

# THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN

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## OBITUARIES

### Edith González

Actress Edith González died of cancer on 13 June 2019; she was 54 years old. Edith González Fuentes was born in Monterrey in December 1964. She made



her debut on the stage as a child, and began to appear regularly on television in the early 1970s. Later in the decade she had small roles in a variety of films, including *Alucarda*, *El rey de los gorilas*, *Ciclón*, and *Guyana: el crimen del siglo*.

González would continue to work in films over the next several decades, but gained most of her fame on television in more than 30 *telenovelas* and TV series such as “Corazón salvaje” and “Doña Bárbara.” She also worked on the stage.

González was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2016 but went back to work after treatment, only to finally succumb to the disease in 2019.

Edith González had one daughter, Constanza Creel, born in 2004, the result of a relationship with politician Santiago Creel. She married businessman Lorenzo Lazo in 2010.



### Mercedes Pascual

Mercedes Pascual died on 9 June 2019 in Mexico City. Pascual was born in Madrid in 1930 and



emigrated to Mexico with her family in 1939 due to the Spanish Civil War. She later became a Mexican citizen. Pascual originally studied dance but later studied acting as well, and appeared in numerous plays,

*telenovelas*, and feature films. Among the latter were *El esqueleto de Señora Morales*, *Los años verdes*, *El juicio de Martín Cortés*, and *Cilantro y perejil*. She

was nominated for a Best Supporting Actress Ariel for her final film, *Tamara y la Catarina* (2016).

Mercedes Pascual was married twice, to actor Claudio Brook, and to diplomat Víctor Flores Olea; she had one daughter from each marriage.



### Alejandro Valdés

Alejandro Valdés, son of actor Manuel “Loco”

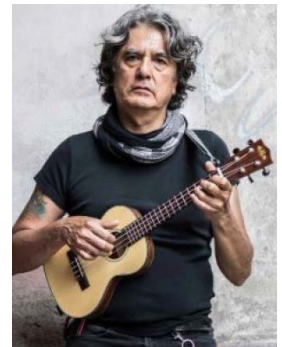
Valdés, died of heart failure on 3 April 2016. He was 61 years old. Valdés, nicknamed “El Pupi,” was involved in show business as an artistic director. He was one of 12 children of the famous comic actor.



### Armando Vega Gil

Musician Armando Vega Gil, drummer and founder of the popular group “Botellita de Jerez,” died on 1 April 2019; he was 64 years old. Vega Gil committed suicide after being accused on the “MeTooMicosMexicanos” Twitter account of abusing a 13-year-old girl. The musician said the anonymous accusation was false and defended his record of humanitarian actions during his career, but indicated in the current climate he was unable to defend himself and had decided to commit suicide as “a radical declaration of innocence.”

Botellita de Jerez was founded in 1982 by Vega Gil, Sergio Arau (son of actor & filmmaker Alfonso Arau), and Francisco Barrios, and remained active (for periods under the name La HH Botellita de Jerez) until Vega Gil’s death, at which time the band announced it was breaking up. The *guacarrock* music of the group can be heard in various Mexican films of the era, including *La verdadera historia de Barman y Droguin* and the semi-documentary *Naco es chido* (directed by Sergio Arau).



### Coral Bonelli

Actor and transgender activist Coral Bonelli died at the age of 57 on 6 May 2019; she had been suffering from diabetes. Born Federico García Ortega in April 1963, “Pinolito” (sometimes



“Pinolillo”) began acting in Mexican cinema as a child, appearing in *Fe*, *esperanza y*

*caridad*, *El hijo de los pobres*, *La casa del sur*, *Los hermanos del viento* and other films, for directors including Jorge Fons, Sergio Ohlovich, Arturo



Ripstein, and Julio Bracho.

At the age of 32, García Ortega became Coral Bonelli and continued her career as a performer, albeit with somewhat less success. However, in 2013 Bonelli and her mother Lilia Ortega (also an actress) starred in Roberto Fiesco’s

documentary *Quebranto*, to considerable acclaim. Bonelli subsequently appeared in other films, including perhaps her last, *Estrellas solitarias* (2015, released in 2018).



### María Zarattini

Writer María Zarattini died on 21 April 2019; she was 64 years of age.

Zarattini, born in Italy, began writing *telenovelas* for Televisa in the mid-1970s. She subsequently married producer José Rendón and worked on a number of extremely popular programs, both originals and adaptations.



### Stefanie Sherk

Actress Stefanie Sherk, wife of actor Demián Bichir, died in Los Angeles on 20 April 2019; she was 37 years old. Sherk had been suffering from depression and took her own life. Sherk was born in Ontario, Canada in January 1982 and began acting professionally in the 2000s. She married Bichir in 2011, and they collaborated on



*Un Cuento de Circo & A Love Song* (2016), directed by Bichir and starring Bichir, Sherk, and Arcelia Ramírez. Sherk also appeared in the Mexican production *Loco Love* (2017).



### Gualberto Castro

Singer Gualberto Castro died on 27 June 2019 of complications from bladder cancer; he was 84 years old. Gualberto Antonio Castro Levario was born in Mexico City in July 1934. He broke into show business as a dancer at the Teatro Blanquita, but joined his cousins Arturo, Javier and Jorge Castro--who had been performing as “Los Panchitos”--to form the “Hermanos Castro.” The group was very popular through the 1960s, appearing in a number of films such as *El zángano*, *Cómo pescar marido*, and *El misterio de los hongos halucinantes*.



Gualberto Castro began a successful solo career in the 1970s: in addition to singing, he appeared in the Spanish-language version of “West Side Story” (“Amor sin barreras”), and was a host of the 1980s TV series “La carabina de Ambrosio.” He had a major role in *La criada maravilla* (1978).

Castro was married 5 times and also had a long-time relationship with actress Macaria that resulted in a son. He is survived by his last wife, Gundy Becker.



## ARIEL AWARDS 2019



The 61<sup>st</sup> Ariel Awards were presented on 24 June 2019 at the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico City. *Roma* won 10 awards, including Best Film & Best Director. *Las niñas bien* received 4 awards. On the red carpet outside the ceremony, participants protested against government cuts for cultural activities, and in favour

of greater equality for women in the film industry and in films.

**Best Film:** “La camarista”, “Las niñas bien”, “Museo”, “Nuestro tiempo”, “Roma”.

**Best Direction:** Lila Avilés, “La camarista”; Alejandra Márquez, “Las niñas bien”; Alonso Ruizpalacios, “Museo”; Carlos Reygadas, “Nuestro tiempo”; **Alfonso Cuarón, “Roma”**.

**Best Actress:** Concepción Márquez, “Cría puercos”; Gabriela Cartol, “La camarista”; **Ilse Salas, “Las niñas bien”**; Sophie Alexander-Katz, “Los días más oscuros de nosotras”; Yalitza Aparicio, “Roma”.

**Best Actor:** Luis Gerardo Méndez, “Bayoneta”; Damián Alcázar, “De la infancia”; Baltimore Beltrán, “Mente revólver”; Gael García Bernal, “Museo”; **Noé Hernández, “Ocho de cada diez”**.

**Best Co-Starring Actor:** Ernesto Gómez Cruz, “De la infancia”; Flavio Medina, “Las niñas bien”; Hoze Meléndez, “Mente revólver”; **Leonardo Ortizgriz, “Museo”**; Jorge Antonio Guerrero, “Roma”.

**Best Co-Starring Actress:** Cassandra Ciangherotti, “El club de los insomnes”; Teresa Sánchez, “La camarista”; Cassandra Ciangherotti, “Las niñas bien”; Paulina Gaitán, “Las niñas bien”; **Marina de Tavira, “Roma”**.

**Best New Performer:** Agustina Quinci, “La camarista”; Alan Uribe, “La camarista”; **Benny Emmanuel, “De la infancia”**; Bernardo Velasco, “Museo”; Nancy García, “Roma”.

**Best Original Screenplay:** “La Camarista”, “Las niñas bien”, “Museo”, “Nuestro tiempo”, **Alfonso Cuarón, “Roma”**.

**Best Adapted Screenplay:** “Ana y Bruno”; **Silvia Pasternac, Carlos Carrera, Fernando Javier, “De la infancia”**.

**Best Photography:** Carlos F. Rossini, “La camarista”; Dariela Ludlow, “Las niñas bien”; Damián García, “Museo”; Diego García, “Nuestro tiempo”; **Alfonso Cuarón, “Roma”**.

**Best Editing:** “Hasta los dientes”, “La camarista”, “Las niñas bien”, “Museo”, **Alfonso Cuarón & Adam Gough, “Roma”**.

**Best Sound:** “Bayoneta”, “Las niñas bien”, “Museo”, “Nuestro tiempo”, **José Antonio García, Sergio Díaz, Skip Lievsay, Craig Henighan, “Roma”**.

**Best Original Music:** “Ana y Bruno”, “Bayoneta”, **Tomás Barreiro, “Las niñas bien”**, “Museo”, “Witkin y Witkin”.

**Best Art Direction:** “De la infancia”, “Las niñas bien”, “Museo”, “Restos de viento”, **Eugenio Caballero, Bárbara Enríquez, Óscar Tello, Gabriel Cortés, “Roma”**.

**Best Costumes:** “Bayoneta”, “De la infancia”, **María Annai Ramos Maza “Las niñas bien”**, “Museo”, “Roma”.

**Best Makeup:** “Bayoneta”, “El día de la unión”, **Pedro Guijarro Hidalgo, “Las niñas bien”**, “Museo”, “Roma”.

**Best Special Effects:** “Cygnus”, “El día de la unión”, “El habitante”, “La gran promesa”, **Alejandro Vázquez, “Roma”**.

**Best Visual Effects:** “Bayoneta”, “De la infancia”, “El día de la unión”, “Museo”, **Sheldon Stopsack & David Griffiths, “Roma”**.

**Best First Work:** “Ayotzinapa, el paso de la tortuga”, “Cría puercos”, “Hasta los dientes”, **“La camarista” (Lila Avilés)**, “Los días más oscuros de nosotras”.

**Best Documentary Feature:** “Ayotzinapa, el paso de la tortuga”, **“Hasta los dientes” (Albert Saúl Arnaut Estrada)**, “Rita, el documental”, “Rush Hour”, “Witkin y Witkin”.

**Best Animated Feature:** “Ahí viene cascarrabias”, **“Ana y Bruno” (Carlos Carrera)**, “El ángel en el reloj”, “La leyenda del charro negro”.

**Best Fictional Short:** **“Arcángel” (Ángeles Cruz)**, “B-167-980-098”, “El aire delgado”, “El último romántico”, “Velvet”, “Videotape”.

**Best Documentary Short:** “19 de septiembre”, “Aurora”, “Las visitadoras”, “M”, **“Sinfonía de un mar triste” (Carlos Morales)**.

**Best Animated Short:** “Justicia”, “32-Rbit”, “Gina”, “Primos”, **“Viva el rey” (Luis Téllez)**.

**Best Iberoamerican Film:** “Campeones” (España), “El ángel” (Argentina), “La noche de 12 años” (Uruguay), “Las herederas” (Paraguay), **“Pájaros de verano” (Colombia)**.

**Ariel de Oro:** Nerio Barberis (sound designer), Paz Alicia Garciadiego (writer), Héctor Bonilla (actor and producer).



## VENEZUELA AND MEXICAN CINEMA

Films were made in Venezuela only sporadically until the 1970s, when a small film industry was established. In the 1980s and beyond, more feature films were produced in Venezuela, including a number of co-productions with Mexico and other Latin American countries.

The Mexican connection with Venezuela dates back to the 1940s, although there were relatively few co-productions: a number of films with Venezuelan settings were shot in Mexico, some Venezuelan performers were imported (in many cases with an eye towards bolstering Mexican cinema’s popularity in their home country), and the occasional Mexican movie (or co-production) was filmed (completely or in part) in Venezuela.



**Rómulo Gallegos:** Gallegos (1884-1969), probably the most famous Venezuelan writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also served as the country's president for a brief period in 1948 (before being deposed in a



military coup). *La trepadora* was filmed in Venezuela in 1924, adapted from a Gallegos novel and co-directed by the author himself. *Juan de la calle* (1941) was another Gallegos adaptation, produced by Gallegos, but

after this the novelist's works were the exclusive property of Mexican cinema for the next two decades. Five of Gallegos' novels were adapted to the screen in Mexico in the 1940s-50s (plus *La señora de enfrente*, for which he wrote an original script): *Doña Bárbara* (1943), *La trepadora* (1944), *Cantaclaro* (1945), *Canaima* (1945), and *La doncella de piedra* (1955). All of these (except *La señora de enfrente*) were set in Venezuela but were Mexican-made and starred Mexican cinema performers.

**Bolívar Films:** Luis Guillermo Villegas Blanco founded Bolívar Films in 1940. The company (which still exists), made a brief and ultimately unsuccessful attempt in the late 1940s-early 1950s to become a major film producer. *La balandra Isabel llegó esta tarde* was an early effort, directed by Carlos Hugo Christensen and starring Arturo de Córdoba and Virginia Luque, all Argentines (although de Córdoba was most famous for his Mexican cinema work). This film won the Best Cinematography prize at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival. Two later Bolívar productions had Mexican connections: Víctor Urruchúa directed both *Seis meses de vida* (1951) and *Luz en el páramo* (1952), casting Lilia del Valle in the first and José Elías Moreno and Carmen Montejo in the latter. [*Amanecer a la vida*, 1950, was not a Bolívar Films production, but it was directed by Fernando Cortés and starred Susana Guízar, both Mexican cinema veterans.]

**Rafael Lanzetta:** Venezuelan actor Rafael Lanzetta had a brief career in Mexican cinema,



appearing in 1945's *Cantaclaro* and *Los años han pasado*--both set in his native land--and a number of other movies from the mid-Forties through the early 1950s, including *Cuatro vidas*

(1949), a Mexican-Guatemalan co-production directed by José Giaccardi, filmed in Kodachrome in Guatemala. This picture reunited Lanzetta with the stars of *Cantaclaro*, Antonio Badú and Esther

Fernández, and added Mexican actress Carmen Molina. Giaccardi was possibly Venezuelan himself, having directed *Destino de mujer* (1934) there, with future Mexican cinema actress Margarita Mora as the star (some sources indicate Mora was born in Venezuela but her birth was registered in the Dominican Republic). Mora also appeared in the Venezuelan film *Venezuela, Andalucía y América* (1937) directed by Fernando Palacios.

**Mexican films set in Venezuela:** a number of Mexican films made in the 1940s thru the 1980s were set in Venezuela and/or filmed (or partially filmed) there. These include:

*Simón Bolívar* (1942)

*Doña Bárbara* (1943)

*La trepadora* (1944)

*Cantaclaro* (1945)

*Canaima* (1945)

*Los años han pasado* (1945)

*Amor salvaje* (1949)

*El amor a la vida* (*La extraña aventura de un hombre*) aka *En tiempos de Gómez* (1950)

*La doncella de piedra* (1955)

*Llamas contra el viento* (1955) Mexican-Colombian coproduction shot in Eastmancolor on location in Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela.

*Socios para la aventura* (1957) Mexican-Argentine coproduction filmed in Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil

*La venenosa* (1957) Mexican-Argentine coproduction shot in Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, and Uruguay  
*Su primer amor* (1959) Shot in Venezuela, Panama, and Mexico.

*Martín Santos, el llanero* (1960) Filmed in Venezuela (?) and Mexico.

*Frente al destino* (*Cuatro muertes a plazo fijo*) (1963): Shot in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela.  
*Alma llanera* (1964): shot in Venezuela and Guatemala.

*Fuego en la sangre* (1964): Mexican-Argentine-Venezuelan coproduction filmed in Argentina and Venezuela

*El hombre de la furia* (*Más allá del Orinoco*) (1964): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*Me ha gustado un hombre* (1964): Mexican-Guatemalan-Venezuelan coproduction filmed on location in Caracas, Venezuela.

*Loco por ellas* (1965): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction filmed in Venezuela and Puerto Rico.

*Yo el gobernador* (1965): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*El reportero* (1966): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*Amor en las nubes* (1966): shot in Mexico, Los Angeles, New York, Caracas, and Madrid.

*OK Cleopatra* (1970): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*Bárbara* (1971): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*Cuando quiere llorar no lloro* (1972): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*El poder negro* (1973): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* (1974): Mexican-Venezuelan coproduction shot in Venezuela.

*Gavilán o paloma* (1984): Filmed on location in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and New York.

*Orinoco* (1984): set in Venezuela but filmed in the state of Tabasco.

