

THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN

SPRING 2022 ISSUE

Spring 2022 Issue

After a busy winter, MFB returns with (sadly) a lot of obituaries, but also plenty of film reviews! There will be at least one additional issue this calendar year (in the fall, our annual Halloween issue).



Obituaries

Rogelio Agrasánchez L.

Producer Rogelio Agrasánchez Linage passed away on 30 December 2021. Agrasánchez was born in August 1934 in



Puebla. He originally began working in the film industry at the age of 15 and organised his own distribution company; he would also receive producing credit as early as *Mi novio es un salvaje* (1953) and *Aventuras del Guardian* aka *Yanko en el guardián de la selva* (1962). In 1969 Agrasánchez purchased Cin. Grovas, a company dating back to the

1930s—*Tres noches de locura*, made in 1969, credits both Rogelio Agrasánchez and Jesús Grovas as producer, and *Los Campeones justicieros* (1970) is also listed as a Grovas film. *Superzán el invencible* (1971), made in Puebla, was probably the first film bearing the Producciones Filmicas Agrasánchez label. This company made more than 5 dozen features over the next two decades (including 8 in 1977 and 10 in 1983). A number of these were shot in Texas, while others were filmed in Guatemala.



Amalia Aguilar

Dancer and actress Amalia Aguilar passed away on 8 November 2021 in

Mexico City. Aguilar was born in Cuba in June 1924, and made her Mexican film debut in *Perversa* (1945). Over the next decade she appeared in more than 20 films--often as a rather stereotyped Cuban



rumbera--before marrying Dr. Raúl Beraún and relocating to his native Peru. The couple had three children, but Beraún died in an airplane crash in 1960. In the Seventies Aguilar and her children returned to live in Mexico, and in 2001 she made a cameo appearance in the romantic comedy *Dame tu cuerpo*.



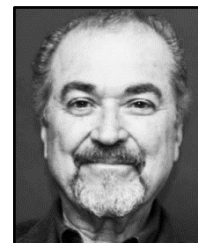
Óscar Cadena

Television host Óscar Cadena passed away in Cancún on 28 October 2021; he was 75 years of age and had been in poor health for some time. Oscar Marcial Cadena Jiménez was born in Mexico City in November 1945 and began working in television in 1968. He was the producer and host of “Cámara infraganti” and “Ciudad infraganti” in the 1980s-90s, programs which focused on Mexico City’s inhabitants and their daily lives. Cadena also directed a documentary film & the TV sitcom “Cómplice en familia,” and appeared in some television shows and at least 3 feature films: in *Trágico terremoto en México* (playing himself), *Cabalgando con la muerte*, and *Cándido Pérez, especialista en señoras*.



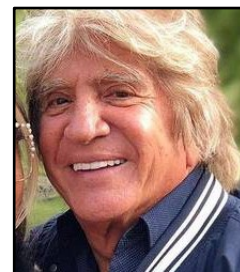
Luis Cárdenas

Actor Luis Cárdenas White passed away on 22 March 2022. Cárdenas began appearing on television in 1990 and worked steadily on TV—including famous *telenovelas* such as “Muchachitas”--on the stage—where he was also a director--and in cinema until 2021. He appeared in films such as *La primera noche*, *Norteados*, and *Los días más oscuros de nosotros*.



Javier Castro

Singer, composer and occasional actor Javier Castro died on 17 December 2022. He had COVID-19. Javier Castro Muñoz was a member of the singing group Los Hermanos Castro; brothers Arturo (who died in March 2021), Jorge and Javier first performed as “Los Panchitos” while still children, then later added their cousin Gualberto Castro and took the name “Los Hermanos Castro.”



The group was very popular in the 1960s and appeared in the films *Matar es fácil*, *El zángano*, *El misterio de los hongos alucinantes*, and *Cómo pescar marido*.

Javier Castro’s daughter Daniela Castro (born in 1969) became a popular actress herself.



Pedro D'Aguillón Jr.



Pedro D'Aguillón Jr., the son of long-time Mexican character actor Pedro D'Aguillón, passed away on 3 February 2022. Pedro D'Aguillón Lozano was born in November 1947. He became a radio announcer and in his late forties started working as a voice actor (his father had also done voice acting in addition to his screen roles). D'Aguillón Jr. voiced characters in animated series like "Dragon Ball," as well as dubbing performers in feature films including Sylvester Stallone as Rambo, and Robert Englund as Freddie Krueger.



Gonzalo Elvira

Producer Gonzalo Elvira died on 11 March 2022; he was 90 years of age. Gonzalo Elvira Sánchez de Aparicio was born in Mexico City in January 1932; his father was a film producer and although Gonzalo studied law and spent some time as a professional *pelotari* in Spain, he returned to Mexico and entered the film industry in 1950. After working in various capacities, including scripter and production supervisor, he eventually became a producer himself.



[There is some confusion in online sources between father and son since they share the same name and occupation: Gonzalo Elvira R. (1900-1972) was the father of Gonzalo Elvira Sánchez de Aparicio. To complicate matters even further, Gonzalo Elvira Álvarez, son of Gonzalo Elvira Sánchez de Aparicio, is **also** a film producer.]



Raquel Ércole

Colombian actress Raquel Ércole passed away on 11 December 2021; she was 81 years of age. Ércole was born in



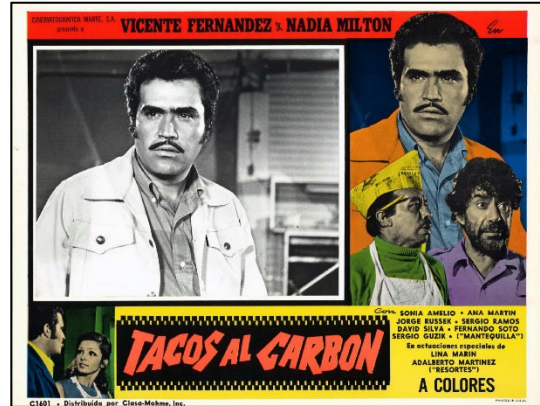
Colombia in 1940, and began her performing career as a dancer. She married Lizardo Díaz, a singer-comedian who was part of the "Los Tolimenses" duo; they were married until Díaz's death in 2012 and had 3 children.

Ércole appeared in the first Colombian *telenovela* and was active in films and on television until 2010. She worked in 2 Mexican-Colombian co-productions, *Un ángel de la calle* and *Bajo el ardiente sol*.



Vicente Fernández

Vicente Fernández, one of the most popular Mexican performers of the past 50+ years, died on 12 December 2021 at the age of 81. Fernández had various health problems for more than a decade—including several bouts with cancer—and had been hospitalised for several months after suffering a fall at his ranch. Vicente Fernández Gómez was born in February 1940 in the state of Jalisco. Due to his family's precarious financial situation, Fernández worked various jobs from a young age, but began to achieve recognition as a singer while still a teenager. He moved to Mexico City in 1965 and within a few years was a popular recording artist.



Although Fernández was primarily a *ranchera* singer, his film career (as was that of Javier Solís) seems to have been modeled after that of Pedro Infante: a mix of urban, working-class dramas and comedies, *rancheras* (and *ranchera*-Westerns and Revolution-era tales), and the occasional contemporary drama (with music). His first film was *Tacos al carbón*, and he made his last movie 20 years later, *Mi querido viejo*.

Vicente Fernández married María del Refugio Abarca Villaseñor "doña Cuquita" in 1963; they had 3 children (and adopted a fourth), including Vicente Jr. and Alejandro Fernández, who also became singers. Fernández was reputed to have had numerous extramarital affairs.

Although Fernández made his last film in 1991 and retired from touring in 2016, he continued to record music as recently as 2020.



Verónica Forqué

Actress Verónica Forqué died on 13 December 2021 in Madrid; she apparently took her own life.

Verónica Forqué Vázquez-Vigo was born in December 1955 and began her screen acting career in the early 1970s. Her father was film director José Ma. Forqué and her mother was actress Carmen Vázquez Vigo (her brother Álvaro Forqué, a director and assistant director, died in 2014). She appeared in numerous films and



television programs and won 3 Goyas (Spain's equivalent of the Oscar and Ariel), including Best Actress for *Kika* (directed by Pedro Almodóvar, for whom she made 3 films). Forqué's only appearance in Mexican cinema was *El canto de la cigarra* (1980), a Mexican-Spanish co-production directed by her father and starring Silvia Pinal.



Rubén Fuentes

Composer Rubén Fuentes passed away on 5 February 2022 at the age of 95. Rubén Fuentes Gassón was born in the state of Jalisco in February 1926, and trained as a classical violinist. However, he joined the Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán in 1944, and eventually became the group's director. Fuentes wrote hundreds of songs, especially in the *mariachi-ranchera* genre, including "La bikina," "Cien años," and "El son de la negra." His music can be heard in many Mexican films, and he also wrote the scores for various movies and served as music director for others.

Rubén Fuentes was married to actress Martha Roth from 1952 to 1971; they had two children.



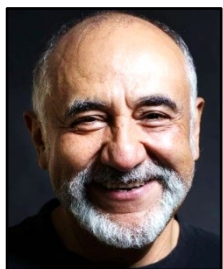
Pepita Gomís

Pepita Gomís, a children's television program host and the ex-wife of actor Héctor Suárez, died on 26 December 2021 at the age of 83. Josefina Gomís Iniesta was born in January 1938; she was the host of the education childrens' program "Telekinder," which began airing in 1963. Gomís received a master's degree in history and held a number of other positions during her life, including hosting several additional television shows and running a bilingual elementary school.

Gomís was married to comic actor Héctor Suárez for 36 years (1965-2001); they had two children, including actor Héctor Suárez Gomís.



Herman López



Actor Herman López died on 19 December 2021. López was born in Mexico City in March 1961 and began working professionally as a voice actor in 1984. In addition to dubbing animated television programs and doing voice work for animated features such as *La leyenda del Charro Negro*, López also appeared frequently as an actor on

television. He was married to voice actor Norma Iturbe; they had one son.



Xavier Marc

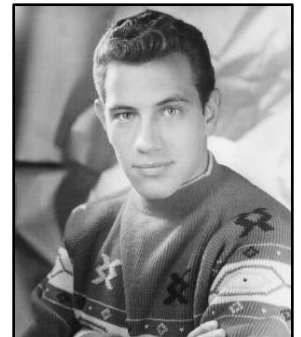
Actor Xavier Marc took his own life on 19 February 2022; he was 74 years of age. He was apparently suffering from serious health problems.

Xavier Rivera Marc was born in Guadalajara in January 1948. He began acting professionally in the early 1960s after studying at the Instituto de Bellas Artes and the Herbert Berghof Studio in New York. During his long career he appeared on the stage, in numerous *telenovelas*, and in more than a dozen films, including *El otro crimen*, *El rapaz*, *The Bees (Las abejas)*, *Two Mules for Sister Sara*, and *The Legend of Zorro*. Marc was also a stage director and taught acting.



Alfonso Mejía

Alfonso Mejía, who made his screen debut in Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950), died on 29 December 2021 at the age of 87. Mejía was born in Mexico City in November 1934 and on a lark attended an open casting call with some friends, eventually earning the role in *Los olvidados* for which he won an Ariel award. Over the next 20 years Mejía appeared in a number of films—earning 2 more Ariel nominations—but rarely had a leading role. He retired after making *Rubi* (1969). Mejía married one of his fans, and relocated to Chihuahua where he spent the rest of his life.



Tania Mendoza

Actress, singer and model Tania Mendoza was killed in Cuernavaca on 14 December 2021; she was 42 years of age.

Mendoza was waiting to pick up her son from *fútbol* practice when she was shot to death by men on a motorcycle. No specific motive was discovered, although Mendoza had previously reported receiving death threats and had allegedly been acquainted with *narcos* in the past.



Mendoza was born in Guadalajara and attended the Televisa acting school CEA; she began appearing on television and in *videohomes* in the late 1990s. In recent years she had been working primarily in live venues as a singer.



Inés Morales

Spanish actress Inés Morales Iglesias died on 5 December 2021; she was 69 years of age. Morales began working in Spanish cinema in the early 1970s, appearing in films such as *Los ojos azules de la muñeca rota* (aka *House of Psychotic Women*), and the Spanish-Mexican co-production *El retorno de Walpurgis* aka *La noche del asesino* (released in English as *Curse of the Devil*), both with Paul Naschy. She also worked in a number of Mexican *telenovelas* in the 1980s, including “Chispita” and “Quinceañera.”



Octavio Ocaña

Actor Octavio Ocaña was shot and killed on 29 October 2021 in Cuautitlán Izcalli, Edo. de México. There is still considerable discussion about the incident, with the police claiming Ocaña accidentally shot himself when his truck crashed, and the actor’s family declaring the police fired the fatal shot.



Octavio Augusto Perez Ocaña was born in November 1998, and was well-known for his role in the long-running television series “Vecinos.” He also had roles in several feature films, including *El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol* and *Amor letra por letra*.



Graciela Orozco

Actress Graciela Orozco passed away on 28 January 2022; she was 86 years of age. Orozco, born in the state of Tlaxcala in November 1935, attended the INBA acting school and went on to have a long and varied career. As an actress she appeared on television, the stage, on radio, and in films such as *Club eutanasia* and *Finlandia*. She also taught acting to prison inmates for nearly 20 years, formed several theatrical companies, worked at Televisa supervising and directing actors, did voice acting, and was also a writer.



Raquel Pankowsky

Actress Raquel Pankowsky died on 28 March 2022; she was 69 years of age. Pankowsky was born in Mexico City in November 1950 (some sources indicate July 1952). She studied at the ANDA acting school and began acting professionally in the mid-1970s. Pankowsky had an extensive television career, both in *telenovelas* and regular series; she became very well-known in Mexico for parodying Martha Sahagún (the wife of then-President Vicente Fox) in the comedy series “El privilegio de mandar.” Her films included *La plaza del Puerto Santo*, *El mexicano feo*, and *Morirse está en hebreo*.



Ismael Ramírez Cruz

Luchador Ismael Ramírez Cruz passed away on 12 January 2022; he was 88 years of age. Ramírez was born in the state of Hidalgo in June 1933. He made his professional debut in 1955, wrestling under various names including “Pancho Pantera,” then became the masked “Rebelde Rojo” in the mid-1960s. He lost his mask to Ultraman in 1977 and continued his career as “Charles Bronson Mexicano” (later opening the “Charles Bronson” gym in Mexico City).



Ramírez began working as a stunt double for El Santo in the latter half of the Sixties, and continued to do so until Santo retired from cinema in the early ‘80s, appearing in at least 14 Santo pictures. Ramírez, as “Rebelde Rojo,” can also be seen wrestling Santo in some films, and has acting roles in others.

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Samuel Río y Valles

Filmmaker Samuel Río y Valles was shot and killed by an armed robber on 26 February 2022; he was 50 years of age. Río y Valles was born in Mexico City in 1971. After studying graphic design and working for various companies making commercials and shorts, in 2013 he founded Mastondonte Films. He’d made two shorts, and had completed one feature film, *Los días que no estuve*, which was released to streaming in 2021.



Abel Rocha

Voice actor Abel Rocha passed away on 26 November 2021 at the age of 96. Abel Rocha Contreras was born in July 1925 and began working in the dubbing industry in Mexico in the late-1980s—his younger sister Gloria Rocha had been a voice actor since the 1950s and worked as a dubbing director for numerous companies—and retired in 2018. Abel Rocha worked on the “Dragon Ball” series for more than 20 years, and provided voices for numerous feature films and television programs.



Enrique Rocha

Actor Enrique Rocha died on 7 November 2021; he was 81 years of age. Enrique Miguel Rocha Ruiz was born in Guanajuato in January 1940. He moved to Mexico City as a teenager to study and became involved in theatre, which led to a career that spanned 7 decades on the stage, in television, and in cinema.

He was nominated for a Best Actor Ariel for his role in *El otro crimen*, but is most famous in Mexico for his many *telenovelas*, often as a suave villain. Other notable Rocha films include *El proceso de Cristo* (as Jesus Christ), *La endemoniada*, *Satánico pandemonium*, and *Santa*.



Rocha was married three times, and had one son.



Carmen Salinas

Carmen Salinas, one of the most popular Mexican performers of the past six decades, died on 9 December 2021; she had been hospitalised for about a month after suffering a stroke. Carmen Salinas Lozano was born in Torreón (state of Coahuila) in October 1939. She began working in the entertainment industry in live venues in the 1950s, but made her television debut in the mid-Sixties and her first film in 1969.



Carmen Salinas tribute at 2022 Academy Awards ceremony

Salinas was a talented comedian as well as a fine dramatic actress and singer; she also did imitations of other performers, including María Félix and Celia Cruz. Beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the ‘80s, Salinas often played a tipsy character nicknamed “La Corcholata.”

She served in the Mexican legislature for several years in the 2010s, and beginning in 1997 produced a long-running live musical version of the film “Salón México.”

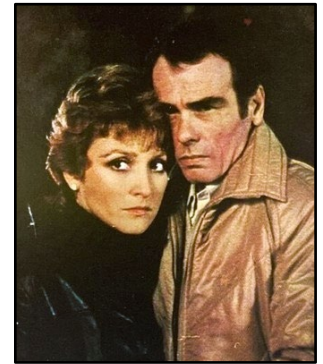
Salinas married musician Pedro Plascencia Ramírez in 1956; the couple had two children, and divorced in 1979. One of their children was composer Pedro Plascencia Salinas, who wrote music for a number of Mexican films but passed away in 1994.



Dean Stockwell

Actor Dean Stockwell passed away in New Zealand on 7 November 2021; he was 85 years old. Robert Dean Stockwell was born to a family of performers in Los Angeles in November 1936, and made his screen debut in 1945.

He eventually earned more than 200 TV/movie credits, including a number of films with connections to Mexico: his Mexican co-productions and/or films at least partly shot in Mexico included *To Kill a Stranger* (*Para matar a un extraño*), *Sandino*, *The Blue Iguana*, and *Alsino y el condor*.



Mexican Film Noir

Film noir is a genre, or trend, or film style, characterised by attributes such as a nihilistic worldview, a distinctive visual “look,” a flawed protagonist, and a *femme fatale*. Particularly popular among film buffs, *film noir* is a label now applied for marketing purposes to various movies, some which would seem to only marginally qualify as such (although there is no accepted definition of the term, so the designation is in the eye of the beholder). In general, *film noir* was most prevalent in the post-World War II period and became less numerous by the end of the 1950s; however, there are earlier pictures which fit most of the criteria, and so-called *neo-noir* emerged in the 1970s.

Film noir was not an exclusively Hollywood phenomenon, but films made in the USA make up the bulk of the generally accepted canon. Clear examples from Mexican cinema exist, although the aforementioned lack of concrete “requirements” that would define a *film noir* once again make assigning the label problematical in many cases. The concomitantly-produced local *cabaretera* genre’s similarities further complicate the matter.

Distino amanecer (1943) is often cited as an early Mexican *film noir*, and there are other pre-1946 films which could arguably qualify, but the first “great” Mex-noir is *La otra* (1946). Director Roberto Gavaldón also helmed the two finest Mex-noirs, *La noche avanza* and *En la palma de tu mano*, and one could also make a case for *La diosa arrodillada*, *El socio*, and possibly even *A la sombra del puente* and *Han matado a Tongolele*. Juan Bustillo Oro’s *El hombre sin rostro*, *La huella de unos labios*, *Retorno a la juventud* (although this is more of a fantasy film), and *El medallón del crimen* are Mex-noir or close to it. Other directors contributed one or more examples, including Alfredo B. Crevenna (*Dónde el círculo termina*), Miguel Morayta (*Hipócrita*, *Camino del infierno*, others), Ernesto Cortázar, Tito Davison, René Cardona Sr., etc.

Mexico also had its *neo-noir* period in the 1970s-80s, with directors like Toni Sbert (*Sin salida*), Alfredo Gurrola (*Días de combate*, *Cosa fácil*, *Llámenme Mike*), Gabriel Retes (*Bandera rota*), Luis García Agraz (*Nocaut*), and Luis Mandoki (*Motel*), among others, producing fine work.

[Note: Rafael Aviña’s *Mex Noir* (Cineteca Nacional, 2017) deals with Mexican *film noir*. I have not read this book yet, but Aviña is a prolific and respected author so I’m sure it’s worthwhile.]



Cornell Woolrich Adaptations



La huella de unos labios [The Mark of Some Lips] (Cin. Grovas, 1951) “Jesús Grovas presents” *Dir-Scr*: Juan Bustillo Oro; *Orig Story*: William Irish [Cornell Woolrich] (“Collared” aka “One Night in Chicago”); *Photo*: Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music*: Manuel Esperón; *Prod Mgr*: Francisco A. Peñafiel; *Prod Chief*: Armando Espinosa; *Asst Dir*: Moisés M. Delgado; *Film Ed*: Gloria Schoemann; *Art*

Dir: Xavier Torres Torija; *Camera Op*: Cirilo Rodríguez, Mario Diver; *Lighting*: Carlos Najera; *Makeup*: Sara Mateos; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec*: Bernardo Cabrera; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Spec FX*: Jorge Benavides; *Studio*: Churubusco-Azteca

Cast: Charito Granados (*María*), Carlos López Moctezuma (*César Villa*), Rubén Rojo (*Felipe Rivas*), Luis Beristáin (*Manuel Andrade*), Gilberto González (*Luis Cortés*), Roberto J.[sic] Palacios (*Lee*), Humberto Rodríguez (*waiter*), Jorge Arriaga, Quica Meyer (*César’s mistress*), Chel López (*cabaret customer*), María Luisa Cortés (*cabaret employee*), Jesús Gómez (*plainclothes policeman*)

Notes: *La huella de unos labios* was based on a short story by Cornell Woolrich (as William Irish), originally published in “Black Mask” pulp magazine in October 1939 and reprinted in “Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine” in July 1949. For some reason, Woolrich’s stories—which had been adapted by Hollywood 16 times between 1942-1950—suddenly became popular internationally in the early 1950s. Woolrich adaptations included *El pendiente* (Argentina, 1950), *La huella de unos labios* (Mexico, 1951), *No abras nunca esa puerta* and *Si muero antes de despertar* (both Argentina, 1952), *Obsession* (France, 1954), and *El ojo de cristal* (Spain, 1955—coincidentally starring Carlos López Moctezuma, who was also the villain in *La huella de unos labios*).

Juan Bustillo Oro was one of the major directors of *cine mexicano* in the 1930s and 1940s, making a large number of films in various genres. He made several entries in the short-lived Mexican horror “boom” of the mid-Thirties (*El misterio del rostro pálido*, *Dos monjes*), an early hit for Cantinflas (*Ahí está el detalle*), nostalgic looks at Mexico’s recent past (*En tiempos de don Porfirio*, *México de mis recuerdos*), rather atypical Jorge Negrete vehicles (*Canaima*, *En tiempos de la inquisición*), typical Jorge Negrete vehicles (*No basta ser charro*, *Cuando quiere un mexicano*), etc., etc.

He continued his eclectic output in the Fifties, eventually remaking some of his popular successes and directing sequels to classic films made by others, before retiring in the mid-1960s (although he lived until 1989). In the first half of the Fifties he made some highly interesting, formally stylised movies—*La huella de unos labios*, *El hombre sin rostro*, *Retorno a la juventud*—as well as some lesser efforts which still have their virtues (*La mujer ajena*, *El asesino X*, *El medallón del crimen*).

La huella de unos labios does not share the extreme visual style of *El hombre sin rostro* and (especially) *Retorno a la juventud*. After the first minute or so—which is filmed somewhat expressionistically—the movie is designed, lit, and shot for the most part in a very realistic manner. Bustillo Oro’s stylistic flourishes in this instance are generally confined to the non-linear narrative format and the almost constant use of stream-of-consciousness voiceover by the protagonist.

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The film has an interesting structure. A pre-credits sequence lasting over 5.5 minutes gives way to a long flashback as soon as the credits (which are superimposed over a shattered mirror, and are accompanied only by wind noise, no music) conclude. The flashback lasts about 40 minutes, at which time the film resumes where the pre-credits sequence left off, and runs another 40 minutes in linear narrative. While not a radical format, essentially splitting a film in half is not necessarily common.

María's voiceover narration starts in the pre-credits sequence and continues throughout, not just in the flashback section. She discusses her motivations, feelings, and actions almost constantly, when not actively in actual conversations with others. Unlike some films which rely on voiceover narration rather sparingly, *La huella de unos labios* probably has more narration than "live" dialogue.



