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ROBERTO GÓMEZ BOLAÑOS 1929- 2014

Roberto Gómez Bolaños, who shot to international fame in the 1970s with his popular television programs, died on 28 November 2014; he was 85 years old. Nicknamed “Chespirito” (roughly, “Little Shakespeare”), Gómez Bolaños was born in the Distrito Federal in February 1929. Although he graduated with a degree in civil engineering from UNAM, Gómez Bolaños opted for a creative career, first working for the ad agency D’Arcy, and then moving



into radio and television scripting. Among the shows for which he wrote sketches was “Cómicos y canciones,” starring Viruta and Capulina, which then led to work on the comedy team’s films, beginning in 1957.

Gómez Bolaños contributed to the screenplays of nearly two dozen Viruta-Capulina movies, as well as a handful of other

films in the same period (he also acted in about a dozen pictures, in small roles). In the latter half of the 1960s, he wrote comedies for Capulina (solo), Pili y Mili, and Los Polivoces, as well as the occasional one-off, such as the grim Western *Juan el desalmado*. [In later years he’d write his own starring feature films and also scripted (and produced) *Que vivan los muertos!* (1997) in which he did not star.]

However in 1968 Gómez Bolaños returned to television with a vengeance, writing and acting in “Los supergenios de la mesa cuadrada” (Supergeniuses of the Square Table) and other shows for Mexico’s channel 8. This led to “Chespirito” in 1970, and the characters he created there—notably El Chavo del Ocho and El Chapulín Colorado—were soon elevated to their own series, which became immensely popular in Mexico and internationally.

Thanks to his TV success, Televisa—through their new subsidiary Televisión—turned Chespirito into a film star. Beginning with *El Chanfle* (1978), Gómez Bolaños wrote and starred in five feature films over the next decade, directing the last four as well. Although *Música de viento* (1988) ended Chespirito’s career as a movie actor, he remained extremely active, branching out as the author of plays, books, and songs, and supervising the endless exploitation of his television characters. From 1996 to 1998 he was director general of Televisión, managing their film production activities.

Gómez Bolaños was originally married to Graciela Fernández Pierre (who died in 2013); they had six children. His only son, Roberto Gómez Fernández, has had a long career as a television producer and director. Chespirito separated from his wife in 1980 and formed a romantic relationship with his frequent co-star Florinda Meza, whom he married in 2004 after divorcing his first wife.

In later years, Gómez Bolaños had been suffering from ill-health. He relocated to Cancún, because the altitude in Mexico City made it difficult for him to breathe without supplemental oxygen, and was confined to a wheelchair. On 28 November 2014 he suffered a heart attack and died. His body was brought back to the capital for burial; approximately 40,000 people attended a public funeral service at the Estadio Azteca, home of Chespirito’s beloved “América” *fútbol* team.



VICENTE LEÑERO, 1933-2014

Author Vicente Leñero, an influential and acclaimed author, journalist, and screenwriter, died on 3 December 2014 in Mexico City; he was 81 years old and had been suffering from lung cancer. Vicente Leñero Otero was born in Guadalajara in June 1933. While studying engineering at UNAM, Leñero became interested in writing and journalism. His first book was published in 1959, and he went on to write numerous books, stories, screenplays, television programs, and plays; he also worked for many Mexican newspapers and magazines as reporter, writer, and editor.



Leñero’s first screen credits came in the early 1970s on a trio of films directed by Francisco del Villar: *El festín de la loba*, *El monasterio de los buitres* (based on a play by Leñero), and *El llanto de la tortuga*. Other literary works by Leñero brought to the cinema included *Los albañiles* and *Misterio* (based on “Estudio Q”); the author also adapted the novels and stories of other authors (such as José Emilio Pacheco, Luis Spota, and Georges Simenon) and wrote original scripts. Among his films: *Mirolava*, *El callejón de los milagros*, *La ley de Heródes*, *La habitación azul*, *El crimen del Padre Amaro*, *El atentado*, and *Mariana, Mariana*.

In addition to the Salvador Toscano medal, which he received in 2008, Vicente Leñero won 5 Arieles for Best Screenplay (*Misterio*, *Mariana Mariana*, *El callejón de los*

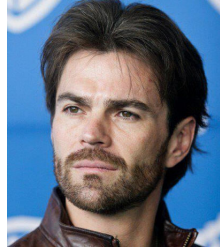
milagros, *La ley de Herodes*, and *El crimen del Padre Amaro*) and was nominated 3 additional times (in two of those cases, he lost to himself for another movie!). He was also honoured numerous times for his literary efforts.

