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WHEN THE LAUGHTER STOPPED: OBITUARIES

Sadly, a number of Mexican film performers passed away in the past several months, including those who were prominent in comedy films.

PEDRO WEBER "CHATANOOGA"

Actor Pedro Weber, known as "Chatanooga," died of cardiac and pulmonary insufficiency on 22 March 2016; he was 82 years old. Pedro Manuel Weber Chávez was born in Ciudad Guzmán, state of Jalisco, on 27 November 1933. He worked in various occupations before turning to performing, and spent a decade singing, dancing, and acting in *carpas* and other live venues before making the transition to films and television.



Weber's nickname variously spelled "Chatanooga" and "Chatanuga"—was taken from the popular Glenn Miller song of the 1940s, "Chatanooga Choo Choo," simply because it sounded amusing. During his career his actual last name was sometimes spelled "Webber" and even "Guever." (His father was

of Lebanese ancestry and it is possible the family name was originally different.)

He made his film debut in the mid-1960s and continued to work in theatrical films, *videohomes*, *telenovelas* and theatres until shortly before his death. His final movie was probably *En el último trago* (2014), in which he appeared with Eduardo Manzano and José Carlos Ruiz.

Chatanooga's most prolific period of film activity coincided with the rise of the sexy-comedy (although he played dramatic roles as well) in the late 1970s, and lasted until the early 1990s. Usually appearing as part of an ensemble cast but occasionally given a leading role (cf, *El vampiro teporocho*), Weber's films included *Pedro Navaja, Emanuelo, El rey de la vecindad, Mas buenas que el pan, Trágico terremoto en México, Los hermanos* *machorro*, and the U.S.-Mexico coproduction *One Long Night* (2007).

Pedro Weber was married 4 times and had 4 (some sources list only 3) children.



Comic actor Charly Valentino was found dead in his home in Mineral de la Reforma (state of Hidalgo) on 20 May 2016; the cause of death was reported to be a heart attack. Carlos Uriarte Aguilar, the actor's real name, was born on 20 April 1951. Valentino cited 19 October 1979 as the date his professional acting career began.

Valentino first gained attention on television in series like "La Matraca" and "La Carabina de Ambrosio," but also began to make film appearances and by the middle of the '80s his film roles assumed more importance. Often



cast as the wacky, roly-poly member of a group of characters, Valentino gradually advanced to more substantial parts (even leads) in films and *videohomes* such as *Taquito de ojo, El semental de Palo Alto, Comezón a la mexicana, Tambo,* and *Ciudado con el chico.*

As his acting career declined in the 2000s, Valentino took up painting and also invested in various businesses, including a television production company and a real estate firm in the USA, where he lived for a number of years before returning to Mexico.



LEONORILDA OCHOA

Comedian and actress Leonorilda Ochoa died on 22 May 2016 of heart failure; she had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease and was 76 years old. Leonorilda Ochoa Pagaza was born in Mexico City on 30 October 1939. She made her professional debut in the 1950s, appearing on comedy television series like "Variedades de mediodía," "Cómicos y canciones," and "Chucherías," with performers like Loco Valdés, Capulina and Viruta, and Chucho Salinas. She later co-starred in "Los Beverly de Peralvillo" as "Pecas" (Freckles), the wife of "El Borras" (Guillermo Rivas).

In addition to her TV and stage work, Ochoa had supporting roles in a number of films in the Sixties and Seventies, including *Muñecas peligrosas, Amor a ritmo de go go,* and *Cazadores de espías.*



She returned to the cinema in the latter half of the 1980s, acting in a handful of films and *videohomes* such as *Las Caguamas ninja* with Pedro Weber and Guillermo Rivas. She also worked in a number of television series and *telenovelas*, including her last, "Código postal" (2006).

Leonorilda Ochoa is survived by her two children, Paola and Sergio.

http://www.leonorildaochoa.com/

MARGARITO ESPARZA

Comedian and actor "Margarito" died of pneumonia on 15 May 2016 at a hospital in Puebla; he was 79 years old. Margarito Esparza Nevares (some sources give his last name as just "Nevare") was born in Sinaloa in May 1936. 27.5 inches tall, Margarito billed himself in later years as



the "world's smallest actor." He began working in television in the early 1950s on "Los Jugelotes de Gamboín," with Ramiro Gamboa and Xavier López "Chabelo." He made various film, TV and live appearances for the rest of his life, although his career

had its ups and downs: he spent the Seventies in El Salvador, then returned to Mexico but by the Nineties was singing in metro stations and on the streets for tips, and had fairly recently been evicted from his apartment in the capital. Margarito's film appearances ranged from the early 1950s to the early 2000s, including films such as *El mariachi desconocido, El tigre negro, La pulquería*, and *Herencia diabólica*.

Margarito Esparza is survived by his widow and three children.



2016 ARIEL AWARDS

The 58th Ariel Awards ceremy was held on 28 May 2016 at Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City. The big winner of the night was *Las elegidas*, a film dealing with the sexual slavery of women, which won 5 Arieles including Best Picture and Best Director (David Pablos).

This film was just released theatrically in Mexico in April 2016, so the awards may help its box-office prospects. *Gloria*, the film biography of Gloria Trevi which has been in release since January 2015, also won 5 prizes, and *Mexican Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso*, a docu-drama about real-life bank robber Alfredo Ríos Galeana, received 4 Arieles.

Actress Rosita Quintana and director Paul Leduc each received the lifetime achievement Ariel de Oro.

[Winners <u>bold & underlined]</u>

Best Film: 600 millas, <u>Las elegidas</u>, Un monstruo de mil cabezas, Gloria, La delgada línea amarilla.

Best Direction: Gabriel Ripstein, 600 millas; Anwar Safa, El Jeremías; <u>David Pablos, Las elegidas</u>; Julio Hernández Cordón, Te prometo anarquía; Rodrigo Plá, Un monstruo de mil cabezas.

Best Actress: Geraldine Chaplin, *Dólares de arena*; Flor Edwarda Gurrola, *El placer es mío*; <u>Sofía</u> <u>Espinosa, *Gloria*</u>; Verónica Langer, *Hilda*; Jana Raluy, *Un monstruo de mil cabezas*.

Best Actor: Kristyan Ferrer, *600 millas*; Tim Roth, *600 millas*; <u>Marco Pérez, *Gloria*</u>; Damián Alcázar, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Tenoch Huerta, *Mexican Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso.*

Best Co-Starring Actor: <u>Noé Hernández, 600</u> <u>millas</u>; Gustavo Sánchez Parra, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Joaquín Cosío, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Silverio Palacios, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Emilio Echevarría, *Un monstruo de mil cabezas*.

Best Co-Starring Actress: Isela Vega, El Jeremías; Vanessa Bauche, Elvira, te daría mi vida pero la estoy usando; <u>Adriana Paz, Hilda</u>; Alicia Quiñonez, Las elegidas; Cassandra Ciangherotti, Tiempos felices.

Best New Actor: <u>Martín Castro, El Jeremías;</u> Óscar Torres, *Las elegidas*; César R. Suárez Morales, *Los jefes*; Alejandro Guerrero S., *Sopladora de hojas*; Fabrizio Santini, *Sopladora de hojas*.

Best New Actress: Yanet Mojica, *Dólares de arena*; Karen Momo, *El Jeremías*; Andrea Ortega Lee, *Ella es Ramona*; Tatiana del Real, *Gloria*; <u>Nancy</u> <u>Talamantes, *Las elegidas*.</u>

Best Original Screenplay: Gabriel Ripstein & Issa López, 600 millas; Ana Sofía Clerici, El Jeremías; Sabina Berman, Gloria; Celso García, La delgada línea amarilla; David Pablos, Las elegidas.

Best Adapted Screenplay: Israel Cárdenas & Laura Amelia Guzmán, *Dólares de arena*; Andrés Clariond Rangel, *Hilda*; Luis Ayhllón, *La extinción de los dinosaurios*; <u>Laura Santullo, Un monstruo de mil</u> <u>cabezas</u>; Matías Meyer & Alexandre Auger, *Yo*.

Best Photography: Martín Boege, *Gloria*; Emiliano Villanueva, *La delgada línea amarilla*; <u>Carolina</u> <u>Costa, Las elegidas</u>; Tonatiuh Martínez, *Mexican Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso*; María José Secco, *Te prometo anarquía*.

Best Editing: Gabriel Ripstein & Santiago Pérez Rocha, 600 millas; <u>Adriana Martínez y Patricia</u> <u>Rommel, Gloria</u>; Jorge Arturo García, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Miguel Schverdfinger & Aina Calleja, *Las* *elegidas*; Miguel Schverdfinger, *Un monstruo de mil cabezas*.

Best Sound: Alejandro de Icaza & Federico González Jordán, 600 millas; <u>Matías Barberis, Jaime</u> <u>Baksht y Michelle Couttolenc, Gloria</u>; Sergio Díaz, Jaime Baksht & Gabriel Coll, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Alejandro de Icaza y Pablo Tamez, *Las elegidas*; Alejandro de Icaza & Axel Muñoz, *Un monstruo de mil cabezas*.

Best Original Music: Jacobo Lieberman, El hombre que vio demasiado; Lorne Balfe, *Gloria*; Daniel Guillermo Zlotnik, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Carlo Ayhllón, *Las elegidas*; Andrés Sánchez Maher, *Mexican Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso.*

Best Production Design: Carlos Jacques, 600 millas; Bárbara Enríquez, El Jeremías; Julieta Álvarez, Gloria; Daniela Schneider, Las elegidas; <u>Bárbara</u> Enríquez y Alejandro García, Mexican Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso.

Best Costumes: Gilda Navarro, *Gloria*; Mónica Neumaier, *Hilda*; Gabriela Fernández, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Daniela Schneider, *Las elegidas*; <u>Gilda</u> <u>Navarro, Mexican Gangster. La levenda del charro</u> <u>misterioso</u>.

Best Makeup: Thal Echeveste, 600 millas; Nayeli Mora, El Jeremías; **David Gameros**, Gloria; Adam Zoller, Las elegidas; Marco Antonio Hernández, Mexican Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso.

Best Special Effects: Alejandro Vázquez, 600 millas; Ricardo Arvizu, Alicia en el país de María; José Ángel Cordero, Familia Gang; Alejandro Vázquez, La delgada línea amarilla; <u>Alejandro Vázquez, Mexican</u> <u>Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso</u>.

Best Visual Effects: Edgardo Mejía, 600 millas; Raúl Prado, Juan Carlos Lepe, *El Jeremías*; Raúl Prado, Edgar Piña & Juan Carlos Lepe, *Gloria*; Miguel de Hoyos, Ricardo Villarreal & Marco Rodríguez, *La delgada línea amarilla*; Edgardo Mejía, Francisco Castillo, Rodrigo de Gante, José Luis Gómez, José Ignacio Narváez, Ivonne Orobio & José Manuel Romero, Mexican Gangster. La leyenda del charro misterioso.

Best First Work: <u>600 millas, Gabriel Ripstein</u>; El Jeremías, Anwar Safa; *Gloria*, Christian Keller; *Hilda*, Andrés Clariond Rangel; *La delgada línea amarilla*, Celso García.

Best Feature-Length Documentary: <u>El hombre</u> <u>que vio demasiado, Trisha Ziff</u>; El Paso, Everardo González; Los reyes del pueblo que no existe, Betzabé García; Made in Bangkok, Flavio Florencio; Tiempo suspendido, Natalia Bruschtein.

Best Animated Feature: El Americano: The Movie, Ricardo Arnaiz & Mike Kunkel; <u>La increíble</u> historia del niño de piedra, Miguel Ángel Uriegas, Miguel Bonilla, Jaime Romandía & Pablo Aldrete; Un gallo con muchos huevos, Gabriel Riva Palacio & Rodolfo Riva Palacio.

Best Fictional Short: *3 variaciones de Ofelia*, Paulo César Riqué; *24 51' Latitud Norte*, Carlos Lenin; *Esclava*, Amat Escalante; *La teta de Botero*, Humberto Busto; *Malva*, Lucero Sánchez; *<u>Trémulo</u>*, <u>Roberto</u> <u>Fiesco</u>.

Best Documentary Short: <u>Ausencias, Tatiana</u> <u>Huezo;</u> *El buzo*, Esteban Arrangoiz; *Muchacho en la barra se masturba con rabia y osadía*, Julián Hernández; *Por los caminos del sur*, Jorge Luis Linares; *Tobías*, Francisca D'Acosta.

Best Animated Short: Conejo en la luna, Melissa Ballesteros; El último jaguar, Miguel Anaya; Los ases del corral, Irving Sevilla; Tictactópolis, José Sierra; Zimbo, Juan José Medina y Rita Basulto.

Best Iberoamerican Film: El abrazo de la serpiente (Colombia), Ciro Guerra; El clan (Argentina), Pablo Trapero; El club (Chile), Pablo Larraín; El lobo detrás de la puerta (Brasil), Fernando Coimbra; Truman (España), Cesc Ga.

