

# The Mexican Film Bulletin

## Volume 22 Number 3

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#### Too Many Obituaries

Sadly, there are far too many obituaries in this issue, including major figures in the Mexican cinema, and others whose film careers were not as significant but who were famous and successful in other fields.

##### Juan Gabriel

Singer and composer Juan Gabriel died on 28 August 2016 in Santa Monica, California; he was 66 years old.



The popular performer—whose Mexico City memorial service was attended by over half a million people—died as a result of heart failure provoked by arteriosclerosis, with diabetes and hypertension as contributing factors.

Alberto Aguilera Valadez was born in the state of Michoacán in January 1950. After his father fell ill, the rest of the family moved to Ciudad Juárez, where

Aguilera grew up. Determined to become a composer and musician, the teen-aged Aguilera—who took the name “Adán Luna” after an early TV appearance—frequented various nightclubs in Juárez, notably the Noa Noa. This led to a chance for a recording company tryout in Mexico City, but it took a number of years—including a stint in prison—for Aguilera to finally progress from backup singer to solo performer. He changed his name once more, to “Juan Gabriel,” honouring his first music teacher (Juan Contreras) and his father (Gabriel Aguilera).

Juan Gabriel’s first successful record was released in 1971, but he was still not the superstar he later became. Eventually, he wrote more than 1,800 songs that were recorded by himself and many others.

Although the singer never publicly and specifically admitted he was gay, this was an open secret. He did have one biological child and adopted three others, who were raised by a woman he considered a great friend.

Juan Gabriel starred in 5 feature films, beginning with 1975’s *Nobleza ranchera*, followed by *En esta primavera* (1976), *Del otro lado del puente* (1978), *El Noa Noa* (1979) and *Es mi vida* (1980). He also had guest roles in *Siempre en domingo* (1984), the Spanish film *Bazar Viena* (1990), and *Qué le dijiste a Dios?* (2014), and appeared frequently on television.



##### Evita Muñoz “Chachita”

Actress Evita Muñoz “Chachita,” whose career spanned 8 decades, died of pneumonia on 23 August 2016. Muñoz was born in Orizaba, Veracruz in November 1936. Her father was an actor and singer. Evita’s first film role was in *El secreto del sacerdote* (1940), and she soon became a popular child star. The role for which she is most often remembered is that of “Chachita,” the daughter of Pepe el Toro (Pedro Infante) in the classic *Nosotros los pobres* (1947) and its sequel, *Ustedes los ricos* (1948).



Muñoz continued to act for the rest of her life, in films, on radio, on the stage and on television. In 1958 she married Hugo Macías Macotela, and they had three children.



##### Polo Ortín

Polo Ortín, who made his acting debut in 1936, passed away on 16 August 2016; he was 88 years old and suffered a heart attack. Leopoldo Ortín Campuzano was born in Mexico City in April 1928. His parents were both actors, Leopoldo “Chato” Ortín (himself the son of two stage performers) and Aurora Campuzano. After appearing in a number of movies in the late 1930s and early 1940s as a child actor, Polo Ortín vanished from the screen until the 1950s (aside from a bit part in 1948’s *Dos tenorios del barrio*, featuring his father), although it is possible he was active in this period on the stage and in radio.



Beginning in the 1950s and continuing until his death, Ortín worked steadily in films, in live venues, and on television (both as an actor and as a voice actor dubbing imported programs). He also directed a handful of *videohomes* in the ‘80s and ‘90s.

Polo Ortín was married to actress Olga Rinzo from 1953 until his death. Their son, Jorge Ortín, is also an actor and director.



## Aldo Monti

Aldo Monti, actor and director, died on 18 July 2016. He was 87 years old. Monti (whose real name was Aldo



Bartolomé Montefiore, although sources also cite Monteforte) was born in Rome in January 1929 but emigrated to Venezuela in 1947. He appeared in several films there, as well as working on the stage and on TV, before moving on to Mexico in the mid-1950s. He received a big build-up as a handsome romantic lead on TV and in films like

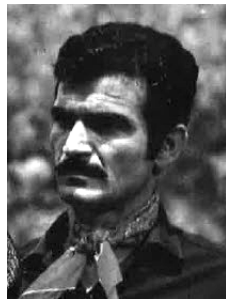
*Kermesse* and *Misterios de la magia negra*, but never became a major star. His most famous role was as "Count Dracula" in *Santo en el tesoro de Drácula* and *Santo y Blue Demon contra Drácula y el Hombre Lobo*.

Monti continued to appear in films sporadically throughout the '60s and early '70s (while still working on TV and the stage). He also produced and directed films and television in both Mexico and in the USA, after relocating to San Diego in the 1980s.



## Carlos Cardán

Veteran actor Carlos Cardán passed away at the age of 83 on 17 July 2016. Carlos López Figueroa—his real name and the one he was billed under at the beginning of his film career—was born in the state of Durango in November 1932. He began acting in movies in the mid-1960s, and over the years also appeared on the stage, in *telenovelas*, and *videohomes*, often as a villain. He retired from acting in 2009 and was living in the actor's union retirement home ("El Casa del Actor") in Mexico City at the time of his death.



## Rubén Aguirre

Rubén Aguirre, best known as "Profesor Jirafales" on the popular "El Chavo del Ocho" television program, died



of complications from pneumonia at his home in Puerta Vallarta, Jalisco on 17 June 2016; he was 82 years old.

Rubén Aguirre Fuentes was born in Saltillo, Coahuila in June 1934. Although he received a degree in agronomy, the 6' 5" Aguirre decided on an

acting career and began working in radio and then

television in the 1960s. He met Roberto Gómez Bolaños and became an integral part of the latter's wildly popular programs such as "El Chavo del Ocho" and "El Chapulín Colorado."

Aguirre appeared in a handful of theatrical films, including several comedies directed by Gómez Bolaños, as well as dramatic films like *Santo y Blue Demon contra el Dr. Frankenstein* and *Sabor a sangre*. In later years, he ran his own circus. He retired in 2013.

Aguirre is survived by his widow, 7 children and 16 grandchildren.



## Chayito Valdez

*Ranchera* singer and occasional film performer Chayito Valdez died on 20 June 2016 in a San Diego hospital; she was 71 years old. Valdez was involved in an automobile accident in 1985 which required her to use a wheelchair; then, in 2003, she suffered a stroke and was in a coma until her death 13 years later.

María del Rosario Valdez Campos was born in Orba (state of Sinaloa) in May 1945 and gained popularity as a *ranchera* singer in the 1970s, eventually recording over 1,500 songs. In 1982 she moved to the USA and became a citizen.

Chayito Valdez can be seen in a number of Mexican films of the 1970s and early 1980s-- as actress and musical guest--including *La hija del contrabando*, *El Charro del misterio*, *Caballo prieto afamado* and *En el camino andamos*.

Valdez is survived by four daughters.



## Elín Ortiz



Puerto Rican producer Elín Ortiz died on 12 June 2016 in Miami, Florida; he had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for 9 years. Ortiz was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, in December 1934, and was an actor and singer before becoming a producer. He was married to *vedette* Iris Chacón from 1968-1973; his second wife was

dancer-singer-actress-TV hostess Charytin Goyco, to whom Ortiz was married from 1974 until his death. The couple had 3 children.

Elín Ortiz produced *Prohibido amar en Nueva York* (1981), a Mexican-Puerto Rican co-production shot in New York, Miami, and Puerto Rico and starring Charytin.



## Julio Vega

Comic actor Julio Vega died on 5 July 2016 of complications from cirrhosis. Vega appeared in a number

of films and television programs, and was also well-known for his TV commercials in the persona of “Julio Regalado.” Vega was born in Mexico City in January 1966, and earned a degree in Publicity & Marketing before turning to acting as a career. Vega claimed to be the son of actor Julio Alemán, who always denied his paternity.



Julio Vega’s film credits include *Cándido Pérez: especialista en señoras*, *Hasta que los cuernos nos separen*, and *Serafín: la película*. He is survived by two daughters.



### Lupe Tijerina

Musician Lupe Tijerina of “Los Cadetes de Linares” died of a heart attack on 5 July 2016 in San Luis Potosí. He was 69 years of age. “Los Cadetes de Linares” were formed in 1960 by Homero Guerrero, but the group achieved its greatest fame in the 1970s after Tijerina joined to play the accordion and sing duets with Guerrero.



Tijerina and Los Cadetes de Linares can be seen and heard in a number of Mexican movies of the 1970s and early 1980s, including *Los dos amigos*, *La banda del polvo maldito*, *Pistoleros famosos* and *Cazador de asesinos*.



### Mariana Karr

Mariana Karr, an actress who worked in Argentina, Spain, and Mexico, died of heart failure in Mexico City on 31 July 2016; she was 66 years old. María Elena Coppola González, her real name, was born in Buenos Aires in November 1949. She began her acting career in her native land, appearing in the 1969 Mexican-Argentine co-production *Somos novios* among other films, as well



as doing considerable television work. In 1994 she relocated to Mexico and became a *telenovela* stalwart. Karr was formerly married to actor Raúl Taibo and had one daughter.



### Susana Duijm

Former Miss World Susan Duijm died on 18 June 1936. Carmen Susana Duijm Zubillaga was born in Venezuela in August 1936. She won the Miss World contest in 1955 and is generally considered the first Latin American to wear that crown. Duijm had a brief acting career, appearing in the Venezuelan film



*Yo y las mujeres* (1959), and then—under the same “Susana Duin”—in two Antonio Aguilar Westerns, *El justiciero vengador* and *El jinete enmascarado* (both 1960).

### Dolores Salomón “La Bodokito”

Plus-size actress María Dolores Salomón “La Bodokito” died on 15 September 2016 after suffering a heart attack; she was 63 years old. Salomón appeared in numerous TV series and films from the ‘90s through 2014. Her films include *Sucedió en Garibaldi*, *Loca academia de modelos*, and *Señora Maestra*. She is survived by her husband and two daughters.



### Cine de Juanga



**En esta primavera** [In That Springtime] (Rosales Durán Prods., 1976) *Exec Prod*: Guadalupe Durán de Rosales, Enrique Rosales Durán; *Prod*: Rafael Rosales; *Dir*: Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Adapt*: Adolfo Martínez Solares, Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Story*: Rafael Rosales, Adolfo Martínez Solares; *Photo*: Adolfo Martínez Solares; *Music*: Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Songs*: Juan Gabriel; *Prod Mgr*: Ernesto Fuentes; *Asst Dir*: José Amezquita; *Film Ed*: Raúl Casso; *Camera Asst*: Rubén Mendoza; *Sound*: Beto Muñoz; *Re-rec*: Salvador Topete; *Union*: STIC; Eastmancolor

**Cast**: Juan Gabriel (*Juan Gabriel*), Estrellita (*Paloma Castro*), Carlos Agosti (*Eduardo*), Ramón Valdez (*Ramón*), Alfonso Munguía (*José*), Merle Uribe (*Lola*), Rosita Bouchot (*Verónica*), Mónica Rosales (*Mónica*), Roberto González (*Sr. Castro?*), Mary Medel (*Sra. Castro?*), Paty Torres, Carlos Bravo [Carlhillo] (*Jack, choreographer*), Jesús González Leal [Chis Chas] (*hotel mgr*), Manuel Reséndez, Félix Granada, Lina Durán, Enrique Iglesias, Edna Rodríguez, Will Rodríguez, Gilberto Martínez Solares (*man who consoles Juan Gabriel*)



**Notes:** Juan Gabriel's first film was *Nobleza ranchera* (1975), a film not noticeably different than movies starring other singers (Cornelio Reyna, Gerardo Reyes, etc.) of the era. Juan Gabriel wasn't a *ranchera* performer, so his presence in this rural melodrama with music seems a bit out of place. *En esta primavera* hews more closely to the singer's image, although it is not an especially good film, overall.

Singer Juan Gabriel is poised for success, aided by his manager Eduardo and his would-be girlfriend, dancer Lola (he's just not that into her). University student Paloma wins a contest to interview Juan Gabriel and they become friends, to the irritation of her hot-tempered boyfriend José. Paloma gets a part-time job as a backup dancer for



Juan Gabriel, which makes Lola jealous. After the two women get into a catfight on stage during a performance, Paloma quits but Juan Gabriel tracks her down and says he

loves her. They agree to wed when he returns from a 15-day tour of the provinces. Lola tells Paloma's parents that Juan Gabriel is already married—to her. Threatened with exile to an aunt's house in Guadalajara and an eventual marriage to José, Paloma runs away, stealing José's motorcycle. After a long chase, she wrecks the bike and is killed. Juan Gabriel brings flowers to her grave.

*En esta primavera*'s dramatic plot primarily focuses on Paloma's story, with Juan Gabriel around mostly for the singing. He firmly and repeatedly rejects Lola's possessiveness, but doesn't appear especially passionate about Paloma until she quits the show (then they have a long "lyrical interlude" montage). Paloma, on the other hand, has repeated conflicts with José, her parents, and so on, and is a more fully-rounded character than Juan Gabriel. [This is not a pun on singer-actress Estrellita's curvaceous body, but it could be.] This isn't really a film about a singer achieving stardom, it's a melodrama about a



young woman whose ex-boyfriend is violent and jealous (even though he acts respectful and reasonable when in the presence of her death.

Unfortunately, the film has a number of strikes against it. The pacing is extremely poor, culminating with the eleven-minute motorcycle chase at the climax: this is nothing but endless alternating shots of Paloma and José and his friends riding motorcycles down the highway. No stunts, just riding, riding, riding. Ernesto Cortázar Jr.'s canned "exciting" music helps, but only for the first couple of minutes. [The score, aside from Juan Gabriel's songs, is all canned and features musical themes that will be instantly familiar to viewers of 1970s Mexican cinema. The music is often hilariously over-done when compared to the mundane action on the screen.]

Curiously, in the movie itself, José and his friends stop and gaze down at Paloma's body and the wrecked motorcycle before riding off to avoid trouble—but one of the lobby cards for the film depicts them actually standing right next to the wreck.

The budget must have been miniscule, and it shows. Juan Gabriel's first "performance" takes place on a tiny stage before a small audience (he sings two songs and tells two jokes), with no visible musicians at all. Later, he's accompanied by 4 female backup dancers, still on a narrow stage and still without any band in sight.



Virtually everything was shot on location, which isn't necessarily a bad point, but this (and the tiny cast) illustrate the shoestring nature of the production. The general technical quality of the movie isn't bad, however, with satisfactory sound and photography throughout.

Juan Gabriel isn't a bad actor and handles his role in a reasonably effective, if relentlessly low-key, fashion. Informed that Paloma is dead, he says "*el show debe continuar*" (the show must go on) and refuses to cancel his concert tour. Estrellita, a singer herself (she gets one solo song in the film), is a pretty good actress and quite attractive. Merle Uribe overacts as the villain in best *telenovela* style, while Carlos Agosti is miscast and Ramón Valdez has one mildly funny bit and one unfunny slapstick bit. Director Gilberto Martínez Solares has a cameo role as a record executive or something at the end.

*En esta primavera* might please Juan Gabriel fans (and Estrellita fans—she also appeared in *Los caciques* and made a number of recordings, but seems to have largely dropped out of sight after marrying a well-known athlete), but it's of more interest for historical reasons than as an engrossing film musical-drama.



