

# The Mexican Film Bulletin

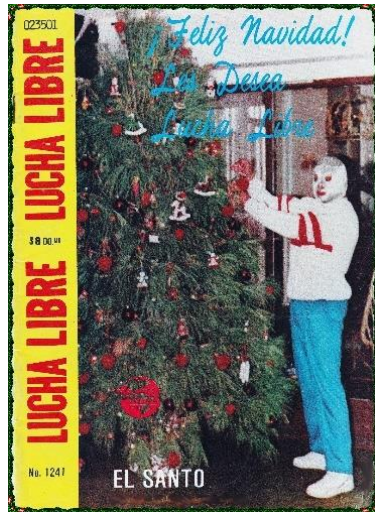
## Holiday Issue Winter 2020-2021

### Bonus Issue—Happy Holidays!

To avoid a long period between issues --and to print some obituaries of individuals who deserve recognition—here's yet another "special" issue! Perhaps we'll do three issues in 2021, but I can't promise anything.

I hope everyone can enjoy the holiday season to the best of their

ability, despite the world situation right now.



### Obituaries

#### César Arias

César Arias, a prolific voice actor who also worked in films, television and on the stage, died on 20 December 2020; he was 79 years of age.



César Antonio Arias de la Cantolla y Ávila was born in Mexico City in October 1941. He studied law and acting at UNAM and was a part of the INBA theatrical troupe. Arias made his film debut in *El juego de Zuzanka* (1970) and appeared as an actor in films and on television over the next 4 decades. However,

in 1983 he also began working as a voice artist, dubbing scores of foreign films & TV shows, narrating documentaries and commercials, and also serving as a dubbing director. Among his other roles, Arias was the voice of "Dumbledore" in the "Harry Potter" films.

More information at the excellent site:

[https://doblaje.fandom.com/es/wiki/C%C3%A9sar\\_Arias](https://doblaje.fandom.com/es/wiki/C%C3%A9sar_Arias)



#### Ernesto Yáñez

Actor Ernesto Yáñez passed away on 17 December 2020; he was 74 years of age and had been suffering from COVID-19. Yáñez made his

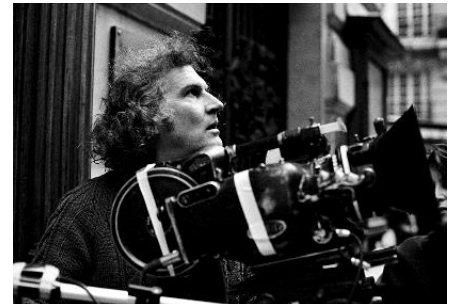
screen debut in *La montaña del Diablo* in 1973, also working on television and the stage. He appeared a variety of films, including "serious" cinema

(working 7 times for Arturo Ripstein and for other top directors like Felipe Cazals), as well as acting in popular genres and even *videohomes* like *Las Caguamas ninja*. Yáñez received a Best Supporting Actor Ariel for *El imperio de la fortuna*. His final film role was apparently in *Pastorela* (2011).



#### Fernando Solanas

Argentine director Fernando "Pino" Solanas died in France on 6 November 2020; he was 84 years of age and had COVID-19 complications. Solanas was born in Buenos Aires in 1936 and began making documentary shorts in the early 1960s. In 1968 he and Octavio Getino made *La hora de los hornos*, a documentary about "neocolonialism, violence and liberation." He continued to make documentaries (winning Argentina's equivalent of the Oscar & Ariel 3 times), but occasionally ventured into fictional narrative filmmaking, including *El viaje* (1990), a co-



production between Argentina, Mexico, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and Spain. Solanas went into exile in Spain and France in the 1970s after he was threatened by the right-wing government, but returned to his native land in the 1980s.



## Flor Silvestre

Actress and singer Flor Silvestre passed away on 25 November 2020 at her ranch in Zacatecas state; she was 90 years of age. Guillermina Jiménez Chabolla was born in Guanajuato in August 1930, and began her career as a radio singer. She entered the film industry in 1950 and eventually appeared in more than 70 films (*Triste recuerdo* was her last, in 1990). Flor Silvestre was married three times: to Andrés Nieto



Villafranco, to television presenter Paco Malgesto (real name, Francisco Rubiales), and to singer-actor Antonio Aguilar (from 1959 until his death in 2007). She had 5 children, one from her first marriage, and two from each of her other marriages. Her children include actresses Marcelia Rubiales and Dalia Inés, and singers (and occasional actors) Antonio Aguilar *hijo* and Pepe Aguilar.

In addition to the many films Flor Silvestre made with Antonio Aguilar, she also co-starred with Piporro, Luis Aguilar, Dagoberto Rodríguez and others, often in Westerns or *rancheras*, but occasionally in comedies and dramas. She was also the model for masked Western heroine “La Llanera Vengadora” in a series of comic books published by Ediciones Lationamericanas.



## Lucy Tovar

Actress Lucy Tovar died in El Paso, Texas on 1 November 2020; she was 68 years of age. Tovar, the niece of actress Lupita Tovar, was born in Mexico City in 1952. She began acting in the 1970s in films and on television, and continued to work until 2010. Tovar later relocated to the USA to live with her children, and reportedly earned a degree from the University of Texas El Paso at the age of 64.



Tovar’s films include *Vals sin fin*, *Mecánica nacional*, *Como gallos de pelea*, *La caravana de la muerte*, and *Divinas palabras*. She had a role in the 1977 *telenovela* “Corazón salvaje” alongside Angélica María, Susana Dosamantes, Fernando Allende, and Martín Cortés.



## Magda Rodríguez

Television producer Magda Rodríguez Doria passed away on 1 November 2020 of hypovolemic shock; she was 57 years old. Rodríguez was the daughter of actress Malena Doria and actor Jorge del Campo; her daughter is singer Andrea Escalona. Her sister Andrea Rodríguez Doria is also a producer and took over the popular show “Hoy” after her sister’s death.



## Puck Miranda

Actor Roberto López “Puck” Miranda died on 27 November 2020 in Mexico City. Miranda began acting in the early 1980s and appearing in numerous television programs and films, including *Lo negro del Negro*, *Cándido Pérez*, *especialista en señoras*, *Federal de narcóticos*, and “Rebelde.” He was also director of the theatrical company “Candilejas.”



## Ricardo Blume

Actor Ricardo Blume, who was born in Peru but achieved his greatest success in Mexico, died on 30 October 2020 in Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico. He had Parkinson’s Disease and was suffering from pneumonia. Ricardo Cristóbal Blume Traverso was born in Lima, Peru in August 1933. He appeared in a number of *telenovelas* in Peru, including the popular “Simplemente María” with Saby Kamalich, then moved to Mexico in 1970. Blume had debuted in the cinema in Argentina in 1965, but in the Seventies in Mexico he alternated films like *Los enamorados* and *Con amor de muerte* (both with Jacqueline Andere) and highly popular *telenovelas* such as “Muchacha italiana viene a casarse” (with Angélica María, he was also in the 2000s remake). Blume continued to work on the stage, in films, and on television until 2014. He was nominated for Best Co-Starring Arieles twice, for *Mezcal* and *Tercera llamada*.



## Corrections/Updates

A couple of pieces of new information arrived recently.



1. *Espiritismo* (reviewed **MFB 25/03**)--a "full" version of this film has surfaced, complete with the formerly-missing scenes of Augusto Benedico as a priest. This footage was not included in previous versions of this film available on DVD and shown on television, nor were they in the K. Gordon Murray *Spiritism*. It is unclear when this footage was removed.

2. *La noche de la bestia* (reviewed **MFB 25/03**)--a "full" version of this film has also become available. My hopes that this would include more special effects shots were largely dashed: the main difference is the inclusion of a scene between Hugo Stiglitz's character and his wife, played by Abril Campillo.

3. I recently obtained copies of *Padre de más de cuatro* (1938), *Naná* (1944) and *El rosario de Amozoc* (1938), 3 Cliff Carr films discussed in **MFB 25/04**. I had seen *Naná* years ago but didn't have a copy (the one I got is of rather poor quality, but it's something), while *El rosario de Amozoc* and *Padre de más de cuatro* are new to me (I am still hoping *El gran cruz* and *Hijos de la mala vida* will show up someday).



## Holiday Cinema in Mexico

Mexican cinema does not have a strong tradition of "holiday movies." There are few equivalents to the multiple versions of *A Christmas Carol*, or *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*, *White Christmas*, *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*, *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians*, *Christmas in Connecticut*, and so on. Two rare "major" Mexican Christmas films are *Santa Claus* and *Los tres Reyes Magos*; some films utilise Christmas as a major plot point (one of the earliest was *Regalo de reyes* in 1942, see also *El tejedor de milagros*, 1961), or have significant spots in the narrative that coincide with Christmas (as a time when families get together, for instance) but are not traditional Christmas-themed movies.

The same applies to New Year's Eve, although this holiday is not necessarily well represented in Hollywood cinema either (*New Year's Evil* to the contrary). As with Christmas, New Year's Eve shows up in a number of Mexican films as an excuse to show time has passed, or to depict social gatherings to further the plot. *Buenas noches, año nuevo!* (1964), which I have seen but do not currently have a copy of, has its plot complications resolved on New Year's Eve, but this specific date is not integral to the plot.



## Santa Claus, the Devil, and the Three Kings

**Santa Claus** (Cinematográfica Calderón, 1959) *Prod*: Guillermo Calderón Stell; *Dir*: René Cardona [Sr.]; *Scr*: Adolfo Torres Portillo, René Cardona [Sr.]; *Photo*: Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music*: Antonio Díaz Conde; *Chorus*: Armando Torres; *Prod Mgr*: René Cardona Jr.; *Prod*:

*Chief*: Guillermo Alcayde; *Asst Dir*: Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Francisco Marco Chillet; *Lighting*: Gabriel Castro; *Camera Op*: Cirilo Rodríguez;



*Makeup*: Concepción Zamora; *Choreog*: Ricardo Luna; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec*: Nicolás de la Rosa; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Music Ed*: Reynaldo Portillo; *Eastmancolor & Mexiscope*; *Union*: STPC; *Studio*: Churubusco-Azteca

**English-dubbed version**: *Prod*: K. Gordon Murray; *Dir*: Ken Smith [?K. Gordon Murray]

**Cast**: José Elías Moreno (*Santa Claus*), Cesareo Quezadas "Pulgarito" (*Mexican boy in Santa's workshop*), José Luis Aguirre "Trosky" (*Precio, devil*), Armando Arriola "Arriolita" (*Merlin*), Lupita [Quezadas] (*Lupita, poor little girl*), Antonio Díaz Conde hijo (*rich boy*), Nora Veryán (*Lupe, Lupita's mother*), Leopoldo [Polo] Ortín Jr. (*awakened husband*), Manolo Calvo (*rich boy's father*), *bad boys*: J. Carlos Méndez, Jesús Brook, Rubén Ramírez G.; *Enriqueta Lavat* (*awakened wife*), Ángel D'Stefani (*blacksmith Llavón*), Guillermo Bravo Sosa (*grandfather*), Graciela Lara (*mother of rich boy*), Rosa María Aguilar, Ignacio Peón (*postal worker*), ?Juan Antonio Edwards, ?Pablo Ferrel

**Notes**: René Cardona's *Santa Claus* is probably one of the most-seen Mexican films internationally, yet the majority of those who watched it probably never knew of its Mexican origins. Why? Because they viewed the K. Gordon Murray version, dubbed into English and shown repeatedly at "kiddie matinees" (and on television, and on VHS, on DVD, even online) over the years. [Note: running time of the KGM version is slightly less than the "original," although even extant Spanish-language prints of *Santa Claus* vary in length from 94 to 96 minutes. The shorter versions actually feature the K. Gordon Murray cut—including English-language replacement sign inserts—but have the original credits and dialogue track.]

Cardona and writer Adolfo Torres Portillo had previously collaborated on *Pulgarito* (whose star, Cesareo Quezadas, gets completely unwarranted second-billing on *Santa Claus*), another child-oriented fantasy

film (Torres Portillo would later co-produce, direct and write the more “Mexican” Christmas film *Los 3 Reyes Magos*). Culturally, “Santa Claus” belongs to a Western European tradition (transferred to the USA), while Spain and various Latin American countries had the more religious oriented *Los Reyes magos* or *Los Santos reyes* (aka the 3 Wise Men) who bring gifts to children on Epiphany eve in January. Consequently, *Santa Claus* is considered by some to be an example of cultural imperialism, and there are occasional references in Mexican cinema which decry foreign (especially *gringo*) traditions taking root in Mexico, usually to the detriment of local cultural practices (see the review of *Cuando regrese Mamá* in this issue; Halloween is similarly criticised in some quarters, as in *Calacán*).

*Santa Claus* probably reflects the increasing “Americanisation” of Christmas in Mexico rather than having caused it. As early as the 1940s Mexican cinema contained fleeting images of Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and

other non-Mexican Christmas traditions, showing the gradual influence of external cultural influences. Cardona and Torres



Portillo add a few original touches to the Santa Claus concept (most notably the idea that his toys are created not by elves, but by numerous children from various countries around the world, possibly abducted and forced to dress in stereotypical “national” costumes and labour for their bearded master). The North Pole scenes are imaginative and wacky, in contrast with the rather limited and drab depiction of real life in a Mexican city. Curiously, while the Mexican children slaving away for Santa are dressed in folkloric attire, there is very little specifically “Mexican” about the scenes set in Mexico itself. This may have been a deliberate attempt to de-nationalise the film so it could be easily exported.



version it’s supposed to be hovering “above the North Pole.” There are also two other castles on nearby clouds, but these are never identified.] The first interior shot of

*Santa Claus* shows Santa Claus with an image of an angel, a *creche*, and the Virgin Mary, as if to reassure Catholic viewers that the true meaning of Christmas is acknowledged by the filmmakers.

*Santa Claus* is well-produced, with art direction and special effects in excess of the usual level in Mexican cinema of this period (to be fair, the subject matter of Mexican films in this era generally didn’t require much in the way of elaborate fantasy visuals); the film is in Eastmancolor and “Mexiscope,” which was a widescreen anamorphic process about which not very much is known (the aspect ratio is either 1.85:1 or 1.78:1).

One odd feature of the film are several dance sequences which are, frankly, not very “child friendly.” The first is “*Danza del infierno*” (Dance of Hell) in which devils prance around and robed figures (souls of the damned?) parade through hellscapes (this scene is truncated in the K.Gordon Murray version and represents the main difference in running times between the original and the dubbed

versions). “*Ballet de las muñecas*” (Ballet of the Dolls) is a rather long scene in which life-size dolls (with horrible faces) surround little



Lupita in a fog-shrouded void as she repeats “I don’t want to be bad! I want to be good!” This dance lasts over 3 minutes and is quite disturbing (also boring). Whoever thought this was a good idea must have had a strange concept of what children liked or found interesting. There a number of other songs in the film, but these are generally innocuous rather than scary.

“Jugetilandia” (Toyland) is located in part of Santa’s cloud-based domain. Although it’s within walking distance of his castle, Santa prefers to remotely spy on his child-labour force via closed-circuit television. Here, children build toys while dressed in their national costumes and singing traditional songs (or, in the case of the U.S. children, “Mary Had a Little Lamb”). In addition to actual nations (Mexico, Italy, Spain, England, China, Japan, Russia), Jugetilandia also has work-spaces manned by children from the “Orient,” Africa, the Caribbean, South America and Central America.

*Santa Claus* never reveals the origins of these children. Were they abducted by Santa on his annual visit to Earth? Are they immortal and don’t age, or are they discarded when adolescence strikes, only to be replaced by new slaves? Are they Santa’s illegitimate children? The clues are contradictory—these children have enough cultural awareness to dress in national costume, speak their own language, and perform specific songs, but in one scene Santa’s pint-size Mexican aide asks “What do people eat on Earth?” This suggests the



boy has either never been on Earth, or he was stolen from his home at such a young age that he has no memory of his previous life.

The Devil sends minor demon Precio to Earth to ruin Christmas—not in a religious way (as one might reasonably imagine), but by convincing children to be bad, which will break Santa’s heart. Given this impressively ambitious assignment, Precio focuses on a mere handful of children in Mexico: poor little Lupita, a lonely rich boy, and three budding juvenile delinquent brothers. Santa observes this and determines to punish Precio on Christmas Eve.

Once on Earth, Santa is the butt of various pranks by Precio, but these all rebound on the minor devil. Nothing will stop Santa from delivering presents! He



also impersonates a waiter in a fancy restaurant and slips the little rich boy’s parents a Mickey that makes them go home to spend Christmas Eve with their son. The bad boys (advised by Precio) set a trap for Santa, intending

to steal his sack of toys, but they’re distracted by music and a meteor (or something) and discover Santa has given them lumps of coal. Precio causes Santa to lose his invisibility flower and sleep dust, and the jolly fellow is chased up a tree by a watchdog. He escapes at the last moment using a toy cat to distract the dog, and Lupita gets her doll. Did you ever doubt it? Santa returns to his castle in the sky, and Precio goes to Hell (presumably).