Ariel de Oro (Lifetime Achievement): Rosita Quintana and Paul Leduc

El muerto al hoyo (y el vivo también) [The Dead Man in the Hole—and the Live One Too] (Grupo Cine-Prods. EGA, 1988 ©1989) *Prod*: Jorge Rubio Salazar; *Dir*: Javier Durán; *Adapt*: Tomás Fuentes; *Story*:



Javier Durán; Photo: Agustín Lara A.; Music: Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; Prod Mgr: Javier García Mata: Asst Dir: Rubén González; Film Ed: Sergio Soto; Makeup: Lucrecia González; Dialog Rec: Miguel Sandoval: Union: STIC Cast: Maribel

Fernández "La Pelangocha" (Nena), Pedro Weber "Chatanuga" (La Comadre), Rebeca Silva (Teresa), Luis Aguilar (don Celestino), Guillermo Rivas "El Borrás" (man from Veracruz), Polo Ortín (union leader), Arsenio Campos (Dr. Ronald Nixon), Raúl "Chóforo" Padilla (Macario López), Memo Muñoz y sus 9 de Colombia, Diana Herrera (prostitute), Blanca Nieves (Lulú), Güero Castro (Jacinto), Gioconda (Margarita, nurse), Gastón Padilla (union official), Agustín Bernal (Caguamo), Rosita Pelayo, Roberto Huicochea, Humberto Luna (car salesman), Jorge Ortín (tough guy in boat), Mario Zebadua

"Colocho" (union official), Luis Guevara (union official), Laura Tovar, Gary Rivas, Peluche, Daisy Sánchez, Billy [Morton] (male nurse), José Luis Jiménez, Rafael Fernández, Rafael Munguía, Ana María Saad, Elizabeth Villagómez, Alejandra Castillo, Socky Tarano, Rocío Muñoz, César Valdez, Joaquín Zendejas "Juancho," Julián Avitia (bearded union official), Santa Peregrino, Bebesa Carrillo

Notes: I was going to accuse this film of being "inspired" by *Weekend at Bernie's*, but it appears that was not the case, given that *El muerto al hoyo* was made in 1988 and the Hollywood movie was not released until 1989. In any case, "manipulation of a corpse to make it seem alive" was not unknown in cinema prior to these films, although *Weekend at Bernie's* spun it out to new lengths.

In *El muerto al hoyo* it is the massive Agustín Bernal whose "corpse" is hauled around, and some of the hijinks

are actually amusing (a hat is placed on his head and a pair of those joke eyeglasses with "flicker" eyeballs on the lenses; later, Pedro Weber approaches the corpse—seated on a sofa—and rearranges it to a



more "aesthetic" position), but this is really only one of a number of sub-plots going on more or less simultaneously. As usual, these are not really well integrated and as a result the picture is episodic and disjointed, but it's still mildly amusing.

Most of the action unfolds at the brothel run by Nena and her gay, transvestite associate La Comadre, but there are a few establishing sequences introducing Nena and her goofy *gringo* boyfriend Dr. Nixon (Arsenio Campos,



mangling his Spanish), hooker Teresa, crooked union officials, and three old friends from various parts of Mexico (Monterrey, Veracruz, and Jalisco) who have come to the capital for a spree. One of the latter— Jacinto—falls ill and is taken to the clinic run by Nixon, where he meets sexy nurse Margarita. Towards the end of the film she finally succumbs to his advances, strips, and hops in bed with him. Jacinto, addressing his unresponsive genitals, says "You and I are the same age, Nicanor, so why did you die first?"

The other two sexy senior citizens arrive at Nena's brothel where they are induced to spend their money on champagne before going upstairs with Teresa and another hooker. The joke here is that elderly Celestino turns out to be insatiable in bed, shocking Teresa.

Meanwhile, the whorehouse is also hosting a party of union officials. Macario has been appointed treasurer of the union, replacing a deceased (and crooked) official, but he is easily corrupted by the other officials. However, he drops the union's bankroll on the floor of the men's room (where it is snatched up by an impoverished student), and the men are unable to pay their bill to Nena.

The Weekend at Bernie's connection comes in because, early in the picture, regular client Caguamo—known for his sexual prowess—has a heart attack and dies while in bed with Lulú. She thinks he's asleep, but Nena and La Comadre realize the truth. They are unable to smuggle the muscular corpse out of the house before the other clients arrive, so Caguamo is passed off as drunk and seated on a sofa in the salon. Finally Nena and La Comadre take him outside and leave him in the back seat of a police car!

But the joke is on them, because the policemen have reported the suspicious activities at Nena's house, and the brothel is raided. Nena escapes but everyone else is arrested. A TV report (by "Jorge Rubio," an in-joke because this is the producer's name) says a "drug ring" was smashed and names La Comadre as the leader. Nena marries Dr. Nixon and gives up her business.



El muerto al hoyo jumps around a lot in the first half, before all of the characters arrive at Nena's house. However, even when Celestino and his friend, the union officials, and the two college students arrive, they don't really interact with each other so the episodic nature of the picture is sustained. On the other hand, at least the different sub-plots are <u>somewhat</u> connected, unlike some other sexy-comedies with completely irrelevant and extraneous sequences inserted willy-nilly. Furthermore, most of the scenes seem relatively original and aren't reconstituted *carpa* skits.

The performances are overall quite good. It's a little difficult to accept Maribel Fernández as both the proprietor

of a brothel <u>and</u> as a virgin who refuses to sleep with anyone until she's married, but she is reasonably witty and sympathetic. Pedro Weber is also amusing as the outrageously flaming queen La Comadre, but Guillermo Rivas looks uncomfortable (or ill) and I had a very hard time understanding his accent. Arsenio Campos, as noted earlier, plays a *gringo* and is (as usual) mocked and portrayed as a buffoon (although he's apparently supposed to be a competent doctor and for some reason Nena wants to marry him). Everyone else is OK, which is to be expected from a cast full of veteran performers playing familiar roles.

Not great but reasonably entertaining.



Dos judiciales en aprietos [Two Cops in

Trouble] (Cin. del Prado--Prods. Esme-Alianza Cin.--Hermes Films--Cineastas Realizaciones Cinematográficas, 1989) *Exec Prod*: Abraham Cherem; *Prod*: Carlos Vasallo; *Dir*: José Nieto Ramírez; *Scr*: Carlos Martín; *Photo*: Alberto Arellanos; *Music*: Tino Geiser; *Prod Dir*: Rafael Arrillaga; *Prod Mgr*: Jesús Fragoso; *Asst Dir*: José Medina; *Film Ed*: Jorge Peña; *Decor*: Francisco Magallón; *Sound*: Manuel Rincón; *Re-rec*: René Ruiz Cerón; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Pedro Weber "Chatanuga" (*Oliverio Vergara Peláez*), Manuel "Flaco" Ibáñez (*Toní*), Sergio Ramos "El Comanche" (*?El Topo*), Raúl Padilla "Chóforo" (*model agency executive*), Yuyito [Amalia González] (*Diana*),



Salvador Sánchez (police chief), Pancho Muller (ad executive), Polo Ortín (French consul), Carlos Yustis (doctor in clinic), Angelines Fernández (Oliverio's mother), América Gabriel, Lizbeth Olivier (patient in clinic), Rosalinda España, José Ruvinskis, María Luisa

Coronel, Ana Berumen, Adriana Fierro, Bernabé Palma, Jorge Ortín, José Olivares, Miguel Ángel Herrera, Jesús García, Lupita Peruyero (*hijacked woman*), Carlos Guilar, Elvía Pedroza, José de Alvarado, Rigoberto Jiménez, Rafael Longoria, Nora Torrero, Guillermo Tijerina, Miguel A. Hernández, Jorge Gallardo, Gonzalos Rosas, Rafael Pérez, Susana Contreras, Gustavo Aguilar (*orderly in clinic*)

Notes: a "buddy cop" picture—of which there were plenty in Mexico in addition to Hollywood and probably every other filmmaking country in the '80s and '90s—*Dos judiciales en aprietos* is moderately amusing but not hilarious. Most of the attention focuses on Weber, Ibánez and Ramos, with supporting comedians Chóforo, Pancho Muller, Polo Ortín and Carlos Yustis appearing in one scene each. The female lead is played by busty Argentine import Yuyito, who's fine but the film's reliance on a handful of performers somehow makes it seem limited and superficial.

Judiciales (members of the Policía Judicial Federal) Oliverio and Toní mistakenly arrest members of another police group and let innocent-looking drug traffickers escape. Their supervisor berates them and threatens the two cops with demotion to "mosquito patrol" in the border area of Chiapas, but Oliverio says he's aware of a drug ring preying on "models and aspiring actresses" in the film industry. He says the Chief will garner good publicity and meets a lot of sexy women if they break the case. Oliverio and Toní spot suspicious activity on the set of a pantyhose commercial and arrest everyone, only to learn the "drugs" being passed around are a sugar substitute so the models can stay thin.

Suspended from the force, Oliverio decides to keep investigating when model/actress Diana says she fears for her life (Toní has decided on a career in sports gambling, but is dragged back into police business by his partner), but she recants her statement and hangs the two cops out to dry once more. Oliverio and Toní, aided by their eccentric friend El Topo [I'm not sure about his character name] and his wacky inventions,

nis wacky inventions, finally crack the case: the models are being hooked on drugs and when they can't afford to buy any more, are locked up in a shady clinic. However, the criminals clear out and the clinic is full of legit patients, foiling Oliverio once more.



Now assigned to duty in a unpleasant tropical region, Oliverio and Toní are about to accept El Topo's offer of work as mercenaries in South Africa when their Chief and Diana arrive: she changed her mind about testifying and the drug ring was smashed, so the two detectives are reinstated.

Dos judiciales en aprietos is, as expected, episodic, and relies mostly on Weber and Ibáñez putting on outrageous costumes and using El Topo's inventions (a rocketpowered bicycle, a directional microphone, etc.) to infiltrate the drug ring. Some of these sequences are more amusing than others (the scene in which Toní dresses in drag and applies for a modeling job is pretty lame). There are a few good bits—an extended scene in which a clinic

orderly (Gustavo Aguilar "Manotas") laboriously reads aloud—and some which aren't very funny (Angelines



Fernández as Oliverio's elderly, oblivious, hearingimpaired mother). The film doesn't really qualify as a "sexycomedy," with only one

bit of nudity (Lizbeth Olivier as a clinic patient who gives Oliverio a come-hither look) and only one actress with a role of any significance (Yuyito).

Weber and Ibáñez are both fine: Weber is really the star, with Ibáñez as his sidekick, and Sergio Ramos gets a fair amount of exposure as well. Yuyito is satisfactory in a frustratingly-written role: she stubbornly refuses to inform on the drug gang, changes her mind, then changes it back again, with no particular explanation. But she's a decent actress and attractive enough, and her Argentine accent is at least a bit of a novelty for the time. Sergio Sánchez does as well as anyone in the thankless straight-man role of "Angry Police Captain" (as the meme goes). Production values are adequate.



Pancho Cachuchas (Prods. Tonatiuh Rodríguez, ©1989) *Exec Prod*: José A. Chávez; *Dir*: Damián Acosta; *Scr*: Julio Aldama, Fernando Osés; *Photo*: Raúl Domínguez, Armando Castillón; *Director of Editing/Post-Prod*: Jorge Manrique; *Prod Mgr*: Javier Archundia; *Asst Dir*: Carlos Chacón; *Film Ed*: Antonio López; *Makeup*: Karla Acosta; *Sound Engin*: Víctor Camacho, Joel Marriott

Cast: Carmen Salinas (*Pura*), Charly Valentino (*Pancho*), Julio Augurio (*Julio*), América Gabriel (*Panchita*?), Pancho Muller (*don León*), [Memo de Alvarado] Condorito (*Cuco*), Los Gatos Negros, Cuitláhuac Rodríguez (*doctor*), Jorge Fegan (*husband*), Blanca Lidia Muñoz (*irate woman on bus*), Roberto Cobo (*Fidel*), Beto Boticario Jr. (*waiter*), Gabriela Ríos "La Che" (*bargirl*), Carlos Yustis (*El Chácharas*), Blanca Nieves (*Laura, bargirl*), Oralia Olvera (*La Catrina*), Rojo Grau (*El Flaco*), La Fufurufa (*cook*), Alfredo Bustamante (*El Muñeco*), Ángela Valverde (*Dorita*), Fidel Abrego (*El Cariñoso*), Bárbara Fox (*cabaretera*), José Luis Avendaño (*bus driver*), *Pancho's children*: Azriel Aguilar, Zuriel Aguilar, Bolivar Hack, Jair del Rubí, Olga Lidia Rodríguez, Zaira Campos; Lisia Suárez (*servant*)

Notes: *Pancho Cachuchas*, apparently never released theatrically, is reasonably well-produced but suffers from an overly-familiar premise (the misadventures of a *campesino* seeking his fortune in Mexico City) and a disjointed script with numerous loose ends. Nominally a comedy, the film is actually tilted somewhat more towards

drama, although—unlike some of its predecessors—it eschews outright tragedy.

Pancho labours mightily on his farm but is unable to provide a decent living for his wife Pura and their numerous children. [As is explained several times, Pancho married Pura when her first



husband, his *compadre*, died of cancer, because he'd previously agreed to care for them in such an instance.] Emigrating to the capital in search of a better life (basically abandoning his family, although he intends to send for them), Pancho runs afoul of an irate woman on the bus: she's met by her pistol-packing husband at the bus terminal, and Pancho narrowly escapes. He gets a job as a *mozo* (essentially a janitor) at the nightclub run by don León and becomes friends with waiter Julio, an aspiring

singer. Pancho and Julio are drafted into working as waiters at a private party for don León's friend, who just happens to be the "husband with a gun." To avoid detection, Pancho dresses in drag—aided by



sympathetic servant Panchita—but when the hostess (the woman from the bus) catches them kissing in the kitchen, she fires them both (assuming they are lesbians). [Later in the film, Panchita reappears, working as a bargirl. Pancho insists she's too good for this kind of life, but she jealously persists. Then she vanishes again.] On the positive side, Julio fills in for the party's scheduled entertainment and wins a job as a singer in don León's club.