The plot: María sells cigarettes in the "Frenesi" cabaret owned by César Villa. The customers constantly flirt with her, but she loves mechanic Felipe. One of her customers is

police inspector Andrade, who's also investigating Villa's criminal activities (which are never clearly explained). María quits her job and while Villa—another of her admirers—superficially wishes her well, he makes it clear he still has feelings for her. Villa's henchmen attack Felipe and beat him badly, but Felipe and María wed anyway. Felipe forces his way into Villa's office and thrashes the villain; Andrade protects Felipe from Villa's thugs, and puts him under protective surveillance. However, Villa's henchman Cortés hijacks a truck and runs over Felipe (even backing up and running him over again!), right in front of María's horrified gaze. [Woolrich would use a similar situation in "The Bride Wore Black."]]

María tells Andrade she's going to make sure Villa pays for his crime, even at the cost of her own reputation and happiness. She becomes Villa's mistress and moves in with him. One evening he comes home from the club and demands that María give him an alibi. She notices lipstick marks on his shirt collar, and he burns the offending garment. María overhears Villa telling Cortés that he killed his mistress Aurora; Cortés is ordered to frame Aurora's friend Francisco for the crime.

While Villa is asleep, María visits Aurora's apartment. She puts lipstick on the corpse and presses the victim's lips against the collar of another of Villa's shirts; she also puts lip-marks on a magazine ad featuring a shirt collar, and leaves the

lipstick tube in the dead woman's hand. María sees Cortés stash a pistol behind a fire extinguisher in the hall—remembering that Villa had ordered Cortés to make sure Francisco's fingerprints were on the murder weapon, María carefully wipes down the gun.

For the rest of the film, María tries to pass along "clues" to Insp. Andrade about Villa's crime, without (a) admitting she basically framed him, or (b) tipping off Villa. Andrade obtains the incriminating shirt but can't arrest Villa until the lab proves the lipstick belonged to the murder victim; María stubbornly refuses to leave Villa, wanting to be present when he's arrested. Villa, who can't understand why his scheme didn't work, decides to flee and tries to force María to accompany him. When he learns María is the "snitch," he uses her as a hostage, but is accidentally run over by a truck driven by Cortés (who is then shot by the police). María (in voiceover) says she isn't happy about the outcome, believing she no longer has a purpose in life, and feels tainted by her association with Villa. However, the film concludes on a hopeful note, since apparently Andrade is still romantically interested in her.



La huella de unos labios is an interesting portrait of a vengeful woman who sacrifices her self-esteem in an attempt to bring her husband's killer to justice. There are various illogical aspects to this—for instance, María just assumes Villa will eventually do something that will give her a chance for revenge—but they're not especially noticeable thanks to Bustillo Oro's script and the performances of Charito Granados and Carlos López Moctezuma. Granados had just

about reached the tipping point in her career, no longer an ingenue and soon to be typecast in more "mature" roles in melodramas. In Bustillo Oro's *Retorno*



a la juventud she's clearly too old for her role as a college student, but here she's in a sort of limbo, moving from a sexy (but decent) cigarette girl in a skimpy costume to a grim pseudo-detective.

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There are a couple of mild “Hitchcockian” touches in *La huella de unos labios*. María, having tweaked the crime scene in Aurora’s apartment, prepares to leave—she goes to the doorway and there’s a cut to her purse, left behind (and containing the marked shirt). Fernando Méndez includes a similar scene in *Ladrón de cadáveres*—the mad scientist, in his guise as an elderly lottery vendor, leaves his sheaf of tickets behind after poisoning some medicine. However, Bustillo Oro doesn’t milk this for suspense—María almost immediately turns around and retrieves the purse—whereas Méndez has the villain leave the room entirely, lingering on the shot of the lottery tickets, before showing him returning to pick them up. In *La huella de unos labios* María is the protagonist and the audience wants her to remember the purse; in *Ladrón de cadáveres* it’s the villain who leaves behind a valuable clue, but the viewer is still somehow relieved when he comes back for it.

The second instance is a clear example of “Chekov’s coat.” María leaves Aurora’s apartment and thinks she sees Cortés



across the street; she hurries off, but is afraid her distinctive striped coat will later give her away. Instead of destroying it, she puts it in the back of her closet. At the

film’s conclusion, she packs her suitcase on Villa’s orders, but leaves the coat in the closet. Villa finds the coat—which means nothing to him, except as an example of how careless María is—but Cortés identifies the coat, proving María is the one who manipulated the crime scene to incriminate Villa.

There are a number of other suspenseful scenes which are effectively done, but without the gimmick of an “overlooked item.” These include María obtaining the name and address of Aurora, then sneaking out and visiting the crime scene, and María loudly proclaiming Villa’s innocence to Andrade while surreptitiously giving him clues (because Villa and Cortés are outside the apartment, listening in).

As mentioned above, *La huella de unos labios* bears some similarities to “The Bride Wore Black” (which was first published in 1940, a year after “Collared”), but in the latter novel the protagonist avenges her dead husband by killing those she (wrongly) believes to be responsible for his death (the 1968 film adaptation removes Woolrich’s twist ending and shows the murder victims were in fact guilty). In Bustillo Oro’s film, María not only doesn’t kill Villa (she would have presumably had many opportunities to do so once she became his live-in mistress), she doesn’t even have a concrete plan to cause his downfall until months later when he accidentally

kills Aurora. The film addresses this by having María at one point decide to leave Villa (and her hellish life with him), only to have Villa compel her to stay and threaten to have her killed if she leaves before he tires of her. Villa himself is depicted as a horrible person, but he’s neither shown to be an actual gangster nor are any of his alleged criminal activities even discussed in detail: it’s unclear why Andrade is investigating him in the first place (at the beginning of the flashback).

La huella de unos labios has a relatively small cast and utilises only a handful of sets, as well as some actual exteriors. A surprising production touch occurs at the end of the movie: Cortés is pursued by the police as he speeds away in a truck after hitting Villa. They shoot him and the truck crashes into a storefront, an actual stunt (and not stock footage)!

Trivia: “Collared” was also the credited source of *La pupa del gangster* (1975), an Italian-French co-production starring Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni. This comedy about a Mafioso enamored of a prostitute was variously released as *Gun Moll*, *Get Rita*, and *Oopsie Poopsie* (!).

Not as outré as either *El hombre sin rostro* or *Retorno a la juventud*, *La huella de unos labios* nonetheless holds up well today as a sturdy thriller/melodrama hybrid.



El ojo de cristal

[The Glass Eye] (IFI-Pardo Films-OroFilms, 1955) Prod: Ignacio F. Iquino [uncredited], Gonzalo Elvira R. [credited on Mexican prints only]; Dir: Antonio Santillán; Scr: José Antonio de la Loma, Joaquina Algar; Adapt/Dialog: Ignacio F. Iquino; Orig. Story: William Irish [Cornell Woolrich] (“Through a Dead Man’s Eye”); Photo: Ricardo Albiñana; Music: [José Casas Augé; Prod Chief: Valentín Sallent; Asst Dir: José



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María Núñez; *Film Ed*: Juan Luis Oliver; *Décor*: Antonio Liza; *Police Advisor*: Chief Inspector C. Ordóñez del Valle; *Makeup*: Adrián Jaramillo; *Sound Engin*: Miguel Sitjes

Cast: Carlos López Moctezuma (*Enrique*), Armando Moreno (*Inspector*), Beatriz Aguirre (*Clara*), Saza [José Sazatornil] (*dry cleaner*), Carolina Jiménez (*Julia, inspector's wife*), Miguel Fleta (*Agent Pérez*), Jesús Colomer (*barman*), María Luz de Reyes (*doña Ernestina*), Juanita Espín (*Engracia, portera*), Manuel Fernández (*Pedro*), Francisco Alonso (*Miguelín*), Francisco Javier Dotú (*Antonio*), Fernando Murtra (*boy*), Manuel Bronchud (*policeman*), Matías Ferret (*company director*), Salvador Garrido (*husband of newsstand operator*)



Notes: sources differ as to whether this was a wholly Spanish film that just happened to feature two imported Mexican performers, or whether it was a Spanish-Mexican co-production. Gonzalo Elvira's company Orofilms released it in Mexico, and his name appears on Mexican prints as "producer," which may indicate he had some financial interest in the film (as opposed to just buying the distribution rights),

but it doesn't necessarily prove this.

I have two copies of the film, a Spanish version (88:15) and a Mexican version (89:35). There are a number of differences between them:

- the Mexican version has been entirely re-dubbed from *castellano* into "Latin American Spanish." Carlos López Moctezuma seems to have done his own dialogue in the latter version, but not in the Spanish copy; Beatriz Aguirre was apparently dubbed (by two different voice actors) in both versions. The dialogue is not identical in some instances. For instance, in the first dry cleaner scene, the shop owner refers to Enrique's suit and mentions "Terrassa" (a city near Barcelona noted for its woollen textile industry) in the Spanish version; in the Mexican dub, he just says *lana* (wool).
- the music score has been altered. The Spanish version uses a prominent solo guitar (in imitation of *The Third Man*'s zither score); the Mexican score uses the same themes but is re-orchestrated or remixed in a fuller "symphony" sound.
- the Mexican credits remove the IFI logo (replacing it with Orofilms), replace the main title (which also has

the IFI logo and references to the Spanish censor board), insert Gonzalo Elvira's name as producer, and—oddly—change the music score credit from simply "Casas Augé" to "José Casas Augé."

- a number of dialogue scenes have been recut for no particular reason: that is, the basic content and length remains mostly the same, but shots have been trimmed and/or closeups inserted/deleted.
- there are several major instances of additional material in each version. For example, in the Mexican version the initial scene in which Enrique visits the dry cleaner's shop is longer and includes footage of the proprietor and his son which is not in the Spanish print. However, the greatest difference is that the Mexican version omits footage—which can be seen in the Spanish version—of Enrique actually strangling Clara, and then a significant amount of footage of the police at the crime scene. These cuts total nearly 2 minutes.

El ojo de cristal was shot in Barcelona, but since it was made during the Franco regime, the *Catalán* language is not in evidence in street signs, etc. The film contains some interesting views of the city—much location shooting was done, but some of the interiors were undoubtedly made in the IFI studios. A number of sequences stand out for their *film noir*-style lighting, but the plot itself is not exceptionally *noir*-ish.

El ojo de cristal was based on "Through a Dead Man's Eye," a 1939 "Black Mask" pulp magazine story by Cornell Woolrich, under his "William Irish" pseudonym. It was adapted for live television in the USA, appearing on NBC's "Manhunt" (sometimes cited as "Assignment: Man Hunt") in July 1951. The director was Daniel Petrie, and the cast included Ernest Borgnine.

Woolrich's story is told in the first-person by Frankie, son of a New York police detective who's slated for demotion. The premise of a glass eye found in the cuffs of a pair of pants leading to the exposure of a murderer is retained in the screenplay of *El ojo de cristal*, as is the concluding sequence in



which Frankie is caught by the killer and saved by his father at the last minute. The motivation for the murder is also the same. However, most of *El ojo de cristal* is original, focusing on the actions of the murderer (Enrique) after the original crime (which is not depicted in the film) and the investigation

by the police inspector of Enrique's second murder, of Clara (not in the original story).

[Woolrich's "The Boy Cried Murder," published in 1947, has some similarities to "Through a Dead Man's Eye," and was adapted into *The Window* (1949), as well as *The Boy Cried Murder* (1966) and *Cloak and Dagger* (1984).]

El ojo de cristal opens with a long (2:30+) sequence: a trench-coated man walks—directly at the camera—through a long, tunnel-like area, then strolls purposely through the early morning streets of Barcelona until he reaches the "Pensión Layetana" where he lives. Only ambient sound is heard. Later in the film, there are several other long sequences which—because they're shot at night—are more *noir-ish*, but this is an effective opening to the film that brings the audience into the story. Who is this man? What was he doing in that building?

After dropping off his suit—muddied during his walk—at a cleaner's, the man (Enrique) goes to a train station and meets Clara. The plot is explained in their dialogue. Although not

all of the details are revealed, since the characters obviously know them, I've included them here: Clara is a secretary for a company which agreed

to pay an indemnity to a man who lost an eye while in their employ. He's now working as a night watchman in an empty factory. Enrique, Clara's boyfriend, tried to extort the payment from the man, accidentally killing him in the process. To make matters worse, the company hadn't yet paid! Enrique says Clara needs to obtain a copy of the dead man's signature, and Enrique will forge an endorsement on the check when it arrives (the next day). Clara grudgingly agrees.

[The film introduces schoolboy Pedro and his friends; Pedro obtains a glass eye after a series of trades. He later learns the eye was discovered by his schoolmate Miguelín in the cuffs of the pants brought in to his father's cleaning shop by Enrique (although they don't know Enrique's identity).]

Enrique decides Clara can no longer be trusted. He devises a scheme that will give him an alibi for her (future) murder: entering her apartment through the patio, so no one knows he's inside, he then tells Clara to send the *portera* Engracia out to find him. Strangling Clara, Enrique leaves via the patio, meets Engracia, and they return to the apartment and discover her corpse. Pedro's father, a detective inspector currently in

disfavour with his supervisor, is assigned the case. Enrique's alibi holds up, although there are a few discrepancies that make the Inspector suspicious.

Pedro, who wants to be a detective like his father, ponders the concept of "clues" (*indicios*), defined by the Inspector as unusual things that shouldn't be there (or that should be there but aren't). He and his friend Antonio speculate that the glass eye might be

proof of a crime: Miguelín says the man who brought in the suit wasn't missing an eye. They decide to stake out the cleaner's

shop and trail the man who picks up the suit. When they do, Pedro discovers Enrique—whom he had previously seen with his father—is the man, and follows him to the abandoned factory. Pedro goes inside and finds the one-eyed man's corpse; the indemnity check is delivered and Pedro snatches it, and is then pursued by Enrique.

Meanwhile, the Inspector—based on a scrap of paper bearing two initials, found in Clara's jacket (she was trying to trace the dead man's signature from a document in the company)—learns the dead man's name (although he doesn't know the man was murdered), and arrives at the factory in time to rescue his son. Enrique is shot trying to escape.

El ojo de cristal's plot rests on one major coincidence—the boy who winds up with the glass eye just happens to be the son of the police inspector investigating a related murder—which doesn't exist in Woolrich's story. In "Through a Dead Man's Eye," there is no second murder, and it is Frankie who discovers the original crime; his father only became involved because Frankie wasn't home when he was supposed to be (because he was trailing the killer)!

Other than this rather unlikely plot device, *El ojo de cristal* is quite well done. There are a lot of memorable supporting characters and entertaining scenes, and the performances are all good. The screenplay takes pains to personalise most of the characters: the Inspector is depressed at his impending demotion, his wife tries to cheer him up, Pedro idolises his



father, Miguelín wants to be a sailor despite his overbearing father's desire that he learn the dry-cleaning trade, etc.. Ironically, neither Enrique nor Clara is given a backstory or much motivation for their criminal scheme, although Enrique is depicted as a clever sociopath (and an automobile salesman, which might be a bit of social commentary). The dubbing in the Mexican version is at times mildly annoying, though mostly for the juvenile players. The cinematography and direction are slick and assured.

In general, the Spanish print is recommended (although online versions, taken from various television broadcasts, usually have a watermark): the video quality is far superior to the Mexican version (my copy of this is from Cine Nostalgia; there is a print online from a "Cinemexicano" broadcast which is in the wrong aspect ratio and of rather poor quality). The Spanish copy is a more "complete" version (despite the minor additions mentioned above), and the voice actor who dubs Carlos López Moctezuma sounds fine.

Not an unsung classic, but consistently entertaining.



Luis Spota and Mexican Film Noir

1949 marked the first time Luis Spota worked for the Mexican film industry. Spanish poet Manuel Altolaguirre--who had become a Mexican film producer--suggested Spota think about writing for the movies, and the young journalist-



turned-novelist decided to try. In two months, he produced the novel "Vagabunda," with the express intent of having it made into a film. He later wrote some short novels in a cinematic style--calling them "fotodramas"--including the original version of *En la palma de tu mano*. In 1950 "Vagabunda" was produced as a film entitled *Flor de sangre*--

although not by Altolaguirre's company--with Domingo Soler, Esther Fernández, and Spota's friend Elda Peralta in the cast. [This picture should not be confused the the 1950 movie entitled *Vagabunda*, based on a play by Mané Sierra and Francisco Ibarra, despite the fact it features Leticia Palma, who appeared in several films based on Spota's novels, in the leading role. To further confuse matters, in 1993 Spota's novel was filmed again, this time under the original book title *Vagabunda*!]

NOVELA CINEMATOGRAFICA DE LUIS SPOTA

Spota's first produced screen work came on *Hipócrita*..! in 1949. Producer Óscar Brooks commissioned Spota to write a screen story for the starring debut of Brooks' new "discovery" Leticia Palma. Spota spent over two months

working on the story: adapted and directed by Miguel Morayta (Spota was not credited on-screen), it is a *noir*-ish tale of an unfortunate young woman (Palma), befriended by a poor composer (Luis Beristáin), and abused by sinister gangster "El Sabroso" (Antonio Badú). El Sabroso (by threatening to harm the composer) forces Leticia to pretend she's bad, and the composer--not knowing her motivation--writes the song "Hipócrita" about her. Leticia eventually kills El Sabroso and, as she is being shipped off to the penal colony of Las Islas Marías, she sees the composer and his new wife leaving on their honeymoon.

Hipócrita set the style of Spota's film work for the next several years. He specialized in stories about members of the underworld, people living on the fringes of society, "night people" of the sort he may have encountered while working as a newspaper reporter or while supervising



Mexico City's nightclubs and theatres as chief of the Espectáculos bureau. Set in a border cabaret, *Corazón de fiera* featured Antonio Badú again as a gangster, Rita Macedo as his girlfriend, and--in a rare sympathetic role--Arturo Martínez as a police detective. *Camino del infierno* reunited the *Hipócrita* team of Leticia Palma and director Miguel Morayta with Spota: Palma and ex-convict Pedro Armendáriz participate in a botched robbery and then fall in love, but Armendáriz is wounded and loses his hand and Palma contracts leprosy! They are both killed at the end.

En la palma de tu mano (for which Spota won an Ariel Award in the Best Original Story category) and *La noche avanza* were both directed by Roberto Gavaldón; the first, a Hitchcockian-style murder tale featuring Arturo de Córdova as a shady fortune-teller conned into murder by a femme fatale (Leticia Palma again), won the Best Picture "Ariel" (and Spota took home the Best Original Story award); the latter picture, a *film noir* about a ruthless *jai alai* player (Pedro Armendáriz), was also an

excellent, suspenseful thriller. *Trotacalles*, directed by Matilde Landeta, starred Miroslava and Elda Peralta as sisters, one married to an older, rich man, and the other



forced into prostitution by the vagaries of life. *Quiero vivir*, directed by Alberto Gout, featured Jorge Mistral as an architect with a fatal illness who falls in love with a dancer (Meche Barba) who has just murdered her drug dealer-boyfriend. They both die at the end.

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Ironically, Spota's novels were by no means all crime thrillers or melodramas. His later prose work was often political in nature (especially the series "La costumbre de poder"), or about bullfighting ("Más cornadas da el hambre"), the life of a movie star ("La estrella vacía"), or engineers constructing a dam under trying circumstances ("Las grandes aguas"). He wrote non-fiction as well. Spota's screen stories are mostly *cabaretera*-style melodramas because this type of film was popular during the period he was most active in the industry, and, given the success of *Hipócrita*..!, his first film, producers who wanted to make this sort of picture knew Spota could deliver.

Years later, in an interview with Edmundo Domínguez Aragonés for the book "Tres extraordinarios," Spota described his early film work:

... the producers would say to you: I have Rosa Carmina and a police dog under contract--here are 2,000 pesos, I want an idea by tomorrow. And by the next day you would turn in 10 pages and.. . they would pay you 2,000 pesos... That's how Mexican films were made.



Spota decided that he would like to direct films himself. Starting in 1950, he repeatedly applied to join the directors' union, and was turned down each time (ironically, Zacarías Gómez Urquiza had made his directorial debut on *Flor de sangre*, based on Spota's novel, but Gómez Urquiza had already worked in the industry as an assistant director for a number of years). Even though Mier y Brooks--the company that produced *Hipócrita*, *Camino del infierno*, and other films based on Spota's stories--offered Spota a directorial contract as a guarantee, the union still refused to budge.

Undaunted, Spota--with money loaned to him by Elda Peralta--made a short, "amateur" film based on material from his bullfighting novel "Más cornadas da el hambre." Entitled *Torerillos*, the picture was shot over 6 or 7 weekends in 1951, and starred young actor (and future director) Alberto Mariscal, along with some actual *novilleros*. Carlos Carvajal, an assistant to cinematographer Jack Draper, was in charge of photography.

Spota followed this later in the year with another short, "Las cartas," with professional actors Arturo de Córdova, Ramón Gay, and Arturo Martínez, all of whom had appeared in films written by Spota. Through the auspices of de Córdova and Gregorio Walerstein, Spota was allowed to use the San Ángel Inn studios on weekends to make the picture. Arturo (de Córdova) is accused of having murdered his wife: while talking on the telephone, he fired a pistol out a window, and a large stack of books fell over. These noises, the mysterious absence of his wife, and some love letters to her from another man, make the police suspect Arturo. He's eventually cleared when his wife shows up, alive. The police apologise and return Arturo's pistol to him. Now aware of his wife's infidelity, Arturo shoots her and is arrested.

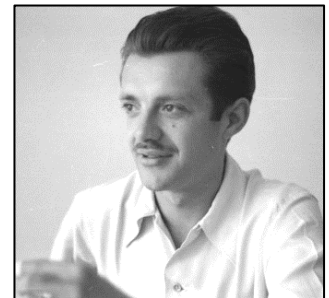
The story of "Las cartas" is similar in its style and ironic tone to the successful *En la palma de tu mano*. Some time later, producer Gregorio Walerstein encouraged Luis Spota to make a longer film incorporating "Las cartas." In 1954, Spota shot four additional episodes--a framing story with Andrés Soler as a balloon

vendor, two based on stories by Julio Alejandro (that Spota later characterized as "totally conventional, which is to say, very melodramatic"), and Spota's new contribution, "El tragafuegos," starring Adalberto Martínez "Resortes. These were combined with "Las cartas," and released as *Amor en cuatro tiempos*.



In some ways, the grim "El tragafuegos" presages Spota's 1959 novel "La sangre enemiga" (later filmed): Resortes plays a "fire-eater" (at one time frequently seen on Mexico City streets entertaining passersby) whose new girlfriend, a taco vendor, asks him to get rid of the young boy who serves as his assistant. When the boy refuses to leave, the fire-eater hits him. Later, while the man sleeps, the boy pours alcohol on him and sets him on fire!

Between production of "Las cartas" in 1951 and filming the rest of *Amor en cuatro tiempos* in 1954, Luis Spota directed another picture, this time a full feature, although it wasn't originally conceived as such. *Nadie muere dos veces* was intended to be shot under the auspices of the STIC union as three separate shorts, which would then be combined into a feature (a practice that didn't actually go into effect until 1957, when the América studios opened) However, producer/actor Abel Salazar and Gregorio Walerstein of Filmex became interested



in the project and obtained a waiver so Spota could direct the feature "legally" (interestingly enough, there is no directorial credit given either on the film itself or on contemporary posters, etc., although Spota is prominently listed as the film's writer). Shot at Salazar's home on the shores of Lake Tequesquitengo over a period of 4 weeks, *Nadie muere dos veces* has a "name" cast (Salazar, Ramón Gay, Lilia del Valle, with guest roles for Fernando Fernández and Pedro Vargas) and is technically competent, but the picture was not well-received.

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Other Spota films which verge on *film noir* include *Tu vida entre mis manos*, *Donde el círculo termina*, *La mujer marcada* (an unofficial semi-remake of *Hipócrita...!*), and *Cadena perpetua* (based on Spota's novel "Lo de antes"). [Note: this section originally appeared in "Luis Spota and the Cinema" in *MFB* 3/8 (March 1997) but has been revised and updated.]



