

# THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN

## VOLUME 21 NUMBER 2

### MARCH-APRIL 2015

#### GERARDO REYES

Singer, actor and producer Gerardo Reyes died in Cuernavaca on 25 February 2015; he had been suffering from liver cancer. Gerardo Reyes was born in the state of



Guerrero in March 1935, and was already a performer and composer at a young age. He relocated to the United States in the mid-Fifties and worked as a radio announcer while establishing his singing career, specialising in "folkloric" music (*rancheras* and so forth).

By the early 1970s, Reyes was sufficiently popular in both the USA and

Mexico to attract the attention of film producers. Antonio Aguilar cast him in supporting roles in *Simón Blanco* and *Don Herculano enamorado* (both 1974), and Reyes also co-starred in *Los tres compadres* and *Un camino al cielo* that year and was very active in cinema for the next decade.

In later interviews, Reyes said he appeared in about "80" films, although less than half of these can be identified with any certainty (he indicated only six of the dozen movies he produced were released). In addition to his starring roles, Reyes also co-starred with El Santo in two movies, and even played a villain (in *El contrabando del Paso*). Although most of his films had rural settings, Reyes would occasionally appear in movies with urban locations, such as *Contacto Chicano* and *Bohemio de afición*. He also directed at least one film, *El hijo de Jacinto Tullido*.

Mostly retired since 2011, Reyes continued to perform occasionally. He had also served as a representative of the PRI political party in the legislature in the 1970s. Gerardo Reyes is survived by 8 children-- 7 daughters and one son, Gerardo Reyes Jr.

#### FILMOGRAPHY

- 1974:
  - Simón Blanco*
  - Don Herculano enamorado*
  - Los tres compadres*
  - Un camino al cielo*
- 1975:
  - El rey*
- 1976:
  - El moro de Cumpas*
- 1977:
  - Caminos de Michoacán*
- 1978:
  - El contrabando del Paso*
  - Dos hermanos murieron*
  - Pelea de perros*
  - El cortado*
- 1979:
  - Frontera brava*
  - Contacto Chicano*
  - El preso no. 9*
  - Sin fortuna*
  - Santo en la frontera del terror*
- 1980:
  - Ay Chihuahua no te rajes!*
  - El rey de los camino*
- 1981:
  - Jacinto el tullido*
  - Santo vs. el asesino de la T.V.*
  - El sexo de los pobres*
- 1983:
  - El asesino*
  - Hombres de tierra caliente*
  - Las ovejas descarriadas*
- 1984:
  - Bohemio de afición*
- 1985:
  - El hijo de Jacinto el tullido*
- 1986:
  - La banda del acordeón*
  - La celda del alacrán*
- 1994:
  - Dos gallos de oro* (released on video in 2002)
- 1998:
  - Jueves de corpus*



## MAGDA GUZMÁN

Actress Magda Guzmán died on 12 March 2015 of heart failure; she was 83 years old. María Magdalena Guzmán Garza was born in the state of Coahuila in May 1931, one of six children (among them her brother Roberto “Flaco” Guzmán, who also had a long career as an actor).

Guzmán studied at the Instituto de Bellas Artes and the Academia de Arte Cinematográfico. Although she reportedly made her screen debut as a child in *Noche de recién casados* (1941), Guzmán began working regularly in



films in the 1950s, earning Ariel nominations as Best Co-Starring Actress for *La duda* (1953) and Best Supporting Actress for *La vida no vale nada* (1954).

Magda Guzmán was a mainstay of early *telenovelas*, and continued to work in this format until 2012. She also appeared on the stage and made occasional film appearances after the 1950s, most recently in *Viernes de ánimas* (2007, released in 2011).

Magda Guzmán’s first husband was theatre director Julián Duprez, the father of her children Karina (who became an actress herself), Gerardo, and Mirtha. After her divorce from Duprez, Guzmán married actor Federico Falcón (the brother of Eric del Castillo) and they had one son, Carlos, before Falcón’s death in 1981.



## AWARDS SEASON DIOSAS DE PLATA

The 44<sup>th</sup> Diosas de Plata ceremony was held on 21 April in Mexico City. The prizes are awarded by PECIME, the Mexican film journalists’ association, celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> year of existence. Career achievement awards went to Maribel Fernández “La Pelangocha,” Gustavo Rojo (for 75 years as an actor!), and Norma Lazareno.

Best Director: Jorge Ramírez Suárez (*Guten Tag, Ramón*)

Best Film: *Guten Tag, Ramón*

Best Screenplay: Jorge Ramírez Suárez (*Guten Tag, Ramón*)

Best Photography: Carlos Hidalgo (*Guten Tag, Ramón*)

Best Actor: Harold Torres (*González: falsos profetas*)

Best Actress: Sofía Espinosa (*Gloria*)

Best Co-Starring Actor: Juan Ignacio Aranda (*Obediencia perfecta*)

Best Co-Starring Actress: Mar Contreras (*Qué le dijiste a Dios?*)

Best Supporting Actress: Adriana Barraza (*Guten Tag, Ramón*)

Best Supporting Actor: Osvaldo Benavides (*La dictadura perfecta*)

Best New Actress: Raquel Garza (*La hija de Moctezuma*)

Best New Actor: Sebastián Aguirre (*Güeros*)

Best Music Score: Rodrigo Flores López (*Guten Tag, Ramón*)

Best Editing: Sam Baixauli, Sonia Sánchez Carrasco, Jorge Ramírez Suárez (*Guten Tag, Ramón*)

Best Song: Aleks Syntek (*Cantinflas*)

Best First Work: *Güeros* (dir. Alonso Ruizpalacios)

Best Animated Short: *La última cena* (dir. Vanesa Quintanilla Cobo)

Best Live-Action Short: *Aquí no pasa nada* (dir. Rafa Lara)

Best Documentary: *Retratos de una búsqueda* (dir. Alicia Calderón)

## ARIELES

Nominations for this year’s Ariel Awards have been released. The Ariel ceremony will take place on 27 May at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. *Güeros* received 12 nominations, *La dictadura perfecta* and *Las oscuras primaveras* 10 each. Best Film nominations went to *Güeros*, *La dictadura perfecta*, *Las oscuras primaveras*, *Guten tag*, *Ramón* and *Carmin tropical*. Three recently-deceased writers will be the subject of homages: José Emilio Pacheco, Gabriel García Márquez, and Vicente Leñero.



## GERARDO IN GRINGOLANDIA

CINEPRODUCCIONES INTERNACIONALES, S.A. presenta a

GERARDO REYES,  
ALMA MURIEL, BRUNO REY  
y FELIPE ARRIAGA En

**EL PRESO**  
**No. 9**

**El preso no. 9** [Prisoner Number 9] (Cineprods. Internaciones, 1979) *Prod*: Alfonso Rosas Priego Jr.; *Dir*: Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Scr*: Jorge Patiño, Alfonso Rosas Priego Jr.; *Photo*: Antonio de Anda; *Music*: Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Title Song*: Roberto Cantoral; *Prod Mgr*: Antonio Merino; *Asst Dir*: Fernando Durán T.; *Film Ed*: no credit; *Camera Op*: Roberto Rivera; *Stunt Co-ord*: Bernabé Palma; *Sound Op*: Abel Flores; *Makeup*: Antonio Castañeda; *Re-rec*: Salvador Topete; *Union*: STIC  
**Cast**: Gerardo Reyes (*Damián Ramírez*), Alma Muriel (*Rocío*), Felipe Arriaga (*Justino Aguilar*), Bruno Rey (*coyote I*), Víctor Manuel Sosa (*Antonio*), Tito Junco (*Mr. Fisher*), Humberto Elizondo (*Beto*), Merle Uribe

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(*Margarita*), Ernest Juárez (? *don Manuel*), Beatriz Adriana (*singer*), Bernabé Palma (*thug on street*), Luis Guevara (*coyote 2*), Donald Grigas, Jaime Reyes (*truck driver*), Victor M. Martínez, Lauro Salazar (*cook*), Alfred B. Crevenna (*restaurant owner*)

**Notes:** a “horrors of immigration” film that almost completely ignores the usual horrors (racism & mortal danger), *El preso no. 9* instead warns would-be immigrants that their wives will become crazed, unfaithful shopaholics in the USA.



Although based on a popular song written and recorded by Roberto Cantoral in the early Fifties (later recorded by Joan Baez, among others), the film only borrows part of its premise from the lyrics (a man is executed for killing

his unfaithful wife and best friend) and conjures the rest out of whole cloth (the song also implies the events took place in Mexico, not the USA).

The film contains a few familiar tropes—Damián and his friend swimming the Río Grande, being deported, working as dishwasher/busboy and in agriculture—but the underlying themes of anti-immigration movies—such as



“life may be difficult in Mexico but it’s worse for Mexicans in the USA”—are almost completely absent. In one scene, after Damián causes an auto accident, the Anglos in the other car make a brief reference to him as a “Mexican son of a

bitch,” which Damián later characterises as “they insulted me.” Earlier, the hostile cook in the restaurant where Damián is working called him an “*indio estúpido*,” but this racist comment is undercut by the fact that the cook himself appears to be Hispanic (and calling someone a “stupid *indio*” is an insult used by many Mexicans against their own countrymen—it’s still racist, but it’s not Anglo-on-Mexican racism). Damián and Antonio are arrested and deported, but they’re not treated unfairly (they’re just driven to the border crossing and ordered to leave), and there is no institutional racism depicted or mentioned. In one scene Damián says “don’t you feel odd walking down the street [feeling] as if you were a criminal,” and in another scene the *ilegales* start to sweat when a policeman approaches them in a diner, but he just asks for a light for his cigarette, but this paranoid fear of *La Migra* is not a major point in the movie.

