

# THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN

## VOLUME 21 NUMBER 3

### MAY-JUNE 2015

#### 2015 Ariel Awards

The 57<sup>th</sup> Ariel Awards ceremony was held on 27 May 2015 at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Blanca Guerra, president of the Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y Artes Cinematográficas, spoke in favour of



more government support for the Mexican film industry. There were homages to three writers—each with

connections to Mexican cinema—who passed away in 2014: Gabriel García Márquez, Vicente Leñero, and José Emilio Pacheco.

There was no overwhelming winner of the evening, although *Güeros*, a comedy-drama about young people in Mexico City-- shot in black-and-white and 4:3 aspect ratio--won 5 prizes including Best Film and Best Direction. Other films which took home multiple Arieles included *La tirisia*, *Obediencia perfecta*, *Las oscuras primaveras*, *Cantinflas*, and *Visitantes*.

Career achievement Arieles de Oro were presented to producer Bertha Navarro and special effects supervisor Miguel Vázquez.

#### Best Film

*Carmín tropical*  
**Güeros**  
*Guten Tag, Ramón*  
*La dictadura perfecta*  
*Las oscuras primaveras*

#### Best Director

Rigoberto Perezcano / *Carmín tropical*  
**Alonso Ruizpalacios** / *Güeros*  
Jorge Ramírez-Suárez / *Guten Tag, Ramón*  
Luis Estrada / *La dictadura perfecta*  
Ernesto Contreras / *Las oscuras primaveras*

#### Best Actor

Óscar Jaenada / *Cantinflas*  
Harold Torres / *González*  
Tenoch Huerta / *Güeros*  
Kristyan Ferrer / *Guten Tag, Ramón*  
**Juan Manuel Bernal** / *Obediencia perfecta*

#### Best Actress

Ilse Salas / *Güeros*  
Karina Gidi / *La guerra de Manuela Jankovic*  
**Adriana Paz** / *La tirisia*  
Cassandra Ciangherotti / *Las horas contigo*  
Irene Azuela / *Las oscuras primaveras*

#### Best Co-Starring Actress

Mima Vukovic / *La guerra de Manuela Jankovic*  
Mercedes Hernández / *La tirisia*  
**Isela Vega** / *Las horas contigo*  
Cecilia Suárez / *Las oscuras primaveras*  
Margarita Sanz / *Las oscuras primaveras*

#### Best Co-Starring Actor

Luis Alberti / *Carmín tropical*  
Alonso Echánove / *Cuatro lunas*  
Álvaro Guerrero / *Eddie Reynolds y los Ángeles de acero*  
Carlos Bardem / *González*  
**Noé Hernández** / *La tirisia*

#### Best Photography

Alejandro Cantú / *Carmín tropical*  
**Damián García** / *Güeros*  
Carlos Hidalgo / *Guten Tag, Ramón*  
César Gutiérrez / *La tirisia*  
Tonatiuh Martínez / *Las oscuras primaveras*

#### Best Adapted Screenplay

Mauricio Walerstein, Claudia Nazoa, Federico Reyes Heróles / *Canon (Fidelidad al límite)*  
José Buil / *La fórmula del doctor Funes*  
**Ernesto Alcocer, Luis Urquiza** / *Obediencia perfecta*

#### Best Original Screenplay

**Rigoberto Perezcano** / *Carmín tropical*  
Fernando del Razo, Christian Díaz / *González*  
Alonso Ruizpalacios, Gibrán Portela / *Güeros*  
Jorge Ramírez-Suárez / *Guten Tag, Ramón*  
Luis Estrada, Jaime Sampietro / *La dictadura perfecta*

#### Best Original Music

Luca Ortega / *Carmín tropical*  
Mario Lavista / *Eco de la montaña*  
Tomás Barreiro / *Güeros*  
**Emmanuel del Real, Renato del Real, Ramiro del Real** / *Las oscuras primaveras*  
Kenji Kishi Leopo / *Somos Mari Pepa*

#### Best Production Design

**Christopher Lagunes** / *Cantinflas*  
Sandra Cabriada / *Güeros*  
Salvador Parra / *La dictadura perfecta*

Antonio Muñozhiero, Mariana Fernández / *La guerra de Manuela Jankovic*  
Julieta Álvarez / *Obediencia perfecta*

### Best Film Editing

Miguel Schverdfinger / *Carmin tropical*  
Yibrán Asuad, Ana García / *Güeros*  
Jorge Ramírez-Suárez, Sonia Sánchez, Sam Baixauli / *Guten Tag, Ramón*  
Mariana Rodríguez / *La dictadura perfecta*  
**Valentina Leduc** / *Las oscuras primaveras*

### Best Makeup

**Maripaz Robles** / *Cantinflas*  
Maripaz Robles / *Carmin tropical*  
Felipe Salazar / *Eddie Reynolds y los Ángeles de acero*  
Roberto Ortiz, Felipe Salazar, Elena López / *El crimen del Cácaro Gumaro*  
Felipe Salazar / *La dictadura perfecta*

### Best Special Effects

Ricardo Arvizu, Willebaldo Bucio / *El crimen del Cácaro Gumaro*  
Alejandro Vázquez / *La dictadura perfecta*  
Nury Álamo, Karina Rodríguez, Alfonso Moreno / *La fórmula del doctor Funes*  
Adrián Durán / *Más negro que la noche*  
**Ricardo Arvizu** / *Visitantes*

### Best Visual Effects

Marco Rodríguez / *Cantinflas*  
Fabián García, Cyntia Navarro, Paula Siqueira / *Eddie Reynolds y los Ángeles de acero*  
Paula Siqueira, Michael Hoffmann, Raúl Prado, Cyntia Navarro, Charlie Iturriaga / *El crimen del Cácaro Gumaro*  
Adriana Arriaga / *La dictadura perfecta*  
**Charlie Iturriaga** / *Visitantes*

### Best First Work

González / Christian Díaz  
**Güeros** / **Alonso Ruizpalacios**  
*Las horas contigo* / Catalina Aguilar  
*Los bañistas* / Max Zunino  
*Obediencia perfecta* / Luis Urquiza

### Best New Actress

Vico Escorcia / *Eddie Reynolds y los Ángeles de acero*  
Gabriela Cartol / *La tirisia*  
Magda Ortiz / *La tirisia*  
**Nora Isabel Huerta** / *Seguir viviendo*  
Petra Iñiguez / *Somos Mari Pepa*

### Best New Actor

Sebastián Aguirre / *Güeros*  
Daniel Carrera / *La fórmula del doctor Funes*  
Hayden Meyenberg / *Las oscuras primaveras*  
**Sebastián Aguirre** / *Obediencia perfecta*  
Alejandro Gallardo / *Somos Mari Pepa*

### Best Sound

Pablo Tamez, Ruy García, Branka Mrkic / *Carmin tropical*  
Axel Muñoz, José Miguel Enríquez, Pablo Fernández, Víctor Manuel Barragán / *González*  
**Isabel Muñoz, Pedro González, Gabriel Reyna, Kiyoshi Osawa, Jaime Baksht, Michelle Couttolenc** / *Güeros*

Santiago Núñez, Pablo Lach, Hugo de la Cerda / *La dictadura perfecta*  
Enrique Ojeda, Enrique Greiner / *Las oscuras primaveras*

### Best Costume Design

**Gabriela Fernández** / *Cantinflas*  
Laura García de la Mora / *Carmin tropical*  
Gabriela Fernández / *Eddie Reynolds y los Ángeles de acero*  
Mariestela Fernández / *La dictadura perfecta*  
Josefina Echeverría / *Obediencia perfecta*

### Best Animated Short

*El color de mis alas* / Miguel Anaya  
***El modelo de Pickman*** / **Pablo Ángeles Zuman**  
*El trompetista* / Raúl Alejandro Morales  
*Tierra seca* / Ricardo Torres  
*Tlacuache de maguay* / Miguel Anaya

### Best Documentary Short

*El palacio* / Nicolás Pereda  
***El penacho de Moctezuma. Plumaria del México antiguo*** / **Jaime Kuri**  
*Jefe del desierto* / Alejandro Ramírez  
*Perreus* / Kalien Delgado  
*Ulterior* / Sabrina Muhate

### Best Fictional Short

*400 maletas* / Fernanda Valadez  
*Ella* / Ximena Urrutia  
*La carta* / María de los Ángeles Cruz  
*Nunca regreses* / Leonardo Díaz  
***Ramona*** / **Giovanna Zacarías**

### Best Documentary Feature

*Bering. Equilibrio y resistencia* / Lourdes Grobet  
*Eco de la montaña* / Nicolás Echevarría  
***H2Omx*** / **José Cohen, Lorenzo Hagerman**  
*Los años de fierro* / Santiago Esteinow  
*Navajazo* / Ricardo Silva

### Best Iberoamerican Film

*Conducta* (Cuba) / Ernesto Daranas  
*La isla mínima* (España) / Alberto Rodríguez  
*Mr. Kaplan* (Uruguay) / Álvaro Brechner  
*Pelo malo* (Venezuela) / Mariana Rondon  
***Relatos salvajes*** (Argentina) / **Damián Szifron**

### Ariel de Oro

Bertha Navarro  
Miguel Vázquez



## María Elena Velasco “La India Maria” 1940-2015

Actress, producer, writer and director María Elena Velasco died in Mexico City on 1 May 2015; she was 74 years old. Although no cause of death was stated, she had been diagnosed with stomach cancer a number of years earlier.

María Elena Velasco Fragoso was born in Puebla in December 1940. She began working as a dancer and

comedic actress in Mexico City venues such as the Tivoli, Follies, Lírico, and Blanquita variety theatres. Her film and television career began in the early 1960s



and she eventually developed her signature "India María" character. *Tonta, tonta pero no tanto* (1971) was her first starring role, and 16 more "India María" vehicles followed, concluding with *La hija de Moctezuma* (2011, released in 2014).

Velasco's character—"María Nicolasa Cruz"—stereotyped and naive but immensely likeable and

always depicted as morally superior to those around her, made her one of the major box-office attractions of the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to her feature films, La India María also appeared on the stage, in *foto-comics* and in a 1990s television series ("Ay María, que puntería!").

