

# The Mexican Film Bulletin

## Volume 18 Number 2

### March-April-May 2012

#### Julio Alemán Dies

Julio Alemán, a popular leading man in Mexican cinema and television since the late 1950s, died on 11 April 2012. Alemán was diagnosed with lung cancer last year, but after undergoing treatment, he returned to work in the play "Perfume de gardenias." However, several months later Alemán suffered a heart attack and was also hospitalised with pneumonia and other complications which eventually led to his death.

Julio Méndez Alemán was born in November 1933 in Morelia, Michoacán, the son of a banker. Although he originally studied agronomy, Alemán decided to become an actor instead. Within a few years of his debut on the stage, TV, and in films, Alemán was promoted to the lead in the "Látigo Negro" series, then went on to appear in numerous movies, alternating between action films, dramas, and romantic comedies. In addition to roles in the "Nostradamus" and "Neutrón" series, Alemán also played superhero "Rocambole," and secret agent "Alex Dínamo" in multiple pictures. He continued to make film and *videohome* appearances into the 2000s, in addition to working in many *telenovelas* and theatrical presentations. Alemán was also a talented singer, although this aspect of his career was not very prominently featured in his movies.

Alemán was married several times (including twice to his first wife) and had six children and nine grandchildren. He served as Secretary General of ANDA (the actors' union) and was also a representative to the Asamblea Nacional.



Morelia, Michoacán, the son of a banker. Although he originally studied agronomy, Alemán decided to become an actor instead. Within a few years of his debut on the stage, TV, and in films, Alemán was promoted to the lead in the "Látigo Negro" series, then went on to appear in numerous movies, alternating between action films, dramas, and romantic

on 6 March 2012; he was 77 years old. González Casanova was born in December 1934 and received his master's degree from UNAM. In the 1950s he began to dedicate himself to promoting the study and appreciation of cinema in Mexico, founding cine-clubs and in 1960 the Filmoteca de la UNAM. He followed this in 1963 with the creation of the film school CUEC.

In addition to these activities, Dr. González Casanova established and guided various publications dealing with cinema, and himself wrote numerous books and articles.

He was also active in film, television, and radio, producing and directing programs and documentaries as well as the occasional fictional work. He can be seen as an actor in a number of independent movies of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *Derrota* and *El infierno tan temido*.

In 2004, Dr. González Casanova received the Salvador Toscano medal for his extraordinary efforts in cinema studies in Mexico. He was the subject of the 2009 book *Manuel González Casanova, pionero del cine universitario* (Univ. de Guadalajara), written by Gabriel Rodríguez Álvarez.



#### More Juan Orol!

Last issue's Juan Orol special, despite its length, could not contain reviews of *all* of Orol's films. Because I didn't want to do two consecutive all-Orol *MFBs*, I have only included a few additional reviews this time, and will continue this method until all of his films currently available to me have been reviewed.



#### Manuel González Casanova 1934-2012

Dr. Manuel González Casanova, who helped create both the Filmoteca de la UNAM and the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos (CUEC), died

**Siboney** (Juan Orol-Raúl Miro Barnet, 1938) *Prod:* Juan Orol, Raúl Miro Barnet; *Dir-Adapt-Story:* Juan Orol; *Photo:* Ricardo Delgado, Agustín Jiménez; *Music Dir:* Rodrigo Pratts; *Songs:* Maestro [Ernesto] Lecuona (5), Rodrigo Pratts (3), Maestro Barros (5), Maestro Rodríguez Silva (2), Maestro Sánchez de Fuentes (1); *Makeup:* Sergio Miro; *Sound Engin:* Rogelio Fernández

## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2



**Cast:** Luisa María Morales (*Ligia*), María Antonieta Pons (*Siboney*), Juan Orol (*Gastón de Montero*), Óscar Lombardo (*Ricardo*), Enrique del Río (*Horacio de Villamar*), Consuelo Sainz (*Felisa*), Ramón

Pérez Díaz (*Francisco*), Lolita Feliu (*young Siboney*), Jean Angelo (*don Pedro, Conde de Villafrancia*), Eustaquio P. Toledano (*don Diego*), Andrés López Ledo (*foreman*), Aurora Lincheta (*Candelaria*), "Chela" Castro (*Caridad*), Jorgelina Junco (*Rita*), Celina (*"santera"*), Amador Domínguez (*Inocencio*)

**Notes:** after producing 7 films in Mexico (directing 5 of them), Juan Orol left the country in 1938 to make movies in Cuba. Orol later said problems with unions and the glut of cinematic melodramas were the reasons for his departure. Orol's first Cuban project--and the only one he made during this visit to the island--was *Siboney*, which introduced María Antonieta Pons to the movies.

Despite the change of scenery and a slight change of genre--*Siboney* is a historical melodrama set in the late 1860s--Oról made the same sort of overlong and poorly-paced film he'd been making in Mexico. To exacerbate matters, the technical quality of the film leaves a lot to be desired (the first Cuban sound feature film wasn't made until 1937, and the recording equipment for *Siboney* came from the newsreel company Royal News), and Orol crams 16 musical numbers into the 97-minute-long picture (including 3 in the first 12 minutes and 6 in the first 30 minutes).

Gastón de Montero protests against the ill-treatment of slaves on his father's plantation and others in the region.



He kills the Count of Villafrancia in a duel over this topic, and is compelled by his father to leave the country to avoid scandal: Gastón goes to Puerto Rico with Ligia, whose singing career he has been promoting.

Some years later, Gastón

returns to Cuba after his father's death. *Siboney*, a slave he'd taken from Villafrancia when she was a girl, is now an attractive young woman. Gastón learns she is the daughter of a nobleman and a mulatto woman: after the death of her parents, *Siboney* was given to a slave couple to raise, to hide her from her late father's enemies. Now, Gastón has Ligia teach *Siboney* how to dress and behave in polite society; she also possesses musical talent. Meanwhile, Gastón frees his father's slaves and gives each family a small parcel of land to farm.

*Siboney*, like Ligia, becomes a singer in Puerto Rico. She and Gastón fall in love, and Ligia (who also loves Gastón), bows out of the picture. Later, *Siboney* leaves Gastón for Ricardo, her singing partner. Gastón learns

Carlos Manuel de Céspedes has declared Cuba independent from Spain, and begun an armed revolution. He returns and joins the fight, but is mortally wounded. *Siboney* returns to Gastón on his death-bed, but Ricardo also appears. Gastón asks Ricardo and *Siboney* to reconcile and be happy. Learning Céspedes and his troops have defeated Spain in a crucial battle, Gastón dies peacefully.

Although *Siboney* was made relatively early in Orol's career, it's remarkably prescient with regards to his relationship with his various "muses."

Gastón manages the singing career of Ligia; while the extent of their romantic relationship is unclear, when Gastón and *Siboney* become involved, Ligia nobly steps aside. Gastón

then creates another star performer, but in this case *she* deserts *him*, seduced by the handsome tenor Ricardo. Gastón takes this in a gentlemanly fashion though there is a nice scene where he is shown sitting alone, bereft, before he's informed of the insurrection in Cuba. Given the personal and professional partnership that developed between Orol and María Antonieta Pons at this time, one has to wonder if Orol somehow anticipated their eventual break-up (and her replacement by Rosa Carmina). The theme of an older man managing the performing career of a young woman—in some cases literally making her a star out of nowhere—is a recurring one in Orol's *oeuvre*, but many of the later films on this topic can be interpreted as the director reflecting on his past relationships. *Siboney* doesn't fit that model, unless there is more to the separation of Orol and Consuelo Moreno that is currently known (at least, Moreno didn't go on to work for other directors after leaving Orol, apparently retiring from films entirely).

