Happy Holidays!

2011 comes to an end, and the 17th year of The Mexican Film Bulletin does as well. Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all MFB readers. Your support and encouragement are greatly appreciated. I hope you shall continue to be with us in 2012, our 18th year of publication!

Obituaries

Pedro Armendáriz Jr.

Actor Pedro Armendáriz Jr. died at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City on 26 December 2011; he was 71 years old.

Pedro Armendáriz Pardo was born on 6 April 1940. His father Pedro Armendáriz was an actor who would shortly become one of Mexico’s most famous performers, and his mother was actress Carmelita Bohr, the daughter of actor-director José Bohr. Pedro Jr. did not immediately follow in his parents’ footsteps, receiving a degree in architecture from the Universidad Iberoamericana. However, he eventually decided to pursue acting and made his screen debut in 1965.

For nearly a decade, Armendáriz appeared mostly in commercial productions like Las vampiras, Super Colt 38, Los juniors, Su precio--unos dólares, and La gran aventura del Zorro, but in the mid-1970s his career took a more "serious" turn (although he still worked steadily in "popular" cinema) with roles in pictures such as 1975’s La pasión según Berenice, La casta divina, Mina, viento de libertad (both 1976) and Los pequeños privilegios (1977). He received an Ariel for his work in Mina, viento de libertad and a nomination for Los pequeños privilegios.

Armendáriz Jr. (although his father had died in 1963, Pedro retained the "Jr." for many years, but eventually became known professionally simply as Pedro Armendáriz) eventually appeared in nearly 150 Mexican and international films, in numerous television series and telenovelas, and on the stage. Like his father, he was fluent in English and can be seen in many Hollywood and international co-productions including Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark (1973), Earthquake (1974), The Mask of Zorro (1998), Amistad (1997), and Licence to Kill (1997--ironically, his father had appeared in an earlier James Bond film, From Russia With Love). He has a role in the forthcoming Will Ferrell vehicle, Casa de mi padre. Armendáriz Jr. also produced a number of films and became known as a passionate advocate for Mexican cinema. He served as the president of the Academia Mexicana de Artes y Ciencias Cinematográficas.

Pedro Armendáriz Jr. won two Ariel Awards for his work: Best Actor for Mina, viento de libertad, and Best Co-Starring Actor for La ley de Herodes. He was also nominated 5 additional times. His notable Mexican films include La pasión según Berenice, La casta divina, Los pequeños privilegios, Cadena perpetua, El secreto de Romelia, La leyenda de una máscara, Dos crimenes, De noche vienes Esmeralda, El crimen de Padre Amaro, and many others. Directors for whom Armendáriz worked include Arturo Ripstein, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Alberto Isaac, Carlos Carrera, Felipe Cazals, Luis Estrada, Jorge Fons, Alfredo Gurrola, Julián Pastor and Ismael Rodríguez.

Eleazar García Jr.

Actor Eleazar García Jr., the burly villain in scores of Mexican films and videohomes from the 1980s to the present, died in a Tijuana hospital on 14 December 2011 of kidney problems, a complication of diabetes.

Eleazar Lorenzo García Gutiérrez was born on 13 December 1957 in Reynosa, Tamaulipas. He was the son of beloved character actor Eleazar García "Chelelo" (and in later years was often billed as "Chelelo Jr."), best-known for his comic norteño roles as the
By the late 1990s was enough of a "name" to be given star billing and to have his image prominently featured on video boxes and DVD covers.

**ALBERTO DE MENDOZA**

Alberto de Mendoza, an Argentine actor whose work took him to Mexico, Spain, and other countries during a career than spanned an incredible 71 years, died of respiratory problems on 12 December 2011 in Madrid. Alberto Manuel Rodríguez Gallego Gonzáles de Mendoza was born in Buenos Aires in January 1923, but left his homeland after being orphaned at a young age.

De Mendoza allegedly made his first film in 1930: Alma de gaucho was one of the numerous Spanish-language films shot in Hollywood in the early years of sound. However, de Mendoza's film career began in earnest in Argentina in 1939. In the mid-1950s he traveled to Mexico, appearing in films such as Que seas feliz!, La adúltera, La dulce enemiga, and La mujer marcada, as well as the Argentine-Mexican co-production Socios para la aventura (he was also in the co-production Manaos, shot in 1979). From the 1960s onward, de Mendoza worked mostly in Europe. His final film was La mala verdad (2011), released less than two weeks before his death.

**JUAN CALDERÓN "EL GALLO"**

TV producer and host Juan Calderón, nicknamed "El Gallo," died on 13 December 2011; he had been suffering from cancer. Juan Calderón Navarro was born in Málaga, Spain in 1936, but came to Mexico with his family in 1939 as a result of the Spanish Civil War. He started working in the entertainment industry at a young age, serving as an assistant to various performers including Enrique Rambal, Capulina and Clavillazo. In 1954 he was employed in television as a production assistant, and was soon directing popular programs such as "Variedades de medianoche" and "Reina por un día."

In 1973 he debuted as an entertainment reporter and program host, creating and hosting numerous programs, and eventually rising to an executive position with the Televisa conglomerate (with a brief digression to rival TV Azteca). Calderón also worked as an entertainment journalist and host on the radio, wrote columns for newspapers and magazines, was on the board of directors of record label Melody, and participated in many other entertainment industry activities.

Juan Calderón is survived by his second wife and 5 children.

**BELATED OBITUARY: ANTONIO PRIETO**

Chilean singer-actor Antonio Prieto died of heart failure on 14 July 2011 in Santiago, Chile; he was 84 years old and had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for a number of years. Juan Antonio Espinoza Prieto was born in Iquique, Chile in May 1927. He became a popular bolero singer in the 1950s and went on to record more than 1,000 songs, act in numerous films internationally, host television programs, and compose music.

Prieto appeared in nearly a dozen Mexican movies in the 1957-59 period, mostly as a "musical guest." However, he played real-life physician-composer Dr. Alfonso Ortiz Tirado in La vida de Agustín Lara (1958), and had substantial acting roles in No soy monedita de oro (1958) and Las tres coquetonas (1959).

Prieto was married to Teresa Woters Ezcurra until her death a decade ago; they had 5 children and 13 grandchildren. One of their daughters married jazz musician Stanley Clarke, and Prieto's grandsons by another daughter are also professional musicians.

**MOST POPULAR FILMS IN MEXICO, 2011**

About 62 Mexican films were released theatrically in Mexico in 2011 (out of approximately 260 total), accounting for 7 percent of the box-office earnings in the country. The most popular film of the year was Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2 ($34 million USD), followed by Transformers 3 ($30.5 million). The most successful Mexican movie was Don Gato y su pandilla, a feature-film version of the popular animated TV series known in the USA as "Top Cat." This appeared on the overall list at #24, with earnings of about $8 million (2.6 million tickets sold). The top Mexican films of the year were as follows:
NEW MEXICAN MOVIE CHANNEL

Although it has been available on satellite services for some time, "Cine Nostalgia" was recently added to the FIOS lineup. Unlike "De Película Clásico" and "De Película," this new channel is offered in the USA only, and shows only black & white Mexican films (although a few Argentine titles also appear on the schedule) from the 1930s through the 1960s. "Cine Nostalgia" is one of the channels operated by producer Carlos Vasallo. So far, there has been some overlap with the "De Película" catalog, but not a lot. "Cine Nostalgia" shows its movies without commercial interruption (although it has infomercials between the films), whereas the "De Película" channels have one commercial break per movie. Neither Vasallo nor Televisa (which runs the "De Película" channels) appear to be doing any restoration of their prints at all, so the video quality is frequently rather poor. Since moving into my house at the end of July, I've added well over 500 "classic" cine nacional titles to my library, and just when the "De Película" catalog was becoming exhausted, "Cine Nostalgia" appeared with dozens of "new" films I've wanted to see. Huzzah!