Fernando Cortés directed the first seven India María vehicles, but after his



departure Velasco began to take on additional responsibilities in the production of her own movies. She co-directed *Okey Mister Pancho* (1979) with Gilberto Martínez Solares, then directed or co-directed 4 additional features, also

working on the scripts of all of her films from 1979 onward. She produced many of her later features, as well as *Huapango* (2001), a non-India María movie in which she had a supporting role and received an Ariel for Best Adapted Screenplay (shared with her children Iván and Ivette). Velasco had previously received an Ariel nomination in 1980 for the documentary short *Desempleo* which she directed.

María Elena Velasco married actor and choreographer Julián de Meriche (whose real name was Vladimir Lipkies). They had 3 children—Iván, Ivette, and Goretti—all of whom contributed to their mother's later features (Iván Lipkies directed *Las delicias del poder*, *Huapango*, and *La hija de Moctezuma*).



**El miedo no anda en burro** [Death Doesn't Ride a Burro] (Diana Films, 1973) *Prod:* Fernando de Fuentes [hijo]; *Dir:* Fernando Cortés; *Scr:* Fernando Galiana; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Song:* Gustavo Pimentel; *Film Ed:* Sergio Soto; *Art Dir:* Raúl Cárdenas; *Cam Op:* Agustín Lara; *Animal Trainers:* Hermanos Gurza; *Monster Costumes:* Antonio Neyra; *Spec FX:* Ramiro Valencia; *Music/Rec:* Heinrich Henkel; *Asst Sound:* Ricardo Saldivar;

*Dialog Rec:* Consuelo Jaramillo; *Asst Dir:* Fernando Durán; *Makeup:* Tony Ramírez; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** María Elena Velasco "La India María" [María Elena Velasco] (*María*), Eleazar García "Chelelo" (*don Braulio*), Fernando Luján (*Raúl*), Emma Roldán (*doña Paz*), Óscar Ortiz de Pinedo (*don Marciano*), Gloria Mayo (*Laura*), Wally Barrón ("*Frankie*" aka *Insp. Maldonado*), Carlos Bravo Fernández "Carl-Hillos" (*lawyer*), José Cibrián Jr. (*gringo tourist*), Antonio Bravo (*doctor*), Alfonso Zayas (*traffic cop*), Mimi (*dog*) [the credits indicate the dog was owned by Chelelo], René Cardona III



**Notes:** this film has been a sore spot with me for a number of years, since my *Mexican Filmography* book contained a major error in the description (indicating the animal that María cares for is a cat, rather than a dog). It wasn't my fault, I'd never seen *El miedo no anda en burro* and I was misled by a secondary source (the usually reliable *Historia documental del cine mexicano*), but it still rankled.

Many years later, I have finally watched the film and—trying to be objective—consider it one of the lesser India María vehicles (although it was fantastically successful at the box-office). Although the direction is weak and the script is repetitive and predictable, one of the biggest issues is that Fernando Galiana merely inserted India María into a standard horror-comedy



format, rather than tailoring the story to her particular strengths. In fact, María doesn't even wear her classic costume for large portions of the latter half of the

movie, spending a significant amount of screen time in a nightgown and mob cap. This, in and of itself, isn't a problem, but it does epitomise the way in which *El miedo no anda en burro* shoe-horns her into a generic script. There is also a bizarre musical sequence in which María talk-sings a lugubrious "Song of Death," accompanied by distorted, fantasy images, a scene which feels extremely out of place.



[Note: Fernando Galiana lifted the final sequence of the movie—María trapped in a cell with the walls closing in on her, and her "rescuers" pulling various levers which only make matters worse—from another script he wrote, *El castillo de los monstruos* (1957). In that film, it was Clavillazo and Evangelina Elizondo in the trap. And of course, the idea of scheming relatives trying to eliminate other heirs to a fortune (only to have their traps backfire) was a hoary plot device used dozens of times—at least!—including as recently as 1972's *Entre pobres y ricos*, directed by Fernando Cortés but not written by Galiana.]

To be fair, the first section of the movie isn't bad and there are some amusing bits of dialogue. In the aforementioned musical sequence, María spots don Marciano playing the organ and says "You're better than the Monje Loco!" When María arrives at the gloomy estate of her late employer, she's greeted by caretaker Frankie. As they walk through the wooded grounds towards the mansion, María asks: "Are there any animals around here?" "Ants, woodlice, lizards, worms, tarantulas, rats, scorpions, and bats," he replies. María: "No butterflies?" "No, we had them exterminated 10 years ago," Frankie says.

As the film begins, elderly doña Clarita is on her deathbed. In attendance are her greedy relatives—doña Paz, don Marciano, don Braulio, Raúl and Laura—as well as Clarita's faithful servant María and Clarita's beloved pet dog, Mimi. After Clarita's death, the relatives eagerly await the reading of the will, only to discover that their relative's entire fortune has been left to



Mimi, with María as custodian of the funds (and the dog). Don Marciano and the others decide eliminating Mimi is the solution, but

their attempts fail. After a bomb placed in a piece of raw meat—intended for the dog but picked up from the ground by María and served for dinner!—explodes, Mimi runs away howling. María is advised to take the pet to doña Clarita's mansion in Guanajuato to recover in peace and quiet.

However, María is leery of the estate's eccentric caretaker, Frankie, and the old house is honeycombed with secret passages which frighten her. The relatives show up for a "visit" and switch their murderous intentions to María (it's revealed that they paid the doctor to poison doña Clarita as well). María unwittingly avoids being shot with an arrow, poisoned (twice), blown up, and pushed off a cliff, and eventually the disinherited family members pack up and go home.

María now thinks she and Mimi are safe, but that night she's pursued throughout the old mansion's

basement labyrinth by a werewolf, a cyclops, a plant-man, and a human-sized frog; she narrowly escapes death in a pit of crocodiles (pushing the plant-man in, where he's attacked by the beasts), and is finally captured and put into a death-trap cell. The "monsters" are revealed to be don Marciano (the werewolf), Raúl (cyclops), Laura (frog) and Braulio (plant-man); doña Paz apparently refused to don a costume, so she just waves a pistol. Before María and Mimi can be squashed by the encroaching walls of the cell, the police—led by "Frankie," actually undercover police inspector Maldonado—rush in and arrest the greedy would-be murderers and rescue María and the dog.



As noted above, the first section (in Mexico City) is mildly amusing. María is a little too solicitous of the dog, talking to it in baby talk and carrying it around, but she's feisty when confronted by the snobbish relatives and is determined to carry out her regular duties despite their presence (curiously, she continues to live in the servants' quarters rather than the main house). But when the film moves to Guanajuato (for no particular reason—the city itself isn't shown much at all, and there is only a passing mention of the famous mummies) it becomes sloppy and repetitive. None of the sight gags is very effective and María turns into a nervous wreck, wailing and beseeching various saints to assist her.



The script is very predictable, with the exception of the final twist...except that this is achieved through some blatant "cheating." At

the end of the second section, the relatives—in a meeting at which María is not present—decide to give up their sinister scheme and go home. Yet in the third part of the film, they return to the house, disguised as monsters, and make further attempts on María's life. It's never explained why they changed their minds, why they didn't try the "fake monster" gag in the first place or who came up with this idea. Since their decision to go home was

not feigned—as mentioned, María isn't there so she has no idea why they're leaving, and thus can't be "fooled"—this was apparently included solely so the final reveal of the monsters would be a "surprise" for audiences.

The monster costumes were created by Antonio Neyra. Neyra (sometimes credited as Neira) was a sculptor who also worked occasionally in Mexican



fantasy cinema creating monsters. His credits include *El castillo de los monstruos*, *La bruja*, and *Misterios*

*de la magia negra*. The werewolf mask is not very detailed (it's just a mass of hair, mostly), and the frog and plant-man costumes are extremely bland. The horned cyclops appears to be a commercial mask based on the creature from Ray Harryhausen's *The 7<sup>th</sup> Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), although the character in *El miedo no anda en burro* dresses in a shiny, futuristic suit with a cape. [Don Post made such a mask but the version used in the movie doesn't match the photos of the late -1970s Post version, at least.]

Despite the quality of the supporting actors in *El miedo no anda en burro*, none are treated especially well. Chelelo and Óscar Ortiz de Pinedo have the most footage, with Chelelo's character receiving the brunt of the failed assassination attempts (he's bitten by dogs, blown up twice, poisoned, pushed off a cliff, and bitten by alligators), but neither has much comic material to work with. Fernando Luján and Gloria Mayo are rarely seen, on the other hand. Wally Barrón is sporadically amusing as the grumpy, grotesque "Frankie," but mostly vanishes in the third section of the movie.

Not horrible but a thematic misstep in the India María series.



**Ni de aquí, ni de allá** [Neither From Here, Nor From There] (Prods. Vlady, 1987) *Exec Prod*: Abe Glazer? (uncredited); *Prod*: Iván Lipkies; *Dir*: María Elena Velasco; *Scr*: Ivette Lipkies; *Orig. Idea*: María Elena Velasco; *Photo*: Alberto Arellanos; *Music*: Chucho Zarzosa; *Admin Mgr*: Adán Méndez; *Film Ed*: Jorge Rivera; *Makeup*: María Eugenia Luna; *Sound Engin*: Guillermo Carrasco; *Re-rec*: Manuel Jasso

**Cast**: María Elena Velasco (*La India María*) (*María*), Sergio Kleiner (*Ivan Cosaco*), Cruz Infante (*Cruz*), Memo de Alvarado (*Condorito*) (*Cabrini, gardener*), Rafael Banquells (*FBI chief*), Humberto Luna (*Mexican customs inspector*), Pepe Romay (*government official*), Poly [Pablo?] Marichal (*black FBI agent?*), Martin Aylette (*white FBI agent?*), Burdette Zea (*Mrs. Wilson?*), Alan Tirion, Ana Arjona, Bruno Schwebel (*Mr. Taylor?*),

Silvestre Méndez, Jorge Mondragón (*don Santos*), León Escobar, Blancaman, Carlos Feria, Eliette Corona, Víctor Enríquez, Violeta Flores, Miguel Galván (*Charly?*), Lila Glusevich, Pepe Hurtado, Miguel Islas, Barbara May, Blanca L. Muñoz (*hooker*), Adalberto Menéndez, Gloria Sunat, Alberto Vieyra, Janka Wurm, Isaías Gómez; *Stunts*: Margot Shaw, Armando Juárez, Alejandro Avendaño



**Notes**: this is an interesting movie, a look at the United States through the prism of Mexican cinema (one of many such films). Although episodic in the extreme and tailored to the slapstick antics of *La India María*, there are certain underlying sentiments worth investigating.