Vicente Leñero is survived by his wife, daughters, and grandchildren.



HÉCTOR ARREDONDO DIES

Actor Héctor Arredondo died on 16 November 2014; he had been suffering from pancreatic cancer. Héctor Arredondo Casillas was born in Mexico City in November 1970, and began acting professionally in the 1990s. After signing with TV Azteca and working in numerous *telenovelas*, his career progressed significantly; his last work in this format was “Los Bravo” (2014).



Arredondo made a number of films, including *La última y nos vamos*, *40 Días*, *Viento en contra*, *Ella y el candidato* and his last, *Cuatro lunas* (2014).

Héctor Arredondo is survived by two young daughters, whose mother is actress Carla Hernández.



MEXICAN BOX-OFFICE HITS OF 2014

At least six Mexican films sold one million or more tickets in 2014: *Guten tag Ramón* (a Mexican moves to Germany, dir. Jorge Ramírez Suárez), *Qué le dijiste a Dios?* (two young women go on a “road trip,” musical-comedy, dir. Teresa Suárez), *Cásase quien pueda* (comedy produced, written, and starring Martha Higareda, dir. Marco Polo Constandse), *Cantinflas*, *La dictadura perfecta* (see reviews [in this issue](#)) and *La leyenda de las momias de Guanajuato* (third in the animated series about a young boy and his weird group of friends who encounter supernatural beings in colonial Mexico).

To date, the most-viewed 2014 film in Mexico is *Maleficient* (12+ million tickets sold), while *La dictadura perfecta* was the top Mexican production (4+ million tickets sold).



REAL PEOPLE IN (SORT OF) REAL STORIES



El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol [The Fantastic World of Juan Orol] (Celuloide Films, 2012) *Prod*: Alejandro Blázquez de Nicolás, Carmen Ortega Casanovas; *Dir*: Sebastián del Amo; *Scr*: Sebastián del Amo, Raúl Fernández Espinosa; *Photo*: Daniel Hidalgo

Valdés; *Orig. Music*: Francisco Albusua; *Asst Dir*: Alfredo Sánchez Sánchez; *Film Ed*: Felipe Gómez, Martín Luis Guzmán; *Art Dir*: Christopher Lagunes; *Costume Des*: Deborah Medina; *Sound Des*: Alejandro de Icaza; *Makeup*: Mari Paz Robles; *Makeup FX*: Roberto Ortiz

Cast: Roberto Sosa (*Juan Orol*; “Johnny Carmenta”), Gabriela de la Garza

(*Mary Esquivel*), Ximena González-Rubio (*Rosa Carmina*), Roger Cudney (*don Guillermo* [William O. Jenkins]), Fernanda Romeo (*Dinorah Judith*), Marissa Saavedra (*Amparo Moreno*), Karin Burnett (*María Antonieta Pons*), Julio Bracho (“policeman” in *electric chair scene*), Esteban Soberanes (“*Charro de Arrabal*”), Rodrigo Murray (*Charles Cabello*), Plutarco Haza (*Maximino Ávila Camacho*), Alberto Estrella (*Emilio “El Indio” Fernández*), Juan Carlos Bonet (*Orol’s childhood friend as an adult*), Rodrigo Cachero (*Memo Alcaine*), Juan Manuel Bernal (*Kodak salesman*), Octavio Ocaña (*Juan Orol as a boy*; *Arnoldo Orol as a boy*), Alfonso Borbolla (*Quirico Michelena*), Jorge Zamora “Zamorita” (*old black man*), Jesús Ochoa (*Gen. Cruz*), Yolanda Montés (*Tongolele*), Rodrigo Corea (*cinema usher*), Mauricio Galaz (*Arnoldo Orol*), Ariadna Pérez Mijares (*Ninón Sevilla*), Amanda Schmeltz (*Mama Orol*), Javier Solórzano (*don Manuel*), Roberto Wohlmuth (*don Gabriel*), Víctor Carrillo (*Orol’s friend as a boy*), Rafael Meraz (*Paquito Franco*), Adriana Guizar (*Consuelo Moreno*), Federico Arana (*Spanish film producer*)



Notes: cinematographer Sebastián del Amo made his directorial debut on this stylish, amusing, and fondly nostalgic biopic (which carries various printed disclaimers admitting “actual names” are used but insisting upon the “fictional” nature of the plot, possibly to avoid legal entanglements).

