (Alma had a blood phobia, somehow connected to her father's death). Bad-Alma is now gone forever! As the film concludes, cheerful Alma and Rodolfo remove the disturbing paintings from the walls of the mansion, and will live happily ever after.

The conclusion of La gota de sangre brings to mind the rather pat psychiatric analysis which concludes Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho: everything is explained away neatly, and Alma is now completely cured, hooray. Rodolfo accepts this without question, even though Bad-Alma really intended (and attempted) to murder him. No chance she'd ever have a relapse, right?

Since Chano Urueta both wrote and directed La gota de sangre, the blame and the praise are all his. At least one Mexican critic at the time of the film's release suggested the plot had been borrowed from Love from a Stranger (1937--which itself was an adaptation of a play taken from an Agatha Christie story), switching the genders of the protagonists (the premise is also a bit reminiscent of Hitchcock's Suspicion, right down to the final revelation that the allegedly murderous spouse is innocent). Urueta's distinctive style can be seen in the various visual tricks he employs to impart a weird atmosphere to the story: camera tilts, low- and high-angle shots, double-exposures and superimpositions, pouring some clear liquid in the front of the camera lens to distort the image, and so forth. He also includes one really bizarre and unexplained bit: a painting in Rodolfo's room is basically a white curving line on a dark background, with a white dot at one point on the curve. As Rodolfo stares at it, the white dot rolls up the curve and back down again, like a marble! What th--?

One of the most notable formal attributes of La gota de sangre is the musical score, which hilariously emphasizes almost every "dramatic" line of dialogue immediately after it is spoken. "Alma, why did you wear dark glasses when we got married?" DUN DUN DUN DUNNNNNNN "It's almost time to go to bed." DUN DUN DUN DUNNNNNNN

The film begins with the murder of victim #7 (the killer isn't shown), followed by the police investigation. The police chief allows a reporter to accompany him, and then there is a long sequence in which the newspaper story of the murders is read in voiceover. Later, Rodolfo discovers Alma's clippings about the killings (all from real-life newspaper "Excelsior"), including one jaw-dropping banner headline that reads "The Murderess Has a Mole on the Left Arm" in giant-sized, bold print (the size that might announce "War is Declared" or "World to End Tomorrow"). Shockingly (and, as the psychiatrist claims later, entirely coincidentally) Alma has a mole on her left arm!

By the way, the titular "drop of blood" on the staircase is belatedly explained by Juan José, who says he shot the family Great Dane "Nerón" when the dog attacked him. Rodolfo had later spotted Juan José and Abelardo carrying a suspiciously corpse-sized bundle out of the house; this was the dead dog, wrapped in a sheet.

The performances are highly entertaining, if not subtle. Lilia Michel doesn't go full "split personality," choosing instead to portray Good-Alma as loving and nice and Bad-Alma as super-emo but not outright evil or like a completely different person. Rafael Baledón does a very good job as the increasingly nervous and terrified Rodolfo. José María Linares Rivas, Andrés Soler, and Tito Junco each have their moments--the psychiatrist's final speech, Abelardo's stubborn refusal to tell Rodolfo anything, and Juan José's cheerful admission that he reads detective novels and always guesses the identity of the killer--and the rest of the cast is professional as well.

The production values of La gota de sangre are adequate. Most of the film takes place on a large set representing Alma's country house, but there are some actual exteriors and the opening scenes in the city are also staged and shot decently.
**Manicomio** [Mental Hospital] (Calderón Films, 1957) *Prod*: Pedro A. Calderón; *Dir*: José Díaz Morales; *Adapt*: Ulises Petit de Murat, José Díaz Morales; *Collab*: Augusto Benedico; *Story*: Ulises Petit de Murat; *Photo*: Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music*: Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Mgr*: Jorge Mondragón; *Prod Chief*: Jorge Cardená; *Asst Dir*: Moisés M. Delgado; *Film Ed*: Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir*: Gunther Gerszo; *Camera Op*: Cirilo Rodríguez; *Lighting*: Carlos Nájera; *Makeup*: Concepción Zamora; *Sound Supy*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec*: Eduardo Arjona; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Medical Adv*: Dr. Guillermo Calderón Narváez; *Madre*, Sra. Luz Mondragón; *Union*: STPC