http://www.cinenostalgia.tv/

CRIME DOESN'T PAY: EXCEPT AT THE BOX-OFFICE

Virgen de medianoche [Midnight Virgin] (Ixtla Films, 1941) Dir: Alejandro Galindo; Scr: Marco Aurelio & Alejandro Galindo; Photo: Gabriel Figueroa; Prod Mgr: Eduardo Quevedo; Prod Chief: Enrique Morfin; Asst Dir: Felipe Palomino; Film Ed: Charles Kimball, José W. Bustos; Art Dir: Manuel Fontanals; Sound: B.J. Kroger

Cast: Jorge Vélez (Felipe Malacara), Manolita Saval (Elisa Ordóñez), Ramón Vallarino (Tony), Gaby Macías (Felipe's girlfriend), Alejandro Cobo (Narciso), Rafael Icardo ("Médico"), Antonio Badú (Rubén), Chela Campos (singer), Ángel T. Sala (police inspector), Raúl Guerrero (Pizzarrin), Victoria Argota (Sra. Ordóñez), Rafael Gutiérrez (Ruelas), Lucille Bowling (Perla), Marcello Dondé (Pocho), Antonio Garay Gudino & Jorge Arriaga (Narciso's henchmen), Julio Ahuet (Reynaldo), Alfonso Bedoya (Felipe's henchman), José Elias Moreno (bartender), Alfonso Sánchez Tello & José Torvay (police agents), Salvador Quiroz (Abad), José Ortiz de Zárate (man who buys fur for girlfriend), Pepe Badajoz (guitarist), Nino del Brillante (singer), Manuel Fábregas? & Roberto Cañedo?

Notes: another example of Alejandro Galindo's early predilection for ersatz Hollywood genre films, Virgen de medianoche is his version of a typical gangster movie, complete with a good-bad gangster hero, a younger brother he's trying to "keep out of the rackets," an innocent young woman who becomes involved with the underworld, a jealous gangster's moll, rival gangs, smuggling, nightclubs, tough cops, and so on. This is a rather pale imitation/tribute at best, but it moves along at a good clip (aside from three momentum-killing songs) and features a number of good set-pieces, ideas, and images.

Jorge Vélez's acting career spanned about a decade but his credits are relatively sparse. He produced a handful of movies under the "Ixtla Films" banner (among others), including Virgen de medianoche. Despite his handsome appearance and stalwart demeanour, Vélez doesn't have a lot of charisma but his negligible screen career is still something of a mystery. Manolita Saval is a little less glamorous than she'd be made up to be in later films, but her performance is satisfactory, as are most of the others in the picture, although no one has an awful lot to do, dramatically.

Elisa visits the office of Sr. Ruelas to inquire about a job. Ruelas tries to explain the nature of the position to the naive young woman (essentially, he's hiring female escorts for visiting businessmen), but they're interrupted by the arrival of Narciso and several thugs. Ruelas refuses to divulge the route one of his delivery trucks is taking, but Elisa--who overheard the details--reveals the information when the gangsters threaten to kill them both. Ruelas is pistol-whipped and Elisa suffers a slight flesh wound in a struggle. Narciso and his henchmen hijack the truck and get away with a shipment of furs smuggled in from the USA. Ruelas takes Elisa to the "Virgen de Medianoche" nightclub owned by his boss Malacara, so she can have her injury tended by the alcoholic "Médico" (= "Doc"). To
by Malacara and his gunmen. Malacara warns Tony not to justify the use of the song by the same title, which has no
title is rather incongruous; even though it refers to the
name of Felipe's nightclub, this was probably concocted to
justify the use of the song by the same title, which has no
real bearing on the plot) contains some interesting stylistic
flourishes as well as homages--broad and specific--to
Hollywood gangster films. The final confrontation
between Felipe and Narciso is nicely put together: Felipe
takes his office to discover a small paper cut-out of a man
with a "dagger" (a toothpick or something) stuck in him,
and he also sees a (real, full-size) coffin Malacara brought!
Felipe pleads with Narciso not to shoot him, stalling for
time until he can reach the button that opens the trapdoor,
plunging Narciso into the basement (Narciso gets one shot
off, wounding Felipe). Narciso is shot to death when he
climbs back up into the office. Felipe stagers out into the
nightclub, kicking over a bass drum which rolls directly
towards the camera (a clever touch).

Earlier, Felipe's henchman Pocho used a sword-cane to
stab Rubén as they sit back-to-back in booths in the
nightclub. The police pick that moment to enter, and
Rubén's escort Perla is compelled to pretend he's merely
drunk rather than dead, until the cops leave.

Virgen de medianoche contains a number of other
sequences which contribute little to the plot but make the
movie richer and more detailed. For example, there's a
scene in which a wealthy man buys a fur for his younger
mistress; this plays out in its entirety, even though the only
relevance to the plot comes after the customers leave, at
which time Narciso and his men offer to sell the furrier
some stolen skins at a greater discount than even Felipe
provides. The byplay between Felipe and his brother Tony
isn't that remarkable (although Tony does complain that
he's not learning anything at university, because the
students are always out on strike!) but the scenes between
Felipe and his gang, between Felipe and his erstwhile
girlfriend, between the gang members themselves, between
Narciso and his henchmen, etc., all seem natural and
enhance rather than detract from the film as a whole.

The production values are adequate, with a nice mix of
actual locations and sets. Virgen de medianoche doesn't
look especially sumptuous but neither does it appear cheap
or slipshod. The photography is by Gabriel Figueroa, but
while his work here is competent enough, there's little
visible sign of his future greatness.

Not a classic, but an appreciative and entertaining

Donde el círculo termina [Where the Circle Closes] (Cinematografía Latina, 1955) Prod: Alfredo Lagos; Dir: Alfredo B. Crevenna; Adapt: José Revueltas, Luis Spota, Alfredo B. Crevenna; Dialog: José Revueltas; Story: Luis Spota; Photo: Rosalio Solano; Music: Lan Adomian; Prod Mgr: Alfredo Valés; Prod Chief: Julio Guerrero Tello; Asst Dir: Jaime L. Contreras; Film Ed: Gloria Schoemann; Art Dir: Eduardo Fitzgerald; Decor: Manuel L. Guevara; Script Clerk: Carlos Villatoro; Lighting: Luis Solano; Camera Op: Hugo Velasco; Makeup: Fraustita; Sound Ed: Antonio Bustos; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Music/Re-Rec: Galdino Samperio; Dialog Rec: José B. Carles; SpFX: Jorge Benavides

Narciso sends his henchman Rubén to the nightclub in
an attempt to locate the storage place of the smuggled furs
(it's in the basement, accessed by a trap door in Malacara's
office), but Rubén is discovered and murdered. His body
is tossed into Narciso's warehouse, trussed up in a sack
(possibly inspired by the "corpse delivery" scene of The
Public Enemy). Narciso's gang raids the "Virgen de
Medianoche" club and a shoot-out ensues. Narciso and his
men are all killed but Malacara is mortally wounded.
Before he dies, he tells the police Elisa and Tony are
innocent of any complicity in the smuggling business.

As mentioned above, Virgen de medianoche (the film's
name of Felipe's nightclub, this was probably concocted to
keep it a secret from Malacara. When the gangster learns the truth, he
refuses to help the couple, even when Elisa is arrested for
wearing a stolen fur coat (given her by Malacara!).

return to the nightclub and to stay away from the family
"business"--he wants the young man to graduate from
university and not be involved in a life of crime. However, Tony and Elisa begin a relationship, keeping it a secret
from Malacara. When the gangster learns the truth, he
refuses to help the couple, even when Elisa is arrested for
wearing a stolen fur coat (given her by Malacara!).
THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN  Volume 17 Number 6 (November-December 2011)

Cast: Sarita Montiel (Isabel), Raúl Ramírez (Raúl del Río), Nadio Haro Oliva (Gabriela), Jorge Martínez de Hoyos (Insp. Carlos Carrillo), Rafael Estrada (El Miles), Antonio Raxel (Vélez), Armando Arreola (Martínez), Fernando Torre Lapham, Javier de la Parra, Humberto Rodríguez (man taking inventory), and Amado Zumaya (Forensics professor), Yolanda Vázquez (?servant girl)

Notes: Donde el círculo termina is somewhat reminiscent of the much superior En la palma de tu mano (1950), and with good reason--both films were written by Luis Spota and José Revueltas (in collaboration with their respective directors, Roberto Gavaldón and Alfredo B. Crevenna). Both pictures feature un-heroic protagonists, unsympathetic femmes fatales, murders of spouses, faux-Hitchcockian "suspense" scenes, and a twist ending in which the central character is tricked into ironically paying for his crime. But En la palma de tu mano is one of the top 100 Mexican films ever made (according to the "Somos" poll, where it ranked #70) and won 8 Arieles (including Best Film and Best Director), so it's not exactly fair to expect Donde el círculo termina to match up well.