¡Hipócrita...! [Hypocrite] (Óscar J. Brooks/Mier y Brooks, 1949) *Prod*: Óscar J. Brooks; *Dir-Scr*: Miguel Morayta; *Story*: Luis Spota (uncredited); *Photo*: Víctor Herrera; *Music Dir*: Luis Hernández Bretón; *Prod Mgr*: Ernesto Enríquez; *Prod Chief*: Manuel Rodríguez G.; *Asst Dir*: Américo Fernández; *Film Ed*: José W. Bustos; *Art Dir*: Francisco Marco Chilet; *Camera Op*: Luis Medina, Felipe Quintanar; *Makeup*: Concepción Zamora "Chivis"; *Sound Ed*: Teodilo Bustos Jr.; *Music/Re-rec*: José de Pérez; *Dialog Rec*: Nicolás de la Rosa; *Studio*: C.L.A.S.A.

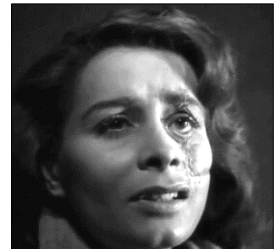
Cast: Antonio Badú (*Pepe* "El Sabroso"), Carmen Molina (*Aurora*), Luis Beristáin (*Gerardo de la Casa*), Leticia Palma (*Leticia aka Leonor Gómez*), Pascual García Peña (*Ricardito*), Elda Peralta (*Teresa, cigarette girl*), Francisco Reiguera (*don Simón*), Wolf Ruvinskis (*El Rayas*), Julien de Meriche (*stool pigeon*), Edmundo Espino (*gangster Juanito*), Los Panchos (*trio*), Hernán Vera (*waiter*), Alfonso Díaz Landa (*Dr. Juan Villalobos*), Ramón Gay (*El Ronco*), Emilio Garibay (*Leandro*), María Gentil Arcos (*Aurora's mother*), Leonor Gómez (*prisoner*), José Chávez Trowe (*prisoner*), Ricardo Adalid (*doctor*), León Barroso & Alfonso Carti (*police*), María Luisa Cortés (*Pepe's jealous date*), Felipe de Flores (*emcee*), José Ortega (*waiter*), Amelia Rivera (*Cristina, maid*), Joaquín Roche (*El Argentino*)

Notes: Luis Spota's first produced film work was *Hipócrita...!*, although he was not credited on-screen. This picture contains elements of the *cabaretera* genre, standard gangster movies, and *film noir*. *Hipócrita...!* is extremely well-directed and shot, and much of the credit should go to director Miguel Morayta and cinematographer Víctor Herrera. The picture is quite stylish, characterised in particular by a preponderance of low-angle shots. For a studio-shot film, this required making sets with ceilings, a not inconsiderable task. Just as Miguel Morayta seems (to me) be a very underrated director, Víctor Herrera (who won the first Best Cinematography Ariel for *La barraca*) is somewhat unsung as a director of photography, despite shooting over 175 films from the early '30s to the early '60s, including *Vagabunda*, *La bruja*, *El monstruo resucitado*, *Ladrón de cadáveres*, *El ataúd del vampiro*, *Misterios de ultratumba*, etc.



Víctor Herrera, Antonio Badú, Leticia Palma, Miguel Morayta on the set of *Vagabunda*

Leticia Palma (real name, Zoyla Gloria Ruiz Moscoso) had appeared in small roles in a handful of films (as "Nazira de Tello") but this was her introduction as a star. She had a relatively brief career, leaving the film industry in 1953 after being ejected from the actors' union over a dispute with Jorge Negrete. Palma had leading roles in 8 films, all crime or crime-related.



Her performance in *Hipócrita...!* is fine, although her musical numbers are rather awkward: her singing was dubbed and her "dancing" feels very odd and artificial (did she invent voguing?). Special mention should be made of the quite effective scar-face makeup Palma wears for the first section of the film—this looks much more realistic than the "bubble-gum stuck on her face" style sported by Sarita Montiel in *Piel canela*, for instance.

[Other scarred-woman films include *Il était une fois...* (1933), *En kvinnas ansikte* (1938, with Ingrid Bergman), *A*

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Woman's Face (1941, with Joan Crawford—all three based on the French play “Il était une fois...”), plus *Lady Scarface* (1941), Miguel Morayta's *Amor perdido* (1950), and horror films like *She Demons* (1958), *Les yeux sans visage* (1960), and *La Señora Muerte* (1967).]

Despite Palma's star turn, perhaps the most interesting character in *Hipócrita...!* is Pepe el Sabroso, played by Antonio Badú. Badú was a

singer turned actor who had appeared in a number of films since the late 1930s; his roles were slightly skewed towards *rancheras* and other rural topics, but he played

various “civilian” parts as well. *Hipócrita...!* kicked off a period in which he was frequently cast as gangsters (although he still alternated these with straight drama and comedy roles): *Hipócrita...!*, *Vagabunda*, *Cuatro vidas*, *Corazón de fiero*, *Paco el elegante*, *As negro*, *El pueblo sin Dios*.

Pepe el Sabroso is a smooth operator, who uses reasonable, polite language, then orders his henchmen to carry out various brutal crimes. He's a germophobe, refusing to shake hands (“it's not hygienic”), drinks only milk, informs one of his various dates that she shouldn't smoke, and so on. He even sings the title song! Pepe apparently legitimately falls in love with Leticia—even buying her a ring—but this doesn't prevent him from considering her his property, and compelling her to work for him and be his mistress by threatening the man she loves. He's an evil character, not portrayed ambivalently at all, but he's not a one-dimensional film gangster.

In contrast, the second leads—Luis Beristáin and Carmen Molina—are not very interesting. Beristáin's character Gerardo is a decent person, helping Leticia when she's



destitute and arranging for her to have plastic surgery, but he's also rather weak and self-pitying, and treats Aurora—who obviously adores him—impersonally until (a) Leticia dumps

him, and (b) Aurora saves his life and career. Then he falls in love with her. Carmen Molina's Aurora is a doormat who bides her time until she wins Gerardo's love.

The character actors in *Hipócrita...!* include Pascual García Peña—who alternated straight gangster roles with comedic parts; he uses a *gringo* accent here—Wolf Ruvinskis, Francisco Reiguera (a larger role than usual), and Elda Peralta (who was Luis Spota's partner for many years). Ramón Gay

has a small role (he's killed off in the first scene), one of many gangster parts he played in the early years of his career.

The film begins with a pre-credits sequence, as Pepe sends his henchmen El Ronco to kill rival gangster El Argentino. Ronco shoots his wheelchair-bound victim, and is in turn stabbed in the back by the man's daughter, Leonor. Badly wounded, Ronco slashes Leonor's face with a broken bottle. Pepe comes in to see what's taking so long, and warns Leonor she'll be charged with murder. After she leaves, Pepe shoots Ronco.

Some time passes. Gerardo is a struggling composer who plays the piano in the shabby “El Cielo” nightclub owned by don Simón.

Leonor, her face horribly scarred, is panhandling outside (she doesn't appear to be a prostitute). She enters the club but at the end of the evening can't



pay for her drinks; Gerardo says he'll cover the tab and when Leonor—who now calls herself Leticia—says she hasn't eaten in three days, he takes her to his furnished room and gives her something to eat. The next morning Aurora, daughter of the landlady, sees a used coffee cup with lipstick marks on it, which upsets her because she has a crush on Gerardo.

The next night, Gerardo discovers Leticia waiting in the pouring rain outside his building. He lets her sleep on his sofa; she takes money from his wallet and buys groceries the next morning. Gerardo has a close friend who's a plastic surgeon and will operate on Leticia at no cost, but she initially refuses.

[This scene is interrupted by a strange cut—some footage (in every copy I've seen, from several different sources) has been removed and replaced with a silent shot of the outside of the “El Cielo” *cabaret*. This is a technique used in Mexican cinema over the years (into the '80s at least) to censor something, but I can't imagine what would have been suppressed here. However, when this interpolated shot ends, Leticia has suddenly changed her mind and has already been successfully operated upon!]

Meanwhile, Pepe has been pressuring don Simón to sell him “El Cielo,” or at least allow Pepe to become his partner (he apparently owns various other nightclubs in the city). The club owner refuses, but Pepe won't take no for an answer, giving don Simón 15 days to change his mind. Pepe is in “El Cielo” when Leticia makes her successful debut as a singer, over the owner's objections (he doesn't know her face has been fixed and says he's not going to put on “a Frankenstein ball”). Pepe tells Leticia he thought he'd seen her before, but he must be mistaken: the woman he knew had a scarred face,

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and besides, she'd be in prison for murder. He offers to make her a star in his high-class *cabarets* and when she refuses he threatens to tell Gerardo—who is in love with Leticia and vice versa—that her father was a drug smuggler and she's a killer. He finally convinces her to cooperate by indicating Gerardo will be killed if she continues to resist.

Leticia dumps Gerardo, claiming she only used him and now has a better deal. Gerardo believes this and goes on a



drunken binge. He writes the song "Hipócrita" in Leticia's "honour" then tries to hang himself, but fails. Aurora rescues him and nurses him back to health, even submitting Gerardo's song to a

music publisher. It's a hit and he's now an acclaimed composer. Meanwhile, Leticia is a star at Pepe's "Picadilly" nightclub, singing and dancing "Callejera." This number is set up cleverly: Leticia is a streetwalker, and we assume Pepe used and discarded her, but then the camera pulls back to show it's all part of her musical number. Leticia doesn't disguise her dislike for Pepe, but he's smitten with her.

Pepe is also involved in negotiations with Leandro, a rival gangster from the north, with whom he wants to broker a partnership so the drugs created in Pepe's labs can be smuggled across the border to the USA. Everything comes to a head on the final night...Gerardo and Aurora are going to the posh "Argel" nightclub (not owned by Pepe) to celebrate his fame and fortune. Pepe decides to escort Leticia there to (a) show her off to Gerardo, and (b) attract police attention so his henchmen can take Leandro to their secret headquarters in an old warehouse. At the club, as mentioned above, Pepe dances with Leticia and sings Gerardo's song "Hipócrita!" He and Gerardo nearly fight, but Leticia defuses the situation. After they depart, Gerardo tells Aurora that Leticia means nothing to him now.

Pepe meets Leandro but the police have been tipped off. Pepe is wounded; he escapes and leaves his henchmen trapped



in the warehouse where they are all shot or arrested. Pepe goes to Leticia's apartment and she patches him up, but refuses to flee with him. Pepe calls the police and gives them Leticia's address, saying she's a murderer. He attempts to scar her face

again before leaving, so she shoots him (5 times!).

As the film concludes, Gerardo and Aurora arrive at the train station to depart on their honeymoon. They see Leticia among a group of prisoners embarking for the Islas Marias

penal colony. [I guess the police didn't buy her "self-defense" plea.]

Hipócrita...! is an excellent film with many fine touches in the film's style, characterisations, and narrative. It's not perfect but it's extremely entertaining from first to last, expertly combining the melodramatic aspects of the *cabaretera* genre with the atmospheric visuals, eccentric visuals, and disillusioned tone of *film noir*.



Luis Beristáin, Leticia Palma, Felipe Mier Jr., Carmen Molina, Miguel Morayta on the set of *Hipócrita...!*

Trivia notes: *Hipócrita...!* was remade in 1957 by Miguel Morayta as *La mujer marcada*, keeping the basic characters (scarred woman, musician, criminal—Ana Luisa Peluffo, Joaquín Cordero, Alberto de Mendoza, respectively) but making some significant changes to the plot. León Barroso, José Chávez Trowe, and Emilio Garibay appear in both versions but in different roles. That same year Morayta remade 1949's *La venenosa* (which he had also directed), again with Ana Luisa Peluffo in the starring role.



Camino del infierno* [Road of Hell] (Prods. Mier y

Brooks, 1950) *Prod:*

Felipe Mier, Óscar J.

Brooks; *Dir-Scr:*

Miguel Morayta;

Story: Luis Spota;

Photo: Ignacio

Torres; *Music:* Luis

H[ernández]. Bretón;

Prod Chief: Julio

Guerrero Tello; *Asst*

Dir: Luis Abaddie

[sic]; *Film Ed:* José

W. Bustos; *Art Dir:*

Gunther Gerzso;

Lighting: J. Guadalupe García; *Camera Op:* Andrés Torres;



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Makeup: Sara Herrera; *Sound Dir:* Jesús González G.; *Dialog Recording:* Francisco Alcayde; *Studios:* Tepeyac
*re-released as *El beso de una muerta*

Cast: Pedro Armendáriz (*Pedro Uribe*), Leticia Palma (*Leticia*), Ramón Gay (*León*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*Dr. Fausto*), Manolo Calvo (*El Chueco*), Alvarado (*Pancho*), Dora María (*singer*), Armando Velasco (*don Fermín*), Ignacio Villalbazo, Guillermo Samperio (*police detective*), Trio Cantarrecio, Trío Los Jaibos, Facundo Rivero y su Cuarteto, Wolf Ruvinskis (*Tony*), Lupe Inclán (*doña Chole*), Pascual García Peña (*henchman Bruno Landeros*), Fernando Galiana (*theater cashier*), José Chávez Trowe (*henchman Joselito*), Edmundo Espino (*chief of detectives*), Julio Daneri (*cantiner*), Kika Meyer (*prostitute*), Francisco Pando (*Juanito, cantiner*), Joaquín Roche (*cabaret employee*), Toña la Negra (*singing voice for Leticia*)

Notes: One of the most notable developments in post-WWII Mexican cinema was the *cabaretera* genre, focusing on the lives of women forced to work as bar-girls (and worse) by



poverty, bad luck, and bad men. Some of these films veered fairly close to *film noir*, although many had standard romantic, happy

endings. Some "pure" *films noir* and hybrids also appeared in this period. *Camino del infierno* was probably made as a followup to *Hipócrita* (1949) and *Vagabunda* (1950): all 3 were produced by Mier y Brooks, starred Leticia Palma, and directed by Miguel Morayta. [It's probably not a coincidence that *Camino del infierno* opens with Leticia Palma singing "Hipócrita."]

Leticia and León plot to rob Tony, owner of the cabaret-gambling den where they both work. They know Tony keeps a large amount of cash in his desk. León blackmails his former prison cellmate, Pedro, into assisting with the robbery, by



threatening to tell don Fermín, Pedro's new boss, about his criminal record. Pedro enters Tony's office to steal the money but is surprised by Tony, who shoots him in the hand. León

comes in and mortally wounds Tony, but is himself shot by the dying man (Tony then stabs León repeatedly!). Pedro forces Leticia to drive him to an abandoned house to hide. He

falls ill from his wounded hand, but Leticia stays with him rather than fleeing. She brings the aged Dr. Fausto to see Pedro; Fausto has to amputate Pedro's hand.

Pedro and Leticia fall in love, and Pedro returns to his job in don Fermín's *cantina*. On the first anniversary of their wedding, Leticia visits Dr. Fausto, believing she is pregnant. Instead, Fausto reveals that she has contracted leprosy! Rather than reveal her illness to Pedro, Leticia pretends she no longer loves him, and runs away.

Pedro, embittered, returns to a life of crime. He takes out his anger on his victims, scarring them with a claw-like device he wears in place of his missing hand. Meanwhile, he searches the underworld for Leticia, who has become a drunken prostitute. They finally



meet, and Pedro learns the truth. They decide that Leticia will go to a leper colony for treatment, and Pedro will turn himself in and pay his debt to society. However, Leticia is shot by the police; Pedro shoots back and is killed, falling from the top of the Monumento a la Independencia (the column topped with the Ángel de la Independencia statue) to his death.



Camino del infierno is a strange and unsettling picture that begins as a crime film, changes (rather awkwardly and not-too convincingly) to a romantic drama, then abruptly becomes a rather bizarre *film noir* with some surprisingly "strong" scenes for the period. For instance, the amputation (without drugs) of Pedro's horribly swollen hand is rather gory, but this is nothing compared to the disturbing scenes in which Leticia discovers she has leprosy. First, she burns her hand with hot grease, but feels no pain. She goes to the doctor and accidentally rams an upright paper spike through her arm (a horrible scene), again feeling nothing. Finally, to test his hypothesis, Fausto deliberately burns her hand (in closeup) with his cigar! Much later, Leticia shows Pedro the disfigured flesh of her neck and shoulder.

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Leticia Palma starts off *Camino del infierno* as a archetypal *femme fatale*, admitting “I like jewels, perfumes, furs,” and will only give herself to the love-struck León if he robs Tony of 300,000 pesos. She later explains to Pedro that she grew up in poverty; her drunken father abandoned the rest of the family, and she learned to hate all men. However, Leticia is reformed by her true love for Pedro, only to contract a dread disease and then die violently.

Armendáriz, while perhaps best known for his rural roles, nonetheless made a fair number of films in which he played urban characters, including *Distinto amanecer* and *La noche avanza*. In *Camino del infierno* he is quite good as the tormented Pedro—unjustly convicted of robbery and sent to prison, and trying to go straight afterwards [see also *Cadena perpetua*, based on a Spota novel]—who at first hates Leticia for involving him in the robbery (which costs him his hand), then falls in love with her, and then hates her again when she (apparently) rejects him.

Camino del infierno is well-made and features some excellent photography, particularly in the final sequences. While most of the film was shot in the studio, there is some use of actual locations, notably the finale at the Monumento a la Independencia. In an earlier sequence shot on location, Pedro and his gang rob a movie theatre which is showing “Abbot y Costello contra los asesinos.”

All things considered, an unusual and entertaining film.

Trivia note: other Mexican films about leprosy include *El misterio del rostro pálido* and *Santo vs. los jinetes del terror*.

[originally published in MFB 1/12 (1995), revised & updated here]



En la palma de tu mano [In the Palm of Your Hand] (Mier y Brooks, 1950) *Exec Prod*: Ernest Enríquez; *Prod*: Felipe Mier, Oscar Brooks; *Dir*: Roberto Gavaldón; *Scr*: José Revueltas, Roberto Gavaldón; *Story*: Luis Spota; *Photo*: Alex Phillips; *Music*: Raúl Lavista; *Prod Mgr*: Miguel Fernández Cajigal; *Prod Chief*: Jorge Cardeña; *Asst Dir*: Ignacio Villareal; *Film Ed*: Charles L. Kimball; *Asst Ed*: Raúl J. Casso; *Art Dir*: Francisco Marco Chilet; *Lighting*: Eduardo Bringas; *Makeup*: Concepción Zamora; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec*: Rodolfo Benítez; *Spec FX*: Jorge Benavides; *Studio*: Churubusco

Cast: Arturo de Córdova (“Profesor” Jaime Karin), Leticia Palma (*Ada Cisneros de Romano*), Carmen Montejo (*Clara Stein*), Ramón Gay (*León Romano*), Consuelo Guerrero de Luna (*Sra. Arnold*), Enriqueta Reza (*Carmelita*), Manuel Arvide (*police insp.*), Bertha Lehar (*Sra. del Valle*), Lonka Becker (*restaurant owner*), José Arratia (*notary*), Nicolás Rodríguez (*lawyer*), Guillermo Ramírez (*highway policeman*), Ignacio García (*organist*), Víctor Alcocer (*policeman*), Stefan Berne (*restaurant employee*), Alfonso Carti (*policeman*), Lidia Franco (*hotel employee*), Pascual García Peña (*man with bird*), Jesús Gómez (*policeman*), Bertha Lomelí (*Karin’s first client*), Tana Lynn (*blonde client*), José Luis Moreno (*boy selling*

lottery tickets), Salvador Pérez G. (*hotel guest*), Carlos Robles Gil (*witness*), Juan Bruno Terraza (*pianist*), María Valdealde (*beauty salon client*), Enrique Zambrano (*police detective*), José Castillo Tapia (*police agent*)

Notes: *En la palma de tu mano* is one of the most well-regarded Mexican films of all time. It ranked #70 on the *Somos* magazine poll of the Top 100 Mexican

Films, was fairly widely-distributed internationally* when it first came out, has been recognised by *film noir* aficionados as a superb example of the genre, etc. And this isn’t a case of a film which achieved its fame with the passage of time: it won 8 Ariel Awards at the 1952 ceremony--Best Picture, Best Direction, Best Photography, Best Sound, Best Actor, Best Original Story, Best Art Direction, and Best Editing--and was nominated for three more (Best Adaptation, Best Supporting Actress [Tana Lynn], and Best Music Score).



*It was released in the USA in 1953 as *Kill Him For Me*, in France as *Mains criminelles* [Criminal Hands], in Italy as *Castigo* [Punishment], and in Germany as *Verbrecherische Hände* [Criminal Hands].

[Although *En la palma de tu mano* has apparently been “restored” within the past several years (and shown at some festivals, etc.), I have been unable to ascertain if this upgraded version has been released on Blu-ray (or even DVD). Most

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copies available on the web and even DVDs (dating back to 2006-8) have less than optimal image quality.]

En la palma de tu mano is very “cosmopolitan”—which may account to some degree for its international popularity—there is relatively little Mexican flavour, something shared to a lesser or greater degree by some other Mexican *films noir*, including *La otra*, *La noche avanza*, etc. Director Gavaldón and the rest of his team (cinematographer Alex Phillips, art director Fco. Marco Chilet, etc.) take their cues from Hollywood *noir*, in terms of plot, character, cinematography, and setting.

As with *La otra*, Gavaldón appears to have picked up a few tips from Alfred Hitchcock (although this might not be deliberate on his part, the similarities could just be coincidental). There are two sequences which feel extremely “Hitchcockian.” In the first, Karin has shot León in his cabin and there’s a knock at the door. Thinking it’s Ada, Karin says [in Spanish] “Everything’s OK, I’ve killed León.” But when



he opens the door, a stranger is standing there, and he’s just heard Karin confess to murder! However, a raging storm cloaked the sound of the gunshots, and the visitor is a lost *gringo* tourist who doesn’t speak Spanish. [Karin proceeds to give the man directions in fluent English.]

The second sequence is even more Hitchcockian in nature. Karin and Ada have disinterred León’s corpse and

put it in the trunk of their auto (apparently León is partially decomposed, as Karin and Ada hold their noses, a nice touch). Their car gets a flat tire on the way back to town. Karin opens the trunk to get the spare tire and jack, and a motorcycle cop pulls up to help! Ada decoys him away from the trunk (which, as we’ve seen, contains a smelly dead body) by feigning a sprained ankle, allowing Karin to close the trunk. After the tire’s changed, Karin has the policeman put the flat tire in the back seat, not the trunk, claiming he’ll get it fixed at the next service station.

“Professor” Karin is a fortune-teller who makes his living feeding the romantic fantasies of middle-aged women, although he’s not averse to a little blackmail on the side. Through information provided by his girlfriend Clara, a manicurist (the same profession as María in *La otra*), Karin learns the circumstances surrounding the death

of wealthy Víctor Romano are suspicious. He approaches Ada, the widow, claiming her late husband had been his client. Accusing Ada of having had an affair with her husband’s nephew León, Karin extorts money from her.

Karin marries Clara, but when León attempts to run him down with his car, he decides Ada and León must have conspired to murder her husband and demands more money. Ada agrees, but only if Karin kills León. However, she also encourages León to murder Karin! The two men meet at a remote cabin and León dies. Karin then informs Ada that their “destinies are linked” and he breaks off his relationship with Clara. However, they discover Ada and León jointly inherited her husband’s fortune, and unless León’s body is produced, the estate will be tied up for years. This leads to the sequence described above, where the corpse is disinterred. They make it appear he was hit by a train.

Ada is picked up by the police and notifies Karin. He’s taken to the morgue to identify a body, and sees Ada leaving; believing she’s betrayed him and unwilling to confront León’s corpse again, Karin confesses to the murder. Ada is arrested as his accomplice. But, irony! Neither Ada nor Karin had been suspected of León’s death: the body Karin was asked to identify was that of Clara, who’d committed suicide.

The twist ending of *En la palma de tu mano* is not necessarily novel; in fact, *La otra* also has a similar ironic conclusion, with María convicted of a murder she didn’t commit, but she can’t clear herself, because that would involve confessing to a different murder.

The *mise-en-scene* of *En la palma de tu mano* is excellent. Alex Phillips had also shot *La otra*: both films feature a mix of posh

surroundings (Magdalena’s house in *La otra*, various swanky places in *En la palma de tu mano*, including a restaurant, Ada’s hotel room, etc.) and shabby settings

(María’s room in *La otra*, Karin’s apartment and “office” in *En la palma de tu mano*). The exterior of Karin’s building has



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a huge image of his head painted on it, and a large “hand” sign to impress potential clients.