**Cast**: Luz María Aguilar (Beatriz), Joaquín Cordero Narváez, Ada Carrasco (Lola, patient), Celia Manzano, Bucky Gutiérrez, Olga Rosas, Roberto Meyer (religious fanatic patient), Armando Acosta (patient), María Cecilia Leger (staff member), Lidia Franco (“don’t breathe” patient)

**Notes**: a number of Mexican films have addressed mental illness and/or have been set in mental hospitals. In addition to Manicomio, these include Celos (1935), Una mujer sin destino and María Montecristo (both 1950), Un largo viaje hacia la muerte (1967), El infierno que todos han temido (1979) and Los renglones torcidos de Dios (1981). Although produced by Calderón Films—a very "commercial" production company, one might even say "exploitative"—and advertised in a sensationalistic manner (the lobby card text reads "Is the sex the cause of madness? An anguished question you should ask yourself: have I been on the edge of madness...?")—Manicomio is actually a relatively serious film about mental illness. A printed prologue claims the picture is made with "absolute scientific authenticity," and two technical advisors are credited: one is Dr. Guillermo Calderón Narváez (a cousin of the film's producer), and the other is a nurse, whose last name just happens to be the same as that of the production manager, Jorge Mondragón. This is not to impugn their professional credentials, however, which seem solid, and Joaquín Cordero later indicated both he and Luz María Aguilar visited an actual mental hospital to prepare for their roles.

Not at all an exposé of inhumane conditions a la The Snake Pit, Manicomio features some melodramatic coincidences and treatments which are considered out-dated today, but the doctors, nurses, and other employees of the mental hospital are depicted as professional and caring, albeit over-worked.

The film's protagonist receives special treatment and avoids being sent to the section for "incurables" only because she's the long-lost sweetheart of one of the doctors!

This particular plot twist (which is revealed very early in the movie) is one of those "melodramatic coincidences," but it also raises a question of medical ethics. Should Ricardo be treating Beatriz, since she was (is) his fiancee? An alternative plot would have been to have him fall in love with her while she was his patient, but that raises another whole set of ethical issues. Additionally, if Beatriz had been a stranger to Ricardo, he probably wouldn't have been so sure that his supervisor's (rather rushed) diagnosis of Beatriz as a schizophrenic was incorrect.

Beatriz, under the name "Laura," is brought to a mental hospital in an unresponsive state, having not eaten, spoken, or moved for several days. Although the facility is overcrowded already, director Dr. Ortiz agrees to find space for the young woman. In her luggage, he discovers a photo of Beatriz and Dr. Ricardo Andrade, one of Ortiz's assistants. Ricardo says Beatriz is his fiancee,
but vanished mysteriously from their hometown some time ago. Ortiz diagnoses Beatriz as suffering from incurable schizophrenia, but Ricardo insists this can't be accurate.

He submits Beatriz to a series of electroshock treatments, which bring her out of her catatonia. She still insists her name is Laura, and doesn't recognise Ricardo. However, while he's away, Beatriz, while alone, is surprised by 4 male mental patients. They don't assault her (in fact they run away when she screams), but Beatriz becomes hysterical and Dr. Ortiz takes this as proof of his original diagnosis. She is sent to the section of the hospital reserved for "terminal" patients--those deemed as incurable, and for whom additional treatment would be useless.

Upon his return, an infuriated Ricardo says something must have triggered Beatriz's relapse (no one else saw the four men with her). He tries insulin shock therapy, which finally produces a result. Beatriz says she and her friend Laura were attacked by a group of men; Laura was raped and murdered (it's unclear if Beatriz was raped or not). Beatriz felt guilty and assumed Laura's identity, and remembers nothing of what transpired afterwards. She and Ricardo leave the mental hospital together.

Manicomio concentrates almost entirely on the story of Beatriz and her treatment, but a few other patients are briefly sketched. Eduviges is a middle-aged woman who pompously boasts of her lovers; Lola is an alcoholic; another young woman has an acute fear of "microbes," and constantly washes her hands (she eventually comes to believe her hands have been eaten by germs and is sent to the "terminal" ward); Elvira steals a child from the children's section of the hospital and commits suicide by gas (the child survives). [Another patient has epilepsy--Dr. Ortiz says these patients are alright most of the time, but have to be prevented from hurting themselves when they have seizures. So they're sent to a mental hospital?!!] The four male patients who cross paths with Beatriz include a former boxer, a religious fanatic, one man who thinks he's a radio transmitter (he has an antenna stuck down the back of his shirt!), and another who constantly gives him messages to "send."