**Del otro lado del puente** [From the Other Side of the Bridge] (Prods. del Rey, 1978) *Prod:* Arnulfo Delgado; *Dir-Scr:* Gonzalo Martínez Ortega; *Photo:* León Sánchez; *Prod Mgr:* Norberto Fargas; *Prod Chief:* Adolfo



Vargas; *Asst Dir*: José Luis García Agraz; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Makeup*: Lucrecia Muñoz; *Sound*: Rodolfo Solís; *Re-rec*: Jesús González Gancy

**Cast:** Juan Gabriel (*Alberto Molina*), Valentín Trujillo (*Jimmy Joe [Jaime] García*), Lucha Villa (*La madre*), Julio Alemán (*Professor*), Estela Núñez (*singer*), Narciso Busquets (*Manny Martínez*), Ana Laura (*Estela García*), Billy Cárdenas (*Danny Molina*), Barbara Kay (*Doris*), Isaac Ruiz, Beatriz Marín, Roberto Rodríguez, Mark Carlton, Joe Kaniewski, David Estuardo, Roseanna Garza, José Luis Rodríguez, José Luis García Agraz (*Raúl*), Emma Serra, Carlos Apodaca, Ronnie Cárdenas (*?Danny's son*)

**Notes:** this is a very unusual film. If it were to be described (accurately) as a musical-social drama with fantasy sequences, gang fights, disco dancing and concert footage, one might surmise that it was a real mess. Quite



to the contrary, however, *Del otro lado del puente* is actually a pretty good movie of considerable interest on a variety of levels.

*Del otro lado del puente* includes both diegetic and non-diegetic musical numbers. There are several scenes in which Juan Gabriel sings as part of a performance (the concluding concert and at a picnic accompanied by *mariachis*), and there are at least two extended dance numbers in a disco setting. However, there are other sequences with music on the soundtrack that does not come from any visible source. Two "fantasy" dance sequences illustrate this: Alberto plays a game of touch football with some guys in UCLA t-shirts as Doris



(dressed like a cheerleader) does what might be described as a disco bump-and-grind on the sidelines. As the sequence ends, the UCLA guys carry Doris away on their shoulders, leaving Alberto behind. The movie concludes with Alberto and Estela dancing in the middle of a

street (as a Juan Gabriel song plays on the soundtrack), and they are eventually joined by numerous other couples (most dressed in the plaid shirts typical of *cholos* or *vatos*). In another sequence, Alberto strides purposefully through the streets, ignoring Doris (who is flirting and dancing

around him) as the song "No quiero nada más de ti" is heard (significantly, Alberto is not shown lip-synching the song). One more example is "Everybody dance in Acapulco," a sort of music-video featuring Alberto and a bikini-clad Doris in Acapulco (on the beach, para-sailing, in a couple of discos), which is then revealed to be a complete fantasy sequence (Alberto subsequently says he'd like to take Doris to visit Acapulco).

The variety of styles in these sequences serves two purposes: Juan Gabriel fans get to hear a lot of his music, but the audience is not subjected to scene after scene of him just standing around singing. Furthermore, the majority of the sequences have some relationship to the plot, even if the connection is occasionally almost subliminal rather than overt.

Another interesting aspect of *Del otro lado del puente* is the manner in which it addresses the Mexican-Chicano question. Alberto, although born in the USA, was raised in Ciudad Juárez and insists he is Mexican, not Chicano.

When his erstwhile-girlfriend, *gringa* Doris, asks "What's the difference?" Alberto sullenly replies "None--[the same as] the difference between a *gringo* and a Mexican."

Later, depressed, Alberto says he wants to go back to Mexico, where things were better for him. However, throughout the movie people and events force Alberto first into solidarity with the Chicanos and then into acceptance of his own identity as a Chicano. Alberto's Hispanic professor of architecture (who admits he hasn't been back to East Los Angeles

for 20 years) says the "North American" students treat the Mexican (i.e., Chicano) students as "curiosities," and urges Alberto to encourage his fellow

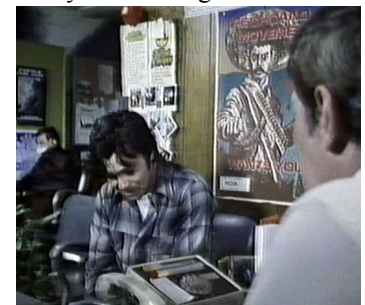


students to be more assertive in class. The professor says education is the only true way for Chicanos to get ahead: "We must not wait for them to give us equality."

Alberto and some of his friends try to convince fellow student Raúl to stay in school rather than drop out and get a job (to support his family). One student says he's from Texas and "things are much better here" in Los Angeles, but the *gabachos* (another derogatory term for Anglo-Saxons) "talk a lot about equality but when it comes to giving it---" [Later, Alberto says he's arranged for Raúl to work for his brother

and still stay in college.] The Chicano students (except, oddly, Alberto) finally speak up in a class discussion on government-funded low-income housing. A *gringo* student says

"it looked pretty nice to him," but the Chicanos--some of whom live in the "projects"--remind him that single-family homes were torn down to build the apartments, and people traded their



privacy and independence for more modern accommodations. [Both of the extended class sessions in the film are entirely in English, with no sub-titles. Unless the movie was counting on a bilingual audience, it is difficult to understand the reason for this, since the scenes are important but the information is conveyed entirely through dialogue and would have been unintelligible to non-English speakers.]

*Del otro lado del puente* has other "political" aspects. Although--unlike some other movies dealing with Mexican and Chicano life in the USA--the picture does not depict any blatant discrimination or racism, there are numerous references to institutional discrimination and even some



rather vague conspiracy theory comments. The political tenor of the movie is revealed in the sub-plot involving former drug addict Jimmy Joe. Manny, who works for the Chicano organization "Project Ayúdate" (Help Yourself), tells

Alberto the establishment doesn't care about young people like Jimmy Joe: "they" want them to stay involved in drugs and gangs "so they won't protest" against social injustice. Later, Jimmy Joe is picked up on the street by two unidentified men who beat him up and tell a Chicano gang he's been dissing them all over town. Jimmy Joe tells Manny and Alberto's brother Danny he's sure the men were plainclothes cops, but can't prove it. Later, members of the gang attack Jimmy Joe despite his protests that the police set him up so the gangs would fight among themselves.

The film also depicts life in the USA as dangerous to



Chicano families. Virtually every Chicano character shown in any detail was a drug user, is a drug user, or has a family member who was or is a drug user. Estela--who's studying social work at USC--says "almost all families here are broken." And while the movie does

not really address the gang issue, there are hints that this is also a problem.

A fair amount of the credit for the success of *Del otro lado del puente* should be given to director-writer Gonzalo Martínez Ortega, who would later collaborate on two more movies with Juan Gabriel for Producciones del Rey, *El Noa Noa* and *Es mi vida*. There are several "false reality" sequences in *Del otro lado del puente* which are stylistically somewhat reminiscent of the director's first feature, *El principio*. In addition to the "Acapulco" scene mentioned earlier, there is a sequence in which Alberto stands at the beach and is greeted by name by his "dream

girl" (Estela, whom he has only seen once before). They stroll off hand-in-hand and then suddenly Alberto is back on the beach, alone--it was all a daydream, but the audience is given no clues in these scenes that would identify them in advance as "fantasies."

Martínez Ortega throws in a few other clever directorial touches. Early in the movie, just after the Professor has (unsuccessfully) tried to get his class to discuss "Chicano Power or Black Power," there is a cut to Alberto eating lunch outside. The scene opens with a shot of a chain on the ground, so that it almost appears that Alberto is shackled (the chain is actually connecting the chair and table together). Alberto gets up to greet a young woman and there is a discreet zoom to a black student, seated alone at a table in the background. I'm not sure exactly what Martínez Ortega meant to convey by these shots, but they certainly weren't randomly included in the movie. There are also three references to the seminal Chicano play (later movie) "Zoot Suit"--Danny Molina has a painting of the zoot-suited "Pachuco" character on his office wall, Doris tells Alberto she and her parents recently saw the play, and--in the middle of the flashback sequence dealing with Alberto's parents--the Pachuco himself (not Edward James Olmos, but a reasonable facsimile) strides down a dark alley to a big band tune.

Plot synopsis: Alberto is an architecture student at UCLA's School of Architecture and Urban Planning. He tells his professor he considers himself Mexican: although born in the USA, he was raised by his sister in Ciudad Juárez. He is attending college on a scholarship arranged by Danny Molina. The Professor says he knows of Danny, a gangster, but Alberto says "he's my brother," and walks away.

Danny actually runs a community organization dedicated to helping Chicanos. His assistant Manny is trying to help Jimmy Joe, a former PCP user. Manny says he himself is a former drug user and spent 10 years in prison as a result. Jimmy Joe is taken to a clinic for examination.

Alberto makes the acquaintance of Doris, a *gringa* student at UCLA. She shows him her palatial home in Bel Air (it has its own pool and a little outdoor elevator used to reach their private tennis court). Doris kisses Alberto, but

when he asks the identity of a young man he had seen her with at a disco, she says it was her boyfriend. That night, Alberto talks with Danny--Danny says he was a gang member and drug abuser but joined the



Army and went to Vietnam, and now wants to help the Chicano community. When Danny and his wife tease Alberto about his rich *gringa* girlfriend, Alberto says he wants to quit school and become a singer-composer to make money. Danny urges Alberto to stay in school, get his degree, and give something back to the community.



Later, the Professor apologizes to Alberto for his comments about Danny, saying he and Danny grew up together in East Los Angeles but he (the Professor) hasn't been back for 20 years. He has learned of Danny's efforts to fight delinquency and applauds them.

Alberto makes a date with Doris to go to the beach but she stands him up. Alberto goes alone and spots an attractive young woman in a bikini who smiles at him and waves, but then vanishes. When he sees Doris later on campus, Alberto complains about her rude behavior and walks away.



Alberto visits Danny's office and meets Manny and Jimmy Joe. Danny has arranged for Jimmy Joe to go on a job interview and Manny and Alberto go along. Manny says he was in the armed forces and became a drug addict,

but Danny helped him quit the habit. Some time later, Jimmy Joe spots Estela and hails her, but he is kidnaped by two men and driven off in their car. Estela calls Danny, and he and Manny come to the campus. Estela is Jimmy Joe's sister--she is also the bikini girl Alberto had seen on the beach. Jimmy Joe comes walking back, beaten up. The men had taken him to a park where they showed him off to a Chicano gang and said he was bad-mouthing them. Jimmy Joe thinks the men were cops but since he can't prove it, Danny and Manny tell him to clam up. Later, Alberto meets Estela formally (at a disco) and they become sweethearts. She is studying social work at USC and wants to do an internship with Danny's group.

Danny shows Alberto their father's grave and then takes him to visit their mother, in a mental hospital. In



1943, their father went off to war, leaving their mother and toddler Danny. To support them, their mother became a streetwalker; upon his return, their father learned the truth and although he didn't abandon the family, he never forgave his wife

and he became an alcoholic. He died in 1954, a year after Alberto's birth; their mother became a drug addict and spent time in prison. Danny says she was cured of her addiction but her mind was destroyed--she is unresponsive to Alberto. As a young boy, Alberto was sent to Mexico to live with his sister.

Jimmy Joe is attacked by some gang members who believe the lies told by the police. Two of Jimmy Joe's friends are shot to death; he is shot, stabbed, and hit by a car (!) but survives. Danny tells Estela, Manny, and Alberto that Jimmy Joe needs a delicate brain operation, but the best surgeon (who lives in San Francisco) is expensive. Alberto says make the arrangements, he'll find

the money. The Chicano community pitches in to promote a benefit concert at the Convention Center. Alberto is the headliner and the hall is packed. The operation is a success.

As the movie concludes, Alberto and Estela visit Danny, who says the concert proves Alberto can be a success as a singer-composer and he (Danny) won't stand in his brother's way any longer if he wants to quit school. Alberto says he will continue to sing and write music--to pay his way through school--but he is now determined to get his degree and use his skills to help the Chicano community.

The performances in *Del otro lado del puente* are generally very good. Juan Gabriel is natural and unaffected, and

Valentín Trujillo is better in a supporting role than he was in some of his leading parts of this era. The billing of Lucha Villa and Estela Nuñez is misleading: Nuñez only sings one song and introduces



Alberto at the final concert, while Villa has almost no dialogue and appears only briefly. [Trivia note: before Juan Gabriel became a star, one of his singing jobs was as a backup singer for other artists, including Estela Nuñez.] Narciso Busquets is his usual professional self, while Billy Cárdenas--I don't know if he was a professional actor or not--is quite good, and Ana Laura is also satisfactory. The production values are fine (the movie was shot on location in Los Angeles) although the DVD version I have (a "discount" DVD made in Canada) has some video problems and the original end title is missing (replaced by what appears to be a 1940s-vintage black-and-white "Fin"!).

[slightly revised from review in MFB 10/7]



**El Noa Noa** (Prods. Del Rey—Prods. Alarca, 1979)  
*Prod:* Arnulfo Delgado; *Dir-Scr:* Gonzalo Martínez Ortega; *Photo:* Francisco Bojórquez; *Music:* Juan Gabriel, Eduardo Magallanes; *Assoc Prod:* Alberto Aguilara [Juan

Gabriel]; *Prod Mgr*: María Luisa Arcaraz, Óscar Magaña; *Asst Dir*: Ana Roth; *Film Ed*: Ángel Camacho; *Art Dir*: Kleomenes Stamatiades; *Camera Op*: Febronio Tepozte; *Makeup*: Marcela Meyer; *Sound*: Víctor Rojo; *Sound Ed*: Rogelio Zúñiga; *Union*: STIC

**Cast:** Juan Gabriel (“Adán Luna” [Alberto]), Meche Carreño (*Mercedes*), Federico Villa (*Alberto’s father; brother Lupe*), Leonor Llausás (*Alberto’s mother*), Dacia González (*María, Lupe’s wife*), Fernando Balzarette (*friend*), Tito Junco (*don David*), Arlette Pacheco, Alba Margarita Cervera, Lilián González, Luz María Rico, María Gabriela, Amado Zumaya (*Juanito*), Inés Murillo (*mother of Mercedes*), José Luis Llamas, Roberto Ruy (*teacher*), Ana Roth, Rogelio Flores, Guillermo Estrada, Bertha Salgado, Martha Chávez, Lupita Rico, Manny Martínez, Raúl Loyá, Tino Chacón, Enrique Marín, Federico Villa hijo, Isi Donacio, Javier Aguilera, Gabriel Aguilera, Gustavo Aguilera, Lupita Aguilera, Armando Aguilera, Los Prisioneros del Ritmo, Tequila Soul Band

**Notes:** producer Arnulfo Delgado reunited director Gonzalo Martínez Ortega and star Juan Gabriel from *Del otro lado del puente* for a two-picture, semi-autobiographical film series about the latter’s rise to fame, *El Noa Noa* and *Es mi vida*. Almost certainly Martínez Ortega took some liberties with Juan Gabriel’s life story, but the general outline and many of the incidents seem to be true. Virtually all of Martínez Ortega’s theatrical movies aside from his 3 Juan Gabriel vehicles were “quality” films—*El principio*, *Longitud de guerra*, *El jardín de los cerezos*, etc.—and his style and talent elevate *Del otro lado del puente*, *El Noa Noa* and *Es mi vida* above the more routine *Nobleza ranchera* and *En esta primavera*.

*El Noa Noa* covers Juan Gabriel’s life up until the point

where he left Ciudad Juárez and moved to Mexico City to make a demo record (around 1968). The film begins with a flashback as hooker

Meche reminisces with nightclub owner don David about teen-aged “Adán Luna” (the first *nombre artístico* taken by Alberto Aguilera—the man credited with giving him this name, Raúl Loya, has a small role in the movie) attempting to sing at the Noa Noa nightclub, but being ejected because he’s under-age (and his presence thus violates liquor laws). He accompanies hooker Meche back to her apartment, and they trade life stories. Meche was impregnated by her first boyfriend, was rejected by her family, and eventually became a bargirl to support her child and herself. However, her baby is taken away by the father’s parents and Meche is now a melancholy alcoholic.