In fact, the only significant *gringo* character in the film is the very kind Mr. Fisher, who hires Damián and Antonio, arranges for their work visas, and even promotes Damián to manager of a new ranch he’s purchased. The other Anglos are ambivalently portrayed: the men whose car was damaged by Damián’s bad driving, and couple of grabby guys who molest Rocío are negative characters but not really racist, while the owner (director Crevenna in one of his usual cameo roles) of the restaurant who hires the two men is neither friendly nor unfriendly, but he willingly hires them despite their illegal status, as a favour to Beto.

In contrast, the most unsympathetic people in the movie are Mexicans! Rocío and Margarita openly and admittedly exploit their husbands, forcing them to emigrate to the USA, work hard, and go into debt so the women can live lives of (relative) luxury. Additionally, Damián and Antonio are initially swindled by some *coyotes* who take their money to smuggle them into the USA, only to drive around for hours and then dump them on the Mexican side of the border.

Consequently, unlike most anti-immigration films which warn Mexicans that going to the USA is dangerous and morally debilitating, the motto of *El preso no. 9* might well be: “Life in the USA is pretty great for Mexican immigrants, just don’t bring your wife!”

As *El preso no. 9*, opens, Mexican farmer Damián finally agrees to go the USA, despite his misgivings: “I don’t know anyone there...I don’t speak English...I don’t even like to visit [Mexico City]...I live very contentedly here. We’re not rich but we have family, friends, and enough [money] to live very happily.” However, his wife Rocío—incited by letters from her *comadre* Margarita, living it up across the border—insists the only way they can get ahead in life is for Damián to become a *mojado*.

Damián travels to the border town of Reynosa and, accompanied by new friend Antonio, crosses the border, but they are quickly apprehended and deported. Scheming



to return, they’re overheard in a bar by a *coyote* who charges them \$150 each and loads them into a truck with numerous other would-be immigrants.

But it’s a

swindle, as they’re still on the Mexican side when they’re unloaded. Tracking down the *coyote*, they force him to make arrangements to get them across for real: Beto drives them over the border in the trunk of his car, and even helps find them jobs in a restaurant in Weslaco, Texas. Fired after punching the hostile cook, Damián and Antonio do what they should have done in the first place: visit Damián’s *compadre* Justino, who’s living with his wife Margarita and working for rancher Mr. Fisher.



Mr. Fisher hires Damián and Antonio: Damián works in the fields, Antonio as a mechanic. Damián's work ethic gets him noticed, and he is given more responsibility at work. Finally, Mr. Fisher says he'll sponsor them both for work visas. After going back to Mexico to pick up Rocío,



Damián and Antonio re-enter the USA, this time legally. Rocío is pleased by her new house (Damián also has a car), but within a short time begins acquiring additional possessions.

[This is illustrated in a very nice, wordless montage

sequence. It begins with Rocío and Damián in bed, then they go shopping for a new sofa, then they're back in bed, then they're shopping for a television, then back in bed, then shopping for jewelry. Damián grows progressively more disgruntled during the shopping scenes, but Rocío "convinces" him every night.]

All of this sex and shopping has caused Damián to neglect his job, and Mr. Fisher expresses his displeasure. Damián's credit is also over-extended and the bank gives him 30 days to straighten things out. But Rocío won't curb her spending, buying a new refrigerator and blender (on credit). Irate, Damián drives off and is involved in a minor auto accident, then winds up in jail (Mr. Fisher posts his bail). Next, Rocío asks Damián to buy her a car ("un Pinto") but he refuses, at least until Mr. Fisher gives him a raise, which doesn't sit well with Rocío. Meanwhile, she's become friendly with Antonio, and accompanies him to the beach with Justino and Margarita (Damián can't go because he's working double shifts to pay off her debts). When Damián gives in and says



Margarita can have a car, she pulls him into the shower with her as a "reward."

Damián discusses the situation with Justino, indicating he was happier in Mexico, and that

Rocío "wants more and more...the worst is that she's not content with anything...All that's left is to sell my soul to the Devil." Justino admits he feels the same way, learning too late that his wife cares more about material things and their standard of living than his feelings.

Rocío flirts with Antonio—who teaches her to drive—but he pulls away because "Damián is like my brother." She shows up at his apartment and when he says they can't

have an affair, she says "ask me to leave, then." Instead, they clinch. Ironically, Damián has just gotten the news from Mr. Fisher that he'll be managing the new property purchased by his boss; he tries to give Rocío the news, but she isn't home.

Driving to Antonio's apartment, Damián notices the door isn't locked, and goes in, only to discover his wife and best friend in bed together. He shoots them both to death.



The film ends with Damián's execution by firing squad, as the title song is heard on the soundtrack: "I killed them, yes sir, and if I were to be born again, I'd kill them again."

One curious aspect of *El preso no. 9*, attributable to the original song lyrics, is Damián's execution by military firing squad (*pelotón*). The state of Texas does not appear to have ever used this method of execution; as noted earlier, the song seems to be set in Mexico (a reference to the protagonist's *jacal* or hut, although this term was also used in the

Southwest USA), but the death penalty hadn't been applied in Mexico since the late 1930s. The firing squad is somewhat more dramatic than hanging, for instance (although the drama is slightly harmed by the fact that one of the soldiers is wearing a badly-scuffed helmet that stands out like a sore thumb), and its use affords Damián the chance for one last dramatic gesture, refusing a blindfold.

Mexico abolished the death penalty in 2005, but hadn't actually executed a civilian since 1937. In addition to *El preso no. 9*, a number of Mexican films depicted incidents

in which Mexicans were executed in the USA, including *El asesino X* (1954) and *La última llamada* (1996): in the earlier film, the protagonist killed a gangster to avenge his sister's seduction and murder at the criminal's hands (so it was a justified "honour" killing) and in *La última llamada* the executed man saved a boy from a sexual assault and killed the assailant in a rage, but couldn't prove his motivation (the



boy vanished) and was therefore given capital punishment for his crime.

In keeping the film's reluctance to criticise the USA, *El preso no. 9* does not use Damián's execution as an opportunity to claim racially-motivated injustice.

Damián's trial isn't shown in *El preso no. 9*, but he apparently had a terrible lawyer, since his case clearly didn't justify capital punishment: even setting aside the "unwritten law" defense ("avenging one's honour"), he obviously shot Antonio and Rocío on the spur of the moment, under an "irresistible impulse." He's probably not going to walk out of the courtroom a free man, but he wouldn't get the death penalty for such a crime. On other hand, the implication is that Damián doesn't want to live, now that he's been betrayed by his best friend and his wife (and they're both dead).



It's rather pointless to criticise a Mexican film for "having too many songs which impede the narrative flow"—that's like criticising the South Pole for "being too cold and having too many penguins." If three of your four main performers (Reyes, Arriaga, Sosa) are singers and you've got a guest star who is also a singer (Beatriz



Adriana), and your film is based on a popular song, well...there's going to be some singing. 10 different songs, in fact, with the title tune heard in an instrumental version over the credits and then sung over the final sequence by Gerardo Reyes.

*El preso no. 9* is actually quite entertaining and interesting. The performances are generally good. Gerardo Reyes is sincere and effectively portrays the frustration his character experiences when the sexy wife he loves nonetheless turns his life into a living hell.

Although primarily a singer with only a couple of film appearances to his credit, Víctor Manuel Sosa is fine as Antonio, and Felipe Arriaga (whose acting career was much more extensive) is also satisfactory. It's amusing to see Tito Junco as the kindly, white-bearded Mr. Fisher, if one contrasts this role with his part in *La pobres ilegales* the same year: in that movie, he also plays a *gringo* who employs immigrants on his farm, but--instead of being a fair and friendly boss--he's a renegade Nazi sadist who murders Mexican women and buries them on his property!

Alma Muriel and (to a lesser extent) Merle Uribe are the villains of the peace, women who compel their



husbands to leave their homeland and work in a foreign country so the wives can enjoy material comforts, who control the men with sex (or the withholding thereof), and are never satisfied with the level of prosperity and comfort they have. At least Margarita remains faithful to Justino (and in fact warns Rocío about flirting with Antonio), although it's unclear if Rocío is "driven" to seek Antonio's affection because Damián is working all or time, or if she's just an immoral, bad person.

The production values of *El preso no. 9* are more than adequate for the scope of the story being told. Presumably everything was shot on location in Donna, Weslaco, and Mercedes, Texas (three towns right in a row, between McAllen and Harlingen) and Reynosa, Tamaulipas. Alfredo B. Crevenna's direction doesn't draw undue attention to itself, but it's professional and the film is paced reasonably well (interruptions for musical interludes aside).

A different look at the oft-filmed theme of *indocumentados*.