The film unfolds in flashback, as (we learn later) María is returning to Mexico from the USA... Somehow, *campesina* María has made the acquaintance of the Wilsons [probably a veiled reference to Gov. Pete Wilson of California] who (for some reason) have hired her to work at their home in Los Angeles. After a year, she will have enough money to buy a tractor for the farm she shares with her aged grandfather Santos. Don Santos is opposed to the offer: "Mexico is a land of abundance." "Not for the *indios*," María replies. Santos says he's afraid María, like many other immigrants, will forget her Mexican heritage and be one of those who is "neither from here, nor from there."

After various comic hijinks on the airplane, María and the Wilsons arrive in Los Angeles. At the airport, María's gauche actions earn her a reprimand from Mrs. Wilson: "María, you can't act that way in this country!" [Note: the English dialogue in this movie is translated into Spanish sub-titles.] María becomes separated from her employers when Customs detains her for attempting to bring a box of green chiles into the country. She stumbles into the men's restroom, where Russian spy



Ivan Cosaco has killed a man. He holds María hostage but she eventually escapes, clinging to the back of a truck as it leaves the airport. The FBI has her under surveillance, believing she is part of Ivan's spy ring. [The FBI chief, instructing his agents, inexplicably adds "Remember Eisenhower."] Two agents (one black, one white) trail María throughout the movie, hoping she will lead them to the rest of the gang.

María wanders around Los Angeles, eating out of trash cans (!) and occasionally dodging Ivan's murder attempts. [An English-language song plays on the soundtrack--"I don't belong here," a female vocalist wails. This has the same idea as the Spanish-language theme song heard over the credits, but doesn't have the same lyrics or music.] A Hispanic bartender gives her directions to the restaurant "El Coyote," where she gets a job in the kitchen. [A running gag in the movie is María's inability to speak English, so all she can order to eat is "coffee and donuts." Cruz, the cook, tries to teach her to say "cheese hamburger" but when she attempts to order this--from a great-looking blonde waitress in a mall foodcourt--she fails and is reduced to "coffee and donuts" once more. However, almost immediately afterwards, she buys a hotdog! This ruins the previous continuity, but allows for a sight gag where she squirts mustard on an FBI agent.]

Ivan spots María in the mall and trails her back to El Coyote. She's fired for incompetence and has to flee, pursued by "La Migra" and Ivan. Two short sequences follow. In the first, María is working in a Pepsi bottling plant (interestingly enough, numerous women are shown working there, including María's supervisor) but has to run from another Immigration raid. Then she gets a job as a chicken mascot outside a Kentucky Fried Chicken stand, but is fired after she fights with another chicken mascot. [The *Variety* review of this movie claims the store manager says--in English-- "our chicken is really



greasy," but she is actually saying "really crispy," pronounced *creespy*. By the way, there is a lot of product

placement in this film, including plugs for Coca Cola, Planter's Peanuts, etc.]

Finally, María gets a job at the palatial mansion of the bed-ridden Mr. Taylor and his ditsy wife. The Taylors have a black Cuban chauffeur, a snooty white butler, and an Italian gardener. María is supposed to care for Mr. Taylor but the high-tech nature of the medical equipment and other household gadgets perplexes her. Ivan digs his way into the grounds but is chased back into the hole by a guard dog (which then urinates on him, ha ha). María decides to give Mr. Taylor a *limpia* (spiritual cleansing) but sets the room on fire and causes her patient's

automatic bed to go wild, eventually launching him out the window (he lands on Ivan, who is arrested by the FBI).

María is deported. Mrs. Wilson says María--who never did any work for her--owes her \$100 for the plane ticket, but María says "charge it to the external debt." Cruz gives María a boombox she had admired and some money to deliver to his wife. At the



Mexican customs station, María has to bribe the officials with toothpaste and a bottle opener in order to keep her boombox. Spotting María's red tennis shoes (in place of the *huaraches* she was wearing when she left Mexico), the official asks if she is a *deportista* (athlete). "No, I'm a *deportada* (deported person)," she replies. The flashback concludes as María climbs back on the bus, only to spot Ivan Cosaco on board!

Since La India María is portrayed as such a dunce, it is hard to tell if she fares badly in the USA because she is Mexican or because she's dim-witted. Clearly, if she was less stubborn, clumsy or inept, she would probably have been able to keep at least one of her jobs (although "La Migra" shows up several times to run her off), and if she had been able to learn basic English, she wouldn't have had to eat "coffee and donuts" all the time (although she certainly could have eaten in El Coyote or any other Mexican restaurant).



The movie does not depict *gringos* as racists or exploitative of Mexicans, and while Cruz says he misses Mexico, he does not (as some Mexican films do) condemn life in the USA. María does say "if I'm going to be treated badly, I might as well be in my own country," but a substantial amount of the grief she suffers is due to (a) her own ineptitude and (b) Ivan's persecution (with La Migra accounting for the rest). The *gringos* are, almost without exception, portrayed as dopes or cold and officious. The chief of the FBI is constantly eating, his two agents are incompetent and foils for slapstick jokes, Mrs. Taylor is eccentric (a violinist follows her around and plays whatever she requests), and the Wilsons are well-meaning but mostly self-centered.

*Ni de aquí, ni de allá* was shot in Mexico and in the USA, and the production values are fine. María Elena

Velasco was one of the top box-office draws in Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s, and while there aren't any spectacular set pieces, the movie doesn't look cheap or rushed at all. There are no noticeable flaws in the direction or pacing (the episodic nature of the movie is to be expected). This was a Velasco family project, with María Elena Velasco directing, providing the "original



idea," and starring; her son Iván produced and her daughter Ivette scripted the picture. The acting is broad but adequate.

There's one self-reflexive bit, as María passes

the real-life Million Dollar Theatre (showing *Herencia de valientes* at the moment): she walks by large photos of Vicente Fernández, Lucía Méndez, and...La India María. Pausing, she strikes a similar pose to the one in her photo and laughs.

Mildly entertaining.



## The 1930s: Sad Musicians



**Sobre las olas** [Over the Waves] (Prods. Miguel Zacarías\*, 1932) *Artistic Direction:* Miguel Zacarías; *Technical Direction Collab:* Ramón Peón, Guillermo Baqueriza, Carlos Cabello, Raphael J. Sevilla; *Story:* Miguel Zacarías; *Photo:* Guillermo Baqueriza; *Music Score:* Max Urban; *Film Ed:* Allyson McTavish; *Prod Des:* Leonardo Westphal [uncredited]; *Sound:* Rodríguez [Hnos.]

\*sometimes credited as Latino Films; the on-screen logo is just "M. Zacarías presenta" (this may be a re-release version)

**Cast:** René Cardona (*Raúl*), Carmen Guerrero (*Margarita*), Adolfo Girón (*Juventino Rosas*), Joaquín Coss (*don Apolinar*), Emma Roldán (*Margarita's mother*), Luis Sánchez Tello (*Manuel Rosas*), Paco Martínez (*Margarita's father*), Rosita Arriaga (*Sra. Rosas*), Jesús Graña & Chaflán (*loafers*), Armando

Arriola (*Villasana*), Eduardo Landeta, Pepe Martínez, Raúl de Anda, Jesús Melgarejo (*servant*), Ramón Peón (*friar*), Manuel Sereijo, Alfonso Sánchez Tello (*Gaudelio Contreras*), Lauro Uranga, Max Urban, Alfred Varela [padre] (*"Duque Job"*)

**Notes:** this was the directorial debut of Miguel Zacarías, who would go on to have a long and impressive career as a Mexican filmmaker. It's interesting to note that Zacarías took credit for "artistic direction" and 4 other individuals were credited for collaborating on the "technical direction" of the film. It's difficult to assign credit for specific aspects of the film's direction since "artistic" and "technical" aren't defined, but apparently Zacarías felt he needed assistants who knew the nuts-and-bolts of physically shooting a motion picture. Subsequently, several of these "collaborators" tried to claim authorship of *Sobre las olas*: when the film was released in New York (with English sub-titles) in March 1934, Ramón Peón was given directorial credit in the *New York Times*, and "Miguel Zacarías: Creador de estrellas" by Rogelio Agrasánchez Jr. indicates Guillermo Baqueriza even filed suit to be recognised as the director.

What is evident is that *Sobre las olas* looks far more advanced, in technical and production terms, than many other Mexican films of the era. Some of this may be attributed to the excellent condition of existing prints (although it's possible this DVD copy represents a truncated re-release version, since the running time is just slightly over an hour and some sources list a substantially longer original length), but the sets, costumes, and overall *mise-en-scene* are obviously quite good. Furthermore, the filmmaking technique is fairly advanced: particularly noticeable is the use of a moving camera (also, thanks to cinematographer Baqueriza's construction of a camera crane, there is at least one

impressive high-angle shot).

*Sobre las olas* is "inspired" by the life of composer Juventino Rosas (1868-1894), whose best-known



work is the waltz "Sobre las olas" (you've certainly heard it, even if you don't recognise the title). Rosas led a "tragic" life, dying in his mid-20s, and this was perfect for a filmed melodrama, even if the details aren't always explicit or accurate.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Juventino Rosas lives with his mother and his older brother Manuel. Although Juventino is a talented musician (notably on the violin) and his family is proud of him, Manuel urges his brother to find paying work. Through the intervention of don Apolinar, who owns the building where the Rosas family lives, Juventino is hired as the piano tutor of Margarita, a

wealthy young woman (and don Apolinar's niece). Although Margarita has a rich young suitor named Raúl,



she and Juventino eventually fall in love. When this becomes known, Margarita's family objects, but the two young people stand firm. Raúl gallantly offers to set up

Juventino in business so he can support Margarita, but the proud Juventino refuses, as he does an offer of help from don Apolinar. Yet music publishers offer only a pittance for Juventino's compositions. Finally, don Apolinar convinces Juventino that he should give up Margarita for her sake: "make her your inspiration, not a victim." After the death of Manuel in a politically-related dispute, Juventino sells "Sobre las olas" for a few pesos to help support his mother (who then dies herself, off-screen). Some time later, a shabby Juventino is spotted on the street by fellow musician Pepe Reyna.



Pepe says Margarita married Raúl and seems happy; he invites Juventino to accompany his orchestra on a tour of Cuba, and the two men walk away together (but Juventino

coughs, which is movie shorthand for "he'll die soon").