*La mujer de fuego* (1988): Venezuelan-Colombian-Mexican coproduction shot in Venezuela.

**Hilda Vera:** Hilda Vera (1923-1988), like Rafael Lanzetta, was one of the rare Venezuelan performers who worked in Mexican cinema of the Golden Age.

From the late 1940s thru the early 1950s, Vera can be seen in *Nosotros los pobres*,

*Ritmo del Caribe*, *Víctimas del pecado*, *A.T.M.*, *Que te had dado esa mujer?* and *Doña Perfecta*.

She then returned to Venezuela and appeared in *Luz en el páramo* and on Venezuelan television and the stage for many years,

reappearing in *Martín Santos el llanero* in 1960. During the

1970s and 1980s Vera took advantage of the resurgence in Venezuelan cinema, working in at least five films directed by Román Chalbaud and a number of others before her death.

**Alfredo Sadel:** singer-actor Alfredo Sadel had a brief period of Mexican cinema popularity, working in five feature films between 1956 and 1960. Sadel



had previously appeared in the Venezuelan feature *Flor del campo* (1951) directed by the aforementioned José Giaccardi and featuring Rafael Lanzetta and Pura Vargas (who worked in a handful of Mexican movies in the early 1970s). Sadel was never top-billed in his Mexican movies, but was usually cast as a Venezuelan friend of the star and got to sing a song or two.

**Julián Pacheco (Guillermo Rodríguez Blanco):** Guillermo Rodríguez Blanco (1927?-2015) was a Venezuelan performer who became famous on radio and television in his homeland as “Julián Pacheco.” This was enough to earn him roles in two Mexican films, *El malvado Carabel* (as the star) and *Dos gallos en palenque* (second-billed to Piporro). He

also appeared in support of Amador Bendayán in *El reportero* (1966). Coincidentally--or not--all 3 of these movies were directed by Rafael Baledón.



**Amador Bendayán:** Amador Bendayán (1920-1989) had a long career in Venezuelan radio and television, and made a number of film appearances as well. In Venezuelan cinema, he worked in *Misión atómica* (1947), *Yo quiero una mujer así* (1950), the previously mentioned *Seis meses de vida* (1951), and *Yo y las mujeres* (1959), before attracting the attention of Mexican producers. Bendayán was given star treatment in *Si yo fuera millonario* (featuring guest star María Félix), *Napoleoncito* (opposite Silvana Pampanini), *El pícaro*, and the Venezuelan-shot *El reportero* (directed by Rafael Baledón and co-starring Tere Velázquez and Andrés Soler). He also took co-starring or supporting roles in *Departamento de soltero*, *Escuela para solteras*, and *OK Cleopatra* (the latter filmed in Venezuela and co-starring Venezuelan actress Lupita Ferrer, who'd previously appeared in 1964's Venezuelan-shot *Me ha gustado un hombre*).

**Joselo:** José Manuel Díaz Márquez (1936-2013) was third Venezuelan comedian, after Guillermo Rodríguez Blanco and Amador Bendayán, to make the transition to Mexican cinema, albeit briefly. Joselo provided comic relief in the thriller *Un extraño en la casa* (1966) and co-starred with Capulina in the spy spoof *Operación Carambola* (1967), both directed by Alfredo Zacarías and shot in Mexico, although they were allegedly Mexican-Venezuelan co-productions. Joselo had previously appeared in two (again, allegedly) Mexican-Venezuelan co-productions shot in Venezuela, *El raspado* (1964) and *Yo el gobernador* (1965), both directed by René Cardona Jr. (the cousin of Alfredo Zacarías) and both featuring a Mexican actress (Sonia Infante and Rosa María Vázquez, respectively). Joselo completed his





Mexican-connected film career (although he did make a few later Venezuelan films), in support of Amador Bendayán in *El reportero* (1966), another co-production, this time shot in Venezuela and directed by Rafael Baledón.

**Mauricio Walerstein:** one of the most prominent filmmakers of the resurgence of Venezuelan cinema in the 1970s and beyond was not Venezuelan at all, but a Mexican. Mauricio Walerstein (1945-2016) was the son of producer Gregorio Walerstein and entered the Mexican film industry on the production side in the mid-Sixties. He made several well-received dramas--*Las reglas del juego* and *Fin de fiesta*--then traveled to Venezuela to direct *Cuando quiere llorar no lloro*, a Mexican-Venezuelan co-production. Walerstein found himself in the midst of a new wave of Venezuelan filmmaking and worked there until 2000 before returning to Mexico--apparently due to his father's failing health--for the last decade and half of his life.

**And the rest...** Aldo Monti, best-known for playing Count Dracula in *El vampiro y el sexo* and *Santo y Blue Demon contra Drácula y el Hombre lobo*, was born in Italy but began his acting career in Venezuela, appearing in at least two feature films in the mid-1950s. Susana Dujim was chosen Miss World in 1955 and parlayed this into a brief acting career that included two Mexican movies--as "Susana Duin"--with Antonio Aguilar, *El justiciero vengador* and *El jinete enmascarado* (both 1960). As noted above, actress Lupita Ferrer had a significant career in Mexican films and television, although she also worked in her native land and in the USA.

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## RÓMULO GALLEGOS ADAPTATIONS

**Doña Bárbara**  
(CLASA Films, 1943)  
*Prod-Dir:* Fernando de Fuentes; *Scr*  
*Adapt/Dialog-Orig.*  
*Novel:* Rómulo Gallegos;  
*Photo:* Alex Phillips;  
*Music:* Francisco Domínguez; *Songs:*  
Prudencio Essa; *Prod*  
*Mgr:* Ricardo Beltri; *Asst*  
*Dir:* Américo Fernández;  
*Collab Dir:* Miguel M.



Delgado; *Film Ed:* Charles L. Kimball; *Art Dir:* Jesús Bracho; *Camera Op:* Rosalío Solano; *Sound:* Jesús González, Howard Randall

**Cast:** María Félix (*doña Bárbara*), Julián Soler (*Santos Luzardo*), María Elena Marqués (*Marisela Barquero*), Andrés Soler (*Lorenzo Barquero*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*Col. Pernalete*), Charles Rooner (*don Guillermo*), Agustín Isunza (*Juan Primito*), Miguel Inclán (*Melquiades*), Eduardo Arozamena (*Melesio Sandoval*), Antonio R. Frausto (*Antonio Sandoval*), Paco Astol (*Mujiquita*), Felipe Montoya (*Balbino Paiba*), Pedro Galindo (*Nieves*), Luis Jiménez Morán (*Pajarote*), Manuel Dondé (*Carmelito López*), Alfonso Bedoya (*peón*), Roberto Cañedo

**Notes:** "Doña Bárbara," published in 1929 (although the author continued revising it until 1954!), is Rómulo Gallegos' most famous novel, and has been adapted twice into feature films (1943 and 1998), as well as television and radio series. Gallegos himself worked on the screenplay of the 1943 version, which made María Félix a screen icon and gave her the nickname of "La Doña" that she bore for the rest of her life (and beyond).

*Doña Bárbara* is over 2 hours long, but while this length was not common in Mexican cinema of the era, it was not totally unusual: *Simón Bolívar* (1941) ran 160 minutes in its original version, and *Canaima* was nearly 2 hours long, for example.

Santos Luzardo returns to Altamira, the *hato* (ranch) his family owns on the plains of Venezuela. The neighbouring land has been taken over by doña Bárbara, a mysterious woman who has used various methods (not all of them legal) to extend her

dominion. As a teen, Bárbara was the cook on a small river boat. She fell in love with a young man, but one day when the captain was ashore, the sinister crew murdered Bárbara's



boyfriend and raped her. Since that time, she has used men for her own ends. For instance, she seduced Lorenzo Barquero, a distant relative of Santos, and tricked him into signing over most of his land. Lorenzo is now an alcoholic and lives in a shack with Marisela, his daughter by doña Bárbara.

Santos wins the respect of his men by taming a wild horse. He fires Balbino, his ranch administrator, who has been conspiring with doña Bárbara to change the demarcation line between the two properties (in her favour). Doña Bárbara tries to charm Santos into cooperating with her. She cuts out a newspaper photo of him and creates a small "altar" to cast a spell on him. [The film does not indicate she

actually has supernatural powers, although the viewer does hear her have a conversation with her invisible *socio* (partner). However, since the *socio* speaks in doña Bárbara's voice, it's suggested this is just her sub-conscious or something of the sort.] Santos occasionally finds himself captivated by his neighbour, but this is probably mostly due to her beauty and personality rather than a supernatural power.



[The film and especially the performance of María Félix are ambiguous regarding doña Bárbara's actual feelings about Santos. Does she really care for him, or is she simply trying to manipulate him for her own gain?]

Santos rejects doña Bárbara's overtures. He also criticises her for her mistreatment of Lorenzo and especially Marisela. Santos helps "civilise" the young woman, who has been completely ignored by her mother and has grown up wild and untutored. Marisela falls in love with Santos and confronts doña Bárbara when she learns her mother is "bewitching" him. Santos arrives in time to prevent doña Bárbara from strangling Marisela. Marisela and Lorenzo move out of Santos' home and back into their shack. Foreign visitor don Guillermo, who plies Lorenzo with liquor in an attempt to "buy" Marisela, gives Lorenzo a bottle of whisky and the older man dies.

Meanwhile, two of Santos' men are murdered and the valuable bird plumes they were taking to market are stolen. The culprit is Balbino. Doña Bárbara sends her henchman Melquiades to kill Santos, but the attempt fails and it's Melquiades who dies. He was shot by Santos' man Pajarote from ambush, but Santos feels responsible. Don Guillermo tries to convince doña Bárbara to accuse Santos of murder but she refuses to do so, blaming Balbino (who is also killed, on doña Bárbara's orders). Doña Bárbara decides to accept Santos' advice to leave and try to "find herself."



As the film concludes, Santos and Marisela will stay on the reunited Altamira property, now that doña Bárbara's domination has ended.

*Doña Bárbara* is a well-crafted film in many ways, although it is not perfect. Certainly a novel can have many, many characters and sub-plots, but a film adaptation doesn't necessarily have to include them all. The scenes in town with Mujiquita and Col. Pernaete are intended to show how doña Bárbara has co-opted the local government into acquiescing to her illegal actions, but they seem forced and unnecessary. Don Guillermo also feels somewhat intrusive. In the novel, this character--a foreigner in Venezuela for the hunting--is named "Mr. Danger" but the film refers to him only as "don Guillermo," and Charles Rooner's Germanic accent seems to suggest he's European. He serves some purpose in the plot, but is perhaps a bit out of place. Finally, the complex conclusion is slightly too complex: Balbino murders Santos' men, then Melquiades is sent to kill Santos (who's been in town to report the deaths of his employees, which the authorities attribute to an accident, then suggest one man killed his own brother), but is shot in a showdown with Santos (it's implied Pajarote actually fired the fatal shot; even so, Santos feels guilty and "confesses," and is overheard by don Guillermo, who tells doña Bárbara). Also, Lorenzo dies--indirectly caused by don Guillermo giving him a full bottle of liquor after Lorenzo had been living with Santos for an extended period of time and not drinking.

The performances are generally quite good overall. María Félix is excellent as the titular character, conveying a range of emotions with considerable subtlety. The script doesn't explain things such as (a) how she amassed such power and property other than using her "feminine wiles," which one suspects would have been rather shopworn after a few years, or (b) the circumstances of how she seduced Lorenzo, became pregnant by him, gave birth to Marisela and then dumped the child on her alcoholic ex-boyfriend. Still, these gaps don't diminish the fine job Félix turns in.

Everyone else is alright, although Agustín Isunza overdoes it a bit as the simple-minded Juan Primito and--as noted above--Charles Rooner seems to have stepped in from another film entirely. Julián Soler, María Elena Marqués, and Andrés Soler are solid pros.

The production values are satisfactory and the technical aspects are glossy and professional. Miguel M. Delgado gets an odd "collaboration" credit on the same screen as director Fernando de Fuentes. After years as an assistant director, Delgado had recently graduated to director status, but exactly what he did on *Doña Bárbara* is not known. Delgado is chiefly remembered as the house director on 33 Cantinflas features between the early Forties until the comedian's final film in 1981.





**La trepadora** [The Social Climber] (CLASA Films, 1944) *Prod:* Mauricio de la Serna; *Dir:* Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Scr Adapt-Orig Novel:* Rómulo Gallegos; *Photo:* Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music:* Francisco Domínguez; *Songs:* Alfonso Esparza Oteo, Chucho Monge, Francisco Domínguez; *Prod Chief:* Fidel Pizarro; *Asst Dir:* Moisés Delgado; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Camera Op:* Manuel Gómez Urquiza; *Makeup:* Sara Mateos; *Sound Dir:* H. E. Randall; *Dialog Rec:* Jesús González G.; *Music Rec:* Manuel Esperón

**Cast:** Sara García (*doña Carmelita Salcedo*), José Cibrián (*don Jaime del Casal; Nicolás del Casal*), Roberto Silva (*Hilario Guanipa*), Beatriz Aguirre (*Adelaida Salcedo*), María Elena Marqués (*Victoria Guanipa*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*Padre Jaramillo*), Luis Jiménez Morán (*Cmdte. Rosendo Zapata*), Paco Astol (*Taparita*), Mimí Derba (*doña Agueda*), Víctor Velázquez (*Carlos Olaizola*), Irma Torres (*Florencia*), Carlos Aguirre (*don Jaimito del Casal*), José Ortiz de Zárate (*Sr. Alcoy*), Ángel T. Sala (*Tío Guanipa #1*), José Goula (*Moraleda*), Conchita Carracedo (*Carlota Alcoy*), Lucila Molina (*Antonieta Alcoy*), Margarita Parlá (*Fernando del Casal*), Sergio Daneri (*Guillermo*), Elva Álvarez (*Eleanora del Casal*), Jorge Arriaga (*Tío Guanipa #2*), Joaquín Roche (*don Lisandro*), Guadalupe del Castillo (*Soledad's sister*), Lauro Benítez (*don Agustín*), María Luisa Corona (*Asunción*), Lidia Franco (*Tía Concha*), Conchita Gentil Arcos (*Cándida*), Rosario González Cuenca (*Dorila*), Rosa María Montés (*shop employee*), José Muñoz (*mayordomo*), Manuel Pozos (*elderly pedestrian*), Enriqueta Reza (*Soledad*), Humberto Rodríguez (*"Mella," Cándida's suitor*)

**Notes:** "La trepadora" was the second published novel by Rómulo Gallegos, and had been filmed in Venezuela in the silent era, written and co-directed by Gallegos himself. In 1944, Gallegos adapted his novel to the screen a second time, probably due to the enormous success of the previous year's *Doña Bárbara* (on which he had also worked).

*La trepadora* is an interesting and entertaining film, but is distinctly split into two separate stories, which makes it feel a bit odd. The first 45 minutes tell the tale of Hilario Guanipa and his courtship of Adelaida; the second half of the movie takes place nearly 20 years later and focuses on their daughter Victoria, the "social climber" of the title. Either plot could have been sufficient for an entire film, but as it stands both feel rather truncated.

[In "Contemporary Spanish-American Fiction" (1944), Jefferson Rea Spell writes "in *La Trepadora* two stories have been indifferently joined together," so it wasn't just the film version that had this issue.]

Although Beatriz Aguirre had previously been an extra in *La monja alférez*, she made her official acting debut here, playing the mother of María Elena Marqués (who was in real life only one year younger than Aguirre!). Marqués had been working in films for several years, notably in *Doña Bárbara*. Arturo Soto Rangel, Paco Astol and Luis Jiménez Morán also repeated from the *Doña Bárbara* cast--one wonders if Luis Jiménez Morán was himself Venezuelan, since 4 of his 6 screen roles in this era are in movies set in Venezuela (*Doña Bárbara*, *La trepadora*, *Los años han pasado*, and *Canaima*).

Roberto Silva (1904-1965) was the cousin of actor David Silva--some sources incorrectly indicate he was born in Brazil, but this is another Roberto Silva, known as the "Prince of the Samba" (there was also a "Roberto Silva" who worked as an art director in Mexican cinema and this was again, another guy)--and an opera singer (appearing with María Callas in the 1950s). His film career was confined to handful of movies in the mid-1940s and one later appearance in 1960's *Ojos tapatíos*. Silva is reminiscent of Jorge Negrete in both appearance and voice, although his 3 songs in *La trepadora* are pseudo-classical rather than popular or *rancheras* (curiously, María Elena Marqués also "sings" 3 songs and Irma Torres 1, although it's likely one or both of the performers was dubbed).