**Sin fortuna** [Out of Luck] (Producciones del Rey-Producciones Grosa, 1979) *Prod*: Gerardo Reyes, Arnulfo Delgado; *Dir*: Narciso Busquets; *Scr*: Gerardo Reyes; *Photo*: Antonio Ruiz; *Music Dir*: Rafael Carrión; *Prod Mgr*: Ernesto Fuentes; *Asst Dir*: José Amezquita; *Film Ed*: Sigfrido García; *Camera Op*: Febronio Tepoxtle; *Makeup*: Lucrecia Muñoz; *Sound*: Roberto Muñoz; *Re-rec*: Salvador Topete; *Union*: STIC

**Cast**: Gerardo Reyes (*Gerardo Martínez*), Eleazar García "Chelelo" (*Chevo*), Narciso Busquets (*don Fernando Orozco*), Felipe Arriaga (*Johnny*), Lina Michel (*Marcelita*), "Tío Plácido" [Alejandro Reyna] (*Rubén*), José Flores "El Avileño" (*Juan?*), Rodrigo Puebla (*Isidro*), Valentina Leyva (*Latina prostitute*), Rodolfo Contreras, Rafael Buendía and María Elena Jasso "El Duetto Frontera" (*singers*), Juan Castro, Arnulfo Delgado (*don Arnulfo, restaurant owner*), Manuel Plascencia, Armando García, Chava Padilla y su Mariachi, Alfredo Correa, Raúl Velasco, Gerardito Reyes Jr., Regino Herrera (*Gerardo's father*), Ricardo Loera (*campesino*), Diana Reyes, Alma Rosa Velasco, Perlita Gálvez, Sonia de León (*blonde*



prostitute #1), Salvador Pineda (*Julián, don Fernando's son*)

**Notes:** this is not really a very good movie, although it has a few points of interest. Co-producer and star Gerardo Reyes also wrote the script, which is episodic and practically incoherent, and first-time director Narciso Busquets proved himself to be a much better actor than director. *Sin fortuna* is also fairly distinct from most of the other Producciones del Rey films in plot, setting, and overall tone.

On the positive side there are a few political statements worth mentioning, and producer Delgado makes a rare screen appearance late in the movie. Eleazar García "Chelelo" has a few fitfully amusing moments, as he seems to be ad-libbing his way through the picture.

*Campesinos* Gerardo, Chevo, Rubén, Juan and their friends are turned down for a loan at the bank, since they have nothing to put up as security. Just a moment earlier,



the audience saw the banker give preferential treatment to a wealthy customer, and an off-screen narrator introduces the movie with the comment: "The

current agricultural situation in Mexico is as follows: on one side there are millions of *campesinos*, *ejiditarios*, communal farmers, and small landowners whose small parcels of land barely provide subsistence. On the other side, various *terratenientes* enjoy regular irrigation, credit, secure markets, cheap sources of labor, and technology."

Gerardo owns a small farm but has to also work on the rich don Fernando's *hacienda* to make ends meet.

Fernando is patronizing towards his workers and does not respect them. Gerardo's family's situation worsens when his brother is injured--while employed by don Fernando--and will be unable to work for a time. His mother is very ill but they cannot afford to send her to a hospital. During a fiesta, Gerardo wagers all he can afford on a horse race, but loses. Fernando's hostile foreman Isidro blames Gerardo for the robbery of the *hacienda* office, and Gerardo is thrown into jail and beaten in an attempt to make him confess. Chevo helps his friend escape; ironically, the police now believe in Gerardo's innocence and were planning on releasing him the next day! The guy just can't catch a break, can he?

Gerardo and Chevo travel to a border town, where they meet *chicano* Johnny. He introduces them to a *coyote* who agrees to take them over the border and find them a job in exchange for half of their first week's pay. The *coyote* warns them "La Migra" has been getting tougher lately, and even shot some people in Arizona. However, the passage across the border is made safely and the two men go to work on a large ranch. Johnny is also employed

there. He tells them "in Houston the Chicanos are at war with the police," and "La Migra...treats [Mexicans] like animals." Gerardo says "hunger knows no borders."

Rodrigo, one of their fellow workers, falls ill and dies.



On payday, a truckload of Ku Klux Klansmen (wearing black robes with white crosses on their hoods) confront the workers at gunpoint. A brawl breaks out and two

workers are shot, but the *campesinos* prevail and expose the *coyote* who brought them across as one of the Klan! [Since this man is clearly Hispanic but some of the other Klansmen were not--and they shout "Get back you dirty Mexicans!" when they arrive--there is some question about whether this is the real (racist) Klan or if they are simply a gang trying to steal the payroll.] Gerardo, Johnny, and Chevo flee in a pickup truck. Stopping in Sacramento to buy new clothes, they continue on to Lake Tahoe.

Gerardo wins \$25,000 gambling (this is only described, not shown). He and his friends check into a hotel, where the bellhop (manager?) spots their bag of cash. Johnny arranges for three prostitutes (two blondes and a Latina brunette) to party with the Mexicans. The next morning, while all are passed out or asleep, two crooks (in league with the hotel manager) steal Gerardo's money. The

Latina hooker gets Gerardo a job singing in a restaurant owned by her friend don Arnulfo (Chevo washes dishes there), but they are fired shortly



afterwards because they're illegal aliens.

Back in Mexico, Gerardo and Chevo relate the story of their adventures to their friends and family. Gerardo vows never to leave the land again. Chevo says "they mistreated us, humiliated us, exploited us." Gerardo adds "You can't imagine how they treat Mexicans in the United States. I cried many times." [This seems a little overblown since the working conditions on the ranch and in the restaurant don't look that bad, and Gerardo lost his jackpot money because he--a married man with two children--got drunk with a prostitute and passed out! As noted above, the "Klan" raid is questionable, and this is the only discrimination or mistreatment actually shown in the movie, otherwise it is just hearsay.]

*Sin fortuna*, shot in the state of Guerrero and in California and Nevada, starts off like a rural melodrama --pitting Gerardo and his friends against exploitative *cacique* Fernando--but this plot is dropped halfway through and swapped for the misadventures of Gerardo and Chevo in the USA. Neither section is worked out with



any sort of dramatic consistency and (as noted earlier) the direction of Busquets is serviceable at best and clumsy at worst. Busquets himself seems

rather ill at ease on the screen, with Rodrigo Puebla and Chelelo faring best among the rest of the cast. Gerardo Reyes sings a few songs (but less than one might expect), while Rafael Buendía and María Elena Jasso perform two. The production values are adequate--movies shot 100% on location just need adequate photography and sound to be passable, and *Sin fortuna* can at least boast of professional work by the technical crew.

A few lines of dialogue are of socio-political interest, but the film itself is marginal entertainment.



### **Santo en la frontera del terror\* [Santo on the Border of Terror]** (Prods. Geminis-Cin. RA, 1979)



*Prod/Dir/Scr:* Rafael Pérez Grovas; *Story:* Sergio David [Pérez Grovas], Carlos Suárez; *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe; *Music Dir:* Francisco Salcido; *Assoc Prod:* Alfredo Uribe; *Prod [Mgr]:* Fernando Uribe; *Asst Dir:* José Amezcuita; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Jacome;

*Camera Op:* Guillermo Bravo; *Makeup:* Estela Sánchez; *Sound Op:* Jorge Guerrero; *Re-rec:* Salvador Topete; *Union:* STIC

[\*Also released on video as "Santo vs. el Asesino"]

**Cast:** Santo (*himself*), Gerardo Reyes (*Gerardo*), Carmen del Valle (*Azucena*), Carlos Suárez (*Carlitos*), Jean Safont (*Dr. Sombra*), Federico Falcón (*Fernando*),

Miguel Angel Fuentes (*Monk*), Sarita Gómez (*Florencia*), Fernando Yapur (*Mr. Richards*), César Gómez, Roberto Gómez, Sixto Hinojosa, Guillermo Ayala, Angélica Sierra, Abel Casillas (*guard*), Oscar Ricci, Guillermo Inclán (*John*), Lilia Landua, Armando García Vaca, Enrique Estrada; *Wrestlers:* Cien Caras, Bobby Lee, Ringo Mendoza, Karloff Lagarde, Mocho Kotta, Jungla, Sangre Chicana, Carnicero Aguilar

**Notes:** Despite a plot that combines science fiction with the familiar Mexican "illegal immigrants in U.S." storyline, *Santo en la frontera del terror* isn't a very entertaining picture, chiefly due to Rafael Pérez Grovas' lackluster direction and the slow-paced, "let's advance the action one inch at a time" script. Santo reverts back to his very early days, serving as a *deus ex machina*, showing up early and late, but is largely absent for the middle of the film.



Gerardo Reyes doesn't have much to do either. Jean Safont, a wrestler who made a surprisingly good villain (albeit in mostly bad films), does a fairly good job as the evil Dr. Sombra (in *La venganza de Huracán Ramírez* he was also a mad doctor). However, even with a plot that features a "mad scientist" and "zombies," *Santo en la frontera del terror* has little or no horror content. Shot in a flat, high-key style on nondescript locations, the film makes no attempt to frighten or shock the audience, treating everything which might possibly be exciting in a dull, matter-of-fact manner.

Gerardo and Fernando make arrangements to cross illegally from Mexico to the United States. The *coyote* (smuggler) who will take them across says they'll work on Mr. Richards' ranch, and will be well-paid and well-treated (hmm...we've heard that before). Fernando wants to earn money to pay for an operation for Florecita, the little blind

sister of his girlfriend Azucena, who sings in a cantina. When Fernando and Azucena are attacked by some drunk customers, Santo and his sidekick



Carlitos, who were passing by, help out. Santo takes off his mask so Florecita can feel his face. He says he'll pay for her operation. Fernando and Gerardo are still going to the U.S. to work (now Fernando says he'll buy a truck with the money he earns); Santo says he'll be wrestling in *gringo*-land so they can look him up if they need help.



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Gerardo and Fernando cross over and are hired by Mr. Richards. His foreman Monk is a surly looking character, and a mysterious looking Dr. Sombra gives each new man a physical examination. Later, Sombra calls a contact in McAllen, Texas, and says "the merchandise has arrived."



That's not suspicious at all, is it? Dr. Sombra and his armed guards take one of the farm workers to his operating room. The next time he's seen, Sombra has some eyes in a glass jar! The

dead "donor" is taken away to be buried. Sombra will use the money he gets selling the stolen eyes (and other organs, apparently) to finance his brain transplant experiments. He has two zombie-like assistants, the results of some earlier surgical hijinks. Monk is eavesdropping and decides to cut himself in on the action.