The Spanish import--whose Mexican sojourn would soon come to an end as she returned to Spain, after a brief stopover in Hollywood--looks stocky and tired, is saddled with an unpleasant character, and (despite her top-billing) shares the screen time with relative newcomers Raúl Ramírez and Nadio Haro Oliva. Montiel has perhaps two good dramatic scenes; Haro Oliva overacts and Ramírez alternates between morosely brooding and being annoyingly feckless. Jorge Martínez de Hoyos is supposed to be the cool, competent detective (he even smokes a pipe), but has relatively little to do.

The production values are adequate, although the sets--while spacious and well-designed--have the antiseptic look common to a fair number of studio-shot Mexican films of the era. However, there are several sequences which effectively use real locations, including a building under construction and a shabby shanty-town located near some railroad tracks.

The wealthy Gabriela murders her lover, Jorge Tovar, and steals documents from his safe. Gabriela's husband Raúl had been involved in shady business dealings with Tovar: Raúl has brought his construction company to the edge of bankruptcy by misusing company funds to pay for his own failed investments and to support his mistress Isabel, who just happens to be Tovar's ex-lover. Raúl has no fortune of his own, and is forced to ask Gabriela for additional money to prop up the company.

Gabriela's cousin, Insp. Carrillo of the police, suspects her in Tovar's murder, thanks to a glove she dropped at the scene of the crime, and a key to Tovar's apartment that she clumsily attempts to hide. When Carrillo informs Gabriela that Raúl is having an affair, Gabriela refuses to give Raúl any additional money. The desperate Raúl agrees to Isabel's plan to have his wife murdered. Isabel's friend El Miles will kill Gabriela in exchange for 5,000 pesos and a plane ticket to Miami. However, after El Miles stabs Gabriela to death in her bedroom, Raúl shoots and kills the assassin. He burns the dead man's fake passport and the payoff money (because it was pierced by the bullet he fired) but doesn't have enough time to destroy the plane ticket before Carrillo and the police arrive, instead hiding the document in the wall safe.

A short time later, Isabel excoriates Raúl for his treachery: El Miles was her brother. Raúl is arrested by the police and charged with the murder...of Jorge Tovar! The airline ticket to Miami is used as proof of his intent to flee the country, and ballistics prove the gun that Raúl used to kill El Miles was the one that shot Tovar (of course, it was Gabriela who used it in that instance). As Raúl is led away, accused of a murder he didn't commit, Isabel laughs. However, when everyone else is gone, she has an imaginary "conversation" with the spirit of Gabriela, and--although Isabel is alive, and free--wonders if she really "won."

Donde el círculo termina isn't a bad film but it's needlessly complicated (which isn't the same as having a clever plot full of twists and surprises) and relies on too many far-fetched coincidences. So, Raúl just happens to be having an affair with Isabel who just happens to have been the mistress of Tovar who just happens to be involved in shady business with Raúl and just happens to be having an affair with Raúl's wife Gabriela, who just happens to have a cousin who is the police inspector who...
just happens to be investigating the murder of Tovar? Small world, isn't it?

The conclusion is not merely a twist, it also contradicts everything Carrillo has been saying throughout the film about Gabriela's guilt (at least he got that right, but then changed his mind). Raúl can't explain how his pistol was used to murder Tovar (since he's unaware of Gabriela's guilt), but the airline ticket isn't really proof of anything. The scene in which Raúl frantically burns the passport and cash of El Miles in the fireplace is clearly supposed to be "Hitchcockian suspense," but it's not very well executed, and it's unclear what Raúl does with the plane ticket (it looks like he just stuffs it behind the painting that hides the wall safe--only later do the police discover it in the safe).

Perhaps the best thing about Donde el circulo termina is the natural, understated friendship between Isabel and El Miles. Rafael Estrada had a long career in Mexican cinema in minor supporting roles, and he makes the most of his scenes here as Isabel's loyal friend (only after he's dead do we learn he's her brother--which is too bad, since it would have been more unique as a male-female friendship, and Isabel could have been just as angry over Raúl's murder of El Miles if the latter had been a friend rather than a relative). There's nothing maudlin or artificial about their relationship: it's clear these two characters have a long history between them, trust each other completely, and yet live independent lives and want to continue doing so.

Donde el circulo termina isn't dull but it is rather awkward and artificial.

La llamada de la muerte [The Phone Call of Death] (Juan Acar, 1959) Prod: Juan Acar; Dir-Scr: Antonio Orellana; Photo: Juan Durán; Asst Dir: José Barrera; Film Ed: Carlos Savage; Camera Op: Felipe Mariscal; Lighting: Ramón Mena; Makeup: Blanca Margarita Paredes; Sound Engin: Jesús González Gancy; Sound Ed: Teodulo Bustos Jr.

Cast: Carlos López Moctezuma (Bronco Joe aka Richard Martin), Víctor Junco (Jefe), Roberto Cañedo (Padre Ortiz), Freddy Fernández (Manuel), Pascual García Peña (Cachuchas), Martha Roth (Betty), Norma Lazareno (Amelia), Mikaela (singer), Jorge Rado ("Rigoberto Escarriaga"), Pilar Aguirre, Xiomara Doña, Sidar Cisneros, Marcel Caes, Armando Soto Montoya, Gilberto Iglesias, Trío Monimbo, Antonio Orellana ("Gallego," milkman)

Notes: Antonio Orellana was a refugee from Franco's Spain (although he left a few years after the Spanish Civil War concluded); after working in advertising in Mexico for several years, he starting writing film scripts. Due to union restrictions, Orellana had little success at first, but by the 1960s was working fairly steadily, particularly on lucha libre films. He also wanted to direct but was once again denied the opportunity because he wasn't a member of the union. Like a number of others, including fellow Spaniards José Baviera and Jorge Mistral, Orellana went outside of Mexico to direct. La llamada de la muerte, shot in Nicaragua, was his directorial debut; he followed this with Fugitivo da noche (1961), made in Brazil (but with Lorena Velázquez and Tito Junco in the cast). Several decades later Orellana was able to direct a handful of independent Mexican films, but his primary profession in the cine nacional was as a screenwriter.

La llamada de la muerte is a slick and accomplished film, especially coming from a novice director. Orellana varies his set-ups and camera angles (without getting too arty), the script is interesting, and the performances--by a mostly-Mexican main cast--are satisfactory (although López Moctezuma, Junco, and Roth--all presumably playing gringos--make no effort at any sort of accent, and Fernández, Cañedo, García Peña and Lazareno--all supposed to be nicaragüenses--don't alter their Mexican identities either). The Managua locations are novel--relatively few Mexican films have been shot in Central America, so this glimpse into daily life in Nicaragua circa 1959 is fascinating. For instance, the police station in the movie features a huge photograph of
dictator Luis Somoza Debayle, who had taken power in Nicaragua after the assassination of his father Anastasio Somoza García.

After a botched bank robbery in Chicago in which he killed several bank guards, Bronco Joe fled to Managua under the alias "Richard Martin." One day he gets an anonymous phone call ordering him to assassinate scientist Walter Dietrich, a resident of the city. An envelope of cash is slipped under his door, and a car and silenced pistol are provided for him. Joe reluctantly complies, driving to Dietrich's house and shooting the man as he leaves for work. Although a police officer arrives on the scene almost immediately, Joe escapes. He gets another call from his anonymous employer ordering him to stay in his apartment until that night, when he'll be smuggled out of the country. Later, when the news comes that Dietrich survived the assassination attempt, Joe receives one more call, threatening him with death for his failure.