The other main point of interest in *Siboney* is the performance of María Antonieta Pons, who would achieve a certain level of success while married to Orol, but became a star under

the sponsorship of her next husband, Ramón Pereda. Pons is immediately recognisable despite her youth and turns in a satisfactory performance—evolving from an unschooled slave into a refined lady—but shows little evidence of the qualities that turned her into a star in the mid-1940s. Most of her musical numbers in *Siboney* are unglamorous "native" dances or staid songs in a theatre setting (and her singing voice appears to have been dubbed).

The musical numbers in *Siboney* are pervasive, even oppressive, overwhelming the slim plot. As would become his habit, Orol tends to clump 2 or 3 numbers together in a short period of time, which kills the



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

momentum and pace of the picture even further. To be fair, the folkloric songs and dances at least retain some musicological interest today, but the pseudo-classical songs by Ligia, Ricardo, and Siboney are extremely dull. The title song is, however, a very catchy musical staple, although its primary performance—once again—is presented in a very staid theatrical setting, with Ricardo singing to an immobile Siboney.

*Siboney* is, setting the musical interludes aside, primarily a melodrama, a love “rectangle” if you will (Gastón, Ligia, Siboney, Ricardo), with anti-slavery and Cuban freedom themes (plus a few instances of Orolian digressions, sub-plots that go nowhere, etc.). Gastón is pretty adamant in his opposition to slavery, killing the Count of Villafrancia in a duel, reprimanding his father’s cruel overseer when that man abuses a slave, then—when he inherits the plantation—freeing the slaves *and* giving them each a house and farmland should they choose to stay.

The Cuban revolution, on the other hand, is almost an afterthought: we don’t see or hear any evidence of Spanish oppression, and Gastón doesn’t seem to think much about the whole liberation idea until (a) Siboney leaves him, and (b) he learns the uprising has already begun. *Then* he returns to the island and becomes an officer in the rebel army. The scenes of battle are very poorly executed and consist of soldiers running around, aimlessly firing their guns, until Gastón is wounded and is carted off by his men. There is little or no discussion of the goals of the revolution (in fact, although slavery was eventually abolished and the Cubans gained some autonomy, Spain didn’t relinquish control of the island until the Spanish-America War, 30 years after the events in this film took place).

As noted last issue, a number of Orol’s films in the 1930s contain prologues, several of them featuring the director himself on-screen.

*Siboney* begins with a long printed prologue that concludes-- “The final commentary of the public...will be the most severe of the critical judgements of this work, and before it, we bow our heads reverently. If it’s adverse, it will serve us as experience and a stimulus for future projects. If it’s favourable...Many thanks.”

The production values of *Siboney* aren’t bad, although obviously a large budget wasn’t available. However, there is a fairly elaborate ball sequence early in the picture which features numerous costumed extras, an impressive



sight. Given the current state of existing prints, it’s difficult to judge the technical quality of the original movie, but the sound recording and photography are sketchy at times. As a curiosity piece, *Siboney* retains some interest, but the over-abundance of musical numbers doesn’t make for a particularly entertaining film.



### Tania la bella salvaje [Tania, the Beautiful Savage] (España Sono-Films, 1947)

*Prod-Dir-Scr:* Juan Orol; *Photo:* Domingo Carrillo; *Music:* Maestro Rosado; *Songs:* Armando Valdespi; *Prod Chief:* Guillermo Alcayde; *Asst Dir:* Julio Cahero; *Film Ed:* José Marino; *Art Dir:* Ramón Rodríguez; *Decor:* Rafael Suárez; *Camera Op:* Enrique Wallace; *Makeup:* Sarita Herrera; *Photo FX:* Machado Hnos.; *Sound:* B.J. Kroger, Paco Alcayde; *Sound Ed:* Lupe Marino



**Cast:** Rosa Carmina (*Tania*), Manuel Arbide [sic] (*Rolando Montiel*), Juanita Riveron (*Fedora aka Isabel*), Enrique Zambrano (*Eduardo*), Kiko Mendive (*Monito*), Juan Pulido (*don Diego*), Mario Jarero (*Pedro Oliveira*), Carlos Pasto (*impresario*), Rafael Plaza (*Frachini, Italian impresario*), Manuel Casanueva (*Dr. Horacio*), Rodolfo Pimentel (*tenor*), Trío Urquiza, María L. Velázquez & Lilia Prado (*bargirls with Tania*), Periquín (*choreographer*), María Cecilia Leger (*Tania’s instructor*), ?Rogelio Fernández (*man in cantina*)

**Notes:** a fascinating film from a psychological viewpoint, *Tania la bella salvaje* could have been titled “Orol’s Revenge.” Although the motif of an older man “mentoring” a young woman appears quite frequently in Juan Orol’s movies, *Tania* is one of the most blatant examples of pseudo-biography, wish-fulfillment, or revenge fantasy in his filmography. The protagonist discovers a diamond in the rough, polishes her into a star, makes her his wife, is betrayed by the ungrateful young woman, but then has (a) the pleasure of seeing her fail after she leaves him, (b) creates a new star with no trouble at all, and (c) graciously accepts the first woman’s abject apology for her poor behaviour (just before she dies). Whether Orol wrote this script thinking of the departed María Antonieta Pons, and/or meant it as a warning to his current muse Rosa Carmina, the sheer outrageousness of it all—not necessarily the melodramatic plot, but the clear parallels with Orol’s life and career—makes *Tania la bella salvaje* a real pleasure to watch.



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

The film is quite good on nearly every other level as well, with a strong cast, satisfactory production values, a decent pace—even with a plethora of musical numbers—and a coherent if melodramatic script. Speaking of musical numbers, the songs and dances in *Tania la bella salvaje* are better than usual, with a real "tropical" flavour (except for one tango, which is used effectively several times).



Rosa Carmina, at least in this point in her career, was not an especially good *rumbera*: her dances were rudimentary and her signature move was agitating her shoulders, bust and head furiously while barely moving her legs or feet. However, she's an acceptable singer and an attractive woman, so her limitations as a dancer can be excused. Juanita Riverón is slightly more accomplished at dancing, but doesn't have Carmina's acting ability or star power. Regardless, the general entertainment level of music in the film is high.

Manuel Arvide (his name is misspelled on the credits—"b" and "v" are pronounced similarly and are occasionally interchanged in written Spanish, although generally not quite so prominently) was a solid supporting actor for years in Mexican cinema, and worked with Juan Orol a number of times, although this was his only starring role. He's quite good, first as the bemused (and slightly lecherous) tourist, then as the dedicated impresario, then as the scorned and bitter husband who at the end proves he still cares for the woman who betrayed and discarded him.



Rolando Montiel vacations on the island of Kanan, where he's introduced to Tania, a local girl who sings and dances for tips. As a child, she was the only survivor of a shipwreck, and has grown up assertive and untamed. Rolando takes her (and her accompanist Monito) back to Mexico, has her rough edges smoothed out, and presents

her in his theatre. She becomes a star. Rolando and Tania marry, but several years later, Tania meets Eduardo, a relative of one of Rolando's friends. Tania and Eduardo have an affair, and Tania eventually quits her job in Rolando's show. "You're as ungrateful as you are vain," he tells her. "You know to what you owe your fleeting fame—me." Rolando turns a girl who works in the theatre snack bar into "Fedora," his newest star. Meanwhile, Tania's career takes a downward turn (we see her in a succession of increasingly less-posh venues, singing before sparse and disinterested audiences). She abuses alcohol and drugs (the drinking is shown, the drugs are only referred to) and Eduardo leaves her. Finally, she winds up a bargirl in a shabby *cantina*. One night, Fedora, Rolando, and a friend go slumming and spot Tania in the dive. Tania collapses and is taken back to Rolando's house to die. She apologises for mistreating Rolando: "I deserve everything that happened to me because I was very bad and cruel to you."