The *Santa Claus* version of the Santa Claus myth features some interesting, non-canon embellishments (and deletions). In addition to the “Santa’s elves” > “child labour” transformation, these include:

- a. Santa’s reindeer are automatons, not live animals. Rudolph doesn’t exist.
- b. Santa can only visit Earth once per year; if he’s still there at sunrise, the reindeer will disintegrate and he’ll be trapped there.
- c. Merlin the Magician is Santa’s roommate; there is no Mrs. Santa.
- d. Santa has various magic gadgets that facilitate his annual journey: dust that puts people to sleep, a flower which bestows invisibility, a key that opens any door.
- e. anything that happens to a “Santa” on Earth—including a Santa robot in a store window—happens to the real Santa (in one scene he’s pelted with a rock).
- f. Santa can literally spy on anyone at any time.
- g. letters to Santa that arrive at the post office are thrown into a fiery furnace (don’t worry, they don’t burn, they merely go up the chimney and arrive at Santa’s castle, where he files them as “truth” or “lies”).

The performances in *Santa Claus* vary, as is to be expected with such a large number of children in the cast. “Lupita” (aka Lupita Quezadas, probably the sister

of Cesareo Quezadas “Pulgarcito”) is effective occasionally, but is clearly not an experienced child actor. In comparison, her brother is fine, and the 3 “bad boys” are also acceptable. Antonio Díaz Conde Jr., son of the film’s composer, is adequate as the lonely rich kid. The adult cast is fine, consisting as it mostly does of veteran performers. José Luis Aguirre “Trosky” might seem an odd selection as Precio—although he did have some acting roles, he was primarily a dancer. He brings a nice physicality to the role. José Elías Moreno and Nora Veryán have the other two main adult roles and they’re fine.



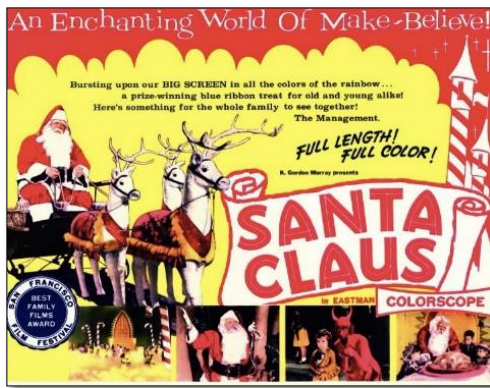
One flaw in *Santa Claus* is its snail-like pacing. Perhaps the filmmakers thought young viewers needed a slow pace and a lot of repetition in order to grasp what was going on? The almost constant narration reinforces the idea that the target audience is quite young and incapable of understanding anything above a very simplistic level. And yet the script contains some clever dialogue and amusing situations that adults can appreciate. For instance, Santa Claus says he’d starve on Earth because he eats “cakes and ice cream made out of clouds,” while on Earth they eat “everything—animals, plants, flowers, roots, birds, even smoke and alcohol!” He also rejects the advice (in Russian) from his juvenile aides “Igor” and “Tamara” that he trade his reindeer for “Sputniks” (the first artificial satellite was Sputnik, launched in October 1957).

The scene with Merlin is both tedious and amusing, as the elderly, absent-minded magician totters around his laboratory to prepare Santa’s tools, somewhat like James Bond’s “Q.” Towards the end of the movie, Precio rouses the inhabitants of a house to attack a “burglar” (Santa Claus) trapped outside in a tree, giving Polo Ortín the chance to run through some of his comic *shtick*, along with Queta Lavat as his exasperated wife and Guillermo Bravo Sosa as the grandfather.

In general, *Santa Claus* in its original version is too long and—until the last 15 minutes or so—paced poorly. However, a lot of work was clearly invested in the script and production, and it shows on screen, and there is entertainment to be had (including involuntary humour and considerable camp value).

The K. Gordon Murray dubbed version loses some of the charm of the original but ups the ante on the camp/bad-film aspects, and the restored versions at least look much better than the film has for many decades.

Trivia notes: this film was spoofed on the “Mystery Science Theatre 3000” television program in 1993; the Vol. 16 release on DVD (2010) included a documentary



short by Daniel Griffith titled “Santa Claus Conquers the Devil,” which allegedly (I’ve never seen it—the DVD sells for \$25 and up) features some footage of yours truly (originally shot for a K. Gordon Murray documentary). *Santa Claus* was also released by VCI in 2011 in a Blu-Ray that features both the K. Gordon Murray version and the “original” Mexican version (which is, however, the Murray cut rather than the full 96-minute film—this is a shame, because the restoration looks great and existing uncut prints of the film are in faded Eastmancolor). This set apparently also contains Daniel Griffith’s mini-documentary.



**Los 3 Reyes Magos** [The Three Magic Kings] (CONACINE-CFA de México, 1974) *Dir:* Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Animation Dir:* Fernando Ruiz; *Scr:* E.C. Fentanes, Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Story:* E.C. Fentanes, Rosario Castellanos; *Photo:* Víctor Peña; *Music:* José Antonio Zavala; *Voice Dir:* Carlos David Ortigosa; *Film Ed:* Pedro Velázquez; *Animators:* Daniel Martínez, Ismael Linares, Moisés Velasco, Claudio Baña, Rafael Escudero, Juan Manuel Macías; *Character Design:* Moisés Velasco, Enrique Maurice; Eastmancolor  
**Cast (voices):** Jorge Sánchez Fogarty (*Gabriel*), Azucena Rodríguez (*María*), José Lavat (*José*), Gloria Rocha (*star of Bethlehem*), Manuel de la Llanta (*Melchor*), Alberto Gavira (*Gaspar*), Armando Coria (*Baltasar*), Rocío Villagarcía (*Jana*), Fernando Ruiz

(*Murcio*), Guillermo Portillo Acosta (*Olbaíd*), Víctor Alcocer (*King Herodes*), Olga Donadío (*Darío*), Juan Domingo Méndez (*Bunga*), Jaime Vega (*centurion*)

**Notes:** this was the first feature-length animated cartoon produced in Mexico (according to the credits, it was the first in Latin America, but that is incorrect—Quirino Cristiani made 3 animated features in Argentina in 1917-1931, and *15,000 Dibujos* was produced in Chile between 1937-42) and is fairly entertaining, if a little odd. A prologue indicates the film will tell the story—with “Mexican touches”—of the Three Kings who journeyed to Bethlehem to pay homage to the baby Jesus. The picture isn’t set in Mexico, but Joseph and

Mary (José and María) definitely look Mexican (García Riera says José resembles the famed *indio* Juan Diego, who saw the Virgin Mary at Tepeyac), and during the



various *posada* sequences there are images of stereotypical *charros*, *norteños*, etc. (one of King Herod’s advisors is also a stereotyped Mexican, with a big moustache and sombrero). These seem a little strange, but don’t really harm the movie’s overall impact (nor do they contribute to it, particularly).

On the positive side, *Los 3 Reyes Magos* moves along at a good pace (I confess I did fast-forward through some of the songs), and the comic relief is not obnoxious. Each king has a personal animal sidekick—Melchor a horse, Baltasar an elephant, and Gaspar a camel—but while these aren’t exactly “realistic,” they don’t talk or anything like that (there are also a couple of scenes with a pair of doves and Melchor has a pet bird—these birds are similarly part-anthropomorphised but have little bearing on the plot).

The animation is satisfactory but the character designs are typical 1970s sketchy, two-dimensional style. The producers saved by including numerous sequences of limited animation (essentially static drawings “animated” by camera movement or minimal animated sections)—there are at least 4 *posada* sequences showing José and María seeking shelter (accompanied by the traditional Mexican song), as well as one sequence of the kings and some vaguely “decorative” transitions or musical interludes. However, the full-animation sequences are reasonably well-done, with decent action and adequate backgrounds.

The voice work is also satisfactory; some sources cite “name” actors David Reynoso, Antonio Raxel, and Mónica Serna in the cast, but this is incorrect (García Riera corrects his original entry in the *Historia*



*documental*, probably taken from publicity materials). The only recognizable name in the credits is Víctor Alcocer (the voice credits are spoken, not printed, at the end of the movie, so the spelling may be off in my credits above).

In a pre-credits sequence, the archangel Gabriel (depicted as rather clumsy) visits María and tells her she has been chosen to give birth to the Messiah. María tells José she saw a fantastic star (“like a butterfly, or a kite”) and the star has its own song (!). Then the credits roll. Each of the three kings also sees the star and recognizes it as an omen. Melchor (bearded astronomer, lives in the



mountains), Gaspar (white-bearded, fat, has a young son, lives in the desert), and Baltasar (lives in Africa—his tribe consists of rather stereotyped “natives,” although some of the musicians look more like Kool and

the Gang; Baltasar himself is depicted with brown skin but Caucasian facial features, more or less)—each set out to follow the star. However, a bat has been observing each of them; the bat, converted into a (somewhat) human shape, is actually minor demon Murcio, who reports to his master Olbaíd (first shown as a human-shaped column of fire, then later as a sort of Japanese



vampire). Olbaíd convinces King Herod that the star predicts the birth of the Messiah; Olbaíd orders Murcio to stop the kings from coming to Bethlehem.

Melchor is ambushed on a mountain road by a giant snake; his horse battles valiantly, and finally the king

stabs the snake through the head with a dagger. Gaspar, struggling through the desert, is nearly fooled by a spring of poisoned water, but his camel alerts him to danger. Baltasar is lured into a river by a (black) mermaid (with an Afro), who turns into vines and tries to drown him; an alligator also joins in the murder attempt, but Baltasar’s elephant clobbers Murcio and the king defeats the alligator.

The three kings unite and head for Bethlehem. Olbaíd joins them, claiming to be another king who wants to see the Christ child. Baltasar discovers “Olbaíd” is “Diablo” (the Devil) spelled backwards and, sure enough, Olbaíd turns into a bat-winged, horned, goat-legged demon. He is getting the best of the three kings when Melchor prays for assistance and Baltasar

stabs the Devil in the heart with his spear, causing the demon to flee.

Murcio repents of his evil ways and his bat-wings are replaced with angel wings. The three kings visit José, María and the baby Jesús with their gifts. María tells them their duty is to remind children all over the world that “to love and to give” (*amar y dar*) are the greatest things in life.

*Los 3 Reyes*  
*Magos* isn’t preachy and (in fact) isn’t really too religious (considering its basic premise).



Aside from the brief opening sequence and the interpolated *posada* scenes, María and José don’t have anything to do with the plot and don’t appear very much. Instead, the film concentrates on the quest of the three kings, and is essentially a fantasy adventure movie. As noted above, the comic relief is fairly restrained, consisting basically of the slapstick antics of Murcio (voiced by animation director Fernando Ruiz). Aside from a brief appearance of Gaspar’s son, the movie wisely eschews any “cute kid” characters, and the kings’ animals (“Packy” the elephant, “Rosita” the camel, and “Añil” the horse) aren’t given sub-plots or anything like that. The kings are each given a personality—Baltasar is clearly the bravest, most athletic, and (possibly) the smartest of the bunch.

Overall, a reasonably good effort.

**Originally published in MFB 9/6 (2003); reprinted with minor revisions & all-new illustrations!**



**Pastorela** [Christmas Play] (Las Prods. del Patrón-FIDECINE-IMCINE, 2011) *Exec Prod:*

Rodrigo Herranz Fanjul, Emilio Portés, Iván Ruiz; *Prod:* Rodrigo Herranz; *Dir-Scr:* Emilio Portés; *Photo:* Damián García; *Music:* Aldo Max Rodríguez; *Line Prod-Prod Mgr:* Issa Guerra; *Film Ed:* Rodrigo Rios Legaspi, Emilio Portés; *Prod Design:* Alejandro García; *Special Makeup:* Roberto Ortiz; *Visual FX:* Gretel; *Special FX:* Chovy; *Sound Design:* Mario Martínez

**Cast:** Joaquín Cosío (*Chucho Juárez*), Carlos Cobos (*Padre Edmundo Posadas*), Eduardo España (*compadre Bulmaro Villafuerte*), Ana Serradilla (*nun*), Ernesto Yáñez (“*God*”), Dagoberto Gama (*Comandante*), Héctor Jiménez (*possessed boy*), Eduardo Manzano (*Cardinal*),



José Sefami (*El Tuerto*), Rubén Cristiany (*Archbishop*), Silverio Palacios (*Dr. Godínez*), María Aura (*reporter*), Omar Ayala (*agent 1*), Alberto Altamira (*agent*), Juan Carlos Bustamante & Ricardo Martínez (*Tuerto's assistants.*), Bruno Coronel (*adolescent devil*), Kristian Ferrer (*secondary archangel*), Xosé Luis Hernández (*secret policeman*), Osami Kawano (*Padre Benito*), Julio Sandoval (*agent at Santa Claus round-up*), Mauricio Schwartz (*arrested Santa Claus*)

**Notes:** *Pastorela* won 7 Arieles--Best Film, Best Direction, Best Screenplay, Best Co-Starring Actor (Cobos), Best Costumes, Best Makeup, Best Visual Effects—and although *Días de gracia* won 8, taking home the “big two” prizes (Best Film, Best Direction) gave *Pastorela* the edge overall. The film earned over \$3 million at the Mexican box-office, despite being released late in the year (November) to capitalise on its seasonal plot (in contrast, *Días de gracia* wasn't released theatrically until 2012).

It's difficult to discern a pattern in the Best Film Arieles in recent years. Some of these are clearly “festival films” (*Stellet licht*, *Lake Tahoe*), while others are more popular and/or Mexico-centric (*El infierno*, *Cinco días sin Nora*), albeit with enough of an



international “hook” to make them exportable. *Pastorela* seems less likely to be intellectually accessible to foreign audiences, not necessarily because of its particular theme, but because of its anarchic formal structure. This is a bizarre fantasy-comedy which is strange and confusing rather than hilarious (at least for me, a non-Mexican), though very well-made and -acted.

*Pastorela* is a more humorous take on the same sort of story—a man's obsession with a religious-social event—seen in *Ánimas Trujano* (1961) and *El Elegido* (1975). A printed message informs viewers that the *pastorela* (sort of a Mexican Christmas pageant) has evolved from a means of religious instruction to a form of entertainment in which the Devil has become the central, most interesting and amusing character (the *pastorela* scenes in Buñuel's *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* are a good example of this).

In the small Mexico City *barrio* of San Miguel de Nenepilco, police agent Chucho Juárez always plays the Devil, but in 2009, various events conspire to deny him the role: the parish priest dies (while having sex with a nun) and is replaced by exorcist Padre Mundo, who's told to run things with a firm hand. Chucho misses the *pastorela* organizational meeting and his role



is given to diminutive cabbie Bulmaro. Chucho is chagrined then outraged when Padre Mundo refuses to reverse his decision. Eventually, the priest apologises and offers Chucho the role of the Archangel, replacing an unsatisfactory (drunken) parishioner. Chucho accepts, but he continues to scheme to regain his position as the Devil. Despite his fear of the larger man (who mobilises his colleagues in the police force to help), Bulmaro stubbornly refuses to yield.

After a series of difficult-to-describe (and/or explain) events, Chucho and Bulmaro are captured and stuffed in the trunk of a car by agents of the police (Bulmaro has been accused of murdering a prosecutor and a large reward has been offered). The rest of the police, meanwhile, have been arresting everyone they can find in a Devil costume (picking up a Santa Claus as well—he doesn't have horns, but he's wearing a red suit) in hopes of finding Bulmaro. Padre Mundo is frantic, because the judges of the National Pastorela Contest are scheduled to watch his group's performance and the Cardinal himself will be in attendance, yet he has no Devil and no Archangel! Finally, the priest is convinced that he must play the Devil's part (and the tipsy original Archangel will have to do his best in that role).

Chucho escapes, killing one of his fellow police agents, but leaves Bulmaro in the car's trunk. He arrives at the theatre and assumes the role of the Archangel opposite Padre Mundo's Devil. Meanwhile, the police (disguised as angels) surround the building in hopes of capturing (or killing) the “assassin”

Bulmaro and his accomplice Chucho, but are suddenly attacked by a horde of costumed Devils, who have escaped from detention.



Bullets don't stop them, so the “angels” pull their swords and the battle is joined. Inside, Chucho and Padre Mundo duel on the stage: just when it appears evil has triumphed, Chucho plunges his sword into his opponent's chest. The “Devil” collapses and so do all of his minions outside, vanishing into thin air.