Meanwhile, Joe's apartment suddenly becomes the center of attention. He's visited by obsequious but annoying concierge Manuel, the housekeeper, a vacuum cleaner salesman, a priest soliciting funds for an orphanage, the milkman, pimp Cachuchas and two young women duped into thinking "Richard Martin" is a wealthy theatrical impresario from New York, and some men carrying a coffin (needed for a neighbor who's just died--the coffin won't fit through the dead man's door so Joe's apartment has to be used as a short-cut). It's like Grand Central Station in there!

Joe is surprised when his girlfriend Betty arrives a day early from the USA. He is less happy to be confronted by the "Chief," a corrupt American policeman who demands half of the bank robbery proceeds. When Joe explains he lost the money in the gunfight with the bank guards, the Chief refuses to believe him, and takes the money Joe got for the Dietrich murder as a down payment. The Chief also compels Betty to leave with him, giving Joe the (mistaken) impression she betrayed his location to the cop.

Eventually, the police unravel the plot. They raid the headquarters of the man who ordered the hit on Dietrich: dying, he says Dietrich "knew too much" about a certain weapon and had to be eliminated. Joe prepares to flee but is shot to death by the fake "vacuum cleaner salesman," actually an agent of the gangster who masterminded the assassination plot. In turn, the murderer is killed by the police. Betty rushes in and embraces Joe's corpse, weeping. Outside, the Chief realises he's lost the bank robbery money, the reward for Joe's capture, and Betty. He shrugs and walks away.

La llamada de la muerte has some loose ends in its script, but these aren't crucial. For instance, as the film opens, a milkman (director Orellana in a cameo) delivers milk in the morning; as the film concludes that night, the milkman is back in the apartment building for no good reason, except to make a wisecrack about losing his customers. There are other holes in the plot but none of them draw serious attention to themselves.

The film doesn't formally resemble a film noir--most of it takes place in the bright daytime, for instance--but Bronco Joe's dilemma is reminiscent of a noir premise. A fugitive in a foreign country believes he's incognito, then learns his identity and location are known; he's blackmailed into committing a murder; fails (and is later told he's to be killed for that failure); is unable to leave his apartment and is thus exposed to numerous visitors who simply won't leave him alone; believes his girlfriend has betrayed him; is blackmailed again by a corrupt cop; and is finally murdered in his apartment by a virtual stranger. The viewer cannot help but sympathise with Bronco Joe to a certain extent, although he is clearly a cold-blooded criminal (he says he shot the bank guards in Chicago "in self defense," but murdering Dietrich--practically in front of the man's twin daughters--reveals his true nature). He just wants to be left alone, and yet it
seems the whole, annoying and dangerous world has decided to pay him a visit on a single day!

La llamada de la muerte is interesting on a number of levels, and it's also a well-made and entertaining film.

---

**El mundo de las drogas** [The World of Drugs]

(Estudios América, 1963) **Prod:** Antonio Matouk; **Dir:** Alberto Mariscal; **Scr:** José María Fernández Unsain; **Photo:** Fernando Colín; **Music:** Jorge Pérez H.; **Musical Themes:** Armando Manzanero; **Prod Mgr:** Jaime Alfaro; **Co-Dir:** Juan Hernández; **Film Ed:** J. José Munguía; **Art Dir:** Arcadi Artis Gener; **Camera Op:** Raúl Domínguez; **Cam Asst:** Javier Cruz; **Makeup:** Graciela Muñoz; **Sound Op:** Jesús Saldivar; **Microphonist:** Francisco Guerrero; **Recordist:** Roberto Muñoz; **Supv Rec:** Enrique L. Rendón; **Rec:** Heinrich Henkel; **Union:** STIC

**Cast:** Julio Aldama (Raúl), Olivia Michel (Ana), Luz María Aguilar (Dr. Inés Ibáñez), Roxana Bellini (Lucy), David Silva (Colonel), Eric del Castillo (Don Taylor), Antonio de Hud (Memo), Cmndte. Octavio de la Vega (federal agent), Álvaro Ortiz (henchman), Antonio Raxel (comisario), Aurora Clavel (murdered campesina), Mayte Carol, Guillermina Tellez Girón, Mary Ellen (?Lina), Yolanda Azcárraga (daughter?), Pancho Córdoba (El Rata), Carlos Rotzinger (Carlos, irate party guest), Nothanael León "Frankenstein" (henchman), Regino Herrera (murdered campesino), Armando Acosta (federal official), Federico Falcón (agent Federico), Rubén Márquez (jailer), Mirón Levine (medical examiner)

**Notes:** originally an actor, Alberto Mariscal reinvented himself as an assistant director (or, in the parlance of the day, "co-director") in the late 1950s when the Estudios América opened. By 1963, he was entrusted with full directorial control over a two-film series, "División narcóticos." El mundo de las drogas was the second entry, with Julio Aldama and Olivia Michel repeating their roles as intrepid Mexican federal agents battling drug trafficking. The film is reasonably well-produced, -written, and -directed and contains some decent action sequences. The major flaw is the odd music score, particularly in the first half of the film: a blaring "shock" fanfare occurs awkwardly at odd moments, there is stereotypical (and out of place) theremin music, and the overall mix seems sub-standard. This mysteriously clears up later in the movie, when the music no longer calls attention to itself (there are several extraneous dance numbers featuring the voluptuous Roxana Bellini, but these are par for the course in Mexican cinema).

After a documentary-style opening describing the Mexican government's battle against the drug trade, particularly opium poppy cultivation in rural areas, El mundo de las drogas shows two gangsters attempting to convince campesinos of the monetary benefits of planting poppies. When one man and his wife threaten to contact the authorities, the thugs knock them out, lock them in their cabin, and set it on fire, before departing in their helicopter. The couple's daughter, who had been bathing in a nearby river, arrives in time to rescue her badly-injured mother.

Taken to the local hospital, the burned woman is murdered by Dr. Inés Ibáñez, a secret member of the drug ring. To fool the gang, the Mexican authorities leak the (false) news that the dead campesina's daughter can identify the killers: the teenaged girl is sent to Mexico City to stay with agent Ana's mother, while Ana disguises herself as the alleged witness and is installed in a border town hotel as bait.

Drugs are taken across the U.S. border by the gang via various methods, including a pouch on the stomach of a woman faking pregnancy, and in a coffin accompanied by false priest Dimas, who operates a funeral agency on the Mexican side. The leader of the organisation is gringo Don Taylor. He lives in a luxurious home in the USA, communicating with Dr. Inés via carrier pigeon. Although pretending to be in love with Inés, Taylor is actually married to Lucy, who performs in a local nightclub and also hosts parties in which young people are introduced to drugs.

Taylor orders the death of the "witness" against his men; when a sniper fails, the gang assaults the hotel in force, but is eventually driven off by the gallant federal agents, including Rául (who has been posing as a blind vendor) and Memo (disguised as a cab driver). Ana is slightly wounded; when she's treated by Dr. Inés, the traitor physician discovers she's not a simple peasant girl. The real daughter is located in Mexico City and murdered by Inés and Lucy. However, when Inés later expresses her desire to get out of the smuggling business, she is shot to death on Taylor's orders. Using small-time addict and drug dealer El Rata as an informant,
Raúl and Ana discover the smuggling operation in the funeral parlour. Lucy and several other gang members are killed in the struggle. The federal agents release the homing pigeons found at the hideout and use a helicopter to track them to Taylor's house. The gangster dies resisting arrest.

There are several interesting aspects to El mundo de las drogas. Clearly, this film is intended to portray the Mexican government's war on drugs in a positive light, showing dedicated, well-trained federal agents using high-powered weapons and other technology (including airplanes and helicopters), and cooperating with the Mexican armed forces and local authorities. Although Raúl and Ana are the protagonists, they aren't given a lot of character development, functioning as part of the larger team most of the time. Indeed, a much more substantial portion of the film's footage is devoted to the "personal" lives of the villainous gang members, especially Inés and Don Taylor.