Meanwhile, Azucena is worried since Fernando hasn't contacted her (the workers are not allowed to leave the ranch). Santo and Carlitos arrive at the ranch; Santo sneaks in. Meanwhile, Monk tries to blackmail Dr. Sombra but is locked up, along with Gerardo and Fernando who were caught trying to escape. Dr. Sombra says the Mexican workers died to save the lives of those "more worthy than they were."

Santo breaks in and questions Sombra. He frees Gerardo, Fernando and Monk (who claims he wasn't in on Sombra's scheme--and he's telling the truth, although it wasn't because he didn't try). However, Sombra and his zombies

eventually capture Santo (and Carlitos, who followed Santo in although he was supposed to call the cops). Monk is shot in a struggle. Sombra hypnotizes one



Mexican and sends him back to Mexico to lure new workers to the ranch with tales of high salaries and good treatment. Sombra and his zombies put Santo and Carlitos in a cabin with a time bomb (but they eventually escape).

Meanwhile, ranch owner Mr. Richards has returned and freed Gerardo and Fernando. When a helicopter lands to pick up the jar of eyeballs, the jar is missing: Richards has it. He was investigating Sombra's past, and a shady past it was, too. Sombra sends his zombies to grab Richards, Gerardo, and Fernando. Santo and Carlitos intervene, so Sombra tries to make his escape via helicopter, but Gerardo grabs a gun and shoots it down.

Back in Mexico, Santo, Gerardo, Fernando, Carlitos and Azucena are present when Florecita's bandages are removed: she can see! The End.

What could have been an interesting film--taking the theme of the exploitation of Mexican illegal immigrants in the U.S. to a fairly extreme level--bogs down in an endless series of minor scuffles, escapes, re-captures, 4 songs, 2 arena wrestling matches, cutaways to "Florecita" on her way to the operating room, and so on. Exactly how Mr. Richards could have been so unobservant as to not notice the armed guards, wire fence, missing workers and Sombra's two zombies is beyond belief: and even if the whole scheme was well-camouflaged, what was Dr. Sombra allegedly doing on the ranch in the first place? Not too many Texas farms have doctors-in-residence, as far as I know.

The plight of Mexican immigrants in the USA is shunted aside for the most part. Gerardo and Fernando are scared off during their first attempt to swim across the Rio Grande by the Border Patrol (who, to be fair, specifically shoot to frighten them rather than harm them). Mr. Richards is touted as the best employer of *braceros*, and greets Gerardo and the others saying "Here on my ranch we like Mexicans and treat them like brothers," although he subsequently ignores them and lets Dr. Sombra run the show, along with brutal foreman Monk (who calls the



workers "indios mugrosos"--dirty Indians). There's a little indirect criticism of the USA in the idea that a

respectable hospital would purchase black market organs for transplants, and the theme of *gringo* exploitation of Mexicans for their body parts would be prominent in some later movies, but this isn't emphasized here. Oddly enough (given the blandness of the overall film), the idea that Dr. Sombra is extracting eyes from Mexican workers and that little Mexican girl Florecita is blind (then later cured by an operation presumably not involving stolen eyeballs) is either a very subtle linkage or a complete coincidence meaning nothing.

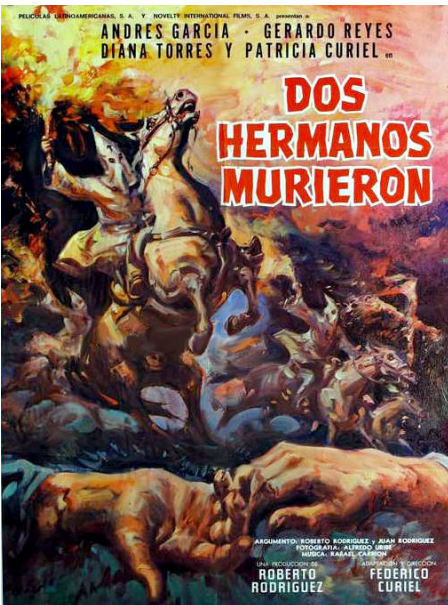
*Santo en la frontera del terror* is perhaps marginally better than Santo's other Pérez Grovas picture, *Santo vs. el asesino de la T.V.* (which also co-starred Gerardo Reyes and features Rubí Re, which counts for a lot), but neither film is much good. El Hijo del Santo didn't fare any better in his two Pérez Grovas vehicles (in fact, these two films were actually much worse than the two Santo movies). Then again, Pérez Grovas didn't have a very good track record from the 1970s on, ruining the "Chanoc" series (watch *Chanoc en la isla de los muertos* and tell me I'm



wrong) and producing a handful of other, mediocre, non-series pictures.



**Dos hermanos murieron** [Two Brothers Died]  
(Películas Latinoamericanas-Novelty Internacional Films,



1980) *Prod*: Roberto Rodríguez; *Dir/Scr*: Federico Curiel; *Story*: Roberto Rodríguez, Juan Rodríguez; *Photo*: Alfredo Uribe; *Music*: Rafael Carrión; *Music Collab*: Susana Rodríguez; *Songs*: Federico Curiel (3), Rafael Carrión (2),

Jaime Guzmán M. (1); *Prod Mgr*: Juan Rodríguez; *Asst Dir*: Damián Acosta; *Film Ed*: Ignacio Chiu; *Camera Op*: Guillermo Bravo; *Dialog Rec*: Jorge Guerrero; *Re-rec*: Salvador Topete; *Union*: STIC

**Cast**: Andrés García (*Andrés Espinosa*), Gerardo Reyes (*Raúl Espinosa*), Diana Torres (*Raquel Fernández*), Patricia Curiel (*Helen Howard*), Ada Carrasco (*doña Rosa*), Marco D'Carlo (*Marco D'Carlo*), Francisco J. Pulido (*?Cuco*), Marciano Martín (*Brown*), Raúl Salcedo (*"Cascarita"* (*Juan Zamora*), Dulce María Rodríguez (*Agrippina*), Marcelo Villamil (*Mr. Howard*), Carlos León (*man in wreck with Raquel*), Fernando Pinkus & Jesús Gómez (*buyers*), Miguel Ángel Lira (*"Medelito"* (*ranch hand who gets punched*), Federico Curiel (*Lic. Martínez*), José Luis Urquieta (*man at party*)

**Notes**: this is an unusual immigration-themed film, which contravenes a number of the standard tropes and doesn't really get to the cross-border action until very late in its running time. Prior to that, *Dos hermanos murieron* is a rural melodrama about two brothers and the bad woman who comes between them. Despite its bifurcated nature, it's not bad at all, with a nihilistic conclusion that's a bit of a shock...unless you had read the title of the movie, of course!

Andrés and Raúl live on a ranch in northern Mexico with their elderly mother. Andrés is a happy-go-lucky womaniser, while Raúl is the "serious" older brother. Raúl, whose wife left him for another man, is coaxed by Andrés into visiting the Club Sandor, where he is smitten by singer Raquel. Unknown to Raúl, Raquel and her lover, club-owner Marco, plan to get all of Raúl's money (the ranch is quite large), sell the club and skip town. Andrés, one of Raquel's former boyfriends, tries to warn Raúl;

when this fails, he visits Raquel in an attempt to uncover her scheme. Raúl arrives and Raquel pretends Andrés was assaulting her; Raúl tells his brother he will kill him if he ever sees him again.

Andrés crosses the border to work in the USA. Thanks to the intervention of the wealthy Helen Howard and her father, he is hired as an airplane mechanic (apparently, his prior experience repairing the ranch tractor was qualification enough). He and Helen fall in love. Meanwhile,

Raúl wants to marry Raquel, but his mother, doña Rosa, tells Raquel the ranch is mortgaged and the family is poor. Raquel storms out in a rage after striking doña Rosa, which causes the older woman to have a fatal heart attack. Before she dies, doña Rosa asks Raúl to find his brother and bring him back to Mexico.

Some of the ranch hands decide to emigrate to the USA, but are attacked by the Ku Klux Klan. Among them is Cuco, whose brother Juan had helped Andrés when he first arrived. Raúl crosses the border (legally) but doesn't know exactly where Andrés is staying: he's directed to a

*fiesta* that night on the Pinky Ranch, where many Mexican workers will be celebrating the *Día de la Raza*.

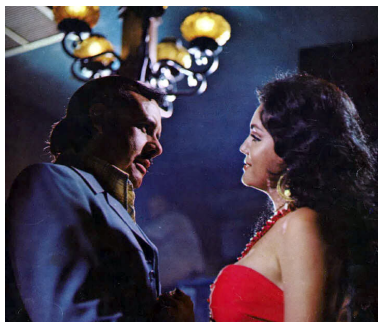
Andrés, Juan, and Helen, coincidentally, are also planning to attend, but before they arrive, the party-goers learn a group of *mojados* is crossing the river near the ranch. They decide to greet them, and protect them in case the KKK shows up. Well, whaddya know, the Klan does show up, along with Andrés, Juan, and Helen. Andrés and Raúl have a brief reunion in the midst of the battle that breaks out, before Raúl is shot to death. Andrés unmasks one of the Klansmen as Mr. Brown, his racist boss at the airport: Brown shoots Andrés but police sirens force the Klan to flee.

Andrés wakes up in the hospital, with Helen by his side. However, when Helen leaves to take a phone call, Mr. Brown comes into the room and shoots Andrés to death! Brown is subsequently killed by the police, but the final shot of the movie is Helen weeping over the body of Andrés.