Alberto was born on a farm but his father developed a mental illness and was institutionalised; Alberto’s family moved to Ciudad Juárez, although he was sent to a state boarding school for a time. This is where he was encouraged to cultivate his musical talent. [It’s unclear, but the hearing-impaired music teacher “Juanito,” played by Amado Zumaya, may be based on the real-life teacher Juan Contreras, who took Alberto in after he escaped from the boarding school.] Moving to Juárez, Alberto continues to write songs although his mother and brother urge him to find “real” work. Despite his obvious talent, Alberto is unable to get a break until Meche convinces don David to allow him to perform at El Noa Noa. [This is unclear—did Alberto suddenly reach legal age?] He also works in another clubs.

Meche and Alberto become close friends (he even moves in to her apartment building) but are not romantically involved. At one point Meche announces she is pregnant by her current boyfriend El Coreano; he’s later killed and she is badly injured falling down some stairs and has a miscarriage.

Alberto meets a visiting record producer who urges him to come to Mexico City and make a demo record, and he decides to leave his comfort zone and give it a shot. And the rest is history...to be related in the sequel, *Es mi vida*.

As with *En esta primavera* and *Del otro lado del puente*, this film is a “Juan Gabriel vehicle” but does not focus exclusively on the star. *El Noa Noa* spends a lot of time on the character of Meche, occasionally feeling like a standard “fallen woman” melodrama with Juan Gabriel in the role of “sassy gay friend” of the protagonist. Actually, while his feature films cast Juan Gabriel as a “romantic leading man,” his characters are still suspiciously un-macho. The singer’s real-life sexual orientation isn’t overtly discussed in his movies—and in fact his characters usually “fall in love” with a woman at some point (in *El Noa Noa* it’s with a young woman whose photo he first sees in a friend’s apartment)—but his songs are much more romantic than his on-screen actions.

Because *El Noa Noa* isn’t a documentary, the omission of certain details and—probably—the inclusion of various fictional characters and episodes, is no problem. Since Juan Gabriel himself was an associate producer (and notice the plethora of Aguileras credited in the cast, presumably all relatives of his), one assumes there is more truth than fiction here. One particularly interesting point which has a definite air of verisimilitude is Alberto’s attitude about his career choice. He makes it plain to his mother and brother that he is uninterested in anything aside from his musical career—unlike some fictional aspiring performers, he doesn’t take a menial job to contribute to his mother’s





support (even though she's repeatedly shown to be worn-out from her own work). He wants to become famous and wants his family to be proud of him, but on his own terms. *El Noa Noa* is quite uncompromising in this regard. At the end of the movie his brother Lupe finally does admit Alberto is extremely talented and should go to the capital; earlier Lupe had expressed his misgivings about the sordid nature of the life Alberto was living. This is not very clear, since it suggests Lupe thinks Alberto is supporting himself by being a pimp or something, none of which is even hinted at in the movie. In fact, in one scene we see Alberto borrow money from a man selling flowers on the street!

Most of the musical numbers in *El Noa Noa* are presented in a straight-forward fashion, either Alberto singing on stage or in more informal settings. The chief



exception is a flashy production number "La Frontera," which features Alberto, Meche (her last scene showed her at death's door in hospital—I guess she got better), and the other inhabitants of the apartment building where they live, dancing their way from the lobby to the roof. The song is catchy, the camerawork is fluid, and the dancers seem to be honestly enjoying themselves. The songs in the film are very enjoyable and demonstrate Juan Gabriel's versatility as a composer and performer, since they range from up-tempo tunes to slower romantic ballads.

Shot on location, *El Noa Noa* has a gritty, almost *cinema verité* look at times. The technical aspects are fine, and the performances are satisfactory. Juan Gabriel, possibly because he was playing himself in a "true" story about his life, seems sincere and comfortable in the role. Meche Carreño's career was largely built on melodramatic roles as troubled young women, and she had that act down pat. Everyone else is fine.

Overall, *El Noa Noa* is a rather enjoyable musical biography.



## Annual Halloween Reviews



## Hermelinda Linda

**Hermelinda Linda** [Pretty Hermelinda] (Pels.



Naciones e Internacionales de Guadalajara, 1984)  
*Exec Prod:* Fernando Osés; *Dir-Scr:* Julio Aldama; *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe Jacome; *Music:* Eduardo Casanova; *Prod Mgr:* Jorge Aguado Bazua; *Asst Dir:* Raymundo

Calixto; *Film Ed:* Jorge Rivera; *Camera Op:* José Luis Lemus; *Sound Engin:* Ricardo Saldivar; *Union:* STIC  
**Cast:** Evita Muñoz "Chachita" (*Hermelinda*), Julio Aldama (*Brígido Pachochas*), Rubí Re (*Arlene*), María Cardinale [sic] (*young Hermelinda*), Julio Augurio (*young Nabor*), Lalo González "Piporro" (*Piporro*), Víctor Alcocer (*irate man*), Mary Jiménez (*singer*), Andrés García (*himself*), Arturo Benavides (*Godínez*), Queta Lavat (*Maria Luisa de Pachochas*), Queta Carrasco (*Nana Chona*), Lupita Perrullero (*Irma, witch*), [Margarita Narváez] La Fufurufa (*Blancanieves, witch*), Ana María Chabot (*Chole, witch*), Arturo Salvador "El Regazón" (*Apolinar*), Miguel Ángel Lira "Medelito," Elvira Negri, Benjamín Escamilla, Leo Villanueva (*Sr. Dosamantes*), Consuelo Molina, Víctor Bejarano (*Bejarano, henchman*), Jaime Reyes (*henchman who goes insane*), Polo Salazar (*gay servant*), Ricardo Otañez, Antonio Miranda, Carlos León (*henchman*), Alejandro [sic] Fernando Pinkus (*neighbour*), Carlos Bravo "Carlillos" (*old Nabor*), Jesús Carrasco, Medel Chico, Los Alcántara (*band*)



**Notes:** the character "Hermelinda Linda" first appeared in the "Brujerías" comic book in 1965 (the title was later changed to "Hermelinda Linda" because the Mexican government didn't approve of a comic named "Witchcraft"). In 1984, Fernando Osés and Julio Aldama purchased the movie rights and produced two film versions starring Evita Muñoz "Chachita" in the title role. *Hermelinda Linda* is reasonably faithful to the comic

books, retaining the main characters (Hermelinda, Arlene, Nana Chona, Apolinar, etc.) and a rude, even risqué sense of humour. While obviously a fantasy film, *Hermelinda Linda* is also a satirical and critical look at Mexican politics (the sequel branches out to cover international relations).

Ugly witch Hermelinda, her daughter Arlene, her aged mother Nana Chona, and some witch friends celebrate Halloween (*Día de las brujas* in Mexico). Hermelinda tells the story of how she saved her neighbourhood...



Elderly politician Nabor pays Hermelinda to change him into a younger man which she does, using a pile of body parts purchased from Apolinar's morgue/market and a

large machine. He originally wanted a body like Jorge Rivero, to which Hermelinda replied, "I'm a witch, not a miracle worker" (when she suggested she could make him like Mauricio Garcés, Nabor scoffed, "He's the same age I am"), but Nabor is pleased with the result nonetheless. Hermelinda warns him to "beware of heat." Nabor returns to his office, where his boss Pachochas finds it difficult to believe he's the same man, but is eventually convinced.



Pachochas, in league with other crooked politicians, plans to bulldoze the homes of Hermelinda and her neighbours in order to build a road through their working-class *colonia*. Hermelinda and her young and sexy daughter visit Pachocha's office to complain, but he only admits Arlene (and just so he

can invite her to a party). Hermelinda converts herself into a sexy woman and goes to the party with Arlene. The youthful Nabor is also there, but he ignores the warnings about "heat" and melts into a skeleton in front of his female companion.

Pachochas refuses to change his plans to build the road. Fortunately, his down-trodden wife comes to Hermelinda for help and the witch decides to kill two birds with the same stone: she gives

Sra. Pachochas a potion that enables her to fight back against her abusive husband. When a bulldozer arrives to knock down houses in preparation for the construction, Hermelinda causes the ground to open up and swallow it. Realising the witch is behind his troubles, Pachochas has Arlene locked up but Hermelinda rescues her daughter. She also



turns one of his henchmen into a hog; another goes insane when confronted by the ancient Nana Chona (who sleeps in a coffin); a third—trying to asphyxiate Hermelinda—is eaten by the witch's pet boa constrictor. The residents of the neighbourhood drive off Pachochas and his thugs with a shower of rocks. Hermelinda gives Sra. Pachochas a potion that changes her into a gorilla. Finally, a beaten Pachochas crawls to Hermelinda for mercy: his life is so terrible now, he'd rather live like a dog! Hermelinda ends her story, introducing her new watchdog to her friends.

Then Hermelinda says she has to depart for her date with Andrés García. The other witches mock her, but there is a knock at the door and it is the handsome movie star, who strolls off with Hermelinda on his arm.

In addition to the final joke of an Andrés García cameo, *Hermelinda Linda* also features a cameo appearance by Eulalio González "Piporro" as a deposed *norteño* politician who asks Pachochas for the loan of some thugs to help win back his position. Piporro then does one song and departs. One imagines Julio Aldama calling in some favours from his fellow performers for these two appearances, which are both rather entertaining.

The special effects are rudimentary but effective enough. When Hermelinda's sexy, youthful appearance begins to wear off at Pachochas' party, she borrows an



upright vacuum cleaner and rides it like a broom back to her house for another dose of her magic potion. Most of her "flight" is represented by a low-angle shot of Hermelinda (from the torso up) against the sky, but when she

leaves the house there is one exterior shot of an actual, full-sized Hermelinda dummy on a vacuum cleaner, apparently on wires! Most of the rest of the "magic" is accomplished by the age-old technique of stopping the camera, moving and/or replacing something, and then starting the camera again.

*Hermelinda Linda* is very critical of the Mexican political class, with no decent or honest politicians shown at all. Pachochas controls the (incompetent) police and also has his own group of *guaruras* who carry out his orders; he even assembles a fairly large group of club-wielding thugs as reinforcements, until they're routed by Hermelinda and her irate, rock-tossing neighbours.





Evita Muñoz is fine as Hermelinda, quite unrecognisable under the bizarre makeup and costume. The film even tosses in a couple of disposable musical numbers which give her the chance to sing and dance a bit (there is also a song by Los Alcántara at Pachochas' pool party). Rubí Re and María Cardinal don't have much to do other than look attractive, but they do this admirably. Julio Aldama wrote himself the flashy role of the lecherous, greedy, abusive, wife-beating Pachochas and handles it effectively. Everyone else—including Aldama's son Julio Augurio—is professional and plays their roles either in a naturalistic manner or a flamboyantly campy one (or both, alternately). The production values are satisfactory: although most of the film was shot on location, the low budget doesn't show at all in terms of sound, photography, and so on.

Overall, reasonably well made and entertaining.



### Agente Secreto 0013 "Hermelinda Linda II"\*

[Secret Agent 0013, Hermelinda Linda Part 2]  
(Cinematográfica de Occidente, c1986) *Exec Prod:* Jorge Aguado Bazua; *Dir:* Julio Aldama; *Scr:* Guillermo González, Julio Aldama; *Based on Comic Book Created by:* Joaquín Mejía; *Photo:* Antonio Ruiz; *Music:* Lalo Casanova, Arturo Castro hijo

\*[this film is also known as *Superagente 0013*--the lobby cards in my collection have a "snipe" on them, changing the title to *Agente Secreto 0013*, for whatever reason; this is also the on-screen title, but many books still refer to the film by the earlier title.]



**CAST:** Evita Muñoz "Chachita" (*Hermelinda Linda*), Xavier López "Chabelo" (*baby*), Yira Aparicio (*Bonga Bonga*), Rubí Re (*Arlene*), Queta Carrasco (*Nana Chona*), Hugo Macías (*Arab?*), Michel Grayeb (*don Tacho*), Bruno Rey (*Cmdte.*), Fernando Yapur (*Arab*), Raymundo Fuentes (*Arab*), Dinorah Retes, Lupita Peruyero, La "Fufurufá" [Margarita Narvaez] (*Hermelinda's friend*), Paco Pharres (*Turrubiates*), Rubén Márquez (*government official*), Carlos Pouliot (*Krakovian*), Ricardo Otañez, "El Regazón" [Arturo Salvador] (*Apolinar*), Polo Salazar (*Japanese man*), Valeria Gallart; *Krakovians:* Daniel Robles, Jorge Bekis [sic?], Alfredo Sandoval

**NOTES:** this was a sequel to *Hermelinda Linda* (1983), Julio Aldama's adaptation of a popular comic book about a funny witch. Evita Muñoz (good in the role), Rubí Re (as Hermelinda's beautiful daughter), and Queta Carrasco (as Hermelinda's ancient mother) repeat their roles in the sequel. Julio Aldama's directorial efforts were generally all on the low-budget end of the spectrum, and *Agente Secreto 0013* is no exception. The humor is pretty simplistic--with the exception of a few topical aspects, discussed shortly--and there aren't many real laughs, but aside from a couple of tedious musical sequences (including a song by Hermelinda herself), the picture isn't offensively bad. As noted above, Chachita is entertaining as the ugly Hermelinda, and Rubí Re is lovely as her scantily-clad daughter. Chabelo doesn't deserve second-billing since he really only appears in one brief sequence, practically a cameo.

Don Tacho, a rich *norteño* businessman and politician visits the home of Hermelinda the witch: he thinks he has AIDS, and begs for a cure. Hermelinda treats him and charges a hefty fee--she doesn't tell him that she merely removed a tick from his backside! Meanwhile, the police decide to consult Hermelinda to help them with a problem: a device which can control the missiles of any nation has fallen into the hands of unscrupulous agents. Used incorrectly, it could cause a nuclear holocaust.



Hermelinda, her daughter Arlene, their henchman Apolinar (a gravedigger), and several witch friends attend a party at the embassy of Krakovia. In an upstairs meeting room, a Japanese man offers to sell the missile controller to the highest bidder; he demonstrates by triggering a non-nuclear missile in Oklahoma (the representative of the USA offers a million dollars): the Krakovians (read: Russians) and the Arabs from Tibia (read: Libya) want to get the device at any cost. However, Hermelinda makes herself invisible and steals it.

The Tibian agents track down Apolinar at his day job and get him to tell them where Hermelinda lives (they then kill him and dump him in one of his own fresh graves). However, after Hermelinda turns one man into a zombie when he tries to steal the device, the others realize the witch's powers are too much for them, so they go to Africa and hire a rival witch, Bonga Bonga. She gives one of the Arabs a pill to swallow which converts him into a baby (played by Chabelo), who is then left on Hermelinda's doorstep. However, before he can steal the device, the "baby" reverts to his adult self, and Hermelinda turns him into a chicken (who is then captured by the third and last Tibian agent, and turned into dinner!). Bonga Bonga gives the final Arab a pill that turns him into a bat, which is

promptly swatted by Hermelinda. Bonga Bonga appears and splits her fee with Hermelinda, since they are both members of the witches union.

The Krakovian spies planted a camera in Hermelinda's house and have witnessed these events. They arrange for a Krakovian witch—who is *not* in the union—to cast a spell via satellite, causing Hermelinda's magic to fail. Don Tacho, who wants to be turned into a young and handsome man, is instead converted into a woman, and so



on. The aged Nana Chona dons a jet pack and space suit so she can disable the satellite. Hermelinda and the Krakovian witch have a magic duel, and Hermelinda triumphs, turning her opponent into a parrot.