The electroshock and insulin treatments are depicted in detail and at length, in extended sequences and montage. Although apparently medically accurate and not exploatively shot, there are a few expressionistic touches. When Beatriz is first given shock treatment, an image of a skull is briefly superimposed over her face, a macabre but nice touch. During her insulin coma, Beatriz "dreams" of being chased by a horse through a forest. There are also a couple of impressionistic, distorted images of people as seen through Beatriz's tortured psyche. José Díaz Morales throws in a few high-angle shots as well for dramatic impact. There is one "shock" cut--an offscreen narrator opens the film, commenting on the patients who, in olden days, were considered...POSSESSED! There's a cut to a closeup of a screaming woman and the title Manicomio is superimposed on the screen. However, this is almost the only example of typical "exploitation" film form, as the picture is otherwise reasonably restrained and serious.

As noted earlier, the medical staff are presented in a very favourable light, with the exception of Dr. Ortiz, whose image is ambivalent at first: he struggles against budget and staffing issues, and feels Ricardo and some other, younger doctors give their patients too much freedom. After Elvira's death, Ortiz orders stricter discipline and extra vigilance. However, he does allow Ricardo to keep treating Beatriz (there is a slight suggestion that the insulin shock regimen isn't authorised) and he apologises for
his hasty diagnosis and reluctance to change once Ricardo is proved correct. Ortiz admits he has something to learn from the younger generation of doctors and asks Ricardo to stay at the hospital and work with him.

Portions of Manicomio were shot in an actual mental hospital (in Mixcoac), although many of the interiors (and possibly some exteriors) were filmed at the CLASA studios. The production values are quite satisfactory and there are plenty of extras (playing mental patients) in several sequences.

Lobby cards for the film claim Manicomio won Best Film, Best Direction, Best Actress, Best Actor, and Best Co-Starring Actress at a film festival in Ecuador, which I suppose was true. The performances are generally pretty good, albeit not especially subtle or nuanced (playing a drunk or mentally ill person is an actor’s dream, since it allows them to chew the scenery without restraint).

The lurid marketing aside, Manicomio is admirably serious in intent and execution.

Caperucita y sus tres amigos [Little Red Riding Hood and Her Three Friends]
(Películas Rodríguez, 1960) Dir: Roberto Rodríguez; Adapt: Roberto Rodríguez, Rafael A. Pérez; Story: Roberto Rodríguez; Photo: José Ortiz Ramos; Music: Sergio Guerrero; Prod Mgr: Manuel R. Ojeda; Prod Chief: Luis G. Rubín; Asst Dir: Mario Llorca; Film Ed: José W. Bustos; Art Dir: Gunther Gerzso; Decor: Dario Cabañas; Camera Op: Ignacio Romero, Hugo Velasco; Lighting: Miguel Arana; Makeup: Román Juárez; Dramatic Advisor: Lic. Enrique Ruelas; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Jesús González Gancay; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Sound Ed: Raúl Portillo Gavito; SpecFX: Benavides; Union: STPC; Eastmancolor

Cast: María Gracia (Caperucita Roja), Manuel "Loco" Valdés (Lobo Feroz), El Enano Sananón (Zorrillo), Prudencia Grifel (abuelita), Beatriz Aguirre (Caperucita's mother), Guillermo A. Bianchi (town patriarch), Luis Manuel Pelayo (hunter), Armando [sic = Fernando] Luján (Manolo), Enrique Edwards (Pecoso), Leticia Roo (Esmeralda), Eduardo Alcaraz (gypsy chief), Consuelo G. de Luna (gypsy woman), Roberto Meyer (priest), Elvira Lodi (Forest Fairy), Edmundo Espino, Duce (dog), Eugenia Avendaño (voice of the Zorrillo)

Notes: the success of Caperucita roja (1959) prompted Roberto Rodríguez to make two sequels in 1960.