Hilario returns to his hometown after an absence of several years, buying & selling cattle and spending the proceeds on riotous living. He is the illegitimate son of don Jaime del Casal, owner of the coffee plantation Cantarrana. Don Jaime is ill and the plantation is suffering; his grown son Jaimito has no interest in taking over the family business, so Hilario agrees to manage the operation as long as don Jaime lives. Don Jaime's wife, daughters, and their friends the Salcedos arrive for a visit. Hilario falls in love



with Adelaida Salcedo, whom he'd met years before when they were both children.

Don Jaime dies and Jaimito installs his friend Olaizola as the administrator of Cantarrana, although he knows little about agriculture. Hilario conspires with Comandante Zapata to scare off the coffee pickers by pretending rebels are in the area, and is able to buy the plantation at a bargain price. He marries Adelaida. Years go by, and they have a daughter, Victoria.

Victoria is bored in the countryside, although she's happy when her father re-opens the manor house at Cantarrana. However, she is less pleased



with her father's womanising ways--he's having an affair with Florencia, the jealously-guarded daughter

(possibly granddaughter?) of Zapata. Victoria falls in love with Manuel del Casal, the handsome son of Jaimito, who visits Cantarrana with a hunting party.

Hilario and Adelaida agree that Victoria can go the city and live with Adelaida's mother doña Carmelita. In the city, Victoria promotes a romance with Manuel, although he's unofficially engaged to Carlota, one of the daughters of wealthy Sr. Alcoy. The Alcoys consider Victoria a social climber from the countryside. Sr. Alcoy offers to finance an electrical project proposed by Manuel, but Manuel



turns it down because he's going to break off his relationship with Carlota. He instead takes a job running an electrical plant in a remote part of the country, which saddens Victoria. She and doña Carmelita

return to Cantarrana, where Hilario has forsaken his philandering and reconciled with Adelaida. Manuel shows up and will marry Victoria.

The "social climbing" aspects of *La trepadora* are confined to a couple of brief scenes, and in fact most of the footage in the city scenes takes place in doña Carmelita's house, where she lives with her 5 sisters (?). There isn't even the expected scene in which the Alcoy daughters try to humiliate Victoria at a party or a dance or something--there's a brief scene in a hat shop, but Victoria mocks the Alcoys rather vice versa.

There are also some odd inclusions and exclusions. Hilario's bearded bandit uncles appear

early in the film, threaten him, but are defeated and locked up, never to appear again. The purpose of this seems to be simply to depict Hilario as a man of action, but there is little or no backstory for the Guanipa uncles (unlike in the novel), and the conclusion of the sequence is rather abrupt. On the other hand, Hilario's scheme to buy Cantarrana from Jaimito is only described verbally, not shown at all.

*La trepadora* doesn't seem especially "Venezuelan" in setting, plot, or characterisation. The coffee plantation of Cantarrana could easily have been a Mexican *hacienda* or *rancho*, and the story and relationships between the characters are not strongly based on Venezuelan themes or history. The costumes try to evoke Venezuela--the distinctive hats, white suits and tall boots worn by the upper-class males--and there are some vague Venezuelan accents and words used by some characters, but viewers unaware of the setting could be excused for thinking the film was set in Mexico or virtually anywhere in Latin America (except most films would try to add some "local flavour," even if it was stereotypical and hackneyed).

The performances are fine. José Cibrián plays a dual role as don Jaime and his grandson Manuel (I guess they thought it would be too much to have him play Jaime, Jaimito and Manuel--although Jaimito is a mildly unfavourable character, whereas Jaime and Manuel are decent sorts, so I guess having another performer play Jaimito was dramatically consistent) and is fine both times. Roberto Silva and Beatriz Aguirre, despite their relative inexperience, are satisfactory. Their "middle-age" makeup in the second half of the film is acceptable, although Silva is made up to appear perhaps a bit too old, whereas Aguirre more realistically appears to be in her forties. María Elena Marqués is generally good, animatedly rolling her eyes and pouting, which makes her cute and attractive. One is always entertained by Sara García, who plays middle-aged doña Carmelita (with teeth) and elderly doña Carmelita (*sans* teeth) in "kindly" mode (as opposed to her "feisty old lady" or "shrewish middle-aged lady" modes).



Production values are fine. Gilberto Martínez Solares directs without any particularly noticeable style, but most everything looks slick and professional. The television print I have seen of *La trepadora* has a number of odd shots inserted almost randomly throughout. The items of flowing water seem to indicate "the passage of time" and are generally used that way, but there are also inserts of

trees blowing in the wind and some other shots which crop up in the middle of scenes (or as transitions between scenes) and do not appear to convey any information or feeling. One wonders if the existing print of *La trepadora* had some technical issues and these shots were spliced in to cover up “bad” or missing footage.



**Canaima** (Filmex, 1945) Prod: Gregorio Walerstein; Dir-Scr: Juan Bustillo Oro; Orig. Novel: Rómulo Gallegos; Photo: Jack Draper; Music: Manuel Esperón; Prod Mgr: Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; Prod Chief: Manuel Rodríguez G.; Asst Dir: Julio Cahero; Film Ed: Rafael Portillo; Art Dir: Luis Moya; Camera Op: Álvaro González; Costumes: Roberto Miranda; Makeup: Fraustita [Dolores Camarillo]; Sound: Juan Manuel Rodríguez

**Cast:** Jorge Negrete (*Marcos Vargas*), Charito Granados (*Aracelis Vellorini*), Gloria Marín (*Maigualida Ladera*), Carlos López Moctezuma (*Col. José Francisco Ardavín*), Andrés Soler (*Count Giaffaro*), Bernardo San Cristobal (*Gabriel Ureña*), Alfredo Varela Jr. (*Arteaguita*), Gilberto González (*Sute Cúpira*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*don Manuel Ladera*), Alfonso Bedoya (*Cmdte. Pantoja aka Cholo Parima*), Luis G. Barreiro (*José Vellorini “El Malo”*), Vicente Padula (*Francisco Vellorini “El Bueno”*), June Byron\* (*Carmen Vellorini*), Carolina Barret (*Juanifacia*), María Luisa Serrano (*doña Herminia Vargas*), Luis Jiménez Morán (*rubber worker*), Salvador Quiroz (*henchman of Ardavín*), Chel López (*Cascareño*), Diana Montez\*, Manuel Dondé (*wagon driver*), Hernán Vera (*cantinerero*), Edmundo Espino (*Ardavín henchman*), Julio Ahuet (*rubber worker*), Juan García (*henchman of Cúpira*), Trío Los Calaveras, Fanny Schiller (*Gallineta*), Rafael Deyón, Jorge Arriaga (*rubber worker*), Eduardo Arozamena, Alejandro Ciangherotti, Julio Daneri (*employee*), Lidia Franco (*doña Luisa Ladera*), Ramón G. Larrea (*comandante*), Antonio Leo (*henchman of Cúpira*), Pedro León (*rubber worker*), Francisco Pando (*employee*), Manuel Roche (*Federico, rubber worker*), Aurora Ruiz (*servant*), Ceferina Silva (*henchman of Cúpira*), Ramón

Sánchez (*rubber worker*), Alfredo Varela Sr. (*Pedro, Vellorini employee*)

\*some sources indicate June Byron = Diana Montez

**Notes:** *Canaima* is quite entertaining and well-made, with an excellent cast and very good production values (most of the film was shot in the studio, including the “jungle” scenes). It also has some of the greatest character names in cinema: Maigualida, Sute Cúpira, Cholo Parima, Juanifacia, and Aracelis, to start with. The film was quite successful: in the first year of the Ariel Awards (1946), *Canaima* received 2 awards (Best Supporting Actor for Gilberto González and Best Supporting Actress for Carolina Barret), and two more nominations (Best Co-Star for Carlos Lopez Moctezuma and Best Supporting Actor for Alfonso Bedoya). Although not much actually happens in the film, there is a nice consistency of theme and atmosphere, and only a couple of songs (which aren’t too intrusive).



Marcos Vargas returns to his hometown of Ciudad Bolívar after spending several years studying in Trinidad. When his widowed mother urges him not to go into the jungle in search of gold or diamonds--as Count Giaffaro, a fellow traveler on the ship home, has urged him to do--Marcos agrees. Sra. Vargas has been warned by the unsavory Sute Cúpira (who claims he owes her late husband a debt) to keep Marcos out of danger--both of Marcos’ brothers died in the jungle, one of them shot by Cholo Parima. Marcos falls in love with Aracelis Vellorini, and decides to seize the opportunity to purchase her uncle don Manuel’s carting company, a “safe” job and one that will give him an excuse to be near Aracelis.

Marcos’ friend Gabriel has taken a job in the same town as a telegrapher, so he can be near his ex-girlfriend Maigualida, don Manuel’s daughter. Local villain Ardavín was rejected by Maigualida and has vowed to kill any man who courts her. Ardavín has also stolen all of don Manuel’s clients for his cartage business, with the exception of the Vellorini family. Marcos defeats



Ardavín in a game of dice and wins the clients back, but Ardavín welshes on the wager. Later, Ardavín's men murder don Manuel and burn all of the wagons he'd sold to Marcos.

Giaffaro, who repeatedly earns fortunes and then loses them, warns Marcos that "Canaima," the evil god of the jungle, eventually possesses everyone, causing them to become greedy and violent. Marcos kills Cholo Parima in a showdown, avenging his brother's death. He's arrested but later freed. Ardavín attempts to confront Marcos but loses his nerve and runs away, going insane. This frees Maigualida to marry Gabriel.

Marcos becomes the boss of a gang of *caucheros* (rubber harvesters). Sute Cúpira and his band of outlaws arrive to collect tribute, but once again the memory of the good deeds of Marcos' father towards a young Sute cause him to withdraw his demands. He even offers to take Marcos along when his gang sets out to attack a nearby village of indigenous people with the intention of raping the women, but Marcos refuses and warns Sute to leave the tribe alone. Sute and Marcos have a showdown and Sute is killed. Count Giaffaro thinks Marcos has now been fully possessed by the spirit of Canaima.

Marcos returns to town and asks Francisco, the father of Aracelis, for her hand in marriage. Francisco instead offers to give Marcos a lot of business if he'll stop seeing Aracelis. Offended, Marcos asks Aracelis to run away to the jungle with him, even though it means her disgrace, and she agrees. They vanish into the jungle and Marcos becomes a legend...



The conclusion of the film *Canaima* differs from the novel in several significant ways: in the book, Aracelis does not go off into the jungle with Marcos, instead marrying someone else (while Marcos marries an indigenous woman). Various characters and sub-plots are jettisoned, as would be expected in the adaptation from novel to screen (even though the film runs nearly 2 hours in length).

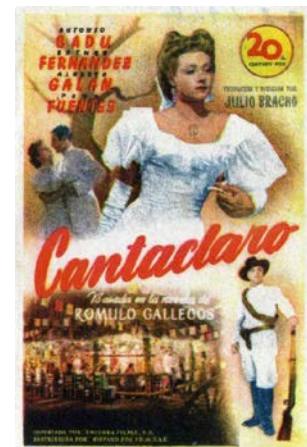
The characterisations in *Canaima* are interestingly complex, although not always clear or logical. Maigualida is depressed and repressed because

Ardavín has isolated her socially. Ardavín is a drunken coward and allows himself to be pushed around by his lower-class girlfriend Juanifacia. Aracelis has the annoying habit of criticising Marcos and his behaviour towards her, only to suddenly change her attitude and say "but I love you." Sute Cúpira's backstory is only hinted at in the film (apparently, as a boy he killed a man who was abusing his mother, and Sr. Vargas supported him), and he vacillates between threats and conciliatory attempts to be friends with Marcos. The Vellorini brothers include José "el Malo" (although he's a pleasant fellow) and Francisco "el Bueno" (who is mostly the opposite). Count Giaffaro is cynical, mystical and a bit sinister: he seems pleased when Marcos finally succumbs to the power of Canaima, killing Cholo Parima and Sute Cúpira. Perhaps the least interesting characters in the film are Gabriel--who doesn't have much to do, other than a brief scene where he accuses Marcos of trying to take Maigualida away from him--and Marcos' other friend Arteaguita, played by Alfredo Varela Jr. in one of his usual nebbishy roles.

Jorge Negrete is serious and subdued for most of the film, singing only briefly. He eschews the traditional Venezuelan *liqui liqui* outfit (Arteaguita does wear one), instead wearing a cowboy hat and a sort of military-style jacket; he also smokes cigars constantly. There isn't a lot of Venezuelan flavour to *Canaima* terms of plot, setting, accents, music or costumes. The performances of the cast are solid and the production design is impressive: the whole film has an air of unreality, of menace and dread. Bustillo Oro was capable of making either conventional, audience-pleasing "nostalgia" pictures and more eccentric efforts with touches of surrealism. *Canaima* falls more in the latter category than the former, and audiences expecting a typical Jorge Negrete-Gloria Marín romantic drama were probably shocked.



**Cantaclaro** (Prods. Interamericanas, 1945) *Exec Prod:* Jesús Cárdenas; *Prod:* Francis J. Alstock [uncredited]; *Dir:* Julio Bracho; *Scr Adapt:* Julio Bracho, José Revueltas, Jesús Cárdenas; *Orig. Novel:* Rómulo Gallegos; *Photo:* Gabriel Figueroa; *Music:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod Chief:* Alberto A. Ferrer; *Asst Dir:* Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed:* Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir:* Jesús Bracho; *Asst Art Dir:* Carlos González;





*SpecFX*: Max de Vega; *Music Rec*: B.J. Kroger; *Dialog Rec*: Rodolfo Solís; *Lighting*: Daniel López; *Camera Op*: Ignacio Romero; *Script Clerk*: Matilde Landeta; *Makeup*: Armando Meyer

**Cast**: Antonio Badú (*Florentino Coronado* “*Cantaclaro*”), Esther Fernández (*Rosángela*; *Ángela Rosa*), Alberto Galán (*Dr. Juan Crisóstomo Payara*), Paco Fuentes (*Juan Parao*), Fanny Schiller (*doña Nico Coronado*), Rafael Lanzetta (*Guariqueño*), Rafael Alcaide (*Carlos Jaramillo*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*don Aquilino*), Alejandro Ciangherotti (*Juan*), Enriqueta Reza (*Juan’s wife*), Maruja Grifell (*doctor’s servant*), Ángel T. Sala (*Col Buitrago*), Joaquín Coss (*don Tesoro*), Manolo Noriega (*man on doña Nico’s ranch*), Fernando Mendoza, Abraham Galán (*José Luis Coronado*), Gilberto González (*government official*), Salvador Quiroz (*man at fiesta*), Roberto Cañedo (*dinner guest*), José Ruvalcaba, Natalia Ortiz, Humberto Rodríguez (*doctor*), José Ignacio Rocha (*don Aquilino’s servant*)

**Notes**: according to Esther Fernández, she first met Francis J. Alstock in Hollywood in the early 1940s; he had previously worked for RKO Radio Pictures and then joined the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, becoming head of the Motion Picture section when Jock Whitney left. Alstock was thus the point man for U.S. government assistance to the Mexican film industry during the Second World War, and in 1943 he received the *Águila Azteca* medal from President Ávila Camacho for his services to Mexico in this period. One indication of the prestige of this award: the others



receiving it at this time were Walt Disney, MGM’s head Louis B. Mayer, and travelogue producer James A. FitzPatrick. Alstock

courted Fernández but she was not romantically interested in him (she later married Antonio Badú, with whom she co-starred in *Cantaclaro* and a number of other films). Alstock’s infatuation with Fernández may or may not have influenced his decision to star her in his first (and only) Mexican movie, *Cantaclaro* (but it probably did).

*Cantaclaro* has a stronger Venezuelan “feel” than *La trepadora* and *Canaima*, although certain aspects will still seem very familiar to Mexican film viewers (the *fiesta* sequence early in the film in particular is difficult to distinguish from any number of scenes in Mexican movies set in Veracruz or elsewhere). There are some vague political references to

rebellions and so on, as well as a number of scenes with clear socio-political content.

For instance, in one scene a government official asks Dr. Payara to change the death certificates he signed, since “yellow fever” is given as the cause of death. The government has eradicated yellow fever in Venezuela, the official says, so obviously no one could have died of it! Payara refuses and another, more compliant doctor will make the change. This scene goes nowhere, although it does (obliquely) explain why Payara eventually became a rebel general. At the film’s conclusion, he and Juan Parao take up their arms to rebel once more.