The script of *Dos hermanos murieron* has a number of plot holes and inconsistencies. For instance, Raquel and



Marcko's plan to swindle Raúl appears to have been concocted on the spur of the moment: Raquel had never met Raúl before that day (bumping into him as she exited a store) and didn't know his identity until he came to the Club Sandor that night with Andrés (something he had



never done and didn't want to do), but she and Marcko apparently decide he's ripe for the picking (whereas Andrés had dumped Raquel because she seemed to be a bad sort). Even then, what exactly is Raquel's plan? To marry Raúl and somehow liquidate

his estate, then run off with Marcko? Seems like a very long-range scheme, and Raquel had no way of knowing Andrés would quarrel with Raúl and their mother would die, leaving Raúl as the sole owner of the ranch.

The portrayal of Mexican immigration to the USA and the conditions there is also muddled. Andrés, on the spur of the moment, goes the USA to live and work: he walks across the bridge to the USA, in broad daylight, carrying a suitcase! Yet Cuco and the other workers, and the group of men in the KKK sequence, are forced to sneak across the border by swimming the river. Why? It's never stated or even implied that Andrés has some sort of legal permission to emigrate (Raúl, on the other hand, goes to find his brother and not to work, so his entry is permitted).

The presence of the openly racist Mr. Brown (who says he doesn't hate Mexicans, but won't hire them because they're "lazy, like burros") and the Ku Klux Klan suggest the United States is a racist country. Juan says the Klan leaders "are very influential—they hold high posts in the factories, and also in the American government." But once again, Andrés seems to be above this (until the end). He's rejected for a job by Mr. Brown, but Helen likes his looks (seriously) and takes him to her father. Mr. Howard says "Gosh, the same story as always. Tell me one thing—why doesn't [Brown] understand that everyone is equal?" [OK, Mr. Howard, tell me one thing: why don't you fire this racist? Howard even says "I'm up to here with that" but still does nothing except order Brown to hire Andrés.] Mr. Howard's wife is Mexican and he's a happy man. "If everyone thought like you," Andrés replies, "there wouldn't be so many problems and discrimination."

In one amusing and ironic bit, as Raúl prepares to go to the USA to find Andrés, lawyer Martínez (director Curiel in a cameo) says "Poor Andrés, the troubles he must be having" and there's a cut to a happy, smiling Andrés and Helen strolling through the streets of Brownsville, window-shopping and enjoying a bright, sunny day!

Despite these contradictions, *Dos hermanos murieron* is generally entertaining and well-made. Gerardo Reyes and Diana Torres get 3 songs each: hers are all in the context of her role as a nightclub singer, while Reyes sings 2 in the countryside and one at the Pinky Ranch party.

The production values are satisfactory and Federico Curiel knows how to put together a slick and professional picture, even one shot entirely on location (in Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas and Brownsville, TX).



The performances are all decent, with Andrés García playing his usual sort of smiling, fun-loving character and Gerardo Reyes carrying most of the dramatic load as the glum, then love-struck brother. Patricia Curiel, the director's daughter one assumes, is fine in one of her only screen roles, Ada Carrasco channels Sara García as the irascible mother constantly berating her sons for their carousing, and Diana Torres is satisfactory as the *femme fatale*. Marciano Martin is pretty amazing as the evil Mr. Brown, although his dialogue (indeed, a fair amount of the dialogue of others as well) was post-dubbed. Comic relief of a very mild sort is assigned to the "lower-class" characters of Cuco (who plays a sort of Chicote sidekick role) and his girlfriend, *india* servant Agrippina (Dulce María Rodríguez, one of the numerous Rodríguez offspring who permeate the movies of their famous fathers).



## LA INDIA MARIA, THEN AND NOW

¡Duro pero seguro! [Hard But Sure]\* (Diana Films, 1974)



Prod: Fernando de Fuentes [hijo]; Dir: Fernando Cortés; Scr: Alfredo Varela [Jr.], Fernando Cortés; Story: Alfredo Varela [Jr.]; Photo: Javier Cruz; Music: Sergio

Guerrero; Asst Dir: José Amezcua; Script Clerk: Damián Acosta; Film Ed: Sergio Soto; Art Dir: Raúl Cárdenas; Camera Op: Alberto Arellano, Armando Castillón; Makeup: Graciela Muñoz; Music/Re-rec: Ricardo Saldivar;



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN VOLUME 21 NUMBER 2 (MARCH-APRIL 2015)

*Dialog Rec:* Carlos Rodríguez; *Choreog:* José Silva;

*Union:* STIC

\*aka *Algo es algo dijo el Diablo*

**Cast:** La India María [María Elena Velasco] (*María Nicolasa Cruz*), Jorge Lavat (*Armando Flores*), Ángel Garasa (*don Fulgencio*), Pancho Córdova (*Dr. Luis Frey*), Alfredo Varela [Jr.] (*Alejandro Ramírez*), Miguel Suárez (*don Ruperto Magallón García*), Maribel Fernández (*Carmen*), María Fernanda de Fuentes (*Carmelita*), Alfonso Zayas (*Mezcalito*), Colucho [Mario Zebadua] (*Victor Rojas "El Chaparro"*), Héctor Ortega (*reporter*), Lola Tinoco (*doña Zenaida*), Jorge Fegan (*Chucho el remendado*), Chis Chas [Jesús González Leal] (*studio employee*), Carlos Bravo "*Carlillos*" (*neighbour*), Margarito Luna & Regino Herrera (*men in autos*), Juan Garza (*studio guard*), El Mago Krotani (*magician*), Ana di Pardo (*actress*), Quinteto Musical Los Clásicos, José L. Murillo (*businessman*)

**Notes:** actress María Elena Velasco created the "India María" character in the late 1960s and was soon elevated to starring roles, appearing in 14 feature films between 1971 and 1992, in addition to a mid-'90s television series, a fotocomic, and so forth. This is a significant body of work, but not excessive--a classic case of over-exposure is probably the team of Capulina and Viruta, who appeared in 35 films in just ten years (1957-1966). Velasco was consistently one of the most popular stars of the '70s and '80s.

*¡Duro pero seguro!* was the fifth "India María" picture and contains elements which were already familiar and which would be repeated throughout the series: María



Nicolasa Cruz is a rather stereotyped *india* who lives with an older relative (usually her grandfather), works diligently, is good-natured, loyal, and generous. At times she seems clumsy and a bit child-like but also

demonstrates a native intelligence and perspicacity. Her superficial *india* traits—costume, hair, accent and malapropisms—are similar to previous (and subsequent) popular culture depictions of *indios*, but her character is more complex and admirable than the (mostly) comic relief *indios* (interspersed with a few "tragic" indigenous characters over the years).

Although in a number of her movies La India María's character falls in love (or at least demonstrates develops a crush on, or swoons over) with a handsome male, she is essentially sexless (although not necessarily by choice) and is portrayed as a nurturing maiden-aunt type. In *¡Duro pero seguro!* she is fond of Carmelita, a little girl who lives in the same *vecindad*, even vowing to pay for the child's emergency surgery, but in the end is forced to

watch the man she loves walk off with Carmelita (his daughter) and the girl's mother Carmen. This depiction is by no means unknown in comedy films, but for every male comedian who is portrayed as unlucky in love, there are others who have on-screen girlfriends, often far more attractive than one would imagine they'd be able to obtain in real life. Female comics, on the other hand, tend to be stereotyped as asexual or man-hungry spinsters (María falls in between these extremes, but rarely if ever has a true romantic partner in her movies).

Most of the "India María" films depict the interaction of the simple, honest rural-rooted (even if she lives in a big city) María with the white-dominated "modern" world, with a number of the films taking on issues such as politics and racism. *¡Duro pero seguro!* only touches on these themes, overtly, three times: in one scene, María makes a mini-speech in the style of politicians, although she subsequently admits she didn't really know what she was talking about. In two other instances, María refers to the racial status of

*indios*, particularly when it relates to romance with *mestizos* or *güeros*, first claiming the handsome Armando wouldn't be interested in a *fea* (ugly) *india* like herself, and at the



end of the movie—when Armando is reunited with his (white) girlfriend—saying "*los indios no tienen derecho de soñar*" (Indians have no right to dream). Throughout the movie María is clearly identified as an "other," standing out from the other people she comes in contact with, whether rich or poor. Ironically, her grandfather doesn't display the slightest indigenous traits, being identified as white, a former horse trainer, with an impressive "Spanish" name: "don Ruperto Magallón García."

María and her grandfather don Ruperto live in a humble *vecindad*; María prepares tacos each morning, which she then sells to the workers at the Estudios América. María has a crush on handsome actor/singer Armando. Don Fulgencio, who runs the studio dining facility, protests María's presence. When she accidentally spills food all over director Alejandro Ramírez, she is ejected from the studio by El Chaparro, who inadvertently hits her. The next day, María returns to the studio and sets up outside the gate; El Chaparro apologises for striking her and then informs everyone he won the lottery! Don Fulgencio spreads the word that hitting María brings good luck, and this seems to come true each time, so even he comes to believe it.

Armando, either because he doesn't like to see María getting pummeled or because he wants her "luck" all for himself (it's unclear), pays María to stay home and make tacos only for him. María thinks this means he's in love with her. Don Fulgencio sends two thugs to abduct and punch María, hoping to earn enough luck to purchase his

own restaurant, but belatedly figures out he has to hit her himself.