*Sobre las olas* has a simplistic, linear plot with no notable twists, but the film does include a few added sequences which don't contribute directly to the narrative. For instance, the sub-plot about Manuel and his political activity is brief (a couple of scenes) and indistinct (no names are named, but obviously this is aimed at Porfirio Díaz and his long tenure as Mexico's president, which would—in about 15 years—lead to the Revolution) but at least Manuel's death doesn't come out of nowhere. Even more extraneous is a scene in a "salon," where Juventino plays the violin to accompany pianist Ricardo Castro (a real person). Don Apolinar is there as well, and he's introduced to a number of other real-life intellectuals and artists (impersonated by actors) associated with the magazine *La Revista Azul*, including novelist Federico Gamboa, poet Juan José Tablada, painter Julio Ruelas, etc. This name-dropping sequence goes on for some time, as various people read poetry, make witty comments, and so forth. It's clever and

interesting but has absolutely no bearing on the drama of the film.

Juventino's decline after the triple blows of his brother and mother's deaths and his separation from Margarita is not shown, even in montage. He just appears on the street, looking fairly dissolute, and when confronted by Pepe Reyna says nothing matters to him and he's basically homeless. [The 1950 *Sobre las olas* features several sequences of a drunken Juventino Rosas—although in different contexts—but while some of this may have been true to the historical Juventino's bibulous habits, one also suspects that Pedro Infante's predilection for scene-stealing drunk and/or emotionally distraught scenes contributed to their inclusion as well.]



As noted above, the production values of *Sobre las olas* are satisfactory, although this is a small-scale story without any particularly elaborate or large-scale scenes. The performances are solid. Adolfo Girón was a pianist, orchestra leader, composer and actor, who lived in the United States during the 1920s and early 1930s (acting in plays with Mae West and Bessie Love, and touring with an orchestra). Girón worked on a handful of Mexican films in the 1930s; he's fine as Juventino Rosas despite his slightly-sinister appearance (he somewhat resembles 1940s actor Alejandro Cobo). Girón and his co-star Carmen Guerrero apparently married sometime after the making of this movie (Girón was also married to singer

Cristina Trevi; their son Fito Girón was a pop musician in the Sixties and beyond and later a TV presenter). Carmen Guerrero had appeared in some Hollywood "Spanish" films



(including the Spanish-language *Drácula*) before making her debut in Mexican cinema in 1932. She's very attractive (especially when shot from certain angles) and handles her role effectively. René Cardona (who's top-billed in the credits) has the thankless role of jilted boyfriend (although he wins out in the end); Raúl at least



isn't portrayed as a villain, although the role isn't very deep. Joaquín Coss as don Apolinar and Luis Sánchez Tello stand out in support, turning in strong performances.

The 1950 version of *Sobre las olas* is much better known, thanks to the presence of Pedro Infante in the starring role and the then-rare (in Mexico) use of a colour process (Ansco Color), but the 1932 film is certainly worth viewing as well.



**Su última canción\*** [His Last Song] (Compañía Nacional Productora de Películas, 1933) *Dir:* John H. Auer (and Fernando de Fuentes, uncredited); *Story-Adapt:* John H. Auer [and Gustavo Sáenz de Sicilia, uncredited]; *Photo:* Alex Phillips; *Music* [uncredited]: Jules Massenet, María Grever, José María Lacalle García ("Amapola"), Manuel Ponce ("Estrellita"); *Music Dir/Arr:* José Briceño; *Prod Mgr:* G[ustavo] Sáenz de Sicilia; *Asst Dir:* Luis G. Rubín; *Film Ed:* Aniceto Ortega? [Emilio García Riera credits him as Film Editor, on-screen credit reads "Laboratorios"]; *Art Dir:* Fernando A. Rivero; *Sound:* E. de la Garza Jr.

\*most sources credit this as *Su última canción* [His Last Song], but the on-screen title of the extant (re-release?) version is *La última canción* [The Last Song].

**Cast:** Alfonso Ortiz Tirado (*Pepe Limón*), María Luisa Zea (*Delia Ballestero*), Víctor Urruchúa (*Juan*), Rodolfo Calvo, Godofredo de Velasco, "El Loco" (dog), María Ramos, Josefina Aguilar, Luis Sánchez Trello, Jorge N. Incháurregui, Chel López, Gilberto González, Paco Martínez (*elderly man dancing in Club Abel*)

**Notes:** Alfonso Ortiz Tirado (1893-1960) maintained two professions for most of his life—he was a medical doctor and surgeon (his father was also a doctor) and a professional singer of considerable renown. In February 1933, Ortiz Tirado starred in *Su última canción*, but made only one other feature acting appearance (presumably as himself), in *Cuando me vaya* (1953), a biography of songwriter María Grever. [Ortiz Tirado was subsequently portrayed by singer Antonio Prieto in 1958's *La vida de Agustín Lara*.]

John H. Auer, the director/writer of *Su última canción*, was a Hungarian born actor who emigrated to the USA in the late 1920s, then moved to Mexico to begin his career as a director. His first feature was *Una vida por otra* (1932); since he didn't speak Spanish, Auer was assisted on this picture by Fernando de Fuentes. De

Fuentes was also on hand for Auer's second film, *Su última canción*, and took over when Auer walked off the project midway through production (García Riera says it was because Auer's wife had left him). Auer returned to the United States and helmed several films in New York before making the move to Hollywood later in the decade.

It's difficult to attribute some of the "arty" directorial touches in this film to Auer, given his early departure. Furthermore, many of the notable stylistic flourishes are editorial and photographic, which might not have been the responsibility of either Auer or de Fuentes as director. For instance, there are a fair number of Dutch-tilt shots, as well as a fairly long



montage of jazz musicians/drinking which accompanies Pepe's downfall towards the end of the movie. Another editorial quirk is the number of dissolves within scenes (i.e., between shots): traditionally, dissolves signify a lapse of time or change of place, and using them—rather than straight cuts—within a particular scene "feels" odd.

Otherwise, the direction can be effective or simply routine, depending upon the sequence. At times there is effective use of close-ups to emphasize the drama, while other scenes are shot and/or edited clumsily. The passage of time is not clear: after a fairly long montage sequence showing Pepe searching for work, he tells someone "I've been looking all day," whereas the montage made it appear he'd been looking for days, even weeks. How long do Pepe, Delia, and Juan work together at the theatre? We don't know, although it must have been a while, since Delia and Juan have enough time to fall in love, but there are no clues otherwise. At



the end of the movie the filmmakers resort to the old "calendar pages changing" trick to specify the length of Pepe's downfall.

The music score is variable. Ortiz Tirado performs a variety of songs, ranging from opera to popular (the literal "last song" in the film is Ponce's "Estrellita"), but the background music consists of a repeated set of treacly themes, with the occasional recognisable tune ("Amapola," which isn't sung but is only heard in an instrumental version).

Unemployed Pepe Limón and his dog El Loco wander the streets of Mexico City. In a park, he prevents a



young woman from taking poison, then brings her back to his room in a humble boarding house to live (he sleeps in the courtyard, the next day arranging to rent a separate room

for himself). Pepe sets out to find work: previously a famous singer, he's now black-listed because his excessive drinking made him unreliable. He finally gets a job washing dishes in the Abel nightclub. Recognised by a patron, Pepe is introduced to the customers and sings to great acclaim. He's subsequently hired to appear in a new show. The young woman, Delia, visits him backstage during rehearsals and is signed up herself.

Pepe is a success and decides to propose marriage to Delia. However, unaware of his romantic intentions, she falls in love with fellow performer Juan and asks Pepe—



whom she admires "like a father"—to approve of the match. Hiding his true feelings, he wishes them well and then goes on a protracted alcoholic bender. [This scene occurs while all

three are in costume for "Pagliacci," but Pepe—oddly enough—doesn't sing the famous crying-clown aria "Vesti la giubba," although he does look in the mirror and laugh and cry briefly.]

Several years later, Pepe is once again a bum (and this time he doesn't even have a dog as a companion!); he pauses outside a house one night and sings, attracting the attention of the residents: Delia and Juan! They don't



recognise him (which is bizarre, since he looks exactly the same, except for a heavy beard, and they heard him sing!), but toss him a coin. He thanks them and walks sadly away into the night.

*Su última canción* assembles

its plot from overly familiar melodramatic tropes. The

touching conclusion is clearly inspired by Alexandre Bisson's "Madame X," a hugely popular 1910 play which had already been adapted to the screen multiple times by 1933. [*Las abandonadas*, 1944, is an uncredited adaptation of this play, and the most famous Hollywood version starred Lana Turner, in 1966.] There are considerable loose ends in the plot: when Delia is introduced, she kisses a portrait of her mother and mumbles some vague apology prior to attempting suicide, but the reasons for her actions are never explained. Obviously she wasn't pregnant out of wedlock (which comes to mind immediately), because she doesn't subsequently have a child, and it doesn't seem—from her dialogue—that her mother is dead, so why did she leave home and why is she going to kill herself? If her willingness to accompany Pepe (a complete stranger, dressed shabbily and lurking in a park at night) back to his rooms seems oddly naïve, perhaps in 1933 people were more trusting? Pepe's problems with alcohol are only alluded to at first—his shabby room has empty bottles standing around—and are only made explicit when he's offered a job in the new play: his prospective employer's partner says Pepe was completely unreliable before. Pepe's emotional breakdown after Delia announces her engagement to Juan plunges him back into alcoholism, proving that his bad reputation was perhaps deserved.

In the final sequence, Pepe wanders through the night and pauses outside a house to sing. There's no suggestion that

(a) he's deliberately singing for tips or (b) that he knows it's Delia's and Juan's home (what a coincidence!). [As he sings, leaning on a fence, a cat can



be seen just behind him—this is very distracting, is the cat going to jump on Pepe?—until just before the end of the song, when it hops off the fence and vanishes.] As noted above, the idea that Delia and Juan wouldn't recognise Pepe is laughable, even though he has a beard and it's been two years since they saw him (there are helpful shots of Pepe's increasingly-shaky hand tearing off calendar pages dated 1930, 1931, and 1932).

Despite running less than 70 minutes, *Su última canción* has such a slim plot that it is padded out with various extraneous sequences (not including Ortiz Tirado's songs, which were the *raison d'être* for the film, so they don't really constitute "padding"). For example, there's a fairly long scene of Juan and Delia on a date (including a boat ride through Xochimilco), and a substantial montage of Pepe seeking work (which is relevant, but could have been trimmed), as well as a

scene in Abel's nightclub featuring a jazz band and customers dancing.