Similarly, Florentino and Rosángela reach a (literal) crossroads: one road leads to his mother’s ranch, the other to the rebellion. Florentino gives up his footloose life as wandering “Cantaclaro” and his chance to settle down with Rosángela, until Venezuela is a free country for all. This scene follows a sequence in which Florentino and Rosángela stop at a shabby hut in the middle of the desert where Florentino had previously visited the impoverished Juan and his wife. The hut is now empty, and another grave has joined that of Juan’s three dead children: his wife’s. Juan buried her, then left. This type of crushing poverty and income inequality is what Florentino hopes a rebellion will eradicate.

As the film begins, doña Nico and her son José Luis fear their ranch will be repossessed by Col. Buitrago, but the arrival of her other son Florentino with a herd of horses resolves this issue. Florentino, nicknamed “Cantaclaro” because of his fame as a singer, doesn’t wish to settle down: he’s searching for something. Setting off the next day for parts unknown, he meets Juan and his wife, then travels further into the desert, eventually reaching the ranch owned by Dr. Payara before collapsing. Payara’s story is later revealed in flashback:



Around 20 years earlier, Payara was engaged to Ángela Rosa. However, she was seduced and impregnated by her ex-boyfriend Jaramillo. Payara marries her anyway, and they move from the city to his isolated *hato* (ranch). However, Ángela Rosa commits suicide after the birth of her daughter. [It’s unclear if this was facilitated by Payara or not—he rather carelessly leaves a bottle of cyanide on the table within his wife’s reach!] Payara boards up the door to her room and raises Rosángela on the ranch. He also hangs Jaramillo.

Rosángela is jealously guarded by Guariqueño, who has two grudges against Florentino: first, Florentino and Rosángela are attracted to each other, and second, Florentino earlier defeated Guariqueño in



a *coplas* contest (sort of a rap battle where singers take turns composing rhyming couplets). Dr. Payara dislikes Florentino because the latter composed a ballad accusing him of murdering Jaramillo (without knowing the truth). Furthermore, because Rosángela is not directly related to him and because she's virtually identical to Ángela Rosa, Payara has a romantic interest in his own adopted "daughter." She doesn't reciprocate, but only because she thinks Payara is her biological father.

Florentino defeats Guariqueño (again!) at *coplas*; later, Guariqueño attempts to ambush Florentino and Rosángela as they prepare to depart, but Juan Parao kills him to save the lovers. As mentioned above, Florentino eventually parts ways with Rosángela, sending her to live on his mother's *hato* (ranch) while he fights for freedom, and Dr. Payara and José Parao also set off to join the rebellion.

[The film thus omits the last third of Gallegos' novel, which deals with a love triangle between Rosángela, Florentino, and his brother (who appears in the opening sequence of the film). There are some other changes as well, but this omission serves two purposes--the film is shorter, and ends on a more or less happy (if open-ended) note.]

There are some, possibly coincidental, similarities between *Cantaclaro* and *Apocalypse Now*--or, to be more chronologically accurate, Joseph Conrad's original novella "Heart of Darkness." Dr. Payara is a sort of Kurtz, who lives in isolation and *Cantaclaro* is the Marlow

(Willard in Coppola's film) character who encounters him in his remote "kingdom." The connection is enhanced by an early scene in the jungle (as opposed to the majority of the film, which takes place on the *llano*), where Payara appears to *Cantaclaro* and some other men as a mysterious, shadowy figure. On the other hand,



Payara does not play the role of colonial exploiter--although he rules his ranch with a firm hand, his political and social attitudes seem to be in favour of the "people" of Venezuela, rather than the oligarchs.

Payara is in many ways the most interesting character in *Cantaclaro*. Florentino, despite the film's title, is only sketchily portrayed as a standard footloose wanderer. Payara, on the other hand, is given an extensive backstory, some of which is depicted in a flashback, and has considerably more psychological depth. In flashback we see he is a man of principle, rejecting orders from the government to change the death certificates he's signed. Payara's motivation for marrying Ángela Rosa, pregnant by another man, is unclear: does he love her, or is he trying to avoid scandal? Later, he executes Jaramillo (personally hanging him), a "stain" on his reputation even as he tries to justify the act by claiming Jaramillo is a member of the corrupt ruling class. As noted above, Payara seems to have been complicit in his wife's suicide, then falls in love with Rosángela because she so strongly resembles her mother. He allows Florentino and Rosángela to leave--or at least he doesn't pursue them--and attempts to redeem himself by breaking his self-imposed exile and returning to the fight for freedom.

Juan Parao is another interesting character, although the fact that he's played by Paco Fuentes in blackface is in dubious taste, at least by current standards. Parao, apparently Payara's ranch administrator, is sympathetic throughout, and in at least one



instance specifically references racial prejudice which prevents him from becoming a leader of rebel troops, unlike "General" Payara. Fuentes won an Ariel Award as Best Supporting Actor in the 1947 *Arieles*. Fanny Schiller received the Best Supporting Actress prize for her fairly small role as Doña Nico. Also nominated were Antonio Badú (Best Actor), Alejandro Ciangherotti (Best Incidental Actor) and Enriqueta Reza (Best Incidental Actress), although they did not win.

Curiously, although Esther Fernández plays two roles--and does a good job of giving them each a distinct personality--she's not the center of attention in either part. The film does not make it clear if Ángela Rosa still loves Jaramillo and is only marrying Dr. Payara on the rebound. She resists Jaramillo's advances but more out of a sense of propriety than because she no longer loves him. Jaramillo dumps Ángela Rosa when he discovers

she's pregnant, and she decides to commit suicide rather than face her shame. Payara "rescues" her--at least temporarily--by going ahead with their wedding even though he knows she's pregnant by another man.

Rosángela grows up under the constant attention of her "father" and Guariqueño, both of whom fall in love with her. She doesn't have much personality otherwise, appearing dreamy and distracted most of the time. Does she really fall in love with Florentino, or just see him as a handsome stranger who can take her away from the isolated ranch where she's lived her entire life?

The technical aspects of *Cantaclaro* are good. Director Julio Bracho--who was nominated for a Best Direction Ariel but lost to Emilio Fernández for *Enamorada*--shot some of the film on location in the state of Veracruz but was unhappy with the results and reportedly re-used some of the jungle sets from *Canaima*. The script received an Ariel nomination as Best Adaptation, but one of the *Cantaclaro* scripters, José Revueltas, took the prize instead for his work on *La otra*. Manuel Esperón did win an Ariel for his music score.



**La doncella de piedra** [The Maid of Stone] (Filmadora Chapultepec-Galindo Hnos., 1955) *Prod:* Pedro Galindo, Jesús Galindo; *Dir-Scr:* Miguel M. Delgado; *Adapt:* Ramón Pérez P.; *Orig Novel:* Rómulo Gallegos ("Sobre la misma tierra"); *Photo:* Gabriel Figueroa; *Music:* Gustavo César Carreón [sic]; *Prod Mgr:* Porfirio Triay Peniche; *Prod Chief:* Ricardo Beltri; *Asst Dir:* Mario Llorca; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Francisco Marco Chilet; *Camera Op:* Ignacio Romero; *Lighting:* Daniel López; *Camera Asst:* Pablo Rios; *Makeup:* Armando Meyer; *Sound Dir:* Jesús González Gancy; *Dialog Rec:* Javier Mateos; *Re-Rec:* Galdino Samperio; Eastman Color; Cinemascope; *Studio:* Tepeyac

**Cast:** Elsa Aguirre (*Remota Montiel*), Víctor Manuel Mendoza (*Demetrio Montiel*), Armando Silvestre (*Jararayú*), José Elías Moreno (*don Adrián Gadea*), Alfonso Bedoya (*Chuachuaima*), Jorge

Martínez de Hoyos (*Airapúa*), Flor Silvestre (*Cantaralia Barroso*), Luis Aceves Castañeda (*Venancio Nava*), Beatriz Saavedra (*Marita*), Genaro de Alba (*Jararayú's friend*), Aurora Walker (*Palmira*), José T. Chávez [sic] (*Gadea's foreman*), Lupe Carriles (*Leonarda*), Elodia Hernández (*Dorila*), Rubén Galindo, Enendina Díaz de León (*bruja*), Lidia Franco & Leonor Gómez (*Guajira women*), Amalia Gama (*old woman*), Óscar Ortiz de Pinedo (*Dr. Rogelio Viñas*), Humberto Rodríguez (*employee of Viñas*), Aurora Ruiz (*Jararayú's mother*), Manuel Vergara "Manver" (*man at campfire*)

**Notes:** after making 4 Rómulo Gallegos adaptations in 3 years (1943-45), Mexican cinema waited a decade before returning to the author's work for a fifth and final film adaptation, *La doncella de piedra*. Based on a 1943 novel by Gallegos ("Sobre la misma tierra"), the film is handsomely produced--shot in Eastman Color and Cinemascope (one of 5 Cinemascope films made in Mexico in 1955) mostly on (unspecified) locations, with some interiors done at Estudios Tepeyac--and addresses a number of familiar Gallegos themes.

For instance, all 5 of the Mexican movies based on Gallegos' work are multi-generational tales, with parents and children playing major roles. The only partial exception is *Canaima* (although the mother of Marcos Vargas does appear), but even here the previous actions (although not shown) of the father and brothers of Marcos Vargas greatly influence his trajectory in the film itself. Like *Doña Bárbara* and *Cantaclaro*, *La doncella de piedra* contains a flashback sequence providing background information about the "parent" in the story. Additionally, the "inappropriate relationships" between parent and child seen in *Doña Bárbara* (mother and daughter love the same man), *Cantaclaro* ("father" lusts after his own daughter), and *La trepadora* (father disapproves of his daughter's romance with his own half-nephew) reappear in *La doncella de piedra*, as Demetrio Montiel very nearly rapes his own daughter.

*La doncella de piedra* is set on the Guajira Peninsula, a mostly desert area owned by Colombia and Venezuela, whereas *Doña Bárbara* and *Cantaclaro* were set in *Los Llanos* (the plains), *Canaima* in the Orinoco jungle, and *La trepadora* in the semi-mountainous coffee-growing region. *La doncella de piedra* is the only one of the Mexican Gallegos-adaptations that focuses on indigenous people.

Half of the Gallegos adaptations have female protagonists: *Doña Bárbara*, *La trepadora* (the second half of the film), and *La doncella de piedra*. Ironically, given the fame María Félix achieved for *Doña Bárbara*, Elsa Aguirre is much more central to *La doncella de piedra* than Félix was in her film. The



characters played by Julián Soler, María Elena Marqués, and Andrés Soler have no equivalents in the later movie, which is almost entirely focused on Aguirre's character. [One wonders if *La doncella de piedra* was intentionally chosen as the film's title (rather than the title of the original novel) because it subconsciously echoed *Doña Bárbara*?]

While waiting for Remota Montiel to arrive for the reading of her father's will, Dr. Viñas tells Adrián Gadea the story of her life (up to that point): famous



smuggler Demetrio Montiel, known as "El Diablo Contento," meets wealthy young widow Cantaralia, an indigenous woman in the Guajira region of Venezuela. They have an affair and Cantaralia gives birth to a daughter, Remota. After her mother's death, Remota

is raised by her aunts Palmira and Dorila, and courted by the handsome Jararayú, a member of the nearby Uriana tribe. When a drought kills off the family's cattle, the aunts decide Remota must--as the tribe's custom specifies--marry the man who offers the largest bride-price. Jararayú is too poor, and instead it is the elderly Chuachuaíma--who is rich and already has multiple wives--who wins the bidding, much to Remota's dismay.

Airapúa, the family's slave (who is also something of a wise man, and Remota's friend), tracks down Demetrio and tells him about Remota's dilemma. Although he's had nothing to do with his daughter for her entire life, Demetrio shows up at the wedding and abducts her. However, Demetrio is lustfully attracted to the beautiful Remota and only the intervention of



his assistant Venancio prevents him from raping her. [Remota doesn't know this until Venancio tells her, much later, at which

time she finally understands her father's parting words about her owing Venancio thanks for his actions.] Instead, Demetrio leaves his daughter with his sister and her husband in Maracaibo. From there, Remota goes to New York City to study, returning to Venezuela only after her father's death.

Remota learns her father left no fortune, although he is owed money from some of his business associates like the obnoxious Gadea, who makes a pass at Remota but denies his debt. However,

Remota has other plans: she is going to return to La Guajira and help improve the lives of her people. She discovers her aunts were persecuted by Chuachuaíma after the broken wedding, and have been living in poverty. They've been helped by Marita, a young woman forced into prostitution after being seduced by Demetrio. Most of the other members of the tribe are glad to see Remota, believing she is the incarnation of the "Maid of Stone" who will rescue them from poverty, but Leonarda says they're poor because Demetrio sold their husbands and sons into slavery. She vows to war against Remota but is forestalled by the arrival of Jararayú--he and his men will protect Remota (and he and Remota will rekindle their romance).



[In an interesting bit which demonstrates once again the influence Demetrio had on many of the characters in the film, Jararayú shows Remota a rifle that her father had given him. He says he went to work for Demetrio to earn enough money to pay Remota's bride-price. When Remota says the rifle was paid for with Demetrio's slavery money, Jararayú throws it down; she picks up and says "now I've given it to you, so it's alright."]



Remota learns her father only sold slaves to Gadea, and sets off to free them, accompanied solely by Venancio. Gadea and his men horribly mistreat, torture, and abuse the slaves (including Airapúa), who work in his sugar factory. Remota shows up and flirts with Gadea, learning the location of the slave cells. Gadea tries to rape her; Venancio intervenes but is shot by Gadea's foreman. However, Jararayú and his warriors appear (tipped off by Marita, who overheard Remota's plan), defeat Gadea (who is killed) and his men, and free the slaves. They will all return to the Guajira and rebuild their lives.

*La doncella de piedra* is a handsomely-mounted production (although it doesn't appear the

Cinemascope version is readily available today) with a sufficient number of extras and a reasonably exciting conclusion pitting Jararayú's men against Gadea's minions. In some ways, *La doncella de piedra* resembles a Western or action film more than it does a Gallegos melodrama; although the narrative is still relatively simple and straight-forward, there is less introspection and more spectacle and action.

The cast and performances are all fine. Elsa Aguirre looks amazing in Eastman Color and is appropriately sincere and impassioned in her role. Víctor Manuel Mendoza does a good job as the amoral Demetrio and José Elías Moreno is outrageously sleazy as Gadea. It's interesting to see Luis Aceves Castañeda playing a sympathetic character for a change. Jorge Martínez de Hoyos, Alfonso Bedoya, and Lupe Carriles (as the strident Leonarda) also stand out.



## MORE VENEZUELA IN MEXICAN CINEMA

**Llamas contra el viento** [Flames Against the Wind] (Prods. Rosas Priego, 1955) *Prod:* Alfonso Rosas Priego; *Assoc Prod:* Alfonso López



Michelsen; *Dir:* Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Adapt:* Edmundo Báez, Alfredo B. Crevenna; *Story:* Edmundo Báez; *Inspired by Poem by:* Porfirio Barba Jacob ("Canción de la Vida Profunda"); *Photo:* Jack Draper; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Mgr:* Mario

García Camberos; *Asst Dir:* Jesús Marín; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas P.; *Lighting:* Miguel Arana; *Camera Op:* Urbano Vázquez; *Makeup:* Felisa L. de Guevara; *Music/Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Dialog Rec:* Francisco Alcayde; Eastman Color; *Union:* STPC [Mexican-Colombian coproduction shot on location in Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela. ]

**Cast:** Ariadna Welter (*Alicia Sepúlveda*), Yolanda Varela (*Claudia Sepúlveda*), Anabelle Gutiérrez (*Laura*), Magda Guzmán (*Eugenio's wife*), Víctor Junco (*William Pérez Gómez*), Fernando Casanova (*Gustavo*), Raúl Ramírez (*Eugenio*), Félix González (*Alfonso*), Carmen Guasch, Lucho Tapia, Luis Espinosa, Samuel Levy, José Francisco Ortega,

Víctor Babino, Dana Orel, Conjunto Leonides Cajar, Trío Servando Díaz, Conjunto Delia Zapata Olivella

**Notes:** four of the five Mexican adaptations of Rómulo Gallegos were produced before he became president of Venezuela (for a brief period). *Llamas contra el viento* also has a connection with a future president of a Latin American company: the Colombian associate producer of the film, Alfonso López Michelsen, would serve as president of that country from 1974-78 (his father had served as president of Colombia twice, once in the 1930s and once in the 1940s).

Despite the "arty" title which suggests a serious drama, *Llamas contra el viento* is a familiar romantic drama about three airline stewardesses (*sobrecargo* although *azafata* seems more common today) on vacation, in search of romance. The multi-protagonist concept was not new, and in fact *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954) was a very recent, successful Hollywood example.