*Tania la bella salvaje* is on one level a traditional show business/romantic melodrama--the "tropical" aspects are limited to the opening section, and after that all the action transpires in Mexico City--and as such is satisfactory, well-made entertainment, and one of Orol's better films in many ways. However, the extra-filmic aspects of the plot resonate very strongly for those who are aware of Juan Orol's career and his relationship with his leading actresses. This makes *Tania la bella salvaje* a key film in Orol's *oeuvre*.



### Antesala de la silla eléctrica [Waiting Room for the Electric Chair]

(Caribbean Films S.A., 1966\*) *Prod-Dir-Scr:* Juan Orol; *Photo:* Agustín Jiménez; *Music:* [Gustavo]

César Carrión [uncredited on print, only on poster]; *Music Dir:* Chucho Rodríguez; *Prod Mgr:* Paco del Busto; *Asst Dir:* José Prieto; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Asst Ed:* Ramón Aupart; *Decor/Sets:* Luke Moberly; *Camera Op:*

## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

Felipe Mariscal; *Lighting*: Santiago Perales; *Makeup*: Paquita Gomery; *Sound Ed*: Abraham Cruz; *Sound Engin*: Tito Martínez; *Re-rec*: Salvador Topete

\*the Mexican poster credits "Caribe Films de Puerto Rico" and "Producciones Juan Orol"

**Cast:** Juan Orol (*Lt. Tony Clark*), Dinorah Judith (*Alicia Scarly*), Frank Moro (*Mario Scarly*), Mario Sevilla (*Capt. Frank Sheiffer*), Felipe de Flores (*Alfonso Braud*), Bertha Sandoval (*Susy*), Manolo Villamil (*Richard Norton*), Rolando Ochoa, Andrés del Campo (*reporter*), Paco del Busto, Miguel Ángel Herrera (*Paul Diamond*), Enrique del Río, Luciano de Pazos (*judge*), Alberto Muñoz, Rogelio del Castillo, Luis Molina, Eugenio S. Torrento, María Magrat, Roberto Monasterio, Lázaro Díaz, Aracelio García, Alberto Piñeiro (*death row prisoner*), Gomery, Conjunto "Panchito Calimano"

**Notes:** this is an interesting and relatively unusual



entry in Juan Orol's filmography, a straightforward detective story with Orol front and center and his newest protégé Dinorah Judith relegated to two musical numbers and a couple of brief dialogue scenes. The direction and script are so

"normal" that in some ways this hardly seems like an Orol movie.

Oh, there are the typically interminable Orolian dialogue scenes, interspersed with some curious script/editing choices. For instance, Lt. Clark goes to see Alicia in a sanitarium, and is told by a doctor he'll have to return in a few days; after one brief scene elsewhere, we're back in the sanitarium and *now* Alicia is interviewed. Why not combine those two scenes into one? Absolutely *nothing* is gained by arbitrarily splitting Clark's visit to the sanitarium into two scenes, set on two different days, especially since they're separated by about one minute of screen time.

*Antesala de la silla eléctrica* is also identifiable as an Orol movie by the presence of some familiar names in the

cast and crew, including regular Orol cinematographer Agustín Jiménez and—in addition to Dinorah Judith—Orol stock company members Mario Sevilla, Felipe de Flores, and Luciano de



Pazos, among others. *Antesala* was primarily filmed in Luke Moberly's Empire Studios near Ft. Lauderdale, Florida (not in Puerto Rico, as some sources indicate, although it is possible—but unlikely—some scenes were shot on the island, or even in Mexico). Post-production was done in Mexico.

Mario Scarly is convicted of murdering movie producer Paul Diamond and sentenced to die in the electric chair within two weeks (the legal system moved much faster in 1966). He asks to see Lt. Tony Clark, the homicide detective in charge of the case: Mario maintains his innocence, but only asks Clark to—after the execution—make sure Mario's sister Alicia receives a sum of money he's set aside for her. She's currently in a sanitarium—the film never states it clearly, but the implication is that she's either a drug addict or an alcoholic. Clark agrees, but later tells Capt. Sheiffer that he believes Mario may be innocent. Sheiffer doesn't agree, and throughout the film argues with and denies every bit of evidence Clark presents; finally, Clark resigns from the police force to continue his investigation.

Clark learns Alicia had a promising career as a musical performer in films, but was exploited and (apparently) seduced and (apparently) turned into an alcoholic (or drug addict) by Paul Diamond. Mario admitted taking a gun to Diamond's office on the night of the murder, to compel the man to pay for Alicia's hospitalisation, but denies killing him. Clark interviews people who knew Diamond, including drunken screenwriter Braud, studio head Biondi, lawyer Richard Norton, and others. He learns Diamond was involved in a fight over control of the studio and was probably killed for his shares in the company. At the end, Norton is exposed as the murderer and arrested; Mario is saved at the last moment from execution (literally—he's *in the electric chair* when the news comes). Clark returns to the homicide squad, vindicated.



Although shot in Florida, *Antesala de la silla eléctrica* is set in California, and the movie industry plays a central role in the plot. There are several exterior shots of the Empire Studios facility, which (oddly enough) has a Asian-style arch in front and a *circular* front entrance. Mario says he brought Alicia from Puerto Rico to work in films: she's excited for the opportunity but soon falls prey to the sinister Diamond, whom apparently everyone hated. Several times during the film Clark tells other people, "If I were a film producer, I'd give you a role," probably an Orol in-joke.

The details of the mystery aren't exactly clear, but a major problem with the plot of *Antesala de la silla eléctrica* is the basic premise: Lt. Clark was the investigating officer who helped convict Mario in the first place, so why didn't he solve the crime *then*, instead of waiting until the execution is two weeks' away? It's true, Mario withheld certain facts at his trial, hoping to spare his sister the ordeal of testifying, so perhaps he's as much to blame as Clark, but it still doesn't speak very well for the abilities of the police force (Capt. Sheiffer says as much when trying to dissuade Clark from pursuing the case,



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

fearing it will embarrass the department) or for the justice system as a whole.



Still, *Antesala de la silla eléctrica* works in large part because classic detective stories are structured as a series of interviews, and this fits perfectly with Orol's penchant for extended dialogue scenes. Orol himself, wearing his trademark fedora and bow tie, demonstrates he's still

a tough guy by slugging a couple of henchmen in one scene. Otherwise, he's absolutely fine as the dogged, alternately smooth- and tough-talking cop, and the rest of the cast turn in good performances as well (for the most part—Alberto Piñeiro has a cameo role and devours the scenery whole). Dinorah Judith's two songs are no great shakes, but at least there are only two of them, and it's rather surprising to see how little footage she actually gets otherwise. This is Orol's picture all the way.

The production values are adequate, with a variety of sets and actual locations on display. The photography is a bit muddy, but this can almost certainly be attributed (at least in part) to the ravages of time, multiple generations of TV prints, and the like.