Pancho, seen "dancing" with a broom in the club after hours, is tutored by bargirl La Catrina and they win a dance contest. Pancho also wins her affections in the bedroom, and eventually becomes a pimp with six different

bargirls in his string. He runs afoul of El Flaco and some other pimps who want him to join their "union." Pancho refuses, but the pimps abduct the blind sister of one of his whores; Pancho intervenes and is stabbed, but not fatally.

Now that he's financially secure, Pancho rents an apartment and brings Pura and the children to the city to live. [Actually, they come to the city but can't find him, and are living in poverty until Pancho accidentally sees his

sons working as juvenile street vendors.] However, Pura catches him in the company of his bargirl-whores, and as the film concludes, everyone—including a chastened Pancho--is back on the farm (although now they have a tractor to help with the farm work). Julio is apparently going to marry Pura's oldest daughter.

Given the episodic nature of the film, one might almost suspect that the production was interrupted at some point (having credited two cinematographers also hints at this). Roberto Cobo, his leg in a cast (whether this was part of



the script or he really had a broken leg isn't known), shows up in two brief scenes only, and the sub-plot with Jorge Fegan and Blanca Lidia Muñoz (as the irate husband and wife team) is just dropped (although

their daughter reappears once, later). Laura (Blanca Nieves), the bargirl with the blind sister, just pops up in time for this sub-plot, then disappears again (I first thought the sister was Panchita showing up again, then realised this was an entirely different set of characters). The Panchita and Laura threads are the most obvious loose ends in the script, since the first one simply ends with no resolution, and the second comes out of nowhere for no particular reason.

There's also something of a thematic disconnect between the relatively "realistic" scenes with Carmen Salinas—poverty-stricken farm life replaced by povertystricken city life, then her bemused reaction to the modern

apartment Pancho has rented for them (she thinks the microwave oven is a television in the kitchen) and the slicker, somewhat more comedic sequences showing



Pancho's ascent in life. He makes urban friends (gay café owner Cuco, clothing vendor El Chácharas), spends his evenings at the club with his girlfriends/employees (then has sex with a different one each night), recharges his batteries by consuming mass quantities of seafood at Cuco's restaurant, buys fancy clothes, and so on. Even the "look" of these sequences is different than the Pura scenes.

Charly Valentino is fairly good as Pancho, using a "rural" accent for a while and then—when he becomes a suave pimp—dropping it. He mugs a few times (the funniest is when he's assigned to clean the nightclub's restrooms and emerges with a horrified look on his face) but mostly plays his role straight. His conversion from naïve *campesino* to ladies'-man is pretty unbelievable but hey, this isn't a documentary so it doesn't have to be

realistic. The film also justifies his philandering by making it clear he doesn't really love Pura, but married her only out of a sense of duty to his late *compadre*.

The rest of the cast is fine; most of the performers were solid veterans and the script doesn't require much innovation. Production values are fine—presumably everything was shot on location, but the photography, sound recording, etc. are adequate. The music score, however, is noticeably "canned" library music, with the exception of Julio Augurio's singing (he's alright).

Trivia: as usual, "family ties" in Mexican cinema result in the employment of various relatives of cast & crew. Cuitláhuac Rodríguez has a cameo role in this film, which was produced by his brother Tonatiuh. Carmen Salinas presumably procured a small role for Lisia [*sic*, Licia] Suárez, the widow of her son Pedro Plascencia. Julio

Augurio's father Julio Aldama gets co-script credit. "Beto Boticario Jr." is apparently the son of actor Beto el Boticario (who doesn't appear in the movie). And star Charly Valentino hired two of his



actual children—Azriel and Zuriel Aguilar—to play his step-children in the picture.

Another curious trivia point: in one scene, Pancho and La Catrina are in her apartment (or in a backroom of the club, it's not clear exactly) and there are two movie posters on the wall. One is for *El hombre de papel* (1963, produced and directed by Ismael Rodríguez) and the other is for *The Mighty Jungle* (1964, which allegedly used footage shot by Ismael Rodríguez for the unreleased *La ciudad sagrada* in 1959).

CHATANUGA <u>AND</u> **CHARLY** Los maistros (Pelados pero sabrosos) [The

Masters: Low-Class but Fine] (Galáctica Films, ©1987) *Prod*: Luis Bekris; *Dir*: Rafael Villaseñor Kuri; *Scr*: Antonio Orellana; *Story*: Rafael Villaseñor Kuri, Luis Bekris, Antonio Orellana; *Photo*: Antonio Ruiz; *Music*: Carlos Torres Marín; *Prod Mgr*: Blanca Rodarte J.; *Asst Dir*: Rubén González; *Personal Asst to Dir*: Rodolfo López Real; *Script Clerk*: Lourdes Álvarez; *Film Ed*: Max Sánchez; *Art Dir*: Gerardo Hernández; *Camera Op*: Febronio Tepozte; *Makeup*: Estela Sánchez; *Sound Op*: Roberto Martínez; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Pedro Weber "Chatanuga" (*husband***), Manuel "Flaco" Ibáñez (*Herculano*), Rebeca Silva (*Luisa*), Humberto Herrera, Charly Valentino; Alejandra Peniche (*Romualda*), Roberto Huichochea (*the Engineer*), Yira Aparicio (*other maid*), Rafael Buendía, Aurora Alonso (*doña Jova*), Arturo Cobo, Leo Villanueva, Gina Leal, Patricia Cohen, Mario Zebadua "Colocho" (*Azulejo aka Prisciliano*), Memo de Alvarado "Condorito", Rafael

Carrión, Los Xochimilcas (*band*), Abril Campillo (*doña Jova's daughter*), El Super Show de los Vaskez, Los Pateros del Norte

**[The heavy use of chilango speech (slang and



accents) made it extremely difficult for me to get character names for much of the cast (some may not even <u>have</u> character names, but some do and despite my best efforts, I couldn't figure them out).]

Notes: a number of Mexican films of the '80s—many of them sexy-comedies focused on groups of workers (mostly men) in Mexico City. The occupations

highlighted included bricklayers, greengrocers, plumbers, deliverymen, metalworkers, mechanics, and so forth, in films such as *El día de los albañiles, Huele a gas, Los verduleros, Los hojalateros, Las movidas del Mofles, Los plomeros y las ficheras*, etc. *Los maistros* features members of various building trades working together on a particular job, although very little work is shown (or, apparently, done) during the course of the movie. [*Maistro* is a term used to refer to someone who has "mastered" their trade, i.e., the head bricklayer, etc., who has assistants or apprentices working under him.]



Los maistros begins on the "Día de la Santa Cruz" [Holy Cross Day], the traditional holiday for construction workers in Mexico (in fact, the first shot of the film is of the wooden cross erected on buildings on this day). Various workers throw a wild party—complete with several bands—on a construction site. An errant fireworks rocket enters a window across the street and blackens the face of the wealthy resident (I'll call him [Chatanuga] even though that's not his character name). He's irate but his sexy wife Luisa calms him down by suggesting they take a bubble bath together. [This is a cringe-worthy scene, since it's pretty obvious both Rebeca Silva and Chatanuga are nude beneath the bubbles.] Later, they depart on a trip, which prompts their two sexy maids, Romualda and [Yira], to invite Herculano and 3 fellow workers ([Herrera, Valentino and Buendía]) over for a party. [Chatanuga] and Luisa return unexpectedly, causing Herculano to dive under their bed, [Herrera] to take shelter in the bathroom, and maid Romualda (wearing one of Luisa's negligees) to hide in the closet.

[Chatanuga] and Luisa's bedroom is set up with various gadgets, including a sound system, flashing lights, and

several video cameras, and they have energetic sex there. Afterwards, while Luisa is in the bathroom ([Herrera] submerges himself in the bubble-filled



bath to avoid detection), [Chatanuga] discovers Romualda in the closet and shoos her out, promising to see her later. He drugs Luisa and leaves in pursuit of the maid. At this point, Herculano emerges from beneath the bed and has sex with the unconscious Luisa! [i.e., he <u>rapes</u> her, there's no other valid interpretation of his actions.] A few days

later, Luisa watches the videotape of that night and sees herself being drugged and Herculano raping her (although, bizarrely, she is first horrified and then <u>smiles</u> at the images!). She decides to avenge



herself on her husband by inviting Herculano back for more?! Meanwhile, [Chatanuga] thinks his wife is away so he comes home to have sex with maid Romualda, but Romualda and [Yira] have brought [Herrera], [Valentino] and [Buendía] back to the house for fun (although later, in a perfect example of the horrid incoherence of this movie, Herculano's assistant [Condorito] is also there). Much running around and hiding ensues.

[Herrera, Valentino, Buendía and Condorito] finally dress in drag to escape the house, but are confronted by [Chatanuga] and pose as Romualda and [Yira]'s relatives. This leads to a clever bit, possibly ad-libbed by [Chatanuga]: first he says "*tener una familia asi*" (to have a family like this), which is a reference to well-known TV public service announcements of the era that featured Manolo Fábregas extolling the benefits of family; then [Chatanuga] adds "*Qué bonita familia!*", which was the ironic catch-phrase of Pompín Iglesias on the '70s-'80s television sitcom "Mi secretaria."

As the film concludes, [Chatanuga] learns the "women" are men in drag, but this doesn't dampen his enthusiasm, and he chases them around a vacant lot in fast-motion.



If Los maistros was made up of just these sequences, it would be a reasonably linear, more or less understandable narrative in the sexy farce genre, albeit one without a great deal of character development or logic. However, the picture is structurally flawed, with other sequences apparently randomly inserted (or at the very least, without any logical linking between them). Characters we've just seen in [Chatanuga]'s house suddenly appear in a nightclub, for example. Presumably this is "the next day" or something, but it's unclear. The continuity and transitions between the scenes are terrible: this is not like the (fairly common) situation in sexy-comedies where the plot stops for a musical number or an interpolated scene that's basically just a *carpa* comic routine, *Los maistros* actively annoys the viewer because of its slipshod structure.

This is too bad, because there are some positive aspects to the film. The musical numbers performed by Los Xochimilcas are excellent, Rebeca Silva has an extended, full-nude dance (Yirah Aparicio also does a bit of full



nudity towards the end of the movie, but Alejandra Peniche merely has one shownothing topless scene), and Pedro Weber "Chatanuga" is reasonably amusing.

Flaco Ibáñez--who has a cast on his foot for the whole movie (presumably a real-life injury because it has no bearing on the plot) that causes him to walk with crutches—is not so good (although it's possible that my impression of his character is negatively influenced by the rape of Luisa), and the other comic actors in support are given little to do. Charly Valentino is uncharacteristically slim and has what amounts to a minor role; Colocho, Condorito and Arturo Cobo are similarly wasted.

Not really recommended, although the first half hour or so (the party and Rebeca Silva's nude dance) are tolerable.

Trivia: although this film is entitled *Los maistros* and begins on the "Día de la Santa Cruz," it should not be confused with the much later *videohome* entitled *Los maistros…el Día de la Santa Cruz*.

El semental de Palo Alto (Hecho en México)

[The Stud Bull of Palo Alto: Made in Mexico] (Galáctica Films, 1988) *Prod*: Luis Bekris G.; *Dir*: Rafael Villaseñor Kuri; *Scr*: Antonio Orellana; *Story*: Rafael Villaseñor Kuri, Luis Bekris, Antonio Orellana; *Photo*: Xavier Cruz; *Music*: Rafael Carrión; *Prod Mgr*: Blanca Rodarte; *Asst Dir*: Rodolfo López Real; *Film Ed*: Max Sánchez; *Art Dir*: Alberto Villaseñor Kuri; *Makeup*: Guillermina Oropeza; *Sound Engin*: Abel Flores; *Re-rec*: Ricardo Saldívar; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Charly Valentino (*Paciano*), Rebeca Silva (*Paty Segura*), María Cardinal (*Dr. Meneses*), Pedro Weber "Chatanuga" (*don Rebuño; Dr. Barriga; German doctor*), Humberto Herrera (*Damián Rosales*), Rosario Escobar (*Fabiana*), Memo de Alvarado "Condorito" (*Kruper*), Anaís de Melo (*Sra. Kruper*), Janet Mass (*German doctor's nurse*), Rosita Bouchot (*Rosita, nurse*), Gioconda (*Rebuño's daughter*), Karla (*Ofelia*), Lizbeth Olivier (*farm girl*), Roberto Huicochea (*Fulgencio, Damián's friend*), Laura Tovar, Tito Guillén (*Próculo, butler*), Carlos Terán, Raúl Alberto, Rafael Fernández, Paty Alvarado, Gina Leal, Flora Fernández, Leo Villanueva (*Porfirio*)

Notes: after a good beginning, this degenerates into a repetitive and plotless one-joke comedy, albeit one with a decent cast and fairly good production values.

Paciano is the



"stud" of the small town of Palo Alto: renowned for his massive masculine endowment (which is, of course, never shown), he is also extremely potent, impregnating many of his young, female conquests. When municipal president

don Rebuño catches Paciano "in the act" with Rebuño's daughter, he arrests the pudgy young man. In front of the whole town, don Rebuño orders a local ninja (?!) to chop off



Paciano's offending male organ (the ninja demonstrates his expertise by slicing various cucumbers with his samurai sword, but decides to use a comically-large axe on Paciano). Protests by the town's young women compel

Rebuño to relent, but he orders Paciano to leave Palo Alto at once.