Alicia, her sister Claudia, and their roommate Laura all work as airline stewardesses in Mexico. Alicia wants true love, Claudia desires financial security, and Laura is a poetry fanatic. They take their annual vacation together, and agree on Venezuela as the destination. When they arrive in Caracas, each admits she had an ulterior motive: an attractive male airline passenger had given her his name and address there. They are shocked to discover it was the same man each time--William Pérez Gómez--who pretended to be exactly what each woman wanted.

They meet William and he is embarrassed to have his scheme exposed, but takes it in good humour, and offers to show the women around Caracas.

However, he spends most of time with Claudia, who agrees to travel with him to his house in Cuba,



in exchange for a diamond necklace. Meanwhile, Alicia meets the melancholy and mysterious Eugenio, and a relationship develops. Alfonso, a waiter at the hotel where the women are staying, is attracted to Laura and pretends to be a poet to impress her. He copies a poem from a book and claims he wrote it.

In Cuba, Claudia falls in love with William's boat captain Gustavo, but tells him she detests poverty and won't marry a poor man. [Earlier, it was revealed that Claudia and Alicia's mother was "beautiful and a true saint," but was never happy because she wasn't married to her daughters' father, and they grew up in



strained circumstances.] However, she turns down William's diamond necklace and returns to Caracas.

Alicia discovers Eugenio is married. He explains that his wife has a fatal illness and he was just seeking consolation when he approached Alicia. Alicia breaks off their relationship but receives a letter from Eugenio's wife inviting her to Panama. In Panama, Eugenio's wife (who doesn't seem to have a first name) says her husband hasn't loved her "like a wife" for some time. She asks Alicia to give Eugenio a letter she has written after she "goes."



Laura learns the truth about Alfonso and breaks up with him as well. The three women decide to cut short their vacation, but their flight home is diverted due to bad weather and they have to stay in Baranquilla, Colombia, for a time, then move on to Cartagena. Amazingly, in Baranquilla they join a tour group and Alfonso is the guide! He tries to reconcile with Laura but she rebuffs him until she sees him dancing with another woman during *carnaval* in Cartagena and gets jealous (the same thing happens to Alfonso). He tells her that he's the farthest thing from a poet: an engineering student. Laura decides being an engineer is practically the same as a poet and they will wed.

In another amazing coincidence, Alicia bumps into Eugenio on the street. He's wearing a mourning band: his wife has died. Alicia reads the letter: his late wife wrote "Make him happy, Alicia," and she decides to do so. Claudia, inspired by all of this romance, returns to Cuba and will marry Gustavo and have "more than six" children (his married brothers each have six).



Pleasant enough albeit predictable, *Llamas contra el viento* does have a few aspects of interest. Early in the film, the audience is tipped off that Eugenio is married. There were several directions the script could have gone in this regard: keep his secret until a future point, revealing it to the audience and Alicia at the same time, or--as the film does--let the audience in on (part of) the secret but keep Alicia ignorant. However, since Eugenio is clearly a good guy, there must be some good reason for his apparent philandering, and this is exposed fairly quickly (but

Alicia is not mollified), which sets up the rather fantastic situation of Eugenio's dying wife gifting him to her successor.

The weakest of the 3 protagonists is Laura, who is obsessed with poetry. That's it, that's her whole personality. Alicia and Claudia each have some backstory explanation for their particular goals in romance, but Laura just wants to marry a poet. This makes her seem weird and fanatic. If the script had made her obsession somewhat broader--say, she's hyper-romantic and influenced by romantic films, novels, and poems, and wants a story-book romance--it would have been more believable.

The character of William Pérez Gómez is a bit out of the ordinary for a film of this type. He actually is a wealthy businessman but otherwise he puts on various personalities to impress women and openly tries to use his wealth to buy their affection. This would qualify him as a villain in many melodramas, but



he's so cheerful and gentlemanly about it that he's easily forgiven. Even Claudia, who berates him for his phony "man of the world" attitude (using foreign phrases, for instance) and rejects his disinterested offer of a diamond ring as a wedding present, later admits he wasn't so bad and was at least open about what he wanted.

There is one bit of gratuitous *gringo*-bashing in the Baranquilla tour sequence. A woman asks Laura (in stilted Spanish) if it's true that the fortress was built using the blood of slaves in the mortar between the stones, and Laura snidely replies that the woman has nothing worry about, since "tourist blood" is too thin to be of use. The woman says "Oh, thank you" (in English), not realising she's been insulted. There is some very minor set-up of this in that the three stewardesses are world travelers and have a low opinion of tourists in general, but this doesn't excuse Laura's rudeness in this scene.

*Llamas contra el viento* was shot in five countries and each gets a differing treatment. The Mexican scenes are nothing special, just a set up for the rest of the plot. A large portion of the film was shot in Caracas, but there is almost literally no showcasing of the city (in one sequence William and Claudia drive on a very modern six-lane highway to a point overlooking the city, but the rest of the Caracas scenes take place in a modern hotel), or Venezuelan culture in general for that matter. There are no significant Venezuelan characters.



In Cuba, Claudia does a bit of sight-seeing in Havana, then goes to the town of Guanabo where she participates in a Cuban party at Gustavo's family home. Some Cuba music and references to Cuban food appear. [Amusingly, Gustavo's young nephews are fans of Mexico, asking Claudia if she knows Pedro Infante and using Mexican slang. In real life, Yolanda Varela had co-starred with Infante (and



Jorge Negrete) in *Dos tipos de cuidado*.]

In the Panama sequence, Alicia and Eugenio's wife visit the Panama canal, of course.

There's also one Panamanian musical number (briefly). The climax of the film takes place in Baranquilla and Cartagena, Colombia, and consumes nearly a fifth of the total running time. The tour sequence (at the Castillo San Felipe) is extremely prolonged, and then the *carnaval* sequences seem to go on forever. To be fair, these are obviously authentic and not stock footage, and the *cumbia* music is entertaining, but far more time and effort is spent showing Colombia than any of the other four countries (probably due to associate producer López Michelsen's input). [The poem that "inspired" the film--and portions of which are read aloud--was written by a Colombian poet, Porfirio Barba-Jacob, who spent considerable time in Mexico and died there in 1942.]

The performances are solid. All of the main performers were Mexican, with local actors taking only bit parts. At least one (William's Cuban butler) was obviously post-dubbed (although he does use *guagua* when referring to a bus, which is a nice localism).

Overall, *Llamas contra el viento* is pleasant enough, and the location shooting is a bit of a novelty.

[Note: the film was shot in Eastmancolor but the print available on YouTube is in black and white.]



**Martín Santos, el llanero** [Martín Santos, the Plainsman] (Cin. Grovas, 1960) *Exec Prod*: Adolfo Grovas; *Prod*: Jesús Grovas; *Dir-Scr*: Mauricio de la Serna; *Adapt/Story*: Fernando Galiana; *Photo*: Rosalfo Solano; *Music Dir*: Manuel Esperón; *Prod Chief*: José Luis Busto; *Prod Admin*: Adrián Grovas; *Asst Dir*: Valerio Olivo; *Film Ed*: Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir*: Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Décor*: Adalberto López; *Lighting*: Antonio Solano; *Camera Op*: Urbano Vázquez; *Makeup*: Concepción Mora; *Dialog Rec*: Nicolás de la Rosa; *Re-rec*:

Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed*: Teodulo Bustos; *Union*: STPC; Eastmancolor, Mexiscope

**Cast**: Miguel Aceves Mejía (*Martín Santos*), Lorena Velázquez (*Blanca*), Alfredo Sadel (*Rafael*

*Miranda*), Adilia Castillo (*doña Rosalba*), Luis Aragón (*Padre Gustavo*), José Dupeyrón (*Crisóstomo*), José Chávez T. (*Nicandro*), Armando Acosta (*man in cantina*), Manuel Dondé (*Manuel*), Humberto Dupeyrón (*Juliancito*), Hilda Vera



(*Tita*), Aurora Walker (*doña Eugenia*), Celia Tejeda, María de la Paz Cabello, Rosa Rodríguez, María Socorro Gancy; Ernesto Torrealba y su Conjunto Los Araucanos, Victorio Blanco (*party guest*), Inés Murillo (*wedding guest*)

**Notes**: this is a not very interesting melodrama with an overly familiar plot (García Riera identifies it as inspired by "Nada mas que todo un hombre," a 1916 novel by Miguel de Unamuno that's been filmed numerous times). I spent most of my time trying to figure which scenes (if any) were shot in Venezuela, based on the actors involved.

A printed title during the credits states "the interiors of the film were shot in the Casa de Piedra, Cuernavaca, Morelos." Does that mean all of the interiors? What about the exteriors? Although the film proper opens with a printed title reading "Somewhere in Venezuela," the exteriors could have very easily been shot in Mexico somewhere. Aside from a few stock shots of Caracas at the end of the movie, there's nothing to prove a single foot of the film was made anywhere other than Mexico. All of the technicians are Mexican film workers. While the cast does include a handful of Venezuelan performers--Alfredo Sadel, Adilia Castillo, Hilda Vera, and Ernest Torrealba and his musical group--it seems far more likely these people were brought to Mexico than to imagine bit players like Victorio Blanco, Armando Acosta, and Inés Murillo went to Venezuela to make a movie.

To be fair, *Martín Santos, el llanero* makes some effort to be "Venezuelan"--much of the music (if not the plentiful songs) has a Venezuelan feel (lots of harp), men wear the *liqui liqui* outfit, and various actors (but not all) try to speak with a Venezuelan

accent. We also get a frequent plot motif in cinema about Venezuela: references to oil wells. On the other hand, the village priest played by Luis Aragón is straight out of Mexican cinema, as is the hustling Tita (who sells clothes to the local women), even though she's played by Venezuelan Hilda Vera, and the *campesino* Nicandro (José Chávez Trowe, a Mexican if I ever saw one).

Martín Santos is a good-hearted rancher and horse



tamer on the llano of Venezuela. He loves Blanca, the young woman who runs her family's hacienda "La Casa Grande," but Blanca is not

interested in the working-class Martín. In turn, Martín is loved by Rosalba, who runs her own ranch and is clearly a better match for him, but he considers her just a friend. Blanca, meanwhile, is engaged to engineer Rafael, but her ranch is failing, she has spent too much money on luxuries, and Rafael must wait until he gets a promotion before he can think of marriage.

Martín tells Blanca he loves her and she laughs at him. When oil is discovered on Martín's property, he becomes rich overnight (buying a Cadillac and a large house). Martín makes Blanca an offer: he'll save her property, even keep it in her name, if she marries him. She's torn, but cannot bear to think of losing the *finca*. They wed, even though Blanca rejects Martín's attempts to win her love. During a charity *fiesta* to help poor children, Rafael returns and engages in a 3-way duel of *coplas* (improvised rhyming song verses, alternating between several people) with Martín and Rosalba. When Rafael

mocks Martín's loveless marriage in song, a fight nearly breaks out. Martín is called away to Caracas,



where Rosalba's little brother Juliancito is undergoing an operation to restore his ability to walk. Rafael asks Blanca to run away with him: she tells Martín if he leaves, she won't be there when he returns.

Julancito recovers and Martín comes back to the Casa Grande. Blanca is there: she says she realised she loves him after all, and they embrace.

Mauricio de la Serna worked as a writer and producer in Mexican cinema for more than a decade before he started directing in 1955; from then until the early 1960s he made a spate of films, most but not all melodramas, and then turned his attention to other areas before making one more movie in 1979. His work on *Martín Santos, el llanero* is technically competent but the film itself is bland and moves very slowly. It's not much fun to watch Miguel



Aceves Mejía mooning around, Lorena Velázquez acting snooty, Adilia Castillo pouting, etc. There's too much sappy sentimentality about Juliancito's illness and Martín's affection for him. [In a sad coincidence, actor Humberto Dupeyrón contracted multiple sclerosis and this eventually required him to use a wheelchair later in life and eventually become a resident of the Casa del Actor retirement facility.]

Most of the fault lies with the script, although not of all of the performances are that convincing, either. The production values are adequate, with nice locations and color photography. As noted, the music score is generally fine--the main title music is quite good, heavy on the harp--but the songs by Aceves Mejía, Castillo and Sadel aren't very memorable.

Decently made but mediocre entertainment.



### Alma llanera [Soul of the Plains]

(Panamerican Films, 1964) *Prod:* Manuel Zeceña Dieguez; *Dir-Scr:* Gilberto Martínez Solares; *Story:* Carlos E. Taboada, Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo:* Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Asst Dir:* José Luis Ortega; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Camera Op:* Ignacio Romero; *Lighting:* Gabriel Castro; *Dialog Rec:* José B. Carles; *Re-Rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; Eastman Color

**Cast:** Antonio Aguilar (*Juan Pablo Ureña*), Flor Silvestre (*Lucía*), Manuel Capetillo (*Ramiro Leyva*), Mauro Leyva, Manuel Dondé (*El Tuerto*), Juan José Laboriel (*Zampayo*), Augusto Monterroso (*Dr. Ramos*), Luis Herrera (*don Julio Landeros*), Jacobo Galindo C. & Hugo Batres (*Juan Pablo and Ramiro as boys*), Aide Andreu, Manuel José Arce y Valladares, Claudio Lanusa [sic], Ramón Aguirre, José Luis Ortega, Emilia Drumont, Luis Carles, Hugo Molina, Carlos Quintana, Juan Vicente Torrealba y sus Torrealberos

**Notes:** Manuel Zeceña Dieguez was a Guatemalan who became involved in the Mexican film industry in the mid-1950s as a writer and producer, then added directing to his portfolio in the Sixties and Seventies. Most of his films in the latter two decades were



"runaway" productions, shot outside of Mexico-- often in his native Guatemala--but featured Mexican film industry performers and technicians. This



occasionally caused some trouble with Mexican unions: Zeceña Dieguez had to pay an "indemnity" in order to get *Pecado* released in Mexico, since it was made (in Guatemala) without union permission.

*Alma llanera*, although set in Venezuela, was shot in both Venezuela and Guatemala. It's

rather difficult to ascertain which scenes were shot where, but one suspects that any scenes with Augusto Monterroso and Claudio Lanuza were filmed in Guatemala, the homeland of these performers. A printed title credits various properties as filming locations, but since the specific countries where these places were located aren't indicated, it's not much help.

Another printed title indicates "The story of this film is a fantasy set during the dawn of the exploitation of petroleum. It has nothing to do with the political, social or economic life of the Venezuela nation." The exact chronological setting of *Alma llanera* isn't clear. Petroleum began to be extracted commercially in Venezuela in the early 20th century, and it appears the film should be taking place no later than the 1920s, but there's no real indication of this. There are no obvious anachronisms (autos, telephones, etc.), but the costumes and hairstyles of the characters do not appear to be especially period-accurate.

*Alma llanera* is one of a handful of movies in the early 1960s in which Mexican leading men played Venezuelans: Antonio Aguilar here, Miguel Aceves Mejía in *Martín Santos, el llanero*, and Javier Solís in *El hombre de la furia* (aka *Más allá del Orinoco*), for instance. In *Alma llanera* Aguilar makes no particular effort at a Venezuelan accent, but he does wear the traditional *liqui liqui* outfit (a Nehru-styled jacket and pants) for much of the film, which is more than Jorge Negrete did in *Canaima*.

*Alma llanera* is, rather surprisingly, fairly nuanced in plot and characterisation, and has an unhappy ending. Antonio Aguilar sings a couple of songs but so does Juan José Laboriel, while Flor Silvestre gets



one and well-known Venezuelan composer-musician Juan Vicente Torrealaba and his group do one solo number and one accompanying Aguilar. However, unlike some of Aguilar's 1970s films, the music does not relegate the plot to mere interludes between songs.

Juan Pablo is a ranch owner in Venezuela. The recent discovery of petroleum has upset the established order of the country: many people are leaving their traditional agricultural work to labour in the oil fields, which upsets Juan Pablo because he has



taken his father's dying words to heart-- one must care for the earth, not exploit it. Early in the film, Juan Pablo visits a town which has been

ruined by the petroleum boom: a city official is drunk & asleep at his desk, a prostitute accosts Juan Pablo as he walks down a dirty street, the only crop buyer is surly and avaricious. However, Juan Pablo is reunited with his childhood friend Ramiro, who has abandoned agriculture and is now a roving gambler.