Particularly notable are the formal aspects of *El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol*, which may be attributed to del Amo’s technical background. The story is told in flashback, beginning in the early 1980s as an aged Juan Orol attends a festival of his old movies. This framing story is in colour, but when Orol discusses his life, the flashbacks are in sepia, black-and-white, and colour, respectively, as his tale progresses from his childhood in Spain [shot silent, with inter-titles] to his subsequent life in Cuba and Mexico. In the late 1950s, there is a scene in which a salesman from Kodak convinces Orol to utilise the then-new Eastmancolour process, and the movie “magically” switches to colour (at first very garish, then becoming realistic). Throughout the film Orol is advised by his “Johnny Carmenta” gangster alter ego—when the

image converts to colour, Carmenta remains black-and-white, a nice touch. Del Amo also uses optical “wipes” as transitions, an homage to “old-fashioned” filmmaking.

The production values of *El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol* are very good, with excellent sets, costumes, and props. Some of these could very well be anachronistic, but I didn’t notice any major bloopers. There aren’t any huge crowd scenes, but the film doesn’t look cheap or artificial (except when it’s supposed to look artificial). Del Amo utilises actual posters and lobby cards as set dressings, and the end credits appear on recreated/modified lobby cards, both nice touches. The soundtrack is largely composed of memorable, vintage popular songs.



Roberto Sosa doesn’t particularly resemble the actual Juan Orol (who’s shown in the opening

sequence, courtesy of his filmed prologue for *El calvario de una esposa*), nor does he attempt to reproduce Orol’s accent (he does use the Spanish expression *Qué coño!* frequently, however), but his performance is quite good overall. Sosa doesn’t do a Juan Orol impression, he creates a character, which is more suited to a protagonist in a dramatic narrative (as opposed to just a cameo appearance). Orol is depicted as someone simply trying to get along in life, who stumbles into filmmaking after a series of career missteps, then develops pride in his work despite widespread critical disdain.

Two recurring threads throughout the film are Orol’s penchant for marrying his leading actresses, and his running feud with “don Guillermo,” a gangster-businessman who eventually takes over the film distribution/exhibition industries in Mexico. Orol’s wives are portrayed by an array of attractive, almost physically-indistinguishable actresses (although to be fair they’re each given distinctive personalities). Least palatable is Karin Burnett as “María Antonieta Pons”—she neither looks,



sounds, nor acts like Pons—while the performers playing Rosa Carmina, Dinorah Judith, and (to a lesser extent) Mary Esquivel fare

somewhat better (Ximena González-Rubio probably resembles Rosa Carmina more than the other actresses look like their real-life counterparts, but as noted above with reference to Sosa/Orol, physical resemblance isn’t the most important thing).

The “don Guillermo” thread is very interesting, although possibly rather cryptic for viewers not well schooled in Mexican cinema history. Roger Cudney, a long-time “professional *gringo*” in Mexican films and *telenovelas*, plays the ruthless businessman, but it’s only after the character’s death that he’s explicitly identified as a foreigner (in a newspaper headline). His real-life counterpart was the wealthy U.S. businessman William O. Jenkins (1878-1963), although (unlike most of the other characters) he’s not identified by his full name in the end credits (Jenkins was known as “don Guillermo,” however, and Cudney’s character is clearly intended to be him). At first shown as a mysterious gangster-businessman involved with various Mexican politicians (from the 1920s through the 1940s), don Guillermo becomes Orol’s nemesis in the 1950s, offering a pittance for the right to exhibit Orol’s films and demanding various illegal bribes and payments, tactics he gets away with because he has a virtual monopoly on cinema distribution and exhibition. In the 1960s, “Johnny Carmenta” pays a visit to don Guillermo, frightening him into having a heart attack (and presumably freeing Orol from the magnate’s clutches).