Several years later, we see Chucho in his Devil costume performing “Highway to Hell” as part of the National Prison Pastorela Contest. He was convicted of murder after the tabloid-fueled furour regarding the “Cursed Pastorela,” but since he keeps winning the prison-*pastorela* prize, he's never appealed his case. Bulmaro was acquitted of the charge of killing the prosecutor, but through a “legal error” is also serving a prison sentence (and participating in the *pastorela*).

*Pastorela* throws so many different things on the screen in such fast-paced fashion that it's never dull. Semi-incomprehensible, yes; but dull, no. The fantasy aspects are sprinkled throughout, but sparingly until the wild conclusion—before then, we see Padre Mundo involved in an exorcism (he's interrupted and the



possessed victim reappears throughout the movie, stirring up trouble), Chucho has unexplained psychic powers (a beer slides across a table into his waiting hand) in addition to a James Bondian-like super-car, and so forth. The end of the movie pulls out all the stops, as Padre Mundo—possessed by the Devil?—repels the police and slams the theatre doors shut with a wave of his hand, the imprisoned “Devils” somehow break free from jail, and finally Chucho vanquishes the Devil with his sword, carving a zig-zag of glowing light into the Evil One’s chest (the horde of minions also display this “wound” and collapse).

Since I’d read very little about the film before I saw it, I was expecting a more “realistic” film about Chucho’s attempts to regain his role (and his pride), rather than a wacky fantasy-farce. Not that *Pastorela* is a failed film (and certainly Emilio Portés can make



whatever sort of movie he wants), but it probably would have also worked as a more conventional comedy, either character-driven or slapstick (or a combination of the two). Conversely, it’s possible that a more *outré* version would have also been

successful, leaning even more heavily on the fantasy elements, perhaps making it more explicit that this particular *pastorela* was a confrontation between Good and Evil. As it stands, the final sequences are confusing, because Chucho (who wants to be Devil) takes the role of the good Archangel (but he still acts crazy and violent) while the generally-sympathetic Padre Mundo is the evil Devil (is he acting? Or has he been actually possessed?). So when Chucho kills Padre Mundo, we’re conflicted—did Chucho do a good thing or a bad thing? A little more clarity might have helped, I’m just saying...

There is a bit of social commentary in the movie, but mostly aimed at easy targets: the corrupt police, the corrupt Church...

*Pastorela* is very well made, with excellent use of location shooting, very good special effects, and fine acting all around. Joaquín Cosío, Carlos Cobos, and Eduardo España stand out—because they have the most to do and their characters are more developed as a result—but the supporting players are also fine. Unfortunately, the copy of the film I saw had no end credits (IMDB provided some) so I cannot provide complete information about performers and their roles (for instance, I have been unable to identify the actress who plays Magdalena, Chucho’s daughter).

Perhaps *Pastorela* was “too Mexican” for my comprehension, but I actually believe the formal aspects of the movie were a greater impediment to my enjoyment of the film than any cultural ignorance on my part. It’s amusing enough, but too frenetic and disparate to be exceptionally entertaining, and its selection as Best Film

of 2011 in the Arieles was an idiosyncratic and surprising but not unwarranted choice.

Reprinted with minor changes from MFB 18/3 (July-Aug 2012)



## Nochebuena...and some not so buena



### Regalo de reyes [Gift of Kings] (Prods.

Arzoz/Films Victoria, 1942) *Prod:* Rafael Arzoz (uncredited); *Dir:* Mario del Río; *Scr:* [Alfonso] LaPena & [José] Díaz Morales; *Photo:* Ross Fisher; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Hernández; *Asst Dir:* Mario de Lara; *Film Ed:* Juan José Marino; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Camera Op:* Jesús Hernández Gil; *Sound:* Eduardo Fernández

**Cast:** Sara García (*doña Esperanza*), David Silva (*Enrique Hidalgo*), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (*Juan Hidalgo*), Pituka de Foronda (*Lucha Santurce*), Rafael M. Lara (*Armando Santurce*), Asunción M. Casals (*Sra. Santurce*), José Pidal (*Bautista*), Amparito Morillo (*Magdalena*), Leopoldo Ortín “Chatito” (*Alberto Santurce*), Narciso Busquets (*Pedrin Hidalgo*), Jorge Landeta, Arturo Soto Rangel (*sec’y. of organisation*), Francisco Pando (*man at meeting*)

**Notes:** “rich vs. poor” is a traditional motif in cinema, and Mexican films are no exception. *Regalo de reyes* somewhat undercuts this theme by have the “poor” family (a) live in a mansion right next to the “rich” family, and (b) not appear to be very “poor” at all (although they don’t have a servant, horrors!), at least compared to the very poor denizens of numerous other Mexican movies of the era. Still, everyone says they’re poor, and they can’t afford a bicycle as a Christmas present for the youngest member of the family, so I suppose “willing suspension of disbelief” applies and for the sake of the story we will stipulate that they are, in fact, “poor.” Or at least poor-er than their immediate neighbours.

The wealthy Santurce family--father, mother, grown daughter, spoiled adolescent son--live next door to the “poor” Hidalgos (widowed father, grandmother,



grown son, adolescent son). Juan Hidalgo is an inventor but can't find anyone willing to invest in his revolutionary invention, so he barely makes ends meet working in an office. His elderly mother hasn't lost faith in him, but Juan is ashamed that he can't buy his young son Pedrín the bicycle he wants for Christmas.

[Cultural note: in Spain and Mexico, the "Three Kings"--rather than Santa Claus--were traditionally credited with bringing gifts at Christmastime (after all, they brought presents to the baby Jesus). The title of this movie could colloquially be translated as "Gift of the Magi," except then it might be confused with O. Henry's story.]

Juan's older son Enrique is an engineer, but apparently makes little or no money, since he can't



contribute to the bicycle fund and owns only one suit. Said suit is splashed with mud by the automobile driven by Lucha Santurce; she laughs at Enrique's appearance and outrage, but is subsequently ashamed of her behaviour. In finest movie

tradition, this means the couple will fall in love. Lucha helps make up for her *faux pas* by providing a bike for Pedrín.



Doña Esperanza asks her neighbour, Sra. Santurce, if her industrialist husband will grant Juan an interview about his invention. Sr. Santurce agrees, but doesn't think Juan's idea is feasible, and vehemently rejects the idea that Enrique and Lucha could ever

become romantically involved. Juan finds another backer for his invention, which uses petroleum rather than coke to create steel, and will soon become rich. However, this means ruin for Santurce, whose fortune is largely based on coal mining (coke is produced from coal): now the shoe is on the other foot, and Santurce begs Juan for assistance. When Juan doesn't act, Santurce is charged with misappropriation of funds and jailed. Encouraged by his mother, Juan agrees to sell his patent and use the money to free Santurce from prison, on Christmas Eve (a year after the first Christmas depicted in the movie).

*Regalo de reyes* is fairly linear and predictable, although there is also a comic sub-plot dealing with the Santurce's sexy maid Magdalena and their dour, long-suffering butler Bautista. Magdalena says every butler in every house where she's worked has fallen in love with her, but Bautista (who constantly complains about his liver) resists her charms, fearing marriage and the birth of a child who might conceivably be as obnoxious as Alberto Santurce. In the end, of course, Magdalena gets her way and they clinch.

The performances in *Regalo de reyes* are adequate. Sara García plays a fairly early version of her

"Grandmother of Mexico" role, constantly telling her son how talented he is, comforting her grandsons, and generally being a selfless saint who is "never wrong" (according to Pedrín). Rafael M. Lara is rather good as the snobbish Santurce, and José Pidal and Amparo Morillo are amusing in their roles. Narciso Busquets, although 11 years old when the film was made, is forced to act as if he were much younger, whining about his bicycle and bursting into tears at inopportune moments. In one scene, he's invited (by Lucha) to Alberto's Christmas party and when Alberto boasts about his family's Christmas tree--which is huge and well-appointed--Pedrín cries and demands to be taken home to his grandmother (the Hidalgo's Christmas tree is a spindly shrub, a predecessor of the tree in "A Charlie Brown Christmas"). Alberto is played by Polo Ortín (although billed here as "Chatito," referencing his father Chato Ortín), who was also teamed with Busquets in *Los dos pilletes*.



Pituka de Foronda, the half-sister of Gustavo and Rubén Rojo, was not conventionally pretty, but she was a



lively and attractive actress who worked in a relatively small number of 1940s films (she later returned to television in the Sixties and would appear from time to time in *telenovelas* until shortly before her death in 1999). Her character's romance with Enrique Hidalgo is quite perfunctory and certainly not the focus of the film at all (even the

Magdalena-Bautista comic-romance sub-plot is more prominent), but the "Romeo and Juliet" aspect does contribute a bit to the progression of the narrative.

*Regalo de reyes* was the first film directed by Venezuelan Mario del Río, whose cinematic career was brief and undistinguished. His direction is competent enough, and there are a number of nice tracking shots which give the picture a fluid look, without really qualifying as a distinctive style. The sequence in which Juan's steel-making process is tested for the first time stands out as well,

with dramatic *chiascuro* lighting on the faces of Juan, Enrique, Pedrín and doña Esperanza as they observe the blast furnace. The sets are substantial enough and although most of the film focuses on the Hidalgo and Santurce households, a few scenes take place elsewhere and look fine.





*Regalo de reyes* is not an especially memorable or important film, but it's adequate entertainment.

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# **La ilusión viaja en tranvía** [Illusion Travels by Streetcar] (CLASA Films Mundiales, 1953) *Exec*

*Prod:* J. Ramón Aguirre; *Prod:* Armando Orive Alba; *Assoc Prod:* Mauricio de la Serna; *Dir:* Luis Buñuel; *Scr Adapt:* José Revueltas, Mauricio de la Serna, Luis Alcoriza, Juan de la Cabada; *Story:* Mauricio de la Serna; *Photo:* Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music:* Luis Hernández Bretón;



*Prod Chief:* Fidel Pizarro; *Asst Dir:* Ignacio Villareal; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Eduardo Fitzgerald; *Rear-Screen Projection:* George J. Teague; *Makeup:* Elda Loza; *Décor:* José G. Jara; *Sound FX:* Teodulo Bustos V.; *Dialog Rec:* José de Pérez; *Music Rec:* Rafael Ruíz Esparza; *Union:* STPC; *Studio:* C.L.A.S.A.

**Cast:** Lilia Prado (*Lupita*), Carlos Navarro (*Juan Godínez "Caireles"*), Fernando Soto (*"Mantequilla"* (Tobías Hernández *"Tarrajas"*), Agustín Isunza (*Papá Pinillos*), Miguel Manzano (*Don Manuel*), Guillermo Bravo Sosa (*Don Braulio*), José Pidal (*El Profesor*), Felipe Montoya (*shop boss*), Javier de la Parra (*Pablo*), Paz Villegas (*Doña Mechita*), Conchita Gentil Arcos & Elodía Hernández (*passengers with saint*), Diana Ochoa (*schoolteacher*) Víctor Alcocer (*corn smuggler*), Daniel Arroyo (*Manuel's friend*), *passengers:* Magdaleno Barba, Victorio Blanco, Regino Herrera, Antonio Leo, Enedina Díaz de León; José Chávez Trowe (*motorcycle policeman*), Jesús Gómez (*traffic policeman*), María Luisa Cortés (*film actress*), Tamara Garina (*gringa passenger*), Salvador Godínez (*trolley co. employee*), Leonor Gómez (*doña Panchita*), Mario Humberto Jiménez Pons (*Lorenzana, student*), Francisco Ledesma (*cornmeal vendor*), Pepe Martínez (*Duque de Otranto*), Álvaro Matute (*Benítez, trolley company executive*), Roberto Meyer (*don Arcadio*), José Luis Moreno (*Conejo, student*) José Muñoz (*shop foreman*), Inés Murillo (*passenger with dog*), Rubén Márquez & Antonio Padilla *"Picoro"* (*henchmen of corn smuggler*), Manuel Noriega (*don Julio*), Juan Pulido (*pharmacist*), Polo Ramos (*skinny butcher*), Joaquín Roche (*inspector*), Nicolás Rodríguez (*don Enrique*), Agustín Salmón (*employee*), Mario Valdés, Hernán Vera (*don Prudencio, butcher*), Manuel Vergara *'Manver' (butcher)*

**Notes:** *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* is an atypical Buñuel film—that is, if you are mostly familiar with *Los olvidados*, *El Nazarín*, *Viridiana*, etc., or even black comedies like *Ensayo de un crimen*, rather than pictures such as *El gran calavera* or *Subida al cielo*. *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* is a highly entertaining, light, screwball comedy running only 80 minutes.

The chronology of the narrative of *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* is a bit confusing. As the film opens, the protagonists learn that streetcar 133 is being removed from service “as of 24 December.” That night they attend a celebration (complete with a *piñata*), dance & *pastorela* in their *barrio*, so one assumes this is Christmas Eve. Most of the events of the film take place on the next day—which would be Christmas—but there is literally no evidence that this is the case, neither visually, verbally, or in any observed variation in the daily lives of the residents of Mexico City.

Trolley mechanics Caireles and Tarrajas have restored streetcar 133 to operating condition after a week of hard labour, only to discover the car is being withdrawn from service and will be scrapped (they may also lose their jobs, but this is unsure). The two men go drinking after work, and are tipsy when they arrive at the Christmas celebration in their neighbourhood—Caireles



is to play God and Tarrajas the Devil and Adam in the *pastorela*; Tarrajas' attractive sister Lupita is cast as Eve. During the intermission, Caireles and Tarrajas sneak

off to the trolley barn to “liberate” some cases of beer they'd spotted earlier in the day. Overcome with sentiment, they decide to take 133 out for a final spin (night watchman don Braulio is at the celebration, drinking).

They return to the dance, but their absence resulted in the cancellation of the second part of the *pastorela* and the dance is over; they agree to take the musicians and doña Mechita (who was dispensing Christmas punch) across town to the *Rastro* (market). Lupita comes along, reluctantly. At the market, a horde of passengers—including meat cutters carrying large chunks of meat—board 133 for their trip home. Once all the riders have disembarked—including Lupita—Caireles and Tarrajas realise the watchman will be back at the trolley garage. They park 133 overnight in the wrecking yard, planning to return it early the next morning.

The next day, the route to the garage is blocked; to avoid picking up passengers, they turn on the “Special” sign, but they're hailed by a schoolteacher with a crowd of schoolboys—she has an order for a “Special” streetcar to take them on a field trip to Xochimilco. Halfway

through the journey, Caireles and Tarrajas pretend the trolley has broken down; when the boys and their teacher get off, 133 speeds away. Meanwhile, the watchman tells Lupita that 133 is missing, so she sets out to find it before he reports this. She boards 133 but it's forced to take on passengers again when a company inspector



orders them on another route. A retired streetcar company employee, Papá Pinillos, boards the trolley and suspects funny business. He disembarks and calls the company but his tale isn't believed.

Pinillos finally confronts the annoyed company manager in person, but when they go down to the trolley barn, 133 is in its place and the watchman (to save his job) verifies it has been there the whole time.

There are many amusing characters and events in *La ilusión viaja de tranvía*. One interesting aspect is its social commentary, which ranges from obvious to subtle. The passengers picked up at the Rastro are working-class Mexican men and women, who thank Caireles when he says there's no charge for the ride. A tipsy man wearing a formal outfit and top hat is identified as the "Duke of Otranto" and is laughed at by the others, while two women carrying a plaster image of a saint are treated respectfully. Later in the film, when 133 is compelled to take on passengers in another section of the city, the riders are middle-class, and view the "no fare" policy with suspicion (one rider, a *gringa*, says it "smells like Communism to me"). Several men say the streetcar employees aren't collecting fares because they don't care about the company's welfare, but just let their salary be late and they'd go on strike.

The transit company workers are separated into the office workers and the mechanics, drivers, etc. Caireles and Tarrajas were allowed to repair 133 because they were former apprentices of their supervisor; they did a



good job, refuting the company's evaluation of 133 as unusable, but the company stands by its decision. The executives

are depicted as rigid and incapable of admitting that the company could be wrong. Pinillos is an odd case, a retired employee who doesn't display solidarity with his former comrades, but instead tries to get them in trouble with the company. Pinillos, who was involuntarily

retired for health reasons, has a reputation with both the workers and the executives as a meddler.

There is also a brief subplot about exploitation of the working-class by food suppliers. In one scene, people waiting at a shop are shocked to see the price of *masa* (a cornmeal dough) has risen significantly over the "official" price. When Lupita protests, the shop owner threatens to close up entirely. Later, 133 is parked on a disused spur line and a truck full of sacks pulls up. The sacks are labeled "fertilizer" (also "Made in USA") but when one bursts, corn is exposed. Residents of the neighbourhood rush to confront the hoarder and his men, fighting them for the grain.