Paciano makes his way across the countryside, but he constantly runs into young women whom he feels

compelled to seduce and men holding a grudge against him because of his past seductions. Finally arriving in Mexico City, he gets a job as a handyman at Dr. Barriga's fertility clinic (what're the odds?!) and swiftly



impregnates the female doctors and nurses. Barriaga uses Paciano on his toughest cases, Sra. Segura and Ofelia, with success. Paciano is finally sent to the eccentric Kruper household, where he's assigned to work his reproductive magic on the lady of the house. Returning to Barriga's clinic, Paciano is surprised to see a delegation from Palo Alto—led by don Rebuño—asking him to return because the town's birth rate has dropped alarmingly in his absence.

El semental de Palo Alto uses a standard sexy-comedy trope—a physically unattractive male is somehow sexually attractive to every woman he meets—but does almost

nothing with it. After the amusing opening section, which has some cartoony, even surreal aspects, the film is nothing but scenes showing women becoming aroused by a glimpse of Paciano's male



organ (or by overhearing him having sex with another woman) and "pressuring" him to have sex (not that he's reluctant, most of the time). The sex scenes are played for humour, with lots of screaming, literal fireworks, and shots of energetic feet and legs (but not much else— given the subject matter, there's surprisingly little nudity in the movie, although there is some).



There is no particular "plot" and no real character development or character arc. Paciano is inconsistently portrayed: sometimes he's innocent and at others he's a sexual predator. Pedro Weber "Chatanuga" plays three roles and makes them

each distinctive but none really has much depth. The sequence with Rosario Escobar and Humberto Herrera (as a sexy young woman and her husband who's away "working in the USA"—until, oddly enough, the very day that she spots Paciano and takes him back to her house for sex) is somewhat longer and more involved than Paciano's other adventures, although a large chunk of time is spent on Herrera singing in a *cantina*. The Kruper sequence is bizarre but not in any sort of inspired or amusing way, unlike the Mexican ninja scene early in the movie.

Not horrible, but pretty weak overall.



LEONORILDA OCHOA

Cazadores de espías* [Spy Hunters] (Pels. Mundiales-T.V. Producciones, 1968) *Exec Prod*: Alberto

Galindo: Prod: Jesús and Eduardo Galindo: *Dir/Adapt*: Rafael Baledón; Story: Adolfo Torres Portillo; Photo: Jorge Sthal [sic = Stahl Jr.]; Music: Gustavo César Carrión: Prod Mgr: Hermilo Sierra Rincón; Prod Chief: Antonio Guajardo; Asst Dir: Américo Fernández: Film Ed: Carlos



Savage; Art Dir: Salvador Lozano Mena; Decor: Alfonso Godínes [sic]; Lighting: Antonio Alvarez; Camera Op: Andrés Torres; Makeup: Felisa Ladrón de Guevara; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Javier Mateos; Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Union: STPC

*[misspelled Cazadoroes on the film!]

Cast: Carlos East (Ricardo), Maura Monti (Silvana), Eleazar García "Chelelo" (Gracielo "Chelelo" Ochoa), Leonorilda Ochoa (Leonorilda García), Héctor Andremar (Gonzalo Ayala "Mister X"), Guillermo Rivas (Cmdte.), Manolo Muñoz (*"Watson" Rodríguez*), Manuel Garay (Silvana's henchman), Mary Medel (spy), Julián de Meriche (Orlof), José Dupeyrón (Silvana's henchman), Armando Acosta (Silvana's henchman), Federico González (Silvana's henchman), José Cora, Francisco Parres [Pharrez] (Gordux), Guillermo Alvarez Bianchi (talent agent), Ramiro Orsi [sic], Ricardo Carrión (Ramiro), Carlos Guarnero "Don Cuco," Manuel Dondé (Bronson), Manuel "Gordo" Alvarado (fake buyer), Armando Arriola (Luis Cervantes), Nothanael León "Frankestein" (henchman of Mr. X), The Rockyn [sic] Devils, The Shadow of the Beast

Notes: a very weak movie overall, a misguided and unfunny spy spoof with horrible musical numbers. The theme music by Gustavo César Carrión (also heard in some other movies around this time) is the best thing about the whole film (and what can you say about a movie that has its <u>main title</u> misspelled on the print?!!).

The city of Santiago, Chihuahua, has become a hotbed



of international intrigue because the climate and geography are perfect for the construction and launching of missiles. Secret agent Ramiro, ambushed by enemy spies, dies in the arms of his brother

Ricardo. A short time later, Gonzalo Ayala is confronted by <u>his</u> long-lost twin brother, who dies after falling out of a window. Because he was wearing Gonzalo's jacket and carrying his wallet, the dead man is identified as Gonzalo. This allows Gonzalo, aka master spy "Mister X," to go underground. However, as a result, Gonzalo's godchildren Chelelo and Leonorilda are notified that they have inherited some property from him.

Chelelo wants to open a wrestling arena, but Leonorilda insists on a "go-go café." Ricardo dissuades them from selling out to one of Mister X's henchmen, arguing that there must be something special about the old building (Mister X's hidden spy headquarters are located



underground beneath it). The two heirs decide to open a combination disco <u>and</u> wrestling arena.

Ricardo tells Chelelo he can obtain

the services of famous wrestler "Rayo de Oro" (who wears a shiny gold suit like "Superzán," and uses karate in his ring appearance) for the opening night; jealous, Leonorilda calls a talent agency and tries to hire "Sophia Loren." Instead, she gets Silvana, actually the leader of a rival gang of spies. Silvana and Mister X's henchmen repeatedly attempt to assassinate Chelelo and Leonorilda, but always

fail (usually killing each other instead). Orlof, one of

Silvana's henchmen, challenges Rayo de Oro to a match against his robot, Andros. On the night of the match, Ricardo--Rayo de



Oro's secret identity--doesn't appear, since he's busy being seduced by Silvana. Chelelo disguises himself as the golden-suited Rayo and ineffectually battles the robot. Ricardo turns the tables on Silvana and leaves her to be eaten by her own carnivorous plant; he arrives at the arena in time to save Chelelo and destroy the robot. Mister X and his men emerge from their subterranean hideout and are defeated by the police and Ricardo. *Cazadores de espías* tries hard to be a wacky, comic book-like spy spoof (after Paco Pharrez is squashed by a huge packing crate, his pancake-flat "corpse" is displayed by the police), but the execution of the various gags is so lame that almost none of them are even slightly funny. The numerous deaths in the movie--while presented "humorously"--are nonetheless in dubious taste for an alleged comedy (Ricardo is particularly ruthless, knocking out Silvana and deliberately leaving her to be consumed by her own plant).

The musical numbers are also sub-par. The playbacks and recording are technically quite poor, and the songs themselves are very bad. Outstanding among these (for its badness) is the tuneless cacophony of The Shadow

of the Beast (a song allegedly sung in English, but since the words are <u>literally</u> unintelligible, it's difficult to tell), but the other songs (by Ochoa, Chelelo, Manolo Muñoz, and The



Rockyn Devils) are also weak and badly recorded.

Cazadores de espías wastes a decent cast--Carlos East, although a solid performer, seems too colorless to be a leading man, and Maura Monti is given an unpleasant character to play (and remains disappointingly covered-up in all but her death scene). Chelelo and Leonorilda Ochoa were better in smaller doses, as supporting players, than they are in major roles.

Unfunny and hard to watch.

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Capulina "Speedy" González (Estudios América— Alfredo Zacarías, 1968) *Prod-Dir-Scr*: Alfredo Zacarías; *Photo*: Javier Cruz; *Music*: Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Prod Mgr*: José Llamas Ultreras; *Admin*: Anuar Badín Zacarías; *Asst Dir*: Fernando Durán; *Film Ed*: Federico Landeros; *Art Dir*: Octavio Ocampo, José Luis Garduño; *Decor*: Saúl Cárdenas; *Camera Op*: Lorenzo Contreras; *Lighting*: Juan Hernández; *Makeup*: María Eugenia Luna; *Dialog Rec*: Francisco Guerrero; *Music/Re-rec*: Heinrich Henkel; *Script Clerk*: José Delfos; *Union*: STIC; Eastmancolour

Cast: Gaspar Henaine "Capulina" (*Capulina Espiridión González*), Leonorilda Ochoa (*Rosita Smith*), Xavier Loyá (*Timothy*), Jorge Rado (*Sheriff*), John Kelly (*Sarge*), Víctor Alcocer (*Padre Anselmo*), Nathanael León "Frankestein" (*saloonkeeper*), Jorge Casanova (*postmaster*), Victorio Blanco (*townsman*), Julián Meriche (*judge*), Juan Garza (*townsman*), Víctor Almazán, Jesús Gómez (*mail rider*), "Los Tonchis"

Notes: "Speedy Gonzales" was a 1961 U.S. pop song (coincidentally co-written by David Hess, later an actor in films like *Last House on the Left*), that became a hit for Pat Boone in 1962. A revised, Spanish-language version is heard over the credits in *Capulina "Speedy" Gonzalez*, and

a speeded-up instrumental is played whenever Capulina uses his super-speed. Unfortunately, as with many of Capulina's solo efforts, the filmmakers assumed undercranked action + funny music = humour, and this is rarely the case (Benny Hill to the contrary). Virtually every



"speedy" scene (and others, such as Capulina riding a horse named "Entrega inmediata" [Special Delivery]) goes on for far too long and doesn't contain any

inherently amusing action. The movie is not without entertainment value—Capulina's screen persona and performance provoke a few smiles—but it could have been better.

Capulina is a rider for the U.S. Mail in the Old West (he doesn't deliver mail, he's just the final link in the Pony Express, and hands over the letters to a postmaster in town). The saloonkeeper in town is justly criticised for the bland quality of his cooking, but tells Capulina that he can't afford to import *chile* from Mexico to spice up his dishes. Capulina plants a *chile* plant near his house, and it immediately grows to a large size (it's unclear if this is magic or if some time is supposed to have elapsed). When Capulina takes a bite of one of the peppers, he suddenly has a burst of super-speed (later in the film, he eats salt to return to normal). He rescues another mail rider from marauding Indians, and <u>runs</u> to town with the mail pouches rather than riding his horse.

Rosita, Capulina's girlfriend, arrives in town and briefly works at the saloon as a singer. She and Capulina plan to marry, but Padre Anselmo says Rosita has to stay at the mission until the wedding.

Sarge and Timothy, two deserters from the U.S. Army,



have a stolen Gatling gun (an early type of machine-gun). The outlaws murder the driver and passengers of a stagecoach and frame Capulina for the crime. He's sentenced to

hang but escapes with the assistance of Padre Anselmo and the magic peppers. Capulina discovers a baby whose parents have been killed by Sarge and Timothy, and he is then recaptured by the Sheriff. Everyone in town is held hostage in the church by the two *gringos* with the Gatling gun. Capulina escapes from jail when energised by the *chile* (smashing through a stone wall like the Kool-Aid Man). His speed allows him to dodge the Gatling gun's bullets, and the weapon finally overheats and explodes, killing the two villains.

As the previous synopsis indicates, this film takes place in the USA, even though everyone speaks Spanish (Sarge occasionally uses some English phrases but all of his significant dialogue—as well as Timothy's—is in Spanish). Capulina is an employee of the U.S. Mail but it's unclear if he's supposed to be a Mexican immigrant or of Mexican descent (even Rosita, who speaks with a strong *campesina* accent, is given the surname "Smith"—or as Padre Anselmo pronounces it, "Es-smith"). Most of the other characters don't have proper names at all, but are presumably Anglos or at least U.S. residents.

The synopsis also hints at the moderately bloodthirsty aspects of the plot: Sarge and Timothy gun down the stagecoach crew and passengers in cold blood (and onscreen!), and when Capulina stumbles across the carnage, he makes several jokes about the corpses! We don't see the actual murders of the baby's parents, but several dead bodies are visible in the house (and Sarge and Timothy debate whether to kill the baby or leave it to starve!). At

the climax, Sarge and Timothy are blown to smithereens, no trace of them, the Gatling gun, or their wagon remaining after an explosion. Not quite as fatal, but still curiously violent, is the



scene in which the other mail rider is captured by hostile Indians, who tie him up and "torture" him (punching him in the stomach repeatedly), until he's rescued by Capulina.

Capulina Speedy González was an STIC film in three "episodes," and while these were mostly a transparent fiction required by union regulations, the script actually does separate itself into three relatively distinct parts. Episode 1 is practically all Capulina, focusing on his antics as a mail rider, his encounter with the saloonkeeper, planting the *chile* bush, discovering the super-speed that the peppers impart, rescuing the other rider, and meeting Sarge and Timothy for the first time. Episode 2 ("Diez Días Después" [10 Days Later]) introduces Rosita and has Capulina framed, arrested, tried, and sentenced to hang. Episode 3 ("El Rápido") depicts Capulina's escape, his discovery of the orphaned baby, and the final confrontation with Sarge and Timothy.

The performances are adequate. Capulina is rather good: like him or not, there's no denying that he's an engaging character who employs a full range of comic facial expressions, body movements, and verbal utterances to good effect. Leonorilda Ochoa, as noted above, doesn't appear until the second episode, when she's introduced dressed in "Spanish" clothing—doing a parody song & dance to the tune of "La Paloma" (Capulina also gets to sing one song later). Ochoa is fine and in fact is really the only other performer allowed to act in a humourous fashion for any period of time, with everyone else playing their roles straight. John Kelly was a familiar *gringo* face in Mexican cinema of this era, often appearing as sheriffs and such in Westerns. Jorge Rado had an odd, peripatetic

screen career, working in Mexico, Hollywood, and European cinema: he doesn't have much to do here.