*Antesala de la silla eléctrica* is insignificant in the greater scheme of cinema, but it's comfortable and pleasant on a mild level, like spending 90 minutes with an elderly uncle as he reminisces about "the old days."



### Organización Criminal [Criminal



Organisation] (Caribbean Films, 1967) *Prod-Dir-Scr*: Juan Orol; *Photo*: Agustín Jiménez; *Music Dir*: Chucho Rodríguez; *Prod Mgr*: Francisco del Busto; *Asst Dir*: José Prieto; *Film Ed*: Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Asst Ed*: Ramón Aupart; *Makeup*: Benjamín Rivera; *Camera Op*: Manuel Santaella; *Sound Engin*: Tito Martínez; *Sound Ed*: Abraham Cruz; *Re-*

*rec*: Salvador Topete; Eastmancolor

**Cast:** Juan Orol (*Tony Florino*), Dinorah Judith (*Silvia Sorrento*), César del Campo (*Guinda*), Manolo Villamil (*Profaci*), Arturo Correa (*Sandy*), Axel Anderson (*Luciani*), Juan Carlos Sta. Cruz, José de San Antón, Félix Monclova, Oswaldo Calvo, Manolo Codeso, Rolando Ochoa, David Ortiz, Alfredo "Tigre" Pérez, Jorge Guerrero, La Lupe (*singer*), Luis Moreno (*singer*),

William Agosto, Víctor Santini, Horacio Olivo, Rafael Plaza, Andrés Carrera, José M. Rodríguez, Pepito Lebrón, Tito Martínez, Rubén González, Andrés Vázquez, Luis A. Cosme, Gil de Ortigas, Walter Buso, José Montilla, Paco del Busto, Nicolás Díaz, Manolo Sabino, Conjunto Musical de Tato Hernández, Víctor Alcocer (*narrator*)

**Notes:** this is a very strange film, even in the Orolian universe. There is almost literally no plot, no drama, no character development. The entire movie consists of gangsters planning to kill people, killing people, then planning to kill *more* people, killing those people, and so on. At one point an off-screen narrator says a year of gang warfare resulted in over 500 deaths, and it feels like we've seen the majority of those depicted on-screen!



*Organización criminal* is set in Chicago, New York, and (very briefly at the end) Puerto Rico. Aside from stock footage—and one scene to be discussed shortly—it appears the film was shot in Puerto Rico (leading to such bloopers as palm trees visible in "Chicago" and "New York," and bilingual signs on various shops in those cities). The curious exception is a short sequence apparently showing Orol actually in New York (more precisely, on the waterfront where the boat docks that takes sightseers to the Statue of Liberty). Nothing really goes on in this scene, but apparently Orol went to New York for some reason and shot a bit of footage there.

In addition to some

familiar Orol stylistic traits—long dialogue scenes, "clusters" of musical numbers, a dialogue reference to him being "old enough to be the father" of a young woman—several new (to Orol) tricks pop up, including multiple scenes in which



characters walk directly at the camera (to provide a scene transition), and odd, pseudo swish-pan transitions between scenes. There are also some budget-driven problems, such as the absence of blanks for the prop guns used in the movie (gunshots are dubbed in, but no muzzle flash appears)—and of course blood-squibs were out of the question, so everyone shot to death dies with absolutely no damage to their clothing whatsoever—and a scene in which Orol's character uses a Tommy gun to kill half a dozen gangsters sitting around a banquet table, without the slightest damage to the numerous bottles and glasses sitting *on* the table.

## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

One rather unusual aspect of *Organización criminal* is the ensemble nature of the cast. Orol (wearing an obvious toupee) is the protagonist only by virtue of his top billing, but he doesn't have appreciably more screen time than, for



example, Manolo Villamil, who plays his primary rival, and Axel Anderson overshadows Orol in the film's second section (in fact, Orol's character is essentially one of Anderson's henchmen). Dinorah Judith does 4 or 5 musical numbers (including one

"tropical" dance and another in which her well-proportioned body is showcased in a body stocking) but only one dramatic scene, and César del Campo has almost nothing to do in his brief appearance.

The film begins in Chicago. An offscreen narrator says "our story takes place during the period of Prohibition," which is absurd, since all of the cars, appliances, etc., are completely contemporary. However, he adds that "this city continues to burn under the fire of machine guns," which seems to contradict his previous statement! A summit meeting of rival gangs, one predominantly Italian and the other a mix of Polish, Irish, and Italian mobsters, fails to resolve their differences, and gang war breaks out. More than half of the film's running time is consumed by battles between the gangs of Tony Florino and Profaci. One man is killed, his death is avenged, a "customer" of Profaci's protection racket is murdered by Florino's men, Profaci retaliates, one of Florino's henchmen betrays him but is killed before he can put his plan into action, and so on. Finally, after a massive amount of carnage (as mentioned earlier, the narrator says over 500 members of the mob died in a year, although with more than 100 policemen), Florino and Profaci both leave Chicago for New York City. Ironically, they wind up working together for the Luciani gang. More killings occur, either rival criminals or uncooperative victims. Finally, things get too hot in



New York, and Florino and some of the others go to Puerto Rico. Luciani decides to have Florino killed for disobeying orders, but Profaci and another man fail in an assassination attempt. However, Florino is arrested when he shoots back at them (they escape) and is sent to prison as the film concludes.

To speak of production values on this level of filmmaking is splitting hairs. Yes, the sound recording is hollow at times and yes, the photography and lighting aren't very good (but, surprisingly, aren't terrible)--it

should be noted that this was shot in Eastmancolor but the television print I saw was in black-and-white, so this may have affected the visual quality. But the score is amusingly infectious library music in a variety of genres, and Orol is nothing if not ambitious in the settings for the his gunfights and slow-speed car chases, staging them on the street and in actual locations, giving us a good look at "Chicago" and "New York" (\*cough\* Puerto Rico \*cough\*) as he does so.

*Organización criminal* has a surfeit of action but little else. It's essentially a series of alternating scenes: people sitting around talking, and people getting killed. Oddly enough, Orol continued the story in a second movie, *Historia de un gangster*, which presumably contained more of a traditional plot (I saw this years ago but do not currently have a copy to review).



### Juan Orol and Julio Alemán



#### El tren de la muerte [The Train of Death]

(Juan Orol S.A.--Pels. Ontario, 1978) *Exec Prod:* Pedro Oropeza; *Dir-Scr:* Juan Orol; *Photo:* Raúl Domínguez; *Music:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.];

*Prod Mgr:* Arturo Martínez Jr.; *Asst Dir:* Román Hernández; *Film Ed:* no credit; *Art Dir:* José L. Garduño; *Camera Op:* Roberto Rivera; *Makeup:* Viky Fernández; *Sound Engin:* Roberto Martínez; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Dubbing Dir:* Eduardo Liñán; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Julio Alemán (*Álvaro* [or Andrés] Cortés\*), Patricia Rivera (*Estela*), Víctor Manuel Mendoza (*sheriff*), Arturo Martínez (*Tony López*), Dinorah Judith (*Wilma*), Jesús Gómez (*Marciano*), Ramiro Orci (*Anselmo Martín*), Claudio Sorel (*Brooks*), Guillermo Díaz, Francisco Tostado (*man who challenges Tony*), Guillermo Herrera (*card player*), Juan A. Rubín, José Martínez, Raúl Pin Hernández, José Murillo (*townsman on street at end*), Raúl Martínez Yáñez, Laura Garza, Claudia Tate, José Harros, Guillermo Inclán (*man flirting in cantina*), Adolfo G. Romero, Bruno Walker, Ubaldo Olvera, Fidel Garriga, Rubén Márquez (*stationmaster*), Fernando Pinkus (*Martín's henchman*), María Cecilia Leger (*old woman in window*)

\*this character is apparently supposed to be Andrés Cortés, the son of Álvaro Cortés, but he's referred to as "Álvaro" for much of the movie by others.