One minor but interesting aspect of *Agente secreto 0013* is the number of topical references in the script. In addition to mentioning AIDS, and the depiction of representatives of the USA, "Krakovia," and "Tibia," there are also several Mexican in-jokes. For instance, don Tacho pulls his pistol and takes cover when he sees a sign reading "PAN"—it is actually a bread ("pan" in Spanish) bakery, but he thinks it refers to the political party by that name, the major right-wing rival to the ruling PRI group. Later, while saddled with the oafish infant played by Chabelo, Hermelinda goes to the "NISE SUPO" building to buy milk: this is a reference to a Mexican government organization which provided subsidized foodstuffs, CONASUPO (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares).

Trivia note: the "Hugo Macías" who appears in this film is presumably Hugo Macías Macotela, Chachita's real-life husband.

Certainly far from polished but occasionally entertaining.



## Modern Vampires

### **Curados de espantos (Se les metió el Diablo)** [Cured Straight (The Devil Got in Them)]

(Televisine-Filmoimagen, 1991) *Exec Prod*: Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Dir*: Adolfo Martínez Solares; *Adapt*: Gilberto Martínez Solares, Adolfo Martínez Solares, Daniel M. Peterson, Juan Manuel Soler; *Orig Idea*: Gilberto Martínez Solares, Adolfo Martínez Solares; *Photo*: Armando Castellón; *Music*: Ernest Cortázar [Jr.]; *Prod Mgr*: Miguel A. Montiel S.; *Film Ed*: José J. Munguía; *Action Co-ord*: Bernabé Palma; *Special FX*: Arturo Godines [sic]; *Latex FX*: Gabriel García Márquez

**Cast**: Alfonso Zayas (*Hipócrates*), Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Vladimir*), Lina Santos (*Magdalena Santos*),

César Bono (*Jacinto*), René Ruiz "Tun Tun" (*Igor*), Claudio Báez (*Det. Ochoa*), Yhira [sic] Aparicio (*drunk victim*), Claudio Sorel (*Prof. Solares*), Michaelle Mayer (*client*), Memo Muñoz, Sebastián Soler, Yair Martínez, Atenea Theodorakis, Nicolás Jassó (*club bouncer*), Bernabé Palma (*Bernabé, worker in cavern*), Armando Palomo, Luis Giné, Rafael Horta, Sergio Zaldivar, Teodoro Costa, Ramón Barrera, Vicky Calderón, Francia Ruiz, Alma Rosa Ferrer, Lizbeth Olivier, Miguel Ángel Herrera, Martín Gómez, Liliana Carranza, Yamil Atala, Marcela García, Chanakin, Roberto Palazuelos (*fantasy lover*), Gilberto Martínez Solares (*archeologist with Solares*)



**Notes:** although riddled with illogical plot twists and continuity errors, *Curados de espantos* is a well-made comedy horror movie that delivers a fair dose of entertainment. Adolfo Martínez Solares had long been professionally associated with his father, director Gilberto Martínez Solares, and became a director on his own in the 1980s. None of his films are outstanding, but all are reasonably slick and professional. *Curados de espantos* resembles a number of the Martínez Solares (father and son) productions of the 1980s in that—while ostensibly a comedy—it contains a number of scenes of fairly graphic violence (Vladimir cuts a man's throat, for instance) which somewhat clash with the "comedy" genre designation (previous alleged "comedies" from Gilberto and/or Adolfo feature rapes, murders, and brutal assaults).



The film opens as aged vampire Vladimir futilely attacks a young woman (she fights back and eventually pushes him over a stairway railing). His "corpse" is taken to a local hospital, where he revives and drinks a nurse's blood, becoming young(er) in appearance. The film is narrated in voiceover flashback by archeologist Magdalena, who's invited to explore a newly-discovered cave underneath an Aztec pyramid with Professor Solares.



[When Solares is introduced, he's standing with another, older man played by Gilberto Martínez Solares.] They find a coffin there, and Magdalena removes a cross-dagger from the mummy-wrapped body inside. This allows vampire Vladimir to come back to life, and he (graphically) kills the workers and Solares. Magdalena escapes but the police don't believe her and she's committed to a mental hospital.

Vladimir opens a disco called "El Sol de Medianoche" (Midnight Sun), where he trolls for new victims (his bouncers eject a woman's escort so he can pick her up). His coffin now rests in a large house, guarded by his minion Igor.

Magdalena is released from the asylum and reads a newspaper article about rural *curandero* Hipócrates and his assistant Jacinto (who is frequently turned into a toad by his *maestro*).

Among their other adventures, we see Hipócrates and Jacinto exorcise a young boy who's been possessed by a demon, a la *The Exorcist*. [Several other incidents are shown, including one that features a rather cruel AIDS joke.]

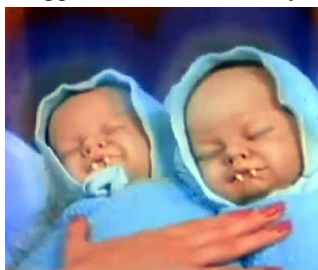
Hipócrates and Jacinto relocate to Mexico City to help Magdalena. Hipócrates also slips Magdalena a potion to make her fall in love with him, but when they discover Vladimir's nightclub (he rather carelessly uses the same vampire-bat motif that was on his coffin as the club's



trademark, and Magdalena recognises it), she is mesmerised by the vampire. The rest of the film is a cat-and-mouse (or should we say, bat-and-mouse, heh) game between

the *curanderos* and the vampire. There are several false climaxes, such as a scene in which Vladimir bursts into flames when struck by the light of sun (and then reappears later with no explanation and no trace of having been burnt to a crisp). He's also lured into the open during a solar eclipse, but is finally destroyed when Magdalena stabs him with the same cross-shaped dagger she'd inadvertently removed from his corpse in the beginning.

As the film concludes, Igor is now running the nightclub, and Magdalena—married to Hipócrates—has just given birth to twin babies...who each



sport vampire fangs!

*Curados de espantos* is reasonably amusing and fairly "serious" in its treatment of vampires. There are several overt mentions of vampire lore, including aspects taken from Bram Stoker's novel "Dracula" and other pop culture sources, including: Vladimir (a reference to Vlad the Impaler?) starts out old, then de-ages as his drinks blood; Igor, like Renfield, eats bugs; a vampire's victim becomes immortal after she's bitten three times. There's also a variation on the traditional vampire-fears-cross trope: Jacinto tries to repel Vladimir by showing him a cross, but the vampire says his ancestors were Jews. Jacinto whips out a large swastika and shouts "Heil Hitler!", which does

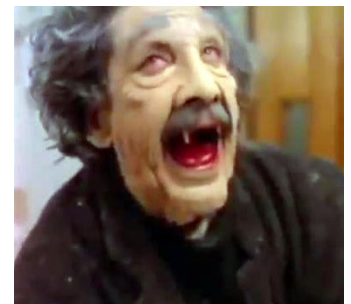


frighten Vladimir. In a fairly obvious joke, Vladimir's mansion has a cuckoo clock where the "cuckoo" is replaced by a bat.

Vladimir's coffin is discovered underneath an Aztec pyramid—and paintings on the wall seem to indicate he was a menace in the pre-Conquest period (and he's wrapped up like a mummy in his coffin)—but he doesn't look or act in a 15<sup>th</sup>-century manner (the year 1425 is mentioned, which seems odd, since Cortés didn't arrive in Mexico until 1519). Also, it hardly seems likely that Igor—ensconced in a large mansion—would have waited over 500 years for Vladimir to reappear. (The relationship between Vladimir and Igor is consistently amusing: Igor is outwardly an obsequious toady but actually chafes at being mistreated and disrespected by his vampire boss. This is not unlike the Hipócrates-Jacinto relationship: Jacinto is jealous of Hipócrates and frequently tries to undermine him, but is usually turned into a toad for his trouble.)

The special effects in *Curados de espantos* are surprisingly frequent and reasonably well-done.

Vladimir first appears in extreme old-age makeup (latex appliances), then de-ages to look like a normal, middle-aged man. There are some satisfactory (if obvious) optical "flying" effects of Vladimir (still in human form) soaring over the city, but there's also at least one scene in which a

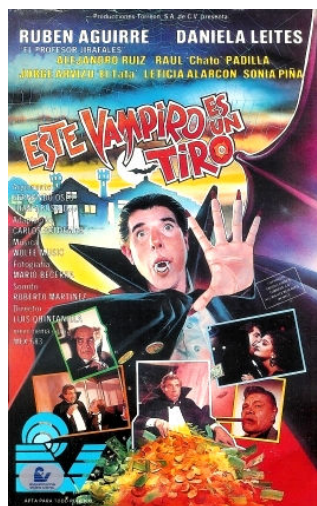


stunt man (presumably) “flies” in for a landing in a park: this was probably accomplished using wires, which is ambitious in itself, and is rather impressive. Wires were most likely also used in a scene where Vladimir levitates. The aforementioned fire “gag” also attests to the producers’ desire to make a quality film rather than take a cheaper way out.

The performances of the five main players are quite good (everyone else is fine, but their roles are very minor). No one really breaks character, a minor miracle in itself. *Curados de espantos* isn’t perfect, but it is one of the more entertaining Mexican horror comedies overall.



### Este vampiro es un tiro [This Vampire is a Shot] (Prods. Torreón, ©1991) Prod: Juan Abusaid Rios;



Dir: Luis Quintanilla R.;  
Scr: Carlos Valdemar;  
Story: Fernando Osés;  
Photo: Mario Becerra;  
Music: De Wolfe Music Library; Post-Prod Co-ord: Javier García; Prod Mgr: Lic. Elizabeth Cortez;  
Admin Mgr: Manuel Zamora; Asst Dir: Socorro Méndez; Film Ed: no credit; Art Dir/Decor: Rubén Piña; Camera Op: Wilma Gómez; Makeup: Victoria Celis; Dialog Rec: Roberto Martínez

**Cast:** Rubén Aguirre (Verónico Brákola),

Alexandro Ruiz (Rodrigo Mendoza), Daniela Leites (Tania Mendoza), Raúl “Chato” Padilla (Dino Moncada), Jorge Arvizu “El Tata” (Count Brákola Sr.), Leticia Alarcón (Melinda), Benjamín Islas (police agent), Sonia Piña (Cmdte. Sonia Toro), José Luis Avendaño (Morales, henchman), Félix Casas (Quintana, henchman), José Abdala (Junior, henchman), Alexandro de la Peña, Cristina Garay, Luis Balladares, Juan Baraona, Alfredo Alexander, Miguel A. Rodríguez, Roberto Macías

**Notes:** reasonably well-produced and acted, *Este vampiro es un tiro* is not especially enjoyable for three reasons. (1) it is not funny (at all)—there is little or no



verbal humour, little or no physical humour, and little or no character-based humour. (2) the pacing is horribly slow—everything takes 10 times longer than it should. (3) there are numerous continuity and logical errors which are quite annoying.

Verónico Brákola, the half-human descendant of a family of vampires, is sent into exile and stripped of most of his powers because he

can’t stand the sight of blood. He relocates to an abandoned (but suspiciously well-maintained) *hacienda* in Mexico, and frequents the nightclub operated by gangster Dino. Verónico has a crush on Tania, Dino’s erstwhile girlfriend and the club’s featured “dancer.” One night, returning from the club on his motorcycle, Verónico rescues Rodrigo, who has been beaten and shot by Memo and his gang. Verónico takes the injured man back to his mansion and reveals his vampiric identity. Coincidentally, Rodrigo is Tania’s brother, and he introduces her to Verónico.

Meanwhile, Dino and his henchmen hold up a van and steal a large quantity of used bills destined for incineration. Coincidentally, Dino decides to hide the money in the same “deserted” *hacienda* where Verónico lives (in fact,



stashing the bags of cash in the crypt, right next to Verónico’s coffin). Rodrigo and Verónico discover the loot and, along with Tania, go on a spending spree. This attracts the attention of Dino, who abducts Tania and takes her to the *hacienda* for a showdown with Verónico. Verónico,

with the assistance of his vampire father (who arrives from Transylvania for a visit), defeats the criminals. Verónico learns all of his vampire powers are now gone, and he is fully human. In the light of day, he and Tania kiss and plan their future together.

*Este vampiro es un tiro* might have been a mildly amusing film if it had a better script. The presence of two “Chespirito” TV-show veterans—Aguirre and Chato Padilla—suggest that the film could have (a) been loaded with wacky slapstick and/or (b) been aimed at young audiences, but

neither of these is actually the case. As noted above, there’s almost no physical humour, and the plot is not oriented towards juvenile sensibilities (it’s not “adult” either, although in one



scene Rodrigo asks if Verónico is “*un vampiro joto*” [a gay vampire] and gets an emphatic denial). Instead, the film is quite bland and boring, as if everyone had been instructed to tone it down (well, except for Jorge Arvizu as Count Brákola, who is extremely manic and as a result is the funniest thing about the whole movie).

Although the lack of humour and the glacial pacing are the film’s major drawbacks, there seem to be more than the usual number of loose ends, inconsistencies, and logical errors in the script as well, and these have a cumulative,



negative effect on the viewer. Without listing them all, here are a few of the most glaring:

(1) a running complaint about (and from) Verónico is that he can't fly (turn into a bat), doesn't have fangs, and doesn't drink blood (in fact, he faints when he sees blood, and late in the movie confesses he's a vegetarian who doesn't even eat fish). Yet twice in the early part of the film he is shown with fangs: once as he's dancing with Tania, and later when he is bandaging Rodrigo's wounded arm and sees his friend's bare neck. Despite this evidence to the contrary (the first scene could be construed as a fantasy sequence, but not the second), his lack of fangs is repeatedly brought up afterwards; Rodrigo even says a dentist could implant some fangs and Tania says Rodrigo visited such a dentist during their shopping spree, but no fangs—false or otherwise—are shown.

(2) Rodrigo is beaten up by Remo and some biker-looking toughs, apparently because Rodrigo's testimony resulted in Remo being sent to prison. The gang is spooked by the arrival of Verónico on a motorcycle, and



piles into a battered Volkswagen Beetle to flee. The Remo subplot is mentioned briefly a few times, including one scene in which Dino tells his henchmen that they'll let Remo "take care of" Rodrigo, but nothing comes of this

until, confusingly, the gang shows up at the *hacienda* to join the final melee, apparently tipped off by Dino.

(3) the major coincidences which drive the plot of the movie exceed the usual zone of tolerance for "movie plot stuff." Verónico just happens to come along and rescue Rodrigo, who just happens to be the brother of the woman Verónico was dancing with in the club. Dino just happens to hide the money at the "abandoned" *hacienda* where Verónico has been living (for how long?) and he just happens to decide to hide it in the crypt (which actually seems rather logical, since the crypt has an iron grating with a chain and lock). This prevents the crooks from entering the living quarters, which are fully furnished and in excellent condition, again belying the alleged "long-abandoned" status of the buildings. The location of the *hacienda* with respect to the town is unclear, although in long shots it seems to be in a fairly isolated area (and yet Rodrigo arrives in one scene on a bicycle, so it can't be too far out in the countryside).

(4) the relationship between Tania and Dino is unclear. She "dances" at his club—and I put this in quotes because she's not an exotic dancer or a go-go dancer or even any sort of speciality dancer: she simply gets on the dance floor and makes a few half-hearted moves, as if she was in a crowd and dancing with someone she didn't especially like. If I were a patron of the club, I'd definitely prefer that she moved aside so everyone else could dance. In the opening scene, Dino interrupts Tania's slow-dance with Verónico (he'd hypnotised her) and orders her "back to work." She complies readily (and also does so in a later

sequence, when Dino ejects both Rodrigo and Verónico from the club), as if she was a prisoner or something. Dino tells Verónico "this one [Tania] already has an owner" and Tania doesn't talk back to him or deny it, and she's later shown in a reasonably friendly *tête-à-tête* with Dino. Of course Dino, being the villain, two-times Tania with Melinda, the blonde female member of his gang.

(5) So, Rodrigo doesn't have a job? Apparently not.