Production values are satisfactory. Apparently the América studios had a "Western town" back lot, and consequently the film doesn't look cheap. The technical aspects are fine, with the exception (possibly due to the video copy I saw) of some flickering in some of the "speedy" sequences.

Not great, but tolerable.

**** The Saga of El Zorro Escarlata

In 1950, producer Luis Manrique hired director



Zacarías Gómez Urquiza, and actors Luis Aguilar, Flor Silvestre, and Pascual García Peña for *El Tigre enmascarado*. Although the "Masked Tiger" appeared in only one film, for the next decade-plus, Manrique, Aguilar, etc., would repeatedly return to the "masked Western hero" genre. Aguilar would portray the Jinete Sin

Cabeza, the Ranchero Solitario, and the Zorro Escarlata (he was also masked heroes El Látigo Negro, El Halcón Solitario and one of the Gavilanes Negros but for different producers, although Zacarías Gómez Urquiza directed the last Halcón film).

El Zorro Escarlata would show up in 8 feature films with remarkably consistent casts and crews; in fact, all 14

of the Manrique/Aguilar "Masked Man" films share numerous credits. Luis Manrique: produced 11, co-produced 2, associate produced 1 Fernando Osés: appeared in at least 12, 1 script credit Pascual García Peña: acted in 12 Jaime Fernández: acted in 11 Zacarías Gómez Urguiza: directed 6 Flor Silvestre,



José Eduardo Pérez, Salvador Lozano: acted in 6 each <u>Ramón Obón</u>: wrote 5 <u>Chano Urueta</u>: directed 4 <u>Antonio Orellana</u>: wrote 4 <u>Fernando Fernández</u>: acted in 3, contributed to 1

script

The Zorro Escarlata series began in 1958 with a two films made on the margins of the film industry (personnel from both the rival STIC and STPC unions were involved): *El Zorro Escarlata* (also released as *La venganza del* *ahorcado*) and the sequel *El regreso del monstruo*. The exact production dates are unclear, but it seems obvious that *El regreso del monstruo* was not filmed back-to-back with *El Zorro Escarlata*, since much of the cast and crew are different. Manrique seems to have had the idea of a continuing series in mind from the first, since Luis Aguilar can be heard singing the brief Zorro Escarlata theme song as the first movie opens (the absolute best Western-hero theme song was the "Mauricio Rosales, el Rayo" *corrido* sung by Antonio Aguilar in his mid-50s series).

Sometime shortly afterward, at least three additional "episodes" were produced, either as television programs or theatrical shorts, and were later released theatrically under several titles (*El Enmascarado Justiciero* and *Aventuras del Zorro Negro*).

After a brief detour in 1959, when Manrique, Aguilar and most of the same team made two "Ranchero Solitario" movies (*La calavera negra* and *La máscara de hierro*—the



hero's mask in these pictures is a full-face black scarf which does not cover the top of his head, so it's different from either incarnation of El Zorro), the Zorro Escarlata was revived and teamed with

another of Manrique's masked heroes, La Sombra Vengadora.

The films that followed were very different in style and tone from the original Zorro Escarlata entries: there

were no fantasy elements, the plots are much more conventional, the pictures were shot on the Churubusco lot rather than on actual locations, and even the Zorro's costume was different (he lost his cape, his mask now covered his entire face, instead of just the upper half, and his hat and clothing are much more "Western" style than before). However, the basic "Zorro" premise was retained—Aguilar's character



pretends to be timid and El Zorro handles the heroic elements—and there were many familiar names in the credits.

El Zorro vengador—produced by Alameda Films and César Santos Galindo, with Luis Manrique credited as Associate Producer--was the final Zorro Escarlata movie (in fact, the "Escarlata" part of his name was dropped after *La máscara de la muerte*) and the last collaboration between Luis Aguilar and Luis Manrique. Aguilar would go on to make a few more appearances as masked Western heroes before finally hanging up his mask in mid-decade.





El Zorro Escarlata aka **La venganza del ahorcado*** [The Scarlet Fox aka The Vengeance of the Hanged Man] (Filmadora Mexicana, 1958) *Prod*: Luis Manrique; *Dir*: Rafael

Mexicana, 1958) Prod: Luis Manrique; Dir: Rafael Baledón; Scr: Antonio Orellana, Fernando Fernández, Luis Manrique; Photo: Raúl Martínez Solares (dir), Domingo Carrillo; Prod Chief: Víctor Salim; Asst Dir: Américo Fernández; Film Ed: Pedro Velázquez; Camera Op: Carlos Nájera; Lighting: Cirilo Rodríguez; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Sound Engin: Enrique L. Rendón; Dialog Rec: Galdino Samperio: Union: STIC **

*[released under both titles, and some sources list the full title as *El Zorro Escarlata en la venganza del ahorcado*] **[although STIC is the credited union, many of the crew members were STPC personnel such as James L. Fields, head of the sound department at the Estudios Churubusco]

Episode titles: "El hijo de la bruja" (The Witch's Son), "La soga del ahorcado" (The Hanged Man's Noose), and "El secreto del resucitado" (The Secret of the Revived One)

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Luis*), Fernando Fernández (*Fernando*), Irma Dorantes (*Gloria Carreón*), Jaime Fernández (*Tomás García*), Pascual García Peña (*Pascual*), Fanny Shiller [sic] (*the witch*), Emma Roldán (*Chabela*), José Eduardo Pérez (*Ricardo Carreón*), Trío Los Mexicanos, Fernando Osés (*El Zorro Escarlata*), Armando Velasco (*Antonio Orellana*), Carlos Suárez (*rural policeman*), Agustín Fernández (*hunchback*), Carlos León (*man at hacienda*)

Notes: this is a fun film, with a very goofy looking monster, a cackling witch, and an athletic masked hero. Director Baledón makes good use of his locations, handles the action sequences well, and manages to work in a little character development. On the negative side, this "character development" (mostly comic relief) and a plethora of songs hamper the pacing of the movie significantly.

One thing which is quite obvious to the viewer is that Fernando Osés plays the Zorro Escarlata in virtually every scene even when Luis Aguilar--who plays Zorro's alter ego--<u>could</u> have done so. In other words, Osés not only handles the stunt work, he also appears in medium shots and closeups, except for the scene at the movie's end when Aguilar unmasks himself. There are several possible reasons for this: Aguilar may have only worked for a few days, and it was more economical to shot the Zorro sequences at another time; or, the physical disparity between Osés and Aguilar might have been so great that inter-cutting between the two in the same sequence would have been too obvious.

As the film opens, Luis and his friend Pascual happen upon a public execution. Tomás is hung for murder and

other crimes, including the attempted abduction of Gloria. Tomás's aged mother doesn't seem too upset--she cackles madly as her son is hung. The *rurales* say the hanged man's corpse will stay on the gallows for 24 hours to serve as an example to others. However, that night the old



witch and her hunchbacked assistant kill one of the *rurales* and steal her son's corpse. The witch revives her son with the help of a magic potion, although he changes from a presentable young man to a bald, potato-nosed, buck-toothed monster who growls like a lion.



The witch sends her monster-son to take revenge on those who executed him. Sometimes he strangles them himself, but at other times his mother arranges for the victim to be magically strangled by a noose or a

neckerchief. In one scene, *rural* captain Fernando is nearly killed but the masked Zorro Escarlata shoots the rope and saves him.

Meanwhile, Luis and Fernando are competing for the attention of Gloria, who lives on a nearby *hacienda*. Luis and Pascual pretend to be cowards whenever danger threatens (well, <u>Luis</u> is pretending, I don't know about Pascual). Gloria is bewitched, then kidnaped by the



monster and taken back to his mother's black magic lair (a hidden cellar under a hut). The witch says Gloria will be enchanted and become their slave. However, while the monster is

out looking for a snake to complete his mother's potion, the Zorro Escarlata breaks in and shoots the witch, saving Gloria. Fernando plants a charge of dynamite in the hideout; El Zorro and the monster fight, but only the monster is left inside when the explosion occurs. El Zorro Escarlata reveals himself to be Luis, and everyone apologizes for thinking he was a coward.

There are some nice touches in this sequence. These include:

(a) the witch has a live <u>monkey</u> in her lair. Hopefully the little fellow escaped before the place blew up.

(b) Fernando stabs the monster in the stomach with his machete, but the monster just pulls it out and resumes the



fight! This is echoed in *El regreso del monstruo*, where El Zorro plunges a pitchfork into the monster's chest, to no effect.

(c) El Zorro climbs up a ladder to escape before the dynamite explodes, but leaves a flaming torch at the top so the monster (who fears fire) can't follow him. The monster gives a sad sigh and crouches by his mother's



body (well, she's a skeleton now) and waits for the end. This is kind of pitiful and a <u>very</u> nice touch.

As noted earlier, there are some good action sequences in the film--El

Zorro fights the monster several times and gets tossed around by the bigger and stronger creature; he also has an exciting conflict with the machete-wielding hunchback. The latter fight is the "cliffhanger" to episode two and opening of episode three. Curiously, a narrator can be heard at the end of the first and second episodes saying "See the next episode..."

El Zorro Escarlata was probably economically made, but the low budget doesn't really show--the actual



locations on the *hacienda* "La Encarnación" (in the town of Nicolás Romero in the state of México) are impressive, the cast is filled with familiar faces, and there are a fair number of extras when

needed. Aguilar seems to be having fun with his role, Fanny Schiller gleefully chews the scenery, and everyone else is adequate. Pascual García Peña is given comic relief responsibilities and is slightly more restrained than in *El regreso del monstruo*, possibly because he's given a feisty foil in Emma Roldán. Although the monster's appearance is rightly criticised for its risibility, at least the filmmakers made the effort to create a bizarre, original-looking creature that required a significant amount of makeup (the transformation scene is nicely done). Aside from his constant growling, the monster is actually quite interesting and effective in the film, particularly in his extended rampage through the *hacienda* (where he kills numerous people and smashes the gallows where he was hung) and in his two extended combats with El Zorro Escarlata.

There is one glaring continuity error: when the witch and hunchback go to retrieve the body of Tomás from the gallows, there is one long shot of the hunchback standing over the corpse



<u>before</u> he attacks the guard and cuts down the hanging man! There is also an in-joke: the man who supervises the hanging (and is later killed by the monster) is named

"Antonio Orellana." the name of one of the screenwriters of the film. A short time later in the film. the witch tries to kill Fernando (via remote control) using the noose that killed her son: El Zorro shoots the rope and saves Fernando, which irritates the witch, so she orders the monster to go out and murder people, especially El Zorro. In the very



next shot, the monster is <u>still there</u> and she repeats her previous dialogue, sending him out <u>again</u>. It's possible this came at an "episode break" and the second shot was a recap of the previous episode's conclusion.

The overall style of the film is bifurcated: the supernatural scenes are fine, weird and enjoyable, but the footage of Luis (and Fernando) singing, and Luis and Pascual's clowning around feels out of place. At one point the monster rampages around the *hacienda* (which is very large, almost like a small town), killing people right and left, and this exciting footage is intercut with Fernando serenading Gloria and—to add insult to injury—Pascual serenading housekeeper Chabela!

One interesting directorial touch: there are a number of shots of characters (often the monster, but not exclusively) coming straight towards the camera. Sometimes these are used as transitions to the next scene, but not always. One of the most impactful occurs during the monster's *hacienda* rampage: he rips a metal grate

from a window, then there's a cut to inside the building as he leaps into the room.

Although the musical numbers and comic relief may prompt frequent use of the fast-forward button, *El Zorro Escarlata* is reasonably entertaining.



El regreso del monstruo [The Return of the Monster]* (Filmadora Mexicana, 1958) *Prod*: Luis Manrique; *Dir*: Joselito Rodríguez; *Scr*: Luis Manrique, Antonio Orellana, Fernando Osés; *Photo*: Carlos Nájera (dir), J. Moreno; *Prod Mgr*: Fernando Osés; *Camera Op*: Fernando Colín, Eduardo Barrera; *Sound*: Consuelo Rodríguez; *Music/Re-rec*: Enrique Rodríguez *[released by Something Weird Video as *Zorro vs. the Teenage Monster*, although this title appears on the video box only]

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Luis*), Teresita Velázquez (*Teresita Morantes*), Jaime Fernández (*Esteban D'Orgaz*), Pascual García Peña (*Pascual Delgadillo*), Arturo Martínez (*Dr. Kraken*), Fany Schiler [sic] (*the witch*), Yolanda del Valle (*Josefa*), Roger López, Trío Los Mexicanos, Sergio Murrieta (*Sergio*), Emilio Garibay (*Felipe*), Fernando Osés (*doubles El Zorro Escarlata*), Agustín Fernández (*Román*), Carlos León (*henchman*), Fernando Yapur (*Pantaleón*), Vicente Lara (*henchman*), Salvador Lozano (*Dr. Joaquín Morantes*)

<u>Episode titles</u>: "El Doctor infernal" (The Infernal Doctor), "El esqueleto viviente" (The Living Skeleton), ? (episode title for part 3 unknown)

Notes: for many years, the only versions of this film readily available (from Spanish-language cable TV and the Something Weird video) began with "episode" 2, "El esqueleto viviente" (The Living Skeleton), suggesting that the movie was at some point edited down for later release on a double or triple-bill. Fortunately, several years ago the Cine Nostalgia channel finally broadcast a complete version, beginning with Episode 1, "El Doctor infernal." Dr. Kraken has set up a laboratory in the basement of an old *hacienda* (literally: its name is *Hacienda Vieja*). He converts a farmhand into a zombie, who then leads Kraken and his men to a cave where they unearth the living skeleton of a witch and her "dead" monster-son (from the first movie). [One of Kraken's assistants is hunchback Román, apparently the same character as the witch's sidekick from *El Zorro Escarlata* who was magically killed by his own neck-scarf so he couldn't reveal the witch's hiding place. Kraken makes an off-hand comment that Román was also revived from the dead but for some reason can't remember the resting place of the witch and the monster.]