**Notes:** *El tren de la muerte* was Juan Orol's first feature film shot in Mexico since 1962's *Sangre en la barranca*. In the intervening decade, he'd made 9 movies in Puerto Rico and/or the United States (mostly Miami), the most recent being *El fantástico mundo de los hippies* (1970). Like Emilio Fernández, by the 1970s Orol was perceived as passé, and had in fact been trying to get *El tren de la muerte* (under a variety of working titles)



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

financed for nearly a decade. As it developed, *Tren* was his last directorial effort prior to his death in 1988.



Orol is mostly remembered today for his idiosyncratic gangster films. *El tren de la muerte* is his only true Western, although some of his earlier efforts were rural action films or *rancheras* such as *Sangre en la barranca*. Shot almost entirely on

the América studios "Western-town" set, *Tren* is professional in appearance and boasts a fair number of extras in some sequences. Talky dramatic scenes alternate with enough action to almost make one overlook the skimpy plot.

Andrés Cortés arrives at the train station near Valle del Paraíso. Learning the next train departs the following morning, Cortés rides into town looking for three men: Brooks, Martín, and Marciano. He finds Brooks in the office of saloon owner Vilma--shots are exchanged, and Brooks dies. Cortés escapes. The sheriff is a puppet of Martín and Marciano, who run Valle del Paraíso. The sheriff interrogates saloon girl Estela--who had a brief conversation with Cortés--but she swears she doesn't know the stranger. Cortés meets Estela on the street and forces her to take him to her room; he questions her about Martín and she agrees to help him in his quest if he'll take her out of Valle del Paraíso the next day.

Estela lies and tells Cortés that Martín is on his ranch; instead, she goes to see Martín in his office. Cortés enters and shoots the man. Martín's henchmen pursue Cortés through the dark streets of town; he's saved from an ambush by Mexican Tony López. Vilma gives Cortés



shelter and tries to seduce him, but the sheriff arrives in pursuit of the stranger. Cortés flees, after Vilma gives him a rifle. However, Estela meets him and says the gun is unloaded. Cortés has a showdown with Marciano in the saloon, and López once again saves him from an ambush. Marciano is shot to

death. Martín, Brooks, and Marciano were responsible for the death of Cortés's family, eight years earlier, and he has now avenged them.

Cortés leaves town, forgiving Vilma for her treacherous moment of weakness. The sheriff, freed of his obligations to the corrupt Martín, Marciano, and Brooks, is given another chance by the townspeople. Estela meets Cortés at the train station and they depart together to begin a new life.

*El tren de la muerte* is set in the Old West of the United States, albeit one modified for Mexican cinema. The signs on the buildings are in English and the costumes are *estilo*

*gringo* (or cowboy), but everyone speaks perfect Spanish and has more or less Hispanic names (except "Brooks"). Arturo Martínez is the only stereotypical "Mexican" of the bunch, wearing a *serape* and a big *sombrero*, but--a curious reversal--his name has been Anglicized to "Tony" López!

Because the plot is so threadbare, the movie wastes a lot of time--particularly in the first section--on completely irrelevant sequences, such as one in which a gunman challenges Tony López (he loses) and another in which an argument breaks out in the saloon over a card game. The putative love triangle between Cortés, Estela, and Vilma is ridiculous and illogical, although it is interesting how both women betray and rescue Cortés, with no real motivation or explanation. The relationship between Brooks, Martín, and Marciano is unclear and the movie breaks a standard dramatic rule by having Martín--who seems to be the ringleader of the villainous trio--killed



in the middle of the film, saving the dramatic "final confrontation" for Marciano, who has been off-screen for most of the picture and has no real personality.

The performances are satisfactory, within the parameters of the



poor script. When the motivations and actions of the characters are so confusing, it is difficult to fairly judge the actors. However, no one turns in a particularly poor performance. As noted above, the production values are adequate, and Orol keeps things moving in the action scenes; despite the long stretches of dialogue, *El tren de la muerte* doesn't drag significantly.

Final notes: the special credit for "dubbing" is curious. Patricia Rivera's dialogue was entirely post-dubbed by someone else (for whatever reason), but many of the other players did their own voices, either recorded live or in post-production. Also, *El tren de la muerte* received a "B" classification when released, indicating mild content, but it does feature a brief but clear (and surprisingly unmotivated) topless scene by Dinorah Judith.

[Reprinted from *The Mexican Film Bulletin* Vol. 14 Number 4]



### Julio Alemán

#### El Tunco Maclovio [Maclovio the Maimed]

(Prods. Brooks, 1969) *Exec Prod*: Larry Brooks; *Prod*: Oscar J. Brooks; *Dir*: Alberto Mariscal; *Scr*: José Delfoss; *Photo*: Rosalío Solano; *Music*: Ernesto Cortázar Jr.; *Prod Chief*: Enrique Morfin; *Asst Dir*: Jesús Marín; *Film Ed*:



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

Carlos Savage Jr.; *Camera Op*: León Sánchez; *Makeup*: Román Juárez; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec*: Luis Fernández; *Union*: STPC; Eastmancolor



**Cast:** Julio Alemán (*El Tunco Maclovio Castro*), Juan Miranda (*Julián Moncada*), Mario Almada (*Juan Mariscal*), Bárbara Angely (*Sara Montaña*), Nora Cantú (*prostitute*), Eric del Castillo (*Yuma*), Juliancito Bravo (*Marcelo Pavón*), José Ángel Espinosa (*"Ferrusquilla" (bearded gunman)*), Eduardo Arcaraz [sic]

(*Tadeo Moncada*), Carlos Agosti (*sheriff*), Federico Falcón (*Martín*), Carlos León and Paco Pharres (*saloon men*), Jorge Patiño (*Fulgencio & his twin*), Jesús Gómez (*ranch hand*), Hernando Namé (*balcony ambusher*), Juan José Laboriel (*Clemente*), Roberto Meyer (*Matías*), Jorge del Rosal (*bartender*)

**Notes:** from the mid-1960s through the end of the 1970s, Alberto Mariscal was the primary director of Mexican Westerns (although he occasionally made other films, including the Kalimán series and even an adaption of "Tom Sawyer"). Most of these were in the style of the



then-popular spaghetti Westerns, and *El Tunco Maclovio* is a good example of this, both in style and content (and it was rather widely exported as a result --including to Spain and Italy, the "homes" of spaghetti Westerns). It's not Mariscal's best film, but it's reasonably entertaining.

Julián Moncada escapes an ambush planned by Martín, an employee of powerful rancher Laura Montaña. Montaña sends Martín with a message for gunfighter Maclovio, known as "El Tunco" because he has only one hand: Martín delivers the letter, then dies after drinking from a poisoned waterhole. Maclovio sets off for the Montaña ranch; on his way he kills two men in a saloon

gunfight, which sets the local sheriff after him. A stranger, Juan Mariscal, helps throw the sheriff off the trail. Maclovio also meets Marcelo, a boy who lives in the forest



near the Montaña ranch, and they become friends. Julián and Maclovio have a confrontation on a narrow mountain trail, and Julián dies at the hands of the gunman. Laura Montaña's daughter Sara, who was engaged to Julián, and Julián's father Tadeo vow vengeance. When Sara and Maclovio accidentally meet while bathing in a river, she attempts to kill him but they wind up in a heated embrace.