Luis Buñuel's attitude towards religion can be seen in a number of his films, but in *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* it is quite oblique. The *pastorela* is a religious play, but it is not supervised by a priest (unlike in *El tejedor de los milagros*):

instead, "El Profesor" is in charge. The content of the play is traditional (God vs. the Devil, the Archangel Michael, etc.—the Christmas



aspect with the Reyes Magos, and so forth was presumably going to be in the second part of the performance, which is cancelled) but it's worked out in a deliberately humorous fashion (as opposed to humour arising mostly from the campy aspects of the amateur costumes and performances). Tarrajas plays both the Devil (wearing a huge pair of bull's horns) and Adam (dressed in a caveman outfit) broadly and the audience enjoys it. By divorcing the *pastorela* from a Church context and in fact eliminating the specific Christmas story, Buñuel turns it into a non-religious burlesque entertainment for the working-class. As mentioned earlier, two women later board 133 carrying a plaster statue of a saint; the film depicts them as a combination of *beatas* (extremely religious women) and swindlers, who count on contributions from their fellow passengers.

In addition to the more obvious attributes of the film—the script, the performances—*La ilusión viaja en*



*tranvía* also has two significant advantages. First, the location shooting provides a fascinating time capsule of early 1950s Mexico City. Additionally, the cast includes numerous

character actors whose presence enriched Mexican cinema for decades, including but not limited to José Chávez Trowe, Guillermo Bravo Sosa, Víctor Alcocer,



Leonor Gómez, Juan Pulido, Manuel Vergara, José Muñoz, Inés Murillo, Regino Herrera, Victorio Blanco, etc. It's also curious to see Antonio Padilla "Picoro" in a (brief) acting role—he's most often seen in Mexican cinema as the ring announcer in *lucha libre* and boxing films.

Although some consider it one of Buñuel's "lesser" films, *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* is extremely well-made and entertaining.



## Cuando regrese Mamá [When Mother Returns] (Alameda Films-César Santos Galindo, 1959)



*Prod:* Alfredo Ripstein Jr.;  
*Dir:* Rafael Baledón; *Scr:* Ramón Obón;  
*Photo:* José Ortiz Ramos;  
*Music:* Gustavo César Carrión;  
*Prod Mgr:* Ramón Hernández;  
*Prod Chief:* Jorge Cardaña;  
*Asst Dir:* Américo Fernández;  
*Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Art Dir:*

Jesús Bracho; *Set Décor:* Rafael Suárez; *Lighting:* Miguel Arana; *Camera Op:* Manuel González; *Makeup:* Angelina Garibay; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:* Javier Mateos; *Sound Ed:* Raúl Portillo; *Union:* STPC; *Studio:* Churubusco-Azteca

**Cast:** Rafael Bertrand (*Arturo*), María Duval (*Meche Morales*), Ofelia Montesco (*Hortensia*), Hortensia Santoveña (*Carmelita*), Pedro D'Aguillón (*Pedro*), Alejandro Changuerotti [sic] Jr. (*Ricardo Morales*), Antonio Sandoval (*Pedro's compadre*), Rocío Rosales (*Guadalupe Morales*), Lucero Taboada (*Piilar "Pili" Morales*), Rafael Banquells Jr. (*Alfonso Morales*), Enrique Edwards (*Roberto Morales*), María Luis Cortés (*neighbour*), Conchita Gentil Arcos (*doña María, neighbour*), Leonor Gómez (*neighbour*), Ana María Hernández (*third cousin*), Fanny Schiller (*Eulalia Martínez, cousin*), María Gentil Arcos (*María Martínez, cousin*), Luis Mario Jarero (*bartender*), Roger López (*notary*), Concepción Martínez (*neighbour*), Francisco Meneses (*doctor*), Jorge Mondragón (*lawyer for the cousins*)

**Notes:** *Cuando regrese Mamá* is a reasonably pleasant melodrama with a decent cast and production values, but little to make it especially memorable. I had

seen it many years ago but had forgotten everything except a brief scene early in the film in which housekeeper Carmelita criticises foreign influence on Mexican culture: "everything foreigners do, we have to do. Where will it end?" She says Meche's late father liked traditional things and that a Christmas tree (*arbolito*) would not have qualified as such. The tree was requested by Pili, the youngest daughter of the family, suggesting that the new generation of Mexicans is losing its cultural identity. Later in the film, the two youngest boys vote for the "Lone Ranger" and "Gastón Santos" to be their new father—one of these is a *gringo* cultural import, and the other a Mexican actor who plays "cowboy" (rather than *charro*) roles (and just happened to be under contract to Alameda Films). Curiously, aside from the credits artwork (showing "typical" Mexican children, piñatas, the 3 Reyes Magos, etc.) and music (which features the *posadas* song), *Cuando regrese Mamá* really doesn't contain any "traditional" Mexican Christmas elements, and the film could easily have been set in any Western country.

On Christmas Eve, the widowed Sra. Morales leaves her six children—teenagers Meche and Ricardo, and young Guadalupe, Pili, Alfonso and Roberto—to buy a Christmas tree. She runs a red light, smashes head-on into a bus and is killed (the Christmas tree



symbolically falls off the car and is crushed by an oncoming vehicle). The siblings conspire to keep the news of their mother's death from little Pili, telling her their mother is "helping the Virgin Mary" and will return some day.

While the older children and housekeeper Carmelita are at the wake, Pili meets Arturo, whose car has broken down outside their house. Family friend Hortensia, an airline attendant, arrives and backs into Arturo's car (a standard "meet cute"). Some time later, Arturo returns—he's an aspiring lawyer, but at the moment hopes to sell



the family a vacuum cleaner (unaware that they're currently orphaned and living in precarious financial straits). His presence is helpful when the three middle-aged cousins of the children's late father arrive with a lawyer: they are determined to do their familial duty and take in the children. However, this requires breaking up

the family, since each cousin will take just two children, and they live in different areas of Mexico. The children protest and Arturo steps in and wins a delay until the following December: the children will have to prove they can live independently in the interim (they later come up with an alternate plan—find a married couple that will adopt all 6 of them).

The children decide Arturo and Hortensia would be acceptable parents, and try to promote a romance between the two adults. Despite their initial hostility, Arturo and Hortensia eventually fall in love (did you ever doubt it?) and wed. But they leave on a long honeymoon and matters come to a head in December: Ricardo, who's gotten a job to support the family (it's not clear what he does), took out a loan and couldn't repay it, resulting in the seizure of much of their home's furniture. Also, the cousins send a letter announcing



their imminent arrival—on Christmas Eve!—to take away the children.

But all is resolved happily (did you ever doubt it?)—Arturo and

Hortensia arrive with a Christmas tree and presents; Pili is informed that her mother is going to stay in Heaven forever (because she's a saint, and saints live in Heaven) but accepts Hortensia and Arturo as her new parents, as do the rest of the children.

One of the interesting aspects of *Cuando regrese Mamá* is its chronological structure. The events of the film take place over the space of a single year, and most segments (although not every sequence) of the film are tied to a particular event or holiday. These include religious, secular, historic and personal occasions--

1. Christmas Eve 1958: the mother dies, Arturo and Hortensia meet
2. Ash Wednesday 1959: Arturo returns to the Morales home, the cousins arrive
3. May Day 1959: the children try to pair servant Carmelita and deliveryman Pancho, with no success
4. 14 July 1959: Guadalupe "marries" her adolescent boyfriend Paco. Paco's mother says he told her he was going to school dressed in his best suit to celebrate "the taking of the *silla*"—this presumably refers to 14 July 1914, when Victoriano Huerta was deposed as president and left Mexico.
5. 16 September 1959: the annual *Grito* ceremony (roughly, Mexico's Independence Day) is shown, and Arturo and Hortensia realise they're in love.
6. 12 October 1959: Pilar's birthday party.
7. Christmas Eve 1959: conclusion.

Several of these are worth commenting on. For instance, Ash Wednesday is not explicitly mentioned, but it would be obvious to viewers in a Catholic country, as

everyone in this sequence has an ashen cross on their foreheads (except the cousins, one of whom tells her sister that she wants to stop by a church afterwards because she feels odds not having the ashes). Ash Wednesday in 1959 was 11 February, so Arturo waited about 6 weeks to come back and try to sell a vacuum cleaner to the Morales household (Carmelita tells him to give her a "demonstration" by cleaning the children's bedrooms upstairs).

On May Day, family friend Pancho stops by the house after participating in the annual May Day parade with the deliverymen's union—their truck features a banner honouring the "Martyrs of Chicago," a reference to the Haymarket



massacre in Chicago in May 1886, after which 7 anarchists were arrested and hung.

There are some logical flaws in the screenplay of *Cuando regrese Mamá*. The issue of the family finances is brought up, dropped, then brought up again. Sra. Morales is a widow who—we later learn—has some sort of job (Pili says she sells dresses and things) and can support six children and a live-in servant in a large, middle-class house that she rents. Soon after her death, the children pool their resources (breaking piggy banks) in order to literally buy food, but when Ricardo gets a (never specified) job, their financial situation is apparently resolved. That is, until the beginning of December, when Ricardo confesses he had to borrow money to pay their expenses because he didn't earn enough, and their furniture is taken away as a result. Arturo and Hortensia aren't around to help, but the monetary crisis is soon forgotten and everything wraps up on Christmas Eve anyway. Also, the exact legal ramifications of the family situation are unclear: the "adoption" scheme is only brought up after the cousins have been convinced to give the six minor children 10 months to prove they can live independently, an unlikely sort of decision for a judge to make (perhaps they do things differently in Mexico, I don't know).





*Cuando regrese Mamá* occasionally alternates its tear-jerking moments with a few bits of humour, but for the most part it's a straight drama. Tossing in Pilar's near-death experience with diphtheria seems over the top, although it serves to bring Arturo and Hortensia closer together. The Arturo-Hortensia romance is generally satisfactory, although there is one jarring moment: Hortensia has repeatedly run into Arturo's car, knocking off the front bumper. The third time this occurs, he demands that she drive him to the police station so he can file a complaint. They climb into her car and...suddenly they're dancing together in a nightclub?! There's no explanation, they're still actually angry with each other--gradually their hostility thaws, but why and how they wound up in a nightclub is never clear.

The performances are generally good. Lucero Taboada gives a puzzling performance—in many scenes she's quite good but there are others in which she seems to not know what's going on. Rocío Rosales is more consistent (and more mannered)—neither of these girls had long acting careers (nor did Enrique Edwards, who plays their youngest brother), but coincidentally (or not), they both appeared (with Rafael Bertrand) in *El hombre de la ametralladora* (1960), another Alameda production. Second-generation actors Rafael Banquells hijo (probably best-known for his role in Luis Buñuel's

*Ensayo de un crimen*) and Alejandro Ciangherotti Jr. had longer careers and are generally fine, as is María Duval. Duval "sings" a song (dubbed by someone else), but—despite her second-billing—is not really the center of the narrative. Rafael Bertrand and Ofelia Montesco



are good as the couple whose romance was "voted" on by the orphans.

The supporting cast is strong, with Alameda stalwart Pedro D'Aguillón turning in a good serio-comic performance, and Hortensia Santoveña playing a sympathetic character for once. Fanny Schiller, Jorge Mondragón, and María Gentil Arcos get one scene, and María's sister Conchita also appears as a sympathetic neighbour.

Production values are fine, although most of the film takes place in the Morales house. Rafael Baledón directs efficiently, although he doesn't display much in the way of style.

*Cuando regrese Mamá* is slick and professional and generally entertaining in a mild way.



**El tejedor de milagros** [The Weaver of Miracles] (Sagitario Films, 1961) *Prod:* Rafael Lebrija; *Dir:* Francisco del Villar; *Adapt:* Julio Alejandro; *Collab:* Emilio Carballido, Humberto Robles Arenas; *Orig Play:* Hugo Argüelles; *Photo:* Gabriel Figueroa; *Music:* Carlos Jiménez Mabarak; *Music Dir:* Eduardo Hernández Moncada; *Prod Mgr:* Luis García de León; *Prod Chief:* Jorge Cardena; *Sub-Di:* Mario Llorca; *Asst to Dir:* José Luis Ortega; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Manuel Fontanals; *Décor:* Pablo Galván; *Camera Op:* Manuel González; *Lighting:* Daniel López; *Makeup:* Armando Meyer; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:* Manuel Topete B.; *Recordist:* José García; *Sound Ed:* Reynaldo P. Portillo; *SpecFX:* Benavides; *Union:* STPC; *Studio:* Churubusco-Azteca



**Cast:** Pedro Armendáriz (priest), Columba Domínguez (*Remedios*), Begoña Palacios (*Verania*), Sergio Bustamante (*Teófilo*), José Luis Jiménez (*don Cleofas*), Enrique Lucero (*Arnulfo*), Aurora Clavel (*Jacinta*), José Gálvez (*Marcial*), Hortensia Santoveña (*Eustolia*), Fanny Schiller (*townswoman*), Ada Carrasco (*doña Agustina*), Virginia Manzano (*Enedina*), Miguel Suárez (*don Sinfo*), Sadi Dupeyrón (*Amado*), Guadalupe Carriles (*choir leader*), Pilar Souza (*Chonita*), Socorro Avelar (*gossip*), Yolanda Guillaumin (*townswoman*), Marco Antonio Arzate (*townsman*), Victorio Blanco (*don Arcadio*), Queta Carrasco (*townswoman*), José Dupeyón (*Arcadio's relative*); *women in church:* Ana María Hernández, Elodia Hernández, Cecilia Leger, Diana Ochoa, Isabel Vázquez "La Chichimeca"; Rubén Márquez (*man in church*), Regino Herrera (*man in church*), Ángela Rodríguez (*townswoman*)

**Notes:** in the 1950s and 1960s (and beyond), a number of Mexican films turned a critical eye at life in the provinces, especially small towns, depicting them as cauldrons of religious fanaticism, jealousy, feuds, and other unpleasant attitudes and events. Examples include *Raíces*, *Talpa*, *Tlayucan*, *Crisol*, and others. *El tejedor*

*de milagros* is one such film, and also bears certain (probably coincidental) similarities to the much later *Canoa* (although with a number of aspects reversed).

*El tejedor de milagros* was based on a play by Hugo Argüelles; the adaptation was done by Julio Alejandro [de Castro], who—although he wrote some original screenplays—was apparently especially adept at turning plays, novels, and stories into films: his credits include *Eugenia Grandet* (Balzac), *Abismos de pasión* (Emily Bronte), *Feliz año, amor mío* (Stefan Zweig), *Nazarín* (Pérez Galdós), *800 leguas por al Amazonas* (Jules Verne), *Viridiana* (Pérez Galdós again), *Los cuervos están de luto* (Argüelles again), *Santa* (Federico Gamboa), and *Tristana* (Pérez Galdós yet again). As one might note, 4 of these films were directed by Luis Buñuel (like Alejandro, a Spaniard resident in Mexico).



Alejandro's collaborators on the adaptation of *El tejedor de milagros* were two distinguished Mexican dramatists, Emilio Carballido and Humberto Robles Arenas. The film was shot by

Gabriel Figueroa, and Francisco del Villar (see photo at left of Figueroa and del Villar on the set) made his feature directorial debut (after spending the 1950s making documentaries). *Los cuervos están de luto* reunited a number of the cast and crew of *El tejedor de milagros*, including del Villar, Alejandro, Argüelles, José Gálvez, José Luis Jiménez, Hortensia Santoveña, and Miguel Suárez, among others.

On Christmas Eve, Arnulfo and his wife Jacinta arrive in a small Mexican town: Jacinta, pregnant, is riding a burro. Arnulfo is a basket weaver who pretends to have only one arm so his baskets will fetch a higher price. Jacinta collapses and is taken in by Remedios, the town midwife (who also performs abortions if the price is right). Remedios is the *madrina* of Teófilo, sacristan of



the local church, but their relationship is also sexual. Teófilo is pursued romantically by the wealthy young Verania, but he feels the socio-economic gap is too great (it apparently didn't stop him from sleeping with her, and it's also suggested that he steals from the church poor-box to buy her presents).

Jacinta is installed in the stable attached to Remedios' house, and impressionable altar boy Amado thinks she is the second coming of the Virgin Mary. Rumors spread throughout the town.

Remedios and Teófilo think they can make enough money from the locals to move away together (Teófilo doesn't commit to the "together" part); however, don Cleofas (an atheist who has spent most his life in Europe) reads about how (real-life) folk saint Niño Fidencio became wealthy and pays Teófilo for the "honour" of becoming the as-yet-unborn child's *padrino*. Teófilo installs Arnulfo outside the church to sell his baskets to the curious.