Alfonso Ortiz Tirado handles his acting chores effectively; rather than declaiming dramatically, he underplays many of his scenes. He's not an especially charismatic actor, but he's satisfactory in this role.



Despite Delia's statement that she views him "like a father," Ortiz Tirado was only 40 years old when *La última canción* was made, and doesn't look middle-aged at all. María Luisa Zea--20 at the time--made her screen debut in this picture, and her

inexperience shows. She's attractive enough (although not as attractive as she'd be later in the decade and in the Forties), but delivers her lines in a rather unconvincing manner. No one else in the cast has much to do, although they're adequate in the brief screen time they're given.

The production values are satisfactory. While existing prints are in shabby condition, some of the cinematography is interesting, the locations (and, presumably, some sets) are well chosen and realistic. One wouldn't say the music score is good, but the fact that the film has a score at all is a bit surprising (not all films had them at this point in cinema history).



## The 1940s: Resisting the Invaders

**Cinco fueron escogidos** [Five Were Chosen] (Prods. Alpha, 1942) *Exec Prod*: J. Humberto Carreón for the Banco Cinematográfico, S.A.; *Co-Prod*: Herbert Kline, Agustín P. Delgado, Mark Marvin; *Dir*: Herbert Kline; *Co-Dir*: Agustín P. Delgado [uncredited]; *Scr*: Budd Schulberg; *Translation*: Rafael [F.] Muñoz; *Dialog Dir*: Xavier Villaurrutia\*; *Photo*: Lauron C. Draper, Agustín P. Delgado; *Music*: Raúl Lavista; *Instrumentation of Songs/Dances*: Rafael de Paz; *Prod Chief*: Jesús M. Centeno; *Asst Dir*: Carlos L. Cabello; *Film Ed*: Rafael Portillo; *Art Dir*: Luis Moya; *Camera Op*: Jorge Stahl; *Sound*: Rafael Ruiz Esparza, Jesús González C., H.E. Randall

\*although the on-screen credit translates to "Dialogue Director," most sources indicate Villaurrutia worked on the script, rather than coaching performers, which is the usual description of this job title.

**Cast**: Joaquín Pardavé (*Glinko*), Julio Villareal (*Anton Dubrovko*), Andrés Soler (*Ivo Stoyan*), Fernando Cortés (*Babich*), María Elena Marqués (*Anna Aramich*), José Morcillo (*Sr. Aramich*), Rafael Icardo (*town constable Andrei Kolda*), Ricardo Montalván [sic]

(*Stefan Dubrovko*), Ángel T. Sala (*Iván Banka*), Alberto Blum (?*Nazi commander*), Ricardo Gallo, Conchita Gentil Arcos (*Marfa*), María Gentil Arcos (*Sra. Eugenia Dubrovko*), Jorge Treviño "Panque" (*Yanko*), María Douglas (*Sra. Stoyan*), Charles Rooner (*Nazi lieutenant who is killed*), José Ignacio Rocha (*train passenger*), Humberto Rodríguez (*priest*), Edmundo Espino (*man with boat*), Ana María Hernández



**Notes**: very few Mexican films have nothing to do with Mexico. The vast majority are set in Mexico, with a smaller percentage depicting Mexicans outside of their own country (for example, in the USA). An even smaller percentage deals with Spaniards or Latin Americans in their home countries. What's left over is a relative handful of pictures, mostly made in the 1940s (although there were some shot in the Thirties and a few made later), taking place in the United States, England, France, Russia and other nations (including some set in fictional countries). *Cinco fueron escogidos* is one of these rarities, taking place in Slavko, a "peaceful town in Yugoslavia," with only Yugoslavians and Germans as characters, not a Mexican or Spaniard in sight. [All the "Yugoslavians" speak Spanish--which is understood by the film audience to represent Yugoslavian--whereas the Nazis speak German among themselves.]

Another interesting point about *Cinco fueron escogidos* is the existence of an alternate version, shot in English with a different cast (at least in major roles). Sadly, this film, usually referred to as "Five Were Chosen" but sometimes called "Hostages" (not to be confused with the somewhat similar 1943 Hollywood movie with that title), appears to be lost. García Riera indicates the English-language version was screened in Mexico, at least for the press, but does not seem to have been released commercially in the Mexico or the USA.



The English-language cast included Howard da Silva, Victor Kilian, Robert H. Harris, Leonid Kinskey (whose cameo role in *El circo* with Cantinflas was shot while he was in Mexico City to make this film), Art Smith, Clifford Carr, Ricardo Montalván, and Rosa Harvan (the wife of director Herbert Kline). Harvan apparently took the María Elena Marqués role, and was a last-minute replacement for Frances Farmer, who left the film after (accounts vary) conflicts and/or health issues. Since Herbert Kline was well-known for his leftist views, it's not surprising to note that many of the imported Hollywood actors were also left-leaning (and in fact more than one was blacklisted during the Red Scare era).

*Cinco fueron escogidos* was written by Budd



Schulberg, also a liberal-left writer (the son of Hollywood producer B.P. Schulberg). In addition to the central conflict (Nazi invaders vs. peaceful Yugoslav villagers), the script sets up several other axes of contention: Mayor

Aramich vs. wealthy Dubrovko, and vagabond poacher Glinko vs. Dubrovko. Aramich is the democratically-elected leader of the town, but Dubrovko thinks his wealth and aristocratic background should make him



Slavko's most important and influential citizen. Glinko is the semi-anarchic voice of Everyman (although hardly the working class) who pokes fun at Dubrovko's pretensions. At film's end, all of

the town's classes unite to battle the Nazis, of course.

The origins of this project are unclear. Kline had previously made the semi-documentary *The Forgotten Village* (1941) in Mexico, so he had experience working there. The film was financed by the Banco Cinematográfico, with Kline, Mark Marvin (his brother, real name Marvin Morton Kline), and Agustín P. Delgado as co-producers. It's possible the film was originally intended as a Hollywood production, but financing could not be secured and the project went south of the border instead. If the producers felt the dual-versions plan would give them two films to sell for slightly more than the price of one (essentially, the salaries for two casts and the costs of raw film and post-production; presumably the sets, costumes, and other production aspects would be shared) the inability of *Five Were Chosen* to find a distributor must have dashed these hopes. As a result, *Cinco fueron escogidos* probably

wound up costing more than a regular Mexican movie, with nothing additional to show for it.

The film begins in Slavko in March 1941. A large portion of the early section sets up the aforementioned conflicts between Aramich and Dubrovko (the latter has filed suit to obtain a right of way through Aramich's barn) and Glinko and Dubrovko (Glinko poaches rabbits that Dubrovko claims are his property), as well as introducing the various townspeople.



Stefan Dubrovko and Anna Aramich are secretly in love, and when Yugoslavia mobilises its

reserves (the country is not yet at war with Nazi Germany, but tensions are high), Stefan leaves for the capital to serve in the army. Anna travels there and they are married, but return to Slavko to spend their wedding night in Aramich's barn (apparently a spot where they had romantic trysts). However, in the meantime Germany has invaded Yugoslavia, and a company of Nazi soldiers has occupied the town.

The Nazis give Aramich a list of items to be provided by the villagers (food, etc.). The mayor calls a town meeting and some discussion of what should be done results: a few opt for resistance, but Dubrovko urges them to go along with the occupiers and not cause trouble.

Anna sneaks into town to obtain some civilian clothes so Stefan (who's wearing his uniform) can escape and rejoin his unit. However, when she returns to the barn she's followed by a Nazi officer, who confronts them both. Stefan and the Nazi struggle, and the latter is shot to death. Aramich arrives: he sends the two young



people to stay with someone who can hide them, and then buries the dead German in the woods. However, the corpse is discovered

(this is not explained—it looked to me like Aramich did a pretty good job of burying him).

The Nazi commander demands that the killer surrender. Aramich tries to accept blame but is tripped up because he doesn't know the cause of death. He's informed that 5 residents must present themselves at the church (where the Nazis have, sacrilegiously, set up their headquarters) the next morning to serve as hostages. If

the man who killed the officer isn't found, the hostages will be shot.

At another town meeting, Aramich volunteers to be a hostage, as does Dubrovko. The other positions are filled by lot: town clerk Stoyan, a meek man with an overbearing wife and a large brood of children; retired military officer Banka; and constable Kolda. Glinko is angry because he thinks he's being discriminated against because of his social class. The next morning, they learn



Banka committed suicide out of fear, and barber Babich (a member of the town council) is (much to his dismay) chosen as the fifth hostage. The five men march off to Nazi headquarters singing a patriotic song, although most of them have to scurry off into the bushes to relieve themselves out of nervousness. When they arrive and are locked in the basement of the church, they're shocked to discover Glinko is already there! He had provoked the Nazis and forced them to arrest him as well.



The next morning, the Nazis receive orders to evacuate the town, but first line up the hostages in front of a

firing squad. At the very last second (of course), Stefan and his fellow soldiers (alerted to the impending execution by Anna, who traveled to their base in the mountains) attack the town, wipe out the German soldiers, and rescue the hostages. As the film ends, all of the villagers (men, women, and children) march off to join the Yugoslav resistance.

*Cinco fueron escogidos* is a fairly light-hearted look at Nazi invasion. Although the Nazis bluster, threaten, and (at the end) try to execute innocent people, in fact it is only Nazis who are killed on-screen, with the exception of one or two anonymous Yugoslavs who are shot in the final battle for Slavko (Banka commits suicide, so his death might indirectly be attributed to them, and one of the young men conscripted early in the film is reported to have been killed in a "border incident," but this is not shown). There are no atrocities

or even especially bad behaviour on display (a German officer agrees to let Anna see her father in exchange for a promise to be "nice" to him later, but he never gets the chance to claim his prize).

Even scenes which could be construed as depicting Nazi ruthlessness have a comedic touch. For instance, the Nazi commander informs Aramich that five hostages are required. Aramich tries to bargain, offering three, exasperating the German. In Austria it was 10 hostages for one (Nazi), in France 25 for 1, in Poland 50 for 1, you don't appreciate what a favour we're doing for you, the officer says. "I confess I hadn't thought of that," Aramich replies, bemused.

Joaquin Pardavé's Glinko is a rather stereotypical cinematic "philosophical bum," proud of his unconventional lifestyle and critical of what he sees as the hypocrisy of the proud Dubrovko, but is generally used as comic relief rather than in any sort of serio-comic way. The henpecked Stoyan and barber Babich also have their comedic facets (Fernando Cortés is made up and costumed to slightly resemble Charlie Chaplin), but are not over-the-top caricatures like Glinko.