Meanwhile, Juan Mariscal saves Maclovio's life by killing Yuma, one of Sara's ranchhands. Years before, Maclovio accidentally shot his best friend, Juan's son. He cut off his own hand in remorse, but Juan says that's not enough: Maclovio must die, but it will be at the moment when it will hurt him the most.

Maclovio decides to go away with Sara and start a new life; he offers to take Marcelo, but the boy insists he wants to be a gunfighter, prompting Maclovio to strike him and then leave. Maclovio and Sara are reunited at the Montaña ranch, when suddenly Marcelo and Juan Mariscal appear. Juan changes his mind about killing Maclovio, but the treacherous Sara gives the order and the sheriff, Tadeo Moncada, and other members of the posse open fire and Maclovio is shot to death.

*El Tunco Maclovio's* script is confused and cryptic at times. Laura Montaña is never seen (except in the pre-credits sequence, and her face isn't shown even then), but presumably she wants to hire Maclovio to kill Julián so he won't marry Sara and thus gain control over some of her land (which formerly belonged to Julián's father). However, after this Laura is never heard from again, or even referred to except in passing. Juan Mariscal apparently has been searching for Maclovio for several decades, and no explanation is given as to how he finally found him (dumb luck?), particularly since Maclovio apparently doesn't live anywhere near the Montaña ranch (based on Martín's extended journey to find him early in the movie). Why does Maclovio kill Julián? Did Laura's letter inform him that Julián was his target? (Because Maclovio never actually *meets* Laura to get instructions.)

The film also includes disparate scenes which in and of themselves may be entertaining, but which do not advance the plot at all. *El Tunco Maclovio* begins with



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

a showdown on the main street of town between Julián and a bearded man, but this is all revealed to be a ruse so Julián can gun down Martín's ambushers. Later, the bearded man shows up in a general store to have a tooth pulled; Maclovio happens to be shopping there, and saves the man's life from the vengeance-seeking twin brother of someone the bearded man (a bounty hunter?) had killed earlier. The whole sub-plot with Marcelo is overly sentimental and marred by awkward dialogue (delivered in an annoying dubbed voice) on Marcelo's part.



Formally, the film has good and bad points. Director Mariscal moves his camera effectively at times, and emulates the spaghetti Western style of giant close-ups, but he also includes some odd camera tricks (two sequences have extended superimpositions, and the final shoot-out isn't staged very effectively or coherently). The flashback scenes of young Maclovio accidentally killing Juan's son, then cutting off his own hand are tinted red and the special effects of the hand-chopping are risible (and Maclovio as



an adult apparently has no problem doing anything--including saddling a horse--despite his handicap).

One notable flaw is the music score.

Ernesto Cortázar Jr. contributes a nice theme song and a few Morricone-like snatches of music, but the rest sounds like ill-chosen library music that ends abruptly when the scene changes (sometimes in the middle of a scene) rather than segueing into a new piece. One assumes the humour is unintended, but every time someone says "El tunco Maclovio," there's a music "sting," which is hackneyed at best and laughable at worst (particularly with repetition).

The performances, dubbing aside, are solid (with the possible exception of Julián Bravo, and Juan Miranda is given the annoying habit of laughing foolishly at odd intervals). Julio Alemán, Mario Almada, and Eric del Castillo are fine, and it's interesting to see Eduardo Alcaraz

(whose last name is misspelled on the credits, something not unusual in Mexican cinema) playing a bitter, grizzled rancher rather than his usual urbane self. Bárbara Angely and Nora Cantú are attractive, but Angely's role is underwritten and while Cantú has a good part as a prostitute, the dubbing hurts her performance considerably. The production values are satisfactory, with effective use of natural locations and a substantial "Western town" set (probably in Durango, although some footage was also shot in Torreón).

*El Tunco Maclovio* was the second Western produced in 1969 by Oscar J. Brooks: *Juan el desalmado*, directed by Miguel Morayta, also featured Juan Miranda and Eric del Castillo, and was also an "adult" Western (rated "C," roughly equivalent to an "R," for nudity and violence). Both films were reasonably successful, and were later paired for double-feature release.



**Amor perdóname** [Forgive Me, Love] (Prods. Jerónimo, 1967) *Prod-Dir:* Jerónimo Mitchell Meléndez; *Scr:* Jerónimo Mitchell, José de San Antón; *Story:* Jerónimo Mitchell; *Photo:* Orlando Rodríguez Leal; *Prod Mgr-Asst. Dir:* Félix A. Ramírez; *Prod Chief:* Tony Rigus; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas Priego; *Camera Asst:* Manuel Jiménez; *Lighting:* César Marrero; *Makeup:* Estela Cid, Rosie Badillo; *Sound Rec:* Santos Sales; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz; *Re-rec:* Salvador Topete; *Asst Ed:* Ramón Aupart; *Theme Song sung by:* César Costa

**Cast:** Julio Alemán (*Carlos Sandoval*), Kitty de Hoyos (*Ana María Rivas*), Marta Romero (*Marta Núñez*), Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*Arturo Solano*), Susana Cabrera (*Lupe*), Braulio Castillo (*prosecutor*), Orlando Rodríguez (*judge*), José de San Antón (*Lic. Cáceres*), Efraín López Neris (*Freddy*), Delia Esther Quiñones, Víctor Santini, José Manuel Caicoa, Luis Alberto Martínez, William Agosto, Eva Alers, Reinaldo Medina, José Hernández Zamora, Juan Batista, Vicky Sanz

**Notes:** although director Jerónimo Mitchell Meléndez had worked with Mexican performers before (Kitty de Hoyos appeared in his New York-shot *Heroína*), *Amor perdóname* was his only Mexican co-production. [Although no Mexican company is credited, the number of Mexican performers and the fact that some scenes were shot in Mexico is the tip-off.] *Amor perdóname* is a fairly entertaining, if routine, melodrama that changes to a legal drama in the final section.

Businessman Carlos meets Ana María in a Mexico City nightclub where Marta Núñez is performing. Carlos, although born in Mexico, has been a resident of Puerto Rico for a number of years and is acquainted with Marta. He escorts Ana María home, and makes a date for the next day. Ana María is actually a prostitute whose pimp, Arturo, thinks Carlos would be a good client, and urges her to be "nice" to him while Arturo is away on a trip. Carlos and Ana María fall in love, and he proposes marriage to her, indicating he must return to Puerto Rico soon. She turns him down but changes her mind on the advice of her maid Lupe.



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

"San Juan, Puerto Rico. One year later." Ana María gives birth to a son; she and Carlos are a happy couple, and he brings Lupe from Mexico to be his wife's companion. They are invited to a party at the home of Marta Núñez, who has remarried--and Ana María is stunned to see Arturo is the singer's new husband! Arturo begins to blackmail Ana María, who asks for Carlos for money

under false pretenses. Meanwhile, Marta suspects Arturo is being unfaithful to her. Desperate to keep his affections, she asks Carlos to allow her to purchase a radio station he has an option on, so Arturo can run it. Carlos is reluctant to give up his dream of a powerful chain of



broadcasting stations.