Another interesting point is the almost complete lack of anti-gringo sentiments in the film. Unlike some other Mexican drug-themed movies, there aren't any overt remarks about the immoral gringos and the damage their appetite for drugs is causing Mexico, although the USA is shown to be the primary destination for the smuggled drugs (heroin in this case, given the poppy references, although it appears Lucy is offering the party guests marijuana, perhaps as a starter drug). Don Taylor's name and geographic location are all that mark him as a gringo (well, he does have an Asian manservant and his house is decorated in "exotic" fashion, so he's clearly a decadent foreigner), since otherwise he speaks fluent Spanish and looks and acts Mexican. In contrast, a representative of the U.S. government who appears in the film does speak heavily-accented (although correct) Spanish and is thus obviously a gringo, but he is a completely sympathetic character, praising Mexico's efforts to defeat the drug trade and promising full cooperation.

Alberto Mariscal would later earn a reputation as a specialist in Westerns (while still directing films in many genres), and while El mundo de las drogas is a contemporary film set mostly in urban locations, the action sequences are effectively staged and shot, especially the shoot-out on the street in front of the border hotel, which goes on for quite some time, and the confrontation between Raúl and Ana and the smugglers in the funeral parlour. In the latter scene, Lucy orders the agents killed, but Ana shoots one of the gangsters in the face with a gun concealed in a plaster cast on her wrist (!), and Raúl dispatches two others with a semi-automatic machine gun (Lucy is accidentally shot by one of her own men).

The production values are surprisingly good. The interior sets are adequate if not elaborate and are "dressed" in a satisfactory manner, the border town exterior set is large and detailed, and the location footage appears realistically remote and norteño. As noted earlier, the film also makes good use of a helicopter to further the plot, which belies the cheapjack reputation some América films have gotten.

There are also a few nice touches which elevate this above the routine. One is rather shocking for the time: early in the movie, the drug smugglers visit various campesinos to convince them to plant poppies. As their 'copter flies towards one farm, we see the teenaged daughter of the owners bathing in a river, wearing a sheer shift which reveals rather a lot of her body. It's not nudity per se (since her skin is technically not exposed), but it still came as a surprise to me.

The character of drug addict El Rata is amusing although not really comic relief. Pancho Córdoba strikes just the right middle ground between twitchiness and cockiness, although the script does get a little confusing later on as he apparently switches sides with no explanation.

There's also a nice throwaway bit in one of the cabaret sequences--which are nicely filmed, though Roxana Bellini isn't exactly a dynamic dancer--a little person is among the club patrons staring at her, open-mouthed, when his little-person wife (presumably) walks up and yanks him away. These are the sort of minor fillips which make the difference between a routine picture and one that's a little better than average.

El mundo de las drogas is an efficient and slick "B" action film.
Cuando acaba la noche [When the Night Ended] (Puerto Rico Films Productions/Columbia Pictures, 1964)

Prod: Damián Rosa; Dir: Julián Soler; Scr: José María Fernández Unsaín; Photo: Alex Phillips Jr.; Music: Radamés Reyes Alfau; Assoc Prod: Florencio Pagan Cruz; Co-ord: Jorge Camargo; Prod Mgr: Bebe Rosa; Film Ed: Carlos Savage Jr.; Camera Op: Carlos López; Makeup/Hairstyles: Nydia Caro; Sound Engin: Manuel Topete; Recordist: J. García Esparza; Re-Rec: Salvador Topete; Sound Ed: Reynald Puente Portillo

Cast: Arturo de Córdova (Dr. Mario Salinas), Marga López (Lina Salinas), Miguel Ángel Álvarez (Luis), Marta Romero (Eva), Orlando Rodríguez, Manuel Pérez Durán, Walter Buso, Juan Boria, Efraín López Neris, Vicente Vázquez, Gil de Ortega, Fernando Robles, Bertha Morales, Sara Cabrera, Charles Gibbs, Tino García, Edwin Ramírez, Nydia Caro, Luis Lucia, José García, Guillermo Cantillo, Jimmy Talavera, Trio Los Rubios

Notes: although the titles are identical, this was not a remake of Cuando acaba la noche (1950), a Mexican crime drama which--coincidentally--also featured traffic in illegal narcotics. There was a brief flurry of drug-themed films in the late ’40s and early ’50s, then another in the early ’60s, before the floodgates opened in the late 1970s with numerous tales of narcotraficantes like Emilio Varela, Camelia la Texana, the Red Car Gang, and so on.

Cuando acaba la noche (1964) features some scenes shot in New York City (mostly, Arturo de Córdova wandering around the streets as the opening credits roll), but--according to a printed notice--"the greater part of this movie was filmed in the luxurious Puerto Rico Sheraton hotel" (in San Juan). De Córdova and López are the two "Mexicans" in the cast (although both were actually born in Argentina), but both Miguel Ángel Álvarez and Marta Romero were familiar faces to Mexican film audiences; the major behind-the-camera talent (director, screenwriter, cinematographer, film editor, sound crew) were also Mexican imports.

In a New York hospital, Mario (his name isn't revealed until later) is cured of heroin addiction after a grueling three-month treatment. Although no longer an addict, he has complete amnesia: the only clues to his past are an expensive ring he was wearing when admitted, and a book of matches from a Puerto Rican nightclub. Mario pawns the ring and buys clandestine passage on a boat to Puerto Rico in search of his identity. At the nightclub, he's recognised by Eva, the featured singer. However, when they later rendezvous at her apartment, Mario discovers Eva never knew his true identity, even though they had a brief affair before he suddenly vanished.

Mario gets a job as a roulette croupier. One night, a well-dressed woman seems shocked to see him, but is rushed out of the club by some men before Mario can speak to her. The woman is Lina, and she complains to her escort Luis that he'd told her Mario was dead. Luis gives Lina, an addict, a shot of heroin to calm her down. Luis and his henchmen don't think Mario poses a threat to their illegal business, since he has amnesia, but they decide to murder him just to be safe. However, Eva is the one who dies in a drive-by shooting. To save Mario from future attempts on his life, Lina tells him the truth.

Mario is scientist Dr. Mario Salinas, who came to Puerto Rico with his wife, Lina, to do medical research. Lina, bored and angry at Mario's neglect of their marriage, allows Luis to escort her in the evenings. Luis falls in love with Lina and addicts her to heroin so he can control her life. When Mario learns this, he furiously informs Lina he's going to denounce her and Luis to the police. Instead, Luis and his men kidnap Mario and addict him to heroin, then dump him on a tramp steamer bound for parts unknown. It was on this boat that Mario arrived in New York City, which led to his eventual cure.

After a vicious fight, Luis is about to kill Mario and recapture Lina but the police arrive and shoot the drug
dealer to death. Lina enters rehab to kick the habit so she and Mario can be reunited.

Cuando acaba la noche has a solid script by José María Fernández Unsain which preserves the mystery sufficiently (when Marga López shows up it's fairly clear she's Mario's wife or something but the details aren't revealed too early) and avoids too much pat moralising. Lina isn't the dutiful scientist's wife, patiently sitting in a hotel waiting for him to show up each night, she's bored and selfish and not shy about expressing her feelings. Mario's work might be for the benefit of all mankind (it's not clear, but apparently he's working on a cure for some illness), but Lina doesn't really care--she wants to be entertained. Mario isn't a saint, either, ignoring his wife's needs, physically pushing her to the floor when he learns of her addiction, and having an affair with Eva.

There are a number of flaws in the screenplay. The chronology of Mario's affair is confused: when he learns of Lina's addiction, he immediately sets off to tell the police, before being "deported" to New York on a boat. This means Mario must have had an affair with Eva before he found out Lina had been unfaithful to him and was using drugs, so he isn't morally blameless.