The mild nature of much of the movie doesn't mean there isn't any dramatic content in *Cinco fueron escogidos*, although it comes rather late and sparsely.

Dubrovko's leave-taking of his wife is effectively handled, as is widower Aramich's farewell to his longtime housekeeper Marfa (they



both admit they love each other). During their stay in the church cellar, the six hostages bury their class differences and personal animosity and prepare to face their execution with dignity. Sometimes the sentimentality is forced: Stoyan's wife brings his youngest child to the church, where Stoyan tries to calm the wailing infant by singing to it (through the barred window), only to break down in tears himself.

The performances are generally satisfactory, with José Morcillo standing out as Mayor Aramich. "Alberto Blum" is presumably the actor who portrays the Nazi commander—he speaks "Yugoslavian" (Spanish) only briefly; most of his dialogue is in German, and is translated by one of his aides. Albert or Alberto Blum doesn't seem to have any other acting credits, and one wonders if he was perhaps an associate of Herbert Kline pressed into participating in this picture (someone named Albert R. Blum was Errol Flynn's business manager for a period in the 1940s and 1950s, but this is the only show business Albert Blum I've been able to locate). Curiously, Charles Rooner—who'd play Nazis and other Germanic types throughout the decade and into the Fifties in Mexican cinema—has a fairly small role as the German soldier killed by Stefan.



Ricardo Montalbán, since he was bilingual, appeared



in both versions of the film. He briefly mentions the movie (although he refers to it as "Hostages") in his autobiography "Reflections," calling it "unsuccessful"

but indicating it led to his role in *Santa*. He also writes that acting coach Seki Sano—who he credits with influencing his acting and became "a dear friend"—"came to Mexico with the *Hostages* company." Since Sano did not appear in *Cinco fueron escogidos* (and probably not in *Five Were Chosen*), his reason for accompanying Kline and the others to Mexico is unknown—but Sano was a dedicated Communist, and this may explain his presence, given the political beliefs of most of the Hollywood contingent on the project.

The production values of *Cinco fueron escogidos* are satisfactory, with a reasonable number of extras, realistic costumes, and a good mix of interior sets and actual exterior locations. The direction is workmanlike without being overtly stylish. As propaganda, it's rather light-weight. As entertainment, it's fine.



**¡Mexicanos al grito de guerra! (Historia del himno nacional)** [Mexicans to the Shout of War: Story of the National Anthem] (Prods. Rodríguez, 1943) *General Supervision*: Ismael Rodríguez; *Dir*: Álvaro Gálvez y Fuentes; *Scr*: Ismael Rodríguez, Elvira de la Mora, Jesús Sotelo Inclán; *Dialog/Story*: Álvaro Gálvez y Fuentes; *Photo*: Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music Dir*: Raúl Lavista; *Prod Mgr*: Antonio Salazar; *Prod Chief*: Paul de Castelain, Enrique Hernández; *Asst Dir*: Luis Abbadie; *Film Ed*: Rafael Portillo; *Art Dir*: Carlos Toussaint; *Costumes*: Tostado y Borderos; *Camera Op*: Enrique Wallace; *Makeup*:

Angelina Garibay; *Technical Adv*: Ramón Peón; *Historical Adv*: Jesús Sotelo Inclán; *Military Adv*: Capt. A. Velázquez Cobarrubias; *SpecFX*: "Machado"; *Sound Engin*: Enrique Rodríguez

**Cast**: Pedro Infante (*Luis Sandoval hijo*), Lina Montes (*Ester Dubois de Saligny*), Miguel Arenas (*Count Dubois de Saligny*), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (*Gen. Ignacio Zaragoza*), Miguel Inclán (*Benito Juárez*), "Chicote" [Armando Soto la Marina] (*El Pastelero*), Salvador Carrasco (*Jaime Nunó*), Margarita Cortés (*Guadalupe González del Pino*), Carlos Riquelme (*Francisco González Bocanegra*), Francisco Jambrina (*Gen. Juan Prim*), Manuel Arvide (*Gen. Lorencez*), Eduardo Arozamena (*Salas*), Guillermo Nuñez Keith (*Alberto*), Salvador Quiroz (*Antonio López de Santa Anna*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*Luis Sandoval padre*), Roberto Corell (*Mourlin, plotter*), Teresa Vega, Pedro Elviro "Pitouto" (*Emergio Lombardini*), Ángel T. Sala (*Napoleón III*), Ramón G. Larrea (*Gen. Jurian*), Max Langler (*Conservative plotter*), Manolo Noriega ("blind" beggar), José Soula (*Mr. Wykie*), Ignacio Peón (*Esteban, coachman*), Ricardo Carti (*Gen. Juan Nepumuceno Almonte*), Armando Gutiérrez (*Felipe*), Chel López (*U.S postal employee*), Dolores Camarillo, Guillermo Zetina, Alfonso Bedoya (*musician in park*), Stefan Berne (*French soldier*), Ana María Hernández & María Valdealde (*dinner guests*),

**Notes**: Álvaro Gálvez y Fuentes was a radio host (nicknamed "El Bachiller") who had worked on the scripts of a handful of films before receiving the opportunity to direct *Mexicanos al grito de guerra!* The Rodríguez Hermanos provided ample production support—there are hundreds of extras in the climactic battle sequence, presumably including members of the Mexican Army (numerous high-ranking officers are thanked in the credits), as well as substantial performers in period costume in the preceding sections of the picture.

Gálvez y Fuentes never directed another film (he continued his radio career and then became a pioneering television performer), and while *Mexicanos al grito de guerra!* looks rather old-fashioned in many ways, the direction isn't clumsy or static. The battle scenes even

include some moderately stylish shots and cuts (possibly Ismael Rodríguez, credited with "General Supervision," had a certain amount of influence on the final product). The script



is awkwardly assembled, however, with the fictional "dramatic" story taking a definite back seat to historical and quasi-historical recreations. A printed prologue states "This film doesn't try to be a history lesson. It is an imaginary story into which many authentic people and occurrences are mixed..."



The film begins as Emperor Napoleon III plots the expansion of his empire to the New World, with the assistance of Count Dubois de Saligny and Mexican general Almonte. The ignorance of the two Frenchmen is played for laughs, with Dubois suggesting it will only require 500 French soldiers to conquer Mexico, and Napoleon III unable to find Mexico on a map ("Don't tell me...I learned it in school once..."). The next, much longer section focuses on the composition of the Mexican national anthem. After the announcement of a contest to produce an *himno nacional*, poet Francisco González Bocanegra is coerced into writing the lyrics by his fiancée Lupe (she locks him in a room until, inspired by several martial illustrations, he comes up with something). His words win the prize; subsequently, band leader and composer Jaime Nunó is encouraged to write accompanying music by one of his musicians, Luis Sandoval. However, "Mexicanos al grito de guerra" is not well-received by the public and falls into obscurity.



Interspersed with these scenes is a romantic sub-plot between Esther Dubois (the niece of Count Dubois, now France's minister to Mexico) and Luis Sandoval. The War of the Reform breaks out, pitting Benito Juárez and the liberals against the Conservatives, who install their own, competing president Miramón. Luis joins the (Liberal) government Army, while his father pledges allegiance to the Conservative rebellion. The Conservatives conspire with Count Dubois: if Mexico defaults on a foreign loan (which has been inflated with excessive interest), France, England and Spain will send troops to recover the money, and this will provide a pretext for occupation of the country by soldiers of Napoleon III.

[Another "sub-plot" features President Santa Anna's famous "window" tax. To raise money, the Mexican president (this section takes place prior to the War of the Reform, during Santa Anna's ninth term as president) and his aide Lombardini "tax the air" Mexicans breathe, with fees levied on the number of windows and doors in buildings. There's a long sequence showing bricked-up doors and windows, with people of all walks of life

awkwardly using a single remaining window as the "door" to their home or business as a way to avoid the onerous tax. ]

When the foreigners arrive in Veracruz (late in 1861), the British and Spanish accept the assurances of Juárez that their claims will be fairly addressed, but Count Dubois insists Mexico is in a state of anarchy and must be conquered and civilised (the Spanish commander protests and is relieved of his duties by Dubois). Luis has an audience with Juárez and the president signs a decree urging the National Anthem be played in all military camps as a morale booster. Juárez makes a speech encouraging his people to fight for their freedom, and a showdown is set: the French troops and their Conservative allies press towards Mexico City, and are confronted by the Mexican Army near Puebla on the 5 of May 1862.

Luis is among the troops on the Liberal side. Esther escapes from her uncle and tries to bring him news that his father will be fighting with the French, but Luis has her locked up for her own protection. Under the command of General



Zaragoza, the Mexicans battle valiantly against the French invaders and the Conservatives, but are at the point of being defeated until Luis seizes a bugle and plays the National Anthem, which inspires the Mexican soldiers to rally and win the battle. However, Luis is mortally wounded. His father, who broke away from the French to rejoin his countrymen, is also shot (by the French): the two men reconcile before their deaths.

I'm no historian, but I suspect the part about Luis playing the national anthem on the bugle, which in turn causes wounded Mexican soldiers to start singing, which then makes the able-bodied Mexicans fight harder to overcome the French is probably...dramatic license. The story of the creation of the song appears to be more solidly based in fact, and even the fates of its composers—González Bocanegra dies and Nunó is forced to leave Mexico due to his connections with the disgraced Santa Anna administration—are more or less accurate (at least as far as we know). "Mexicanos al grito de guerra!" was not officially adopted as the Mexican national anthem until 1943 (which probably inspired the production of this film), and by Mexican law the *himno nacional* is not supposed to be "exploited" commercially in popular culture. This has led to instances such as the requirement that the soundtrack of *Jumanji* (1995) be altered for the Mexican release of that movie, since a fragment of the song can be heard in the background of one scene.

For dramatic reasons, the song as a whole is heard only at the conclusion of *Mexicanos al grito de guerra!* Before that, some of the lyrics are read aloud, and the opening notes are played by Nunó on the piano as he composes them. The debut of the anthem in 1854 takes place at the luxurious Santa Anna theatre before an elite crowd—including Santa Anna's "imperial guard," modeled after that of the Russia Czar and wearing false



beards!—but Santa Anna himself doesn't deign to appear. Even in this sequence, however, the actual music isn't heard.