Juan Pablo falls in love with Lucía, the daughter of local businessman don Julio. She shares his love of the land. However, the petroleum industry continues to seduce away local workers. When oil is discovered on Juan Pablo's ranch, he refuses to exploit it, insisting that agriculture is the only moral use of the land and the petroleum boom has destroyed traditional Venezuelan values. This attitude upsets the residents of the area, including don Julio, Ramiro, and others, who realise their town is going to die because everyone is leaving to work elsewhere. Someone shoots at Juan Pablo from ambush but he is unhurt. Don Julio forbids Lucía to marry Juan Pablo but she elopes with him regardless.

After *El Tuerto*, Ramiro's bodyguard and constant companion, dies of malaria because the town doctor has emigrated due to the failing local economy, Ramiro and a group of townspeople burn Juan Pablo's crops. Ramiro kills



Zampayo, Juan Pablo's long-time employee and friend. Juan Pablo and Ramiro have a showdown and Ramiro is killed, but don Julio shoots and kills Juan Pablo. Lucía says she's pregnant and she will obey Juan Pablo's wishes: the oil on his ranch will not be exploited.



Although Juan Pablo is the film's protagonist, his anti-petroleum/pro-agriculture stance is not presented without some ambiguity. Although he's usually polite each time one of his workers or neighbours gives up farming for work in the oil fields, Juan Pablo clearly feels they're weak and are betraying the true Venezuelan spirit. In an argument with Ramiro, Juan Pablo essentially says his friend has become morally corrupt because he abandoned farming for the rootless life of a gambler; Ramiro says people have to seize opportunities, not passively sit back and be at the mercy of the many factors that can ruin farmers. An agent for an oil company tells Juan Pablo that exploiting petroleum will bring progress, including "schools, hospital, and businesses" to the region, but Juan Pablo rejects these in favour of tradition and simpler times. In one scene later on, Juan Pablo admits to Lucía that he's having doubts about his stand, but it's unclear if he would have ever changed, even if he hadn't been murdered by his own father-in-law.

The performances in *Alma llanera* are generally quite good. Antonio Aguilar and Manuel Capetillo play well off each other, without the usual *ranchera* comedy touches. Their aforementioned confrontation



in which they end their friendship is satisfying intense, and their final showdown--on horseback, in the middle of a river--is

different enough (although there are an awful lot of shots fired in the scene considering it's just two men, each with one pistol). It is nice to see Juan José Laboriel in a substantial, dignified role as well; as mentioned above, he even gets to sing two songs (including one he wrote). Luis Herrera is pretty good as don Julio, who goes from friendly to hostile over the course of the film, and Flor Silvestre is fine as well.

Production values are satisfactory, although the print I screened was over-scanned and rather dupey in appearance.

Generally more interesting than I expected.



**El hombre de la furia\*** [The Man of Fury]  
(Cin. Fermont--Prods. Fernando Orozco--Sono Films de Venezuela--Prods. Manuel de la Pedrosa, 1964)  
*Exec Prod:* Bonifacio Zaera; *Prod:* Manuel de la Pedrosa; *Dir:* Fernando Orozco; *Scr:* Fernando Orozco, Víctor Eberg, Manuel de la Pedrosa; *Story:* Fernando Orozco; *Photo:* J. Carlos Carbajal, Abigaíl Rojas; *Music Dir:* Carlos Tirado; *Prod Mgr:* Juan José Mata M., Berardo Echeverry; *Asst Dir:*

Humberto Gavaldón; *Film Ed:* José W. Bustos; *Décor:* Mirka Singer; *Camera Op:* Olivier Molina, Antonio Marcucci; *Makeup:* Antonio Federico; *Costumes:* Hugo Montes; *Dialog Rec:* Juan Montclud; *Re-Rec:* Salvador Topete; *Sound Ed:* Teodulo Bustos V.; *Unions:* SUTIC (Venezuela), STPC (Mexico)

\*aka *Más allá del Orinoco*

**Cast:** Javier Solís (*Alberto Mendoza*), Dacia González (*Mayra*), Fernando Soto "Mantequilla"

(*Zorrillo*), Cuco Sánchez (*Canario*), Guillermo Gálvez (*Ramón del Conde*), Miguel Ángel Landa (*Ramoncito*), Ignacio Navarro (*Balarassa*), William Gómez (*young Alberto*), Ildemaro García, Ramón Belmonte, Flor



Jury, Rafael Gómez, Alba de Huaman, Rudy Hernández, Julio Páez, Ramoncito Mata, Emilio Santos, Raul Sáenz Flores, Chelique Sarabia y su Conjunto, Rafael Montaña y su Group de Baile

**Notes:** Fernando Orozco was a Mexican who produced, directed, and wrote (not all at the same time) a number of films from the 1950s until the mid-1980s, mostly on the margins of the Mexican film industry. According to García Riera, Fernando Orozco went to Colombia in the early Fifties to promote a filmmaking industry there, but was unsuccessful and was forced to leave due to legal issues. After a handful of production credits in the late 1950s, Orozco's name -- or his pseudonym "Fernny Morosco"-- begins to show up in the next decade and in the 1970s as a screenwriter, director and producer. Virtually all of these films, while officially Mexican co-productions due to Orozco's participation, were shot outside of Mexico (Colombia, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, even Europe).

Orozco teamed with Cuban expatriate filmmaker Manuel de la Pedrosa (de la Pedrosa was Spanish but had worked in the Cuban film industry throughout the 1950s) to make *El hombre de la furia* and *Loco por ellas* in Venezuela in 1964-5, then went back to Colombia in 1966 for *Requiem por un canalla*. Víctor Eberg, who had collaborated on the scripts of Orozco's two Venezuelan efforts, returned in this capacity and Guillermo Gálvez (the villain in *El hombre de la furia*) produced.

*El hombre de la furia* is not really a good film, but it is strange and therefore sometimes entertaining. Production values are minimal: virtually everything seems to have been shot on location, which is positive in some regards (because it makes things look authentic) but negative when it comes to



maintaining strict control of the technical aspects such as cinematography and sound recording.

Young Alberto is the only survivor of an attack on his family's home by don Ramón and his henchmen. He's raised by three good-hearted cattle thieves: Balarassa (who teaches Alberto to shoot and to use a lasso), Canario (who instructs the boy in singing and playing the guitar), and Zorrillo, a Mexican (who teaches Alberto to read and write). When Balarassa and Canario are arrested, Zorrillo and Alberto flee to another part of the country. Time passes. The now adult Alberto reads a newspaper article about don Ramón, and decides to go home and settle accounts.

Don Ramón has a son, Ramoncito, who is selfish, greedy, and slightly psychopathic (he likes strangling chickens). Both father and son are attracted to Mayra, the lovely daughter of their neighbour don Manuel. Manuel owes Ramón a considerable sum of money, and Ramón is using this to pressure him into allowing him to marry Mayra. To increase the strain on Manuel, Ramón sends his men to steal the other man's cattle, but Alberto happens upon the raid and defeats the rustlers. One of the men, unknown to Alberto, is his old mentor Balarassa, now working for don Ramón.



Mayra thanks Alberto for his actions. She's able to repay the favour soon enough: Alberto goes to don Ramón's *hacienda* to confront his father's murderer, but is beaten up by Ramón's men, dragged behind a horse, then tied upside down over a river: when the river rises, the piranhas will eat him, head first!

Mayra has been swimming nearby (in a river full of alligators and piranhas?) and Ramoncito steals her clothes (she's still wearing a fairly modest outfit of underwear). Walking home, Mayra spots Alberto and rescues him.

Alberto and Zorrillo are reunited with Canario, who lives in a nearby town. Later, Balarassa assaults Alberto on don Ramón's orders, but Alberto turns the tables and Balarassa realises it's his foster son. Alberto and Ramoncito have a fight outside Mayra's bedroom window (Ramoncito had unwittingly hired Alberto to serenade her on his behalf!). To finish off the situation, Alberto lets Ramón and Ramoncito think Mayra will be alone in his old house that night. Both Ramón and Ramoncito show up hoping to take advantage of the young woman (who isn't even there): father and son struggle and Ramoncito is killed. Alberto locks Ramón in the house and it catches fire (accidentally). Ramón dies in the conflagration. Alberto marries Mayra and all is well.

Although the basic plot of *El hombre de la furia* is fairly conventional, some odd touches add entertainment value, although the script never goes quite far enough. Ramoncito gets a fairly strong build-up as a psycho (even as a child he likes to kill those chickens; he also cheats at cards), and is frequently and openly in conflict with his father, then later turns into a more or less normal suitor for Mayra. Don Ramón is a stereotypical *cacique* without a lot of depth (and Guillermo Gálvez almost literally shouting most of his lines doesn't add much subtlety to the portrayal). The elaborate death-trap that Alberto's opponents create seems like ludicrous over-kill: why not just chuck Alberto in the river for alligators and/or piranhas to eat? And, like every villain everywhere, they put Alberto in the trap and then leave without waiting to see if he's going to die. The conclusion is also not quite satisfying: Alberto doesn't have a final showdown with Ramoncito, and his confrontation with don Ramón merely results in the villain being locked in a house (he starts the fire himself, accidentally, and by the time Alberto notices it, it's too late to save don Ramón).



The performances are satisfactory, the production values adequate. Given that this is a Javier Solís vehicle and features Cuco Sánchez, a plethora of songs is to be expected; none are really memorable, however.



The plot has little that is specifically “Venezuelan” about it, but at least the settings and costumes seem authentic. *El hombre de la furia* is generally mediocre but the Venezuelan aspect makes it slightly more interesting than it would have been if it had been set and shot in Mexico (where it would have been just one of scores of such rural melodramas).

Trivia note: in one scene, don Ramón slips and offers his men a reward in “pesos” rather than *bolívares*, which is the Venezuelan currency.



**Loco por ellas** [Crazy About Women] (Cin. Fermont--Prods. Fernando Orozco--Sono Films de Venezuela, 1965) *Exec Prod:* Bonifacio Zaera; *Prod:* Fernando Orozco; *Dir:* Manuel de la Pedrosa; *Scr:* Manuel de la Pedrosa, Víctor Eberg, Fernando Orozco; *Story:* Manuel de la Pedrosa; *Photo:* Carlos Carbajal; *Music:* Carlos Tirado; *Prod Mgr:* Juan J. Mata Mata; *Asst Dir:* Humberto Gabaldón; *Film Ed:* José Bustos; *Camera Op:* Tony Rodríguez; *Makeup:* Antonio Federico; *Sound Engin:* Galdino Samperio (Mexico), Juan Monclus (Venezuela); *Sound Ed:* Teódulo Bustos; *Titles:* Carlos Prino; *Union:* SUTIC

**Cast:** Tin Tan [Germán Valdés] (*Ángel Macías*; *Alberto Macías*; *Papá Macías*), Lorena Velázquez (*Elena Rosas*), Marcelo Chávez (*Marcelo*), Néstor Zavarce (*Antonio*), Evelyn Suffront (*Yolanda*), Chichi Caldera (*singer*), Chelique Sarabia y su Conjunto, Hugo Montes, Josefina Briceño, Rhia Grecia, María de la Soledad Gómez, Alba de Huaman, Julián H. Alemán, Carmen Sandía, Alfredo Jiménez, Orlando Rivas, Santos Camargo, Rosita Rodríguez, María Teresita Quiroga, Mechita Marcano, José D'Yator, José Becerra Colmenares (*announcer*), Ballet de Víctor Álvarez y Ada Zanetti

**Notes:** Tin Tan's career as a solo star began to go downhill rather quickly in the 1960s. Although he continued to appear in films until his death in 1973

(aged only 57), the comic actor split his time between lower-level star vehicles (such as *Tin Tan el hombre mono*) and pictures in which he co-starred with others (Miguel Aceves Mejía in *Viva Chihuahua*, Javier Solís in *Fuerte, audaz y valiente*, Enrique Guzmán in *Especialista en chamacas*, and so on). *Loco por ellas* is in the first category, but stands out because it was shot in Venezuela (and Puerto Rico) and has relatively few Mexicans in the cast or crew.

The same team that made *El hombre de la furia* in July 1964 returned in May 1965 to produce *Loco por ellas*. Manuel de la Pedrosa and Fernando Orozco switched roles this time, with de la Pedrosa handling the direction and Orozco taking the producer's chair.

Manuel de la Pedrosa (1915-1981? or 1993?) was a Spaniard who moved to Cuba in the 1950s and directed some films there, pre-Castro. Based on sketchy info, it seems de la Pedrosa worked briefly under the Castro regime but left when the film industry was nationalised. After kicking around Latin America for a few years--during which period he directed *Loco por ellas*--de la Pedrosa eventually returned to Spain and made documentaries and shorts.

*Loco por ellas* is a generally entertaining picture, mostly due to Tin Tan's antics. The budget was certainly low but this doesn't seem to have really harmed the film much. There are even a few surprising touches, such as a partial mockup of an airplane, showing (from the outside) Tin Tan's character and his accomplices flying. Some scenes were almost certainly shot in actual hotels and TV studios, but it's possible a few "sets" were used (or at least dressed to look appropriate).



The credits are animated (by Carlos Prino, a prolific TV commercial animator), a nice touch. The credits don't appear until 27 minutes have elapsed! Tin Tan is flying to Venezuela in an airliner and is given a “Popeye” comic book to read; as he stares at the pages, the credits begin and periodically cut back to closeups of his astonished face.

Popular singer Ángel Macías winds up in a Puerto Rican hospital with two broken legs, to the dismay of



his manager Marcelo and his girlfriend Elena. If Ángel doesn't fulfill his contract to appear in Caracas, he'll have to pay a huge financial penalty. The solution? Have Ángel's twin brother Alberto impersonate him, lip-syncing to recorded "playbacks." There are two problems. First, Alberto



is a recluse who's spent 30 years studying religion "by correspondence" (Ángel says "I don't even know what religion it is."). Second, when Alberto sees an attractive

woman, he has an "attack," twitching, jumping around, making strange noises, and so on. However, Alberto agrees to help his brother and the second problem is temporarily resolved by having him wear a pair of glasses with the lenses painted black.

Just before Alberto, Elena and Marcelo depart for Venezuela, Marcelo is shocked to learn Ángel has been faking his injuries. He plans to go to Venezuela and steal the world's largest diamond, using his brother as an alibi. Ángel has long been leading a double life as a singer and a criminal; Marcelo doesn't approve, but has no say in the matter.

In Caracas, Alberto successfully impersonates Ángel, but occasionally peeks at women and has several of his attacks. He discovers that if he kisses a woman the attacks stop. Meanwhile, Ángel and his gang fly to Caracas in a light plane. There is some time-wasting footage of Alberto and Ángel in the same hotel and the subsequent (very mild) confusion between them, but this is quite low-key.

[It should be noted that there are no special effects used to show both Alberto and Ángel in the same shot. The illusion (such as it is) of twins is accomplished by alternating shots and in one or two instances using a body double who always keeps his face turned away from the camera.]

The night of the big show, Ángel and his men appear on a yacht and rob the "world's largest diamond" from its owner. However, as they make their getaway, their plane has engine trouble. [The yacht is supposedly "on the high seas" but it's not explained how Ángel and the gang get there--he isn't flying a seaplane.] At the theatre, Alberto has fallen asleep; when he wakes up, he says he dreamed his brother was in an airplane crash.

When it comes time for Alberto to sing, Marcelo and Elena botch the playback (very clumsily trying to operate a reel-to-reel tape recorder) but Alberto has been possessed by his brother's spirit and is able to perform flawlessly. [It's never explained how--immediately upon arrival in Caracas--Alberto was

able to participate in an improvisational exchange of *coplas* with Antonio, and more than hold his own.] After the show, Alberto confesses he loves Elena, and his brother Ángel's spirit pushes them together, approving of the match.

*Loco por ellas* has some gaps in logic, particularly around Alberto's "affliction"-- only "attractive women" make him act strangely, but his "attacks" seem to be triggered chiefly by looking at their legs. Also, he's constantly peeking over his dark glasses, and yet only goes wild a few times in the film (additionally, sometimes the glasses seem to make him effectively blind, while at other times he negotiates walking and other activities with ease, despite the glasses).

The film presents Ángel as a very famous celebrity singer, actor, etc., referencing movies, recordings, and concerts. This raises the question: why and how does he find the time to be an international jewel thief? There is no indication he's ever used Alberto as an alibi before. Furthermore, Ángel makes it clear his life of crime is not just because he wants thrills, he openly states that the diamond will be sold and bring him a lot of money-- wasn't he making enough as a superstar singer?

*Loco por ellas* has an extremely minor sub-plot involving two Venezuelan singers, Antonio and Yolanda, who escort Alberto, Elena and Marcelo around. Yolanda fears Antonio is falling for Elena and he thinks Yolanda might be interested in "Ángel," but this never develops into a serious conflict and is easily resolved.