A few mechanical details of the plot falter as well. Lina rather too easily falls into addiction, for instance. Furthermore, the script takes pains to inform us that Lina has not yet slept with Luis (even though she believes Mario has been dead for more than 3 months, and she's addicted to heroin, supplied by Luis). This makes Luis seems like the world's most patient villain (partly because he's romantically attached to Lina, though he doesn't try to win her affection, he uses drugs and threatens to coerce her into sleeping with him, yet for some reason he doesn't actually force himself on her). The idea that Mario would go all the way to Puerto Rico on such a flimsy clue as a matchbook seems slightly far-fetched (and how does he get back to Puerto Rico? He's standing around on a dock and a shifty-looking sailor basically says "Hey, you want to illegally go to Puerto Rico?"). Finally, Lina's flashback in the latter half of the film is a bit of a cheat, since it contains scenes in which she is not present and about which she could not have known any details.

In one flashback scene, Mario meets a police official who mentions the recent upsurge in local drug dealing. The specifics of Luis's drug operation are vague: he alludes to having a boss, he's only shown with one client, etc., so he seems to be a rather small-time operator, although he's apparently not a street-level dealer. Mario's withdrawal symptoms aren't depicted in great detail, but the opening sequences and the flashback scenes in which he is forcibly addicted to heroin are relatively grueling and realistic. Lina cowers in fear at the end of the movie as she enters the treatment center: there are alternating shots of Mario's eyes and Lina eye's through a slot in the door as it closes, locking her in.

Cuando acaba la noche is fairly well put together: although existing prints are of rather poor quality, the direction and photography seem slick and professional, without the crude or homemade look that mars some "runaway" productions (caused by a combination of technical issues or limitations, different film stock and/or lighting, inferior sound recording and/or extensive post-dubbing, and so forth). The subsidiary actors are all at least adequate--Puerto Rico had a substantial stock of trained performers who worked on television, in live venues, and in films (when they could), so films shot in Puerto Rico avoided the awkwardness present in some co-productions filmed in Latin American countries in which smaller roles were populated by well-meaning amateurs. Chiefly a showcase for Arturo de Córdova and (to a lesser extent) Marga López and Miguel Ángel Álvarez, Cuando acaba la noche is a satisfactory drama with a decent story and reasonable production values.

Cargamento prohibido
[Forbidden Cargo]
(CLASAS Films Mundiales, 1965) Exec Prod: Felipe Subervielle; Dir: Miguel M. Delgado; Scr: Alejandro Cavanillas [Fernando Galiana]; Photo: Gabriel Figueroa; Music Dir: Antonio Díaz Conde; Prod Chief: Antonio Guerrero Tello; Asst Dir: Américo Fernández; Film Ed: Gloria Schoemann; Art Dir: Manuel Fontanales; Lighting: Luis Garcia; Camera Op: Manuel Santaealla; Makeup: Elda Loza; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Francisco Alcayde; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Sound Ed: José Li-Ho; Union; STPC
Cast: Narciso Busquets ("Miguel Lozano" aka Sebastián Gálvez), Alma Delia Fuentes (Marta Villanueva), Wolf Rubinskis (Carlos Aguilar), Rubén Rojo
Notes: Miguel M. Delgado is best-known as the "house director" for Mario Moreno "Cantinflas," helming virtually all of the comedian's films from 1941 to 1982. But Delgado had plenty of time between these assignments to handle other films in all genres. Cargamento prohibido is a competent thriller: nothing especially new or unique, but well-made and with a decent cast.

Perhaps the three outstanding aspects of Cargamento prohibido are Narciso Busquets as the hero, Emily Cranz as the secondary love interest/musical guest, and a very good fight scene between Busquets and Wolf Rubinskis at the climax. Born in 1931, Busquets had been a child actor in the 1930s and 1940s (his father was actor Joaquín Busquets), then was mostly off-screen in the 1950s, doing voice work (a profession he continued to exercise for many years). He returned to prominence as an actor in the '60s but was generally cast as villains and, later, in character parts. Cargamento prohibido is one of his few starring roles and he's fine (he also looks a lot like Stacey Keach). Within a few years, however, he'd put on weight and--literally and figuratively--moved into "heavy" roles.

Emily Cranz, born in Arizona, was a popular singer and dancer in the '60s and she's showcased here in four musical numbers. The script is curiously ambivalent about the two female roles in the film: Marta (Fuentes) seems to be hero Miguel's love interest, but there isn't much chemistry between them (and it's later revealed that she was engaged to his late brother, so that's awkward), whereas Nelly (Cranz) and Miguel flirt openly and seem to be a better match. However, Nelly departs for unspecified reasons, apparently leaving Miguel and Marta together, except...at the film's end Miguel goes away alone, albeit after suggesting he and Marta might reunite once they've each had time "to think." I'd like to go a little "extra-filmic" and hope that it's Miguel and Nelly who eventually hook up later.

Although there are a few bursts of action earlier, the brawl between Miguel and villain Carlos (Rubinskis) at the climax is the picture's highlight. Taking place after hours in a nightclub, the fight lasts several minutes and is very well-staged and shot. There may have been some doubling involved, but most of the time it's clear that Busquets and Rubinskis were doing their own stunts. Chairs and tables are smashed, the two men grapple furiously. This is one of the better "Hollywood-style" fights I've seen in a Mexican film.

Miguel Lozano arrives in a port town on Mexico's Pacific Coast (location footage was shot in Mazatlán, but the city isn't specifically named in the movie), looking for Carlos Aguilar. Carlos runs a nightclub but is also reputed to be involved in organised crime; Miguel says he was recommended by a gangster in the USA, but Carlos isn't interested in hiring a new henchman, and his brother Robert agrees. Miguel meets Marta, a young woman who runs the town's newspaper: she tells Carlos personally and also hates what his criminal activities are doing to the region. Miguel later tells Marta that he is her..
Carlos assigns Miguel to drive a shipment of drugs to the USA, but it's a trap: Miguel turns the vehicle over to the police and they discover only sand. This proves Miguel is a police spy and Carlos and Roberto attempt to kill him, but Miguel shoots Roberto and has the aforementioned fight with Carlos that culminates in the latter's arrest. Miguel leaves town but he and Marta may meet again some day.

The production values of *Cargamento prohibido* are satisfactory. As García Riera notes, very little use is made of the Mazatlán location shooting: there are various street scenes and such, but the majority of the film's footage takes place on interior sets created at the Churubusco studios in Mexico City. These sets aren't especially lavish, but they're serviceable and the whole film is slick and professionally assembled.

**Mil Máscaras** (Filmica Vergara Cinecomisiones-Columbia Pictures, 1966)

*Prod:* Luis Enrique Vergara; *Dir:* Jaime Salvador; *Scr:* Ramón Obón; *General Idea:* Adolfo Torres Portillo; *Photo:* Alfredo Uribe; *Music:* Gustavo César Carrión; *Prod Mgr:* Jorge García Besné; *Asst Dir:* Ángel Rodríguez; *Film Ed:* J. Juan Munguía; *Art Dir:* Alejandro Herrera; *Makeup:* Armando Islas; *Dialog Rec:* Jesús Sánchez; *Re-rec:* Salvador Topete; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Mil Máscaras (Mil Máscaras), Malú Reyes (Elena), Dagoberto Rodríguez (Andrés Cory), Eric del Castillo (Mario), Agustín Isunza (Prof. Bogardus), Manuel Garay (leading scientist), Fernando Osés (Raco), Ángel Rodriguez Jr. (? orphan boy), Diana Mariscal (singer), Roberto Mayer [sic] (Prof. Singer), Alfonso Torres [Juan Miranda] (Pantera Torres), [Carlos Marcos Aguilar] "Polín," "Dino," Frankenstein [N. León] (club bartender), Patricia Ferrer (gang member), Federico Curiel (don Alejandro), Sadi Dupeyrón (? wrestling spectator), César Gay, Sandra Boyd (Mario's girlfriend), Lucia Muñoz, Altia Michel, Armando Acosta (Raco's father), Guillermo Ayala, Lucia Guilmain (Raco's sister), Ali Junco, Victor Alcocer (dubs Mil's voice), J. Luis Villavicencio, Santanón (wrestling spectator), Carlos Suárez (don Fermín), Gerardo Zepeda & Juan Garza (wrestlers), Antonio Padilla "Picoro" (ring announcer), Eduardo Bonada (cowardly wrestler)

**Notes:** producer Luis Enrique Vergara had lost both El Santo and Blue Demon to other film companies, so in 1966 he signed a relative newcomer, Mil Máscaras (real name, Aarón Rodríguez). *Mil Máscaras* was followed by *Los canallas* (a direct sequel), then Vergara merged his two "name" assets by putting the wrestler in two movies with Hollywood import John Carradine, *Las vampiras* and *Enigma de muerte.*

*Mil Máscaras* has its good points, but is harmed by the pedestrian direction of Jaime Salvador. It's a pity Federico Curiel, who directed the other 3 Vergara Mil Máscaras films and has a substantial acting role in *Mil Máscaras,* didn't helm this one as well. The "action" scenes are uninspired--although Mil himself is energetic, leaping around with gusto--and even the "dramatic" footage drags.