Arturo decides to leave Marta and demands \$100,000 from Ana María as one final payment. If she lacks the cash, she can arrange for her jewels to be "stolen" by him. Ana María threatens to shoot herself (with a pistol she took from Carlos' desk), but Arturo wrests the pistol away from her. Later, Arturo tells Marta he never loved her and is going away forever.

That night, Carlos catches a shadowy intruder in the house. They struggle, and someone shoots the burglar to death: the victim is Arturo! Carlos, who did not fire the fatal shots, shoots his pistol twice into a potted plant, then calls his lawyer and confesses to the killing. He claims self defense, but the prosecution decides to charge him with murder. Despite his lawyer's pleas, Carlos refuses to let Ana María testify. Marta does take the stand and denies her marriage was in trouble. Carlos' attorney learns Carlos owned two identical pistols, and the bullets that killed Arturo were not from the gun he turned in. The prosecution claims this proves the shooting was premeditated murder. However, Ana María takes the stand and tells her story, admitting she was seduced into prostitution by Arturo, then blackmailed by him. She says Arturo took away the pistol she had, and she didn't shoot him. The prosecution claims she's trying to cover for Carlos.

However, the defense proves Marta had hired a private detective to shadow Arturo. Marta is recalled to the stand and confesses everything: she stole the pistol from Arturo and followed him to the home of Carlos and Ana María, where she killed him as he fought with Carlos.

Ana María prepares to leave Puerto Rico, believing Carlos no longer loves her. However, he admits he knew

of her past all along, and loves her anyway. They reconcile.

The final part of *Amor perdóname* provides an interesting twist on the standard melodrama formula even if some of the legal procedures are a bit shaky. For example, it's the middle of the trial before anyone thinks to test the bullets that killed Arturo see if they were fired by Carlos (to be fair, he did confess to the shooting, but still...). This revelation inspires the prosecutor to change the charge against Carlos from *homicida calificado* (presumably something like second-degree murder) to premeditated murder. It is neat, however, that Ana María's big confession basically counts for nothing: the prosecutor dismisses it as an attempt to exonerate Carlos. Only when Marta, in tried-and-true "Perry Mason" fashion, completely breaks down on the witness stand and confesses everything is justice served.

The performances in *Amor perdóname* are pretty good, overall. Marta Romero gets a lot of attention--some big dramatic scenes, a couple of songs--and Pedro Armendáriz Jr. is splendidly evil, which leaves Julio Alemán and Kitty de Hoyos looking a little bland. Susana Cabrera is her usual acerbic self, and the Puerto Rican supporting players are fine. The production values are adequate. Curiously, the scenes in Mexico City are not at all distinctive and could easily have been filmed in Puerto Rico; the Puerto Rican footage--aside from a brief "travelogue" sequence showing various imposing buildings (prominently flying the U.S. and Puerto Rican flags)--is also confined to some anonymous looking buildings and exteriors, not exactly making full use of the island as a movie location.



◆◆◆  
**La muerte pasa lista** [Death Calls the Roll] (Estudios América, 1959) *Dir-Scr:* Federico Curiel "Pichirilo"; *Photo:* Fernando Colín; *Music:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod Mgr:* Luis García de León; *Co-Dir:* Alberto Mariscal; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Arcadi Artis Geney; *Camera Op:* Raúl

Domínguez; *Camera Asst:* Roberto Jaramillo; *Sound Rec:* Enrique Rendón; *Sound Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Julio Alemán (*Julián Ramírez, el Látigo Negro*), Martha Elena Cervantes (*Rosita Valenzuela*), Beto el Boticario (*El Rápido*), Pancho Córdova (*don Miguel Valenzuela*), Lulú Parga (*Julieta*), Diana Ochoa (*Chona*), Héctor Gamboa\*, Alejandro Parodi\*, Genaro de Alba, Fernando Curiel (*Martín*), Roberto Araya, Lupe Llacá



## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

(?Mercedes), Miguel Arenas (*leader of bank robbers*), Norma Angélica (*Victoria López*), Pepe Hernández (*municipal president*), Victorio Blanco (*don Cipriano*), Carlos León (*driver of the "turismo" bus*), Noé Murayama and René Barrera (*outlaws*), Mario García "Harapo" (*town barber*), Manuel Sánchez Navarro (*don Antonio, bank president*), Enedina Díaz de León (*don Antonio's wife*), Vicente Lara "Cacama" (*man in courtroom*), Ángel Merino (*false telegrapher*), Fernando Yapur (*henchman*), Hernán Vera (*don Cuco*), Federico González (*son of Mercedes*)

\*[Parodi and--possibly--Gamboa do not appear in this film, despite being credited on-screen; they do appear in other entries in this series.]

**Notes:** "El Látigo Negro" first appeared in three 1957 movies starring Luis Aguilar, but although his name is the same, the 1959 incarnation of this masked Western hero is *not* intended to be the same character (the Aguilar Látigo's real name was Cristián, whereas the Alemán Látigo is named Julián).



The 1959 series consisted of five films, unusual for the period, where 3 or 4 was the norm for an América series. Although *La muerte pasa lista*, like most América studio movies, allegedly consists of three "episodes"--"Mensaje de sangre," "El Látigo en acción" and "La marca del Chacal" (the episode titles mean nothing, really)--the demarcation between them is not very clear.



The first episode involves a gang of rustlers who somehow learn when ranches are under-staffed, and take advantage of this to steal livestock. Julián Ramírez, aka El Látigo Negro, uncovers the plot: the regular telegrapher was murdered (and his daughter

abducted), so a member of the gang could become his replacement. The spy passed on information so his accomplices could raid the ranch whenever a rancher left town. El Látigo smashes the gang, rescues the kidnapped woman, and exposes the villainous telegrapher.

The second episode is extremely convoluted and feels like it lasts much longer than the other two. Bank robbers have been plaguing the town of San Fernando, and *comisario* (like a sheriff) Miguel is feeling the pressure--his birthday party may be spoiled unless he solves the case! Bank manager don Antonio and his wife are abducted by the robbers. El Látigo helps capture some of the bandits, but the gang's secret mastermind is working as a hotel clerk. He's joined by his sexy assistant Victoria López, but El Látigo defeats them, rescues don Antonio, and saves don Miguel's job.

In the third episode, crazed doña Mercedes orders her mentally-challenged, scar-faced son to murder various people who had earlier sent him to prison (where he was badly injured in a fire, and thought dead). He stabs his victims to death and carves a sequential number of slashes on their body. Don Miguel and his daughter Rosita are captured by the two maniacs, who intend to horribly disfigure them with a hot iron, but El Látigo arrives to save the day. The slasher falls off a cliff and his hysterical mother is arrested.

The various mysteries in *La muerte pasa lista* are quite simplistic and are easily resolved by the Látigo, who actually appears only briefly in each episode. Most of the film's running time consists of byplay between Julián, his comic sidekick El Rápido, don Miguel, don Miguel's daughter Rosita (Julián's girlfriend), Rápido's ditsy girlfriend Julieta, and various other townspeople. The five films were all made consecutively in 1959 with the same crew and the same regulars in the cast, almost as if this was a television series later converted to 5 feature films (which was allegedly what the América studios was doing, but very few of the individual episodes were *really* intended for television).