For some reason, even though *Loco por ellas* is over-loaded with songs (from Tin Tan, Zavarce, Suffront, and Chichi Caldera), Lorena Velázquez's character is also supposed to be a singer and lip-syncs an entire song during the final concert/TV show. It doesn't even sound like her and there's no real narrative reason why she would be a singer, but perhaps Velázquez wanted something to do other than react to Tin Tan's antics.

The performances are satisfactory overall. Tin Tan makes sporadic attempts to distinguish between Ángel and Alberto, sometimes successfully (he also has a cameo as their aged, paralysed father, who has no dialogue). Lorena Velázquez and Marcelo Chávez were solid pros, and both Néstor Zavarce and Evelyn Suffront are natural and professional. The name of the performer who plays the Venezuelan impresario is not known--he has little to do (although

he's on-screen quite a bit), and based on the resemblance to the producer's caricature in the opening credits, I wonder if this might be Fernando Orozco?

In general, *Loco por ellas* is inoffensive and mildly amusing, but the Venezuelan setting and performers make it fairly interesting to watch.



**OK Cleopatra\*** (Películas Latinoamericanas-- Productora Fílmica Re-Al, 1970) *Assoc Prod:* Amador Bendayán, Alberto López; *Dir:* René Cardona Jr.; *Adapt:* Fernando Galiana; *Story:* René Cardona Jr.; *Photo:* Minervino Rojas; *Music:* Gustavo César Carrión; *Prod Chief:* Juan Manuel Polo; *Prod Mgr:* Luis Quintanilla R.; *Asst Dir:* Pedro López; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Asst Ed:* Ramón Aupart; *Technical Coord:* Manuel Flores; *Lighting:* Luis Ramos Urquidi; *Camera Asst:* Manuel Jiménez; *2d Camera:* Oswaldo Pino; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz; *Dubbing:* Bolívar Films; *Music/Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez

\*[on the film the title is *OK Cleopatra* but some publicity materials show *O.K. Cleopatra* instead. García Riera suggests the title was inspired by *O.K. Nerone*, a 1951 Italian comedy, although there is no plot relationship between the two movies.]

**Cast:** Enrique Guzmán (*Enrique Moreno*), Enrique Rambal (*Bernardo Mendoza*), Ángel Garasa (*Lorenzo*), Amador Bendayán (*Amador*), Lucy Gallardo (*doña Bárbara Piamonte*), Lupita Ferrer (*Lupita Mendoza*), Heidy Blue (*Patricia Mendoza*), Raúl Amundaray (*Rodolfo Piamonte*), Toco Gómez (*policeman*), Guillermo González (*Polito*), César Granados, Kiko Mendive (*drunk*), María Antonieta Aponte

**Notes:** *OK Cleopatra* is a mildly entertaining fantasy-comedy shot in Venezuela, although there's no attempt to include any "typical" Venezuelan

aspects (not even music--Enrique Guzmán sings a handful of generic pop songs). Instead, everything is more or less "cosmopolitan" and could easily have taken place in Mexico or any other Latin American country. Even the general "look" of the film is more like a standard Mexican movie of the era--slick & polished--compared to roughly contemporary films like *Cuando quiero llorar no lloro* or *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* that have a more "indie" feel (by the 1980s and beyond, as the industry matured, Venezuelan films took on the same sort of slick visual style as everywhere else).

The concept of a sentient, talking animal was not a new one. "Francis the Talking Mule" was a novel and film series, and "Mister Ed" was a popular U.S. television program (also based on a literary property). *OK Cleopatra* was not even the first Mexican movie about a talking horse: *El caballo que canta* (1963) stars Luis Aguilar who makes his living by singing--only it's his horse who really sings while Aguilar just moves his lips! (One would think a singing horse would be a

bigger attraction than a singing human) *OK Cleopatra* does exactly the same sort of thing with the "talking horse"



gimmick as its predecessors: the horse only talks to Amador, but occasionally makes snide remarks that are overheard by others, forcing Amador to cover up. Late in the film, the horse gets Amador in trouble with a policeman, a variation on the old Abbott & Costello bit where Abbott's comments cause Costello to run afoul of an authority figure or a bully.

The film has an interesting if not very well realised "origin story" for the talking horse. Amador's uncle, horse trainer Lorenzo, has a fatal heart attack. He'd previously stated (somewhat illogically) that if the horse Cleopatra doesn't win a race while he's alive, he'll come back after death to make sure it happens. This occurs, as Lorenzo is reincarnated in Cleopatra's body. Amador asks if this (reincarnation) is usual, and Lorenzo says he was given "special permission" (from God, presumably), apparently to square the plot premise with Catholic theology (which doesn't recognise reincarnation).

Part of the plot revolves around Lorenzo/Cleopatra's fear of stud horse Burton (get it? Richard Burton, re: Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra?). Lorenzo tells Amador he could have been reincarnated in a male horse in England, but he chose Cleopatra because he wanted to be closer to Amador. [This, however, contradicts his earlier reason for

reincarnation--to help Cleopatra win a race.] So there's a clear implication that the male Lorenzo in a female (horse) body fears being "raped" by another male (horse).

There is one very curious sequence where Lorenzo/Cleopatra has to frantically flee from Burton in a large fenced area--both horses are running at full speed, and one wonders how this was done (some of it is editing, but clearly they are running). At the end of the film, it's revealed that Lorenzo/Cleopatra was "caught" by Burton, with the result being the colt



"Burton Jr."

*OK Cleopatra* has about 4 alternating sub-plots. Wealthy Venezuelan horse breeder Bernardo is a widower with two grown daughters, Lupita and Patricia. 25 years earlier, Bárbara jilted him and married another man; they had a son, Rodolfo, but Bárbara's husband later died. Bernardo and Bárbara are rival horse breeders; she wants to buy some land from him for her business, but he refuses out of spite.

Rodolfo, a petroleum engineer, falls in love with Patricia but doesn't tell her that he's doña Bárbara's son. Meanwhile, doña Bárbara hires singer Enrique--a compulsive gambler who's deeply in debt--to court Lupita, planning to arrange for them to "break up" in exchange for Bernardo's land.

Finally, Bernardo's horse trainer Lorenzo has been unable to win a race with Cleopatra. Lorenzo dies and is reincarnated in the horse, but Bernardo decides to retire the filly and instead breed her. He also fires Lorenzo's nephew Amador as a jockey, but allows him to stay on as a stable hand. Lorenzo and Amador come up with a plan: Amador "abducts" Cleopatra to force Bernardo to allow the horse to race one more time. They are caught by the police but Bernardo, impressed by Amador's sincerity, agrees to one last race.

Meanwhile, Enrique falls in love with Lupita for real and returns doña Bárbara's money. Bernardo learns of the scheme and thinks Rodolfo's romance with Patricia was also part of Bárbara's plot.

In the end, Amador and Lorenzo/Cleopatra win the race. Lorenzo goes to heaven, leaving Cleopatra

and her colt in Amador's care. Enrique and Lupita, Rodolfo and Patricia, and Bernardo and Bárbara all reconcile and a triple wedding is in their future.

*OK Cleopatra* contains only very mild humour at best. Enrique Guzmán plays a nervous, awkward character (not funny), Amador Bendayán is mostly an earnest straight man, leaving Enrique Rambal with most of the humour burden, which is derived chiefly from his personality (as opposed to actual jokes or slapstick). Two local comics appear in two scenes each. Toco Gómez is a policeman who uses his sense of smell to interrogate people; in his second scene, he



arrests Amador and Lorenzo/Cleopatra, who have traded Bernardo's truck for a cart but are going too slowly down a highway. Guillermo González plays Patricia's putative, prudish boyfriend (she doesn't care for him but her father agreed to an engagement) who says "Once we're married you'll understand my way of thinking"; he breaks their engagement when Rodolfo tells a (false) story of skinny-dipping with Patricia in Maracaibo.



Emilio García Riera's review of *OK Cleopatra* mentions product placement, but this does not seem excessive today. The Caracas Hilton and La Rinconada racetrack receive a lot of attention due to the amount of footage shot there, and Royal cigarettes are promoted twice, but that's about it (unless you count the two giant white Cadillacs driven by Bernardo and Lupita).

The performances in *OK Cleopatra* are fine: everyone is a pro and handles their roles effectively. Although they maintained individual careers, Enrique Rambal and his wife Lucy Gallardo appeared together in more than a dozen movies in the 60s and 70s, usually playing mature couples (as they do here). Another name of interest is Heidy Blue (sometimes billed as Hedi, Heidi or Hedy), perhaps best-known



as El Santo's love interest in *Santo y Blue Demon contra los monstruos*. She's almost unrecognisable here with brown hair, but handles her role in a satisfactory manner. One suspects she may have

been post-dubbed, along with some others, given that Bolívar Films get a "dubbing" credit (or perhaps



that's just for Garasa's voice when he's a horse?). Rambal, Bendayán, Gallardo, Guzmán, and Garasa seem to have done their own voices; I'm not sure about Ferrer, Amundaray or the other Venezuelans in the cast (although Ferrer had already been working in Mexican cinema and television for a number of years).

Trivia note: the director of photography on *OK Cleopatra* was Minervino Rojas, a Cuban cinematographer who went into exile in the 1960s and spent many years working in Latin American cinema (and occasionally on independent English-language features in the USA as well, cf *Super Fly*, *The Irish Whiskey Rebellion*, and *Journey Through Rosebud*). He worked on a number of Mexican films and co-productions shot outside of Mexico, but apparently either couldn't get into the union in Mexico or chose not to live there. His work in *OK Cleopatra* is slick and professional. [He shouldn't be confused with the Cuban baseball player of the same name.] The music score is by Gustavo César Carrión and--as usual for his work in this era--is full of jaunty organ music.

In sum, *OK Cleopatra* is nothing special, but it's reasonably entertaining.



### **Cuando quiero llorar no lloro** [When I Want to Cry, I Don't Cry] (Neocine--

Promociones Aristos, 1972) *Exec Prod*: Abigaíl Rojas; *Dir*: Mauricio Walerstein; *Scr*: Román Chabaud, Mauricio Walerstein; *Orig Novel*: Miguel Otero Silva; *Photo*: Abigaíl Rojas; *Music*: Miguel Ángel Fuster; *Prod Mgr*: Samuel Roldán; *Asst Dir*: Alicia Walerstein; *Film Ed*: Alcides Longa; *Makeup*: Isabelia Corio; *Sound*: Nestor Cabrera, Manuel Orellana, Luis Cabrera; Eastmancolor, Panavision

**Cast**: Valentín Trujillo (*Victorino Peralta*), Orlando Urdaneta (*Victorino Perdomo*), Pedro Laya (*Victorino Pérez*), Verónica Castro (*Malvina*), Haydeé Balza (?*Amparo*), Liliana Durán (?*Sra. Perdomo*), Guillermo Montiel, Hilda Rivas (*Blanquita*), Luis Pardi, Esther Plaza, Zulma Zady (*Lucía Pérez*), Miguel Ángel Landa (*Cmdte. of*

*guerrillas*), Rafael Briceño, Andrés Toro (*Camachito*), Jesús Tadeo (*José Ignacio Cabrujas*), Samuel Roldán, Fernando Arriagada (*Crisanto Guánchez*), Boris Chacón, Guillermo García, Perla Vonashek, Freddy Méndez, Luis Rosales, Alberto Drenjoy, Julio Gazette, Alfredo Gerardi, Chony Fuentes, Samuel Akinin, Luis Salazar (*narrator*), Julio Mota, Candelario Ferrer, Gischa Gómez, Yadira Caraballo, Ginger Rivas, Edgar A. Díaz, Dario Nossi, Carmen Lovera, Julio Navarro, Carmen Geyer

**Notes**: although *Cuando quiere llorar no lloro* was the first of Mauricio Walerstein's numerous Venezuelan films, he did not realise this when he went to Venezuela in 1972 to make a film version of Miguel Otero Silva's 1970 novel (the extremely popular book was later adapted to television multiple times). Although officially a Mexican-Venezuelan co-production, *Cuando quiero llorar no lloro* was made by a Venezuelan crew and the cast was Venezuelan except for Mexicans Valentín Trujillo and Verónica Castro (both of whom would go on to greater fame within a few years).

The film begins with 1948 newsreel footage of President Rómulo Gallegos, first taking office and then being deposed by a military coup in November of that year. On 8 November 1948, three babies are born, all named "Victorino"--Victorino



Peralta, the son of a wealthy family; Victorino Perdomo, whose father is a Communist and is later arrested by security forces (he has a portrait of Stalin on the wall of his living room, what did he expect?); and Victorino Pérez, the son of a poor black woman. In 1958, dictator Pérez Jiménez is overthrown and Perdomo's father is released with other political prisoners. In 1966, on the Victorinos' 18th birthday ... [The film changes to colour.]

[The stories of the 3 Victorinos are intercut, but are related separately below.]

Pérez escapes from jail, where he has been serving a sentence for robbing a shop and shooting 2 men. He punishes his unfaithful girlfriend by stabbing her, then puts her in a cab and sends her to a hospital. He goes home to see his mother--who wishes him "happy birthday," in a sad scene--then meets his childhood friend Crisanto. Crisanto, Pérez and some others rob a jewelry store, but are pursued by the police. All are shot to death; Pérez is the last to die. As the film ends, he's buried in the hills outside the city.

Perdomo is a member of an urban guerrilla group that's planning a bank robbery. He has a girlfriend (Amparo); his father is now a member of Congress. The bank robbery fails: after a gun battle with police, most of the gang is killed but Perdomo is captured. He's tortured to death in police custody. His bound body is tossed on the street, with clear signs of the violent abuse he suffered. His funeral turns into a massive protest march.

Peralta is given a fancy new sports car for his birthday. He and his friends spend their time in various anti-social activities, including robbing an old



man, shooting dogs on the street, and crashing and disrupting a party of an acquaintance. Leaving the party, Peralta

and his friends arrive at the scene of Pérez's death. Driving away in his new car, Peralta and a young woman are killed when it crashes. Peralta's funeral is attended by rich friends of his family.

The Perdomo protest march and the Peralta funeral procession cross paths, going in opposite directions.

*Cuando quiero llorar no lloro* concludes with black and white footage of the "Miss Venezuela" pageant, 1966.

So, 3 young men from different socio-economic groups are born on the same day and 18 years later they die on the same day, for varied reasons. Pérez is a criminal, although one could speculate that poverty has left him without any other option. Perdomo revolts against the government--to some extent following in his radical father's footsteps, although the latter has now been co-opted and is part of the government--and is murdered by government agents. Peralta, a child of the rich, leads an aimless life and dies senselessly, the result of his excessive privilege (and, to be fair, his obvious mental issues). This is not a particularly optimistic outlook for Venezuela.

On the other hand, in 1966, the year in which the movie was set, democratically-elected President Caldera took office, ending two decades of military dictatorships. This suggests (a) the characters and lives of the three Victorinos were shaped by the society in which they were raised, but (b) things might improve (too late for those three!) with the return of democracy to Venezuela.

Walerstein's film avoids being excessively didactic, and doesn't go out of its way to make excuses for the protagonists--although it's clear the film has more sympathy for the poor Pérez and Perdomo, whose father was jailed by the dictators, than for the degenerate rich kid Peralta. Peralta's parents, relatives, and their friends are rich, self-

centered caricatures but aren't openly evil; the really violent acts are committed by the police and security forces of the dictatorships.

A bit of footage depicts each Victorino's childhood: Pérez lives in brutal poverty, Perdomo is seen being separated from his father and then reunited with him, and Peralta demonstrates his sociopathic tendencies early, burning down his sister's playhouse. Later, while Peralta's friends participate in some of his anti-social activities (robbing the old man, shooting dogs, disrupting a fancy party), it is fairly clear that he's the worst of the bunch and the ringleader. In one scene he deliberately and cruelly dumps a box of coloured chalk into a fishtank, for instance. This is not intrinsically connected to his upper-class status, it's a sign of a psychological disorder.



The opening sequences of Gallegos' removal from office in 1948 and the 1958 end of his successor's rule are presented factually, without overt comment, although certainly the audience is made to understand that the military coup and subsequent brutal dictatorship under Pérez Jiménez were negative events. Later, Peralta's father makes a passing comment that "democracy" has its flaws, but it's better than any other political system (a paraphrase of Winston Churchill): *Cuando quiero llorar...* suggests that Venezuela in 1966 is still far from free, with a repressive government and great social and economic inequality. In another scene, Malvina's father tells his friends that he's put his money in foreign banks because "after Cuba, one never knows what could happen."