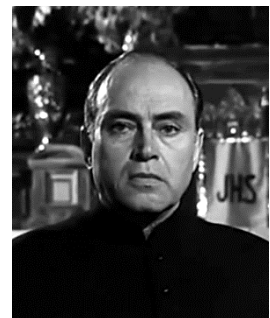
The local priest is angry when he learns his entire congregation has gathered outside Remedios' house instead of attending the *pastorela* program. He orders everyone to return to the church and designates don Cleofas, town administrator don Sinfo, and crooked gambler Marcial as the three



"Reyes Magos" in the play. During midnight mass, the congregants receive updates on Jacinta and her child: the child is born, the child was born dead, the child came back to life! [Remedios used cold water to shock the newborn into breathing and crying.] The church empties as the townspeople gather again to pray at the stable. Teófilo, remorseful, tries to tell the truth but is attacked by Marcial, who has attached himself to don Cleofas in hopes of sharing the bounty of gifts. The priest arrives and castigates his parishioners—he shows them that the baby is normal, but his arguments fall on deaf ears. One woman seizes the child to take it to the church, and a stampede ensues. Teófilo tells Remedios he's leaving town—but with Verania.

The infant is placed in the *crèche* near the altar and becomes an object of adoration. Arnulfo and Jacinta arrive to reclaim their child, but Jacinta discovers her baby has died. Everyone goes home silently; the priest, devastated, falls to his knees; Arnulfo and Jacinta walk away.

*El tejedor de milagros* is handsomely produced, shot almost entirely on sets and populated by numerous extras. The play is "opened up" to some extent, with multiple scenes shot in the church, in the church courtyard, and in Remedios' home, with other sequences taking place in the homes of Verania and don



Cleofas. Del Villar's direction is effective without being showy, and while certain scenes clearly have their



origins on the stage, he cuts effectively and there is little staginess about the action. The performances are all solid. Perhaps most surprising today is a young, slim, and handsome Sergio Bustamante, who within a few years would be firmly ensconced as a heavy-set, bald or balding character actor specialising in villainous roles. Pedro Armendáriz, shorn of his usual moustache (since priests in Mexico are traditionally clean-shaven) and bereft of his usual wig, has a strong presence as the priest, a stern, patriarchal taskmaster who considers his flock somewhat errant, but seems sincere in his faith and shows flashes of compassion.

*El tejedor de milagros* is one of those films that has a largely negative point of view—this is to say, it's critical of some things without presenting a positive alternative. The superstitious nature of the town's population is a flaw, but who's to blame? The priest says "this isn't the religion I taught you," but it actually is, except taken to an extreme. Are the townspeople to blame if they believe the story of Jesus Christ being born in a manger and decide the current circumstance is too similar to be pure coincidence? In *Canoa*, a local priest (played, coincidentally, by Enrique Lucero who appears here as Arnulfo) controls his



congregation and whips up mob action against outsiders; in *El tejedor de milagros*, the priest loses control of the people and they become a mob (albeit one with different goals than in *Canoa*) despite his attempts to order them to stop and—after they defy him—his subsequent attempts to reason with them. It's unclear if *El tejedor de milagros* is specifically anti-Catholic or if it just opposes irrational beliefs which lead to irrational actions.

*El tejedor de milagros* also includes some familiar criticisms of provincial life, including hyper-religious *beatas*, incompetent government officials, hypocrites, scoundrels, etc. Remedios the midwife provides a needed service but her clandestine (but apparently widely-known) activities—helping “unfortunate young women” terminate unwanted pregnancies—have made her unpopular with the *gente decente*. Her emotional breakdown at the end of the film as Teófilo announces his intention to leave town with Verania exposes her intimate relationship with her godson, shocking those who witness it.

This is a solid film that holds one's interest throughout. The characterisations are multi-dimensional and the conclusion is uncompromising.

*El tejedor de milagros* premiered in Mexico City on 27 December 1962, so it benefited from a timely release (although it was hardly a “feel-good Christmas movie”)

and had an initial run of 4 weeks. The film was entered in the 12<sup>th</sup> Berlin Film Festival in 1962 but won no awards (despite the fact that Dolores del Río was on the jury)—John Schlesinger's *A Kind of Loving* took the Golden Bear prize.



## Un hombre en la trampa [A Man in the Trap]

(Prods. Sotomayor, 1963) Prod: Jesús Sotomayor

Martínez; Prod

Exec: Heberto

Dávila Guajardo;

Dir: Rafael Baledón;

Scr: José María

Fernández U[nsáin];

Narration Text:

Ramón Obón;

Photo: Raúl

Martínez Solares;

Music Dir: Sergio

Guerrero; Supv:

Miguel Sotomayor

Martínez; Prod

Chief: Armando

Espinosa; Asst Dir:

Américo Fernández;

Film Ed: Carlos

Savage; Art Dir: José Rodríguez G.; Lighting: Miguel

Arana; Camera Op: Cirilo Rodríguez; Sound Supv:

James L. Fields; Sound Dir: Galdino Samperio; Dialog

Rec: Luis Fernández; Makeup: María del Castillo; Union:

STPC; Studio: Churubusco-Azteca

**Cast:** Ignacio López Tarso (*Javier Ortiz*), Kitty de Hoyos (*María*), David Reynoso (*Cmdte. Fuentes*), Evangelina Elizondo (*Sra. de Fuentes*), Adriana Roel (*Cristina*), Sergio Bustamante (*Cristina's husband*), Emma Roldán\* (*old nurse*), Víctor Alcocer (*Juan, co-worker*), Ángel Merino (*Enrique Valdés, Javier's boss*), José Pardavé (*man at office party*), Celia Viveros (*doll vendor*), Carlos León (*policeman*), Armando Acosta (*ambulance attendant*), José Chávez Trowe (*first watchman*), Arturo “Bigotón” Castro (*man in bar*), Fanny Schiller (*matron in car*), Victorio Blanco (*blind man*), Lupe Inclán (*woman with creche*), Aurora Walker (*Cristina's mother*), Jesús Gómez (*police agent*), Ricardo Adalid (*doctor*), Armando Gutiérrez (*María's client*), Fanny Schiller & Cecilia Leger (*women in auto*), Marco Antonio Arzate (*police agent in hospital*), Vicente Lara “Cacama” (*man in religious procession*), Leonor Gómez (*woman in religious procession*)

\*credited, but cut from existing prints

**Notes:** *Un hombre en la trampa* was shot mostly on location in Mexico City in December 1963, and the city's noted holiday light display (and traffic, and people window-shopping) take up the first 5 minutes of the film. After this, there are occasional Christmas references, but the setting is used only as occasional ironic counterpoint, and the narrative could have taken place on any night of the year.



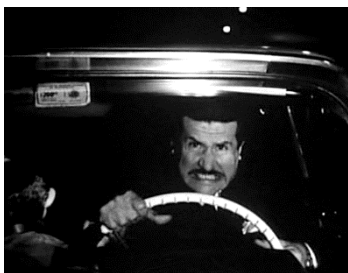
*Un hombre en la trampa* tries to work up a Hitchcockian “innocent man on the run vibe,” but with a major difference: the protagonist is not “innocent.” He’s not guilty of the crime he fears he committed (a hit-and-run killing of a baby and its mother), but he is guilty of a non-fatal hit-and-run. Thus, during the last two-thirds of the film he’s not being pursued by the police for the purpose of arresting him, but rather to prevent him from doing something desperate because he believes he’s a wanted man. It makes *Un hombre en la trampa* much more ironic than a Hitchcock film like *The 39 Steps* or



*North by Northwest* or *The Wrong Man*, but it also means there’s less suspense and less at stake. [Of course, as the film goes on, in addition to the initial crimes of reckless driving and leaving the scene of an accident, Javier assaults several police officers, shoots at them, smashes the glass doors of a store, and carjacks 2 women.]

Rafael Baledón directs the film with his usual professionalism, but the overall effect is hampered by frequent “arty” voiceover narration (some provided by David Reynoso as the police commander, but it’s unclear if he does it all)—“What is the difference between a fearful and frightened man who flees and a wounded animal? They have the same desire to flee, the same instincts, the same *astucia* [cunning].” [In 1985, Ignacio López Tarso starred in the film *Astucia*. A coincidence? Yes.]

Office worker Javier and his wife are expecting their first child after 8 years of marriage. While he’s at the company Christmas Party, Javier is notified that his wife has been taken to the hospital. Javier’s boss loans him



his auto so he won’t have to search for a taxi; speeding through traffic, Javier hits a young woman pushing a baby carriage. He stops but when a bystander shouts “leave before the police get here,” Javier drives off,

shortly thereafter crashing into a truck. He flees on foot. Pursued by the police, he hides in an empty stadium,

then a museum. Caught by the night watchman, he’s allowed to leave since the watchman says Javier “doesn’t have a face like a thief.” The police have discovered who the driver was, and are watching the hospital where Javier’s wife is a patient.

Javier performs various good deeds to illustrate his basic decency: he assists a blind man in crossing a street, and later advises a little girl to return to her home (she thinks her parents don’t love her). He visits his co-worker Juan and asks the man to go to the hospital to see how his wife is doing (when Javier called, a receptionist—under police direction—says she can’t give out information over the phone, Javier has to show up in person), but Juan’s wife doesn’t want to get involved and calls the police. Javier leaves (and Juan goes back to watching a very noisy program on television).

Prostitute María, whose room is across the street from the hospital, befriends Javier. She brings news that Javier’s wife had a son, and arranges for Javier to disguise himself and enter the hospital. Javier says he’ll turn himself in to the police, but only after seeing his wife and child. However, once in the hospital he struggles with a police guard and shoots him with his own pistol (“It was my fault,” the man says!) and flees. He exchanges fire with another policeman on the roof. Pursued by more police, Javier smashes a glass door and enters a Sears department store. Outside once more, he hides in a car and forces two women to drive him away. Alighting from the car, he calls the police and is put through to Cmdte. Fuentes, in charge of the case. Javier meets the police official and hands over his gun. As the film concludes, Javier goes into his wife’s hospital room and a baby’s cry is heard.

Although *Un hombre en la trampa*’s plot revolves around Javier’s desire to see his pregnant wife, Elvira de Ortiz does not appear in the film at all. If we want to prolong the Hitchcock analogy, I suppose that makes her the “MacGuffin.” Nonetheless, the Ortiz marriage is obliquely held up as an example to the other couples in the film, none of whom have children and none of whom are depicted as very happy. The wife of Cmdte. Fuentes begrudges the time he spends on his job, saying she feels “like a widow whose husband is alive,” and later tells him their marriage is a failure. The couple leaves to spend an evening out, then Fuentes is sent to meet Javier—his wife says she’ll take a cab home, but Fuentes urges her to accompany him, and she witnesses his bravery and concern for the “innocent” Javier, which leads to a reconciliation between the police officer and his wife. Javier’s friend Juan is willing to help him,



but Juan’s wife doesn’t want to get involved and calls the police, which provokes Juan’s anger. Prostitute María displays a hard-boiled attitude but is softened by Javier’s



story and decides to help him. She refuses payment for her time (she even turned away a potential client); Javier gives her a little monkey-doll he'd purchased for his newborn son (and had carried throughout his flight through the city). Finally, Cristina (the woman struck by Javier's auto)--as is revealed in several later scenes--became mentally unbalanced when her (real) child died. She now treats a doll as her child, and is distraught when it is "killed" in the accident. Her husband (on the orders of Cristina's psychiatrist) replaces the "baby" with another doll to mollify his wife (although when she's seen one last time, she doesn't seem that happy). He tells his mother-in-law that Cristina will recover when she has a real child again (which presumably means he's having sex with his mentally ill wife in an effort to achieve this result). When you add the sequence in which Javier convinces a little girl to return to her family, the moral of *Un hombre en la trampa* seems to be "children are essential to a happy marriage."



Despite the prominent billing of "The City of Mexico" as Ignacio López Tarso's "co-star" in the opening credits, most of the action in *Un hombre en la trampa* takes place in a relatively narrow section of the city (in the film's topography, if not in real life—the stadium appears to be the Estadio Olímpico Universitario, located in Ciudad Universitaria in Coyoacán, but I'm unsure which hospital it is and where the Sears store was in 1963). There is no sense of Javier traveling from *barrio* to *barrio*, *colonia* to *colonia*—which is logical, since his goal is the hospital where his wife is a patient—but it seems to the audience that he's sort of going in circles.

The production values are fine: the location shooting (most of which occurs at night) gives the film a bit of a *cinema vérité* vibe. The performances are also satisfactory.

No classic, but a different "look" than usual and an acceptable plot.



**Las amiguitas de los ricos** [The Mistresses of the Rich] (Interfilms, 1967) *Dir-Scr*: José Díaz Morales; *Story/Adapt*: Alfredo Varela [Jr.]; "Literary Version": Antonio Vies; *Photo*: Raúl Domínguez; *Music*: Enrico C. Cabiati; *Theme Song*: Irvin [sic] Taylor & Ken Lane ("Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime"); *Prod*

*Mgr*: Roy M. Fletcher; *Asst Dir*: Fernando Durán; *Film Ed*: Federico Landeros; *Camera Op*: Roberto Jaramillo; *Asst Cam*: Antonio Ruiz; *Lighting*: Rubén Méndez; *Makeup*: Graciela Muñoz; *Recordist*: Heinrich Henkel; *Asst Rec*: Ricardo Saldívar; *Union*: STIC; *Studio*: América



**Cast**: Ana Bertha Lepe (*Betty*), Maricruz Olivier (*Lia aka Rosalía*), Fanny Cano (*Nora*), Sara García (*Luz Romero*), León Michel (*Tony Casasús*), YuYu (*María*), Arturo Cobo (*Lupito del Vergel*), Augusto Benedico (*Raimundo*), Carlos Cortés (*Julio Hernández*), John Novak (*Richard McDonald*), Antonio Raxel (*Pedro*), Pedro D'Aguillón (*Casto González de la Garza*), Consuelo Frank (*Consuelo, Casto's wife*), Federico del Castillo (*friend of Julio*), Claudia Martell (*sexy widow*), Elvira Lodi, Roy Fletcher, Roberto Meyer (*village priest*), Enriqueta Carrasco (*Raimundo's wife*), Orlando Rodríguez (*Santa Claus*)

**Notes**: in the late 1960s, a number of Mexican producers began making "adult"-themed films. Adultery, infidelity, homosexuality and other themes were explored, and characters included mistresses, prostitutes, pimps, swingers, newlyweds, etc. René Cardona Jr., José Díaz Morales and others directed performers such as Mauricio Garcés, Enrique Rambal, Silvia Pinal, Ana Bertha Lepe in these pictures, which were in some ways precursors to the *fichera* genre of the '70s and the *sexy-comedies* of the '80s. A number of the films were anthologies or at least multi-character narratives with numerous sub-plots. Examples include *Don Juan 67*, *Siempre hay una primera vez*, *Un nuevo modo de amar*, *El día de la boda*, *El amor y esas cosas*, *El despertar del lobo*, *Como pescar marido*, *Trampas de amor*, *Mujeres, mujeres, mujeres* (there was also a *Muchachas, muchachas, muchachas*), *Click--fotógrafo de modelos*, *El cuerpazo del delito*, etc.

One of the most prolific companies making this type of picture was "Interfilms," which produced 18 features



in 1967-70 alone. Interfilms was run by Pedro A. Calderón; José Díaz Morales --who had been associated



with the Calderón family before, directing some of their notorious, ground-breaking "nude scene" features of the mid-1950s--helmed the majority of the company's movies. Although most if not all of the Interfilms product (released through Columbia Pictures) was rated "C" (roughly equivalent to an

"R" in today's MPAA system), overt nudity was not a significant factor, at least in the Mexican versions (it's possible prints intended for international release contained alternate takes or added footage). The "C" rating was therefore probably generated by the relatively liberal view towards sexual matters expressed in the films (at least right up until the end of each movie, when conservative mores almost always triumphed).

*Las amiguitas de los ricos* and *Mujeres, mujeres, mujeres* both went before the cameras in January 1967.



The crews were almost identical, and various performers appeared in both movies, although *Mujeres, mujeres, mujeres* was a multi-story picture with three distinct "episodes" (these being STIC productions) and thus had three different casts. For some

reason, *Mujeres, mujeres, mujeres* was given a "D" rating--adults only--rather than a "C."

*Las amiguitas de los ricos* has two special points of interest: its fantasy content and its stereotypical *gringo* character (who is rather more prominent and sympathetic than usual). [I might personally add a third point: Fanny Cano, whose mere presence makes a film worth watching, at least in my opinion!] Otherwise, the film suffers from a sloppy,



illogical script which splices together its various scenes without much regard for clarity or continuity or chronology (not to mention the usual lapses in common sense which are endemic in melodramas).