(6) Verónico and Rodrigo state their intention to return the stolen money, but decide to spend some of it on themselves (on clothes, a car, a hang-glider, etc.). Apparently the police (who arrive at the end to arrest Dino and the other crooks) will be okay with this? I mean, the money was worn-out and going to be incinerated anyway, right?

There aren't many "jokes" in this film, and the ones that are present are fairly understated. Verónico claims to have attended Harvard, where lots of vampires go to school. "Politicians, too." "Same thing." (Mexican presidents Miguel de la Madrid, Felipe Calderón Fournier and—most notoriously—Carlos Salinas de Gortari were Harvard grads. Salinas de Gortari was President at the time this film was made.)

The lack of slapstick is curious, but perhaps leading man Aguirre was not comfortable with it or didn't feel it fit the character he was playing. In one odd and terribly-directed/edited scene, Rodrigo tries to help Verónico "fly"—he gives the vampire a sort of plastic hang-glider ("from the United States") and tells him to leap off a high wall of the *hacienda* and "flap your wings." Verónico plummets to the ground, of course, but this is "shown" only in medium-closeup and reaction shots of Rodrigo: the filmmakers didn't even resort to using a dummy, and the comedic impact of this sequence is nonexistent.

There are a handful of technical issues. The photography is quite good, and the *hacienda* used for location shooting is very impressive (albeit, as mentioned earlier, in excellent repair considering

Dino says it's been abandoned for years). The music score is "library music" but it is surprisingly good and appropriate.

However, the sound is poor in several scenes, especially two

(probably shot at the same time, although in the context of the movie they occur at different points in the narrative) in Dino's "office," where there is a noticeable echo throughout.

The performances are satisfactory. Rubén Aguirre is likeable and dignified, Chato Padilla is his usual blustery self, while Alexandro Ruiz and Daniela Leites are adequate. Jorge Arvizu "El Tata," dressed in a Dracula suit and cape and with a mouthful of bizarre fangs, is hilarious as Verónico's father, hopping around frantically,



attacking people, uttering strange screeching noises, and so forth.

Note: one of Aguirre's daughters in real-life is named Verónica. In *Este vampiro es un tiro*, Verónico Brákola explains his odd name to Rodrigo: "my parents were expecting a daughter and picked the name Verónica." It's therefore possible Aguirre's character in the movie is a sly reference to his own daughter.

The film was scripted by the prolific Carlos Valdemar from a screen story by Fernando Osés, which explains the "Brákola" reference (Osés played "Barón Brákola" in the film of the same name in 1965). Luis Quintanilla Rico spent many years working as a production manager and executive producer before adding film directing to his resumé in the 1980s. After *Este vampiro es un tiro* Quintanilla would helm two more Rubén Aguirre-starring vehicles for Prods. Torreón, *Aventuras de Fray Valentino* and *Fray Valentino II*, which featured Aguirre as a friendly monk.



**Drácula mascafierro\*** (Prods. Lobo—Alexa Prods., ©2002) Exec Prod: Alejandro Sánchez; Prod: Juan Cruz; Dir: Víctor Manuel "Güero" Castro [end credits also list Esteban Rivas]; Scr: Esteban Rivas, Víctor Manuel "Güero" Castro; Photo: Salvador Cerezero [sic, spelled Cerecero on end credits], Manuel Martínez; Music: Network Music, Music and Images; Music Ed: Daniel Gutiérrez; Prod Mgr: Alejandro

Sánchez; Film Ed: Ángel Téllez; Sound Engin: Roberto Muñoz

**Cast:** Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Roberto Rivas*), Gary Rivas (*Gary [Martín]*), Jorge Aldama (*Jorge Orgasmón*), Mario Zebadúa "Colocho" (*Douglas McArtur*), Cien Pérezcano (*Diana*), Liliana Pérez (*Laura Mendoza*), Etel Nino (?*Candelaria*), Nora Edith (*Verónica*), Letty [sic] Uri (*Marcela*), Gustavo Rosas (?*Sergio*)



\*end credits list title as *Drácula masca fierros*; aka *Dos nacos en el hotel del placer*

**Notes:** this was one of the final films of Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán, who died in August 2002, possibly even during production. Guzmán appears primarily in the first 30 minutes of the movie, then vanishes for 17 minutes while the plot takes an entirely

different direction (and his later scenes are completely unrelated to this "new" plot). The presence of two different credited cinematographers also suggests this film was patched together. There is a surprising (given the general lackadaisical attitude exhibited by the filmmakers in almost every other way) scene in which Gary Rivas (son of Guillermo Rivas "El Borrás") says he's glad he shaved his moustache—this explains why his character has a moustache in his scenes with Guzmán, and is clean-shaven the rest of the time. Rivas refers to himself as "Martín" in the first part of the movie, but is called "Gary" later. While Rivas does interact with Guzmán, Aldama does not, another indication that the film is composed of footage shot at different times.

The film begins in a hotel owned by Ricardo Rivas, which has very few guests and even fewer employees (we see Gary and one maid). Ricardo is a vampire, who bites *zafitig* guest



Laura and—apparently—turns her into a vampire (it's never really clear). Laura spends most of her time having soft-core sex with her boyfriend Sergio, Ricardo (sort of—a humiliating scene for Flaco Guzmán), a hotel maid, and a boat operator. As noted above, after 30 minutes this "plot" is shelved (reappearing sporadically later). Gary and his pal Jorge both show up at the



"Border Association Company," led by "Douglas McArtur," who warns them of a plague of gay vampires (or something). Nonplussed, Gary and Jorge go on vacation to another hotel, where they meet and romance 3 young women. [Douglas McArtur and his dim-witted maid have two more meaningless scenes just to fill up the running time.] However, Gary and Jorge discover they have turned into gay vampires themselves. The end! (Thank goodness!)

Curiously, the only nudity (no full frontal, however) in the film occurs in the first section (and in random scenes from this "plot" inserted in the second half, for no particular reason). The three attractive female performers in the latter part of *Drácula mascafierro* remain fully clad at all times (well, if bikinis count as fully clad), even when indulging in simulated sex with Gary and Jorge.

Although it's mildly surprising to see Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán in a film of this type, actors must act to make a living (he even appeared in a hard-core sex film entitled





*Exxcitación latina*, albeit in non-sex scenes). Guzmán looks rather worn and only briefly musters enough energy to “act”—the budget apparently didn’t extend to cover fangs, so his vampire bites people using normal-looking teeth (when Gary and Jorge turn into vampires in the film’s final scene, they at least have fake-looking plastic vampire teeth). Gary Rivas and Jorge Aldama try to fill up their screen time with witty dialogue, but fail most of the time. Aldama began appearing in *videohomes* in the 1990s, mostly with his brother Julio Aldama Jr., and was not above acting in other soft-core films (which makes the lack of nudity in the second part of *Drácula mascafierro* even more incomprehensible). The only other “name” in the cast is comic actor Mario Zebadúa “Colocho,” who has 3 pointless scenes: these feel like director Castro just gave him the gist of what needed to occur and Colocho ad-libbed the rest, and very little humour resulted.



The vampire aspect of the film is weak, probably because Guzmán wasn’t available to complete his scenes. Gary and Jorge talk about him sleeping all day and only coming out at night, which—typical for the inferior quality of the movie—is contradicted by scenes of Guzmán’s

character walking outside in the daytime with Gary prior to this point. There are a lot of pointed dialogue references to “Dracula,” but there’s no indication “Ricardo Rivas” is supposed to be Dracula: he’s just some vampire guy (without fangs or any other vampire attributes).

The second part of *Drácula mascafierro* mentions vampires twice: Douglas McArthur gives a brief, vague warning that Gary and Jorge could be “infected” with the gay vampire virus (how? why?) and in the last 30 seconds of the picture they actually become gay vampires, but that’s it. I suppose director/writers Castro and Esteban Rivas felt they had to make some gesture, as lame as it is, towards vampirism, given the film’s title (the alternate title *Dos nacos en el hotel del placer* actually better describes the majority of the movie’s content) and the set-up in the first half-hour.

This film would be more interesting if the story behind its production were known; as it stands, *Drácula mascafierro* is quite poor and not entertaining.



## Future Worlds

**México 2000** (CONACINE, 1981) *Exec Prod*: Pablo Buelna; *Dir*: Rogelio A. González Jr.; *Scr*: Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Add'l Dialog*: Héctor Lechuga, Marco Antonio Flota; *Story*: Jesús Salinas; *Photo*: Gabriel Figueroa; *Music*: José Antonio Zavala; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfin; *Asst Dir*: Javier Carreño; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Prod*

*Des & Costume Des*: Kleomenes Stamatziades; *Art Dir*: Agustín Ituarte; *Decor*: José Tirado; *Camera Op*: Manuel González; *Lighting*: Gabriel Castro; *Makeup*: Elda Loza; *Sound*: José García; *Sound Ed*: Javier Patiño; *Re-rec*: Jesús González Gancy; *Union*: STPC

**Cast**: Chucho Salinas (*elder god, Zeus?*; *Sr. Pérez; school director; don Luis; don Fidel; TV news anchor; don Abelaído; gov't official; Filegonio Pérez Jr.; compadre; blind bus passenger; don Miguelito; older man*), Héctor Lechuga (*Mercury; Sr. Sánchez; indio trilingüe; don Matías; governor of Michoacán; ex-bodyguard; Filegonio Pérez Sr.; bus driver*), Rojo Grau (*French reporter; Julito; son of Matías; interviewer; bus passenger*), Elizabeth Aguilar (*goddess; Sra. Pérez; Petra; bus passenger; blind man's aide*), Miguel Gurza (*god; Panchito*), Humberto Gurza (*god; son of Matías*), Jacqueline Hivet (*goddess*), Dora Elsa Olea, Arturo Adonay, Tina Romero, Lourdes Salinas, Paco Morayta (*Asian god; president of Mexico on the bus*), Fernando Yapur Chehuan (*“espalda mojada” food vendor*), Olga Armendáriz, Chava Godínez (*smoking man; bus passenger*), Abel Asencio Cureño “El Naranjero” (*merengue vendor; Rodolfo*), Gerardo Moscoso, Alejandro Ortiz



**Notes:** *México 2000* is probably more entertaining if you’re Mexican, since it is not so much a comedy as it is a political satire requiring a certain awareness of Mexican society. The basic “joke” is “all the things that were bad in Mexico are now good.” For example, many Mexicans have a poor opinion of the traffic police, feeling they write tickets just to receive a *mordida* (bribe). In the film, traffic police in 2000 are friendly, courteous, clean the windshield of the vehicle they’re just pulled over, and even lend the driver money so he can purchase his registration sticker (*calcomanía*)! Some of the sequences are amusing in and of themselves, but the underlying humour requires knowledge of the extreme contrast between today (i.e., 1980) and the utopian world of 2000.

A group of “gods” observe the Earth and decide mankind doesn’t deserve to exist. Mercury arrives late and says he’s seen a wonderful nation which proves humanity can change for the better: Mexico. The gods agree to give the Earth six years (the term of office for a Mexican president) to shape up. The film begins 20 years later.

[The “gods” in this sequence are not identified, and don’t really correlate with the Greek or Roman pantheon, except for “Mercury” (who isn’t named). Curiously, the white-bearded leader (one assumes him to be Zeus) refers to the boss upstairs, “who visited Earth and ...” (Chucho Salinas mimics someone hanging on the cross). So it’s unclear exactly what deities this group of individuals is supposed to represent.]

The “typical” Pérez family is introduced, reminiscing about the old days, when Mexico City was crowded, there were traffic jams, pollution, and so on. Now, the city has clean air (it’s later mentioned that crops are being grown there!), there are only 2 million inhabitants (in real life, the Distrito Federal had 8 million residents in 1980), people have faith in their government’s honesty, and the world looks to learn from Mexico’s progress. Mexico has defeated Brazil in soccer, and a Mexican has won the Nobel Prize in medicine.

The director of a Mexican school chastises the wife of a powerful politician who asks for preferential treatment for her child. In contrast,



when Sánchez confesses he can’t afford the school fees, the director says students all receive free education. Sánchez works as a health inspector, and discovers a “wetback” (*espalda*

*mojada*) from the USA working at a (luxurious) food stand. “México ser un paraíso,” he tells Sánchez in broken Spanish.

In another scene, ex-servant Petrita visits her former employers. The children look full-grown even though they’re only 10 and 12 years old. Petrita now has her doctorate in tourism, and takes don Luis and his family to meet her father Matías and the rest of his children (all of whom are university students). One of the sons mentions a “science fiction movie” called *Nosotros los pobres* that



deals with “poverty,” a concept none of them are familiar with. There is also a brief discussion of the “de la Madrid” banking system (a reference to president Miguel de la Madrid).

They also meet an indigenous person who—using a tiny cellphone which actually looks like it belongs in the 2000s—negotiates trade deals with Germany (in German), the UK (speaking to “Your Majesty...Elizabeth” in English) and “Mitterand” in France (in French). Since the USA needs to buy Mexican wheat, he tells them he can’t fill the demand from all other countries as well.

Brief sequences from television broadcasts follow, including a speech from aging labour leader “don Fidel” (a reference to real-life Fidel Velázquez), an interview with the governor of Michoacán, and a report showing how Mexican culture has spread to other countries, causing them give up their traditional habits: some French children have a piñata, Swiss yodelers wear *sombreros*, and in the USA children prefer *Día de los Muertos* sugar-candy *calaveras* (skulls) to Halloween. There is also a sequence showing a man smoking and becoming progressively more horrible in appearance. A father tries to explain the now-extinct habit to his children, admitting people smoked “everywhere. Especially in cinemas.”

Don Abeláido and his assistant Paty work in the government employment office, and are delighted to receive a rare visit from someone seeking a job. He’s unshaven and dirty, admits his previous job was as a *guarura* (a hired thug) for a high-level politician in the old days, and has been hiding in his house for the last 20 years to avoid angry mobs. Don Abeláido finds the ideal job for him: traffic policeman. When Señor Pérez commits a



minor traffic infraction (everyone drives modified golf carts now), the ex-*guarura* pulls him over but—as mentioned above—is polite and accomodating. Pérez

says he’s taking his children to a concert, and the traffic cop immediately knows it’s the Moscow Symphony (playing music by Mexican composers). The national Mexican symphony is always on tour, but not “Berlin or London”—they’re playing various provincial cities in Mexico.

The first Mexican astronaut, Filegonio Pérez Jr., is interviewed. He says his father wanted to go into space in the 1970s. In a flashback, we see Filegonio Sr. (apparently) dream about constructing a rocket (half of it is a pickup truck) and blasting off into space with his *compadre* (who bears a definite resemblance to Filegonio Jr.).

A bus driver, urged by his grown daughter to retire, says things were really tough 20 years before. A long flashback sequence follows, showing chaos in a crowded bus in 1980. In 2000, however, busses are modern (even Mexico’s president rides one to work!), with a “stewardess,” live entertainment (music students doing their social service obligation play classical music on request), and a paid government aide to assist a blind passenger.



Señor Pérez tells his son various words have been banished from the language: *flojera* (laziness), *corrupción* (corruption), *trampa* (trap, or trick). All of the corrupt politicians and business people have been sent out of the country, but not—as his son suggests—as “ambassadors.” This all dates back to 1980, when a senior citizen and a young boy agreed to listen to each other and share their experiences to create a better world. Everyone must treat others with love, respect, and above all, honesty.

As the film ends, the council of gods votes: everyone still thinks humanity should be destroyed, except Mercury, and the elder god agrees that the vote had to be unanimous to pass, so Earth is saved. (And Mercury slips Zeus a bribe.)