Meanwhile, Carmelita, the little daughter of María's neighbour Carmen, is in an accident and has to have an expensive operation on her spine. María vows to find the funds to pay for it, which eventually results in her



participating in a *charrería* contest (sort of like a rodeo) and performing the *paso de la muerte* stunt. Don Fulgencio, repentant, explains the "luck" thing to

María (who's been wondering why people keep hitting her). María thinks Armando has been deceiving her for his own career purposes (and in fact he does suddenly become popular singing *rancheras*). María hits herself (and wins 10,000 pesos in the contest), and compels the surgeon who's going to operate on Carmelita to hit her: the operation is a success and María doesn't even need the money to pay for it, since Armando discovers he is the little girl's father (he had an affair with Carmen when she was an extra at the América studios, but never knew she became pregnant with his child). María sadly watches the



reunited little family walk away. As the film ends, she allows crook Chucho el Remendado—who robs from the rich and gives to the poor—to hit her (so he can rob a bank), but he's hit by a police car and arrested,

so perhaps her status as a bringer of good luck has finally come to an end.

*¡Duro pero seguro!* has a cast loaded with comedy veterans and newcomers who'd later become famous. In the first category are Ángel Garasa, Alfredo Varela Jr., Colocho, and Pancho Córdova, all serving as straight men for María Elena Velasco's character. Garasa is particularly good in the scene in which don Fulgencio confesses everything to María and apologises for spreading the story about her. María forgives him and allows him to hit her one last time for luck, but when he leaves her apartment he's set upon by her angry neighbours, who beat and kick him severely!

Future comedy "names" include Alfonso Zayas (who starts out playing a comedic drunk, then sobers up but has little to do in either state), Maribel Fernández (before she earned the sobriquet "La Pelangocha"), and Jesús González "Chis Chas"—all three of these would go on to greater fame in the 1980s, although none is especially noticeable here.

Although *¡Duro pero seguro!* revolves around the Estudios América, there is almost no depiction of actual filmmaking; the plot could actually have taken place in almost any large, factory-like place of business, but it is still interesting to see a handful of actual shots of the outside of the facility. The rest of the film is a mix of real exteriors and sets (including sets representing the studio and sets representing "real" places). Fernando Cortés directed the first 7 "India María" films; Alfredo Varela Jr. (who also has an acting role), a frequent Cortés collaborator (since the Fifties), contributed the screen story and worked on the script.

The film contains a mix of character comedy, verbal humour, and slapstick, with a few touches of sentimentality. The performances are in general very good, but it's clearly Velasco's show. She participates in a grueling "ballet" scene (in which the other dancers go out of their way to strike her "for luck"), a go-go dance dream-sequence, a (too long) chase through an amusement park, and the *charrería* scenes, in which she (and her double) ride on horseback. None of these is truly hilarious, but—with the exception of the amusement park sequence—they are more or less tolerable. Most of the humour in *¡Duro pero seguro!* arises from the interplay between María and the other characters, which is mostly amusing rather than laugh-out-loud funny. Not the best of her early films, *¡Duro pero seguro!* is still generally entertaining.



**La hija de Moctezuma** [The Daughter of Moctezuma] (Vlady Realizadores, 2011) *Exec Prod:* Goretti Lipkies; *Prod:* María Elena Velasco; *Dir:* Iván



Lipkies; *Scr*: Ivette Lipkies, Iván Lipkies, Raúl Sánchez Figueroa; *Adapt*: M.E. Velasco; *Photo*: Alberto Lee; *Music*: Fernando Acosta; *Film Ed*: Sigfrido Barjau, ?Edgar Sosa

**Cast:** María Elena Velasco (*La India María*) (*María Nicolasa Cruz*), Eduardo Manzano (*Xocoyote*), Rafael Inclán (*Moctezuma*), Raquel Garza (*Brigida Troncoso*), Ernesto Pape (*Alonzo Gallego*), Federico Villa (*Sergeant*), Irma Dorantes (*governor's secretary*), Armando Silvestre (*Colonel*), Alfredo Sevilla (*?Bianchi*), Yekaterina Kiev (*Bianchi's assistant*), Alejandro Márquez, Guillermo Von Son, Julián Hernández, Roberto Fiesco (*Brigida's aide #2*), Joaquín Rodríguez

**Notes:** after *Las delicias del poder* (1996, released in 1999), María Elena Velasco “La India María” went into semi-retirement, starring in one television series (and



appearing in a number of others), and co-writing and acting in (in a cameo role) *Huapango* (2001), directed by her son Iván Lipkies.

However, in 2011 she returned to her most famous role with *La hija de Moctezuma*,

executive produced by her daughter, directed by her son, and co-scripted by herself, her daughter and her son (plus Raúl Sánchez Figueroa).

A slick and entertaining film, *La hija de Moctezuma* rather curiously could not find a distributor willing to release it theatrically until the fall of 2014, when it debuted with 370 prints (a respectable number, although it pales in comparison to a blockbuster like *La dictadura perfecta*, which was available on more than three times as many screens). It's difficult to understand this, given the legendary status of the India María character, although it's possible distributors felt her fan base had diminished over the years, particularly given her absence of more than a decade from the big screen. Although complete box-office results are not available (the International figures on boxofficemojo.com are six months out of date), anecdotal evidence suggests the film did reasonably well in cinemas. (One joke illustrating the long delay between production and exhibition is an appearance by a Vicente Fox-lookalike as the President of Mexico: Fox left office in 2006, and Mexico is now on its second chief executive since then.)

*La hija de Moctezuma* features a number of the standard “India María” tropes: María Nicolasa Cruz lives with an older, male relative,; displays a number of “traditional” aspects (costume, hairstyle, speech, rides a burro, etc.); naively comes in contact/conflict with the “modern” world (including politics) and foreigners, etc., but eventually triumphs thanks to her innate decency. However, this film—while still focused almost exclusively on María's actions—places her in a somewhat different narrative than usual, a plot with numerous allusions and

homages to other (mostly Hollywood) movies, while retaining its *mexicanidad* (indeed, the poster and film bill the character as *La Mexicanisma India María*—the most Mexican India María).

What other films are referenced, overtly or peripherally? *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Matrix*, *Predator*, *Home Alone*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *El ombligo de la luna* (perhaps), to name the most obvious. Indirectly, the presence of Eduardo Manzano, Irma Dorantes, Federico Villa, Rafael Inclán, and Armando Silvestre is a tribute to Mexican cinema history. *La hija de Moctezuma* is loaded with physical comedy familiar to India María aficionados, but it's also replete with competent CGI effects (mostly used effectively).

The film's strength—the essentially unchanged character of María—is also, ironically, its weakness. María Elena Velasco was 71 years old when the film was made, and there are scenes in which she looks it. There's no concession to this in the script, as María is subjected to the same (or more) strenuous physical comedy she exhibited in her 1970s vehicles, and behaves the same way as before in the “dramatic” sequences, and



yet it feels somehow...wrong. She's a senior citizen, for heaven's sake, she shouldn't be doing this stuff! Is that ageism? Perhaps. What if she were a man, would it be more acceptable? Maybe, although it depends upon the type of physical action taking place on the screen (Harrison Ford in *The Expendables 3* comes to mind). Yes, clearly María Elena Velasco isn't personally sliding down the side of mountain, riding a raft over a waterfall (she's then seen floating face-down in the water, apparently lifeless), and taking every other sort of pratfall one can imagine, but I found it impossible to put reality out of my mind. [As an aside, María Elena Velasco's health has been in the news this year, with reports indicating she is suffering from cancer and has undergone at least one surgical procedure.]

This may be only my opinion: critical reviews of *La hija de Moctezuma* were generally kind and didn't find it incongruous to depict a 71-year-old participating in rough physical slapstick. Additionally, the version of the film I saw was a bootleg, shot off the screen in a Mexican cinema (sorry, the film never played theatrically where I live), and the audience laughed quite a bit, including at the physical action. Some of this may have been because the viewers were predisposed to like La India María and wanted to laugh, but they honestly did seem to find the sight of her flying through the air, falling down, being covered with mud, etc., amusing. So...I guess it's just me.

The film begins in 1520. Emperor Moctezuma orders his son Xocoyote to accompany the warriors who are

hiding his treasure from the invading Spanish *conquistadores*. Moctezuma tells Xocoyote he needs to destroy the black mirror of the god Tezcatlipoca, which is too powerful to remain in human hands. When some Spaniards ambush the treasure convoy, Xocoyote—



holding the mirror—says “I don’t want to die!” and the mirror makes him immortal: a sword thrust through his body has no effect. The mirror

also shoots a beam of light at the *conquistador*, burning his hands and causing him to flee.

“500 years later, more or less...” Xocoyote is now a very old man, who lives in a hut with his daughter María Nicolasa Cruz. Outsiders want to buy the land, but they refuse to sell. More of a threat, however, is unscrupulous state governor Brígida Troncoso, who sends her inept henchmen to obtain Tezcatlipoca’s mirror, which will enable her to become President of Mexico. Xocoyote sends María on a quest to recover (and then destroy) the mirror. On her way, she’s joined by Spanish treasure



hunter Alonzo. After many perilous adventures—including repeated clashes with Brígida’s men as well as the gang of Bianchi (who has a female martial arts-expert in his employ)—María and Alonzo find Moctezuma’s hidden treasure and the mirror. However, the mystical prize is snatched away by the governor’s men.

Brígida uses the power of the mirror to remake herself into a glamorous figure and she becomes the presidential candidate of all three of Mexico’s major political parties, thus virtually ensuring her election. María and Alonzo, posing as reporters for a glossy popular magazine—and accompanied by Xocoyote, who can convert himself into a German shepherd dog—steal the mirror back.