Example: at some indeterminate point in the past, Nora strolls past a group of university students. One of them, Julio (who says he's "almost an architect"), has just said "the only women worth anything are foreigners." He flirts with Nora and she rejects him coldly, then a street photographer takes a photograph of them. Years (?) later, Julio just happens to be the editor and proprietor of a "lonely hearts club" magazine (what happened to



architecture?) and is randomly invited to a Christmas Eve dinner at which Nora is also present. Julio still has the snapshot of them together, how sentimental! However, he becomes convinced Nora is a...let's say, "courtesan," and although he says he "loves" her, he repeatedly (both on and after Christmas Eve, although exactly how much time elapses between their meetings is also unclear) tries to get her into bed, even tearing her dress at one point. Then they reconcile because...Nora comes back to him?! So we've got muddled chronology, outrageous coincidence, mistaken impressions, and completely illogical actions. And that's just one subplot!

Lía and Betty are the mistresses of Raimundo and Pedro, respectively. The older men, both married, pay for the women's luxurious lifestyle in Cuernavaca, but visit only on the weekends. On one such weekend, Raimundo and Pedro are accompanied by their friend from Monterrey, Casto, who expects to be set up with Nora, a friend of Lía. Nora hasn't decided to enter the life of a kept woman: she joins the party (which involves skinny-dipping by the women and other diversions) but refuses to sleep with Casto. Lía and Betty ask their boyfriends to spend Christmas Eve with them "decently," but Raimundo and Pedro merely deliver their gifts (a diamond ring for Betty and the paperwork for a new car for Lía) and then depart to spend the holiday with their families (Casto didn't make it at all: "he's in the hospital"). In revenge, the women decide to invite 3 strangers to share their dinner. Julio, editor of a match-making magazine, is called on the spur of the moment and agrees to attend, bringing along his friend Tony, a womanising undertaker. To complete the trio, they pick up drunken *gringo* Richard, found clinging to a lamp post ("he has a defect: he's American and he's drunk," Julio says--wouldn't that be **two** defects?). Lía's servant María arranges for her own date, but is disappointed when the effeminate Lupe shows up.

The party is just getting started when Lía's elderly mother Luz arrives unexpectedly from the provinces. Lía and her friends claim the young men are their fiancés. Everyone enjoys themselves--Betty pairs off with Richard, Lía with Tony, and Julio with Nora. Nothing untoward goes on, because only Betty is interested in having sex with her new boyfriend, and before anything can happen



between them, Richard gets an emergency call to report to work (he's employed at the satellite tracking station in Guaymas). Raimundo and Pedro show up, angry, but are unable to make a big deal of it because Lía's mother is present. They depart and then Doña Luz hustles the other men out, including Lupe (who was only pretending to be gay).



A few days later (again, the chronology is unclear, although it isn't New Years yet), Pedro appears and gives Betty a diamond ring to apologise, but she rejects it (and returns one he had given her earlier): she's been listening to Richard on the short-wave radio as he chats about her to the orbiting Gemini astronauts passing over Mexico. Ashamed of her prior life, Betty decides to go away so Richard can't find her and propose marriage (as he has indicated he will do). Lía gets a letter from the priest in her hometown and learns her mother died on 16 December...so it was apparently her kindly ghost who spent Christmas Eve with her daughter and the others, helping set them on the right path in life. Raimundo offers to pay Lía's passage to Europe, but she breaks off their relationship.

Julio and Nora finally get together, and decide to spend the New Year's holiday in the countryside. They convince Lía and Betty to go along. Tony appears in his hearse and confesses his true love for Lía. As they drive off, Betty spots Richard standing beside the road and they are also reunited.

In addition to the "Phantom Hitchhiker"-like twist regarding the ghost of doña Luz (handled reasonably well, with a few well-placed clues



only obvious in retrospect), *Las amiguitas de los ricos* also includes a cameo appearance by Santa Claus! The film opens with a scene in Heaven (shown as a black void, oddly enough): God (unseen, heard in voiceover) warns Santa Claus not to meddle in the lives of adults on Earth. He must limit his activities to making children happy; Santa Claus agrees but then breaks his word, causing a Christmas tree to mysteriously appear in the yard of Lía's house (which inspires the Christmas Eve party), and later appearing on the street to ask Lía, Betty, and Nora what they want for Christmas (Betty--a diamond ring; Nora--true love; Lía--to freeze time).

The other aspect of interest--the presence of *gringo* Richard McDonald--is curious in several ways. While



*gringos* have appeared in Mexican cinema since at least the 1920s, most of the favourable U.S. characters are women or older men (such as Cliff Carr). Young male *gringos* were not especially prominent in Mexican films (especially prior to the 1980s),

and were often portrayed as villains or at least unsympathetic weaklings. However, while Richard displays some stereotypical attributes--he's clumsy (mostly because he's drunk), speaks heavily-accented, grammatically-shaky Spanish, is attracted to Mexican

women, and is presented as something of a naïf--he is by no means an unpleasant or negative character and is rather readily accepted by Lía, Betty, and the others. Doña Luz says "these Americans never grow up. But they're very likeable." Richard is given a personality and a back-story, another rarity for Mexican cinema *gringos* (he's referred to as an *americano* several times, which is not the usual practice in Mexican movies, where *gringos* are usually called *gringos* or *norteamericanos* or *estadounidenses*). In fact, the Richard-Betty sub-plot occupies much more screen time than either the dysfunctional Julio-Nora romance or the almost nonexistent Lía-Tony story: although Ana Bertha Lepe was top-billed and would thus be expected to have the lion's share of the footage, it wasn't necessary to pair her character with the *gringo* male (one might expect quite the opposite). Worth noting, however is the original depiction of Betty as a wholly mercenary character who, furthermore, affects an Italian accent--one might say she is already practically a foreigner herself. And yet, by falling in love with a *gringo* who goes against the stereotype of "Americans" as a people obsessed with business and money, she discards these false values and resumes her Mexican identity.

Consequently, *Las amiguitas de los ricos* is a rare example of a Mexican movie which places a young and handsome male *gringo* in a Mexican milieu, gives him a major role, depicts him sympathetically, pairs him up with the leading lady (at least in terms of billing), and lets them live happily ever after.

The technical aspects of *Las amiguitas de los ricos* are adequate. José Díaz Morales had little discernable directorial style but was a competent craftsman. Most of the film was shot on location in somebody's luxurious house in Pedregal (curiously, in the final scene, two huge dogs can be spotted frolicking in the yard, although they appear in no other scene).

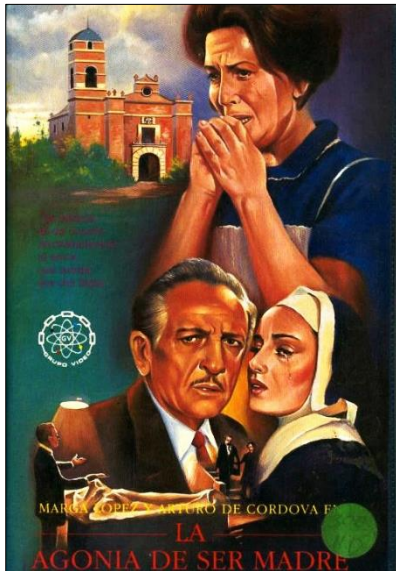


The performances are all professional, within each performer's limitations and style. Yu Yu (Varela) and Arturo Cobo handle the comic relief and towards the end of the film even go through a sort of *carpa* routine: Lupe proposes to María and she agrees, but says he has to help support her invalid uncle...her little brother...her uncle's wife...etc., with the appropriate grimaces and gesticulations by Lupe each time. Fanny Cano is strikingly beautiful but frozen-faced as always, Maricruz Olivier carries the heavy melodramatics, Sara García is her usual stalwart self (in one scene, she's referred to as *abuelita*--even though in the context of the film she's not one's grandmother--which references her nickname of "the grandmother of Mexico"). Carlos Cortés and León Michael are adequate, and John Novak does a good job,

although he'd have been easier to take if he hadn't been saddled with the stereotypical *gringo's* pidgin-Spanish dialogue.

Trivia note: the oft-repeated theme song of *Las amiguitas de los ricos* is an instrumental version of "Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime," a major hit for Dean Martin in the mid-1960s.

Reprinted from MFB 17/4 (July-Aug 2011)



**La agonía de ser madre** [The Agony of Being a Mother] (Productora de Películas Sanen, 1969) *Exec Prod:* Carlos E. Enríquez; *Prod:* César Santos Galindo, Ernest Enríquez; *Dir:* Rogelio A. González Jr.; *Scr:* Ramón Obón, Rogelio A. González Jr.; *Story:* Patricia Kennedy; *Photo:* Rosalío Solano; *Music:* Luis H. Bretón; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir:* Jaime L.

*Contreras;* *Script Clerk:* Rogelio González Chávez; *Film Ed:* Gloria Schoemann; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano; *Decor:* Raúl Serrano; *Lighting:* Antonio Solano; *Makeup:* Ana Guerrero; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:* Francisco Alcaide; *Recordist:* José F. Baena; *Sound Ed:* José Li-Ho; *Union:* STPC; *Studio:* Churubusco-Azteca; Eastmancolor

**Cast:** Marga López (*Ana García*), Arturo de Córdova (*Luis García*), Karla (*Yolanda*), José Alonso (*Antonio*), María Eugenia San Martín (*Elena*), David Estuardo (*Jorge*), July Furlong (*Mari Rosa*), Gonzalo Vega (*Rubén*), José Baviera (*doctor*), Cesaréo Quezada[sic] (*El Ena*), Yolanda Liébano [aka Yolanda Liévana] (*Rita, receptionist*), Agustín López Zavala, Manuel Dondé (*police inspector*), Delia Peña Orta (*Virginia*), Enrique Pontón (*friend of Luis*), Agustín Fernández (*Tiburón, gambler*), Victorio Blanco (*dice game onlooker*)

**Notes:** 14 years after *Feliz año, amor mío*, Marga López and Arturo de Córdova again co-starred in a melodrama with a holiday tie-in, in this case Christmas Eve. Time had not been kind to de Córdova, who was only 61 years of age when he shot *La agonía de ser madre*, but who had suffered a serious stroke in 1967 and looks quite frail at times (the stroke affected the left side of his body, and you will notice that he doesn't use his left arm in the film and walks stiffly). *La agonía de ser madre* and *El profe* (1970) were his final films—both with Marga López, who apparently encouraged him to

remain active—before his death in 1973. Marga López, on the other hand, had been settled in “mature” roles for at least a decade, and seemingly stopped aging, looking largely the same for much of the rest of her life.

*La agonía de ser madre* is a depressing melodrama about a classic *madre abnegada* who has a terrible husband and awful children; everyone is depressed, bitter, dissatisfied, unhappy. When the mother gets the news that she has only 3 months to live, she prays to the Virgin to allow her to live long enough to solve her family's problems! This is a tearjerker of the first order, although the fact that everyone except the mother is unsympathetic (although not one-dimensional, to give the script credit) makes it hard to watch at times.

Ana learns her heart problems mean she has only a short time to live. She is married to Luis, who is

unhappy in his job, drinks too much, is in ill health, complains about “young people,” and is overly strict with his



teenage daughter Yolanda but overly lenient with his wastrel son Antonio. They have another daughter, Elena, who is married to Jorge, a dentist; they have a young daughter, Virginia. Elena thinks Jorge doesn't show her enough affection and is jealous of his patients and even their daughter. Antonio hangs around with Rubén, who convinces him to pilfer minor items from a drugstore (while Rubén escapes with some drugs), an act that Ana witnesses. Luis forbids Yolanda to attend a friend's birthday party; she sneaks out but is caught by Antonio, who brings her home. Ana says Yolanda's actions were “more serious than a mere escapade—it was an act of rebellion against your father.” She says Yolanda clashes with her father because “you are both proud, stubborn, violent.”

Luis, angry because his boss wants him to take on a younger assistant, arrives home on his birthday and



drunkenly smashes his birthday cake onto the floor in front of his wife, children, and granddaughter. After he goes upstairs (a bottle in his hand), Ana tells her family they should “not judge, but try to understand” him. Later, Luis accuses Yolanda of accepting a gift from a boy (it's a cross, and her friend Mari Rosa loaned it to her); Yolanda responds bitterly and Luis slaps her. He repents—asking Ana to apologise to his daughter for him—but Yolanda runs away that night. Luis disowns her. That night, in a very affecting



scene, Ana goes into a corner to cry so Luis won't hear her. She finally has to take one of the pills her doctor prescribed in the opening scene. On her next visit, the doctor says she needs absolute bed rest, but she refuses—"my family needs me as I am—God will help me." Doctor: "Science can do nothing more for you, but a miracle?" Ana: "The miracle isn't for me. There are things much more important for a mother."

Ana learns Luis has taken time off from work to (fruitlessly) search for Yolanda. They finally go to the police, but are told the majority of runaway teen girls are never found. "Some don't want to be found and others—it's better not to think about them."

Meanwhile, Elena decides to divorce her husband, and this finally makes Ana lose her temper. She says Elena's obligation is to "be pretty for the one you love and who loves you. You've always come to me with your complaints, but there will come a time when I won't be here. Respect yourself."

Antonio loses money to gambler Tiburón and is given 2 hours to pay up. Ana catches him stealing money from his father's wallet while Luis sleeps. Antonio tells his mother that he began hating his father when he saw him hit Yolanda. Ana tries to stop him from leaving and suffers an attack; he helps her take a pill. She says he has to reconcile with his father because she won't be around to mediate between them. "Act like a man, make me proud of you." She swears him to secrecy. Antonio confesses to his father and apologises, and they reconcile.

On Christmas Eve, when Yolanda hasn't returned, Luis and Yolanda stay home while Antonio, Jorge, and Elena go to midnight mass. Luis is despondent but Ana pretends to have lost her faith in God and Luis rallies to encourage her. The police call: a young woman who might be Yolanda is in the hospital. When they get there, the patient has died but it wasn't Yolanda. What a relief! (Well, too bad for whoever it was.) When they get home, Yolanda is there—she's a nun. As Ana looks on, the camera suddenly switches to a subjective shot from her POV--the room shakes, and Ana collapses.

The next day (?), Ana bids her children farewell with words of encouragement and advice (she says Yolanda became a nun to escape, "not to serve God," and that she should return to a secular life and get married someday). She thanks Luis for the life they had together. After they leave, Ana tells God "I'm ready," and dies peacefully.

*La agonía de ser madre* doesn't tie up the loose ends perfectly—Antonio never repaid his gambling debt (but didn't get beaten up as far as we know), presumably Elena repaired her marriage but we never see that happen (she and Jorge are together on Christmas Eve, though), and it's never explained how Yolanda could go from high school girl to full-fledged nun (apparently—she's wearing a full habit) in less than 3 months—but Ana at least has the satisfaction of setting her children and husband on the right path before she goes.

The performances in *La agonía de ser madre* are generally fine, within the confines of the heightened melodramatic style of expression. Arturo de Córdova's physical condition was not good, but his acting was not impaired (although in some scenes he very slightly slurs his words)—he's not a sympathetic figure on the surface, but Luis García is clearly a man who wants to stop (or even reverse) time, to be the formerly active, energetic, respected businessman and head of a family who is in control. His age and health, and the fact that the world is moving on and his children are growing up, make Luis bitter and he lashes out at those around him. De Córdova gets a number of stand-out scenes where he chews the scenery (but in a good way).

Marga López turns in an excellent performance as the saintly Ana, who tries to keep the peace between the members of her family, dispensing advice that is not always accepted. She is almost always calm, suffering in silence—while she has less acting "fireworks" than de Córdova, she's quite fine in the role.

José Alonso and Karla, as Antonio and Yolanda, get the lion's share of what's left of the screen time, and they are OK. Karla, aka Nora Lárraga--whose younger sister Vianey Lárraga married composer Agustín Lara in 1969 (he was 72 years old, she was 19)—made quite a few films in the latter half of the Sixties and first half of the

Seventies, but only occasionally afterwards. María Eugenia San Martín, as Elena, has less character development and footage, but she's satisfactory.

*La agonía de ser madre* was one of the final films of Cesareo Quezadas "Pulgarcito," whose acting career faltered when he was no longer a cute little boy. In 1971 he was arrested for armed robbery, and in 2002 was sentenced to 20 years in prison for sexually abusing his children. Actor David Estuardo, who had a decent career in Mexican cinema from the late Sixties through the 1970s and also worked as a voice actor, is actually David Stuart Povall, born in Texas in 1947 ("Estuardo" is the "Mexicanised" version of his middle name). Estuardo speaks Spanish without any discernable accent and usually played Mexican characters, as he does in *La*



*agonía de una madre*. In real life, he married Bárbara Ransom, another U.S. citizen who acted in Mexican cinema in this era.

Special mention should be made of the little actress who plays grandchild Virginia. Although uncredited, she is Delia Peña Orta, who was only about 3 years of age when she made the picture (her second—she'd made her debut a few months before in *Confesiones de una adolescente*). Virginia only appears in a handful of scenes and has almost no dialogue, but in the long "birthday dinner" sequence she stands on a chair without moving or speaking as the melodrama rages around her, quite a feat for such a young child. Peña Orta worked steadily in films and on television until *Discoteca es amor* (1978); this film, which contained adult situations and nudity, convinced her father that she should "retire" from acting, and she did.