During World War II, a group of four scientists decides to combat injustice in the world by raising an orphan to become a champion of goodness. The child is trained physically and mentally for the task that lies ahead and--20-odd years later--is ready to carry out his mission as Mil Máscaras. The scientists spin a globe and randomly choose a location to begin their quest: Mexico!

Gangster Andrés Cory wants to control lucha libre so he can make money gambling on fixed matches; he employs brutal wrestler Raco and a gang of delinquents to intimidate the wrestlers contracted by arena owner don Alejandro. The scientists who "manage" Mil Máscaras offer their protegé as an opponent for Raco, but are turned down. However, after wrestler Pantera Torres is assaulted by Raco and his gang and must be hospitalised, don Alejandro's secretary Elena convinces her boss to accept the scientists' offer. Mil defeats Raco, which enrages Cory. He sends his thugs to eliminate Mil--they fail, but one of the four scientists who raised Mil is killed. Finally, the gangsters abduct Elena and order Mil to lose a match or she'll die. Mil wins anyway, but he, Pantera, and their friend Mario rescue Elena and break up the gang. In a struggle with Mil, Cory falls off a building to his death. Raco and the others are arrested. [As mentioned earlier, *Los canallas* is a direct sequel to *Mil Máscaras:* Raco escapes from prison in the second movie.]

The origin story of Mil Máscaras is somewhat reminiscent of previous superheroes, including pulp magazine favourite Doc Savage. Why he adopts the specific persona of Mil Máscaras is not clear, nor is the reasoning behind his initial foray into saving the world: defeating a small gang of
THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN  Volume 17 Number 6 (November-December 2011)

criminals trying to control a wrestling arena in Mexico (it's shown that Mexico was chosen randomly for his first real-life test, but it would seem there might be more serious criminal problems that would require his attention...oh well, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, they say).

After their initial introduction, the four scientists (two of whom have names which are unintelligible on the soundtrack) change from a dedicated group of experts to comic relief, bumbling around and arguing among themselves. The death of (the most expendable) one comes as a shock and Mil's violent reaction seems reasonably sincere and is effectively depicted (for a change).

The criminals are an odd bunch. Andrés Cory is a typical businessman-gangster, dressed in a suit and sipping cognac, while Raco is a middle-management thug, and his henchmen are burly quasi-hippies. There is in fact a rather strong and yet illogical "youth" thread in the film, with frequent scenes of go-go dancing--in one sequence, the good guys stop dancing poolside (a chance to show closeups of women in bikinis and Alfonso Torres shirtless--well, he's shirtless a lot, as is Mil Máscaras, so this is a film with more beefcake than cheesecake) and rush to the sordid club where the villains hang out, also dancing. Everybody dance now! This emphasis on youthful environments seems somewhat out of place because virtually all of the characters in the movie are adults rather than teens, and none of them appear likely to be lounging around in go-go clubs (as opposed to more "adult" nightclubs).

It's possible the script was originally written with the idea of much younger antagonists (and possibly protagonists as well), which would explain a bizarre scene in which Raco argues with his parents and storms out of their apartment. Fernando Osés was 44 years old when he made Mil Máscaras and looks it, so this scene is just stupid, not to mention irrelevant. Emilio García Riera writes that production on the film was interrupted due to union problems, and resumed some time later, after Vergara appealed to the government. He suggests some inconsistencies in the finished film may be a result of this hiatus. For instance, in one scene Raco is preparing to burn out Mario's eye with an automobile cigarette lighter. Mario screams as the camera zooms in, then the scene cuts. The next time we see Mario, he's fine. What the--?

Guess Raco changed his mind at the last second. Or something. I can't imagine why a production delay would affect continuity like this--it's not just the usual unbelievable coincidence or convenience-based scripting, it's a cliffhanger that is completely ignored in the next scene!

A trivia note: the dialogue of both the hero and one of the main villains in this film was post-dubbed. The unmistakeable voice of Víctor Alcocer can be heard when Mil Máscaras speaks, and Fernando Osés is also dubbed by someone else (his real voice was rarely heard in movies, allegedly because he had a Spanish accent).

The cast includes a number of performers who would become better-known within a few years, notably bodybuilder Alfonso Torres (who changed his name to Juan Miranda and starred in a number of Westerns) and Patricia Ferrer (who seems to have had a nose job after this film). Diana Mariscal is the musical guest star, and does a ludicrously horrible song which has to be heard to be believed: she's constantly off-key and periodically "sings" "Eh, eh, eh" as if she's being examined by a throat doctor. Mariscal had previously done a satisfactory job as the female lead in Especialista en chamacas, so her terrible performance here is puzzling, if diverting in a train-wreck sort of way (she'd later appear in Jodorowsky's Fando y Lis). Sandra Boyd doesn't sing, but her "acting" leaves quite a bit to be desired (and when she's not delivering her lines in a stilted fashion, she's standing around with a disgruntled look on her face). It's interesting to see Gerardo Zepeda in ring action as a professional wrestler (which he had been in real life), since in most of his films he played thugs or monsters.

Aside from Mariscal's number, the music in Mil Máscaras is actually rather good, if slightly repetitive. The production values are adequate: it appears most of the film was shot on location, and the few sets that were constructed are rather crudely decorated with the art director's idea of what "wild youth" would find attractive (devil masks, stick figures, a drawing of a cat). The World War Two sequences are chiefly composed of aerial stock footage, but a bombed-out building set was constructed so the scientists could rescue a baby from the arms of its dead mother. The filmmakers also pay unusual attention (for a film of this ilk) to continuity, depicting Roberto Meyer with a full head of hair (a bad black wig) in the WWII era, and bald by 1966 (the other men have gone gray in the meantime as well).

Not a bad film, but Mil Máscaras would have been better in the hands of a better director and with a little more care expended on the script.
Sin salida [No Exit] (Cin. Marte, 1970) Prod: J. Fernando Pérez Gavilán, Mauricio Walerstein; Dir-Scr: Toni Sbert; Photo: Raúl Dominguez; Music: Rubén Fuentes; Songs: Salvador Flores, Arturo González "Alegro"; Prod Mgr: Jesús Fragoso; Asst Dir: Fernando Durán; Film Ed: J. J. Munguía; Art Dir: J. Luis Garduño; Script Clerk: Javier Durán; Sound Op: Ricardo Saldivar; Re-rec: Heinrich Henkel; Union: STIC

Cast: Jorge Rivero (Sandro Martínez), Mario Almada (Villegas), Nadia Milton (Carmela), Daniela Rosen (Lucía), Miguel Ángel Landa (Tariq), Arturo Hansel ("El Marqués," aka Vittorio Perruci), Augusto Benedico (doctor), Sergio Jiménez (Manuel), Leticia Robles (Teresa), Pancho Córdova (don Seve), Ernesto Gómez Cruz (Manuel's friend), Margie Bermejo (Maria), Eduardo López Rojas (Manuel's friend), Gerardo Zepeda (Pelicano), Jorge Fegan (detective), Regino Herrera (Tarrugito), Alfredo Rosas, Federico González (Marrana), Arsenio Campos (billiard player), Armando Acosta (El Osteón), Antonio Zubiaga (Policiano), Jorge Marrana (bordello singer), Mario García González (Manuel's friend), Rodrigo Puebla (henchman), Arturo Alegro (bordello singer), René Barrera & Juan Garza (golf thugs), José Luis Fernández (nightclub thug), Enrique del Castillo, Hortensia Santoveña (madame in bordello), José Estrada (Manuel's friend), Cecilia Leger (Lucía's aunt), Miron Levine (Goldberg), Christa von Humboldt (Sra. Goldberg)

Notes: a fairly stylish, hard-boiled crime-action film, Sin salida was the directorial debut of Toni Sbert, whose film career was mostly limited to a handful of pictures in the 1970s. Sbert once said he preferred to make good commercial cinema to bad art-cinema, and the movies he directed are examples of this: only one of them (La plaza del Puerto Santo) isn't easily classifiable as a genre picture. Sin salida is something of a violent neo-noir, with a doomed, flawed protagonist, a femme fatale, urban locations, and a nihilistic conclusion.