The romance between Luis and Esther isn't central to the film and

unfolds over a relatively long period of time. They first meet around 1854, when Luis is still a musician (and doesn't have a moustache); they're attracted, but don't even know each other's names. In a sequence set in crowded park, Luis sings to her, accompanied by some street musicians (the jealous Alberto drives her coach away so rapidly that he crushes the men's instruments). Years later, Luis is now in the army and they get to know each other better, attending a party where they play a word game and flirt. The arrival of the foreign fleets at Veracruz prompts Esther's uncle to order her to leave Mexico City (and, eventually, Mexico itself), but she convinces her loyal coachman (Ignacio Peón in a slightly larger role than usual) to drive her to Puebla, where Luis is stationed. This leads to their final encounter in May 1862, but Luis is then killed, which sort of puts an end to their romance.

Another prominent character is food vendor El Pastelero (The Pastry Man), played by El Chicote. He's



seen in the "park" scenes, hawking his wares with saucy songs; later, while pushing his cart through the streets, he eavesdrops on strategy meeting between Dubois and various Conservative

plotters. Unable to control his ire at their sinister designs on Mexico, he insults them and then goes to see Benito Juárez to inform the president that "foreign ships" are on their way. Juárez thanks this epitome of the Humble Mexican, who promises to do his part to defend his country. We later see El Pastelero in uniform at the Battle of Puebla; in a horrifying bit, when the wounded soldiers rise up to sing the national anthem, El Pastelero signifies that he can't...because his legs have been blown off by French cannon fire!

There are parallels drawn between the French Intervention and World War II, although these aren't very

pointed. Napoleon III could be considered a surrogate Hitler, with his plans for world conquest. Later, French general Lorencez dismisses the agreement between the intervening nations and the Juárez government as "not being worth the paper it's written on," and he tears it to pieces, smiling in a sinister fashion. This could very well have been inspired by Hitler's reference to the Munich

Agreement he signed in 1938 and allegedly called "a scrap of paper" in 1939 when he abrogated its terms.

There is also a fair amount of dialogue in which French characters refer to Mexicans as "uncivilised" and pronounce themselves a superior "race." As the Mexican troops move into position at the Battle of Puebla, a group of indigenous people (from the town of Zacapoaxtla) ask General Zaragoza to put them in the front lines so they can show the arrogant French that the *güeros* aren't superior to them. [This is apparently historically accurate.] Both the Soviet *Alexander Nevsky* and the Italian *Scipio Africanus* contain sequences in which diverse segments of the national population unite to fight for their country; *Mexicanos al grito de guerra!* doesn't do this quite so overtly, but the montage of Mexicans going into battle against the French does feature images of uniformed



Mexican soldiers, the aforementioned indigenous troops (in "typical" peasant clothing), and men wearing the distinctive *chinaco* outfit.

The French

troops, on the other hand, seem to be primarily wearing Zouave uniforms (except for the officers).

It's interesting to note that a young Porfirio Díaz appears briefly, as Mexican officer singled out by General Zaragoza before the battle. Díaz would later go on to become a virtual dictator and his refusal to step down precipitated the Mexican Revolution, so his reputation in post-Revolution Mexico was not particularly good. However, his image was (for some reason) rehabilitated in 1940s Mexican cinema and this cameo appearance is one example of that (although not the most egregious by any means).

*Mexicanos al grito de guerra!* was one of Pedro Infante's early leading roles. He's satisfactory in the role although, as noted above, his particular sub-plot is just one of many. Lina Montes was a very beautiful blonde actress who appeared in a handful of 1940s films, then vanished from the screen until the 1970s. When she



returned, Montes was almost completely unrecognisable (having put on a lot of weight), but went on to forge a solid career as a character actress (winning a Best Supporting Actress Ariel for *El principio*) for about a decade, prior to her death in 1984. Miguel Arenas has a juicy role as the sinister Count Dubois, while El Chicote shows he wasn't just useful in comic relief as he delivers a heartfelt speech to Benito Juárez. Armando Gutiérrez, despite his prominent role as Luis' friend Felipe, is last-billed.

Speaking of Juárez, Miguel Inclán would reprise his role as the Mexican president in *Entre dos amores* (*Porfirio Díaz*) (1944), which featured a number of the same characters and performers (albeit in different roles)



as *Mexicanos al grito de guerra!* The unidentified actor playing Díaz in a cameo in the earlier film is replaced by José Luis Jiménez; Arturo Soto Rangel is

no longer a Conservative fighting against Juárez and the Liberals, but is now Liberal general Zaragoza (Miguel Ángel Ferriz in the first film); Salvador Quiroz is demoted from Santa Anna to just an "officer," while Chel López is upgraded from a U.S. postal clerk to an Imperial officer! (Various other actors appeared in both films, including Manolo Noriega and Roberto Corell).

*Mexicanos al grito de guerra!* is episodic and a bit like one of those "historical pageant" films which presents a succession of recreations of Important Moments Featuring Famous People, but it is quite well-produced and generally interesting. The final battle sequence is impressive, not only in the number of extras, but there are numerous nice touches (a French soldier climbs up the wall of the Mexican fort, only to have a cannon discharged point-blank at his mid-section, blowing him to pieces on-screen). Overall, satisfactory entertainment if not dramatically cohesive.



## The 1970s: Lesser Chanocs

**Chanoc en la isla de los muertos** [Chanoc on the Island of the Dead] (Cin. RA-Prods. Geminis, 1975) *Prod-Dir:* Rafael Pérez Grovas; *Scr:* Rafael Pérez Grovas, Alfredo Uribe; *Tzekub's Dialogue:* Rafael Márquez; *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe; *Music Dir:* Manuel Esperón; *Assoc Prod:* Alfredo Uribe; *Prod Chief:* José Rodríguez R.; *Asst Dir:* Sergio Rodríguez E.; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Jacome; *Camera Op:* Armando Castellón; *Animal Trainers:* Miguel and Humberto Gurza; *Sound Op:* Roberto Muñoz M.

**Cast:** Humberto Gurza (*Chanoc*), Ramón Valdez "don Ramón" (*Tzekub*), Karime Moisés Eljuve (*Mari*), Juan Garza (*cannibal killed by snake*), Carlos Zugasti,

Luis Gonzaga, Guillermo Ayala, Alberto Catani, Rafael Lara, Rafael Pérez Grovas (*man interviewing Juan*)



**Notes:** I had long believed this movie to be one of the worst ever made, but a second viewing proves me to have been somewhat harsh in that judgement. *Chanoc en la isla de los muertos* is boring and stupid, but the photography and location shooting (Ixtapa Zihuatanejo on the Pacific coast) isn't bad, and I know I've seen worse films in my life. That doesn't mean this one is any good, because it isn't!

Chanoc, Tzekub, and their shabby-looking chimpanzee sidekick are hired by playboy sportsman Juan López to be the crew on his yacht, which he plans to sail around the world to set a new record. Due to Tzekub's ineptitude, the yacht--which mysteriously turns into a *really* obvious toy boat several times--hits a reef and sinks. Juan is picked up by another boat and taken back to civilization, but Tzekub, Chanoc, and their chimp are shipwrecked on a deserted island.

They spend months there, living a kind of Robinson Crusoe existence. Chanoc tames a jaguar. Tzekub



catches fish and rescues a little monkey from an alligator. One day, they spot several canoes full of "natives"

approaching--the warriors have a little white girl captive, and tie her up to a totem pole near a pit full of human bones. Chanoc and Tzekub chase the men away and rescue the girl, Mari. She says the natives can't practice cannibalism on the inhabited islands in the archipelago, so they kidnaped her and brought her to the "Island of the Dead" to kill and eat. Her parents--who live on another island--think she's dead, so they won't be looking for her.

More time goes by. Mari joins their little community. Chanoc and Tzekub drive off another attack by cannibals. Mari is bitten by a snake, but lives. The cannibals come back again (persistent devils, aren't



they?) and are preparing to sacrifice Tzekub and Mari, but Chanoc--aided by Juan López, who finally got around to searching the islands for his missing friends--defeats the warriors and rescues the others.

This was the third and last time Humberto Gurza would portray Chanoc; he's rather more stocky in this movie than he was in his first effort (four years earlier), and has even less to do than usual, since his interaction



with humans is minimal. Ramón Valdés is more lively as Tzekub, and that just about exhausts the "acting" in this movie: the only other familiar name in the cast of "actors" is Juan Garza, who has only a brief stunt appearance as a cannibal. The little girl playing Mari is clearly dubbed by an adult speaking in a (horribly



annoying) "child's" voice, and the "cannibals" are all young, skinny guys with short haircuts (García Riera—perhaps jokingly--suggests they were waiters at the hotel where the film crew was staying!). Even Rafael Pérez Grovas

appears in a bit part, making him a quadruple-threat man (producer, director, writer, actor) in his directorial debut.

If your idea of entertainment is watching Humberto Gurza and Ramón Valdés playing Robinson Crusoe, *Chanoc en la isla de los muertos* is right up your alley. Otherwise, it's an uninteresting, boring, cheap, plot-less waste of time.

[Trivia note: the music score of this picture includes a "jungle" theme that appears to be a slowed-down and slightly-altered version of Ravel's "Bolero."]



**Chanoc en el Circo Unión** [Chanoc in the Union Circus] (Cin. RA-Prods. Geminis, 1978) *Prod-Dir-Scr*: Rafael Pérez Grovas; *Assoc Prod*: Alfredo Uribe Jacome;

*Tzekub's Dialog*: Rafael Márquez; *Photo*: Alfredo Uribe; *Music Dir*: Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Song*: Jaime Guzmán Mayer; *Prod Mgr*: Marcko D'Carlo; *Co-Dir*: José

Amezquita M.; *Film Ed*: Alfredo Jacome; *Camera Op*: Guillermo Bravo; *Sound Ed*: Jorge Rivera

**Cast**: Diana Torres (*Araceli D' Carlo* aka *Linda*), Alejandro Fuentes (*Chanoc*), don Ramón Valdez (*Tzekub*), Marcko D'Carlo (*Sr. López*), Mario Cid (*police commander*), Ricardo Adalid (*Chuchito Fuentes*), Ernesto Morán, Guillermo Ayala, Humberto Olivares, Ángel Medellín, Bernabé Palma, Alfredo Lara, Renato "El rey de los payasos" (*himself*), Amado Zumaya (*Sr. Ortiz*), Jaime Reyes (*waiter*)

**Notes**: after *Chanoc en la isla de los muertos* (1975), the "Chanoc" series had nowhere to go but up, and *Chanco en el Circo Unión* is actually a reasonably professional movie. Not really a *good* one, but not horrible.