Arturo de Córdova had been a leading man in Mexican cinema since the 1930s, and was also successful in Hollywood and elsewhere (notably Argentina & Spain, for obvious reasons). In addition to standard “star” roles in dramas and comedies, de Córdova played a surprising number of flawed protagonists (mentally unbalanced, murderers, and so on) in films like *En la palma de tu mano*, *El hombre sin rostro*, *Cuando levanta la niebla*, *Él*, *Crepúsculo*, *La diosa arrodillada*, *El hombre que logró ser invisible*, and so on. Karin is a cynical rogue in *En la palma de tu mano* but it’s his mystical romantic attraction to *femme fatale* Ada that results in his involvement in a murder plot (although arguably he kills León in self-defense, since León is trying to murder him). De Córdova was nominated 8 times in 12 years for a Best Actor Ariel, receiving the prize three times (*En la palma de tu mano* was his first win).

Leticia Palma’s screen career was truncated due to a dispute with the actors’ union, but it’s difficult to imagine what sort of roles she’d have played in later years had she continued to act. Virtually all of the films in which she starred were crime-oriented melodramas, and while she wasn’t always an unsympathetic character, she did not seem suited for more traditional roles in films. She’s very good in *En la palma de tu mano* but her role is almost schematic, without much character development. The rest of the cast is fine, with lots of great Mexican character actors in supporting parts.

En la palma de tu mano is one of the best Mexican *films noir*, a polished production with clever twists and good performances.



La noche avanza [Night Falls] (Mier y Brooks, 1951)

Exec Prod: Ernesto Enriquez; *Prod:* Felipe Mier, Óscar J. Brooks; *Dir:* Roberto Gavaldón; *Scr:* José Revueltas, Jesús Cárdenas, Roberto Gavaldón; *Story:* Luis Spota; *Photo:* Jack Draper [misspelled “Drapper” on the credits]; *Music:* Raúl Lavista; *Prod Mgr:* Miguel Hernández Cajigal; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir:* Alfonso Corona Blake; *Film Ed:* Charles L. Kimball; *Art Dir:* Edward Fitzgerald; *Decor:* José Barragán; *Lighting:* Miguel Arana; *Makeup:* Armando Meyer; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog rec:* Manuel Topete; *Music/ re-rec:* Caldino Sarnperio; *Asst Ed:* Raúl J. Casso; *Studio:* Churubusco Azteca



Cast: Pedro Armendáriz (*Marcos Arizmendi*), Anita Blanch (*Sara*), Rebeca Iturbide (*Rebeca Villareal*), Eva Martino (*Lucrecia*), José María Linares Rivas (*Marcial Gómez*), Julio Villareal (*señor Villareal*), A[rmando] Soto de la Marina “El Chicote” (*Chicote*), Juan García (*henchman*), Carlos Múzquiz (*Armando Villareal*), Wolf Rubinskis (*Bodoques, henchman*), Francisco Jambrina (*Luis*), Luis Mussot Sr. (*doctor*), Robert Y. Palacios (*Li Chan*), Carlos Riquelme, Margarito Luna



(*henchman*), José Torvay & Héctor Mateos (*policemen*), Alfredo Varela Sr. (*doctor in dressing room*), Humberto Rodríguez (*pawnbroker*), Luis Mussot Jr. (*shoeshine boy*), Jorge Chesterking (*cabaret client*), Felipe de Flores (*airport employee*), Ignacio Peón (*jai alai spectator*), Héctor Godoy (*hotel clerk*); professional jai alai players (“*pelotaris*”): Pedro Adrinúa, Ignacio Echeverría, Gabriel de Pablo, José Ma. Urrutía, Aquiles Elorduy, Jaime Inchandurrieta, Francisco Úbeda; pelotaris: Ricardo Adalid, Genaro de Alba, Agustín Fernández, Álvaro Matute

Notes: This was Roberto Gavaldón’s follow-up to his highly successful film noir, *En la palma de tu mano*, also based on a story by Luis Spota. While *La noche avanza* wasn’t as acclaimed as its predecessor—failing to receive a single Ariel nomination—in some ways it’s even better, with a larger cast of interesting characters, a unique setting (the world of professional *jai alai*), and a less familiar story. *En la palma de tu mano* has a quirkier script with several standout sequences, so each film has its strengths.

Like the earlier film, *La noche avanza* is *film noir* with an amoral protagonist; however, in this film there is no *femme fatale* equivalent to Leticia Palma’s role in *En la palma de tu mano*. Instead, the women in *La noche avanza* are victims of the manipulative and crass Marcos Arizmendi (“It’s better to have a fifth of a first-class man than to have all five parts of a fifth-rate man. Don’t you forget it...”). Even moreso than *En la palma de tu mano*, *La noche avanza* manipulates the audience so that we are forced to empathise with a basically unsympathetic protagonist (in fact, a murderer). This is somewhat similar to *Psycho*: in the sequence when Norman

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Bates tries to sink Marian Bates' car in a swamp, the car doesn't go under at first, and the audience is ironically placed in the position of wanting it to sink, to hide evidence of the crime! In *La noche avanza*, Marcos' frantic attempts to get cash to pay off his would-be killers (ah, the days before 24-hour teller machines!) and his fear each time the police appear (although they are just trying to be helpful, he thinks they know about Sara, and so do we) put the viewer on his side to an extent, even though he has been portrayed unsympathetically throughout the entire film.

Marcos Arizmendi, nicknamed "El Amo" ("The Boss") is a famous *pelotari* (*jai alai* player) disliked by most of his fellow athletes because of his arrogant manner ("The world is for the conquerors, not the conquered!"). Marcos also ruthlessly uses and abuses women, including the rich, middle-aged Sara, young singer Lucrecia, and the high-class Rebeca, whom he has recently discarded. When Rebeca tells Marcos she is pregnant with his child, Marcos tries to convince her to have an abortion ("This child must not be born!"), refuses to marry her, and then arranges with her father to deceive her: Marcos will soon be leaving for a season in Cuba, and hopes Rebeca will get over him while he's gone. When Rebeca learns the truth, she attempts to commit suicide by jumping in front of a streetcar, but is rescued by her brother Armando. She confesses "Marcos and I were something more than simply sweethearts" [i.e., they slept together], and Armando hits her. When she adds that she's pregnant, Armando says "You should have started with that!" (Their father doesn't know either of these things, he just believes Rebeca had a crush on Marcos.)

Armando is heavily in debt to gambler Marcial. Together, Armando and Marcial confront Marcos; Armando says he's told Marcial about Marcos and Rebeca. Unless Marcos throws his next big match, he'll be accused of corrupting the morals of a minor, and a scandal will erupt: "Your name, your prestige are at risk." [Marcial tells Armando that he doesn't really care about the money he'll make betting on the match, he just wants to get even with Marcos, who had

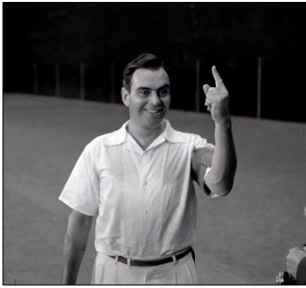
humiliated him earlier because Marcial was smitten with Lucrecia.]

However, just before the match begins, Armando tells Marcos the deal is off, that Rebeca got money from her father to pay off Marcial. Marcos goes ahead and wins. But it turns out Armando double-crossed both Marcos and Marcial, betting a large sum of money on Marcos to win. Marcial is angry at Marcos, and has him kidnaped. Marcial's men force Marcos to drink a whole bottle of tequila and plan to kill him, but when they find the athlete's checkbook and see how much money he has in the bank, they get greedy. They take Marcos to a doctor and have him revived.

Marcos has to find someone who will cash his check and thereby save his life from the hoods. Marcos first looks for Chinese gambler Li Chan, but he can't be contacted; next is Sara, who admits that she isn't really rich--she only pretended to be wealthy in order to keep Marcos' attention (they'd had an affair 3 years earlier in the Philippines, when she was married, and she'd now falsely claimed to have inherited "millions"). Marcos steals her jewels, and Sara is shot and killed in a struggle with him. But the jewels turn out to be fake. Marcos finally reaches Li Chan and cashes his check, then pays off Marcial's men.

Because the doctor who revived Marcos had reported him kidnaped, the police have been looking for him all over the city.

Marcos tells them no, he's OK. Later, the police show up again, and Marcos is sure that they intend to arrest him for Sara's murder, but they just want to return his cigarette case (given to him by Sara), found on one of the hoodlums. The police escort Marcos to the airport so he can catch the plane for Cuba, foiling a final attempt by Marcial to get revenge. On



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the flight, Marcos dozes off. Seated up front, the betrayed Rebeca is waiting. She walks back and shoots Marcos several times, killing him.

As the film ends, a poster outside the *frontón* (*jai alai* arena) bearing Marcos' name is ripped and falls into the gutter. A dog urinates on it. (Payback: early in the film, Marcos had kicked a dog as he left the *frontón*.) Finally, a street cleaner picks up the poster and puts it in his trash can.

This final scene is slightly over-done—the dog (who even gets a big closeup) could have been omitted, and the downfall of Marcos could've been conveyed simply by having the



poster falling into the street and then being stuffed into the trash can. But this is a minor complaint. It does bring up a (possibly unintentional) motif throughout *La noche avanza*,

“important pieces of paper.” Pieces of paper which feature into the plot include the “Marcos” poster, Armando’s IOU, *jai alai* betting slips, Marcos’ check, airline tickets, and newspapers. In fact, newspapers are highlighted several times: the doctor who treats Marcos calls the police afterwards because he sees Marcos’ photo in the paper, and Marcos (on the airliner) reads an article about himself headlined “El Pelotari Marcos se Despidió Invicto” [Pelota Player Marcos Bids Farewell Undefeated]. This newspaper falls to floor of the plane; Rebeca steps on it as she approaches the sleeping Marcos, and when he dies, his corpse comes to rest on it.

La noche avanza is very well-produced. The photography by Jack Draper (including some nice location shooting) is particularly fine, as is Edward Fitzgerald’s art direction: the film looks amazing, especially in restored prints. The actual locations—the *frontón*, the airport—are interesting to see, and the sets—notably the nightclub where Lucrecia sings and the “Chinese casino” (shown only for a few seconds)—are well-designed and atmospheric.



[Note: the Frontón México, in the Tabacalera *colonia* of Mexico City, opened in 1929. After being closed for a number of years, it re-opened as a cultural/event center in 2017. As accurately depicted in *La noche avanza*, the Monumento de la Revolución is nearby.]

Armendáriz (shorn of his usual moustache for a change, although he’d be clean shaven in a number of roles), with this

film and *El Bruto* the following year for Luis Buñuel, demonstrated his ability to play unsympathetic characters. He’s quite good, and the rest of the cast is also fine, some playing against type (like Chicote, to an extent, although the gangsters are actually more humorous than frightening), while others—like José María Linares Rivas and Julio Villareal—are comfortable in their usual sort of roles. The exotic-looking Eva Martino had a relatively brief career in Mexican cinema, appearing in a handful of films—mostly second leads or in support—in the 1944-53 era.



Rebeca Iturbide is excellent in her role as the high-strung, innocent young woman who’s betrayed by Marcos, and Anita Blanch elicits sympathy as a middle-aged woman desperately trying to buy affection.



A final note of interest is the *jai alai milieu*: this sport, popular in certain very localized areas of the world (including Miami), featured a large number of Basque emigrants (note the typical Basque names in the cast, such as Echeverría); later, women players became the vogue (at least in Mexico).



The *jai alai* match scenes are well-done and have a definite documentary feel, but if one isn’t familiar with the rules of the game, it’s rather difficult to get excited about the action. Special mention should be made of the opening sequence of

La noche avanza, which features Marcos participating in a match, intercut with various characters who'll be important later (Rebeca, her father, Lucrecia, Armando, Marcial): this is really superbly shot and edited.

Note: review originally published in *MFB* 3/7 but significantly expanded, updated, corrected, and revised here.



Quiero vivir* [I Want to Live] (Rosas Films, 1951)

Prod: Rodolfo Rosas Priego; *Dir-Adapt:* Alberto Gout; *Story:* Luis Spota; *Photo:* Alex Phillips; *Music:* Antonio Díaz Conde; *Prod Mgr:* Mario García Camberos; *Prod Chief:* Paul Castelaín; *Asst Dir:* Jesús Marín; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas



Priego; *Art Dir:* Manuel Fontanals; *Camera Op:* Rosalío Solano; *M. Barba's* *Costume Des:* Armando Valdez Peza; *Décor:* José Barragán; *Makeup:* Elda Loza; *Back Projection:* Óscar Lepe; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Sound Op:* Luis Fernández; *Re-rec:* Galdino

Samperio; *SpecFX:* Jorge Benavides; *Script Clerk:* Ícaro Cisneros; *Studio:* Churubusco-Azteca

*re-released as *La muerte es mi pareja* [Death is My Partner]

Cast: Jorge Mistral (*Rubén Iturbe*), Meche Barba (*Mercedes Ríos*), Julio Villareal (*Cmdte. Rodolfo Saldivar*), Víctor Alcocer (*Ángel*), Andrea Palma (*Andrea Iturbe*), Lupe Llac (*Alicia*), Celia Viveros (*Angélica*), Roberto Gálvez (*"El Ronco" Gómez*), Charles Rooner (*Dr. W. Van Buren*), Alberto Mariscal (*Ángel's henchman*), Salvador Quiroz (*party guest*), Enrique Díaz Indiano (*Samuel, major domo*), Daniel Arroyo (*party guest*), Manuel de la Vega (*Tomás*), Salvador Godínez (*Ángel's henchman*), Álvaro Matute & Ángel Merino (*police agents*), Luis Mussot hijo (*Manuel*), Acela Vidaurri (*Clara, cabaret coat-check worker*)

Notes: Alberto Gout is probably remembered today mostly for his Ninón Sevilla vehicles (*Revancha*, *Aventurera*, *No niego mi pasado*, *Sensualidad*, *Mujeres sacrificadas*, *Aventura en Río*) or the internationally-distributed "sexy-Bible" movie *Adán y Eva*, but he also made several films with Meche Barba

(startin with *Humo en los ojos*), one with María Antonieta Pons, one with Rosa Carmina, plus a number of movies that didn't feature *rumbera* stars. He passed away in 1966 at the early age of 53.

The initial premise of *Quiero vivir* is slightly reminiscent of *D.O.A.* (1949): at the film's outset, the protagonist learns he has only a short time to live. However, unlike *D.O.A.*, the plot of *Quiero vivir* doesn't revolve around his attempt to discover the person who "murdered" him, but instead thrusts the protagonist into a criminal plot involving a young woman he meets. In

fact, his imminent death has very little bearing on the narrative: he breaks up with his fiancée and leaves his



own birthday party because he's upset, but after that nothing really happens that wouldn't have happened if he'd just taken those initial actions for some other reason. And he doesn't even die as a result of whatever illness he has, he's shot to death.

La noche avanza, based on a Spota story, also has a "ticking clock" element which is under-used. Although the last third of the film takes place over a few hours, and protagonist Marcos is scheduled to leave Mexico on an early flight the next morning, this particular aspect is not played up at all; in fact, if he happened to miss this flight, he could have conceivably taken a later one (although admittedly he would have been in danger from gangster Marcial and the police might have eventually connected him to a murder he'd committed). On the other hand, if he'd missed his flight, he wouldn't have been shot to death by Rebeca on the plane.

Is *Quiero vivir* a *film noir*? Since there's no widely accepted criteria for this definition, a movie is *film noir* if you choose to label it as such (within reason). *D.O.A.* is certainly *noir*, but *Quiero vivir* has both *noir* and non-*noir* attributes. The presence of Alex Phillips (*La otra*, *En la palma de tu mano*, *Sensualidad*, etc.) behind the camera doesn't guarantee *noir*-dom: the cinematography and *mise-en-scene* are inconsistent. Some sequences are atmospheric, others are not, and the overall *milieu* is more upscale than one might expect in a *film noir*. The narrative veers between *film noir* and standard melodrama-crime, although there are enough *noir* "markers" to suggest it should qualify.

On his birthday, and the day he's just won a prestigious contest, architect Rubén learns he has an incurable medical condition and will die in a short time (the doctor tells him "several weeks, maybe a month," but after Rubén leaves the

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doctor admits to his assistant that 3 days is more likely). [Rubén's exact malady is not specified, although a brain tumour would be a good guess.] Rubén goes home and says nothing to his family or friends, but breaks off his engagement to Alicia, then leaves his party and goes for a drive.

Meanwhile, Mercedes and gangster El Ronco, sitting in a parked car, argue: he compelled her to become his mistress by threatening to have her younger brother—a member of Ronco's gang—sent to prison. Now that her brother has left the city, Mercedes rejects Ronco. He strangles her, she grabs his pistol, a shot rings out, and Ronco is dead. Mercedes flees. A mysterious figure approaches the car and removes the pistol



and Mercedes' necklace that had been clutched in Ronco's hand.

Rubén picks up Mercedes and drives her to the nightclub where she's employed as a dancer. After she performs her

number, Rubén takes her to her apartment. He says she can count on him, and will see her the next day. However, after she goes in, Rubén has an attack and passes out. A mysterious man (again) tries to get into Mercedes' apartment, but she blocks the door and he departs. Rubén shows up, ill. Mercedes helps him and he spends the night on her sofa, telling her no one had ever cared about him before, and "now it's too late."

The next day Rubén goes home and is confronted by his sister Andrea. He obliquely tells her to prepare for a "transcendental change" in him, and that he's fallen in love with another woman. Andrea says the man she loved felt he was unworthy of her and she's always regretted it, so "if you're sure this woman is your happiness, go to her."

Gangster Ángel—the mysterious man we've been seeing—is picked up by the police outside Mercedes' apartment building. Both he and Mercedes are taken to Cmdte. Saldívar's office for questioning in Ronco's murder. Ángel is released and Rubén—over the phone—gives Mercedes an alibi. After she departs, Saldívar tells his assistant, "I don't understand how a man like [Rubén] can be a friend of a woman like that: a drug trafficker's lover."

Rubén returns to the doctor's office and says he was resigned before, but now he wants to live. Science can do nothing to help him, he's told, but perhaps—if he has faith—a miracle might occur.

Ángel confronts Mercedes and threatens to turn over the pistol and necklace to the police if she doesn't surrender Ronco's stash of money. She denies knowledge of this, but Ángel gives her until the following evening to come up with it. To spare Rubén from becoming involved, Mercedes turns

him away. Instead, Rubén visits the nightclub that night, and bargirl Angélica tells him how Mercedes was forced to be Ronco's mistress. After the show, Rubén takes Mercedes home. I want to help you, Rubén says, but "I'm in a hurry." They agree to "live as if these are our final moments."

They kiss, fade to black (i.e.,

they sleep together). The following day they have a picnic in the country, visit a church and pray, and come back to the city. Rubén goes home and puts a pistol and bullets in his pockets.

After her performance, Mercedes gets a phone call from her brother Manuel: he's being held hostage in Ronco's house by Ángel's men. Ángel takes her there. Rubén, meanwhile, is waylaid by another thug but turns the tables and learns where Mercedes has gone.

Ángel admits he murdered Ronco and blamed it on Mercedes; he threatens to kill her and her brother unless he gets the missing money. Rubén arrives and shoots Ángel's henchman, but the gangster runs across the street to the closed and dark Plaza de

Toros (bullfight stadium). Rubén pursues him and Mercedes follows.

After a long, running gun battle, Mercedes is shot by Ángel; Rubén has another attack that

compromises his vision, and he is also shot, but finally kills Ángel. Rubén and Mercedes die in each other's arms.

Meche Barba does 3 musical numbers in *Quiero vivir*. I suppose this comes with the territory when your star is a noted *rumbera*, but although Alberto Gout varies his camera angles and edits the sequences efficiently, none of the numbers is especially noteworthy. Barba's costumes are quite conservative (in the third, dance-only sequence she removes her long skirt but is still wearing a bodysuit that looks like a one-piece bathing costume) and although the second song "Mi negrito" is Cuban-tinged, the *rumbera* quotient is low. The third number is rather odd, alternating between sedate, "high-class" and faster mambo-style dancing; the male dancers are wearing top hats and tails, but in the background there are large projected shadows of two men wearing large sombreros dancing the mambo?! Of greater import is the fact that these sequences really slow down the film's pace and contribute nothing to the plot: we could have had the first one, to



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establish Mercedes' as a legit performer in a fairly posh nightclub, but the second and third are over-kill.

Barba was a rare example of a Mexican *rumbera* (although she was actually born in New York City to Spanish and



Mexican parents)—María Antonieta Pons, Ninón Sevilla, Rosa Carmina, Amalia Aguilar, etc., were all Cuban. Barba appeared in a number of non-musical films,

notably *Lola Casanova*. Unlike Leticia Palma, whose career ended abruptly for union-related reasons, sources differ as to whether Barba retired voluntarily in 1953 or was simply no longer in demand (she eventually returned to acting in the mid-1980s).

This is essentially a two-character film, Rubén and Mercedes, with minor contributions by Julio Villareal, Víctor



Alcocer, Andrea Palma, Celia Viveros, and Charles Rooner. Jorge Mistral is satisfactory, although he really gets only one "acting!" scene, when he begs the doctor

to find a way to keep him alive. Otherwise, he seems rather stoic and doesn't have a lot of opportunity to demonstrate what this sudden death-sentence (followed by finding true love) means to him. Meche Barba gets slightly more opportunities to exhibit emotion and she's fine as well.

Quiero vivir looks a bit cheap: it's shot on limited (but



adequate) sets and a few actual exteriors. The sequence in the Plaza de Toros is interesting, as Rubén and Ángel dash along the various corridors and tunnels (they don't actually go into the seating area or the

bullring), periodically shooting at each other. Existing prints carry the re-release title of *La muerte es mi pareja* and are rather murky, but one can see a few glimpses of what were probably nice compositions.

Antonio Díaz Conde's score is hyper-dramatic, even bombastic at times. Díaz Conde scored well over 250 films in a roughly 30-year period (early '40s to early '70s)—he died in 1976), and it's only logical that some of his music sounds familiar, but I'd swear *Quiero vivir* contains themes that were slightly re-vamped and used in *El horripilante bestia humana!*

Overall, *Quiero vivir* is satisfactory without being outstanding.



Nadie muere dos veces (No One Dies Twice]

(Filmex, 1952) *Prod.*: (uncredited) Gregorio Walerstein, Abel Salazar; *Dir/Scr.*: Luis Spota; *Photo*: Carlos Carvajal; *Music*: Manuel Esperón; *Film Ed.*: Rafael Ceballos; *Makeup*: Román Juárez; *Music/Re-rec.*: Enrique Rodríguez

Cast: Abel Salazar (*Raúl García*; *Ricardo Islas*), Luis Aguilar (*Alberto*), Lilia del Valle (*Irma*), Ramón Gay (*Arturo Robles*), Pedro Vargas (*singer in boat*), Fernando Fernández (*Fernando*), Salvador Quiroz (*don Arturo*), Enedina Díaz de León (*Enedina*)

Notes: This film, while professional in all of the technical areas, still resembles a home movie or an amateur film at times—it was shot at Abel Salazar's house on Lake Tequesquitengo, with irrelevant cameos by Fernando Fernández and Pedro Vargas (who look like they just stopped by for the weekend and were pressed into service), and features three fairly long water- skiing sequences (only one of which has any connection with the plot).

The story has aspects of a *film noir* or thriller, but its somewhat jarring happy ending, the above-mentioned skiing and musical interludes, and Abel Salazar's uneven performance all mitigate against any sort of a consistent tone. Salazar is all over the map, at times utilizing his familiar comic mannerisms and at other times trying to be hard-boiled, then suddenly switching to a romantic, nice-guy persona. Lilia del Valle plays it straight and is generally adequate (given the script), as is Ramón Gay, but Luis Aguilar (shirtless for the

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whole film) is terribly miscast in a subsidiary, unsympathetic role.

Down-and-out Raúl García arrives at Lake Tequesquitengo and steals a few pesos from a small café-store on the shores of



the lake. At a house across the lake, he sees a beautiful woman, Irma, confronted by her ex-husband, jewel thief Ricardo Islas, who has just escaped from prison. Ricardo taunts Irma, giving her a pistol and daring her to shoot

him. When he threatens her, Irma shoots and Ricardo falls over a railing to the shore of the lake below. From his hiding place, Raúl sees that Ricardo--dead--is his exact double! Both Raúl and Alberto, Irma's handyman, watch her sink Ricardo's body in the lake. When Irma returns, Raúl confronts her. At first he poses as Ricardo, but she soon sees through him. However, he blackmails her into allowing him to stay at the house for a time. He is introduced to the servants as her husband.