Moctezuma’s spirit informs María she must toss the mirror into the volcano Popocatepetl; despite a last-minute intervention by Brígida, María succeeds in destroying the mirror (Brígida falls into the lava as well). The film concludes with a museum exhibition of Moctezuma’s treasure. Alonzo asks María if she wants to accompany him to find Pancho Villa’s lost treasure...

One interesting aspect of *La hija de Moctezuma*’s plot is the body count: in addition to Brígida, burned to death in the volcano, two characters are turned into gold statues by the mirror, and Bianchi’s aides are presumably sealed up

in the treasure cave and left to die (maybe they were rescued when the treasure was retrieved, but it’s unlikely). In contrast, María, Alonzo, and the governor’s two aides undergo numerous potentially fatal ordeals but survive, exhibiting only cartoonishly blackened-faces, torn clothes, and so on.

The film has a very strong fantasy component, unlike most previous India María films (although a few of these had some fantastic elements, such as 1972’s *Pobre, pero... jhonrada!*), which account for most of the CGI effects.

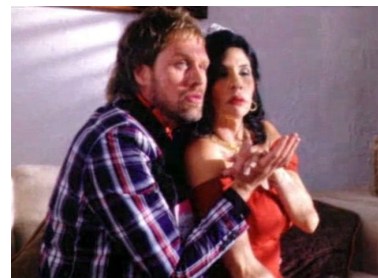
Almost everything is played straight—one notable exception is the gateway to the treasure room, which has a computerised-sounding



voice that demands the access code—and pre-Conquest Mexican history is generally respected (the obsidian mirror of Tezcatlipoca, use of Nahuatl in the opening sequence—although Moctezuma later speaks Spanish to María—and so on).

There is some political content in *La hija de Moctezuma*, although it is relatively mild. There’s no overt suggestion that Mexican politics in general is flawed or corrupt: Brígida is the primary villain and her evil ambitions are so over the top (and are achieved via supernatural means) that they don’t really constitute an analogy to real life. The depiction of the bumbling Mexican president at the end (the Vicente Fox clone) is a good-natured caricature, not a condemnation. Although Alonzo and (apparently) Bianchi are Spaniards, there is only a very mild suggestion that their quest for Moctezuma’s treasure represents a “foreign” attempt to steal Mexico’s patrimony (Alonzo’s reward for his participation in the recovery of the treasure is, ironically, Bianchi, whose body has been turned to solid gold).

*La hija de Moctezuma* is paced reasonably well,



although there are several mildly extraneous sequences (particularly one in which María and Alonzo are captured by drug smugglers and held in a cabin, which is subsequently

assaulted by soldiers), and other bits go on for too long. There are some gaps in logic in the script as well, but overall this is assembled in a clear and linear fashion: María goes on a quest to find the mirror, loses the mirror, recovers the mirror, destroys the mirror.



The performances are all solid. Although it had been 15 years since *Las delicias del poder*, Velasco reunited various performers from this film for *La hija de Moctezuma*—Irma Dorantes, Ernesto Pape, Yekaterina Kiev, and Alejandro Márquez—as well as cinematographer Alberto Lee (not to mention Iván and Ivette Lipkies, who’d obviously be involved in their mother’s project). The new “major” players are Rafael Inclán, Eduardo Manzano, and Raquel Garza: Inclán had appeared with La India María in *La comadrita* (1975) but neither Garza (who’s primarily a television actress) and Manzano (who achieved comedy fame as one “Los Polivoces” a few years before María Elena Velasco became a star) had worked with La India María before. Inclán plays his role straight, while Manzano and Garza have more flamboyant parts. Armando Silvestre is virtually unrecognisable in a small role; Federico Villa is much older and heavier than when he was—briefly—a film star, but it’s nice to see him again. Irma Dorantes, who has suffered health problems in recent years, has a substantial cameo as the governor’s secretary, and even gets to take a pratfall.

Not hilarious but very well made and generally amusing.



## BONUS FILM REVIEWS!



**Amor a ritmo de go-go** [Love in Go-Go Rhythm] (Películas Mundiales-T.V. Prods., 1966) *Prod.*: Jesús & Eduardo Galindo; *Dir.*: Miguel M. Delgado; *Scr.*: Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Photo*: José Ortiz Ramos; *Music*: Raúl Lavista; *Music Arr.*: Leo Acosta; *Prod Mgr.*: Alberto Galindo G.; *Prod Chief.*: Julio Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir.*: Américo Fernández; *Film Ed.*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir.*: Salvador Lozano; *Decor*: Pablo Galván; *Choreog.*: José Silva; *Makeup*: Felisa L. de Guevara; *Camera Op.*: Antonio Carrasco; *Lighting*: Gabriel Castro; *Sound Supv.*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec.*: Manuel Topete; *Re-rec.*: Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed.*: José Li-Ho; *Union*: STPC; Eastmancolour

**Cast**: Javier Solís (*Raúl*), Rosa María Vázquez (*Lupe*), Leonorilda Ochoa (*Leonor*), Eleazar García “Chelelo” (*Lucio*), Raúl Astor (*don Guillermo de la Vega*), Yolanda

Montés “Tongolele,” Arturo Cobo (*Héctor*), Carlota Martínez Solares (*rich widow*), Consuelo Monteagudo (*Raúl’s student*), Sady Dupeyrón, José Luis Caro (*Café a Go-Go doorman*), Los Hooligans\*, Los Rockin Devils, Leo Acosta Orchestra, Carlos Guarneros “Don Cuco,” Carlos Romano

\*on a pre-credits screen listing the record label affiliations of Javier Solís and the two bands, “Los Hooligans” is spelled correctly, but in the credits the spelling is “Los Holligans” [sic]

**Notes**: very slight but generally entertaining musical comedy, with a plot that’s mostly a framework for numerous musical performances, *Amor a ritmo de go-go* brings up various themes (older-style music vs. new music, cross-generational romance) then glosses over them.

There are 13 musical sequences in the film. These are split between traditional ballads or boleros sung by Javier Solís, rock and roll songs by the Hooligans and Rockin Devils, and big band style instrumentals by Leo Acosta’s orchestra (although there is some overlap, with Acosta’s band “extending” some of the rock and roll songs). As was common during the Sixties in Mexico, two of the songs are covers of U.S. hits: “Hey Lupe” is “Hang On Sloopy” with new lyrics, and “Bule Bule” is a version of “Woolly Bully” (oddly enough, the latter song is not listed in the credits). Both are performed by Los Rockin Devils, and both are heard twice. The big finale starts off with Los Rockin Devils singing “Bailar a ritmo de go-go,” with Los Hooligans and Leo Acosta’s orchestra then joining in. Tongolele, who appeared in one production number earlier in the film (described as a “rehearsal,” it features Tongolele, go-go dancers, and Leo Acosta’s band—with Acosta playing the drums), dances for a bit in this number as well.

Lupe and her roommate Leonor are dancers at the Café a Go-Go (an improbably large venue run by the pretentious Héctor). Lupe has a middle-aged admirer, the wealthy don Guillermo, who presents her with a brand new white Ford Mustang convertible. At first she refuses to accept it, then agrees



to “pay” for the car by giving don Guillermo dance lessons at his apartment. All completely innocent, of course. One problem: Lupe doesn’t know how to drive. Don Guillermo sends her to Raúl, who runs a small driving school with his pal Lucio (we later learn Raúl owes money to don Guillermo, so that’s how they knew each other).

Raúl and Lupe become friendly during the lessons. He visits the Café a Go-Go but isn’t impressed with the ambiance, and later tells Lupe he doesn’t like her being ogled by the male customers. Lucio also visits the club with a rich widow who signed up for driving lessons but is

more interested in romance; however, Lucio falls for Leonor and tells the widow “go-go has driven me crazy!” (He gives her a peso “for the streetcar” and says “keep the change!”)

During a performance at the Café, a bunch of university students (presumably—they’re all wearing sweaters with the “Puma” mascot of UNAM) rush the dance floor and try to kiss Lupe. A brawl breaks out, but Raúl,



Lucio, don Guillermo, and the regular patrons defeat the intruders. However, afterwards Raúl punches don Guillermo when the older man says he will eventually win Lupe’s affections. The next day, don Guillermo shows up to foreclose on Raúl’s loan—intending to take the school’s auto—but Lucio pays him with money that he later informs Raúl came from “the go-go girls.” As it develops, Leonor loaned him her savings (and Lupe’s), which infuriates Raúl, who hands over the car’s title to Lupe (eventually she gives it back and they reconcile with a kiss). Leonor tells don Guillermo that Lupe loves him but is afraid Raúl will commit suicide if she dumps him; she suggests the wealthy Guillermo give Raúl and Lucio jobs at one of his businesses in another city, thus getting them out of the way.



He agrees, and throws a “farewell” party at the Café, announcing his engagement to Lupe at the same time. But Lupe, Raúl, Lucio and Leonor double-cross him,

driving away (presumably don Guillermo will be a good sport and not cancel their new employment...).

The script, as noted above, brings up a number of issues but discards them, occasionally in confusing fashion. Raúl is given some cryptic dialogue about his past, how he moved to the city and even though he’s not happy as a driving instructor doesn’t want to go home to the countryside as a “failure.” He also tells Lupe he’d like to be the captain of ship so no one can give him orders, that he stopped drinking 10 years before (although he subsequently gets drunk after a sort-of argument with Lupe), that he doesn’t like to dance (although he and Lupe slow-dance on a date), and so on. Lupe has no particular goals in life, other than getting married: she isn’t a student and doesn’t even use the standard “I’m going to be a star” excuse for her current job (she is the main dancer at the

Café a Go-Go, but this is hardly stardom). After the brawl with the Pumas, Lupe says she now agrees with Raúl’s low opinion of her “career” and is going to quit go-go dancing—a statement that goes nowhere, because she’s right back in her usual job the next time we see her!