The weakness of the "mystery" aspect of the scripts hurts, but *La muerte pasa lista* has a number of things to recommend it. The cast is full of familiar faces and the main characters--Julián, Rápido, don Miguel, Rosita--are likeable. The production values are surprisingly good,

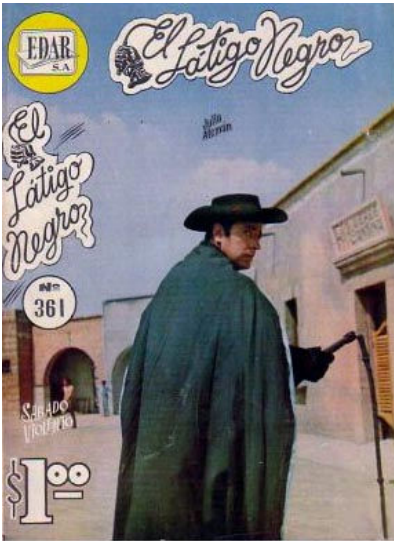


with plenty of extras when needed. Federico Curiel was a very competent director of this sort of movie, and while there isn't a *lot* of action, the Látigo scenes are well done. One curious aspect is the Látigo's use of a very long and fearsome looking black whip, which he wields skillfully, eliciting shrieks of pain from the various villains (this is something you don't often get in such films and is quite surprising and effective). Julio Alemán sings three songs (one per episode) and these are fine; in the second episode, Norma Angélica does a couple of sexy dance numbers in a *cantina*, and although she's attractive enough, these musical interludes feel really out of place.

## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

Pleasant enough in some ways, *La muerte pasa lista* unfortunately does not fully utilise its masked hero, giving the majority of its screen time to his civilian alter ego and that character's friends.

*Addendum:* although Alemán appeared in only 5 "Látigo Negro" films, the character was carried over to a long-running (over 375 issues) series of *fotomontaje* comic books in the 1960s. One interesting thing about this series is that Alemán and Beto el Boticario apparently posed for new photos for the comic series, since their appearance varies from the actual films, which were shot years earlier (the comic was still being published as late as



1967). Alemán seems to have only done new covers: the inside art uses 1959-era photos of Alemán as "Julián Ramírez" (with a moustache), whereas the covers show a more mature Alemán *sans* moustache. However, Beto el Boticario looks older and heavier in the interior photos *and* on the covers, suggesting he worked more extensively on the comic book series.



**Una mujer para los sábados** [A Woman for Saturdays] (Panamerican Films, 1968) *Prod/Dir/Scr:* Manuel Zeceña Diéguez; *Orig. Play:* Federico Inclán; *Photo:* Juan Manuel Herrera; *Theme Song:* Arturo Castro; *Prod Mgr:* Manuel Zeceña Jr.; *Film Ed:* Alfredo Rosas

*Priego; Camera Op:* Pedro Vázquez, Dioncio Juárez; *Re-rec:* Salvador Topete; *Sound Ed:* Abraham Cruz

**CAST:** Julio Alemán (*Javier Lozano*), Tere Velázquez



(Gabriela Alarcón), Amadeo Chabot (*Luisa*), Arturo Castro (*Jacobo "Chicuco" Schneider*), Velda González (*Valeria, maid*), Angel Cazarín (*Pierre*), Laura Nell [aka Anel] (*Medea, maid*), Pedro Vázquez (*hotel manager*)

**NOTES:** this adaptation of a stage play was shot on location in the Dominican Republic, but makes absolutely no use of "local colour." Producer Manuel Zeceña Diéguez began producing films outside Mexico in the early '60s -- still using largely Mexican casts and crews--mostly for budgetary reasons. [This back-fired in some cases, since he was compelled to pay an "indemnity" to Mexican film unions before his films could be shown in Mexico.] The action of *Mujer...* takes place almost entirely inside and on the grounds of a single house and in and around the Hotel Embajador, and while these are satisfactory and attractive locations, the picture could have been made in literally *any* country.

Javier meets Gabriela, with whom he has been corresponding romantically. They have fallen in love via long distance. He is surprised to discover she is a young and attractive woman; likewise, she is shocked to discover he is handsome. Luisa, Gabriela's friend, accidentally reveals Gabriela is a "kept woman," whose expenses are paid by Chicuco, a rich Jewish man who only visits her on Saturdays. Javier storms out, but love conquers all, and he eventually comes back and marries Gabriela. They confess to each other that they were hoping to find a rich mate via correspondence, and now they have to find a way to survive. Chicuco, tipped off by Gabriela's maid,





## THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN, VOLUME 18 NUMBER 2

discovers the existence of Javier and withdraws his financial support from Gabriela.

Javier gets a job selling life insurance, but the only rich man he knows is Chicuco (Javier says the insurance



company is picky about their clients: they don't want *poor* people, *sick* people, or *old* people). Gabriela tries to convince Chicuco to buy an insurance policy in her favour, but Chicuco tricks Javier and gets

him in trouble with his boss. Chicuco then proposes a *menage a trois* ("like in vaudeville"), where he will continue to support Gabriela but allow her to remain married to Javier; and in case Javier objects, they won't tell him about the arrangement!

Luisa, with the aid of dress designer Pierre, manages to attract Chicuco's attention, so he decides to make her his mistress as well! Javier displays singing talent and is hired by the swanky Hotel Embajador, at least partly through Chicuco's influence. The End.

*Una mujer para los sábados* is very obviously adapted from a play.



Although Zeceña Diéguez tries to liven things up by having his characters walk around, even moving scenes outdoors in natural locations, he cannot disguise the fact that the picture is basically a string of *long* dialogue scenes

between 2 or 3 people. The insurance-sale sequence is a good example, taking place outside the Hotel Embajador, around the swimming pool. Javier and Gabriela come to see Chicuco; they sit at a table and *talk*. Javier calls his boss on the telephone and then leaves to see him. Gabriela and Chicuco stroll around the pool, sit down somewhere else, and *talk*. Gabriela gets a phone call telling her Javier has been hurt; she leaves. Chicuco runs into Pierre, they *talk*! The *whole film* is like this, with the exception of two interpolated songs near the end of the film (Javier sings one in the shower and one in front of some fountains). The fact that *Una mujer para los sábados* was shot entirely on location does nothing to hide its stage origins.

The acting isn't bad. Julio Alemán and Tere Velázquez have to struggle against their characters' innate unlikeability: Javier is sappy and inept, Gabriela is self-centered and self-pitying. Arturo Castro (who also wrote the theme song) was dealt a better hand by the script,

since Chicuco is a more interesting character; however, Castro's attempt at a Jewish-Middle Eastern accent comes and goes. Amedee Chabot, wearing a brunette wig (probably to set her apart from the blonde Velázquez) is attractive and animated in a good supporting role. Her dialogue is dubbed as usual, although one can see by her lip movements that she *was* speaking her lines in Spanish. Angel Cazarín is adequate as a stereotypical effeminate, French dress designer.

*Una mujer para los*

*sábados* is basically harmless, but it does have an "adult" plot and dialogue and Zeceña Diéguez included a few mildly risqué shots to spice it up: there is no frontal nudity, but Amedee Chabot is seen nude from the waist up (from behind), and there is implied nudity of Velázquez and Alemán in a bedroom scene.

Not particularly good or bad, *Una mujer para los sábados* does at least give one some idea of what a light "sexy" stage comedy of the era would have been like.



**THE MEXICAN FILM BULLETIN** is published 6 times a year by David Wilt, 6803 Dartmouth Ave, College Park MD 20740 USA. Contents ©2012 by David E. Wilt except for material already copyrighted, which is used under the Fair Use provisions of the law.

Read **MFB** online in colour at:

[www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~dwilt/mexnews.html](http://www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~dwilt/mexnews.html)