Meanwhile, Luis and his pudgy sidekick Pascual arrive in San Miguel. Coincidentally—or IS it?--El Zorro Escarlata shows up at the cave; Kraken sends the zombie to kill him but El Zorro escapes just as the cave collapses.



Kraken, aided by Dr. Morantes, uses electricity to bring the monster back to life. Kraken puts a ring on the monster's hand, which makes the creature obey his commands. He also (this isn't explained at all) converts the turnip-headed monster into a normal-looking man, Esteban D'Orgaz, who is unaware that he's a resurrected monster.

When Teresita Morantes comes to town searching for her father, Esteban poses as the grandson of the owner of the *hacienda*, and tells Teresita he hasn't seen Dr. Morantes (Morantes is apparently being held prisoner by Kraken, although he participates in the monster's initial

revival enthusiastically). Luis and Pascual try to help Teresita, but their cowardly behavior irritates Sergio, a local man attracted to the young woman.



The witch wants to be reunited with her son, but this means she needs a new body. Kraken has one on hand, but it is too rotten to use; he sends his henchmen out to dig up a fresh corpse, but El Zorro scares them off. Instead, they callously shoot a young woman tending a herd and take her body back to the lab. The witch takes possession of

the body, which miraculously changes from a young shepherd to matronly (Kraken makes a comment about the resurrection process "aging" the body—at least the witch looks like a normal woman now, and not like the aged, toothless hag she was in the first movie). Her son, in his Esteban body, still doesn't recognize her.

Kraken decides the monster needs a mate: he sends the creature out to kidnap Teresita. However, before she can



be monsterized, El Zorro breaks into the lab. The usual fires, sparks, and short-circuits appear, killing the witch and Kraken. When Kraken's hand (wearing <u>his</u> copy of the power ring) burns up, the monster collapses. The *rurales* arrive and wipe out Kraken's gang (the outlaws fight to the last man, an interesting bit, and the film makes sure to give us separate closeups of their corpses). The lab blows up. El Zorro unmasks as Luis, to everyone's surprise. He and Pascual leave.

El regreso del monstruo is certainly very similar to *El Zorro Escarlata*: the monster is pretty much the same (I mean, it's the same monster, but the makeup is slightly

different), and each film concludes with the heroine strapped to a table, in imminent danger of being turned into a monster, followed by a brief



battle and then an explosion. However, *El Zorro Escarlata* is a fantasy film (the monster is created through magic), while *El regreso del monstruo* is a combination of science-fiction and fantasy (the living skeleton is fantasy, but Kraken is certainly a mad scientist who revives and controls the monster through scientific means; he also has a giant-screen TV set which apparently shows anything he wants it to). It may or may not be significant, but the civilian alter ego of El Zorro Escarlata is garbed as a *charro* in the first movie, and in *norteño* costume (essentially, like a Western cowboy) in the second.

Joselito Rodríguez and Rafael Baledón were both competent journeymen directors, and there isn't a lot to distinguish between them in these two movies (although Baledón is perhaps a little better at shooting action). *El* regreso del monstruo is slightly wackier than *El Zorro Escarlata--*any movie with a talking skeleton that has light-bulb eyes has a <u>real</u> head-start on weirdness--and while it has its share of songs (Aguilar, Murrieta, and Yolanda del Valle all sing), the pace is very slightly faster than the first film. On the flip side, there isn't as much physical action and there are some big gaps in the plot, such as:

How does the monster get converted into normallooking Esteban? Why does he randomly change back and forth in appearance? By what process does the witch's consciousness get transplanted into the dead shepherdess' body? Dr. Kraken's ultimate goal is obtaining the "secret of eternal life," known to the witch—is it a scientific secret (doubtful)? Some magic secret (apparently)? If Kraken

can revive dead bodies, doesn't he <u>already</u> have a secret to eternal life? *El Zorro Escarlata* was much more linear: the witch



wants revenge on those who caused her son to be executed, and almost everything that follows in the plot is directed towards that end.

Another curious lapse in logic and/or continuity occurs towards the end of the film. The monster leaves the *hacienda* and comes to town to abduct Teresita; El Zorro goes <u>to</u> the *hacienda*. The monster grabs Teresita and leaves: everyone hears her scream and Luis is <u>right there</u>. The *rurales* mount up and head for the *hacienda*, but the monster and Teresita (he's carrying her, on foot, remember) are already in Kraken's lab and she's strapped to the operating table. El Zorro bursts in. So, El Zorro returned from the *hacienda* to town (and appeared as Luis), then went <u>back</u> to the *hacienda* after Teresita was

abducted? And the monster <u>walked</u> to the *hacienda* from town (<u>carrying</u> Teresita) and still easily arrived well before El Zorro <u>and</u> the



rurales, who were all riding horses?

The supposed *raison d'être* for a <u>masked</u> superhero is so he can fight crime without revealing his true identity, thus allowing his "harmless civilian" persona to remain free of danger and legal repercussions, and possibly to obtain information. In *El regreso del monstruo*, El Zorro Escarlata does nothing Luis couldn't have done on his own, without the mask and costume. Luis's fake "coward"

act gives him no advantage and thus serves no purpose. Dr. Kraken does have one "spy" in the town of San Miguel, but he only alerts the villain to Sergio's mission to ask the *rurales* for help: Luis is not involved at all. So there's no particular reason for him to masquerade as El Zorro Escarlata (and since he unmasks at the end, everyone from now on will know who he is anyway).

El Zorro Escarlata has two confrontations with the monster, and loses them both. In a nicely-shot and rather shocking sequence, the monster--for no particular reason—

bursts into a cabin and abducts a little girl right in front of her parents (the key art on the poster and lobby cards is inspired by this sequence), carrying her off to



a barn. El Zorro intervenes, but the monster is invulnerable (not only to the girl's father's bullets, but also to a pitchfork that El Zorro plunges into his chest) and is strangling El Zorro when Dr. Kraken recalls him to the lab. At the climax, the monster also has the upper hand on El Zorro when he suddenly collapses (and, incongruously, reverts to his human appearance in death). Fernando Osés



is somewhat less obvious as El Zorro Escarlata in this film than he was in *La venganza del ahorcado*,

since he's

rarely shown in closeup and is almost always in action, but there's one shot in the barn sequence where he can seen clearly.

The major problem with El regreso del monstruo is the enormous disconnect between the "monster" sequences (including Kraken in his lab, the witch, Dr. Morantes, Esteban, etc.) and the "town" sequences (Luis, Sergio, Josefa and the mariachis singing, Luis and Sergio sniping at each other over Teresita, Pascual's ridiculous overeating, and so on). The monster scenes are not only outré and entertaining, there is more characterisation and depth in them: the witch loves her son, Esteban is confused, Kraken is a driven man, Morantes is conflicted, Kraken's henchmen are ruthless). In comparison, the ranchera-style music and comedy seems totally out of place and false. Some tonal accommodation could have been made between the two parts of the movie, but instead it feels like footage from two completely different films has been spliced together.

The cast is solid, although Pascual García Peña <u>really</u> overdoes the "I'm always eating" *shtick*. Tere Velázquez

is quite young and cute-looking, while Yolanda del Valle is attractive in an entirely different, more mature and assertive way (in fact, Josefa is supposedly Sergio's aunt, but she doesn't look that old). Sergio Murrieta had a very

brief film career, which seems rather odd: he's handsome enough, a decent actor and singer, but only showed up in a handful of



films in this era. The "Zorro" premise means Aguilar's character is always portrayed as meek and even cowardly (so no one will suspect he's El Zorro Escarlata), and this gets old really fast.

Still, this is generally an entertaining film of its type.



Aventuras del Zorro Negro [Adventures of the Black Fox] aka El Enmascarado justiciero** [The Masked Fighter for Justice] (Prods. Luis Manrique, 1958?) *Prod*: Luis Manrique; *Dir*: Rafael Baledón; *Scr*: Ramón Obón; *Photo*: Raúl Martínez Solares; *Prod Mgr*: Víctor Salim; *Asst Dir*: Guillermo Cramer; *Film Ed*: Gloria Schoemann, Pedro Velázquez; *Lighting*: Carlos Najera; *Camera Op*: Cirilo Rodríguez; *Sound*: Enrique L. Rendón; *Union*: STIC

**fairly recently, this film has been referenced online including IMDB--as *El Zorro Escarlata en diligencia fantasma*, but I am unsure if this is an "official" title or even one unofficially applied for a bootleg release, or is just a title applied because that happens to be the first episode's title.

<u>Episode titles:</u> (1) *La diligencia fantasma* [The Phantom Stagecoach], (2) *El hombre sin manos* [The Man with No Hands], (3) *El látigo envenenado* [The Poisoned Whip]

Cast: (in all episodes) Luis Aguilar (*Alfonso Rodríguez*), Pascual García Peña (*Pascual*), Fernando Osés (*El Zorro Escarlata*) Episode One cast: Rosalba de Córdoba (*Alicia*), Salvador Godínez (*crooked sheriff*), Julio Ahuet (*deputy*), Luis Mussot (*Federico*), Carlos Suárez (*government official*), Trío Los Mexicanos (*voices only*), ?Vicente Lara (*henchman*)

Episode Two cast: América Martín (*niece*), Guillermo Cramer (*Jacinto*), Salvador Lozano (*uncle*), Trío Los Mexicanos (*voices only*)

Episode Three cast: Lorena (daughter of don Diego), Guillermo Cramer (Padre José), Carlos Suárez (El Látigo), Manuel Casanueva (don Diego), Eduardo Salas, Trío Los Mexicanos (stage passengers), Ignacio Peón (second victim), Fernando Osés (henchman)



Notes: at some point (probably in 1958), Luis Manrique produced three additional "episodes" about El Zorro Escarlata, in addition to the first two feature films starring this masked hero. Rafael Baledón, who directed *El Zorro Escarlata*, also helmed all 3 shorts, which were shot at the same *hacienda* "La Encarnación" as the first feature.

These episodes seem to have been intended for release either to television or as stand-alone shorts, rather than a multi-part film, given that there is no common narrative thread linking the plots (except the presence of El Zorro and Pascual), and that some performers appear in multiple episodes in different roles, which you'd think audiences would have noticed. Nonetheless, these episodes were spliced together and released as a "feature" film under two different titles, the misleading *Aventuras del Zorro Negro* and the equally vague *El Enmascarado justiciero*.

The original episodes (which I have seen) have individual credits and TV-like formats (each runs about 25 minutes long and has two breaks for commercials). Each part has a Luis Aguilar song and a little physical action inserted into the skimpy plot. I've not seen either of the "features" compiled from these episodes, so I am not sure what sort of editing was done to combine them.

[There is a version on YouTube which begins with Episode One, including the credits but not the title, then continues with Episodes 2 and 3, omitting those credits and titles (each new episode just begins with a fade up from black), but I don't know where this particular copy originated.] Both theatrical versions of this film were handled by distributor Cinematográfica América; according to García Riera, *El Enmascarado justiciero* was released in 1961 (although he erroneously identifies it as part of the "Ranchero Solitario" series). *Aventuras del Zorro Negro* probably came out later, based on the style of its lobby cards. Although neither film is advertised as a Zorro Escarlata vehicle, lobby cards for both titles list "El corrido del Zorro Escarlata" as one of the songs in the picture (and in fact this song is heard in Episode 3).

While reasonably close to the feature films in some ways—Aguilar, García Peña, Osés, the original style Zorro costume—these episodes also have their own take on the character. El Zorro Escarlata's secret identity (which isn't so secret) is "Alfonso Rodríguez," a "music teacher and church organ tuner." Sometimes Aguilar wears the Zorro costume but not the mask, sometimes he wears the costume <u>and</u> the mask, and sometimes he dresses in regular clothing. It doesn't seem to matter, because people appear to recognise him, regardless!

Also, while Fernando Osés can be spotted as El Zorro in the action scenes, Luis Aguilar does have some dialogue scenes while in costume, a rarity in the previous theatrical features.

Episode One: *La diligencia fantasma*—10 years ago, a stagecoach carrying a fortune in gold disappeared without a trace. Federico, whose son was on the coach, refuses to believe his son was a robber. His frequent requests to the government for an investigation are finally answered by the arrival of El Zorro Escarlata and Pascual. Using an old stagecoach borrowed from a neighbouring village, El Zorro tricks the crooked sheriff and his gang into revealing their guilt in the original robbery, just hours before the statute of limitations would have expired. As the episode concludes, El Zorro says "we're going to look for The Man With No Hands."



Episode Two: *El hombre sin manos*—a masked sniper with hooks for hands has been killing people. El Zorro and Pascual arrive at a *hacienda* owned by a young woman and her invalid uncle. The uncle turns out to be the killer (he wears fake hands but replaces them with hooks when he goes into sniper mode): he's trying to gain control of a large area of land. Eventually El Zorro defeats the killer and his henchman Jacinto. [The fight with Jacinto takes place in a storage shed filled with old railroad cars (?), the same location used at the climax of *El valle de los buitres*

(1958). This was a "Jinete Solitario" movie directed by Rafael Baledón. Another curious bit of trivia—*El Jinete sin cabeza* (1956), also produced by Luis Manrique and starring Luis Aguilar as a masked Western hero, begins with a sequence in which a man's hands are chopped off. The actor who plays this unfortunate fellow is Salvador Lozano...who plays the Hombre sin Manos here! This is a very weird coincidence.]