*México 2000* is episodic and quite didactic and while some of the scenes are independently funny (the 1980 and 2000 bus ride sequences are especially good), much of the movie is simply people talking about the good aspects of



Mexico now, and how bad it was before. Although most of the cast plays multiple roles, Chucho Salinas and (especially) Héctor Lechuga handle the comedy and everyone else is a straight man (or woman) for them. This is fine, because Lechuga and Salinas are both very good comic performers and while not all of their characterisations hit the spot, many of them do (some are simply too brief to allow elaboration, or are under-written and simply require the actor to recite their lines to make a point).



The production values are satisfactory. There isn't much in the way of elaborate sets, costumes or special effects, but the ones that exist (such as the Mexican spaceship) are effective enough to get the point across. I'll reiterate my shock at the scene in which the *indio trilingüe* uses a cellphone to speak to the leaders of England, France, and Germany—well into the 1980s, mobile phones were the size of bricks and this one is the size of a late '90s version. Most of the film is shot in a flat, zero-degree style which reinforces the television sketch-comedy feel of the project. It's not a fully-realised, coherent dramatic movie, but it was not conceived as such.

*México 2000* is very interesting, because its utopian vision of Mexico in the year 2000 reveals the concerns, complaints, desires and hopes of the Mexican people in 1980.



## Si las mujeres mandaran (o mandasen) [If

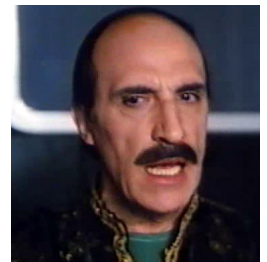
Women Ruled] (Nuevo Cine, S.A., 1982)\* *Exec Prod*: Samuel Menkes; *Dir-Scr*: José María Palacio; *Photo*: Hans Burmann; *Music*: Jesús Gluck; *Prod Dir*: Ricardo Bonilla; *Film Ed*: Mercedes Alonso; *Decor*: Gumersindo Andrés; *Makeup*: María de Elena; *Asst Dir*: José Luis Pérez Tristán; *Camera Op*: Manuel Velasco; *Spec FX*: Pablo Pérez; *Choreog*: Juan José Ramos; *Sound Tech*: Eduardo Fernández; Eastmancolor

\*Spanish-Mexican co-production but specific Mexican company not credited.

**Cast:** Amparo Muñoz (*Agustina*), José Sazatornil “Saza” (*Marcelo*), Claudia Islas (*Comandte María Santurce*), África Pratt (*Sgt. Ramírez*), Florinda Chico (*wealthy older woman*), Raúl SENDER (*Carlos*), Antonio Gamero (*don Cosme*), María Elena Flores (*doctor*), Manuel Zarzo (*Braulio*),

Pilar Alcón (*Tirana*), José Yepes (*flower vendor*), Sergio Mendizábal (*cab driver*), Emilio Mellado (*fruit vendor*), Paco Andrés Valdivia (*robot*), Fernando Poal (*Sancho*), Fernando Valverde (*Edipo, blind man*), Agustín Póveda (*evangelical announcer*), Ángela Bravo (*director duelo*), Azucena de la Fuente (*TV announcer*), Botoa Lefe (*Casta*), Cristina Castizo (*Urbana*), Adelaida Susana (*Zoraida*) **Dubbing:** María del Puy (*dubs Amparo Muñoz*), Gloria Cámara (*dubs África Pratt*), Carolina Montijano (*dubs Pilar Alcón*), Javier Dotú (*dubs José Yepes*), José Luis Gil (*dubs Fernando Poal*), Paloma Escola (*dubs Azucena de la Fuente*), José Moratalla (*dubs Paco Andrés Valdivia*), José Carabias (*dubs additional voices*) [Sazatornil, SENDER, Chico dub themselves]

**Notes:** *Si las mujeres mandaran (o mandasen)* is a science fiction comedy, albeit one which isn't especially funny. The primary male protagonist lives an unhappy life, finds true love, then loses her at the end. There's not much slapstick or even verbal comedy, the satire of a future society run by women isn't very pointed (in fact, it's less outrageous than earlier efforts along the same lines, such as *El sexo fuerte* and *Cuando las mujeres mandan*): basically, women have traditional men's roles and vice versa. Unlike the previously-cited films, *Si las mujeres mandaran* does not center around male resistance to (and eventually revolt



against) female domination (this does occur, but only at the very end of the movie).

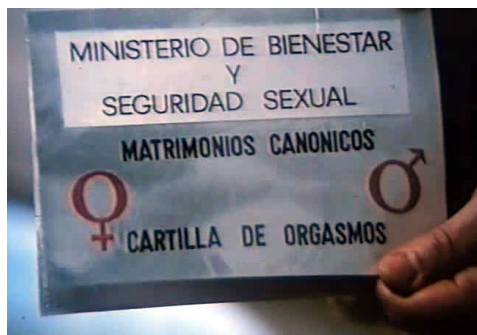
It is the year 2983, and women rule the world. In Madrid, Marcelo is married to military officer María, and they have two daughters. Marcelo is a hen-pecked “housewife” to the *macho* María, who has a “mistress” (Sancho, a singer). One day, Marcelo is approached by Agustina, who indicates she is attracted to him, but he demurs. Agustina continues her efforts to make his acquaintance, but Marcelo—even after consulting his best friend Carlos—refuses to give in. However, María become suspicious and obtains a government-issued chastity belt that Marcelo is compelled to wear.

Marcelo finally agrees to visit Agustina’s home, where she introduces him to various delicacies from the past, like wine and *paella*. Her robot removes the chastity belt from Marcelo. Agustina is an archeologist who’s been researching how women gained control over the world.

Marcelo’s grandfather was a legendarily potent lover, and now Agustina wants Marcelo as her lover and hopes he can help men regain their place in society.

However, María catches them together and challenges Agustina to a duel. Agustina is mortally wounded (accidentally, by the doctor attending the duel!) but urges Marcelo to continue the struggle. He becomes the leader of the male liberation movement, and within 100 years men are now back in charge...which sparks a counter-revolution by irate women!

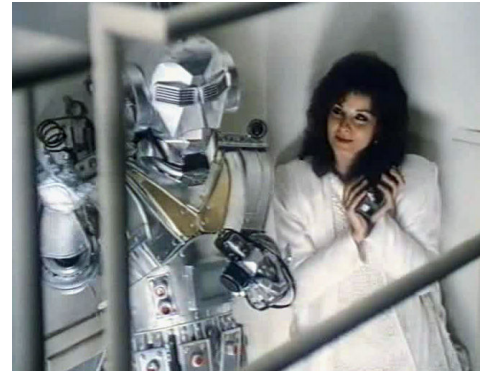
The world of 2983 looks a lot like 1982, with the exception of the “future fashions” worn by the inhabitants (and these aren’t that futuristic, either). There are robots (well, we see one). Earth has apparently colonised the other planets, since Marcelo’s father now lives on Saturn, and comes and goes via commercial rocket service (not that we see any of this). There aren’t any future automobiles, in fact María’s official vehicle is an antique



car from the 1940s. “Taxis” are actually a sort of pedicab. Food is apparently rationed and Agustina mentions that wine was made from grapes, “before the vineyards disappeared.”

The government controls the sex lives of its citizens. Marcelo has an “orgasm ration card” from the Ministry of Well-being and Sexual Security. When he and María have their monthly sex, they are required to each take a pill and are supervised (via television) by a representative of the government (the whole act lasts precisely 30 seconds)! This is amusing but Agustina and Marcelo later have to watch an old erotic video and read a manual in order to have sexual relations. These scenes seem to be mutually contradictory. Agustina doesn’t know about sex, even though it is—although regulated by the government and not very “sexy”—something that occurs with regularity between married couples (once a month, according to Marcelo’s ration book)?

There are a few minor, tantalising references to the rest of the world of 2983. For example, María complains she has to “leave the country” to get gasoline for her auto, and is driven to a gas station run by Arabs, suggesting each of these is a diplomatic outpost? The monetary unit in Spain is now “pastoras” (rather than *pesetas*). There’s a reference to a man finally being admitted to a prestigious *academia* (his fellow members immediately nit-pick his speech) and a news report discusses the defeat of a proposal to allow polygamy (women could have multiple husbands, of course) by religious authorities. There are also billboards which indicate McDonald’s still exists in Spain one hundred years from now.



As noted above, *Si las mujeres mandaran* is not hilarious, with relatively few jokes and not even much satire. The only deliberately “funny” characters are the effeminate robot and the government “sex ministry”



employee, while Marcelo, María and Agustina are played straight by José Sazatornil, Claudia Islas, and Amparo Muñoz (all quite effective in their roles). This is also not really a “sexy” comedy, although Claudia Islas has one nude scene and Amparo Muñoz is seen topless a number of times.

*Si las mujeres mandaran* appears to be the only feature directed by José María Palacio, who was primarily a screenwriter. His direction is satisfactory, without any noticeable style or flair. The production values are adequate, although little effort was made to depict a futuristic world: virtually everything was shot on location, and while a few of the buildings selected look somewhat “modern,” this is not consistent. The overall “look” of the movie is quite bland and unimaginative.



## Fairy Tales

**Pulgarcito** [Tom Thumb] (C.L.A.S.A. Films



Mundiales, 1957) *Exec* Prod: José Luis Bueno; *Prod*: Armando Orive Alba; *Dir*: René Cardona [Sr.]; *Scr*: René Cardona, Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Photo*: José Ortiz Ramos; *Music*: Raúl Lavista; *Songs*: Enrique Jarrie, René Cardona Jr., Alfredo Zacarías (2); Raúl Lavista,

René Cardona Jr., Alfredo Zacarías (2); *Prod Chief*: Ricardo Beltrí; *Asst Dir*: Luis Abbadie; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Roberto Silva; *Tech FX Dir*: René Cardona Jr.; *Special FX*: Javier Sierra, Dionisio Juárez; *Sound Ed*: Teodilo Bustos Jr.; *Makeup*: Armando Meyer; *Special Props*: Julio E. Gordillo, Heriberto Enters, Fernando Velázquez, Alfredo Martínez; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec*: José de Pérez; Cinecolor

**Cast**: María Elena Marqués (ogre's wife), José Elías Moreno (ogre), Cesáreo Quezadas (*Pulgarcito*), Manuel Dondé (*Matías*), Nora Veryan (*mother*), Rafael Banquells Jr. (*Pedro*), Bertha Rodríguez A., Eduardo Rodríguez I., Rocío Rosales J., Gonzalo Carmona R., Martha Kendis, Arturo Álvarez L., Bertha Castellón G., Pablo Jorge Nava, Irma Castellón G., Teresa Rodríguez Castaño, [María]

Antonietta de las Nieves (*Flor*), Paquito Fernández (*Pablo*), Manuel Bernal (*narrator*)

**Notes**: although *Santa Claus* (1959) has become a cult film since the wide distribution of the English-dubbed version, its predecessor, *Pulgarcito*, is not as well known. The two films share a director (René Cardona), star (José Elías Moreno), and writers (Cardona, Adolfo Torres Portillo); both are colour fantasy films based on pre-existing characters.

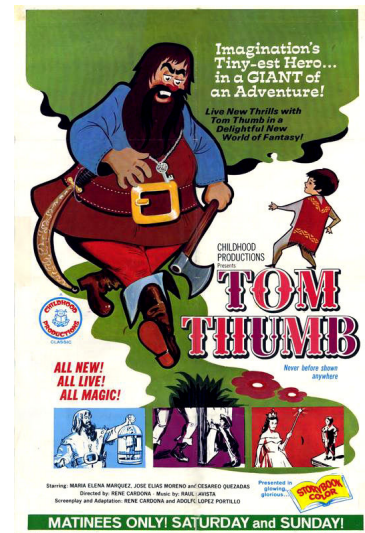
In 1964, Barry Yellen formed Childhood Productions and began to compete with K. Gordon Murray in the “kiddie matinee” market in the USA. Murray had already purchased the rights for the majority of the Mexican movies that might be appropriate for these venues, so Yellen looked mostly to Europe for his imports. However, he did pick up one film that Murray had rather inexplicably overlooked,

*Pulgarcito*, and released it theatrically in 1967 in a dubbed version as *Tom Thumb*. It seems odd that Murray didn't buy *Pulgarcito*, since he had considerable success with *Santa Claus*—which, as noted above, shared a director, scripters, and numerous performers and technicians with the earlier picture. But *Santa Claus* was a Calderón production, the source (along with ABSA) of most of Murray's Mexican imports, whereas *Pulgarcito* was made by CLASA Films Mundiales, so perhaps he just couldn't make a deal for it. Having not seen the dubbed *Tom Thumb*, I cannot make a value judgement regarding Yellen's dubbing versus Murray's.

In its original version, *Pulgarcito* is a moderately entertaining movie. One puzzling point is that the film largely avoids utilising the main character's diminutive size as a plot point. *Pulgarcito* doesn't have many adventures

(or indeed, do much of anything) relevant to his size. His part in the narrative would have been little changed if he was just a normal-sized boy.

Part of this is because *Pulgarcito*'s size in the film—while somewhat variable—seems to be at least a foot tall,





possibly two, and thus he can't do teeny-tiny things like drinking from a thimble or riding a mouse or hiding under a teacup. The effects used in *Pulgarcito* vary in effectiveness. There seems to be little use of opticals or split-screens: instead, Pulgarcito is filmed with over-sized props (including several sets of fake legs) and these shots are intercut with footage of the other, normal-sized characters. At other times, Pulgarcito appears in the same shot with his brothers, who are rather clearly doubled by fully-grown men, to accentuate the size difference between them. None of this is especially poorly done, and since (as noted above) the script is not at all ambitious regarding Pulgarcito's size-related actions, the overall effect is satisfactory.

Pulgarcito and his six brothers live with their parents in the forest. Their father is a wood-cutter and cannot earn



enough to provide for his family. [Maybe he should have thought of that before he had seven children, you think?] Pulgarcito

overhears his parents bemoaning their desperate circumstances, and convinces his brothers to help out: the next day, they set out to do some tree-chopping themselves. The evil Ogre catches their scent (he loves to eat children and can smell them a mile away) and pursues them through the forest. The boys are given food and shelter in the home of a kindly hag, who turns out to be the Ogre's unhappy wife. When the Ogre gets home, he discovers the uninvited guests and takes them prisoner.



They escape but are soon recaptured.

Pulgarcito gets on the good side of Mrs. Ogre and her seven children (all girls, wouldn't you know it) by teaching them hygiene. The Ogre is eventually tricked (and tickle-tortured) into opening his chest of magical treasures: Mrs. Ogre recovers her magic wand and becomes a beautiful fairy queen, and also converts the evil Ogre into a kindly, loving husband and father. Pulgarcito and his brothers get some magic presents as well—including an axe that will allow their father to cut down

trees "a thousand times faster" (deforestation, here we come)—and go home to meet their worried parents.

*Pulgarcito* has some slow spots, a few forgettable songs, and is very small in scale (no pun intended), with the bulk of the movie taking place in the Ogre's house, but it's harmless entertainment, buoyed by some good performances. José Elias Moreno seems to be having fun as the villainous Ogre, who's likeable despite being a cannibalistic wife-abuser. His confrontations with Pulgarcito are funny (in a *Home Alone* sort of way) but too limited. María Elena Marqués seems to be enjoying herself as the ugly, down-trodden Mrs. Ogre, but gets to turn on the glamour at the climax. Mrs. Ogre's back-story is pretty sad: she was tricked by the Ogre's playing of the magic flute, then he stole her magic wand and compelled her to marry him. Now the Ogre browbeats her and disparages her housekeeping skills and appearance (although since they have seven children, he must not have been completely turned off by her looks). Pulgarcito's brothers and Mrs. Ogre's daughters are mostly an undifferentiated mass, although apparently María Antonieta de las Nieves



(later known as La Chilindrina) plays one of the girls (it's also possible "Rocío Rosales" is the same actress who played "Princess Dorita" in *El Gato con Botas*).