Sandro worked for an organised crime syndicate; he fell in love with prostitute Carmela and wanted to go straight, but the mob ordered his execution instead. Sandro kills some of his assailants but is badly wounded and captured by the police. Some years later, he is released and reunites with his friend Manuel. Sandro gets an honest job as a machinist, falls in love with foreman don Seve's niece Lucía, and plans a future, but his former associates track him down. Manuel is murdered and Manuel's girlfriend Maria and Lucía are raped and beaten. Sandro avenges his friends by killing the gangsters, but is unable to find the mysterious head man, "El Marqués." Don Seve and some of Sandro's friends are killed when their shop is blown up. Sandro penetrates the office of Villegas, the organisation's second-in-command, and (before he kills the man) learns Carmela is now married to the wealthy Vittorio Perruci, aka "El Marqués." Carmela has been the one giving the orders to destroy Sandro's life. Santo goes to the Perruci mansion and kills both El Marqués and Carmela, but is fatally wounded himself.

The motivation for the gang's persecution of Sandro is never entirely clear, and Sandro himself spends much of the film attempting to figure out why he's been targeted. Eventually, it turns out El Marqués hates Sandro for killing his brother, and Carmela wants vengeance on Sandro because she loved him and thinks he let her down, but neither of these explanations is entirely satisfactory. However, this vagueness merely adds to the nightmareish, noir-like quality: Sandro simply wants to be left alone, to play fútbol with his pals, to run his lathe (a skill he learned in prison), to marry Lucía and live a peaceful life, but his past won't let him. And while he's perfectly capable of taking care of himself, he can't protect Manuel, or Lucía, or María, or don Seve, or his fellow workers. Even when--after Manuel's death--Sandro breaks off contact with his new circle of friends, they still aren't safe.

Emilio García Riera, among others, has compared Sin salida to Point Blank (1967), and while there are some similarities, the basic premise is inverted: in Point Blank, the protagonist seeks out those who cheated him of his share of a robbery and left him for dead, while in Sin salida Sandro wants nothing more than to live the rest of his life in peace, but the mob won't leave him alone. Interestingly enough, Point Blank was also the (uncredited) "inspiration" for Mauro el mojado (1986), and
Los cafanes produced in 1970 and star Jorge Rivero as a character returning to be a regular guy. Meanwhile, Nadia Milton has almost no footage and spends the place, while the other representing a normal life and future. Sandro in Sin salida is a former gangster and killer who now wants to be a decent working man, whereas Mario in Verano ardiente was (we assume) a good person until his experience in Vietnam turned him into a psychotic assassin.

One last "movie connection"—Sin salida reunites various members of the cast of producer Pérez Gavilán and Walerstein's Los cafanes (1966), casting them in similar (albeit mostly minor) proletarian roles: Sergio Jiménez, Ernesto Gómez Cruz, and Eduardo López Rojas (Óscar Chávez had better things to do, apparently). They're all fine, but this seems like a casting gimmick. Jorge Rivero is satisfactory in his role, though he's not required to emote to any significant extent. Daniela Rosen (Arturo Ripstein's sister) is an attractive young woman and an adequate actress, but she seems distracted and slightly out of place, while Nadia Milton has almost no footage and spends the final scene of the movie repeatedly shrieking "Kill him!" It's interesting to see Venezuelan actor Miguel Ángel Landa in the cast, since Mauricio Walerstein would soon relocate to that country and begin a directorial career there.

Shot mostly on location, Sin salida has a nice, gritty atmosphere, although it occasionally veers from realistic towards expressionistic, as in the opening sequence when Sandro flees from his pursuers in the corridors of a shadowy, empty plaza de toros, or in the flashback sequences in the brothel where Carmen works. In contrast, the barrio scenes are straightforward, neither glamourising nor deprecating the daily lives of the workers with whom Sandro is now affiliated (he even joins their fútbol team). He doesn't quite fit in—in part because Jorge Rivero is so-mature-idol handsome and muscular—but he makes an effort to be a regular guy.

Later in the film, Sandro reverts to his previous profession—tough gangster—and wreaks havoc on his former partners. In one scene, he surprises a group of thugs playing golf and guns them all down, despite five to one odds! Later, he beats up Villegas (Mario Almada, who despite second-billing appears only briefly) to get information about Carmen and El Marqués, then callously shoots his ex-associate to death. Wounded in a skirmish, Sandro has a gang-affiliated doctor sew up the bullet hole without anesthesia, then—learning the doctor has snitched him out—kills the doctor and the men sent to murder him. Tough guy!

Sin salida doesn't stress its film noir-like fatalistic plot—and, as noted above, doesn't have many noir-ish visuals—but it's a taut, exciting and well-made action-crime movie.

INDEX TO VOLUME 17

Articles:
2011 Ariel Awards #3
2011 Ariel Awards nominations #2
A Gringo in Mexican Cinema #4
Mexican Movie Box-Office in 2010 #1
Most Popular Films in Mexico, 2011 #6
Screen to Print: Mexican Movie and Celebrity Comics, Part One #3

Obituaries:
Pedro Armendáriz Jr. #6
Juan Calderón "El Gallo" #6
Kippy Casado #2
Linda Christian #4
Eleazar García "Chelelo Jr." #5
Gaspar Henaine "Capulina" #5
Manuel Esperón #2
Jorge Lavat #5
Manuel López Ochoa #5
Alberto de Mendoza #6
Lilia Michel #4
Humberto Navarro #3
Paul Picerni #1
Antonio Prieto #6

Reviews:
Allá en el rancho de las flores #3
Las amiguitas de los ricos #4
Ángeles y querubines #2
Año bisecto #3
Los astronautas #5
El Atentado #1
El automóvil gris #2
Bendito inferno (Sin noticias de Dios) #2
Cacería humana #3
Capulina vs. los vampiros #5
Carabina 30-30 #4
Chueco el Roto (1954 version) #3
Crónica roja #1
Cuando acaba la noche #6
Dónde el circula termina #6
Los Endemoniados del Ring #1
El Halcón solitario #3
El Infierno #1
El libro de piedra (2007 version) #5
The Living Idol #5
La llamada de la muerte #6
La llamada del sexo #1
Lo veo y no lo creo #1
La Mano Que Aprieta #1
Manos de Seda #4
Mientras México duerme (1983) #4
Los miliones del Chatflán #4
Morir a mi manera #1
Muchachos de barrio #4
El mundo de las drogas #6
Nacido para matar #1
El presionero 13 #2
Qué haremos con Papa? #4
El rápido de las 9.15 #5
La rebelión de los colgados #2
Sin salida #6
Somos lo que hay #2
Tarjeta verde #3
Tempestad #1
La Texana maldita #5
Tiempo y destiempo #3
Tres citas con el destino #5
Las vampiras #5
La vida íntima de Marco Antonio y Cleopatra #4
Virgen de medianoché #6
Yambao #5

THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN is published 6 times a year by David Wilt, 6803 Dartmouth Ave, College Park MD 20740 USA. Contact me at: dwilt@umd.edu
©2011 by David E. Wilt except for material already copyrighted. Read MFB online at: www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~dwilt/mexnews.html