Episode Three: *El látigo envenenado*—the inhabitants of a small town are terrorised and robbed by El Látigo, who wields a poisoned bullwhip. Don Diego, the municipal president, refuses to resign in favour of the gang leader despite being held captive by the outlaws. Alfonso Rodríguez arrives on the stage, along with don Diego's daughter. Alfonso—El Zorro Escarlata—aided by his sidekick Pascual and town priest Padre José, defeats El Látigo and his band. [This episode begins with Aguilar singing the theme song of El Zorro Escarlata. Fernando Osés has a minor role as one of El Látigo's henchmen, in addition to his stunt work as El Zorro.]

A mildly interesting oddity.



El correo del norte [The Northern Courier] (Prods. Universal.

(Prods. Universal, 1960) Exec Prod: Luis Manrique; Dir: Zacarías Gómez Urquiza; Story: Luis Manrique*; Photo: Ignacio Torres; Music Dir: Sergio Guerrero; Prod Mgr: Ricardo Beltri Jr.; Prod Chief: Ricardo Beltri; Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: Carlos Savage Jr.;

Asst Ed: Sigfrido García; Art Dir: Salvador Lozano; Camera Op: Ignacio Mariscal; Sound Ed: Reynaldo P. Portillo; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio "Crucy"; Dialog Rec: Javier Mateos; Makeup: Carmen Palomino; Spec FX: Juan Muñoz Ravelo; Union: STPC

*[no screenplay or adaptation credit; print sources credit Zacarías Gómez Urquiza]

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Luis Torres*), Fernando Fernández (*General Fernando Beltri*), Rosa de Castilla (*Carmen*), Jaime Fernández (*Colonel*), Arturo Martínez (*Col. Carraldo*), Rosario Gálvez (*innkeeper*), Sergio Murrieta (*Sergio Murrieta*), Fernando Almada (*General Zárate*), Salvador Flores Rivera (*Salvador*), Ramón Bugarini (*Captain*), Emilio Garibay, "Colo" Cora, El Zorro Escarlata, La Sombra Vengadora [Fernando Osés], José Chávez Trowe (*Beltri soldier*), Salvador Lozano (*man hit in San Andrés*), Guillermo Hernández "Lobo Negro" (*man with burro*) **Notes**: *El correo del norte* marked the return of two of Luis Manrique's masked heroes, El Zorro Escarlata and La Sombra Vengadora, dropped (with no explanation or backstory) into a Mexican Revolution tale. The two characters would return in the sequel, *La máscara de la muerte* and again in *La venganza de la Sombra*.

El correo del norte was shot at the Churubusco Studios and benefits from decent production values and a reasonable number of extras, but this doesn't mean it was an expensive movie: the film opens with a rather long stock-footage montage of the Revolution, accompanied by a song (there are 4 songs in the film itself), a cheap way to fill up some time, and not especially useful except to situate the film in a particular time period.



General Beltri learns the *Villista* forces (of which he is a part) have triumphed and now control much of northern Mexico. If he can coordinate with General Zárate (located in the south-western state of Guerrero), the progress of the Revolution will be accelerated. In time-honoured movie fashion, he splits his plan into three separate pieces of paper, and gives one piece to Sergio and Carmen, one piece to Luis, and one piece to the Sombra (whom he summons using a smoke signal), sending them the "2,000 kilometers" to Zárate. Unfortunately, two traitors escape and take news of Beltri's scheme to *federal* officer Col. Carraldo in the town of San Andrés.

Sergio and Carmen pose as poor *campesinos* and travel with some refugees; coincidentally, Luis and his sidekick Salvador <u>also</u> join the group. However, while stopping in San Andrés, Sergio and Carmen are identified as Beltri supporters and sentenced to die. El Zorro Escarlata and La Sombra Vengadora team up to rescue them (the Sombra had earlier rescued some young women from the unwanted lustful advances of Carraldo and his officers), but the Sombra is captured and unmasked. [In a bizarre bit, the *federales* express shock at his identity, but never use his name or otherwise explain how they happen to know him. Fernando Osés is only shot from behind in this sequence, which is very awkward when he's later trying to free himself and <u>still</u> keep his face turned away from the camera.] El Zorro returns and helps him escape.



However, Luis is subsequently arrested by Carraldo's men. In an *homage* to Jules Verne's novel "Michael Strogoff: the Courier of the Czar" (which also more or less provided the inspiration for the film's title and basic premise), Luis is blinded with a red-hot machete. Carraldo allows him to leave, with Salvador as his guide.

Carraldo sends two of his men (the two traitors who escaped from Beltri's camp) in pursuit of Sergio and Carmen. They catch the couple before they reach Zárate's headquarters and steal their part of Beltri's document, then pretend to be the actual couriers. The Sombra shows up with his portion of the plan, and then Zorro appears with <u>his</u> part of the paper—he unmasks and reveals himself as Luis (the Sombra took the place of the man who was supposed to blind Luis, and made sure not to seriously harm him with the red-hot machete). Zárate has the two Carraldo spies arrested and everyone is happy.



While *El correo del norte* is hardly a realistic look at the Mexican Revolution, one could equate Beltri with Pancho Villa and Zárate with Emiliano Zapata, rebel generals who each controlled a certain region of Mexico. The name "Carraldo" may have been intended to evoke memories of Venustiano Carranza, although in the film Carraldo is just a Federal colonel and apparently not particularly powerful on a regional scale. Carraldo and his *federales* are portrayed as typical oppressors, abusing young women, torturing and executing their enemies, and so forth.

[In one odd scene, as the refugees file into town, a man watching shouts "My daughter!" and starts forward only to be brutally struck down by the soldiers. This is never explained, but in the sequel, *La máscara de la muerte*, the same character/actor is introduced as Carmen's father. The characters played by Jaime Fernández and Rosario Gálvez aren't given personal names in this film, but in the sequel they are called "Col. Camacho" and "Chayito."]

The film doesn't do an especially good job of logically integrating the Zorro Escarlata and the Sombra Vengadora into the Revolutionary *milieu*—Zorro is more at home, given his Western outfit, while the bare-chested Sombra (whose costume includes "buccaneer" style boots and a flamboyant cape) seems out of place. As noted above, no explanation is ever given for the existence of <u>either</u> hero, but the Sombra clearly has a preexisting relationship with Beltri (since they've arranged a smoke signal to summon him). However, unlike some of the subsequent Zorro Escarlata films, the Sombra and Zorro both engage in some energetic brawls with the *federales*, which is nice to see.

Reasonably entertaining overall.



La máscara de la muerte [The Mask of Death] (Prods. Universal, 1960) *Exec Prod*: Luis Manrique; *Dir*: Zacarías Gómez Urquiza; *Scr*: Luis Manrique; *Photo*: Ignacio Torres; *Music Dir*: Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr*: Ricardo Beltri Jr.; *Prod Chief*: Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir*: Julio Cahero; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage Jr.; *Asst Ed*: Sigfrido García; *Art Dir*: Salvador Lozano; *Camera Op*: Ignacio Mariscal; *Makeup*: Carmen Palomino; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio "Crucy"; *Dialog Rec*: Javier Mateos; *SpFX*: Juan Muñoz Ravelo; *Union*: STPC

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Luis Torres*), Fernando Fernández (*Gen. Fernando Beltri*), Rosa de Castilla (*Carmela*), Jaime Fernández (*Col. Camacho*), Rosario Gálvez (*Chayito*), Sergio Murrieta (*Sergio*), Salvador Flores Rivera (*Chavo*

Delgadillo), Ramón Bugarini [billed but does not appear], Carlos León (Vengador 14), Emilio Garibay (don Cástulo), "Colo" Cora, El Zorro Escarlata, La Sombra Vengadora [Fernando Osés], Francisco Pando (prosecutor), Salvador Lozano (Carmela's father), José Chávez Trowe (Beltri officer)

Notes: *La máscara de la muerte* is a sequel to *El correo del norte*, with most of the previous performers returning in more or less the same roles (the major exception is Arturo Martínez). However, Luis Aguilar's character in this film claims to be a former resident of San Andrés (in fact, his family's ranch is allegedly nearby), which was never mentioned in *El correo del norte*.

Riders under the command of General Beltri have been oppressing the inhabitants of the region, murdering people,



stealing cattle, burning their homes, and abducting women. Luis and his sidekick Chava witness the aftermath of one such massacre and take the sole survivor—a young boy to San Andrés. The townspeople are arming themselves to resist Beltri's depredations; Luis is skeptical, believing Beltri is an honest military man who's fighting <u>for</u> the people, not against them. He retains his faith even when he's informed his father was murdered and the family ranch burned by the outlaws.

Unknown to the residents, a secret society known as the Brotherhood of the Scorpion is behind the attacks, vowing "vengeance!" They kidnap Carmela and try to prevent



o prevent anyone in town from escaping to confront Beltri at his headquarters. El Zorro Escarlata and the Sombra Vengadora team up to battle the

villains. When confronted by El Zorro, Beltri denies the accusations and returns to San Andrés to face charges; he's sentenced to death, but the Sombra arrives with the survivors of another, recent attack and they swear they saw Beltri in action there. Since he couldn't be in two places at

once, it's obvious there are Beltri imposters at work. The Brotherhood of the Scorpion attacks San Andrés and is defeated in a pitched battle by the townspeople, El Zorro, and the Sombra. The villains are exposed as disgruntled landowners who disagreed with the aims of the Revolution and tried to ruin Beltri's reputation to harm the cause. They have a supply of rubber Beltri-masks which allowed them to impersonate him during the raids. El Zorro and the Sombra ride off (in different directions), their job done for now.

La máscara de la muerte is a more conventional Western than El correo del norte, and doesn't make a lot of sense. The whole concept of the Brotherhood of the Scorpion-whose members wear black robes adorned with the image of a scorpion and black, conical hoods (Ku Klux Klan-style)-seems sort of pointless (and there is a lot of ritual, secret meetings, and so forth) since presumably the members knew each other anyway. The idea of impersonating Beltri is alright (albeit "harming the prestige of the Revolution" seems a rather vague goal) although it's clear Fernando Fernández plays the "fake" Beltri except in the final, unmasking scene. At least two young women are abducted during the course of the picture, and no explanation is given for that. El Zorro Escarlata and the Sombra don't have much to do here, either. Even the songs seem more intrusive and less tolerable than they did in the first movie.

It's as if the filmmakers used up all of their imagination and effort on *El correo del norte* and *La máscara de la muerte* was stuck with the left-overs.

Trivia notes: *El Zorro vengador* (1961 directed by Zacarías Gómez Urquiza and written by Gómez Urquiza,



Fernando Fernández and Antonio Orellana) also used the "Brotherhood of the Scorpion" gimmick, although in that film the gang wore black robes and black-with-white-stripes over-the-head masks rather than the conical KKK hoods. They still use the "*Venganza! Venganza!*" chant, though.

In *El regreso del monstruo*, Luis's gluttonous sidekick is the rotund Pascual Delgadillo, which is nicely ironic (*delgado* means slim or svelte). In *La máscara de la muerte*, Luis's sidekick Salvador is portrayed as constantly hungry, and his last name is <u>also</u> given as "Delgadillo"-however this time these attributes seem inappropriate, since actor Salvador "Chava" Flores is not fat at all (in fact, he's noticeably shorter and smaller in bulk than Luis Aguilar).





La trampa mortal [The Deadly Trap] (Jorge García Besné/Columbia Pictures, 1961) *Prod*: Jorge García Besné, Luis Manrique; *Dir*: Zacarías Gómez Urquiza; *Adapt*: Antonio Orellana; *Story*: Luis Manrique, Antonio Orellana; *Photo*: Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music Dir*: Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir*: Julio Cahero; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Asst Ed*: Sigfrido García; *Art Dir*: Salvador Lozano; *Camera Op*: Antonio Carrasco; *Makeup*: Margarita Ortega; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec*: Rodolfo Solís; *SpFX*: Juan Muñoz Ravelo; *Script Clerk*: Rogelio González; *Sound Ed*: Reynaldo P. Portillo; *Union*: STPC

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Luis Rosales*), Flor Silvestre (*Rosita*), Jaime Fernández (*don Melquiades Sánchez*), José Eduardo Pérez (*don Luis González*), Rosario Gálvez (*Carmela*), Cuco Sánchez (*Cuco*), Margarito Luna (*Melitón*), Carlos León (*don Ramón*), Emma Roldán (*Rosita's mother*), Ramón Bugarini (*Agapito*), Armando Vélez (? *Luisito*), Roberto Ledezma & Enrique Zambrano (*henchmen*), Rubén Márquez (*card player*), Pascual García Peña (*Sebastián, cantinero*), Jorge Casanova (*Fernando, bank employee*), Carlos Robles Gil (*card player*), Victorio Blanco (*townsman*), Emilio Garibay (*inspector*)

Notes: this is an "unofficial" Zorro Escarlata movie, since the masked hero is never referred to by this (or any other) name in the film (he's just called "El Enmascarado"). However, his costume is the same and there is no particular reason he <u>couldn't</u> be El Zorro. While some might argue that in the context of the plot he seems to have only adopted the masked persona for this specific, personal task, he is certainly well-prepared with a costume, two horses, and so forth, which might suggest he developed his Zorro character during his 15-year absence from his hometown.