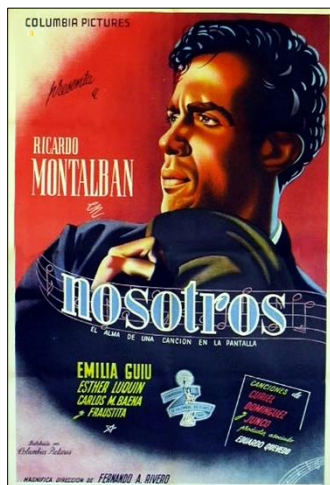
Existing "HD" copies of *La agonía de ser madre* appear to have been *faux*-letterboxed (some of the credits are cut off, a sure sign of tampering), and there are some odd transitions which almost certainly were added later (there is another copy on YouTube, of much lesser quality—looking like it was shot off a television screen!—but the re-formatting of the HD version is obvious when compared with this one). The production values are satisfactory, although most of the interiors are relatively bland. Rogelio González's directorial style is mostly vanilla, but it's slick and professional and there are even a few nicely-composed shots (in addition to many giant closeups of tormented, sad, and angry faces).

Your tolerance for melodramatic excess will determine if you find *La agonía de una madre* enjoyable or excruciating.



## What are you doing...New Year's Eve

**Nosotros** [Us] (Prods. México, 1944) *Exec Prod*: José Luis Calderón; *Prod*: Eduardo Quevedo; *Dir/Adapt/Dialog*: Fernando A. Rivero; *Story*: Ernesto Cortázar and Alfredo Robledo ("Destino"); *Photo*: Ignacio Torres; *Music*: Manuel Esperón, Francisco Argote; *Prod Chief*: José Luis Busto; *Asst Dir*: Jaime L. Contreras; *Film Ed*: Rafael Portillo; *Art Dir*: Jesús Bracho; *Artistic Collab*: Francisco Ortiz Monasterio; *Makeup*: Sara Mateos; *Sound Engin*: B. J. Kroger, Eduardo Fernández



**Cast**: Ricardo Montalbán (*Armando Suárez*), Emilia Guiú (*Marta*), Esther Luquín (*Lilia Robledo*), Dolores Camarillo (*Fraustita*) (*Mariquita*), Ángel T. Sala (*Fidel Robledo*), Carlos Martínez Baena (*Pedro Suárez*), Fanny Schiller (*Milagros Robledo*), Gloria Iturbe (*María Suárez*), Rafael Icardo (*Ramón Pérez*), Laura Martel, Manuel Dondé (*Marcelo*), Elma Seedorf, Amparo Montes (*singer*), Kiko Mendive (*himself*), Alma Riva, Fernando Rosales, Fernando Fernández (*singing voice only*), José Pardavé (*lottery vendor*), Freddy Romero (*drunk*), Ignacio Peón (*Robledo's servant*)

**Notes**: after appearing as an extra and bit player in a number of movies, Emilia Guiú received her first starring role in this film, an extremely well-directed and interesting melodrama. Aside from a typical bit of outlandish melodramatic coincidence, *Nosotros* is quite entertaining and surprisingly downbeat.

On New Year's Eve, prostitute Marta tries to leave a noisy nightclub, but her companion Marcelo prevents her from leaving and encourages her to drink. Eventually, the celebration ends and the club manager has one of his employees take the nearly unconscious Marta to her apartment. Mariquita, the *portera*, puts the weary whore to bed. A short time later, a man--fleeing from the police--hides in Marta's bedroom. He is



preparing to depart when the angry Marcelo breaks in and assaults Marta--the fugitive knocks out Marcelo and leaves, but not before Marta gets a good look at her benefactor.

The next day, Marta sees the man being detained by the cops; she claims he is her close friend, and they release him. Armando, the fugitive, tells her he dropped out of college and gradually descended to the level of a common thief. After a frank discussion with Marta, Armando determines to reform. He borrows some money from his parents and buys a car, going into business as a free-lance cab driver.

Marta and Armando are reunited and get "married" (they go to a church and recite vows in front of the altar, without benefit of clergy).

Three months pass. Armando and Marta now live in a small but decent apartment. She is no longer a prostitute, but rather a homemaker (Mariquita has become their maid). Despite her happiness, Marta is insecure and fears something will happen to ruin her life with Armando. When Armando has the chance to get a job as a chauffeur for a rich man, she is opposed, but eventually relents. Armando's employer is Fidel Robledo, a powerful politician. Fidel's daughter Lilia



flirts with Armando and shows him off to her friends, but he doesn't succumb to her advances. One evening, Armando foils an attack on his boss by an armed man, earning the gratitude of Sr. Robledo. Marta has a strange reaction to the news of the assault, anxiously asking if Robledo was harmed. She also confesses to Mariquita that she's pregnant, but won't tell Armando of her condition.

Robledo is disappointed with a speech prepared for him, and offers Armando the chance to revise it (he knows Armando spent two years in law school). The politician is so pleased with the results that he promotes his chauffeur to the post of private secretary.

One evening, Armando goes to a nightclub with Lilia Robledo (this scene immediately follows a sequence in which Armando and Marta visit a "Mexican" family



restaurant) and the couple is given some souvenir photos of their evening. Armando puts the pictures in his coat pocket and forgets about them, but naturally the

pictures are found by Marta, who fears the worst. She leaves Armando a note and vanishes.

Time passes. Lilia and Armando are now engaged to be married. During a dinner attended by the Robledo and Suárez families, Armando is summoned to meet a visitor: Mariquita, who has returned from an extended trip. When Armando says Marta left him, Mariquita reveals two bombshells--Marta was pregnant, and Marta is the daughter of Sr. Robledo, and thus Lilia's sister! Lilia nobly tells Armando he must find Marta and their child, renouncing her own claims to happiness.

But despite an intensive search (in a montage sequence), Armando is unable to discover Marta. On New Year's Eve, he narrowly misses seeing her in a sleazy *cantina*. After he has departed, a depressed Marta drinks poison. She is taken to a hospital, and Armando--



alerted by newspaper articles--visits her. Marta tells him their child died at birth; "we would never have been happy," She adds, "think

of the future [instead of the past]." Marta dies, and as the movie concludes Armando walks down a long corridor of the hospital, alone.

Director Fernando A. Rivero is a relatively little-known figure in Mexican cinema. Trained as an architect, he became involved in the film industry in the early 1930s, working in various capacities before assuming the role of art director. He moved up to direction in 1938, but left the movies in 1952 for the advertising business. *Nosotros* was the first of six movies Rivero made with Emilia Guiú. His other pictures include some widely-distributed shorts with Cantinflas, *Seda, sangre y sol* with Jorge Negrete and Gloria Marín, and *Perdida*, starring Ninón Sevilla.

Rivero may not be entirely responsible for the formal qualities of *Nosotros*, but the film is nonetheless quite stylish in its own way. There is considerable camera movement, including pans and tracking, which tends to increase the length of shots. The next-to-last scene is a wonderful two minute, 38 second long-take sequence--Armando enters a cantina and the camera tracks with him as he moves across the screen from right to left, threading his way among the revelers in the crowded dive. He pauses, listens to an (off-screen) singer performing "Nosotros," then leaves the cantina (the camera tracks back with him, from left to right). But instead of cutting, the camera now tracks *back* through the cantina (from right to left), and pauses at a table (loaded with empty beer bottles) where a working-class man is sitting. A woman seated across from him suddenly raises her head from where it had been resting on the table top--it is Marta. [If you look at this sequence more than once, you can see her head resting on the table in the foreground as Armando walks through the cantina.] The camera pauses as Marta and her friend have a brief, friendly conversation before he departs. Then the camera rests on Marta as she slowly pours something into her beer, drinks it, and grimaces. As she begins to agonise, the camera tracks right once more, leaving the cantina.

In addition to this minor gem of a scene, *Nosotros* also includes a couple of very nice matched dissolves. For example, in one scene Lilia kisses Armando, then stands smiling (almost smirking) as he leaves. Her face dissolves to a closeup of Marta's face, as she sits in bed waiting for Armando to return (she's knitting booties, a sure pregnancy tip-off). Later, there is a dissolve from a shot of Lilia's fur coat on a chair in her room (after she and Armando have been together in a nightclub) to a shot of Armando's topcoat on a chair in his apartment the next morning (just before Marta picks it up and finds the incriminating photos). Overall, the camera work and editing are top notch, very fluid and assured.

The performances are also fine. Ricardo Montalbán, shortly to depart for Hollywood, makes it plain why he was picked up by the "big leagues," handling a variety of emotions in a professional manner. Emilia Guiú has less ground to cover, but effectively conveys her character's internal torment and insecurity, while Esther Luquín--who has to go from frivolous rich girl to sympathetic fiancée--is also good. The supporting roles are handled

effectively, although none of the performers really have to stretch.

Aside from aforementioned far-fetched coincidence--Armando just happens to find a job with a man who just happens to be the estranged father of his common-law wife (and this really could have been omitted since it has no real bearing on the plot)--*Nosotros* is actually a fairly "realistic" melodrama, with people acting in a more or less "normal" fashion. Yes, Marta rather foolishly refuses to reveal her pregnancy to Armando, but this is explained away as one manifestation of her emotional insecurity. But it's nice to see such things as: don Felipe is a rather ruthless employer and dominates his family, yet isn't an unsympathetic character; Armando's mother gives him her family jewels to pawn so he can buy a car (putting one of her own rings in the jewel box); Armando's parents love him but when Marta disappears, they are clearly relieved since they think she's below him, socially; Lilia frivolously shows off Armando to her friends and flirts with him, but later falls in love for real and admits the error of her previous behavior. Marta is clearly a prostitute, no bones about it; in fact, when she and Armando return to her apartment after their "marriage," Mariquita expresses her disapproval, saying (in effect), that she doesn't like Marta to bring her clients home (but when she learns the couple is married, she relents).

*Nosotros* is a very fine little movie, worth watching.



Trivia note: Montalban only made a handful of other Mexican films after he moved to the USA, but coincidentally one of these was *Buenas noches, año nuevo!* (1964), which also used New Year's Eve as a plot point.

**Reprinted from MFB 10/1 (April 2004) with minor changes and all-new photos!**



**Feliz año, amor mío** [Happy New Year, My Love] (Cin. Filmex, 1955) *Prod:* Gregorio Walerstein; *Dir:* Tulio Demicheli; *Scr:* Julio Alejandro; *Orig. Novella:* Stefan Zweig ("Letter from an Unknown Woman"); *Photo:* Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Violin Solos:* Henryk Szering; *Prod Mgr:* Vicente Fernández; *Prod Chief:* Manuel Rodríguez; *Asst Dir:* Manuel Muñoz; *Film Ed:* Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir:* Jorge Fernández; *Décor:* Florencio Malagón; *Decorative*

*Painting:* Pedro Gallo S.; *Lighting:* Juan Durán; *Camera Op:* Andrés Torres; *Makeup:* Dolores Camarillo; *Music/Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Dialog Rec:* Rodolfo Benítez; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz; *Studio:* San Ángel; *Union:* STPC; Eastmancolor



**Cast:** Arturo de Córdova (*Ricardo Caso*), Marga López (*María*), Andy [Andrés] Velázquez (*young Ricardito*), Dalia Iñíguez (*María's mother*), Lorraine Chanel (*Sofía*), Miguel Suárez (*Pedro*), Manuel Zozaya (*Rafael*), Rosenda Monteros (*Luisa, María's assistant*), Dolores Camarillo (*Nana*), Ernesto Roemer (*orchestra conductor*), José Pidal (*Ricardo's doctor*), Ignacio López Tarso (*Manuel Quintana*), Nicolás Rodríguez (*María's doctor*), Julio Daneri, Silvia Carrillo, José Luis Caro, Julián de Meriche, Patricia de Morelos, José Muñoz (*man at concert with binoculars*), Lidia Franco (*woman at concert*), Cecilia Leger (*woman at airport*), Humberto Rodríguez (*priest*)

**Notes:** Stefan Zweig's novella "Letter from an Unknown Woman" was published in 1922, and before it was adapted to the screen in Mexico in 1955, it had already been filmed (officially and unofficially) in 1929 (Germany), 1933 (Hollywood), 1943 (Finland), 1948 (Hollywood again), and 1952 (Greece). The most famous version is the 1948 Hollywood film *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, directed by Max Ophuls and starring Louis Jourdan and Joan Fontaine in the roles later played by Arturo de Córdova and Marga López.



Coincidentally, both Fontaine and López were 30-31 years of age when they played the leading role, which required them to age from an impressionable teenager to a mature woman over the course of the film (neither actress is entirely

believable as the younger character). Howard Koch's screenplay for the Ophuls version takes certain liberties with Zweig's original, and Julio Alejandro also makes some changes, albeit rather fewer--in the original work, the male protagonist has no name, and is a novelist; Koch made him a pianist and named him Stefan Brand,



while Alejandro changed this to violinist Ricardo Caso; the Ophuls version is a period film, whereas the Mexican picture is contemporary—or at least it concludes in the present day (it's unclear exactly when it begins, since the sets, costumes, props seem more or less contemporary to 1955 throughout—in one scene, Ricardo visits the grave of his first wife and son, whose death is listed as “1935,” suggesting the events of the film probably begin in the late Thirties or early Forties).

*Feliz año, amor mío* was a relatively lavish production, shot in colour in various locations and featuring two of Mexico's biggest stars. One striking aspect of the film is the amount of music it contains. Yes, one of the two protagonists is a concert violinist, but the narrative focuses on Marga López's character and is not a fictional biography or career study of de Córdova's Ricardo Caso. The picture begins with an 8-minute concert sequence (including the credits), and follows this up with scenes in which Caso plays the violin on-screen and in which María listens to recordings of his music (or violin music is just heard on the soundtrack). Violinist Henryk Szering was born in Poland but emigrated to Mexico after World War II and became a nationalised citizen; he certainly earns his salary for *Feliz año, amor mío*. [De Córdova is shown “playing” the violin several times, and appears to be doing his own bowing and fingering (not being a violinist, I can't vouch for how realistic his actions are). Unlike films about a pianist—where closeups of anonymous hands on a keyboard can be inserted more or less seamlessly—it'd be fairly obvious if shots of a double playing the violin were used.]

Violinist Ricardo Caso collapses after a concert; he was warned by his doctor to cease performing, but ignored the advice. He considers suicide, then opens a long letter he just received...[flashback, narrated by María]

María is an art student who lives with her widowed mother in Mexico City. María is a fan of Ricardo, constantly playing his records and drawing portraits of him. She's pleasantly surprised when Ricardo moves into a neighbouring house (what are the odds?!) but is slightly disillusioned when he comes home with a woman and she sees their shadows as they embrace.



Eventually she “forgives” Ricardo for his actions, but is saddened when her mother remarries and they relocate to Pátzcuaro. Coincidentally, this is where Ricardo's wife and son—who died in an accident—are buried, and María sees him at their grave.

Some time later, María returns to Mexico City and is lurking outside his house on New Year's Eve when Ricardo comes home and sees her. Although she tries to flee, he catches up and invites her to dinner. They go dining and dancing, but the popular music offends

Ricardo's sensibilities—he asks María if she'd like to come back to his home and listen to some recordings. She agrees, one thing leads to another, and they sleep together. María leaves the next morning before Ricardo awakes. Ricardo tells his major-domo Pedro that he thought María was just out for a fling, but then discovered otherwise (presumably this means she was a virgin). But he has to leave the country immediately to fill in for another violinist. When María returns, she sees a note on the door from Pedro; she rushes to the airport but can't get Ricardo's attention before he departs.

As so often happens in melodramas, the first time a virgin has sex she becomes pregnant. María gives birth to infant Ricardito, but declines to notify Ricardo by mail, deciding to wait until she can see him in person. Several years go by (based on Ricardito's size, probably 4 or 5): María is now a successful fashion designer with her own shop. Ricardo returns to the city for “one concert only.”

María attends the concert—which features another long (3 minute) violin solo, although during part of this María is fantasizing about married life with Ricardo and her son—



and goes backstage only to discover Ricardo doesn't recognise her. He's engaged to Sofia, and they visit María's shop the next day to purchase a wedding gown! Oh, the irony! Ricardo meets Ricardito, and shows him how to play the violin. Overcome with emotion, María has to leave the showroom.