Irma and Raúl seem to get along, but she attempts to drown him while he is learning to water-ski. However, Irma can't go



through with it, and eventually Raúl and Irma fall in love. She tells him that she led a rough life, and didn't know Ricardo was a crook

when she married him. She turned to alcohol to help her forget about him. Meanwhile, police detective Arturo comes to the lake in pursuit of Ricardo. He thinks Raúl is the escaped criminal, but doesn't arrest him at once, hoping to find the fortune in jewels Ricardo had stolen.

Ricardo's body is discovered by some other vacationers at the lake, but the face has been disfigured, and it is tentatively identified as Raúl, not Ricardo. Alberto, jealous of Raúl and rejected by Irma, tells Arturo and local police chief don Antonio that Raúl and Irma killed the man found in the lake. Irma and Raúl are arrested, and each tries to take the blame to save the other. Arturo reveals that the victim had not been shot, but was killed by the fall. However, he arrests Raúl, accusing him of being Ricardo. Raúl proves his identity with

his fingerprints (well, that was easy!), and he and Irma are free to begin their lives together.

Nadie muere dos veces has its share of bizarre, illogical coincidences and plot holes--beginning with the identical



physical appearance of Raúl and Ricardo--but other, better films have managed to deal with similar problems and still be entertaining and interesting. Even the intrusive songs and water-skiing scenes, while they do harm the pace of the picture, are not the most serious flaws. Spota's direction is satisfactory overall, with a few little arty touches (such as a shot where Ramón Gay walks up and looks directly at the camera as he talks) and generally good photography (the film was shot entirely on location, making it look a bit unusual for the period).

Then why is *Nadie muere dos veces* not a good film? The script (as opposed to the general story) and (to a lesser extent) Salazar's performance are the chief culprits. The latter problem was discussed earlier; the problems with the script are numerous, from some odd factors (such as several scenes where voiceover narration by Ramón Gay takes the place of long exposition which otherwise would have been covered in dialogue, which seems to be a "cheat," although given the circumstances of production, it might have been necessary to do it this way for reasons of time and money) to general problems with dialogue, characterization, and pacing. A curiosity piece at best.

[Note: originally printed in *MFB* 3/8, but updated and revised here.]



Tu vida entre mis manos [Your Life in My Hands]

(ABCINE Mexicana, 1954) *Prod:* Antonio Matouk; *Dir-Scr:* Raphael J. Sevilla; *Orig Novel:* Luis Spota; *Photo:* Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music:* Jorge Pérez; *Prod Chief:* José Luis Busto; *Asst Dir:* Mario Llorca; *Film Ed:* Felipe Marino; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez Granada; *Décor:* Carlos Arjona; *Camera Op:* Manuel Santaella; *Lighting:* Mariano García; *Makeup:* Angelina Garibay; *Sound Ed:* Teodulo Bustos; *Dialog Rec:* Francisco Alcayde; *Re-rec:* Rafael R. Esparza; *Studio:* C.L.A.S.A.

Cast: Esther Fernández (*Laura Ocampo*), Armando Calvo (*Dr. Roberto Alonso*), Ramón Pereda (*Lt. Vidal*), Ángel Infante (*Dr. Pérez*), Georgina Barragán (*Ester*), Jorge Fábregas (*Tony*), Enrique García Álvarez (*Dr. Jiménez*),

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Eduardo Alcaraz (*Nicolás*), Raúl Ramírez (*Lic. Mathey*), Tony Díaz (*Dr. Ramírez*), Estela Matute (*nurse*), Teresa de Sevilla (*young nurse*), Victorio Blanco (*barber*), Ismael Pérez “Poncianito”* (*Panchito, paper boy*), José Muñoz (*rich norteño don Manuel*), Lupe Carriles (*neighbour*), José Pardavé



(*pickpocket in bar*), Ignacio Peón (*official at hearing*), Cecilia Leger & Rafael Estrada (*servants in Acapulco*), Julio Daneri (*priest*), Aida Araceli (*blonde employee at barber shop*), Manuel Calvo (*motorist who picks up Laura*), Manuel Jarero (*man at*

conference), Victor Jordán (*cantinero who is struck*), Francisco Meneses (*police agent*), José Mora (*judge*), Rafael Sevilla hijo (*Dr. Alonso's servant*), Alfredo Soto (*joking man at conference*), Salvador Terroba & Leonor Gómez (*couple who pick up Laura*)

*IMDB credits Jaime González Quiñones

Notes: *Tu vida entre mis manos* is not without interest, but it is overlong (101 minutes) and the script is poorly constructed. It feels like there were two or three different screenplays that were just mashed together: Dr. Alonso as a suspected serial killer, Dr. Alonso leaves his wife for former patient Laura, Laura's various romances, Laura and Dr. Alonso's rocky romance, etc. There are some ludicrous aspects and several of the performances are inconsistent and even poor at times.

Laura, a manicurist in a barber shop (just like María in *La otra* and Clara in *En la palma de tu mano*), is the mistress of wealthy *norteño* businessman Manuel; she is also courted by young Tony, but she just thinks of him as a friend. Walking home at night, Laura is confronted by a man (whose face is not seen) and stabbed. Surgeon Dr. Roberto Alonso operates on her heart and saves her life. When Laura awakes, she seems to believe Roberto was her assailant. Police Lt. Vidal is suspicious of Roberto, lurking around in comical fashion and then scuttling away before he's spotted.

Not only a surgeon, Roberto also lectures on abnormal psychology, claiming every person has the capacity within

them to commit murder, and then they might not even remember they did it.

Roberto allays Laura's fears by sending her flowers and a fancy robe, even though he has an adoring wife, Ester. When Laura is released from the hospital, Roberto tracks her down (in the apartment paid for by don Manuel) and professes his love: he moves her to a newer, fancier apartment.



They go to Roberto's house in Acapulco for a vacation; Roberto acts weird, showing Laura a scalpel with his & hers initials on it, giving her sleeping pills, etc. Lt. Vidal shows up, still suspicious. Ester, who'd accidentally discovered Roberto's two tickets to Acapulco, files for a divorce.

Laura grows bored with Roberto and dumps him. He starts drinking and botches an operation on a young newsboy, who dies. Roberto and Laura get back together: he says they'll leave the country and be married. However, when Laura fails to show up for a date, Roberto goes to her apartment and discovers her embracing Tony. [Ironically, Laura had just told Tony that she was marrying Roberto and could no longer see him.] An irate and jealous Roberto chucks Tony out and angrily breaks off his relationship with Laura. For some reason he doesn't return to his usual hangout, the bar owned by Nicolás, instead going into a neighbourhood *cantina* (with only one customer). He gets drunk(er) and as he leaves, the other customer steals his wallet. Roberto returns to pay the tab, then realises his wallet's been stolen and argues with the bartender. Then he goes back to Nicolás's bar, where the owner convinces him to apologise to Laura. In the meantime, Laura answers a knock on her door and she's shocked by who she sees (we don't see him, of course). A struggle ensues (most of it in pitch darkness), and Laura's maid calls the police. Roberto arrives first and finds the apartment in a shambles, bloody handprints on the wall, but no Laura. Lt. Vidal and his men arrive and arrest Roberto.

It's never explained what happened, or how Laura got away, but the next time we see her, she's walking along a street in a daze; a lecherous man picks her up and they drive off. It's implied that he rapes her, because some time later he drops her—still in a state of shock—in an alley and departs. Laura is taken in by a poor couple who live nearby; they steal her jewelry but put her to bed (they're unable to get rid of her because the police keep coming by).

Roberto is put on trial for Laura's murder. In a confused bit, he claims the pickpocket can give him an alibi, but the

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man can't be located (and the bartender, obviously still holding a grudge against Roberto for slapping him, says he's never seen the doctor before). In another confusing twist, the police constantly interrogate Roberto, asking where he took Laura's body, but late in the trial a body must have shown up somewhere, because Lt. Vidal interrogates various doctors who did the autopsy on it—only Dr. Ramírez swears it was Laura's corpse.



Found guilty, as Roberto is being led away he spots the pickpocket (who'd been attending the trial) and tries to catch him, but the police think Roberto is trying to escape and shoot him! Later that night (we assume), the couple who've been harbouring Laura drive her somewhere and put her on the street, still in a daze. Wouldn't you know it, the killer appears and stabs her to death. He's surrounded and caught by the police—it's Dr. Ramírez, who was jealous of Roberto's standing in the medical profession and killed Laura because he knew Roberto loved her. Roberto will probably recover and is reconciled with his long-suffering wife.

Although *Tu vida entre mis manos* is not an especially good film, there are some interesting aspects. Raphael J.



Sevilla isn't particularly acclaimed as a director, but he had a nearly 30-year career as director, writer, and producer. He adds a couple of directorial touches.

First, the killer's attacks on Laura employ a bit of subjective, killer's-eye point of view: Laura looks directly at the camera and expresses shock, then (the first and third times, when he stabs her), we don't see the actual stabbing, just Laura collapsing.

The other notable directorial touch is almost cartoon-like in its form. Early in the film, Roberto is having a conversation with his loving wife; he's clearly not that interested in her expressions of love and affection, and as she talks, footage of

a violin playing is superimposed over his ear, suggesting her voice is discordant music to him. He also "sees" Laura's face in his coffee cup! Later, as Roberto operates on the little paperboy, footage of Laura—who's just broken up with Roberto—walking



towards the camera, is superimposed on his forehead! This reminds me of scenes from "The Simpsons" where the contents of Homer's head are displayed.

[See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3KpR6EyZX0>]

One of the major problems with *Tu vida entre mis manos* is the lack of a sympathetic

protagonist. Armando Calvo's Dr. Roberto Alonso is at no time portrayed as admirable or particularly likeable (he is kind—in one scene—to the paperboy). From the beginning of the film he



seems neurotic and irritable, which makes him a red herring: is he going to turn out to be the killer, like Arturo de Córdova in *El hombre sin rostro*? He acts so suspicious for the first half of the movie (Laura's stab wound was caused by a knife "or a scalpel?" he suggests); then in the second half, he falls to pieces when Laura dumps him, gets drunk and jealous and mean, spending the last portion of the picture sitting gloomily around, on trial for murder. Laura (Esther Fernández) is definitely subsidiary to Roberto (despite her top-billing), and is ambivalently depicted: she's not a *femme fatale*, and not a victim (until the latter portion of the film, where she's in a state of shock and is then murdered). She's not an angel, beginning the film as the mistress of one man, switching to become the mistress of another man, and keeping a third admirer on the side (although he's "just a friend," although it's not clear if this is "with benefits" or not).

Surprisingly, some of the minor characters do have personalities. The pickpocket has a scene in which he explains to the bartender that he feels sorry for Roberto, but not sorry enough to come forward and admit to being a criminal: he only steals to provide food for his family, and doesn't want to risk leaving them without his support. The couple who "rescue" Laura are also given some footage which makes them more human, rather than just ciphers.

On the negative side, there are several clunky aspects of the crimes themselves. For instance, the killer has the miraculous ability to appear wherever Laura is. He attacks her in her apartment and—as noted above—it's never explained how she escapes to the street, but that's where we next see her. The killer is closing in on her when the lecherous driver picks

her up. Then, some time and distance away, the driver dumps her in an alley, and the killer is there, too—but Laura’s taken away by the couple. Then, a few days later, Laura is driven somewhere else and dropped off, and the killer is right there again! (And this time he kills her)



This shot does not appear in extant (TV) prints of the film.

The other illogical issue occurs at the climax, when the killer, Dr. Ramírez, confesses. As we learn early in the film, two women were fatally stabbed prior to the first attack on Laura. Dr. Ramírez says he attacked the women so he could operate on them and save their lives, thus enhancing his professional stature. However, Ramírez did not operate on the first two women—in fact, it’s Lt. Vidal who informs the doctors about the first two murders, suggesting they were DOA or possibly treated at another hospital. So this motivation for Ramírez makes no sense (unless you rationalise that he miscalculated and accidentally killed the first two women, and was only “successful” in his first stabbing of Laura, i.e., she didn’t die—however, this time Roberto was given preference for the operation on Laura). His excuse for attacking Laura the second time is more logical: to punish Roberto, who loves her.

Trivia notes: for some reason, actual open-heart surgery footage crops up in a number of Mexican films, including some obvious (*El horripilante bestia humana*), some bizarrely inappropriate (*Especialista en chamacas*, a comedy romance with music!), and unnecessary (*Tu vida entre mis manos*). In the latter film, the entire credits sequence features closeup images of a heart operation in the background! This is narratively justified but it’s gross and not at all crucial. There’s also a bit of actual surgical footage in the second surgery scene.

Also: in a significant amount of his footage, Armando Calvo is either wearing very dark facial makeup or has a very deep tan. This has nothing to do with the plot (even though there is a sequence set in Acapulco), since the “tan” footage occurs both at the beginning of the movie and the end, with no explanation, and Calvo’s skin tone looks normal in the middle section of the picture.

Finally, actor Jorge Fábregas (who had a relatively brief film career) is almost certainly aka Jorge Sánchez Navarro, and is also almost certainly some relation to Manolo Fábregas (whose real name was Manuel Sánchez Navarro). It’s unclear what connection there was, if any—Manolo Fábregas was the son of actor Manuel Sánchez Navarro and Fanny Schiller, but sources don’t list any siblings for Manolo. There seems to be a family resemblance but that might be my imagination, just based on his name. Also, the lecherous driver who picks up Laura in the last part of *Tu vida entre mis manos* was Manuel Calvo, Armando’s younger brother.

Tu vida entre mis manos is fairly well produced, with both studio and location shooting (it looks like Calvo and Fernández actually went to Acapulco, or at least some beach area).

Both Calvo and Fernández have some good scenes but their roles are so poorly written that their performances also suffer; everyone else is satisfactory.

Not a great film or even a particularly good one, but not a total loss.



More Mex Noir

La otra [The Other One] (Prods. Mercurio, 1946) Prod: Mauricio de la Serna

[some sources also credit Jack Wagner];

Dir: Roberto Gavaldón;

Scr: José Revueltas, Roberto Gavaldón

[some sources also credit Jack Wagner];

Story: Rian James;

Photo: Alex Phillips;

Music: Raúl Lavista;

Prod Chief: Alberto A.

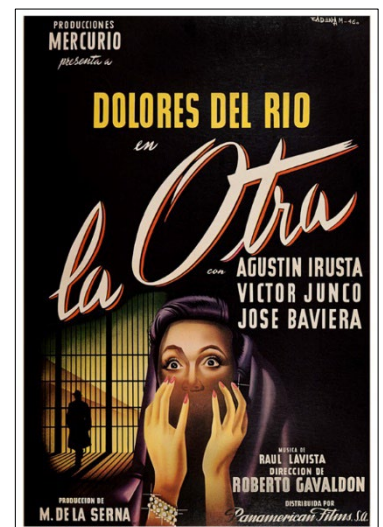
Ferrer; Asst Dir: Ignacio Villareal; Film Ed:

Charles L. Kimball; Art

Dir: Gunther Gerzso;

Camera Op: Rosalío

Solano; Makeup: Ana Guerrero; Sound Dir: James L. Fields;



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Dialog Rec: Nicolás de la Rosa; *Music rec:* Galdino Samperio;
Studio: Churubusco

Cast: Dolores del Río (*Magdalena Montes de Oca; María Méndez*), Agustín Irusta (*Roberto González*), Víctor Junco (*Fernando*), José Baviera (*Lic. de la Fuente*), Conchita Carracedo (*Carmela*), Carlos Villarias (*Lic. Félix Mendoza*), Rafael Icardo (*judge*), Manuel Dondé (*Villar, detective*), Daniel Pastor (*boy at funeral*), Humberto Rodríguez (*Sr. de Córdoba, manicure customer*), Elodia Hernández (*maid*), Paco Martínez & Lydia Franco (*guests*), José Arratia (*medical examiner*), Ricardo Avendaño (*cook*), Luis Badillo (*police agent*), Elizabeth San Román & Beatriz Jimeno (*Carmela's friends at funeral*), Elisa Christy (*dress shop employee*), Julio Daneri (*Sr. Domínguez*), Felipe de Flores (*gift shop employee*), Enedina Díaz de León (*landlady*), José Escanero (*major domo*), Elvira Gosti (*beauty shop employee*), Maruja Grifell (*maid*), Ramón G. Larrea (*barber, María's boss*), Raúl Lechuga (*major domo*), Jorge Narváez (*lottery ticket vendor*), people at funeral: Daniel Arroyo, Genaro de Alba, Ricardo Avendaño, Salvador Pérez G., Amelia Robert, Leonor de Martorel, Alfredo Varela Sr., Juan Villegas; party guests: Carmen Cabrera, Carmen Cipiriani, Lidia Franco, Bertha Lehar, Paco Martínez, Cecilia Leger



Roberto Gavaldón, Jack Wagner?, Dolores del Río, Alex Phillips, ?

Notes: Roberto Gavaldón, although he didn't have the international recognition* given to Emilio Fernández or (later) Luis Buñuel, was one of Mexican cinema's major directors for four decades. He began his directorial career in the late 1930s and made his final film in 1977, but his finest work was done from the mid-Forties through (arguably) the Mid-Sixties: in this period he won three Best Director Arieles and was nominated six additional times in this category.

*[Gavaldón had a few brushes with international cinema: *Adventures of Casanova* (a co-production with Hollywood), *Mi vida por la tuya* (an Argentine film), *The Littlest Outlaw* (a U.S. film shot in Mexico), *Flor de mayo* (aka *Beyond All Limits*, apparently a Mexican production but shot in English and Spanish versions to accommodate Hollywood actors Jack Palance and Paul Stewart), and 4 Mexican-Spanish co-productions made in the 1970s.]

Gavaldón was a "high-class" director whose films are virtually all slick, substantial productions with major stars (at least until the mid-1950s, after which he made some "commercial" pictures such as *El Siete de Copas* with Antonio Aguilar and *Las cenizas del diputado*, starring Piporro). *La otra*, shot at the then-new Churubusco studios, has extremely impressive production values (and looks great in the recently restored version). For those familiar with Mexican cinema, the very "luxuriousness" of the sets has an odd, distancing effect when seen today: the movie looks and feels more like a Hollywood film of the period than a Mexican movie, even one of the "Golden Age." The film is clearly set in Mexico, the cast is full of Mexican cinema faces, but the *mise-en-scene* isn't familiar. This isn't necessarily a criticism, merely an observation. [And perhaps if I re-watch other films from this era I'll change my opinion.]

One curious bit of trivia is that *La otra* was based on a screen story by Hollywood writer Rian James. James had numerous screen credits from the early 1930s to the early 1940s, at which time his movie work seems to have dried up almost completely (he died in 1953). After 1942, he's only credited with *La otra*, *Eve Knew Her Apples*, and *Whispering City/ La Forteresse* (made in Canada in French and English with different casts). His screen story for *La otra* was remade in 1964 as *Dead Ringer* (with Bette Davis in the dual role), and as a 1986 TV-movie entitled *Killer in the Mirror* (starring Ann Jillian as the twins).

Of course, stories of twins/impersonations were not unknown, even in pre-film days, as oft-filmed novels "The Prince and the Pauper" and "The Corsican Brothers" illustrate. [And let us not forget that great year 1988, when both *Twins* and *Dead Ringers* were released.] Coincidentally, in 1946 Bette Davis had starred in *A Stolen Life* as a twin who replaces her dead sister; this was based on the novel "Uloupený život" by Karel J. Benes, which had been previously filmed in the UK in 1939 as *Stolen Life*.

It's unclear why and how James' script arrived in Mexico. Dolores del Río, of course, had had a long career in Hollywood cinema and certainly retained contacts there. Jack Wagner was also a Hollywood veteran. Furthermore, the Estudios Churubusco was partially financed by RKO-Radio Pictures, and during World War Two Hollywood and Mexico had developed closer relations, including on a personnel level: Hollywood imports to the Mexican industry in this period including director Norman Foster, screenwriter Robert Tasker, etc.

Roberto Gavaldón, quoted in Emilio García Riera's *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, said the script for *La otra* was subsequently purchased by Warner Bros. as a Joan



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Crawford vehicle, but director Michael Curtiz told Gavaldón they couldn't improve on his version! Be that as it may, *Dead Ringer* was made as a Warner Bros. production, albeit nearly two decades later.

La otra is a polished, stylish film. Since a significant amount of the picture is set in a giant, mostly-white mansion, standard *noir* visuals appear only selectively—but the final few minutes of the picture include some amazing, classic images as María is taken to prison. Emilio García Riera remarks that the presence of Dolores del Río somewhat overwhelms the film, and this is correct: she's on-screen almost all the time, and is given lots of gigantic "glamour" closeups as she emotes. Her performance (actually one-and-a-half, since her footage as the real Magdalena isn't extensive) is fine, but she's clearly THE STAR at all times.



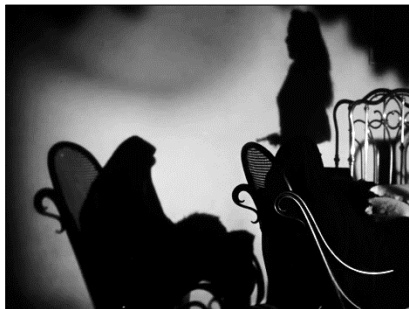
few minutes of the picture include some amazing, classic images as María is taken to prison. Emilio García Riera remarks that the presence of Dolores del Río somewhat



Gavaldón adds some nice stylistic touches, aided by Alex Phillips' cinematography. There are tracking shots, pans, and crane shots; there are even some outré angles (including a low-angle shot filmed through a glass-topped table), but not excessively. The theme of "doubles" is reinforced visually: there are numerous shots of María (and Magdalena) in mirrors; shadows of people are another relevant motif.



A crucial plot point involves an El Greco painting, "María Maddalena en penitencia" (he actually did multiple paintings on this theme; the one shown in *La otra* appears to be the 1580 version



owned by the Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City): this not only references the two sisters in the film (María and Magdalena), but also alludes to María's suffering and remorse for the crime she committed.

María Méndez works as a manicurist in a barber shop, enduring the barely-veiled advances of her clients. She's

engaged to police detective Roberto, but says they're too poor to wed. María's identical twin sister Magdalena married a wealthy man who has since died, leaving her with a huge



mansion and a substantial fortune. Magdalena does not appear especially grieved at her loss; she treats María like a literal poor relation, criticising her for a lack of ambition (i.e., for not using her sex to attract men). Fed up, María lures Magdalena to her shabby apartment on Christmas Eve and murders her sister; she then switches clothes with the dead woman, leaves a suicide note, and steps into her sister's life.

María deftly avoids revealing her true identity, even when she meets Roberto at the police station during the investigation into her sister's death. She seems to feel some regret at having to abandon her relationship with him, and later experiences a pang of remorse when she learns "María" was left 100,000 pesos in her brother-in-law's will. Had she postponed her murder plans for a



week or so, her money problems would have been solved. However, María puts these behind her and goes on a shopping spree, purchasing jewelry, clothes, etc.

At her birthday party, María is "reunited" with Fernando, and eventually deduces that he and Magdalena were lovers. María tries to break off the relationship, but Fernando hints at a secret they share, and eventually openly admits he helped Magdalena murder her husband. He now blackmails María into continuing their affair and forces her to hand over cash and jewelry. María decides to leave the country, but has spent her annual income (from her husband's estate) and asks de la Fuente, her lawyer, to secure a loan so she can leave. When de la Fuente arrives with the papers, he notices a valuable painting by El Greco is missing (all of the house's artwork was left to the Mexican government in Magdalena's husband's

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will). María is legitimately surprised but eventually Fernando is caught with the artwork by Roberto and the police. He



claims María gave it to him and she confirms it, but this makes Roberto suspicious. Magdalena's husband's body is exhumed and contains arsenic; Fernando

confesses and implicates Magdalena. "Magdalena" (i.e., María) is convicted of murder and sent to prison for 30 years.

As he later did (rather more extensively) in *En la palma de tu mano*, Gavaldón incorporates some irony and suspense into *La otra*, touches which may seem "Hitchcockian" to viewers today, but may not have necessarily been seen as imitative at the time. For instance, María leaves her apartment where her sister lies dead, and the camera lingers in the room—what could be wrong? Then María comes back, takes off her eyeglasses (which Magdalena did not wear), and leaves them. María's poor vision quickly comes back to haunt her, as the police—after discovering the body—ask her to read aloud her sister's alleged "suicide note." It's a blur and she feigns emotional distress to avoid doing so. Later, she again pretends to be upset so she won't have to sign legal papers; after futilely practicing forging Magdalena's signature, María instead deliberately burns her right hand on a fireplace poker, thus giving herself an excuse to sign with her left hand and explain away the difference in handwriting. Another example occurs as María is carrying out her murder plot; Roberto is on the street outside María's apartment, and sees Magdalena's



parked car, but he doesn't go up. In fact, he turns and walks away just seconds before María emerges, dressed in her dead sister's clothes. Later, María is confronted by Fernando: she has

no idea who he is, but soon realises he was Magdalena's lover. She has to continue the affair when she learns Fernando had helped Magdalena murder her husband.