La trampa mortal begins in 1940: engineer Luis returns to his family ranch, Los Laureles, after the death of his mother. He plans to live there with his wife Carmela and young son Luisito. Luis sells most of the ranch cattle to pay off the mortgage, to the barely-hidden displeasure of don Melquiades, who covets the land for himself. Two years later, Luis has rebuilt his herd and plans to reward his loyal workers for sticking with him. Melquiades lures Luis into a crooked card game and wins all of the money Luis earned by selling his cattle. Luisito accidentally discovers Melquiades was cheating, and Luis is shot to death by the villain's henchman Agapito. Luisito and his mother are evicted from the ranch.

15 years later, the adult Luis returns to town, incognito. His father's faithful assistant Melitón now runs the *cantina* and Luis's childhood sweetheart Rosita is a popular singer there. She's courted by Melquiades but rejects his attentions. Melquiades orders Luis, who's posing as a cattle buyer, to get out of town and Luis--pretending to be meek and inoffensive—agrees to leave but stalls as long as he can. That night, a masked man forces a bank employee to open the safe; ignoring the money, he takes one document, and burns the mortgages on file. He leaves the King of Spades behind (this was the card Luisito discovered which revealed Melquiades' cheating).

The masked man eventually forces Agapito and Melquiades' other conspirators to sign confessions to his father's murder and other crimes. In a final confrontation, Melquiads threatens to kill Melitón unless Rosita agrees to marry him, but he's defeated by the hero and he and the rest of his gang are arrested. Rosita is shocked to discover that the "cowardly" Luis is the heroic masked man, and that Luis is her long-lost childhood sweetheart as well.



La trampa mortal is a routine Western like many others, with the protagonist resorting to masked hijinks so he can act freely. However, the fact that star Luis Aguilar doesn't appear until nearly 30 minutes have passed is rather unusual: the first section of the movie is much more extended than the usual sort of prologues, and has more depth as well. While Luisito's childhood crush on Rosita is lame, the character of don Luis is portrayed in some depth and with a certain ambivalence. He's depicted as weak in some ways--although he's a decent husband, father, and ranch owner, he's manipulated by Melquiades over an extended period. When don Luis first pays off the mortgage, Melquiades encourages him to play cards and deliberately loses; two years later, Melquiades coaxes don Luis into playing cards again (even though he has his son with him and they're expected at the ranch for a celebration), and this time fleeces the rancher.

Although the "old age" makeup for Jaime Fernández, Margarito Luna, Jorge Casanova, Ramón Bugarini and

Carlos León is a little clumsy (mostly they just have gray hair, although some facial makeup is also evident), you have to give the filmmakers credit for trying, anyway. And not everyone survives from 1940 to the second section, Rosita's mother is specifically mentioned as having passed away, and presumably Luis's mother is also now dead.

La trampa mortal contains 8 songs, which is a lot, but at least one musical sequence is mildly amusing. Luis, having been ordered to leave town by Melquiades, pauses on his way out of the *cantina* to sing a rousing number with the house band. When he's done, everyone applauds. Unimpressed, Melquiades says, "Get out!"



There isn't a lot of physical action in the film, but the final brawl between the masked man, two police officials. Melquiades and his henchmen is entertaining and effective enough. Production values are satisfactory, as are the performances. José Eduardo Pérez does a good job as the flawed don Luis, and it's ironic that Rosario Gálvez-the wife in real life of Luis Aguilar-is cast as his character's mother here. Veteran character Margarito Luna has one of his larger roles in this movie and is ably seconded (in the first part of the film) by curmudgeonly Emma Roldán. La trampa mortal marks the return of Pascual García Peña, Aguilar's sidekick in a number of previous masked-hero pictures (but who'd been replaced by Chava Flores in El correo del norte and La máscara de la muerte): García Peña would appear in the final three Zorro Escarlata movies as a *cantinero*, rather than as a comic sidekick.

La venganza de la Sombra [The

Vengeance of the Sombra] (Jorge García Besné/Columbia Pictures, 1961) *Prod*: Jorge García Besné, Luis Manrique; *Dir-Adapt*: Zacarías Gómez Urquiza; *Story*: Jorge García Besné, Luis Manrique; *Photo*: Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music*: Sergio



Guerrero; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfin; *Asst Dir*: Julio Cahero; *Film Ed*: Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Asst Ed*: Ramón Aupart; *Camera Op*: Antonio Carrasco; *Makeup*: Margarita Ortega; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Rerec*: Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec*: Rodolfo Solís; *SpFX*: Juan Muñoz Ravelo; *Union*: STPC

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Luis Rodríguez*), Flor Silvestre (*Anita*), Jaime Fernández (*don Eduardo Pérez*), Cuco Sánchez (*Cuco*), Arturo Martínez (*outlaw leader*), José Eduardo Pérez (*don Guillermo Vázquez*), Carlos León (*bank manager*), Ramón Bugarini (*outlaw*), Pascual García Peña (*cantinero*), Rica Osorio (*waitress*), José Dupeyrón (*outlaw*), Eduardo Bonada (*La Sombra*), Fernando Osés (*El Zorro*), Emilio Garibay (*outlaw*), Jorge Casanova (*outlaw*)

Notes: after taking one film off (*La trampa mortal*), La Sombra Vengadora (billed here as just "La Sombra") returned for his final team-up with El Zorro Escarlata (now called just El Zorro), and gets a bit more footage than he had in their first two movies together. The film is still just a routine Western but the two masked heroes add some interest.

An outlaw gang attacks the ranch of Lorenzo Fernández, whose law-abiding actions have put a crimp in their criminal activities. They kill him and steal his cattle. The gang leader gives his henchmen some cash and promises to pay them the rest "in San Andrés on the 17th," when he'll be meeting with the "big boss."

One problem: Lorenzo Fernández was the brother of La Sombra, and the masked hero sends a message (via smoke signal, then Cuco) to Luis, aka El Zorro. Luis rides to his secret headquarters (in a cave behind a camouflaged door), changes to his costume, switches horses, and rides off. El Zorro and La Sombra raid the gang's hideout but only two outlaws are left. The leader sneaks back, chases off the heroes' horses, and shoots his two accomplices to keep them from talking. One of them still manages to say "San Andrés on the 17th" before he dies.



In San Andrés, the gang leader reports to don Eduardo, the most powerful landowner in the region. Eduardo covets both the ranch and the daughter (Anita) of don Guillermo, whose cattle herds have been decimated by rustlers and who owes don Eduardo money. Luis shows up posing as a cattleman who needs pasturage for his cows, and offers to buy don Guillermo's ranch. Luis's

sidekick Cuco gets a job singing in the local *cantina* and La Sombra just lurks around in the shadows (get it?).

After the usual running around—sandwiched between 7 songs, one less than *La trampa mortal*—El Zorro and La Sombra confront don Eduardo and the outlaw leader (one bad guy for each hero, how convenient) and bring Lorenzo's murderers to justice. La Sombra thanks El Zorro for his help and rides off.



La Sombra Vengadora, unlike El Zorro Escarlata, didn't have a secret identity in his films but at least in this movie we learn his last name ("Fernández," perhaps an homage to Manrique's frequent employees Fernando and Jaime?). He's still subsidiary to Luis/El Zorro, even though it's his brother who needs to be avenged and his name in the title. The gimmick of La Sombra sending/receiving messages via smoke signal had been used before but it's at least something different and distinctive about him. Professional wrestler and occasional actor Eduardo Bonada is billed as La Sombra: although Fernando Osés originated the role and was clearly beneath the mask in at least parts of *El correo del* norte, it would have been difficult for him to play both El Zorro and La Sombra (especially in the scenes where they're on-screen at the same time).

For the only time in the series, we see Luis change into the El Zorro costume (possibly the other movies thought it was a good idea to keep the "secret" of El Zorro's identity until a "reveal" scene at the end, but the audience knew all along that Luis = El Zorro), and his secret cave headquarters is interesting (and should have been used more often).

Although Cuco Sánchez appeared in the final 3 Zorro entries, he's really only the hero's sidekick in this one. Not required to do any strenuous comic relief, Cuco does get a couple of bits of character development here: when he delivers news of La Sombra's summons to Luis in a *cantina*, he deliberately provokes another customer into a brawl and knocks him down. Later, he arrives in San Andrés, flirts with a *cantina* waitress, and gets a job as a singer there.

Aside from the two masked heroes, this is nothing special.



El Zorro vengador [Zorro the Avenger] (Alameda Films-César Santos Galindo, 1961) Prod: Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; Dir/Adapt: Zacarías Gómez Urquiza; Story: Fernando Fernández, Antonio Orellana; Photo: Agustín Martínez Solares; Music: Sergio Guerrero; Assoc Prod: Luis Manrique; Prod Chief: Enrique Morfin; Asst Dir: Américo Fernández; Film Ed: Alfredo Rosas Priego; Art Dir: Salvador Lozano; Decor: Rafael Suárez; Lighting: Gabriel Castro; Camera Op: J. Antonio Carrazco [sic]; Makeup: Felisa L. Guevara; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Rodolfo Solís C.; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Sound Ed: Raúl Portillo; Union: STPC

Cast: Luis Aguilar (*Luis Hernández*), María Eugenia San Martín (*Carolina*), Jaime Fernández (*henchman*), Fernando Soto "Mantequilla" (*Pomponio*), Arturo Martínez (*Froylán García*), José Eduardo Pérez (*don Rosendo*), Pascual García Peña (*cantinero*), Guillermo Hernández (*henchman*), Cuco Sánchez (*singer*), Trío Los Mexicanos, Trío Los Aguilillas, Cuarteto México, Conjunto Río Bravo, Armando Acosta (*henchman*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*priest*), Victorio Blanco (*old man in cantina*),

Carlos León (Verdugo), Emilio Garibay (man at cockfight), Jesús Gómez (henchman) Notes: this

Notes: this was the last "Zorro Escarlata" film, made by a different



company than the previous pictures (although Luis Manrique was credited as associate producer, since he owned the rights to the character). It went into production in November 1961, a few months after *La trampa mortal* and *La venganza de la Sombra* had wrapped (the end of July). The production values are somewhat higher than earlier films: at least, several scenes have a very substantial number of extras, and there are a couple of reasonably elaborate sets.

Luis and his sidekick Pomponio stop off in a cantina to celebrate his departure for San Pedro, where he is to marry Carolina. However, Luis is shocked when his friend Ramón stumbles into the saloon and dies, an arrow in his back. A short time later, in San Pedro, Ramón's brother is framed for rustling and then lynched by Froylán García and his gang (a long and intense scene), who want the deed to the mine owned by the brothers.

Luis, in his Zorro Escarlata persona, arrives in town; he confronts and kills Verdugo, one of García's men, in a duel with machetes. Luis and Pomponio cut down the body of Ramón's brother and bury it in a nearby cemetary. While they are there, a ghostly figure gives Luis the mine documents. One of García's henchmen spies on the transaction.

The film then takes a <u>long</u> break from the plot. There is an extended sequence set at the local fair, with numerous

musical numbers featuring the Conjunto Río Bravo (doing an excellent version of "El Ojo de Vidrio"), Cuco Sánchez, Luis, and others. <u>Then</u> everyone goes to the *palenque* where Luis and Cuco Sánchez have a musical "duel,"



<u>then</u> the rooster owned by don Rosendo, Carolina's father, defeats García's gamecock. From start to finish, these sequences consume at least 30 minutes, a substantial percentage of the film's total running time.

Luis and Carolina are standing on the church steps, just moments away from wedlock, when the Zorro Escarlata rides up and abducts the bride-to-be! He takes her to a



secret hideout of the Brotherhood of the Scorpions, the gang that wants the deed to the gold mine. García, their leader, is the <u>fake</u> Zorro Escarlata. The Scorpions send a ransom note to don

Rosendo: unless Luis hands over the deed to the mine, Carolina is doomed.

However, Luis, in his Zorro outfit, penetrates the Scorpions' lair and, taking advantage of the confusion caused by the appearance of <u>two</u> Zorros, rescues Carolina and captures García. The other Scorpions are trapped in the mine when Luis cuts the rope on the mineshaft elevator. Rosendo and a posse arrive to straighten out matters. Luis and Pomponio see the "ghost" once more; he tells Luis to take a break from crime-fighting and go on a honeymoon with Carolina, then vanishes. Luis explains to Pomponio that the "ghost" is a man who suffered at the hands of criminals and has dedicated his life to battling evil. His supposed ghostly powers are just tricks to help him in his quest. [This is patently unbelievable, since the guy literally vanishes in front of their eyes. Why the film

felt it necessary to debunk any possible supernatural explanation is not known.] Although



the film doesn't show (or even refer to) Luis retiring as El Zu

to) Luis retiring as El Zorro, the fact that he's engaged to be married as the movie begins suggests that his career as a masked crime-fighter might be over (and as El Zorro Escarlata...it was).

The cast is strong, with Manrique-Aguilar familiar

faces Pascual García Peña (who has some amusing byplay with Fernando Soto "Mantequilla," El Zorro's new sidekick), Arturo Martínez, José Eduardo Pérez, Emilio Garibay, Carlos León, and Jaime Fernández



bidding the Zorro Escarlata franchise farewell. Old-timer Arturo Soto Rangel shows up in a brief part as a priest. The female lead goes to María Eugenia San Martín, who had a fairly short but prolific run as an ingenue in early 60s Mexican cinema.

El Zorro Vengador isn't too bad, although the musical + cockfight interlude goes on <u>much</u> too long. Otherwise, it's practically non-stop action with a bunch of people

wearing masks slugging it out, chasing each other around, and so forth. There isn't much time spent on character development (Jaime Fernández's



character doesn't even have a <u>name</u>), there are plenty of holes in the simplistic plot, and the "fake" ghost is a big letdown, but overall this is a mildly entertaining Western.

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