Cesáreo Quezadas plays Pulgarcito, and acquits himself well, although his high-pitched voice and rapid manner of speaking at times makes his dialogue difficult to understand. Quezadas exploited his fame over the next few years in a number of films, but his acting career faltered and eventually collapsed (his last film role was in 1972). In 1971 he was arrested for armed robbery; although he overcame this misstep, many years later (2005) he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for child abuse.

The production values of *Pulgarcito* are satisfactory, aided by the (for the time) novelty of colour photography. René Cardona Sr. didn't have a noticeable directorial "style," but he was a competent filmmaker who knew how to put together a slick and professional motion picture.





**El Gato con Botas** [Puss in Boots]\* (Pels. Rodríguez, 1960) *Dir-Adapt:* Roberto Rodríguez; *Story:* Sergio Magaña; *Orig Story:* [Charles] Perrault; *Photo:* Rosalío Solano; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Songs:* Herminio Kenny; *Prod Mgr:* Manuel R. Ojeda; *Prod Chief:* Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir:* Carlos Villatoro; *Film Ed:* José W. Bustos; *Art Dir:* Roberto Silva; *Decor:* Pablo Galván; *Camera Op:* Urbano Vázquez, Hugo Velasco; *Lighting:* Antonio Solano; *Optical FX:* Ricardo Sáenz; *Special FX:* León Ortega; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Ernesto Caballero; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed:* Raúl Portillo G.; Eastmancolor; Union: STPC

\*[released in an English-dubbed version as *Puss N' Boots* by K. Gordon Murray in 1964.]

**Cast:** Rafael Muñoz "Santanón" (*The Cat*), Humberto



Dupeyrón (*Juanito*), Antonio Raxel (*King Serio*), Armando Gutiérrez (*Federico the Ogre*), Edmundo Benítez (*The Rooster*), Rocío Rosales (*Princess Dorita*), Luis Manuel Pelayo (*King's advisor*), Ana María Hernández (*The Lady of Time*), Elvira Lodi (*Dorita's lady-in-waiting*), José

Luis Fernández (*The Black Herald*), Edmundo Espino (*Juanito's father*), José Luis Moreno (*Juanito's brother*), David Hayat (*Juanito's brother José*), Rubén Márquez (*woodcutter*), Hernán Vera (*cook*), Jesús Gómez (*villager*), *men at court:* Victorio Blanco, Carlos Robles Gil, Daniel Arroyo; Nothanael León "Frankenstein" (*Ogre's henchman*), Ramón Sánchez, Margarito Alfaro (*jester*), Julio Lucena (*Voice of The Cat*), Jorge Arvizu (*voice of The Rooster*), Fernando Yapur (*palace guard*)



**Notes:** a surprisingly entertaining fantasy film, *El Gato con Botas* was one of five "fairy tale" pictures directed by Roberto Rodríguez, from

*Caperucita Roja* in 1959 to *Los espadachines de la reina* in 1961. This was the only one of the group not to feature his "Lobo Feroz" and "Zorrillo" (Wolf and Skunk)

characters, but they are ably replaced by the somewhat similar Cat and Rooster.

Shepherd Juanito witnesses King Serio delivering tribute to the ogre Federico, who terrorises the populace with his magic and his brutal henchmen. Juanito develops a crush on Princess Dorita, whose glove he finds on the road, unaware Federico intends to force her marry his son Babusón. Juanito wanders into the haunted forest; his father, searching



for him, is crushed under a fallen tree. Juanito discovers the home of the Lady of Time (in a giant tree stump). She says the ogre can only be conquered by a hero who wears the magic boots, cape and hat she gives him: they're far too small for Juanito, but he takes them along when he leaves. The next morning, Juanito learns his father has died, and is ejected from his home by his two greedy older brothers. Fortunately, they also toss the family cat out after him. The cat speaks to Juanito and the boy dresses the animal in the boots, hat and cape, which convert the normal-sized animal into a talking, 3-foot tall cat-like creature that walks upright!

[The first 15 minutes of *El Gato con Botas* are extremely grim and may have upset some young audience members. The ogre is fearsome, not funny; King Serio, his daughter, and his entourage are all sad, terrified, and/or grim; one of Serio's men is flogged (to death?) on-screen, and his corpse dumped into front of the King; Juanito wanders through a forest (at night, during a storm) and is accosted by various bizarre creatures; Juanito's father is pinned under a fallen tree branch (in the same storm) and screams ineffectually for assistance; the older man dies just as Juanito arrives; Juanito's two brothers cheat him of his inheritance and force him to leave his home. Some fun, eh kids?]

With the arrival of the Cat, the film's tone lightens a bit, although is still a fair amount of *angst* (the King's starving courtiers, Dorita's fear of being forced to wed the ogre's son) and violence (Federico's main henchman is the Viking-helmeted Black Herald, who wields a whip; also, Juanito's rotten brothers now work for the ogre).



Juanito and the Cat revisit the Lady of Time: she explains the powers of the boots, etc. They concoct a plan to defeat the ogre and save Princess Dorita (and the King, etc.). The Cat and Juanito meet an oversized, talking Rooster. The Rooster says everyone in the palace is starving because of the ogre's depredations, and he didn't want to be consumed. They join forces. The Cat pretends

to be an emissary of the “Marqués Juan de Carabás,” who will help the King defeat Federico. After various mishaps, he finally wins the King’s confidence. Meanwhile, Juanito tries to make friends with Dorita, but is banished from the palace because he’s a commoner.

The Cat and the Rooster visit Federico in his cave headquarters. The ogre displays his awesome magic powers (he even has a fire-breathing dragon), but when the



Cat dares him to change into a mouse (and to turn his son into a kernel of corn), Federico falls for the trick. The Cat eats the mouse and

the Rooster eats the corn, destroying the ogre. The kingdom is freed from his reign of terror.

Back at the palace, the Cat introduces Juanito as the fake Marqués de Carabás, and it looks like there will be a wedding between Juanito and Dorita...in about 5 years, when they’re old enough! Not to worry, the Lady of Time appears and makes time fly: now Juanito and Dorita

(played by two other actors) can wed! (Everyone else has lost 5 years of their lives, but who cares!) Also, the Rooster is revealed to be King Serio’s long-lost son Bambino:



he is restored to his human form. The Cat gets his fondest wish: to sit on the throne for a moment. Then he returns his boots, cape, hat, and sword to the Lady of Time and becomes a real cat once again (although he now has a cat lady-friend).

*El Gato con Botas* isn’t perfect. There are a few time-wasting songs (although one musical number featuring the Rooster is pretty amusing), some repetitive bits (the Cat



keeps trying to bring food to the palace—including the Rooster!—but never manages to deliver the goods), and some continuity gaps. However, the general

impression is positive. The production values aren’t great, but they’re adequate, and the various effects are satisfactory.

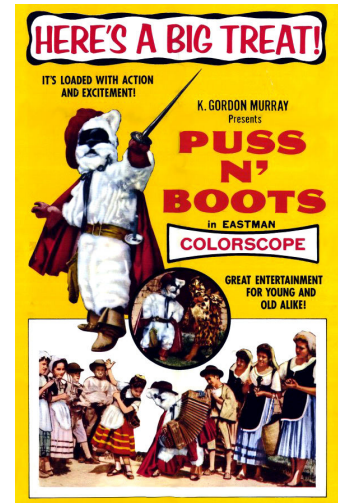
The Cat costume is odd-looking, but functional (the Rooster outfit is somewhat better). Curiously, Federico the Ogre and his son both wear false torsos to make them look immensely fat—these are weird but well done for the most part. Another strange bit is the green-faced makeup Antonio Raxel wears as King Serio for most of the movie: I suppose this is an outward manifestation of his depression (since it clears up once the ogre is destroyed), but it makes him look like a zombie when he’s shown in the same shot as other performers with normal faces.

While Rafael Muñoz “Santanón” played both Zorrillo and the Cat in the Rodríguez fairy tales, he did not do his own dialogue. Here, the Cat is voiced by Julio Lucena. I may be imagining it, but Lucena at times sounds as if he’s imitating Cantinflas. The Rooster is dubbed by well-known actor and voice artist Jorge Arvizu. Both of these characters are at times a little difficult to understand, but the voices are fairly appropriate.

The performances by the “human” actors range from good (Armando

Gutiérrez as the ogre, Antonio Raxel), to adequate (Humberto Dupeyrón, Luis Manuel Pelayo) to barely passable (Ana María Hernández, Rocío Rosales). A trivia note: Dupeyrón has a surprising nude scene in the movie (the Cat tells him to strip off his shepherd’s clothing and dive into a river, later returning with clothing more appropriate clothing for his “Marqués” impersonation). Dupeyrón had minor roles in two of the “Caperucita Roja” movies, but is best-known for *El Gato con Botas* and for playing the child vampire in *Huella macabra*.

Better than expected.



## Carradine in Mexico

**Pacto diabólico** [Diabolical Pact] (Filmica Vergara-Cinecomisiones/Columbia, 1967) *Exec Prod:* Jorge García Besné; *Prod:* Luis Enrique Vergara; *Dir:* Jaime Salvador; *Scr:* Ramón Obón Jr.; *Story Idea:* Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Orig Novel:* Robert Louis Stevenson (“The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”); *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe; *Music:* Gustavo César Carreón [sic]; *Song:* Tito Novaro; *Asst Dir:* Tito Novaro; *Film Ed:* José Juan Munguía; *Art Dir:* Octavio Ocampo, José Méndez; *Camera Op:* Morales Carlos [sic]; *Re-rec:* Heinrich Henkel; *Dialog Rec:* J. Joaquín Jiménez; *Recordist:* Guillermo Carrasco; Eastmancolor; *Union:* STIC



**Cast:** John Carradine (*himself; Dr. Holback*), Regina Torné (*Dinorah Jekyll*), Miguel Ángel Álvarez (*Dr. Frederick Holback*), Guillermo Zetina (*Doyle*), Andrés García (*Alphonse Bennett*), Isela Vega (*singer*), Gloria Munguía (*?Melissa Jackson*), Ángel DiStefani (*executioner*), Laura Ferlo (*?Melissa's sister*), Silvia Villalobos, Enriqueta Carrasco (*neighbour*), José Antonio García, Carlos Suárez (*policeman in park*), Víctor Alcocer (*dubs John Carradine*)

**Notes:** Robert Louis Stevenson's short novel "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" has been adapted to cinema—both officially and unofficially—many, many times in various countries. Five years after this version was made, Stevenson's work was brought to the screen again with *El hombre y la bestia* (1972). *Pacto diabólico* was one of John Carradine's four Vergara features—the two in which he co-starred with Mil Máscaras (*Enigma de muerte* and *Las vampiras*) were directed by Federico Curiel, while the other two were helmed by Jaime Salvador. Salvador, a Spanish emigré, had a prolific if undistinguished directorial career in Mexico, bringing little style or energy to his movies.

Like all of the Vergara Carradine films, *Pacto diabólico* begins with an introduction by Carradine himself (dubbed by Víctor Alcocer). After the credits, the plot gets underway, although it takes a long time to get all of the exposition out of the way. Dr. Holback believes a



convict sentenced to die (we later see her go to the guillotine).

substance in the human eye is the key to creating a youth serum. He and assistant Alphonse remove the eyes of a woman

[The film is set in a non-specific location in what appears to be the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are few vague hints this might be France—the name "Alphonse," the guillotine reference, but the character names are a mix of just about everything...except Hispanic, oddly enough.]

Holback greets Dinorah, the visiting university-student daughter of his late friend Dr. Jekyll. She is engaged to Alphonse and stays at Holback's house (which used to belong to her father). Holback completes his formula that night and becomes a younger version of himself; he pretends to be his own nephew, Frederick Holback.

Frederick visits a nightclub and escorts the featured singer-stripper to her apartment after the show. They have sex, then Frederick notices his hands have grown hairy and hastens to leave. Outside, he changes into a bestial figure, then returns to the apartment and murders the stripper, gouging out her eyes.



Back home, Holback is filled with remorse for his crime. For some reason, the youth potion did not merely turn Holback into a younger man, it also created a separate personality which shares the body's consciousness with his own. The monstrous transformation can be reversed with more of the formula, but there's no clear explanation for the change in the first place. [Also, sometimes the beast-man changes into young Frederick, but at least two times he reverts to the older Holback.]

Frederick murders Melissa, a friend of Dinorah's, to get her eye-juice. He later tries to kill Melissa's sister to cover up his crimes, but she eludes him. [Although she's rescued by a policeman,



the authorities don't bother to go to Holback's house to arrest (or even question) "Frederick" about this attempted murder.] Dinorah spots Frederick in his monstrous state and gets hysterical. The beast-man has an inconclusive

fight with Alphonse and later unsuccessfully tries to strangle Dinorah in her bed.

Finally, Holback gets control of his body (which is now normal, but old again) and resists the urge to kill Dinorah. He commits suicide by leaping into a fiery furnace in the basement.

*Pacto diabólico* is, after the rather slow beginning, fairly lively but superficial. The “monster” makeup for Frederick is rather poor: other than fangs and the hair on his hands, Miguel Ángel Álvarez just looks like he’s



wearing brown greasepaint on his face (the film’s publicity art makes the monster look more like an ape-man). The basic

premise of Stevenson’s original work—the “good” and “evil” sides present in everyone—is largely jettisoned here: Holback’s initial plan is to create a youth serum, and the split-personality aspect of the plot comes out of left field (and actually *Pacto diabólico* goes Stevenson one better, with three personalities instead of two: Holback, Frederick, and the beast-man). Although the movie overtly references “Dr. Jekyll” and his experiments, it’s unclear how this is related (if at all) to Holback’s work.

The script has a lot of loose ends. In addition to those noted above (why Frederick becomes a monster, why the police don’t follow up on his attempted murder of Melissa’s sister), these include: Dr. Holback disappears, and aside from an initial reference to “he has a lot of work to do at the university,” no one seems to care about where he is and why he hasn’t come home after several days (at least: the film’s time-line isn’t precise). Alphonse and Melissa attend the local university, whereas Dinorah has been studying elsewhere, and an inordinate amount of screen time is wasted with pointless discussions about books needed for their schoolwork, and so forth.

One curious aspect of *Pacto diabólico* and *La señora muerte* is the inclusion of brief, almost identical (both in



terms of context and what’s shown) nude scenes in each movie (I’d known about the one in *La señora muerte* for years, but didn’t see an “uncut” version of *Pacto diabólico* until preparing for this review). In *Pacto diabólico*,

after Frederick and the stripper have sex (off-screen), Frederick leaves and the stripper (Isela Vega) gets out of

bed and prepares for a bath. Vega is seen topless and nude from the back (waist-up), a sequence which lasts only a few seconds and could be easily trimmed. It’s amusing that she’s only wearing a towel when the beast-man attacks and kills her, yet this “garment” stays stubbornly wrapped around her body!

The film has a very small cast and most of the scenes occur on a handful of sets. The only significant exterior scene was probably shot in Chapultepec Park, as Melissa’s sister escapes from a carriage and flees from the pursuing Frederick. The primary sets, notably Holback’s laboratory, are dressed adequately, but others—such as the nightclub—are flat and artificial looking, a common liability in Estudios América productions of this era. The other technical aspects are fine. Of some interest is Gustavo César Carrión’s score, which ranges from atonal, pseudo-electronic music under the opening credits to reiterations of his familiar “horror” themes which date back to the 1950s.



The performances are solid, although most of the dramatic heavy-lifting is given to Carradine and Álvarez, with Torné, García, and Guillermo Zetina (as “Doyle,” the butler) just going through the paces in a professional but uninspiring manner. Although Carradine’s dialogue was post-dubbed (he was speaking English on the set—there may have even been an intention to release English-language versions of these movies, as was done with the Vergara Boris Karloff quartet), he still gives his all. Álvarez isn’t required to do much nuanced acting, but he’s appropriately smarmy as Frederick and vigorous as the beast-man.