Caperucita y sus tres amigos (presumably the Lobo, Zorrillo, and her dog Duce) is not a very good movie, burdened by a meandering plot and uneven pace, and (like Caperucita y Pulgarcito contra los monstruos) concentrates mostly on characters other than Caperucita herself. María Gracia was a lovely little girl but not an especially talented actress: she spends most of this film smiling pleasantly and looking around as if searching for some direction. Instead, Roberto Rodríguez gives full rein to the "humorous" antics of the Lobo and Zorrillo, as well as padding in the form of various songs and several "gypsy" dances (there is even a minor romantic sub-plot between two of the gypsies!). [Although the characters in these movies speak Spanish and Caperucita's town is named "San Juan," the setting is clearly some sort of fairy tale-European country, based on the architecture and costumes. The gypsies in Caperucita y sus tres amigos speak with heavy Spanish accents and dance the flamenco, and are clearly outsiders compared to the villagers who wear Tyrolean hats and dirndls.]

El Lobo Feroz and his friend the Zorrillo are now "guardians of the forest" rather than fieras [beasts], but the Lobo is still a glutton, eating a whole pot of soup cooked by Caperucita's grandmother (plus a loaf of bread and even the napkin!). A tribe of gypsies camps near the grandmother's house. The local villagers, considering the intruders to be potential thieves, give them permission to stay for just 15 days. The gypsies make their living by
performing for the townspeople, as well as telling fortunes. The Lobo learns the "pact" he has with the village (to be the forest guardian) will be broken.

The Lobo has unpleasant encounters with a hunter and a mischievous boy. When Caperucita's grandmother is bitten by a snake, the Lobo and Zorrillo save her life by taking her to the gypsy camp for treatment. At first the villagers think the Lobo is to blame (incited by the hunter and the boy) but when his heroism is revealed, the wolf is given a raise in salary instead. Later, however, the hunter and some friends mock the Lobo and refuse to acknowledge the "pact," so the wolf reverts to his bestial nature and attacks them, then flees. The Lobo and Zorrillo take shelter in the "deserted grotto" (as opposed to the "inhabited grotto," I guess), hiding from a mob that wants to kill the wolf (a wanted poster offers a reward for the Lobo, "dead or alive—preferably dead").

Caperucita finds her two friends with the aid of the Hada de los bosques (Forest Fairy), but the villainous hunter and the mob toss dynamite into the cave in an attempt to kill the Lobo! The Forest Fairy helps Caperucita find an exit, but the little girl is picked up by the gypsies on their way out of town. The Lobo and Zorrillo follow. When the Lobo is caught in a trap, he sends the Zorrillo to help Caperucita escape (the gypsies have been "making" her dance as part of their show). The Zorrillo is subsequently shot and wounded by the evil hunter. However, everything is straightened out in the end, and the film concludes with a "fiesta of forgiveness."

Caperucita y sus tres amigos, as mentioned earlier, doesn't waste a lot of time on Caperucita's antics, with most of the footage going to other characters. Even Duce the dog (not to be confused with Lassie-like heroics. However, none of this is very interesting or entertaining, and I will confess that Eugenia Avendaño's voice-dubbing for the Zorrillo becomes tiresome very quickly (after a matter of seconds, in fact)—it would have been more amusing to give the little skunk a deep masculine voice, rather than the nasal, whiny, high-pitched "female" (although the skunk is supposed to be male) tones. Loco Valdés, on the other hand, is mildly amusing as the Lobo Feroz, but there are far too many scenes of the Lobo and Zorrillo arguing, dancing, singing, fighting, etc.

The production values are satisfactory, with particularly nice color photography and a lot of exterior location shooting (so much so that one questions how much "art direction" Gunther Gerzso actually had to do).

Caperucita y sus tres amigos was released in the USA (dubbed) in 1964 by K. Gordon Murray as Little Red Riding Hood and Her Friends. According to some sources, K. Gordon Murray dubbed the dialogue for "Stinky the Skunk" himself! Murray's penchant for releasing Mexican fantasy films in dubbed versions is well-known. He seems to have been particularly enamoured of the "Wolf" and Skunk" characters, distributing dubbed versions of all 3 of the "Caperucita" series in which they appeared, as well as Los espadachines de la reina (aka The Queen’s Swordsman [sic]), another film featuring the furry duo. Murray then actually shot new footage (using far inferior, homemade costumes) of "Wolf and Skunk" for several bizarre USA-made featurettes, including Santa Claus and His Helpers, Santa’s Enchanted Village, and Santa’s Magic Kingdom.

While not terrible, Caperucita y sus tres amigos is pretty tedious, at least for someone in my age group.

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