Aside from Dolores del Río, there are really only three roles of any significance in *La otra* (although it's fun to spot familiar faces among the supporting cast, including Carlos Villarrías): Agustín Irusta as Roberto, Víctor Junco as Fernando, and José Baviera as Lic. de la Fuente. They're all

fine. Irusta was an Argentine tango singer who did a fair amount of acting as well, in Spain, Argentina, and Mexico (5 films in the mid-1940s). He's given a lot of big closeups—not as many as Dolores del Río, but plenty—and turns in a sincere performance. José Baviera is an old pro and handles his role well, while Víctor Junco is quite good as the smarmy gigolo.

La otra was nominated for 6 Ariel Awards—Best Film, Best Director, Best Photography, Best Actress, Best Co-Starring Actor (Víctor Junco), Best Music Score, and Best Adapted Screenplay—but only José Revueltas won, in the last category. The first four categories were all won by *Enamorada* and its cast/crew—Emilio Fernández, Gabriel Figueroa, María Félix—out of a total of 8 prizes for this picture.



Trivia note: the film apparently takes place over the space of a year, beginning in the Christmas season and concluding with the next Christmas (María tells Roberto "*Feliz Navidad*" as the prison door closes). In the earlier section, numerous images of holiday decorations, such as a Christmas tree and Santa Claus (including a "live" one), are prominently displayed, and "Jingle Bells" can be heard on the soundtrack.



Sensualidad [Sensuality] (Prods. Calderón, 1949) *Prod.*:

Pedro A. Calderón and Guillermo Calderón; *Dir/Scr.*: Alberto Gout; *Story/Adapt.*: Álvaro Custodio; *Photo*: Alex Phillips; *Music*: Antonio Díaz Conde; *Music Arr.*: Yoyo Casteleiro; *Prod Chief*: Enrique M. Hernández; *Prod Mgr.*: César Pérez Luis; *Asst Dir.*: Winfield Sánchez; *Film Ed.*: Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Art Dir.*: Manuel Fontanals; *Camera Op.*: Rosalío Solano;



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Choreog: Ninón Sevilla, Jorge Harrison; *Makeup:* Rosa Guerrero; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Studio:* Churubusco

Cast: Ninón Sevilla (*Aurora Ruiz*), Fernando Soler (*Alejandro Luque*), Domingo Soler (*Cmdte. Santos*), Andrea Palma (*Eulalia*), Andrés Soler (*Menéndez*), Rodolfo Acosta (*El Rizos*), Rubén Rojo (*Raúl Luque*), Bobby Capó (*Bobby Capó*), Los Ángeles del Infierno, Juan Pulido (*robbery victim*), Enrique Díaz Indiano (*doctor*), José Ortiz de Zárate (*don Eusebio*), Jaime Valdés (*reporter*), Antonio Tanus, Kiko Mendive (*performer*), Cecilia Leger (*servant*), Jorge Harrison

Notes: this is not the best of the Alberto Gout-Ninón Sevilla collaborations, but it is a very good movie nonetheless. It isn't exactly a Sevilla vehicle--Fernando Soler appeared in a



number of mature-man-seduced-by-younger-woman melodramas (including Buñuel's *Susana*), and *Sensualidad* leans in that direction and certainly works as a melodrama cum *film noir*. Sevilla performs several musical numbers, and also turns in a very strong acting performance. The production values are quite fine, with substantial sets and moody photography, plus some well-chosen bits of location and exterior shooting.

The film opens with Aurora fleeing through a darkened nightclub after a shot rings out. She hides in the basement, and thinks back to the circumstances which brought her to this point...

Judge Alejandro Luque sentences wise-cracking bargirl Aurora ("I was born to dance and to make money") to two years in prison for robbing a middle-aged businessman, but her pimp, El Rizos, goes free for lack of evidence. Luque is beginning a moral crusade against Mexico City's seamy nightlife. Released from jail a few months early for "good behavior," Aurora is reunited with El Rizos, but she vows never to go back to prison. When Rizos tries to set her up with another prosperous businessman, she refuses and is beaten for her defiance. Luque appears and helps her home (he doesn't recognize her). Feigning injury, Aurora coaxes the judge to her apartment and seduces him.

This sequence is interesting and at the same time irritating. The coincidence of Luque just happening to come across El Rizos and Aurora is far-fetched, and while his failure to recognize her is barely believable, it still rankles. However, the seduction scene is cleverly done and there is an excellent transitional device: Aurora puts on a recording of Bobby Capó

singing "Sensualidad" as she first seduces Alejandro, and the song continues on the soundtrack as their affair begins, segueing to a "live" performance by Capó in a nightclub. It is here that Aurora breaks off her relationship with the smitten Alejandro, revealing it was only a plot to get revenge for her incarceration. Thus, their whole affair is encompassed by a montage within the running time of the film's theme song.



Alejandro confesses to his wife Eulalia, who is understanding: "You did the same as all husbands have done--you waited longer than the rest [to do it] but you also repented sooner." [Alejandro and Eulalia embrace, and the camera lingers on a closeup of Eulalia's impassive face, repeating a shot which earlier showed Alejandro and Aurora embracing, in which the camera showed Aurora's triumphant expression.]

However, Alejandro can't forget Aurora, and steals a large sum of money from his office safe so they can run away together. Aurora refuses to go, but El Rizos stabs Alejandro and steals the cash. Alejandro confesses to his son Raúl and his friend, policeman Santos. Raúl convinces Santos to keep the news of the robbery quiet, to save his father's reputation. Santos and Raúl develop a scheme of their own to recover the money. Meanwhile, Eulalia has a heart attack and dies.

Raúl meets Aurora and pretends to fall in love with her.

She is skeptical at first, but apparently succumbs to his charms. She convinces El Rizos to bring the stolen money to her dressing room at the nightclub where she dances; however, at the



crucial moment, Alejandro bursts in and shoots the pimp. He pursues Aurora through the club, ending the flashback.

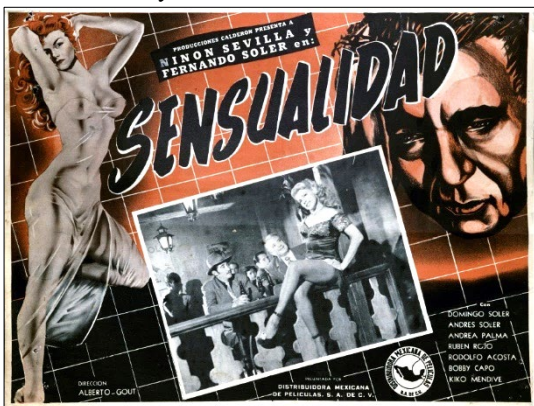
Alejandro confronts Aurora but cannot bring himself to kill her. She takes him back to her house and introduces him

to her new lover--his own son, Raúl! However, Raúl says the romance was all a trick, that he could never care for her:



"you're just garbage." An enraged Alejandro strikes his own son, then turns his wrath on Aurora. In a very nice sequence, Aurora runs outside, trips and falls, and crawls across her lawn, trying to escape from Alejandro, who is stalking after her. He finally catches up and strangles her to death. The police arrive, and Alejandro kisses Aurora's corpse before being led away.

Sensualidad is a very slick and entertaining picture, bolstered by Sevilla's performance. Aurora isn't inherently evil or greedy, just selfish and self-centered. She seems genuinely shocked and angry when Alejandro sentences her to jail, and emerges embittered but wiser for the experience. She humiliates Alejandro but is apparently willing to let it go at that; Alejandro's persistence is the catalyst for the subsequent events in the film, culminating with the deaths of El Rizos and Aurora at Alejandro's hands (and Eulalia's death, indirectly caused by his actions). As Aurora, Sevilla is independent, clever, cognizant of her physical attractiveness. She is taken in by Raúl's romantic advances after initially being suspicious, but in fact Raúl is pretty convincing: even the audience, which knows in advance about his plan, begins to wonder later on whether he has really fallen in love with Aurora.



Sensualidad thus falls into a middle ground between *cabaretera* films, in which the female protagonist is often more a victim than victimiser, and *film noir's* tradition of *femmes fatale*. For example, the basic premise of *Sensualidad* is similar to that of Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Street* (and, to a lesser extent, *The Woman in the Window*)—middle-aged, married man falls for a younger woman with a criminal boyfriend. However, in *Scarlet Street* the younger woman, Kitty, is depicted as greedy and amoral, which Aurora is not. Sevilla's character is not quite as sympathetic as those she plays in *Aventurera* or (especially) *Víctimas del pecado*, but she's not a typical *noir femme fatale* either. [A non-*noir* comparison is *Der blaue Engel* (The Blue Angel, 1930), in which a middle-aged, professional man becomes obsessed with a sexy younger woman. In this film, the protagonist attempts to strangle the woman who caused his downfall, but fails, unlike in *Sensualidad*.]

Fernando Soler does his usual good job, but the depth of Alejandro's infatuation with Aurora is not very well developed by the script. His irrational refusal to give up Aurora conflicts with his otherwise rational behavior. The movie does contain a number of clues in its representation of male-female relationships: Santos is widowed (and reportedly went to pieces after his wife's death); Menéndez (Alejandro's secretary) shows up drunk one day, frustrated with his boring life and marriage; Raúl is engaged to a young woman but she is only glimpsed a few times and has no real impact on the plot; Alejandro's marriage to Eulalia is apparently happy, but she is, after all, a middle-aged woman with heart trouble, and Alejandro is thus primed to have an affair. Yet, the "affair" proves to be literally life-altering.

The rest of the cast is satisfactory: Rodolfo Acosta is type-cast as the sneaky El Rizos, the other two Soler brothers and Andrea Palma are seasoned veterans, and Rubén Rojo is earnest.

Overall, a very stylish effort and worth watching. Originally published in *MFB* 8/2 (2001). Updated and revised in 2022.



Vicente Fernández Films

Juan Armenta "El repatriado" [Juan Armenta, the Repatriate] (Estudios América-Cima Films, 1974)
Prod: Gregorio Walerstein [uncredited]; *Assoc Prod:* Vicente Fernández; *Dir:* Fernando Durán; *Scr:* Rafael Villaseñor K[uri]; *Adapt:* Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Story:* Rafael García Travesi; *Photo:* Fernando [Álvarez Garcés] Colín; *Music:* Gilberto Parra; *Film Ed:* Raúl Casso; *Art Dir:* Kleomenes Stamatiades; *Camera Op:* Antonio Ruiz; *Makeup:* Victoria Celis; *Dialog Rec:* Víctor Rojo; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Union:* STIC; Eastmancolor; *Studio:* Estudios América

Cast: Vicente Fernández (*Juan Armenta*; *Fernando Garza*), Lucía Méndez (*Julia*), Eduardo de la Peña "Lalo el

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Mimo" (*Serapio Antúñez*), Fernando Soto "Mantequilla" (*Eusebio Mendoza "Magüey"*), Alicia Juárez (*Alicia*), Rebeca Iturbide (*doña Elena*), Gladys Vivas (*Alicia's friend*), Jorge Russek (*Mr. Clayton*), Alberto Insúa (*Mustio*), Víctor Alcocer (*don Ramón*), Rafael Valdez (*?Román Andrade "Bronco"*), Rodrigo Puebla (*gang member*), José Antonio Álvarez, Carlos León (*comisario*), Ángela Rodríguez, José L. Murillo (*priest*), Regino Herrera (*old man whose wife is killed*), Manuel Dondé (*corrido singer*), Guillermo Álvarez Bianchi (*card player*), Jorge Fegan (*card player*), Alfredo Gutiérrez (*card player*), Víctor Armenta (*foreman*), Alejandro Fernández (*boy*)



Notes: a curious hybrid of Western and *ranchera*, *Juan Armenta "El repatriado"* changes its tone every few minutes. The film begins in a small town with a man singing the *corrido* of Juan Armenta, then cuts to a *cantina* where Alicia Juárez sings a long song, followed by the arrival of Vicente Fernández's character, who also sings a song. Boom, 10 minutes gone already. Then there's a very long (15-minute) card game sequence, another song by Fernández, some backstory, a bank robbery, and we're already nearly 40 minutes into the 85-minute running time before either the leading lady or Fernández (in his second role) have even appeared.

Yes, Vicente Fernández plays a dual role, as the moustached Juan (who wears "cowboy" clothes) and his clean-shaven (except for his giant sideburns) half-brother Fernando (clad in traditional *charro* garb). Fernando's dialogue is dubbed by someone else (with a much deeper voice than Fernández's usual raspy tenor)—this is especially noticeable in the scenes Juan and Fernando share together. Most of the scenes with both characters are done with shot/reverse-shot editing and/or showing the back of a double's head in two-shots, but there is at least one split-screen which is competently done.

While *Juan Armenta "El repatriado"* doesn't overtly specify its time period, it looks like a typical late-19th century Western (no cars, telephones, etc.) but undercuts this with inconsistent costuming: most of the characters wear clothing

that's period-appropriate, which makes those who don't (banker don Ramón, Julia) stand out like a sore thumb.

Screenwriter Rafael Villaseñor Kuri was an assistant director (working on, among other films, two previous Vicente Fernández vehicles) and occasional writer who turned to directing in the latter half of the 1970s and became Fernández's "house director" in the 1980s, helming the majority of the star's movies in this era.

Fernando Durán's direction of *Juan Armenta* is quite good, with lots of camera movement, high/low angles, effective editing and shot placement, etc. However, the photography is mostly flat and high-key, and the sets and locations (Taxco, state of Guerrero) are not particularly interesting.

Juan Armenta uses the *High Noon* technique of a song (in this instance, the *corrido* of Juan Armenta, sung by a street singer played by Manuel Dondé) heard periodically throughout the film; the *corrido* is a linear narrative and is heard one verse at a time, as the plot advances.



Vicente Fernández is fine in both of his roles. Lalo el Mimo plays his sidekick role mostly straight, but it's rather sad and embarrassing to watch a thin and aged Fernando Soto "Mantequilla" acting drunk and foolish. Lucía Méndez, as noted above, doesn't appear until the film is nearly half over; she's satisfactory but her character's romantic conflict—Fernando or Juan?—comes late and is rather perfunctory and rushed. It's also rather annoying (again, as noted above) that her costumes are distinctly 1970s' style. Alicia Juárez is killed off about a third of the way through the film; as mentioned earlier, she gets to sing one song and display a lot of cleavage. *Juan Armenta* was the last of 4 films Rebeca Iturbide made in 1974, and it turned out to be her final acting role: in 1976 she suffered an injury to her spine and used a wheelchair for the rest of her life (she died in 2003). Her role is a rather minor supporting one.

The villains of *Juan Armenta* are given some personality but, as with Lucía Méndez's character, they're not central to the plot, and are killed off with 15 minutes remaining in the movie. The gang is led by Ramón "Bronco" Andrade (who, based on the cast list, I assume to be played by Rafael Valdez); his henchmen include Mustio, who's apparently supposed to be gay (he wears a yellow shirt and a pink scarf in

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his first appearance, and his fellow gang members tell a bargirl “he doesn’t like women!”), and two guys who apparently don’t have names (one of them is Rodrigo Puebla). Their motivation is greed and also a vague vendetta against Fernando Garza’s family.

Juan Armenta, the illegitimate son of *hacendado* Sebastián Garza, left his ranch after the death of his mother, venturing to the USA. As the film opens, he returns, accompanied by Serapio, and is reunited with his friend, singer Alicia. Juan participates in a *cantina* poker game with *gringo* Mr. Clayton, and wins a large sum of money. When Clayton accuses Juan of cheating (which he was) and calls him “a Mexican greaser,” Juan exposes Clayton himself as a crooked gambler. Clayton pulls a pistol but is shot to death by Juan.

Juan and Serapio travel to his now-derelict ranch, and decide to use their gambling winnings to restore it to prosperity. However, as they are depositing the cash in the town bank, a gang of outlaws led by Bronco rob the bank, killing Alicia (who, with a friend, has also come to town, intending to open a *cantina* with money Juan gave her). Bronco and his men have a long-standing grudge against local rancher Fernando Garza, Juan’s half brother. Fernando, engaged to marry Julia, insists Juan move onto the *hacienda* and share their father’s inheritance.



Bronco’s gang raids the ranch and ambushes Fernando and the local *comisario* when they pursue them. Bronco challenges Fernando to a duel but Juan and Serapio—suspecting a trap—attack the outlaws first, killing them all (Bronco is stabbed by his henchman Mustio, who is then shot in cold blood by Juan).

However, Juan suddenly conceives a passion for Julia and forces his affections on her, but she insists she loves Fernando. Juan leaves the ranch, returning on Julia and Fernando’s wedding day to abduct her. Julia continues to reject his advances. Serapio, who disagrees with Juan’s actions, brings Fernando to the hideout. Juan, finally repentant,

surreptitiously unloads his pistol and engages in a duel with Fernando, who kills him.

The “dual-hero” concept is a familiar one in cinema: two linked but contrasting characters clash, often over a woman, with the less “worthy” of the two eventually giving way to his opponent, sometimes by sacrificing himself. [There are films



which modify this formula somewhat: in *Shane*, the Shane character is more heroic and admirable than Joe Starrett, but Shane represents the “lawless” West and is also too noble to steal Joe’s wife.] *Juan Armenta* follows the blueprint to some extent, but there are a number of deviations from the norm. First, the two heroes do not meet until nearly the halfway point of the film. Additionally, Juan—the “bad” brother—is not presented as bad (or reckless or selfish) for the majority of the film (both before and after Fernando is introduced). Then he suddenly and for no clear reason becomes obsessed with Julia, even though they have shared almost no screen time up to that point. He represses these feelings (after being shamed into it by Serapio), and saves Fernando by wiping out Bronco’s gang, but then suddenly (again) professes his love for Julia and kisses her. He desists when her mother intervenes, then rides off with Serapio and mopes around for a while, before crashing the wedding (literally, he rides his horse into the house where everyone is gathered) and abducting her. Then at the end, Juan reverses course again, allowing Fernando to kill him. These erratic changes of personality make it difficult for the audience to evaluate whether Juan is “bad” or not, and his final sacrifice has little impact as a result. It would have been more appropriate for Juan to have impersonated Fernando, substituting for him in the final showdown with Bronco, and to have died gallantly there, never revealing that he was in love with Julia. [This would have followed the *Shane* example mentioned above.]

I first saw *Juan Armenta* over 30 years ago and had little or no memory of the plot—I didn’t even recall that Vicente Fernández played a dual role—and while re-watching it this time, I thought perhaps the Fernando character would be

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portrayed negatively, perhaps as a foppish rich guy, and that tough-guy Juan would come out on top in the dual-hero contest, because that's how the first half of the film is constructed. At no time is Juan presented as having any significant negative traits, so his sudden (and inconsistent) conversion to "the character that has to die" was rather surprising.

Despite the episodic and at times contradictory nature of the script, *Juan Armenta* is still a satisfactory film in most ways. The direction is stylish, the songs are good, and Vicente Fernández's two performances are entertaining.



El Arracadas [Earrings Man] (Cima Films, 1977) *Exec Prod:* Arturo Martínez; *Assoc Prod:* Vicente Fernández; *Dir:* Alberto Mariscal; *Scr:* Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Photo:* Javier Cruz; *Music:* Gilberto Parra; *Prod Mgr:* Antonio Merino; *Co-Dir:* José Amezcua; *Film Ed:* Max Sánchez; *Camera Op:* Alberto Arellanos; *Camera Asst:* Adrián Canales; *Makeup:* Graciela Muñoz; *Sound Op:* Roberto Muñoz; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Vicente Fernández (*Mariano Landeros*), Mario Almada (*Narciso Santos*), Roberto Cañedo (*Ramiro Landeros*), Patricia Rivera (*Elena Rivera*), Fernando Almada (*Doroteo Carrillo*), Raquel Olmedo (*doña Fabia*), María Teresa Álvarez (*Teresa Buendía*), Humberto Elizondo (*Huesos*), Wanda Seux (*Betty*), Alfredo Gutiérrez (*henchman*), Pedro Muñoz "Chihuahua," Patricia Maldonado (*La Toya?*), Luis de Alba (*waiter*), Arturo Martínez hijo (*young man at cockfight*), Alejandro Fernández, Carlos León (*sheriff*), José Luis Fernández (*Matías*)

Notes: Vicente Fernández basically made three types of films in his career: *ranchera* comedies, urban comedies and dramas, and dramatic Westerns/*rancheras*. *El Arracadas* is one of the latter, a well-crafted revenge story with a nihilistic ending. Director Alberto Mariscal balances the Western and *ranchera* aspects -- this is visually signified by Fernández's outfits in the picture, which range from pseudo-spaghetti

Western (cowboy hat, leather clothes, unshaven face) to typical *charro* garb (big sombrero, short jacket, etc.) .

Doroteo Carrillo and his henchmen arrive at the home of Dr. Landeros, who--years earlier--had been unable to save the life of Carrillo's son. Carrillo kills the elderly doctor and rips one of the earrings from the man's wife's ear, as a reminder of his vengeance. Doña Fabia makes her grown son Mariano swear he won't rest until he kills Carrillo. Mariano takes her other earring as symbol of his vow. Time passes, and Mariano becomes known and feared as "El Arracadas." One day, Mariano meets middle-aged cockfighter Narciso Santos, who is also hunting Carrillo. The two men join forces, although Mariano won't reveal his real name or the reason he is looking for Carrillo.



They stop in a small town and Mariano falls in love with Teresa, a young woman who runs the local hotel and owns a nearby ranch. Mariano decides to marry her and give up his endless quest for revenge--which makes Narciso happy--but he accidentally stumbles across a clue to Carrillo's whereabouts (ironically, the jeweler from whom Mariano is buying his wedding ring spots the earring and says he saw its mate, not long before) .

Mariano breaks off his engagement to Teresa and leaves for the town of Pajaritos with Narciso. Carrillo lives there under the name Rivera, but is out of town on a trip. Mariano meets Rivera's daughter Elena and decides to begin his

revenge by raping her, but they fall in love instead.



Carrillo's men ambush Santos and Mariano. The older man, fatally wounded, says "If I had been your father..." and Mariano replies,

"All this time we've been together, you have been." Carrillo comes home and learns what has transpired.

He and Mariano have a showdown in the deserted *palenque* (cockfight arena) . When Elena arrives, she finds her father's corpse. Mariano is gone. Back home, Mariano drops both earrings on his father's grave, signifying the completion of his quest. Several weeks go by. Doña Fabia says they have to put the past behind them. However, Elena suddenly appears: she wounds Mariano, and when he refuses to defend himself, she

threatens to shoot doña Fabia. Elena and Mariano exchange fire, and both fall to the ground, dead.

The soundtrack for *El Arracadas* includes some excellent songs, including the title *corrido* (narrative ballad) which is



only heard in snatches, somewhat reminiscent of the use of the theme in *High Noon*. The picture is fairly grim overall, and even has a surprising amount of gore

(a lot of bullet holes in foreheads, blood squibs in the chest, pools of blood after Dr. Landeros is murdered and also in the cockfight scenes). Fernández, as noted above, definitely has a dour, almost anti-heroic demeanor in many scenes, with his unshaven face, earring, and black outfit.

The plot of the film bears some resemblance to *Los hermanos del Hierro* and *Sabor a venganza* (the latter directed by Alberto Mariscal, who directed *El Arracadas*): in all three films, a mother uses her son(s) as instruments of her vengeance, eventually ruining all of their lives. The conclusion of the film is also slightly reminiscent of the end of the 1969 spaghetti-Western *Cimitero senza croci* (aka *Une corde...un Colt*): after he kills her father and 2 brothers (in a fair gunfight), Diana shoots the protagonist, Manuel (in fact, the basic premise of the plot—after the Rogers family hangs her husband, María convinces her old friend Manuel to get revenge on them, with fatal results for all—is similar to *Los Hermanos del Hierro*, *Sabor a venganza* and *El Arracadas*, and probably other spaghetti Westerns). Adolfo Torres Portillo worked on 11 Vicente Fernández films, including writing 5 solo scripts ranging from urban drama (*Tu camino y el mío*) to ranchera comedy (*El diablo, el santo y el tonto*) to Westerns (this one).