Producer Rafael Pérez Grovas enlisted a new "Chanoc" for this picture, with Alejandro Fuentes following Andrés García, Gregorio Casal, and Humberto Gurza as the man in the red t-shirt. Like Gurza, Fuentes appears to have been a real-life animal trainer, and performs acts with tigers, chimps, and elephants in the movie. Fuentes is handsome enough and is a satisfactory actor, although it appears his dialogue was all post-dubbed. Ramón Valdez (wearing a platinum blonde wig that looks like it was stolen from Doris Day) returned as comic relief sidekick Tzekub, a role previously played by Chano Urueta and Ramón's own brother Germán "Tin Tan" Valdez. The cast also includes busty Diana Torres in a dual role (sort of), and Steve Brodie-lookalike "Renato, the King of the Clowns."

Aside from some dicey sound in some scenes, the production values on *Chanoc en el Circo Unión* aren't



bad: the movie was shot on location of course, but Alfredo Uribe's photography is nice and sharp and the behind-the-scenes footage at the circus is interesting. Ernesto

Cortázar's music score isn't quite up to snuff, featuring his usual array of familiar "canned" themes plus annoying "circus" music and an even more annoying ragtime-jazz theme (which is repeated at some inappropriate moments later on). Diana Torres sings (off-key) one song and dances (with four other women)



to a Cortázar disco instrumental (heard in many other movies scored by him). Curiously, these two musical numbers take place on the cabaret stage littered with musical instruments and sound equipment, but no band members are shown even while the music is playing! The movie is padded out with considerable footage of circus acts, although to be fair they all involve principals in the cast--Chanoc and his animals, Renato and his little dog, and Diana Torres (or her double) as part of a trapeze act.

The authorities ask Chanoc to investigate a smuggling ring that has been importing electronic goods from the USA and Japan into Mexico. The goods show up around the time that the Union Circus is in a particular location, but the perpetrators cannot be identified. Chanoc is hired as a replacement for the show's injured animal trainer.



During his first rehearsal he is nearly mauled by a tiger, because someone shot the animal with a dart. The smugglers are led by López, who occasionally disguises himself as a kindly old man who brings children to the circus. [This makeup is quite good and I was unable to identify Marcko D'Carlo in the role until he removed it!] However, the gang has one member who works undercover in the circus--this person is only shown from



behind, dressed in a black fedora and black suit. [Pérez Grovas "borrowed" this from *Blue Demon y las diabólicas*, and if you saw that movie the "twist" ending here is obvious from the start.

However, the film doesn't even handle this competently, as we shall see.]

Chanoc asks his godfather Tzekub to investigate from outside the circus. The older man blunders around, openly asking questions about contraband goods, and draws the attention of the gang. He visits a nightclub with the "kindly old man" and is smitten by Linda, the sexy red-haired singer. Told he's going to meet her at a party, Tzekub is taken to a warehouse full of smuggled electronic devices and beaten in an attempt to make him talk. Meanwhile, several other members of the gang try to waylay Chanoc, but he eludes them. He later trails one of the crooks to the warehouse and frees Tzekub. Before he tips off the police, Chanoc stops for dinner with Araceli, the sexy brunette trapeze artist from the

circus (and, although he doesn't know it, a dead ringer for Linda). Araceli, a member of the gang, arranges to have the warehouse emptied and when the police arrive with Chanoc, the building is empty.

Back at the circus, the smugglers attack but Chanoc, Tzekub, and Renato the clown capture them and turn them over to the police. The contraband is hidden in the circus's transport trucks, but before López can have the vehicles driven away, the police arrest him. Chanoc chases the black-hatted "inside man" from the gang, who is revealed to be...Araceli! This, of course, is NOT a surprise, since the audience has already



seen Araceli phone the gang about the warehouse, and later saw her attempt to slip Chanoc a mickey. Consequently, having her "unmasked" at the end is pointless. The script is also inconsistent about her role: she takes orders from López throughout the movie and even when she makes calls to tip off the gang isn't really giving orders, but then she's suddenly identified as "the chief" (and, to confuse things even further, is later only referred to as "the gang's insider at the circus").

*Chanoc en el Circo Unión* has a lot of loose ends but it's not as bad as I expected it to be. Fuentes is adequate in the lead, Ramón Valdez is moderately amusing as Tzekub, Diana Torres is attractive, and Marcko D'Carlo

is satisfactory as the villain. I wouldn't necessarily recommend this, but it was not painful to sit through.

Note: this has been released on DVD in the USA by



Brentwood, most economically as part of a two-disk, four-film "Chanoc" set that can be bought for under \$5.00 in most places.



**En medio de la nada** [In the Middle of Nowhere] (CONACULTA-IMCINE-Ladrón de Besos S.A., © 1993) *Exec Prod:* Jorge Ramírez-Suárez; *Prod/Dir:* Hugo Rodríguez; *Scr:* Marina Stavenhagen, Hugo Rodríguez; *Photo:* Guillermo Granillo; *Music:* Eduardo Gamboa; *Assoc Prod:* Miguel Necoechea, Eduardo de la Bárcena; *Prod Mgr:* César Ahumada; *Asst Dir:* Moisés Ortiz Urquidi; *Film Ed:* Hugo Rodríguez; *Assoc Ed:* Carlos Bolado; *Art Dir:* Gloria Carrasco; *Costume/Makeup Design:* Manuela Loaeza; *Direct*



Sound: Juan Carlos Prieto; Post-prod Sound: Nerio Barberis; 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit Dir: Salvador Aguirre; Makeup: Graciela Muñoz

**Cast:** Manuel Ojeda (*Joaquín Garza*), Blanca Guerra (*Susana*), Gabriela Roel (*Claudia*), Guillermo García Cantú (*Raúl*), Juan Ibarra (*Juan*), Emilio Cortes (*Ernesto*), Alonso Echánove (*Ramón*), Jorge Russek (*Esteban*), Ignacio Guadalupe (*Alejandro*), Dario T. Pie (*highway patrolman 1*), Daniel Giménez Cacho (*Miguel*), Justo Martínez (*bartender*), Antonio Marros (*shopkeeper*), Jose Rubisky (*highway patrolman 2*)

**Notes:** this is an interesting thriller, somewhat in the mode of *The Petrified*

*Forest*—a group of people is held hostage in a remote diner by a gang of criminals. The acting, direction, and production are all very assured and slick, but the script has a couple of annoying false spots that were mildly annoying.



Joaquín Garza is the leader of a striking miners'

union who learns his men have gone behind his back and signed an agreement with the owners, who undermined Joaquín by spreading rumors of his corruption. Joaquín is attacked and wounded by hired assassins as he leaves, and his associate Miguel is murdered.

Some years later, Joaquín, his wife Susana, and their teenage son Juan operate "La Victoria," a failing roadside diner and gas station in the middle of the desert. One morning, as their friend Ramón is going into the nearest town for supplies, he spots Claudia walking along the highway, and directs her to the diner. She says she left two friends in their disabled car up the road, so Joaquín and Juan drive her back there in their battered pickup (Ramón continues on his trip). Waiting in the car are the injured Raúl and his brother Ernesto; the car's radiator was pierced by a bullet, and it has to be towed back to the diner.

Once there, Raúl and Ernesto take Joaquín and his family hostage, also wounding trucker Alejandro when he tries to flee. Raúl worked for the powerful Esteban, but was having an affair with Claudia, Esteban's wife. They were caught together and had to flee: Raúl was shot in the stomach.

In town, Ramón runs into Esteban, who is asking about a car with two men and a young woman inside, but Ramón can truthfully say he hasn't seen it. Returning to the diner, Ramón is taken prisoner with the others. Claudia urges Raúl and Ernesto to use Ramón's pickup to flee, but Raúl delays. Ernesto, bored, starts to molest Susana, but Joaquín intervenes. He runs outside to Alejandro's truck, where a pistol is hidden under the seat—Joaquín shoots Ernesto to death. Raúl and Joaquín confront each other, guns drawn, but Raúl is suddenly shot from behind by Esteban, just arrived from town. Claudia and Esteban drive away.

*En medio de la nada* has a few loose ends--why Raúl didn't immediately leave the diner in Ramón's truck, and why Esteban is hunting his faithless wife alone are two such--but on the whole it is a smooth and engrossing movie. There isn't a lot of introspection and philosophical dialogue, but the characters are given reasonable depth. Joaquín has withdrawn from the world at large after being unjustly accused of union corruption; although the diner is in danger of going broke (he receives news of the rejection of a bank loan early in the film), he is reluctant to leave. Susana and Juan, on the other hand, are not happy "in the middle of nowhere," especially Juan (presumably this is summer vacation, since there's no suggestion he goes to school, although since the nearest town is 30 minutes away, maybe he doesn't attend at all). There is a suggestion that Susana and Ramón are attracted to one another, although they are probably not having an affair. Joaquín submits to the orders of Raúl and Ernesto meekly, but later asserts himself (expertly bandaging Raúl and Alejandro's gunshot wounds) and leaps to Susana's defense when Ernesto gets fresh.

Raúl is also an interesting character: he tells Joaquín it would be nice if Claudia showed any sign that she loved him, but realizes she doesn't. She was just using him for her own pleasure, but was compelled to flee when her husband found out. Throughout the movie, Claudia is irritated, impatient, and brooding, and she goes back to Esteban without a word at the end.

The performances are quite good overall, with no false notes. It's nice to see the late Jorge Russek, puffing on his ever-present cigar, and Daniel Giménez Cacho has a brief cameo in the opening sequence. Ojeda, García Cantú, and Emilio Cortés do most of the "acting" but only Cortés is a little florid (which comes with his role, as Raúl's faithful and protective brother). The production values are fine, especially the photography and art direction. The location shooting (San Luis Potosí) is very effective in suggesting the diner's isolation.

Trivia note: a brief clip is shown (on TV) from *Camino largo a Tijuana*, directed by Luis Estrada (listed in the end credits as *El camino largo*).

A quick final note: this was released on DVD in the U.S. by Vanguard in 2003, with English sub-titles. I don't like to criticize anything that makes Mexican cinema more accessible in the USA, but the sub-titles on this version are horrible! They are in some cases just plain wrong, but even more often they are grammatically erroneous, incomprehensible, and riddled with spelling mistakes.



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