One might expect some sort of generational/culture clash with regards to the differing styles of music on display here, but while Raúl virtually always has a glum look on his face when he’s at the Café a Go-Go (compared to Lucio, who loves the music and literally dances in his seat), this isn’t presented as a specific dislike of rock music (he’s just



jealous of Lupe’s scantily-clad gyrations in front of the crowd). At one point he does complain about Lucio dancing to rock music in the office, saying “you’re acting like a 15 year old,” but he doesn’t otherwise verbalise his distaste for the music itself. Similarly, when don Guillermo begins his first “dance lesson,” he starts to put his arms around Lupe, only to be told “this isn’t a *danzón*”—in 1966, young people dance separately.

The film’s romantic pairings (real or hoped-for) are curiously stratified, generationally. Don Guillermo is clearly much older than Lupe (Raúl Astor was 47, Rosa Ma. Vázquez 23 in real life, although at one point Lupe says “I’m 20 years old”), and the rich widow is older than Lucio (Carlota Martínez Solares was 15 years older than Chelelo), and the film presents both of these relationships as inappropriate and humorous. On the other hand, Raúl tells Lupe “I’m not so old,” but he’s still depicted as a



mature individual who’s experienced much more than she has in life (Solís was actually 12 years older than Vázquez); the Lucio-Leonor romance is a typical “secondary” romance between comic relief sidekicks, and although Ochoa was 15 years younger than Chelelo, this is not as obvious on-screen as the Solís-Vázquez disparity. The only age-appropriate relationship in the film is a failed one, between Héctor and Leonor.



*Amor a ritmo de go-go* was shot in February 1966, less than 2 months before Javier Solís died (on 19 April 1966) of complications following gall bladder surgery. Solís made 9 films in 1965-66 and these were released over a period of several years, leading to various movies being labeled “the final film” for the actor. *Amor a ritmo de go-go* premiered in August 1966—a very quick turnaround for



a Mexican feature film in this era, possibly in an attempt to cash in on the recently-deceased star's popularity. Solís is fine here, playing the straight man to Chelelo and Astor; he has only one real comedic scene, convincing an inept student that she'd be happier and safer not learning to drive. Vázquez is also satisfactory, shaking her money-maker in the go-go scenes and handling the perfunctory “drama” adequately. Raúl Astor is smooth and assured as the lecherous don Guillermo, making him far less of a cartoonish villain than one would expect.

However, the most entertaining performance in *Amor a ritmo de go-go* comes from Eleazar García “Chelelo,” who is consistently amusing throughout. His body language, facial expressions, and gestures, along with his delivery of dialogue which is not necessarily inherently funny (although there are some good lines), is at the top of its form. Although the majority of his films were *rancheras*, Westerns, or other “rural”-themed pictures (or he'd play his rural *norteño* character in an urban setting), he's perfectly at ease here, only briefly alluding to his regional roots (complaining at one point that someone called him a *provinciano*, when he's really from *el norte*).

The production values of *Amor a ritmo de go-go* are adequate, with most of the Café a Go-Go sequences featuring a relatively large number of youthful extras dancing exuberantly, in addition to the bikini-clad go-go girls in cages and on platforms. Miguel M. Delgado makes no attempt to infuse this film with any sort of style: everything is shot in a very flat, straight-forward fashion with no attempt to recreate any sort of rock and roll feeling in the photography or editing. The plot-music-plot-music structure of the script results in a slightly choppy narrative flow, but the pacing isn't that bad (and the song sequences are generally good): the most irrelevant and extraneous number is Tongolele's dance, which could easily have been excised.



**La raza nunca pierde (Huele a gas)\*** [The People Never Lose: It Smells Like Gas] (Cin. Calderón, 1985) *Exec Prod*: Mario Gris; *Prod*: Guillermo Calderón Stell; *Dir*: Víctor Manuel Castro; *Scr*: Lic. Francisco Cavazos, Víctor Manuel Castro; *Photo*: Raúl Domínguez; *Music*: Marcos Lifshitz; *Prod Mgr*: Ricardo Gutiérrez; *Co-Dir*: Alejandro Todd; *Film Ed*: José Liho; *Makeup*: Estela Sánchez; *Sound Engin*: Víctor Rojo; *Union*: STIC

\*the title on screen appears this way; film was advertised under both titles

**Cast**: Rafael Inclán (*Chilo*), Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Chito*), Sasha Montenegro (*Magda del Río*), Carmen Salinas (*La Corcholata*), Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (*Jorge Torres*), María Cardinal (*Lorena Zapata*), Elsa Montes (*Teresa Zapata*), Güero Castro (*don Lucrecio*), Griselda Mejía (*Blanca*), Christopher Lago (*Jorgito*), Chico Che y la Crisis (*band*), Xorge Noble (*gay husband*), Humberto Elizondo (*Cmdte. Elizondo*), Paty Castro, Carlos Suárez (*Lic. Carlos Suárez*), Ana Berumen, Alma Thelma, Alfredo "Pelón" Solares (*stuttering waiter in pulquería*), Pancho Muller (*Mendoza*), Candelaria, Rafael de Quevedo, Gloria Alicia Inclán (*gas customer*), Pedrín [Orozco], "Serapio" [Roberto Montúfar] (*lottery vendor*), Carlos Bravo "Carhilllos" (*Mendoza's asst.*), Gonzalo Sánchez (*angry man in pulquería*), Rigoberto Carmona

(*licenciado*), José Luis Avendaño (*policeman at explosion site*), Luis Almeida, Elena Ballesteros

**Notes:** I wouldn't be surprised if this moderately entertaining comedy was partially financed by a gas company, since there is a very strong sub-text--courtesy of several pointedly didactic scenes in which characters explain gas safety measures--about the use and mis-use of bottled gas. Although various accidents occur during the course of the movie (a baby is asphyxiated, a hot water heater nearly explodes, a stove does explode and burn a woman, the gas plant itself blows up!), all of these are explained away by customer carelessness (or, in the case of the plant explosion, an "unforeseen shifting of the sub-soil"), not by any problems with the gas itself, or the company (although the film does make gas seem like a rather dangerous substance). There is even a scene in which a gas company employee explains why gas smells bad (it's an additive put in to the odorless natural gas so leaks can be detected).

Although sold as a "sexy-comedy," *La raza nunca*



*perde* has exactly four scenes of nudity, carefully spaced throughout the film. Sasha Montenegro, María Cardinal, and Elsa Montes do one scene each of full frontal nudity (Montenegro's is the shortest), none in overtly sexual situations, and there is also a brief topless scene featuring another actress (played for comedy). Although Flaco Guzmán's character is described as a womanizer, only one of his (attempted) seductions is depicted, and this ends humorously (the woman's husband comes home, Guzmán pretends to be gay to allay the man's suspicions, only to have the man flirt with him!).

The cast is quite good. Miguel Ángel Rodríguez's character is clearly intended to be an homage to Jorge Rivero--(a) he's named Jorge, (b) he plays a former boxer (Rivero's role in various sexy-comedies), and (c) his character is married to Sasha Montenegro's character (a la the *Pulquería* series). Inclán and Guzmán have a good rapport, and the supporting cast is satisfactory (even Carmen Salinas, in her usual role as "La Corcholata," is easier to take this time).

Jorge Torres is a former champion boxer who retired for health reasons. After losing his savings in a bad investment (he repaid the investors instead of allowing them to lose their money), Jorge bought a truck and became a bottled-gas delivery man, assisted by Chilo and Chito. Jorge also left his wife, famous actress Magda del

Río, vowing never to return to her (and their young son) until he became wealthy (she had made an angry comment about him living off her money).

Meanwhile, Chilo has been told by astrologer don Lucrecio that he's the last descendant of Tutankhamen, and has been cursed with bad luck by Neptune. This explains his failure to seduce his women customers (as Chito does), why a complete stranger mistakes him for someone else and beats him up, and so forth.

Jorge's drunken friend La Corcholata asks Magda to let her son Jorgito visit his father, but the bitter Magda refuses. She thinks Jorge is having an affair with his neighbor Lorena (untrue, since Lorena is a "decent woman"). La Corcholata abducts Jorgito, who is happy to be reunited with his father. However, Magda files legal action and regains custody of her son.

Chito tells Jorge he has honest intentions towards Lorena, and Jorge says he has no romantic interest in the voluptuous young woman. Chito and Lorena become engaged. Chilo proposes to Lorena's sister Teresa and is accepted (Teresa escapes serious injury when her robe catches fire from the stove, the aforementioned nude scene for Elsa Montes). The gas company that supplies Jorge's gas suffers an explosion, and the owners are held criminally responsible for negligence. However, Jorge proves the gas line ruptured due to natural causes, and is rewarded with a gas concession of his own, and enough money to buy a fleet of trucks. Chilo learns he is not the last descendant of Tutankhamen ("Negro" Durazo is, which explains his bad luck), and wins the lottery after buying a ticket with the number recommended by a repentant don Lucrecio.

*La raza nunca pierde* is fairly good fun, without the padding that slows down a number of sexy-comedies. The *pulque* shop sequence is a bit too long and irrelevant, but it's funny enough, and the two musical sequences by Chico Che's band (during the credits and at the very end of the movie) are fine.

There are a couple of in-jokes, including a reference to "Father Cavazos" (named after the screenwriter), but the most amusing of these is the scene between Rafael Inclán and his real-life mother, Gloria Alicia Inclán. At the end, Chilo says, "I like you, you remind me of my mother," and she replies "Oh, like you have one."

Not great, but satisfactory entertainment.



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