El Arracadas is bolstered by a very strong cast. In addition to Fernández, who is fine in the title role, Mario Almada and Raquel Olmedo (saddled with gray hair in most of her scenes) are quite good. A young Patricia Rivera is attractive but her dialogue seems to have been post-dubbed; Tere Álvarez seems a little lethargic at first, but as the film progresses it appears that this is just a manifestation of the passive character she is playing. When Mariano says their wedding is off, he's leaving town, and doesn't even give her an excuse, she doesn't express any anger or violent dismay. She merely says "I'll have a lot of memories [to think about] until you return." To which he curtly replies, "I won't be coming back." Fernando Almada doesn't have much footage but is OK in one of his rare villainous roles, while Roberto Cañedo has nothing more than a cameo role with almost no dialogue. A young and thin Luis

de Alba has a good bit part as a saloon waiter, and Humberto Elizondo is satisfactory as a sleazy henchman.

Trivia note: this was the first of 7* films Fernández and Patricia Rivera made over a period of years. They apparently had an off-screen romance, so much so that Fernández tacitly acknowledged Rivera's son Pablo Rodrigo Fernández (born in 1987) as his son. Years later, after Fernández's oldest son had



been kidnaped, the singer had his family take DNA tests (presumably so there would be proof of identity in case of further abductions), and it turned out that Pablo Rodrigo Fernández was not his son.

*[they made 5 films as actual co-stars, but Fernández also had unbilled cameo roles in two 1982 films featuring Patricia Rivera, *Dos de abajo* and *Los malvivientes*. As I mentioned in the *MFB* review of the latter film:

One amusing aspect of the film is the unbilled presence of Vicente Fernández in a cameo role. Fernández and Patricia Rivera had a romantic relationship...this is likely the explanation of his comic appearance here, in two scenes. In the first, Fernández sees Jorge Lavat and Rivera enter a hotel lobby; he follows them but when Lavat brusquely says "What do you want, fool?" Fernández retreats, saying, "Nothing, nothing." Later, Lavat and Roberto Jordán are sitting next to Fernández in a bar. The first two men say "Do you think that's--?" and "No, I don't think so..." when Fernández suddenly explodes, shouting "Yes, it's me! Can't I even have a drink without people bothering me! I'm a human being!" He storms out, and Lavat says, "Ooh, what a bad temper."]

Overall, *El Arracadas* is a very good picture that holds up even after more than 40 years.

Originally published in *MFB* 5/2 (Sept-Oct 1998). Updated and revised here.



Acorralado [Cornered] (Cumbre Films, 1988) *Exec Prod*: Luis Bekris G.; *Assoc Prod*: Vicente Fernández; *Dir*: Rafael Villaseñor Kuri; *Scr*: Ramón Obón [Jr.]; *Photo*: Xavier Cruz [Ruvalcaba]; *Music*: Manuel Esperón; *Prod Mgr*: Blanca Rodarte; *Asst Dir*: Rodolfo López Real; *Film Ed*: Max

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Sánchez; *Art Dir*: Alberto Villaseñor Kuri; *Camera Op*: Javier Cruz Osorio; *Re-rec*: Ricardo Saldívar; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Vicente Fernández (*Reynaldo Beltrán*), Julieta Rosen (*Aurora Dávila*), Claudio Obregón (*Santos Garnica*), Sergio Jiménez (*Báez*), Carlos Cardán (*Lupe*), Gina Morett (*María*), Miguel Ángel Negrete (*Juvencio*), Miguel Suárez (*Sr. Dávila*), Sergio Acosta (*Onésimo*), Jorge Bekris, Efrén Pérez Aladera



(*Esteban*), Rafael Carrión (*Garnica employee*), Rosita Bouchot (*Lupe's wife*), Jorge Fegan (*Lic. Ochoa*), Rubén Márquez (*proxy groom*), José Luis Caro (*judge*), Rigoberto Carmona (*Pedro, driver*), ?Roberto Ruy (*bandit*)

Notes: Vicente Fernández continued his varied film career in the '80s and early '90s (his final picture was *Mi querido viejo* in 1991), making comedy *rancheras*, one more urban comedy/drama (*Picardía mexicana Dos*), a contemporary action film (*Matar o morir*), and a number of dramatic *rancheras*-Westerns, mostly period films and mostly directed by Rafael Villaseñor Kuri, Fernández's "house director." His last two *ranchera*-Westerns (*Mi querido viejo* was a contemporary drama), *Acorralado* and *Por tu maldito amor*, compare favourably with some of his earlier dramatic films in this hybrid genre, although they're a bit less grim and have a larger romantic component.

The film begins by intercutting two scenes. (1) a group of armed men led by Báez surround a cabin where Reynaldo and a *campesino* are staying; Reynaldo refuses to surrender, and a gunfight breaks out. The old *campesino* and all of Báez's men



are killed (Báez is also shot and wounded), and Reynaldo rides off. (2) Aurora, daughter of the wealthy Sr. Dávila, marries Luis Garnica by proxy since his work as an engineer prevents

him from traveling to the wedding. Aurora determines to

reunite with her husband, despite her father's fears that the region is still unsafe. [It's unclear exactly when *Acorralado* takes place, but it appears to be the early 1920s at the latest.] This sequence is well done, including some matched cuts—Reynaldo begins to open the cabin door/cut to Aurora opening a door, etc.—although there's some initial confusion since the first shot of (2) is Aurora waking up, and it initially appears she's in the same room as Reynaldo, rather than a different location.

The local *cacique*, don Santos Garnica, rails against "agitators" and traitors, especially the local *campesinos* and small ranchers who have formed a cooperative. He threatens to cut off their access to water. One of the cooperative members is shot and another is arrested (then "shot while trying to escape"). Reynaldo places explosives on Garnica's dam (in broad daylight!) but prevents his friend Lupe from blowing it up until there is no one around; unfortunately, don Santos' son Luis unexpectedly runs back onto the dam to retrieve some papers and is killed. Don Santos tells his henchman Báez (his arm now in a sling, due to the wounds he suffered in the opening sequence) to "bring me the head of Reynaldo Beltrán!"

Reynaldo tells Lupe to meet him at Dos Cruces. "What are you going to do?" Lupe asks. "It's better that you don't know," Reynaldo replies. Aurora arrives at the Santos *hacienda* and learns her husband is dead. Don Santos tells her to leave and she departs the next day, after the funeral. However, her auto is ambushed by bandits, the driver is killed, and only Reynaldo's timely arrival saves her from a fate worse than death. [In a tragic and ironic coincidence, Julieta Rosen later said she eventually left Mexico due to crime, indicating both her driver and a friend were shot to death during a robbery she witnessed.] However, when Reynaldo learns who she is, he decides to make her part



of his plan (and smacks her when she resists). [He's unaware that don Santos doesn't care about her at all.]

During their journey, Reynaldo and Aurora don't get along (of course). At one point she asks "Why do you hate me?" and he replies, "Not you—what you represent. The system," i.e. *caciques* like Santos Garnica who exploit the poor—to which she replies, her family earned their wealth through hard work, without trampling or exploiting anyone. And she loved Luis Garnica as a person, not as a representative of the ruling class. Later, she mocks Reynaldo by saying "I have the right to fight for my freedom, right?"

Aurora is bitten by a snake (on her breast, of course) and Reynaldo has to cut the bite and suck out the venom. Meanwhile Báez deduces that Reynaldo killed the bandits and now has Aurora. He and his men spot the two fugitives and

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pursue in a truck, but Reynaldo shoots the radiator and he and Aurora escape. They visit María's cabin since Aurora is feverish from the snake bite, then press on when she's recovered enough to travel. Báez and his men torture María's son until she tells them Reynaldo is headed for Dos Cruces, then they kill both mother and child.

Aurora asks Reynaldo what he did to provoke such a dogged pursuit. "Think. Protest. Demand our rights...to work the land and live with dignity from doing that." She knows he killed her husband and he explains it was an accident: "I'm not a murderer." They pause so Aurora can take a bath in a stream, and Lupe and Onésimo arrive. Aurora says "don't give me that story that all *campesinos* are good and noble!" and he replies "They're desperate! Your system made them that way!" She says there are good people on the other side-- "I'm one of them"--but he never bothered to get to know them. They arrive at Lupe's cabin, where his wife and six children greet them. Reynaldo later tells Aurora his wife and child died a long time ago because he couldn't afford

medicine for them.

He says Aurora (who's now wearing a peasant blouse and skirt, presumably gifted her by María) will be free when they reach Dos Cruces.

However, Dos Cruces is deserted, and they see numerous dead men



hanging inside the church: it's an ambush by Báez and his men. Lupe's friend Onésimo is killed and the others take refuge in the church; Reynaldo says they have Aurora with them, but Báez refuses to cease fire. Lupe, Aurora, and Reynaldo ride out the back door (actually just a hole in the wall) to escape, but Reynaldo is wounded (Lupe rides back as if to give him cover, but we don't see what happens to him, making his later reappearance rather surprising). Aurora can't understand why Garnica's men fired at her. She and Reynaldo take refuge in a cave. He compels her to remove the bullet and cauterise the wound. While he's passed out, she rides back to Dos Cruces, but can't bring herself to surrender to Báez and returns to the cave. Aurora asks Reynaldo--if he knew Báez and Garnica didn't care about her and thus she was of no use as a hostage--why he didn't set her free. They kiss (of course) and she says she's a virgin (camera pans away as they do it).

Don Santos demands to know why Reynaldo hasn't been caught (it's been 2 weeks since the gunfight at Dos Cruces). Aurora's father, who's come to find out about her, asks if his daughter was with Reynaldo--Báez lies and says no, "he certainly killed her."

Aurora is now committed to the struggle, but Reynaldo doesn't know what he can do. They're pursued by Báez and his men. [Reynaldo says "*Nos tienen acorralados!*" Hey, he said the title!] Báez claims they won't harm Aurora if Reynaldo surrenders. Reynaldo decides to surrender but Aurora says she's pregnant with his child. He sends her away and says "Don't let my death be in vain." Aurora walks up to Báez, who prepares to kill her but his (more moral) aide Juvencio gets in the way and is shot. Suddenly Lupe and a group of riders appear! Perfect timing! Báez is cornered by Reynaldo and begs for his life but Reynaldo shoots him

many times (using two pistols).

As the film concludes, Reynaldo says they'll come for him someday, but Aurora replies "times are changing...men who were involved in the armed struggle are coming to power. You have to change your way of thinking...for our son, our future and hope."

Acorralado has some significant flaws. It seems to start in the middle of the story, with Reynaldo and his fellow *campesinos* in the middle of a conflict with Santos Garnica; it's never explained exactly what he's been doing to exploit them, and while Santos is not a pleasant character, the real villain of the film is Báez, his henchman. Perhaps this is why Garnica is still alive at the end of the movie, violating the usual narrative rule that evil be punished. The interaction between Reynaldo and Aurora is more or less typical "Taming of the Shrew" stuff, although their ideological discussions are interesting; how Aurora found out that Reynaldo killed her husband is never explained, and she takes it remarkably well.



The pacing of the film is weak, and the 91 minute running time seems much longer: a huge percentage of the running time is a repetitive cycle of: Reynaldo and Aurora talk, Báez surprises them, they escape, over and over again. We even get two similar "injury/healings" sequences--Aurora is bitten by a snake and Reynaldo saves her, then Reynaldo is shot and Aurora "operates" on him. Reynaldo's "plan" and even his organisation of *campesinos* is also not explained. Lupe's



arrival with the *campesino* cavalry at the climax feels forced (and as noted above, the audience has been led to believe Lupe is dead, or something, since he just vanishes outside Dos Cruces).

One thing that can't be said about *Acorralado* is that it's over-loaded with songs (which tend to hamper a film's pacing even more). Surprisingly, the first (of just two) Vicente Fernández songs doesn't come until the 47-minute mark (more than halfway through the film—the other one comes at 62 minutes and is reprised at the very end). The orchestral music score, on the other hand—especially the “overture” that plays over the credits—is quite bombastic and impressive (and it wasn't even Manuel Esperón's final score, he also did *Por un maldito amor* and Fernández's last picture, *Mi querido viejo*).

On the positive side, the period setting (especially the antique motor vehicles) is nice and the location shooting is fine. Vicente Fernández is back in his “grim” mode (after a bunch of comedies) and Julieta Rosen (one of my 80s crushes)



looks great and plays an assertive, spunky character. Sergio Jiménez chews the scenery from top to bottom but that's not a problem. Claudio Obregón and Miguel Suárez are

satisfactory, as are Carlos Cardán and a de-glamourised Gina Morett (also Rosita Bouchot, although her role is smaller). It's a surprise to see Ricardo Carrión in a miniscule bit part—one would have expected him to play the larger role of Báez's assistant, taken by Miguel Ángel Negrete.

Julieta Rosen, whose acting career began in the late '70s, appeared with Fernández in *Matar o morir*, *Acorralado*, and *Mi querido Viejo*. Although I'd always wondered if she were related to actress Daniela Rosen (and thus, director Arturo Ripstein, whose full name is Arturo Ripstein y Rosen), she isn't: Julieta Rosen's real name is Julieta Ingrid Ramirez-Cabañas Rosenlind. She eventually moved to Miami, got married, and retired “definitively” from acting in 2018.

Rafael Villaseñor's direction is interesting: there are many (many) huge closeups of faces, and a fair number of extreme long shots of people riding/driving across the countryside, which doesn't leave a lot of space for “normal” medium shots (a slight exaggeration, but the preponderance of giant closeups is quite obvious).

Overall, reasonably entertaining although it drags a bit at times.



Carmen Salinas



Mexicano...tú puedes [Mexican, You Can Do It] (IMCINE-Conacite Dos, 1983) *Exec Prod*: Luz María Rojas; *Dir*: José Estrada; *Scr*: Olivia Michel; *Photo*: Miguel Garzón; *Music*: Pedro Plascencia Salinas and Pancho Sáenz; *Prod Mgr*: Alejandra Hernández; *Co-Dir*: Francisco Guerrero; *Film Ed*: Max Sánchez; *Art Dir*: Francisco Magallón; *Decor*: Ana Vera; *Sound*: Guillermo Carrasco; *Makeup*: Guadalupe Beltrán; *Union*: STIC

Cast: Sergio Jiménez (*Vicente Pacheco*), Carmen Salinas (*Carmen Pacheco*), Arturo Alegre (*Héctor*), Lupita Sandoval (*Lucha*), Alma Delfina (*Irma*), Mario Casillas (*salesman*), Juan Ángel Martínez (*Jota Jota*), Ernesto Yáñez (*Ismael*), Rubén Rojo (*Rivera, head of development company*), Isabela Corona (*doña Aurora*), Ana Ofelia Murguía (*blonde bureaucrat*), Mario García González (*maestro Martín*), Leonor Llausás (*Lupe la bruja*), Antonio Miguel (*Moisés*), Mario Delmar (*maestro Guillermo*), José Zambrano (*judge in divorce office*), Alberto Gavira (*employee in delegación*), Roxana Frías (*Georgina*), Licia Suárez, Agustín Silva (*carpenter*), Gloria Alicia Inclán (*doña Chona*), Iván Suárez (*Neto*), Gerardo Moscoso (*abortionist*), Martha Meneses (*servant in Pedregal*), Alfonso Kafiti (*waiter in cabaret*), Ernesto Casillas (*Filu*), Braulio Zertuche (*cantina waiter*), Uriel Chávez (*Chon*)

Notes: *Mexicano...tú puedes* is an interesting but overlong (or perhaps just poorly-paced) film which depicts the Mexican working class as gullible, stubborn, corrupt, and desirous of a better life. The script unfortunately loses direction about two-thirds of the way through: the tribulations of buying land and constructing a house are all but forgotten as the plot suddenly shifts to the marital difficulties of the protagonists. What could have been a biting satire in the hands of an iconoclastic director like Gustavo Alatriste (despite his technical shortcomings) bogs down in melodrama despite the directorial talent of José Estrada.

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The script for *Mexicano tú puedes* was written by former actress Olivia Michel, and seems to have been her only screenwriting credit (she appears to have retired from acting in the early 1970s). Michel earned two Ariel nominations for her work on the picture, Best Story and Best Screenplay (losing to the writers of *Vidas errantes* and *Frida, naturaleza viva*, respectively). The film did take home two Diosas de Plata (the prizes awarded by PECIME, the



film journalists' association), Best Film and Best Actress (Carmen Salinas—see photo at left, Salinas & her daughter with the award).

Factory worker Vicente and his wife Carmen have several children and another on the way. They live in an apartment but Carmen sees a television advertisement for a housing development (*fraccionamiento*) called "Bosques de los Pinos" (Pine Forests) in the Mexico City suburbs. She contacts the sales office and eventually her husband is convinced to make a down payment on a lot. [The development company promises a swimming pool, tennis courts, etc., but they are only selling land, the construction of homes is left to the buyers, unlike most U.S. housing developments.]

To help make payments, Carmen--inspired by another TV ad--starts selling Avon products, and later branches out into contraband merchandise. [Another televised ad causes her to buy a new sofa on the installment plan.] Vicente scrapes together all the money he can, but the workers he hires to

build his home are unenthusiastic and eventually walk off the job, leaving a mere shell of the house behind. It turns out that the housing development has no sewer service

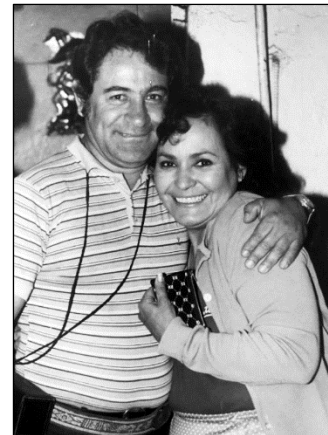


and in fact the land they are buying is really owned by the government!

In order to get a government loan in a timely fashion, Vicente romances a bleached blonde clerk (Ana Ofelia Murguía, shocking to behold), but still has to pay a higher interest rate and a bribe. Eventually, the tension between Vicente and Carmen becomes so great that they legally separate. A pregnant Carmen goes to an abortionist. She and the children move into the barely-completed house while

Vicente remains in the apartment--now virtually empty, except for a single chair and a mattress on the floor--with his new girlfriend Irma, a secretary from the factory. However, Vicente and Carmen finally reconcile and as the movie concludes, they join a protest march demanding satisfaction from the crooked real estate company. [Earlier in the movie, the couple watched a similar march as they were listening to the salesman's spiel; he passed off the protest as the result of some disgruntled people being ejected from their land.]

Mexicano tú puedes has some entertaining moments, but for the most part it is pretty slow going. At every turn, Vicente is confronted with more red tape, more corruption (private and official), and more demands for cash. Unfortunately, neither Vicente nor Carmen are very sympathetic characters, since they both whine and complain and then try to cheat or exploit others. The script tries to impart a cyclical nature to the events. The two protest marches are one example and Vicente's "flexible" *macho* beliefs are another: after Carmen has her new baby, she wants to know if Vicente will use condoms or if she should take birth control pills (to prevent another pregnancy); Vicente has a violent reaction, saying "we'll have as many children as God wills!" But later, when he learns Carmen is again pregnant and planning an abortion, Vicente roughly tells Irma, "none of that pregnancy stuff from you!" Vicente has a similar change of heart about Carmen's various businesses: first he forbids her to get a job, but later demands that she keep working, so they can continue to make payments on their house.



Director José Estrada and Carmen Salinas on the set.

As mentioned earlier, the movie had the potential to be a bitter black comedy or even a decent drama, but the pacing, structure, and unsympathetic protagonists make this less entertaining than it could have been.

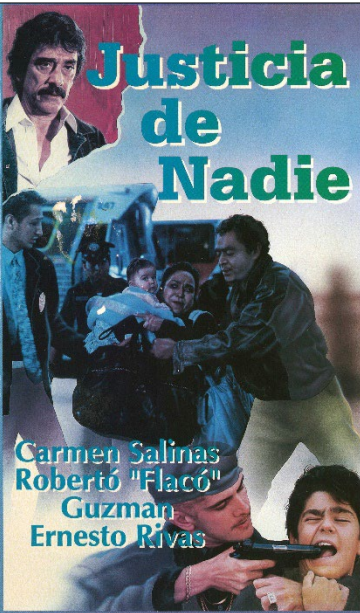
A few trivia notes: scenes from a *telenovela* starring Ana Martín and Guillermo Murray are briefly shown on TV. The television commercial for the furniture company has an instrumental version of "Ghost Riders in the Sky" as background music. And for wrestling fans, in one sequence Vicente takes the woman from the government loan office to a nightclub. Among the other customers are several masked

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female wrestlers and their (unmasked) male escorts, celebrating the birthday of one of the women!



Justicia de nadie [Nobody's Justice] (VIPS & Diseño Fílmico, 1991, ©1992) *Exec Prod:* Georgina Terán; *Prod:* Enrique Gómez Vadillo, Georgina Terán G.; *Dir-Scr:* Rafael Montero; *Photo:* Francisco Bojórquez; *Music:* Pedro Plascencia Salinas; *Prod Coord:* Mario Lemus Lego; *Asst Dir:* Romelia Álvarez; *Film Ed:* Sergio Soto; *Sound:* Miguel Sandoval, Roberto Martínez; *Makeup:* Lulu Villegas; *Re-rec:* José Luis Núñez, Ricardo Saldivar; *Union:* STIC



Cast: Carmen Salinas (*doña Guadalupe Cortina*), Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Gustavo*), Ernesto Rivas (*Andrés*), Evangelina Martínez (*Bety, neighbour*), Licia Suárez & Eduardo Renséndiz [spelled "Edgardo Reséndiz" on opening credits] (*couple who deliver baby to Lupe*), Martín Altomaro [spelled "Altamoro" on opening credits and "Altomoro" on end credits] (*Ramiro*), Salvador Garcini (*blackmailer*), Aida Naredo (*neighbour*),

Paolah [sic] Ochoa (*woman at delegación*), Lucero Lander (*Sra. Davis**), Julio Monterde (*hotel mgr*), Lourdes Enríquez (*television announcer*), Virgilio Leos (*Lic. Ayala*), José Luis Luna & Cruz Leal (*kidnappers*), Eduardo Terán (*second blackmailer*), Flavio Peniche, Luis Augusto Herba (*Sr. Davis**), Leslie Montero (*Davis baby**), Arturo Vences (*bath house attendant*), Renata Monge (*girl*), Miguel A. Vázquez & Jaime Sánchez (*doña Lupe's customers*), Francisco Beltrán (*young man in delegación*), Guadalupe Peruyero (*doña Virginia, neighbour*), José Luis de Alva, Raúl Nava (*lawyer*), José Olivares (*cmdte.*), Flavio Peniche & Luis E. Parra (*police at bus station*), Julio Monje & Andrea Aguirre (*bus station employees*)

*although the end credits list the characters' names as "Davis," in the film they are very clearly identified as the "Sariñana" family.

Notes: Rafael Montero has had a long and successful career as a director with 2 Arieles to his credit—Best Medium-Length documentary in 1989 and Best Director for *Cilantro y perejil* (which also won Best Picture)—but is not as famous as some of his contemporaries who started making feature films in the same period, such as Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro. *Justicia de nadie* doesn't seem to be very

well-known, although it did receive theatrical release in 1992, and Carmen Salinas received a "Heraldo" award as Best Actress.

Justicia de nadie, like a number of Montero's films, is set in Mexico City (Montero himself was born there), and there are a number of aspects of *chilango* daily life which would probably have been familiar to contemporary audiences. In one scene, doña Lupe and her friend Bety try to find a working pay phone: the first two have been vandalised and a line has formed to use the third one (in fact, queueing in lines—or just waiting for something—is a repeated motif). When they report her son's abduction to the police, the worker who takes the report seems insulted that doña Lupe and Bety assume the kidnappers were police agents. "You might think we're ignorant, but we know what police agents look like!" Bety says, but is warned that such accusations without proof are reckless. The overall ambience of *Justicia de nadie* is that of a large city whose "ordinary" inhabitants have to struggle every day to survive against official indifference, corruption, and their own fellow residents.



The film doesn't make a big deal of it, but the wealthy Sariñana couple recovers their stolen baby thanks to a media blitz and concerted police action, while the working-class doña Lupe can get no assistance from the authorities in finding her son.