The presence of veteran Afro-Cuban actor Jorge Zamora “Zamorita” is always welcome. Probably the most prominent “actor of colour” in Mexican cinema, Zamora has a hilarious recurring role as a curmudgeon who repeatedly criticises Orol, but also has significant influence on the director’s life (first, suggesting bullfighting as a career which brings fame and the attentions of women, which causes Orol to relocate to Mexico from Cuba; and years later introducing Orol to Rosa Carmina).

El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol begins in 1982. The elderly Orol sits alone in the lobby of a cinema showing his old movies. An usher emerges and says only a handful of people are in attendance. “They used to call me King of the Cheapies [*churros*] but the cinemas were full. Now I’ve been accorded a certain amount of acceptance [*gracia*] but no one comes to watch my movies,” Orol says, ruefully. He tells the young cinema employee “it all began in Ferrol [Spain]...”

Young Juan Orol gets in an argument with some other boys and has his face slashed. His mother says he’s always in trouble and is in her way, and thus sends him to live with a cousin in Cuba, so she can remarry. [Clearly, Orol’s life inspired the future television show “Fresh Prince of Bel Air.”] In Cuba, Juan tries his hand at baseball, boxing, and auto racing, only to fail in each of these endeavours. Every time, an old black man criticises him (saying “your [pitching, boxing, driving] is shit!”) [When Orol returns to Cuba in the mid-Forties, the same man is there and tells him “Your movie is shit!”]



Orol also sees a well-dressed figure in the audience at each of these events, shaking his finger in a disapproving manner—this man is later introduced as “Johnny Carmenta,” Orol’s mystical alter ego. Taking the old man’s advice, Orol relocates to Mexico as a *torero* and achieves some success. He marries Amparo Moreno; they have a son, Arnoldo (named after a bull that gored Orol!), which prompts Orol to give up bullfighting. He goes to work as a secret policeman for General Cruz. In 1927, Orol is ordered by Cruz to film the execution of a *Cristero*, getting his first experience with a movie camera.



Amparo Moreno dies (telling her husband “remember, the show must go on!”) and political events force General Cruz to resign. Orol is referred to Quirico Michelena, involved in the Mexican film industry. Orol becomes a

producer, then actor, then director. “Bad But Box-Office” reads a trade paper headline about *Madre querida*. Orol travels to Cuba, meets and marries María Antonieta Pons, and they make a series of films together. In 1945, they appear in *Los misterios del hampa* (“You’ve create a new genre: *gángsters tropicales*.”) and Pons attracts the attention of politician Maximino Ávila Camacho. Orol threatens the man, then flees Mexico for Cuba (Ávila Camacho dies after drinking poisoned coffee in the presence of don Guillermo—it’s implied that Orol caused this; at least don Guillermo blames Orol for it). Pons and Orol split, but Orol soon finds another muse, Rosa Carmina (after Ninón Sevilla turns him down).

After nearly a decade as a team, Orol and Carmina break up, because she wants to be a dramatic actress, but he says “you have the gift of rhythm!” and continues casting her in the same sort of roles. In 1955, he hires Mary Esquivel as his new leading lady, but she eventually cheats on him with assistant director Memo and then departs. Orol has a *Citizen Kane*-esque “wrecks the room in a rage” scene, setting his scripts on fire, but is rescued by the phantom Johnny Carmenta. Carmenta also confronts don Guillermo, causing the older man to have a fatal heart attack.

Orol’s old friend Michelena introduces him to Dinorah Judith, who becomes his final wife and star actress (as he carries her over the threshold on their honeymoon, Orol drops her and says “Ay, my lumbago!”). Dinorah is with him when he gets news of the planned *homage* to his career, and—as the flashback ends (the cinema usher has fallen asleep during Orol’s tale)—she also accompanies him to the ruins of the Cineteca Nacional (destroyed by fire in 1982—a smudged Johnny Carmenta looks on).

El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol is not a documentary or even a “straight” biopic of “the Frankenstein of Mexican cinema” (as one review quoted in the film says). Perhaps the script takes some liberties with the facts (as a boy Orol runs afoul of “Paquito [aka Francisco] Franco,” and much later indirectly causes the deaths of Maximino Ávila Camacho and William O. Jenkins, none of which seems highly plausible), but it captures at least part of Orol’s energy and determination, although it does skimp on the amount of his own personality and sentiment he clearly invested in his movies.