More years go by and Ricardito is now a teenager. Ricardo is married to Sofia but they live apart. María continues to send Ricardo red roses each year on New Year's Eve, anonymously (although his servant Pedro knows the source) with a card reading “*Feliz año, amor mío*.” Ricardo: “Who could this woman be, Pedro?” “Someone who never forgets, sir,” is the reply. “If that woman should show up,” the lonely Ricardo says, “tell her I need a sweetheart, a lover, a daughter, or even only a nurse.” Meanwhile, María has a suitor, Manuel. They're at a nightclub on New Year's Eve and she says she'll tell him at midnight if she'll accept his marriage proposal...but who should María see in the club but Ricardo. What're the odds?! He smiles and sends her a note, and that's it for poor Manuel (who is never seen again), as María leaves with Ricardo. They spend the night together and as she departs the next morning, María crosses paths with Pedro.

María falls ill and returns to Pátzcuaro, where she writes the story of her life in a letter to Ricardo, then dies listening to his concert on the radio. [End flashback] Ricardo regrets never realising who María was or what she could have meant to his life. He brings red roses to María's grave and introduces himself to Ricardito,

promising to help him achieve his dream of becoming a professional musician. As the film concludes, Ricardo and Ricardito are living in the house where María first saw Ricardo, and her spirit is pleased that she brought them together.

[The film concludes with a long shot of the deserted street outside the house, eerily effective and a callback to two previous scenes: on the night Ricardo and María first met, he spotted her on the street, staring at his house, and followed her; later, after their final meeting, María leaves and walks down the same street in a driving rainstorm.]

*Feliz año, amor mío* is, aside from the framing story, told from María's viewpoint: it's her letter that constitutes the bulk of the narrative. There is, however, one rather jarring exception—the sequences late in the film in which Ricardo talks with his doctor, and then discusses his loneliness with Pedro. María would have had no knowledge of either of these scenes, and the inclusion of them in the flashback that represents her letter to Ricardo is inconsistent. However, these scenes are important, since they reinforce the idea that Ricardo's



life is unhappy and he would have been better off had he and María married. This seems to be the point of the film: María's obsession with Ricardo and her difficult-to-understand refusal to contact him after Ricardito's birth is portrayed as noble, or something. She becomes a successful fashion

designer but has never forgotten Ricardo; she strongly hints to her suitor Manuel that she'll accept his marriage proposal at midnight on New Year's Eve, only to dump him without hesitation when Ricardo flirts with her (and she still refuses to identify herself to Ricardo, even though he repeatedly says he seems to recognise her).

After this (second) one-night stand, María doesn't return to Ricardo, again for unexplained reasons. There's an abrupt cut from her leaving his house in the pouring rain to a shot of a hospital—in voiceover, María says she fell ill and was hospitalised for a year, but it's unclear (a) what her (fatal) illness is, (b) if it's related to her stroll in the rain (unlikely), and (c) if she was stricken so suddenly that she couldn't go back to see Ricardo (or even contact him), despite his obvious desire to have a relationship with her. Possibly—although this is not stated—María felt Ricardo was now unattainable because he was married (albeit separated). Instead, once

she goes to Pátzcuaro to die, María writes the multi-page letter that will be sent to Ricardo after his death. Guess that'll teach him!

[Ironically, this in some ways mirrors the real-life relationship between Marga López and Arturo de Córdova. They had a real-life romance, although both were married and had children (López in fact was married twice to the same man, Carlos Amador, and divorced him twice!). After López's second divorce in the early 1960s, she and de Córdova formed a couple (although his wife never granted him a divorce) until the latter's death in 1973.]

More evidence of the woman-centric sympathies of *Feliz año, amor mío* is the treatment of María giving birth to a child out of wedlock: there is never any



suggestion that she suffers personally or socially because of this, unlike in some other films. Her mother disappears from the movie when María leaves Pátzcuaro for Mexico City—not reappearing until the very end, as María is dying—but María has faithful servant Nana as her

companion, and as noted above, María quickly (in terms of the film's narrative) becomes a successful businesswoman and a good mother (she even calls Ricardito at midnight on New Year's Eve—right in the middle of her second tryst with Ricardo!). There are also no repercussions (that we see—remember, this story is being told by María) to her shabby treatment of Manuel.

Ricardo is depicted ambivalently. He's a self-centered womaniser, but with a conscience, expressing remorse after his first encounter with María (because she wasn't the "loose woman" he expected). However, he apparently never changes, randomly picking up María in a nightclub at least 15 years later (and it's clear if he'd gone to a different nightclub, he'd have picked up someone else). But his life isn't happy: his first wife and child died in an accident, his second wife doesn't love him or live with him, his health is bad and is affecting his career, and he thus has nothing left to live for...until María gives him the posthumous gift of a son.



Tulio Demicheli had a long career as a director and screenwriter, and made a number of perfectly fine films (also some lesser ones, such as *Assignment Terror* aka *Los monstruos del terror*, 1970). *Feliz año, amor mío* is quite slick and professional but without a noticeable style: the relatively low-volume melodrama (no screaming confrontations) unfolds in clean, modern settings, and aside from a rather small number of close-ups (which reinforces the "cool" nature of the events



we're shown), the visuals do not draw attention to themselves.

This is essentially a two-person film, with Marga López getting slightly more attention than Arturo de Córdova, but both performers are well served by the script, with meaty scenes and roles which allow them to age on-screen (always a plus for actors), although this is accomplished mostly by costume, hairstyle, and acting rather than makeup (the time frame of the film is probably around 18-20 years from start to finish). Supporting roles are aptly filled. Curiously, only one actor is credited as "Ricardito," although "young Ricardito" and "teen Ricardito" are played by different performers. Production values, as noted above, are fine. Most scenes take place on studio sets, but some footage was shot at Lake Pátzcuaro, and the concert sequences appear to have been filmed in an actual auditorium.

Arturo de Córdova won the Best Actor Ariel for *Feliz año, amor mío*, and Julio Alejandro took home the award for Best Adapted Screenplay. Tulio Demicheli, Marga López, Rafael Ceballos (film editing), Jorge Fernández (art direction), and Rodolfo Benítez (sound) were all nominated but did not win.



**La endemoniada** [The Possessed One] (Estudios América-Cima Films, 1967) *Assoc Prod*: "Gómez Muriel-Ruanova"; *Dir*: Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Scr*: Alfredo Ruanova; *Photo*: Raúl Domínguez; *Music Dir*: Enrico Caviatti [sic, Cabiatti]; *Prod Mgr*: Jacobo Derechín; *Asst Dir*: F[ernando] Durán Rojas; *Film Ed*: Raúl J. Casso; *Art Dir*: Octavio Ocampo, José Méndez; *Camera Op*: Roberto Jaramillo; *Makeup*: Graciela Muñoz; *Lighting*: Douglas Sandoval; *Music/Re-rec*: Heinrich Henkel; *Sound Op*: Ricardo Saldívar; *Union*: STIC; *Studio*: América; Eastmancolor

**Cast**: Libertad Leblanc (*Lucía*; *Princess Fausta de Santillán*), Enrique Rocha (*Gonzalo de Véneto*), Carlos Cortés (*Ricardo Márquez*), Rogelio Guerra (*Pablo*), Adriana Roel (*Bertha*), Bertha Moss (*mother*), Arturo Martínez (*Marcos*), Agustín Martínez Solares [hijo] (*Fausta's lover*), José Baviera (*Diego*), José Alfonso Torres [aka Juan Miranda] (*blacksmith*), Norma

Lazareno (*secretary 1*), Guillermo Rivas (*Inspector*), Nora Lárraga [aka Karla] (*secretary 2*), Eduardo MacGregor (*ass't to inspector*), Manuel Dondé (*doctor*), Ángela Coronado (*maid*), Alejandra Macbride (*Martita*), Enrique García Álvarez (*Grand Inquisitor*), María del Carmen Rodríguez Morquecho

**Notes**: "Inspired" by *La maschera del demonio* (aka *Black Sunday*), directed by Mario Bava in 1960, *La endemoniada* is a satisfactory horror tale featuring Argentine import Libertad Leblanc in a dual role. Leblanc, who removed her clothes on film with some frequency, had a brief but prolific movie career in the Sixties and Seventies, shooting pictures in her native land and Mexico, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, the USA, etc. She worked with producer/director Emilio Gómez Muriel and his producing partner/writer Alfredo Ruanova (himself an Argentine) on *La endemoniada*, *La perra*, and *Lujuria de marihuana* (aka *Esclava del deseo*).

*La endemoniada* was released in Mexico in a cut version (rated "B", and according to García Riera, with no nudity) and these prints are fairly common on the internet—copies running 77 minutes most likely omit portions of the nude scenes (i.e., any shots which actually show nudity). This apparently includes the Laguna Films DVD (based on an Amazon.com review). Uncut versions do exist—I have the VideoVisa VHS and a version sourced from cable TV which each run about 82 minutes and do contain nudity. [Also note: the 1975 Spanish film known as *Demon Witch Child* was originally titled *La endemoniada*, so don't be fooled if you do go looking for the Mexican film.]

*La endemoniada* is billed as part of the "series" "Historias de amor y aventura." The only other entry I have found in this series is *Alerta*, *alta tensión*, a James Bond-ish spy film starring Jorge Rivero. Other than the "series" name and the fact that both films were produced by Estudios América & Cima Films, there is no connection between the two films, thematic or otherwise.

As with most STIC features until the 1970s, *La endemoniada* consists of three "episodes." The first episode usually has the main feature's title (and doesn't have a separate title card); the second episode has a title card included here--"El tóxico de las Borgia"—but there's no third episode title on the print I have.

In the 1500s, Princess Fausta is caught by her husband Diego just after she has murdered one of her lovers. After giving her a tongue- and whip-lashing, Diego turns her over to the Inquisition, which condemns her for murders, witchcraft, and so on (this scene is



slightly reminiscent of one in *El barón del terror*). A spiked, iron devil-mask is jammed onto her face and she's bricked up in the walls of her castle as her vampire consort Gonzalo looks on from hiding.

400 years later, Gonzalo appears on New Year's Eve at the home of a dysfunctional family, coincidentally built next-door to Fausta's castle (which he says he's purchased and renovated). The family consists of miserly Mother (she's given neither a first name nor a



family name in the film), her alcoholic son Marcos, daughter Bertha, Bertha's daughter Martita, Bertha's husband Pablo, and

Lucía, the wife of Marcos (who just happens to be the exact physical double of Fausta). Also present is "family friend" Ricardo, Lucía's former boyfriend. Gonzalo invites them to visit his home, especially Lucía, who has been curious about it since childhood.

Gonzalo goes back to the castle (the exterior shots look like a castle but no one ever calls it that) and meets a young woman who answered his advertisement for a private secretary. He bites her neck and drinks her blood, killing her. He then goes to the basement where Fausta's corpse is still chained to the wall—her face,



when the devil-mask is removed, resembles a Morlock from *The Time Machine*. Gonzalo gives some sort of garbled explanation about having finally found Fausta's double, which will allow her to return to life for the "Black Year." And sure enough, when Lucía pays a visit some time later, Gonzalo hypnotises her, puts Fausta's necklace around her neck, and Fausta reappears, alive!

There are a number of odd things about this. First, Fausta is a separate person—in other words, Lucía is not possessed by Fausta, they inhabit separate bodies. Late in the film, Ricardo reads about "bilocation" from a parapsychology book, saying a person can be possessed by someone else's spirit; when Lucía says that wasn't the case, that she was physically elsewhere when Fausta was impersonating her, Ricardo points out another quote that contradicts what he just read! Apparently the possessing

"spirit" could also take physical form and not just possess someone else's body. Not sure why this was brought up at all—except perhaps to justify the film's title—since in every instance we see, Fausta is clearly not possessing Lucía's body. And in only two instances do the two women seem to have a psychic connection (when Fausta's arm is burned by a candle, Lucía feels it, and Lucía feels it when Fausta is shot). Ricardo also explains this away late in the film, claiming Lucía got burned because "Fausta is immaterial, only a spirit." Again, completely illogical, since Fausta has been physically interacting with people for the whole movie.

Second, Fausta has not only regained her youth and beauty, she's now dressed in modern outfits that are identical to those worn by Lucía, because...magic? This happens repeatedly during the film, although Fausta occasionally wears a red negligee. Throughout the film, Fausta can be identified by the necklace (which Gonzalo took back from Lucía) and by her evil actions, but she seems to come and go at will and never runs into Lucía. They're in the same scene a couple of times but are never shown together—you could say this was deliberate, to maintain the possibility that Fausta is a "spirit," but that's contradicted multiple times (as noted above). More likely, the filmmakers didn't want to invest in split-screen or hiring a body double.



A short time later, Fausta impersonates Lucía and gives Mother poison. Marcos and Pedro aren't too sad, because now they can spend the older woman's money: Pedro buys a new car and Marcos indulges in his hobby (drinking). Fausta appears in sexy lingerie to Marcos and stabs him (she has one move that she uses four times: get partially naked, embrace a man, reach under whatever they are lying on, grab a dagger, stab him). Marcos doesn't die and accuses Lucía, but she can prove she was far away from the house with Pedro. Fausta returns and smothers Marcos with a pillow. She then seduces a hunky blacksmith and gives him the old back-stabbing treatment. Gonzalo feels Fausta's lust threatens their plans (plus, he loves her and is jealous)—he turns into a bat (for the only time in the movie) and goes to hide the corpse.



Fausta impersonates Lucía and denounces Pablo to the police, accusing him of murdering Marcos. Pablo is



arrested and sent to Mexico City; Bertha follows him, leaving their daughter Martita in Lucía's care. Fausta impersonates Lucía again and takes Martita to the castle, intending to seal her up in the basement walls, but Martita flees and is rescued by Ricardo (who has more or less figured out the whole plot based on a convenient book he read).

Lucía moves to a hotel but on New Year's Eve is abducted by Gonzalo. Fausta tries to seduce (and stab)



Ricardo but he knows Lucía wouldn't be such a slut, so he shoots Fausta multiple times. However, it's Lucía (in the castle) who feels the impact of the bullets; as she falls, she knocks

over a lit candle and it burns up a portrait of Fausta, which conveniently causes Fausta to burn up as well. Ricardo goes to the castle, sticks a fireplace poker in Gonzalo's chest, and leaves with Lucía.

[The *denouement* reinforces the inconsistency of the Lucía/Fausta situation: Fausta is shot and Lucía feels it; but when Fausta burns up, Lucía is just fine. So it's only one-way? Even fantasy films should have rules.]

The biggest problem with *La endemoniada* is the script. Alfredo Ruanova borrowed the basic premise and some other aspects of

*La máscara del demonio/Black Sunday*, but he didn't copy the story entirely, and instead substituted some vague and even contradictory plot



points to explain what was going on. It's never clearly explained why Fausta sets out to eliminate her neighbours: Lucía is only related to them by marriage, and those murdered by Fausta (Mother and Marcos, and an attempt on Martita) don't threaten her scheme (whatever it is) at all. Also, even if she had killed Martita, Bertha is still alive, so the family wouldn't have been wiped out. Gonzalo being a vampire is mostly irrelevant (although this idea was in *La máscara del demonio*, so it had to be in this one too, I guess)—he turns into a bat one time, and kills two women, but these are things he didn't have to be a vampire to do (except for the bat part), and in fact the two murders he commits are completely extraneous to the plot. It's also unclear why Gonzalo—who is already undead—is going to “die” at the end of the Black Year.

The production values are *La endemoniada* aren't bad, but the film suffers from the usual artificiality of its América studio sets: the castle and its dungeon aren't bad, but the family's home (where much of the action

takes place), the police station, and the hotel room are all completely impersonal and uninteresting. Some of the scenes in which the family stands around arguing resemble a *telenovela*, both in the flat style in which they are shot and the melodramatic conflict. The budget was clearly low, and the cast very small. The horror makeup for Fausta is decent.

On the positive side, most of the performances are satisfactory. Libertad Leblanc does a reasonably good job in her dual role. She's attractive; she doesn't have the same... “attributes” as her fellow Argentine performers Isabel Sarli and Zulma Faiad, but she's not shy about disrobing (which she does multiple times in the picture). Some of her wigs are pretty unattractive, though. The other stand-out in the acting department is Arturo Martínez as the drunken Marcos; after he's nearly stabbed to death by Fausta, he does an excellent job of portraying Marcos as weak and terrified, fearful of his “wife” finishing him off (which she does). Alejandra Macbride is not so good as Martita—she's made to appear, act, and talk as if she were considerably younger than her (apparent) real-life age. Macbride has only one other film credit (*La amante perfecta*, 1969), although it's possible she also worked in television in this era.

If you can get past the illogical aspects of the plot, *La endemoniada* is moderately entertaining.



## One More Obituary: José Antonio Hernández

As this issue was being completed, news came that producer/director José Antonio Hernández passed away on 22 December 2020 of complications from COVID-19; he was 50 years old. Hernández, a graduate of the CUEC film school (now known as ENAC), produced numerous films in the 2000s, including *Santos peregrinos*, *31 días*, and *Familia Gang*. He also directed the feature *Redención* and various short films.



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