Justicia de nadie was shot on location in Mexico City and serves as a kind of time capsule of the time/place. Production values are fine; the cinematography is drab and rather depressing, but that fits with the overall mood of the film itself and is thus deliberate, not a technical or qualitative shortcoming.

Doña Lupe sells hot food from a table in front of the *vecindad* where she lives. One evening her teenage son Ramiro shows up, insisting he needs money so he can "escape." However, he's seized and beaten by some men—who strike doña Lupe when she protests—who then toss Ramiro in their auto's trunk and drive off. Doña Lupe and her friend Bety report the abduction to the police, without much hope. However, two men show up and say Ramiro was taken because he owes a lot of people money; they give doña Lupe 5 days to come up with 20 million pesos to fix the problem, or Ramiro may go to prison for 20 years.



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At her wit's end, doña Lupe goes to Gustavo, Ramiro's father, who works as a masseur in a bath house. Gustavo doesn't want to get involved, but his influential client is intrigued by doña Lupe's story and suggests Gustavo take her to meet "Andrés." Andrés is a mysterious criminal figure who seems sympathetic to doña Lupe; he says he'll not only help her, but she will also be helping a "poor, unfortunate couple." Doña Lupe is to deliver an infant—handed over to her by a rather suspicious-acting pair—to Acapulco for adoption. Unable to get a bus ticket for that day, she and the child spend the night in a hotel.

The next day, doña Lupe is arrested at the bus station (the police have been detaining all passengers with infants). The child's parents arrive and the mother says Lupe will pay for her crimes in prison and in hell. In a prison cell, doña Lupe dreams of her son Ramiro, and sees him in a coffin. The film concludes with a printed epilogue: "The day doña Lupe learned of her son's death, she lost her mind completely. She's currently in a health care facility and refuses to speak, listen or see."



This is a bit confusing, since she refuses to talk to her defense attorney prior to this dream (?) sequence, which is where she sees Ramiro's body. To compound the confusion, the cover of the MDVC VHS release features a photo of Andrés pointing a gun at Ramiro's head, a scene that does not appear in the film at all! This suggests that perhaps Andrés deliberately abducted Ramiro so doña Lupe would have to work for him as a baby-courier, although this is illogical, since doña Lupe only meets Andrés because Gustavo's client suggests it, and no one could have known in advance that doña Lupe was going to visit Gustavo at the exact moment he'd be working on that particular client. [The text on the back of the VHS box also mistakenly identifies doña Lupe's son as "José Alonso" rather than Ramiro.]

In fact, nothing is really explained in *Justicia de nadie*. Who abducted Ramiro and why? Who are the two men who subsequently asked doña Lupe for 200 million pesos, and could they really free Ramiro if paid? There's a reference to multiple cases of infant abduction—is Andrés behind them all? Who were the people who gave doña Lupe the baby—was the woman the child's nanny? Why doesn't doña Lupe

explain what happened—she officially reported Ramiro's disappearance, and she could denounce Andrés, but instead she (at first) just says "I'm trying to save my son," and later refuses to talk at all. This lack of closure isn't a fatal flaw, since such things aren't wrapped up tidily in real life, but we expect a bit more from a fictional dramatic film.

Justicia de nadie is a Carmen Salinas vehicle, no doubt about it: she's in virtually every scene, whereas everyone else appears in discrete sections, first Evangelina Martínez as Bety, then Flaco Guzmán as Andrés, then Ernesto Rivas as Andrés, etc. Doña Lupe is a sympathetic character; she's not assertive or feisty, but tired and down-trodden. She plods along, first trying to find someone to help her, and then doggedly carrying out the task she's been assigned.

While Salinas is fine and *Justicia de nadie* is well-intentioned and non-exploitative, the film is also paced rather slowly and is ultimately rather depressing. The latter half of the picture consists of endless scenes of doña Lupe carrying the baby, walking, standing in line, etc. This is a case where a bit more action of some sort (dramatic or physical) would have been welcome. Instead, *Justicia de nadie* is basically a sad movie about a sad woman in a sad situation.

Trivia notes: this film was made before the *nuevo peso* was implemented in 1993 (each new peso replaced 1000 old pesos), so the prices quoted seem astronomical today (32,500 pesos for a bus ticket from Mexico City to Acapulco, 10,000 pesos for a taxi ride, 20 million pesos ransom, 2,000 pesos for a sandwich, etc.).

Pedro Plascencia Salinas, a composer who passed away in 1994, was the son of Carmen Salinas. Actress Licia Suárez, who plays one of the (presumed) abductors of the baby, was the real-life wife of Pedro.



Amalia Aguilar



Amor perdido [Lost Love] (Gustavo de León, 1950)
Exec Prod: M[odesto] Pascó; Prod: Gustavo de León; Assoc
Prod: J. Antonio Nicolý S.; Dir: Miguel Morayta; Adapt:

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Miguel Morayta, Guadalupe González; *Story*: Víctor Mora; *Photo*: Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music*: Jorge Pérez; *Prod Chief*: Luis G. Rubín; *Prod Asst*: Pedro Escobedo; *Asst Dir*: Luis Abbadie; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Art Dir*: Ramón Rodríguez; *Décor*: Carlos Arjona; *Camera Op*: Manuel Santaell; *Lighting*: Mariano García; *Makeup*: Felisa L. de Guevara; *Sound Engin*: Eduardo Arjona; *Re-rec*: Rafael R[ui]z Esparza; *Sound Ed*: Teodilo Bustos; *Studio*: C.L.A.S.A.

Cast: Amalia Aguilar (*Amalia*), Yadira Jiménez (*Celia*), Víctor Junco (*Luis*), Tito Novaro (*Ernesto Méndez*), José Pulido (*Andrés*), Eduardo Alcaraz (*don Paco*), Felipe de Flores (*plastic surgeon*), Alfredo Varela Sr. (*don Matías, landlord*), Chel López (*man at party*), Enrique Zambrano (*El Californiano*), Ricardo Adalid, Julia Alonso, Armando Arriola (*waiter*), Lily Acleamar (*Andrea, dressmaker*), Alfonso Torres (*nightclub emcee*), Julio Daneri (*Pedro, bartender*), Dámaso Pérez Prado (*himself*), María Victoria (*María Victoria*), María Luisa Landín (*singer*), Juan Bruno Tarraza (*pianist*), Kika Meyer (*bargirl who hits Luis*), Acela Vidaurri (*cabaret employee*)

Notes: in 1949, Miguel Morayta directed the stylish *Hipócrita...*! and in September 1950 he made the fine *Camino del infierno*. Then in December of that year he started shooting *Amor perdido*, something of a misfire. It's not uninteresting, but it's certainly a lesser effort in his filmography.

Ernesto is a pianist in the working-class *cabaret* run by don Paco. He loves Amalia, but she doesn't like him "that way."



When Amalia is nearly evicted for non-payment of rent, Ernesto covers the bill and says Amalia can parlay her dancing talent into a job at the *cabaret*. She's dubious but

agrees. Ernesto asks his best friend Luis, who owns the fancy "Raffles" nightclub, to attend Amalia's debut.

Unbeknownst to Ernesto, Luis is also a gangster who deals drugs, and has a very jealous ex-girlfriend, Celia. Caught by Celia as he's kissing singer María Victoria, Luis orders Celia to leave: "I don't want to see you again, not even in a photograph!" At don Paco's club, Luis is smitten with Amalia, but her performance of "Mambo del papelerero" bores the patrons; when one man mocks Amalia's dancing, Luis punches him and a general brawl breaks out. Luis is



clubbed with a bottle. Despite her inauspicious debut, Amalia is convinced by Ernesto and Luis to become a professional dancer, after a period of training.

Meanwhile, Celia refuses to take "hit the road" for an answer, and vamps Luis's henchman Andrés for information. Learning Luis has a crush on Amalia, Celia visits her and warns her off.

Amalia loves Luis and debuts at his club, performing "Mambo universitario" (with Pérez Prado leading the band and large number of other dancers, all clad in



college-gear) to great acclaim. Afterwards, Luis proposes marriage to Amalia, vowing to change his life to be worthy of her; Ernest sees them kissing and slinks off. He writes "Amor perdido" in her honour. It becomes a huge hit.

Celia coerces Andrés into writing a letter to Luis's competitor in the drug business, then "warns" Luis that Andrés is betraying him. Luis and Andrés have a confrontation that leaves Andrés dead and dumped in a rural ditch. Luis visits Amalia in her new apartment (that he pays for) and says he has to leave on a "business trip."

Ernesto is visiting Amalia in her apartment when the gas stove explodes, burning her face. The doctor says "no matter what I do, she'll always be deformed." Amalia receives a letter from Luis: he's coming home and looks forward to their wedding. She's in despair but Ernesto has a plan: they'll leave Mexico and Amalia can resume her dancing career wearing a mask. The ensuing stock-footage montage indicates she's successful. As they're performing in Cuba, Luis enters the nightclub and shoots her! He says Celia told him (before committing suicide) Ernesto and Amalia were just using him for his money. Luis says Amalia has "an angel face but a blacker soul than mine."

Amalia, dying, removes her mask. Her face is scarred up quite a bit (the makeup isn't great, but it's adequate). Luis apologises, she dies. The End.



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Amor perdido has a little bit of everything (except comic relief), but is very inconsistent. Compared to *Camino del infierno*, for example, *Amor perdido* looks cheap and uninspired: the sets are unimpressive and sparsely furnished, and the cinematography is high-key and flat, not stylish or atmospheric. How much of the blame goes to cinematographer Ezequiel Carrasco, art director Ramón Rodríguez, the C.L.A.S.A. studios, or producer Gustavo de León (who might have skimmed on the budget) is unknown, but *Amor perdido* doesn't look good.

Amalia Aguilar has top-billing but is by no means the center of attention. Significant footage not featuring her is devoted to the characters played by Víctor Junco, Tito Novaro, Yadira Jiménez, and José Pulido. Amalia falls in love with Luis, a gangster (although she doesn't know this), relegating her love-lorn friend Ernesto to the "friend zone" (literally, multiple times, saying she thinks of him as a "brother"). The viewer keeps waiting for Luis to betray Amalia, or for Amalia to realise decent Ernesto is the one she really loves, but it doesn't happen: apparently Luis and Amalia really love each other and Ernesto is just out of luck. Not that this guarantees a happy ending.

The film again subverts audience expectations by portraying Amalia's disfigurement as the result of an accident (her gas stove explodes), when we've already seen:

- a. jealous Celia is shown to be violent
- b. Celia visits Amalia in her original apartment and threatens her
- c. as Celia leaves, she specifically says she'll "mark" Amalia's face some day
- d. Celia gets the keys to Amalia's new apartment from Andrés

And yet Celia is not linked to the explosion. In fact, she disappears from the film, and at the very end Luis says she committed suicide; although she told Luis that Amalia was unfaithful to him with Ernesto, she apparently made no mention of sabotaging Amalia's stove.



Not in current prints of the film.

Amor perdido's musical sequences, while numerous, are actually linked to the plot. Aguilar dances 3 times, representing three stages of her career: as an amateur ("Mambo del papelerito") in don Paco's club (where she's booed!), as a professional ("Mambo universitario"), and as the

"Masked Dancer" at the end of her career. However, apparently one musical number was filmed but cut, since lobby cards exist showing her and Pérez Prado, and Aguilar is wearing a costume that she does not wear in the film.

The title song is sung twice, once by María Luisa Landín (whose version of the song was a huge hit and became her signature tune), and once by an unidentified singer (dubbing Tito Novaro), accompanied by superimposed flashback scenes recapping the movie up to that point. María Victoria does one song as well, but even this is peripherally relevant to the story, since she's depicted as Luis's latest lover, and then gets in a cat-fight with Celia!

Amalia Aguilar's performance is satisfactory, but her character has no back-story and she's largely a passive figure throughout the film, manipulated "for her own good" by Ernesto and "for love" by Luis. Both Ernesto and Luis have more character development than she does—so do Celia and even Andrés! The other performers are all given more chance to display their emotive talents than Aguilar, suggesting perhaps that dramatic acting was not her strong point.



After appearing in the unauthorised STIC feature film *No te dejaré nunca* in 1947, Tito Novaro (and his co-star Anita Blanch) had been banned by the union from screen acting for several years. STPC and STIC had an agreement that only STPC would make feature-length films, a pact that STIC evaded in the late 1950s when the América studios opened. Novaro returned to films in 1950 and Blanch in 1951 (*La noche avanza*). Novaro's saddled with a dud role as doorman Ernesto, but he does the best he can with it. Víctor Junco's Luis walks a fine line between villain and sympathetic character: he's a gangster and shoots Andrés (to be fair, Andrés pulled his pistol first), but we don't see him commit any other crimes, and he claims to be going straight for Amalia's sake. He appears to truly love her, and is so outraged at her apparent betrayal that he kills her (he does apologise for this). Junco has a several "acting!" scenes and makes the most of them.

Yadira Jiménez was a Colombian actress who had a fairly short career—sometimes as a *rumbera*—in Mexican cinema. She’s good as the insanely jealous and manipulative Celia, although as noted above the film never lets her various schemes come to fruition (or at least we’re not informed of that) and she just disappears from the picture. Her interactions with José Pulido are quite entertaining: he’s crazy about her, but Celia wants nothing to do with him until she realises she can use him to get back at Luis and Amalia. Then she offers herself to him, but only after he does her bidding (thus avoiding “payment” indefinitely). Why she sets him up to be killed by Luis isn’t clear.



Amor perdido isn’t without some entertainment value, but it’s certainly not in the same class as Morayta’s contemporary efforts *Hipócrita...!*, *Vagabunda*, or *Camino del infierno*, to name just three.



Los dineros del Diablo [The Devil’s Money] (Prods.

Noriega, 1952) *Prod*: José Noriega; *Assoc Prod*: José Othón Posada; *Dir-Scr*: Alejandro Galindo; *Dialog*: Alejandro Galindo, Carlos Villatoro; *Story*: Carlos Villatoro; *Photo*: Agustín Jiménez; *Music*: Federico Bahena; *Prod Mgr*: Alfredo Vilana; *Prod Chief*: Alberto A. Ferrer; *Asst Dir*: Jesús Marín; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: José Rodríguez G.; *Lighting*: Gabriel Castro; *Camera Op*: Sergio Véjar; *Choreog*: Manuel Darde; *Makeup*: Felisa L. de Guevara; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec*: Eduardo Arjona; *Re-rec*: Galindo Samperio; *SpecFX*: Jorge Benavides; *Studio*: Churubusco-Azteca

Cast: Amalia Aguilar (*Estrella*), Roberto Cañedo (*Manuel Olea*), Víctor Parra (*El Gitano*), Martha Patricia (*Cristina Oropeza*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*Teodoro Oropeza*), Prudencia

Griffell (*Sra. Olea*), Jorge Alzaga (*Maldonado, police agent*), Bruno Márquez (*factory worker*), Francisco Reyguera [sic] (*El Papi*), Enrique Carrillo (*La Rata*), Javier de la Barra (*Gitano’s henchman*), Manuel de la Vega (*El Chato*), José [Pepe] Nava (*Ronco*), Manuel Trejo Morales (*police agent*), Francisco Pando (*Sr. Olea, Manuel’s father*), Jesús Gómez (*driver*), José del Río (*intern*), Jorge Martínez de Hoyos (*hospital official*), Víctor Manuel “Güero” Castro (*dancer*), Leonor Gómez (*drink vendor*), Gregorio Acosta (*factory worker*), Magdalena Estrada (*vendor*), José Pardavé?

Notes: Roberto Cañedo served a long apprenticeship as a film actor, appearing in numerous films as an extra and minor player before advancing to supporting roles and then achieving leading man status. After a few years, he transitioned back into supporting roles (albeit larger ones this time), which he continued to perform until the early 1990s. In *Los dineros del Diablo* one can’t help but think the working-class protagonist’s role would have been more suited to director Galindo’s go-to “everyman” actor David Silva. But perhaps Silva was busy or something, so Cañedo stepped in and he does a fine, sincere job, even if he doesn’t particularly look working-class. And, despite the billing, Cañedo is the main character in the picture—Amalia Aguilar’s role is definitely a supporting one (she’s not even the protagonist’s love interest, and only partially a *femme fatale*).

Textile factory worker Manuel is sent to deliver some samples to a potential customer. As he leaves, he sees a man force his way into the adjacent apartment and hears a woman scream. Manuel punches the intruder and ejects him, earning the gratitude of the resident, nightclub performer Estrella. Manuel turns down a cash reward, but Estrella says if he ever needs anything, to look her up at the “Flor de Lis” cabaret. Estrella is the girlfriend of gangster El Gitano, who’s in business with fence El Papi. [When a crook brings in a stolen television, El Gitano won’t pay a high price, because “there’s no market for those, yet.”]



Manuel’s alcoholic father is struck by a truck, but Manuel’s manager don Teodoro won’t give him time off to go to the hospital (not even for no pay!). By the time Manuel arrives that night, his father is dead, and it’s too late to have the body delivered to his home for a traditional wake...unless Manuel can come up with some cash. Desperate, he goes to the “Flor de Lis,” intending to ask Estrella for help. El Gitano is there and gives him a reference for El Papi, as well as 500 pesos, but Manuel is suspicious and turns him down. However, that night



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Manuel thinks it over and visits El Papi, who gives him 500 pesos and tells him to write up a floorplan of the factory where he works, for a future robbery.

Manuel becomes friendly with don Teodoro's daughter Cristina, who convinces her father to (sort of) apologise to Manuel. This doesn't dissuade Manuel from stealing don Teodoro's car key, and facilitating a robbery of the factory that night: El Gitano's men load up a truck with valuable textiles. Manuel demands a high price for his cooperation, and El Gitano reluctantly pays it, although the gang leader is suspicious of Estrella's friendly attitude towards Manuel.

Don Teodoro is arrested when some of the stolen merchandise was found in the trunk of his car. [Apparently Manuel planted it, but this isn't shown.] Cristina comes to Manuel and his mother for help, and the two young people's friendship blossoms into romance. However, while Manuel is



out (taking Cristina home), the police arrive and show his mother a pair of trousers: she identifies them as Manuel's, and they say the car keys were found in a pocket. [It's never explained how and where they got the trousers.] Manuel spots the

police and goes to El Gitano: he threatens to surrender to clear don Teodoro's name, but El Gitano points out that the plant manager will be freed anyway since the police are after Manuel. Manuel agrees to accompany him on a trip up north, where the gang will be delivering the stolen textiles and returning to the city with a load of beer. El Gitano's car has a flat tire, and as Manuel is helping repair it, the gangster tries to run him down. Instead, Manuel shoots and causes the auto to crash, pinning El Gitano in the wreckage. Manuel ignores the injured man's pleas and walks away.

Back in the city, Manuel tells Estrella what happened to El Gitano. She doesn't care, "I have you now." As soon as the rest of the gang returns, they'll leave. The police are watching El Gitano's house, however. Estrella is stunned to see El Gitano, badly injured and on crutches; he says he got there by



"dragging myself." He shoots her. Manuel comes in and El Gitano berates him for deserting him. Manuel: "What did you expect? That I'd pull you out of there and put some arnica [a herbal pain reliever] on you? No, I'm not the good Samaritan."

El Gitano shoots Manuel in the legs then the police burst in and arrest them both.

As the film concludes, Manuel—now using crutches himself—boards a train that will take him to the Islas Marias penal colony. Cristina, Manuel's mother, and don Teodoro

see him off. Cristina says she'll wait for him to pay his debt to society.

The last part of *Los dineros del Diablo* is a little surprising. The conventional twist would have Manuel repent of his actions and double-cross El Gitano and the gang, thereby earning some leniency for himself, and allowing him to reunite with Cristina sooner. However, Manuel not only rather ruthlessly leaves El Gitano to (possibly) die in the auto wreck, when he gets back to the city he first goes to see his mother (who rejects him), then he contacts Estrella. They kiss and make plans to flee, strongly suggesting that Manuel is not planning some sort of last minute change of heart, didn't tip off the police, and so on.

It shouldn't be too much of a shock that an Alejandro Galindo film (based on a story by former actor and later assistant director Carlos Villatoro) has a fair amount of overt and covert social/political content.

Protagonist Manuel works in a textile factory (Estrella later refers to him as "the proletarian"); his father is an alcoholic and his aged mother has to take in laundry to make ends meet.

When Manuel rails against his father's vice, his mother says (paraphrasing) "alcohol is the opiate of the masses, a way for the poor to forget their troubles." When Manuel's father is struck by a truck and taken to hospital, Manuel asks plant manager don Teodoro for a half-day off. Teodoro refuses: "The factory doesn't understand feelings (*sentimientos*)...you're the one we hired, not your whole family." Teodoro is later chastised by his daughter: "One can be the boss and [still be] decent and humane." Teodoro apologises to Manuel: "Work is work, it's something sacred." However, not everyone thinks the same way: when Manuel delivers a book of samples to a potential customer, the maid who answers the door sneers at him and says "next time use the service entrance."

After Manuel's father dies, the morgue director says the workers who'd normally transport the corpse to Manuel's home for the wake have gone for the day, but if Manuel is willing to pay extra, "it can be done." Manuel goes to ask cabaret artist Estrella for a loan, and is forced to stand idly by as she sings the song "Don Dinero": "Money has infinite power; To be a bandit is an honor, to be poor is a crime."



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The film doesn't entirely excuse Manuel's turn to a life of crime as a legitimate alternative to being one of the working-class poor. Don Teodoro tells Cristina that Manuel is not a good employee (and thus not a good prospective mate for her);



ironically, when Manuel starts to plan a robbery of the factory where he works, don Teodoro says now he's on time, is showing an interest in different departments, etc.! Manuel first rejects El Gitano's

offer of "help," indicating it "seems crooked," but later changes his mind (after an entertaining montage sequence of double-exposures, showing Manuel's mother working, Gitano offering money, Estrella singing). When Manuel's perfidy is exposed, Cristina says he's "basically good (*al fondo*)," but her father retorts: "To be a decent man, it's not good enough to be good underneath, you have to be good all the time!" And Manuel's mother tells him "your father gave me a lot of grief, but nothing that made me so ashamed [as what you've done]." She even withholds her blessing (the worst thing a Mexican cinema mother can do to her child) until he's paid for his crimes!

[As mentioned above, Manuel's father is an alcoholic, and Manuel is introduced as a non-drinker, presumably because of his father's bad example. However, in a nice, subtle touch, once Manuel becomes involved with El Gitano's crooked deals, he starts drinking alcohol, socially. Not to excess, but it shows his morals have been eroded.]

There are also a couple of understated jabs at the USA. In the *Flor de Lis* nightclub, the cigarette girl offers "*Cigarros americanos? Del país?*" When she doesn't have Manuel's brand, El Gitano hands him a pack of *americanos*, that Manuel sniffs appreciatively. After getting a cash advance from the gangsters, Manuel returns to work with a metal lunch box (vs. the paper bag he'd been carrying before); a fellow worker calls it a *lonchera americano*, and ask if he has "ham and eggs sandwiches" inside.



The film also has a mildly clever twist: the man from whom Manuel "protects" Estrella early in the film shows up periodically thereafter, lurking around and

observing the action. He's finally revealed towards the end of the movie to be Maldonado, an agent of the police. Presumably he was trying to interrogate Estrella when he forced his way into her apartment, and she resisted, which

attracted Manuel's attention. His actual role remains a mystery to the audience until late in the film, a nice touch.



Although *Los dineros del Diablo* is certainly not a musical and is not about show business, Amalia Aguilar is given two musical numbers, the aforementioned "Don Dinero"—in which she sings and dances with a chorus of tuxedo-clad men—and "Magdalena," which is more *rumbera*-inflected. In both sequences, future director Víctor Manuel "Güero" Castro can be easily spotted as one of the chorus "boys." At the conclusion of "Don Dinero," El Gitano says Estrella should be performing with women dancers, "instead of those---" (presumably casting aspersions on the male dancers' masculinity), but Estrella demurs, saying she won't dance with female backup dancers because "I don't like competition." Less visible is Jorge Martínez de Hoyos, whose bit-part career was shorter than Cañedo's but still lasted 4 or 5 years. If you blink, you'll miss him (he's a member of the hospital staff).

Production values are satisfactory. Most of the film seems to have been shot in the studio. Galindo was not known as a visual stylist, and most of the picture is filmed in standard, realistic, zero-degree style. The main exceptions are the sequence mentioned above with superimpositions showing what Manuel is "thinking," and one nice shot where he hides from the police who've been interviewing his mother.

Los dineros del Diablo is interesting and generally entertaining.



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