There's also a brief reference to the earlier dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (who ruled Venezuela from 1908-1935). Perdomo goes to a meeting of his guerrilla group, held in a private home. Inside, an older woman is holding a séance. When Perdomo arrives, one of the séance participants asks "Is that the spirit of General Gómez?" "No, it's someone knocking at the door," the woman says, and gets up to let Perdomo in. This is amusing but it also may be meant to suggest the "spirit" of dictator Gómez is still alive in Venezuela, despite its alleged "democracy."

Walerstein's Mexican films were made under the auspices of an established film industry (of which his father was a major part), and although they do deal with socio-economic-political topics, their film form



is relatively conventional. *Cuando quiero llorar...* is not particularly radical, formally, although it does employ various devices

popularised by the various "New Wave" cinemas over the previous decade or so: a fragmented narrative, use of actuality footage, location shooting, various film stocks, etc. The gory sequence of the guerrillas' massacre at the hands of the police is shot in slow motion (possibly inspired by *The Wild Bunch* or *Bonnie and Clyde*), with no sound other than incongruous music provided by a nearby ice cream truck! Walerstein's next film, *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano*, is narratively more conventional, with one major, fourth-wall-breaking exception.

The performances are all fine and understated (even Valentín Trujillo's Peralta isn't over the top). Both Pedro Laya and Orlando Urdaneta would reappear in Walerstein's next film, *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* (along with Miguelángel Landa, who once again played the leader of a revolutionary group); although the screen time is fairly evenly split between the three Victorinos, Urdaneta has somewhat less "drama" in his footage (and the scenes Perdomo shares with his girlfriend Amparo give her a lot of attention). Few of the supporting actors have much to do, although Zulma Zady as Pérez's mother makes a strong impression in her one major scene, despite having almost no dialogue.

*Cuando quiero llorar no lloro* is a very good film, with a number of nuanced aspects that merit closer examination, without seeming overtly didactic. The location shooting gives the picture an almost *cinéma vérité* feel, similar to *The Battle of Algiers* and other contemporary films.

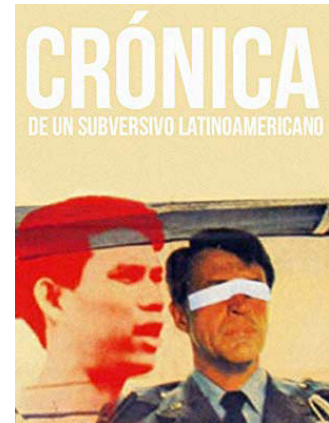


**Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano** [Story of a Subversive Latin American] (Rojas & Walerstein Productores Cinematográficos, 1975) *Dir:* Mauricio Walerstein; *Scr:* José Ignacio Cabrujas, Luis Correa, Mauricio Walerstein; *Story:* Luis Correa; *Photo:* Abigaíl Rojas; *Music:* Miguel Ángel Fuster; *Film Ed:* Alberto Torija; *Asst Dir:* Enver Cordido; *Prod Mgr:* Hernán Rubín; *Camera Op:* Ramón Carthy; *Art Dir:* Eduardo

Sosio; *Makeup:* María Marrero; *Sound:* Kurneval Robles; Eastmancolor

**Cast:** Miguelángel Landa (*Juan Carlos*), Claudio Brook (*Col. Ernest Robert Whitney*), Pedro Laya (*Pedro*), Orlando Urdaneta (*Miguel Ángel Rivas*), Lucio Bueno, Eva Mondolfi (*Liliana*), Perla Vonasek (*Marta*), Óscar Mendoza, María Eugenia Domínguez (*wife of Juan Carlos*), Rafael Briceño, José Ignacio Cabrujas (*member of bureau of rebel organisation*), Asdrubal Meléndez

**Notes:** while Mauricio Walerstein's first Venezuelan-shot film, *Cuando quiero llorar no lloro*, featured two Mexican actors in the cast, the film was very "Venezuela-specific," dealing with that country's politics and society, and was based on a well-known novel by a Venezuelan novelist. *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* is both more Venezuelan and less Venezuelan than its predecessor. One Mexican actor (Claudio Brook) appears, but the rest



of the cast is Venezuelan and there is little or no effort to have them tone down their Venezuelan accents (a bit difficult for me to understand at times), but the film deliberately does not identify the country in which it is taking place--in fact, in one scene Juan Carlos tells Col. Whitney that "Your country has been at war with us for 40 years. Your Marines invaded us. You bombed us." None of these apply specifically to 1964 Venezuela, although perhaps this is an attempt to conflate U.S. intervention in all Latin America into one country.

However, the incident upon which the film is based did occur in Venezuela: the FALN guerrilla group kidnaped a U.S. military officer in an attempt to prevent the execution of Nguyen Van Troi, a member of the Viet Cong who attempted to assassinate U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara on a visit to Vietnam in 1963. It's unclear why Walerstein avoided "naming names" in *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano*: perhaps he wanted to suggest the struggle against "North American imperialism" was not specific to a single country, or he may have felt freer to fictionalise the story if he gave it at least a degree of separation from the actual events.

Juan Carlos is a newspaper reporter in the capital of a Latin American country; he's married and his wife is expecting a child. However, he is also the leader of a "brigade" of the *Movimiento Armado de*



*Liberación*, a leftist guerrilla group. When his “supervisor” passes the word that the “truce” is off and the guerrillas can begin active operations, Juan Carlos and his associates make plans to abduct U.S.



military advisor Col. Whitney and hold him hostage until Nguyen Van Troi is released.

Juan Carlos’ group includes 4 men and 2 women: Pedro, Ángel “El Tigre,” César, Miguel Ángel, Liliana

and Marta. Pedro, the second-in-command, is the *mulato* son of *campesinos* who works in a gas station. The others are students or middle-class, including the wealthy Liliana, who was radicalised by her artist lover Sergio in Paris.

[About 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the way through the film, there is a segment in which each member of the group faces the camera and explains how they became involved in the “struggle.” This is a curious sequence that is not stylistically repeated in the movie, but has the advantage of avoiding the awkward insertion of exposition & back-stories into the main plot.]

Whitney is kidnaped and taken to a vacant apartment. The guerrillas treat him well, but keep him under close guard. At first Miguel Ángel translates from Spanish to English for the prisoner, but when Juan Carlos arrives with Whitney’s dossier, he notes that Whitney studied Spanish in high school



“and got very good grades.” Whitney debates with his captors, saying he’s a military officer who follows orders and his presence in

their country is “not political,” and at the request of their nation’s government. He says Nguyen Van Troi is a prisoner of South Vietnam, not the USA, and wonders why the members of the group became involved in an armed struggle (suggesting Russia, China or Cuba are manipulating them). The brigade’s plan works: Van Troi’s execution is postponed.

The police begin an intensive search of the city, going house to house. They also arrest various “suspicious” individuals. Liliana and Sergio’s apartment is searched, and Sergio becomes upset (he’s aware of what Liliana is doing but is not directly involved). Liliana urges Juan Carlos to find a new hiding place for Whitney, but a collaborator

backs out and Juan Carlos can’t get in touch with his contact on the central committee.

Confronted by the police while sitting a parked car with a young woman, brigade member César panics, tries to flee, and is arrested. He betrays the other members of the group: they are all arrested except Miguel Ángel (who is last seen as a fugitive, leaving on a bus), Pedro, and Juan Carlos. As the film concludes,

Juan Carlos and Pedro prepare to shoot it out with a group of heavily-armed police who have surrounded the building in which they are hiding. Meanwhile, Whitney has been released unharmed and Nguyen Van Troi is executed in Saigon.



Aside from the aforementioned sequence in which the group members talk directly to the camera, *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* is a relatively slick and conventionally-made film. There is relatively little didactic content aside from the credits sequence which features news footage of the Vietnam war and voice-over narration, news-reader style (later in the film, radio news broadcasts can be heard at several points). The members of the guerrilla “brigade” speak very little of their ideology, and even the one, rather brief scene in which they engage Whitney in conversation is low-key. Indeed, the film doesn’t even seem to strongly take sides: the audience’s sympathy is with the guerrillas because we get to know them (a bit), but Whitney is not demonised (quite the contrary, he’s shown to be a good family man and he is quite polite and reasonable in his interactions with his captors). Even the police and government forces are not depicted in an extremely negative fashion during their search for the guerrillas and their hostage: in one scene they break into a brothel and disturb some of the clients, which is portrayed more or less humorously, and later they pound on the metal door of a walled compound, only to be confronted by a nun! [It should be noted that, at the film’s end, several of the group in custody are shown to have been severely beaten, so not all is sweetness and light.]

The first section of *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* is similar to a “caper film,” as the “brigade” makes plans, does surveillance, and then puts their plan into action. Each person has their role to play and the abduction of Whitney goes off flawlessly. The middle part of the movie slows down a bit, with Whitney in custody and most of the group

spending their time guarding him, even as the police begin their search. The finale moves quickly, as the guerrillas are betrayed and captured. There is little suspense and not much that is surprising, although in general the film moves efficiently. One bit of uncertainty occurs towards the end: as the plot unravels, Pedro and some of the group argue that



Whitney should be executed, but Juan Carlos tells them “killing Whitney would be like killing Van Troi” and “they’re the murderers, not us.” However, we do not see Whitney actually being released, and it’s only when a radio broadcast reports that he’s been found,

unharmed, do we know that Juan Carlos prevailed.

The performances are all fine. From the late 1980s through the 1990s (and beyond), Telemundo showed Mexican films but very little Mexican television programming (since this was mostly the property of Televisa, which had Univisión as its U.S. outlet), so Venevisión provided various programs (and some Colombian *telenovelas* as well)-- there was the “Miss Venezuela” pageant, which I never missed, and also the sketch comedy show “Bienvenidos” hosted by Miguelángel Landa. Consequently, it’s a bit disconcerting to see him in a serious role here, although in fact Landa has had a very extensive career, mostly as a dramatic actor (as recently as 2018’s *El vampiro del lago*). Orlando Urdaneta, who had appeared in *Cuando quiere llorar no lloro* (as did Pedro Laya), continued his acting career (going into exile in later years due to his opposition to Hugo Chávez); he can be seen in some other Mexican productions as well, including *Verano salvaje* and *Guyana: el crimen del siglo*.

The production values are satisfactory: shot entirely on location, the cinematography (by Abigail Rojas--a man, despite his name, who passed away in 1976 at the age of 44) is effective and the sound is professional. Films made in Mexico by the long-established film industry had a certain “professional,” even glossy style that was reflected in the visuals, whereas *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* looks more like an “independent” production. Sadly, the only print I could find of *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* was an old VHS rental tape of dubious quality (the film’s first 20 minutes can be seen on YouTube, apparently sourced from a similar tape), although it appears a much nicer version is available from some streaming platforms or via cable television.

In general, *Crónica de un subversivo latinoamericano* is entertaining and well-made, and

rather less “political” than one would suspect from its title.



## Bonus Review!



**El descuartizador\*** [The Ripper] (Grupo Galindo, 1991) *Exec Prod:* Eduardo M. Galindo Pérez; *Prod:* Eduardo M. Galindo Pérez, Santiago Galindo, Pedro Galindo III; *Dir/Adapt:* René Cardona III; *Story:* Héctor Gastelum, Pedro Galindo III; *Photo:* Javier Cruz Osorio; *Music:* Ignacio Medrano; *Prod Mgr:* Maximiliano G. Llado, Ramón Loranca; *Asst Dir:* Jorge Arvizu; *Film Ed:* Miguel Álvarez L.; *Sound Engin:* Abel Flores; *Spec FX:* Ramón Loranca

\*[*Decuartizador* means something like "Dismemberer," but that's a clumsy title so this is generally referred to as "The Ripper" in English.]

**Cast:** Jorge Reynoso (*Carlos García Chávez*), Edith González (*Dr. Verónica Arizmendi*), Arsenio Campos (*Dr. Renato Galván*), Víctor Badillo E. "Victorel" (*Dr. Rivera*), Norma Gavidia (*Martha*), Rafael Montalvo (*Lt. Pérez*), Tito Guillén (*wino*), Guillermo Buigas (*prosecutor*), Abigail Morel (*prostitute #1*), Paola Ochoa (*woman hit by truck*), María Marcucci (*first victim*), Patricia Alvarado (*second woman*), Ana Laura Espinosa (*prostitute #2*), Eduardo Galindo A. (*Santiago García*), Manuel Galindo A. (*Manuel García*), Luis Chapital (*doctor*), Guillermo Vonson (*Dr. Lombardo*), Alfredo González (*cemetery caretaker*), nurses: José Carlos Teruel, Julio Monje, Marcos Berumen

**Notes:** this is a decent *videohome* with some outré aspects, although it never goes completely over the line. Edith González may or may not have been happy to have this on her resumé, but she looks great (in a wide variety of outfits) and handles her role effectively. The Galindos were responsible for a number of imitation-Hollywood horror & slasher films in the 1980s (*El cementario del terror*, *Ladrones de tumbas*, etc.) and turned out a few

direct-to-video productions in the early '90s in the same vein.

Plastic surgeon Carlos murders his wife and young sons, claiming "I am the new Messiah." He's sent to a psychiatric hospital. After Carlos attempts to escape, Dr. Rivera subjects him to electro-shock therapy at "full power!" which leaves the patient in a catatonic state. Dr. Verónica Arizmendi arrives at the hospital to test a new therapy and chooses Carlos as her guinea pig; criminologist Renato is assigned to assist her. Verónica's therapy consists of showing Carlos slides of various peaceful landscapes and some other random images; he snaps out of his trance



when she inadvertently plays the same music he was listening to when he killed his family.

Carlos has an apocalyptic view of the

world, believing "life begins after death," and decides Verónica is a messenger sent to herald the end times. He escapes from the hospital (murdering Dr. Rivera and several male nurses), kills his brother-in-law (a veterinarian) and steals surgical instruments and a truck. A cave under a cemetery provides Carlos with a base of operations (once the wino inhabiting it has been killed). Carlos--for obscure reasons--decides to construct a flesh-mask of Verónica, and begins murdering women and cutting off parts of their faces (a chin, a nose, etc.) to make his mask. He does this in broad daylight but nobody seems to notice (until the mutilated corpses are discovered). In his first kill, for instance, Carlos hits a woman with his truck, then stops and slices off her chin in the middle of the street.



Carlos abducts Verónica and brings her back to his lair, where he puts on his mask (frankly, it doesn't look anything like Verónica) and prepares to operate on her, but Renato has followed them to the cave, and intervenes. After a protracted struggle in which Carlos is shot multiple times, smacked with a log, and has acid thrown in his face, the insane murderer finally dies. However, as the film concludes, Verónica sits in the cave, modeling a bust of Carlos and muttering about the end of the world.

*El descuartizador* is wacky but tries to justify its wackiness with some psychological and mystical mumbo jumbo that is even less logical and more confusing than similar efforts in other movies of this

type. There's even a bit of early CSI-style science: the police put together a composite of the stolen facial features from the victims and discover the "new" face Carlos is assembling is...Verónica! Sadly, this comes about 30 seconds too late to warn her. [I'm not sure how much good this would have done anyway, since Verónica already knew Carlos was on the loose, was murdering women, and had an obsession with her.]

The gore effects are satisfactory but relatively restrained: we see Carlos beginning to cut, some blood appears, and then occasionally the aftermath. Fortunately, most of his victims are dead before he begins his operations, but his final victim--a prostitute taken back to the cave so he can remove her scalp--is alive and screaming when Carlos starts cutting. The flesh-mask he makes is fairly reminiscent of Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

The performances are fine. Jorge Reynoso plays the demented Carlos with understated menace: why don't people realise he's the New Messiah and just let him kill them? "Life begins after death," after all. Edith González



and Arsenio Campos are the strait-laced investigators without much personality, but they're adequate for their purpose, as are Rafael Montalvo as Lt. Pérez and Víctor Badillo as the sleazy Dr. Rivera (possibly a relative of Dr. Nick Rivera from "The Simpsons"?). Production values are about par for a *videohome*, which is to say everything was shot on location, but the cinematography and sound are professional; the music score is satisfactory, the usual synthesizer stuff but it gets the job done.

When I originally saw this film (decades ago), I noted that Arsenio Campos was referred to as both "Dr. Renato Galván" and "Dr. Renato Gálvez" (Pérez also calls him "Sergeant" once), but this time I only heard "Galván." In the end credits it's just "Renato," but IMDB lists "Gálvez." I did catch one more blooper though: Carlos' wife is named "Martha" (and credited as such), but when Verónica is reading the case notes she says his wife's name was "Gabriela."

Overall, moderately entertaining, but not as sleazy and outrageous as it could have been.



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