His films are portrayed in a rather campy fashion (when in fact they were, at least for a significant part of his career, reasonably well-produced if narratively semi-coherent) but this is in keeping with the theme of an “involuntary surrealist” (and although clearly Orol wasn’t utilising one tiny, hand-cranked camera to shoot his movies, this sketchy depiction of the making of his films is acceptable shorthand). *El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol* neither mocks nor lionises Orol: he’s portrayed as neither an incompetent idiot nor an unsung genius.

Of particular interest to fans of Mexican cinema, but highly entertaining for anyone.



Cantinflas (Kenio Films, ©2014) Exec Prod: [Kenio Films] Vidal Cantú,

Adolfo Franco, Alejandro Barrón [sic], [Bullet Films] Braulio Arsuaga Losada, Eduardo Graniello, Ángel Losada Moreno, Ángel Losada R., Gonzalo Barrutieta, José Alverde, Carlos del Río, Daniel Olivares, Óscar Vilchis, Francisco Moguel; Prod: Vidal Cantú, Adolfo Franco; Line Prod: Issa Guerra; Assoc Prod: Mario

Moreno I., Alejandro Barrón; Dir: Sebastián del Amo; Scr: Edui Tijerina [and Sebastián del Amo, uncr.]; Photo: Carlos Hidalgo; Music: Roque Baños; Theme Song: Aleks Syntek; Prod Mgr: Germán Jiménez; Asst Dir: Manuel Hinojosa; Film Ed: Nacho Ruiz Capillas; Prod Des: Christopher Lagunes; Makeup: Maripaz Robles; Audio Des: Alejandro de Icaza; Direct Sound: Santiago Núñez; Union: STPC

Cast: Óscar Jaenada (Mario Moreno “Cantinflas”), Michael Imperioli (Mike Todd), Ilse Salas (Valentina Ivanova), Luis Gerardo Méndez (Estanislao Shilinsky), Gabriela de la Garza (Olga Ivanova), Bárbara Mori (Elizabeth Taylor), Luis Arrieta (Billy), Adal Ramones (Mantequilla), Julio Bracho (Jorge Negrete), Mario Iván Martínez (Robert), Teresa Ruiz (Meche Barba), Joaquín Cosío (Indio Fernández), Eugenio Bartilotti (Juan Bustillo



Oro), Rodrigo Murray (*Jorge Mondragón*), Cassandra Ciangherotti (*Estela Pagola*), Javiera Gurruchaga (*José Furstemberg*), Moisés Arizmendi (*Miguel M. Delgado*), Otto Sirgo (*Andrés Soler*), Juan Carlos Colombo (*don José Pagola*), José Carlos Montés Roldán (*Maurice*), Giovanni Zacarías (*Gloria Marín*), Alejandro Calva (*Jacques Gelman*), Carlos Aragón (*Gabriel Figueroa*), Marius Biegai (*Gregorio Ivanovich*), Magali Boyselle (*"Diablita" #2*), Roger Cudney (*John*), Eduardo España (*Alejandro Galindo*), Ximena González-Rubio (*María Félix*), Jorge Zarate (*Fidel Velázquez*), Mauricio Argüelles Quintana, Héctor Kotsifakis (*"vice-president" in stage act*), Diana Lein (*Vitola*), Andrés Montiel (*Agustín Isunza*), Flor Payan (*Lupita Tovar*), Julián Sedgwick (*Charlie Chaplin*), José Sefami (*Diego Rivera*), Esteban Soberanes (*Manuel Medel*), Eréndira Ibarra (*Rita Macedo*), Hernán del Redo (*Agustín Lara*), Adrián Herrera (*newsboy*), Alejandra Prado (*Mapy Cortés*), Alejandro Springall (*investor*), Alfonso Borbolla (*Ernesto Alonso*), Aranza Muñoz (*dancer*), Armando Vega Gil (*salon musician*), Carlos Corona (*"President Calles"*), Carlos Millet (*"Ávila Camacho"*), Dagoberto Gama (*boxing trainer*), Humberto Busto (*Tito Guízar*), Iván Añana (*Pedro Armendáriz*), Jessica Gocha (*Dolores del Río*), Juan Pablo Campa (*Kirk Douglas*), Jon Ecker (*Marlon Brando*), Karin Burnett (*Marlene Dietrich*), Laura de Ita (*"Diablita" #1*), Mariana Gaja (*Charito Granados*), Mario Zaragoza (*Salvador Carrillo*), Marissa Saavedra (*Sofía Álvarez*), Pedro de Tavira (*David Niven*), Rafael Amaya (*Frank Sinatra*), Celedonio Núñez