*Pacto diabólico* is mildly entertaining and not dull.



**La Señora Muerte [Lady Death]** (Fílmica Vergara-Cinecomisiones, S.A., 1967) *Exec Prod:* Jorge García Besné; *Prod:* Luis Enrique Vergara C.; *Dir:* Jaime Salvador; *Scr:* Ramón Obón Jr.; *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe J.;



*Music:* Gustavo César Carreón; *Asst Dir:* Tito Novaro;  
*Film Ed:* J. Juan Munguía; *Asst Ed:* Ángel Camacho;  
*Camera Op:* Carlos Morales; *Cam Asst:* Eduardo Rojo;  
*Script Clerk:* José Delfos; *Art Dir:* Octavio Ocampo, José Méndez; *Asst Art Dir:* Raúl Cárdenas; *Fashions:* Pedro Loredó; *Re-rec:* Henrich [sic] Henkel; *Dialog Rec:* J. Joaquín Jiménez; *Recordist:* Guillermo Carrasco; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** John Carradine (*himself; Dr. Favel*), Regina Torné (*Marlene*), Elsa Cárdenas (*Julie*), Miguel Ángel Álvarez (*Tony Winter*), Mario Orea (*medical examiner*), Isela Vega (*Lisa*), Víctor Junco (*Andrés*), Carlos Ancira (*Laor*), Fernando Osés (*Lt. Henry*), Patricia Ferrer (*wax museum victim*), Cristina Rubiales, Alicia Ravel (*?Patricia Winter*), Carlos Ortigosa, Lucrecia Muñoz, Tito Novaro (*pianist*), Victor Alcocer (*dubs John Carradine*)



**Notes:** shot back-to-back with *Pacto diabólico* in June-July 1967, *La Señora Muerte* is also set in an unspecified location—all of the characters have Anglo names—but is not a period film. John Carradine, Regina Torné, Isela Vega and Miguel Ángel Álvarez

appear in both movies, although in some ways Torné and Álvarez swap roles: Torné is the “monster” this time, while Álvarez plays the role in *Pacto diabólico* (Isela Vega’s characters get murdered both times!). Both movies have a similar underlying premise: a decent person becomes deformed as the result of a scientific process, and has to kill people to get a particular substance from their corpses. Each movie also fails to provide a clear rationale as to when the protagonist is “monstruous” and when he/she is not, with the transformations occurring more or less randomly to suit the dramatic demands of the plot.

*La Señora Muerte* and *Pacto diabólico* also each contain brief, virtually identical nude scenes. In *La Señora Muerte*, Regina Torné’s character is introduced in bed with her husband. After they talk, she gets up and puts on a



robe, exposing her naked torso. These scenes are pure exploitation (although in a way they’re “realistic,” since the characters have just finished having sex) and yet the rest of *La*

*Señora Muerte* (and *Pacto diabólico*, for that matter) is very tame, with no more nudity and no explicit gore on display. For instance, *La Señora Muerte* seems to go out of its way to avoid

showing Marlene actually extracting blood from her victims, all of the process occurring out of the frame.

In some ways, *La Señora Muerte* resembles an Italian *giallo* more than it does a horror film: Marlene stalks her (female) victims, wears (one) black glove (to cover her deformed hand), and kills in a variety of (mildly stylish) ways.

John Carradine introduces the film. “It all began one night, when love spoke with Destiny...” Marlene and her husband Andrés are still strongly in love with each other: “Eternity wouldn’t be long enough to show you how much I love you,” Andrés says. But he is obsessed with the thought of death. Feeling a sudden pain, he insists that Marlene call Dr. Pavel. Marlene protests: “he was thrown out of the Academy of Medicine!”

At Favel’s lab, the doctor tells Andrés that he has incurable cancer. When his treatment fails, Favel puts Andrés in a state of suspended animation, and tells Marlene he must



replace her husband’s tainted blood with fresh: hers will do. That night, Favel begins the process of taking Marlene’s blood in order to revive Andrés, but an accident occurs, radiation feeds back into Marlene’s

body, and her face is horribly deformed. She begs Favel to cure her, and he once again agrees—but there is a price. She must bring him blood for his work, blood from young women! “Kill, to save your own life, and that of your beloved husband. Kill, or remain the way you are forever, ugly and without love.” Marlene’s face gradually resumes its normal aspect, thanks to an injection from Favel.

Tony and Lisa are employees of fashion designer Marlene, and are having an affair. Tony’s wife Patricia tells some friends she’ll walk home across the park. However, Marlene is waiting. She murders the woman and drains her blood. Patricia’s body is discovered. The medical examiner



tells the police that there wasn’t a single drop of blood in the body.

Marlene begins to feel her “problem” returning. She calls Tony and asks him to come to the fashion house at

once, then tells Lisa that Tony wants to see her at his apartment. Marlene murders Lisa in Tony’s apartment and drains her blood. Arriving at Pavel’s lab, she is met by Laor, who tries to grope her. They struggle, and the bottle

of Lisa's blood is smashed. Favel comes in and whips Laor for his actions. Looking at the spilled blood, Favel says: "An unfortunate occurrence. That blood was very valuable to me." [In a wonderful bit of acting, Marlene doesn't say anything to this, but her body language effectively conveys her frustration and desperation.]

Tony finds Lisa's body and moves it to the fashion house. The next day, Marlene's assistant Julie finds the body in the storeroom. Meanwhile, Laor appears in Marlene's office. He shows her a bottle of blood he got for her—his own blood. "Your blood won't do," Marlene tells him. "It has to be from young women, according to Favel." They can't fool the scientist, "it would be the end for my husband—and myself." [Marlene acts kindly towards Laor in this scene, although the last time they met he tried to rape her.]



Marlene tells Lt. Henry that Tony and Lisa were having an affair. Tony is questioned at his apartment, and although he denies any guilt, the bloodstains on the floor are enough to cause his arrest. At the fashion house, several models are talking. One is engaged to a young man who is going to open a wax museum of horrors. In fact, that night she's going to visit him to work on costumes for the wax figures. Marlene overhears their conversation. She goes to the wax museum first and murders the proprietor. Then, when the young model arrives, Marlene kills her, drains her blood, and finally cuts off her head with a display guillotine (why a wax museum would have a working guillotine is not explained).

[This is an interesting sequence. Marlene behaves in an extremely cruel manner, throwing acid in the boyfriend's face and then clubbing him with a candlestick. She stabs the model and looks almost aroused as she does so. Then, for no discernable reason, Marlene drags the body over to the guillotine and beheads it.]

The next morning, Lt. Henry has Tony released from custody: "That unpleasant night you spent in jail saved you." Since more murders were committed while Tony was locked up, he's now free. Tony tells Lt. Henry he found Lisa's body in his apartment but moved it. Marlene had asked him to come in to the fashion house that night, but she was gone when he got there. They decide to pay a call on Marlene.

Meanwhile, Marlene, beginning to change again, calls and asks Julie to come to the house at once. Once there, Marlene attacks Julie but Julie flees outside and meets Lt. Henry and his men. Marlene escapes and goes to Favel for help. Favel straps her to a table, then reveals that he deliberately caused her disease. He needs her blood to revive Andrés and prove his theories. Favel drains all of Marlene's blood, and she dies. Favel tells Laor to dispose of the body, but before the mute assistant leaves the lab, he throws a switch. When Favel activates his machinery, the equipment blows up and destroys the lab, killing the mad scientist.

Outside, a crowd has gathered. Marlene's body is on the street. The police found her, with Laor nearby, crying. In death, Marlene's face resumes its normal appearance, and Laor smiles. [Upon second viewing, it's possible Laor just imagines Marlene is once again beautiful.]

*La Señora Muerte* at least tries to be a little different,

with its reluctant "monster" who falls into the hands of an unscrupulous mad scientist simply because of her great love for her husband. Marlene is not exactly a cunning killer, since all of her victims are people



connected to her rather than complete strangers, which almost guarantees she'll be caught. However, as noted above, although there are scenes where she agonises over her actions, when she is actually murdering people she appears quite ruthless. The one-sided relationship between smitten Laor and Marlene is not unfamiliar but it's handled effectively, and the "twist" ending-- where Favel reveals he deliberately scarred Marlene so she'd supply him with the blood he needs--is decent enough.

The performances are generally satisfactory, although Carradine is not quite as good here—in an outright villainous role—than he is in a more ambiguous part in



*Pacto diabólico*. He was apparently encouraged to "act villainous" and thus chews the scenery, especially in some odd, interpolated shots where (against a black background) he orders Marlene to "Kill! Kill! Kill!"

It's mildly annoying that two main characters—Dr. Favel and Lt. Henry—are both dubbed, Carradine because he didn't speak Spanish and Fernando Osés because (it is assumed) he had a Spanish accent. Torné and Miguel Ángel Álvarez have the most screen time and the widest opportunity to act, while Elsa Cárdenas and Isela Vega are more or less along for the ride. Carlos Ancira doesn't have any dialogue but is



fine in a stereotypical “mad scientist’s assistant” role, and Mario Orea turns in a professional performance as the medical examiner. A trivia note: actress Alicia Ravel was married to director Salvador, and appeared in only a handful of films after their marriage (most of them directed by her husband).

*La Señora Muerte* seems somewhat more expansive than *Pacto diabólico*, with a wider variety of locations (including Marlene’s house/business, which has a huge set of stairs leading to the front door, making it resemble a museum or something) and a significant number of extras in several scenes. Unfortunately, these scenes are two



fashion shows which go on forever: the first one (by a swimming pool) is mildly tolerable but the second lasts for what feels like hours. There are numerous cutaways to other action (Marlene

murdering Lisa, etc.) but then we always come back to the damn fashion show, with a glum-looking Tito Novaro endlessly playing the piano as anonymous models stroll around. Overall, the pacing is rather slow and the thrills quite mild.

On the positive side, the horror makeup for Regina Torné is very good. Almost exactly half of her face is horribly scarred and distorted; this appears to be makeup and appliances, since the distortions flex with her facial movements. Her hand is also wrinkled and scarred. Compared to the cheapjack brown-face “monster” makeup seen in *Pacto diabólico*, *La Señora Muerte* is extremely effective and well-executed.



Trivia notes: although it is Regina Torné who has the on-screen nude scene in *La Señora Muerte*, the one-sheet poster for the film depicts Isela Vega in a revealing negligee that Torné’s character wears in the film. Years later, at least one videotape release of the movie also substituted Vega’s face for Torné’s on the box.



## Bonus! Horror Comedy

**Locura de terror** [Crazed with Terror] (Prods. Sotomayor, 1960) *Exec Prod*: Heberto Dávila G.; *Prod*: Jesús Sotomayor Martínez; *Dir*: Julián Soler; *Adapt*:

Alfredo Varela Jr.; *Story*: José María Fernández Unsain; *Photo*: Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music Dir/Arr*: Jesús Zarzosa; *Prod Chief*: Antonio Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir*: Jaime Contreras; *Film Ed*: Juan José Marino; *Art Dir*: Javier Torres Torija; *Decor*: Carlos Grandjean; *Lighting*: Miguel Arana; *Camera Op*: Cirilo Rodríguez; *Re-rec*: Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed*: Raúl Portillo; *Dialog Rec*: [Rafael Ruiz] Esparza; *Makeup*: Mayer [sic, Armando Meyer?]; *Spec FX*: Sáenz; *Union*: STPC



**Cast**: Germán Valdés "Tin Tan" (*Pacífico Otero*), Manuel "Loco" Valdés (*Dr. Anacleto Lucas*), Sonia Furió (*Lucía*), Verónica Loyó (*Marilú*), Andrés Soler (*Dr. Ivanov*), David Silva (*Dr. Jones*), Agustín Isunza (*orderly*), Consuelo Guerrero Luna (*doña Angustias*), Elizabeth Dupeyrón (*Chilindrina*), Raúl Guerrero, Ángel Merino, Salvador Terroba, Nathanael León "Franquestain" (*patient who melts*), Imelda Miller, José Wilhemý (*patient*)



**Notes**: when I first reviewed this film in MFB 12/2 (2006), I called it “a disappointment.” That’s still true to an extent, since *Locura de terror* is about 90% comedy and music and 10% atmospheric horror and surprisingly decent effects. However, I have revised my overall opinion of the movie upwards (slightly). Tin Tan and his brother "Loco" Valdés are teamed up again, with variable results. Tin Tan is almost—but not quite—a straight man, and Loco Valdés

mugs wildly and rattles off non-stop non-sequiturs in a style that is in some ways a precursor to Robin Williams and Jim Carrey.

*Locura de terror* starts out with an atmospheric credits sequence, featuring a really nice monster (later joined by another, similar creature), and 30 minutes later pulls out all the stops with a great scene in which a "dead" patient (N. León) literally melts down from a body into a skeleton. This appears to have been achieved by undercranking the camera and melting a wax image, but it's a top-notch job. The filmmakers knew it, too, because they re-run parts of it several times, and (bad decision) even run the footage in reverse to show the body being reconstituted.

Some of the other effects aren't so great. Tin Tan is strapped in the chair and reduced to a skeleton with a human head (a fairly poor illusion). He then gets out of the chair and runs around for a while, by the simple procedure of having him dress in a black suit with a white "skeleton" painted on it (to be fair, a few shots of this are decent but most of the time it's pretty obvious).

There is also a large (football-sized) spider that moves at a snail's pace (if at all), and a couple of shots of the monsters (and a cat) dissolving in an acid bath.



Provoked by the arrival of his obnoxious mother-in-law, Pacífico goes insane, calling himself "Tarzán." He's sent to the mental hospital run by Drs. Lucas, Ivanov, and Jones. Pacífico confesses to Lucas that he's not crazy, he just wants to stay out of his house until his mother-in-law departs. What Lucas doesn't know--because he's an idiot, and also spends most of his time pursuing sexy nurse Lucía--is that Ivanov and Jones have a secret basement lab where they are performing unusual experiments. Mental patients "die," are exhumed by the doctors, and then disintegrated and re-integrated. It has something to do with brain transplants, too. Unfortunately, the re-integrated bodies come back as ugly monsters, not normal human beings.

Deciding to vary their modus operandi a bit, the mad scientists "kill" Pacífico and subject him to the process, which results

in his live head perched on top of his skeleton! The doctors also kidnap two street urchins to use as transplant subjects.



Lucas and Lucía stumble onto the lab and merriment (to use the term loosely) results. Eventually, Jones is killed by a big spider, Ivanov is disintegrated, the monsters are

melted in an acid tank, Pacífico gets his body back (but before he does, he scares his mother-in-law into running away), and everyone lives happily ever after.



*Locura de terror* is effectively split into two parts: the horror aspects don't kick in until nearly the half-way point, although to be fair the second half of the movie has much more of this content.

The first half is almost entirely comedy, showcasing Tin Tan and then Loco Valdés (and then, both of them).

Sonia Furió performs one solo musical number, while Tin Tan and "Loco" Valdés do a couple of others. Consuelo Guerrero de Luna is fairly amusing as Tin Tan's obnoxious mother-in-law, who celebrates inappropriately at his "funeral." Sonia Furió is attractive enough but Verónica Loyo is rather bland. Andrés Soler and David Silva are adequate as the evil mad scientists: Soler pretends to be wheelchair-bound and fondles a pet cat (only to ruthlessly toss it into an acid bath just to demonstrate its effectiveness!).

The sets and photography are satisfactory. To give Sotomayor credit, they don't pull their usual stunt of using stock footage from other movies and actually invested a certain amount of effort into the special effects scenes.



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