Notes: when planning a film biography of an actor or actress, the filmmakers have a basic decision to make--concentrate on the performer's career (and public image) or their personal life? Hopefully, either the subject's career and/or their private life is interesting enough to sustain an entire film, otherwise the result can be a sort of "pageant of recreations" of scenes from their movies, interspersed with the standard show-biz success story (hard work, lucky break, tragedy, and so forth), often heavily fictionalised and/or bowdlerised.

Mexican cinema has not produced a large number of such projects (not counting documentaries), notably *La vida de Agustín Lara* (produced in 1958, at which time Lara was still alive--in fact, he didn't die until 1970), *La vida de Pedro Infante*, 1963, starring one of Infante's brothers), *Mirolava* (1992), and a relative handful of others (as well as some lightly-disguised versions using fake names).

Mario Moreno "Cantinflas," arguably the most famous Mexican performer of the 20th-century and still instantly

recognisable in much of the world today, died in 1993. His estate was subjected to endless legal wrangling between his nephew (Eduardo Moreno Laprade) and his "adopted" son (Mario Moreno Ivanova, the biological son of Cantinflas and a young woman, adopted by the comedian and his wife after the mother's death), and both sides jealously guarded both the intellectual property and the memory of their deceased uncle/father. A curious Cantinflas biopic began production at the end of 1994, then ran afoul of this family feud and didn't see the light of day until 2006 (see the review in this issue of *No hay derecho joven* for more details).

Two decades after Moreno's death, Kenio Films apparently reached an agreement with Mario Moreno Ivanova to film a big-budget "authorised" biography of the famed comedian. Tapped to direct was Sebastián del Amo, whose previous project (and directorial debut) was another period biopic, *El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol*; the script was written by Edui Tijerina, who had no previous film credits, but had a number of years experience working Monterrey as a writer and university lecturer. [I don't know at what point del Amo was brought into the project, or if in fact he actually helped conceive it--in an interview, Tijerina only mentions the producers.]

Cantinflas treads a middle ground between the two poles of "career" and "private life," spending some time on Moreno's development as a stage and screen performer, his union activism and business interests, as well as on the relationship between Moreno and his wife Valentina. However, the film frames this mostly in flashbacks between scenes set in 1955, showing producer Mike Todd putting together *Around the World in 80 Days*. As a number of critics have remarked, this diverts attention from the Cantinflas story, and it's difficult to see why this format was chosen. Perhaps the filmmakers had a plan from the first to make this picture more "accessible" to international audiences, and felt making the film revolve around Hollywood would serve this purpose. This also results in about half the film being spoken in English, again, possibly hoping for a cross-over audience. [I've seen two versions of the film, one with Spanish sub-titles for the English dialogue, one with English sub-titles for the Spanish dialogue.]

[The previous Cantinflas biopic also used a framing device, in that case a "celestial trial" of the deceased comedian. Both films also contain a recreation of a dance sequence from *El bolero de Raquel*, oddly enough.]

But since this is a Mexican film about one of their great stars, *Cantinflas* goes out of its way (a) to argue that *Around the World in 80 Days* would never have been made if Cantinflas hadn't agreed to star in it, and (b) it is also strongly suggested that he probably financed it as well. The framing story makes it appear the highlight of the career of Cantinflas was his first Hollywood film, even though he lived until 1993 and starred in a score of movies after *Around the World in 80 Days* (including one additional Hollywood film, *Pepe*, despite his declaration in

this picture that he was going to stay in Mexico with "my people" from now on)--the narrative of the film stops in 1956.

The major problem with the "Mike Todd" story is that it consumes so much time and the constant intercutting between the two threads disrupts whatever dramatic momentum that exists in either section. The Cantinflas part of the film is reduced to a series of vignettes which depict:

a. his 1931 stage debut at the *carpa* owned by don José Pagola; his subsequent meeting with Estanislao Shilinsky,



the formation of their team at the *carpa* run by don Gregorio, father of Shilinsky's wife Olga and of Valentina, who will wed Mario Moreno.

b. the realisation that political comedy is popular, the spontaneous creation of the "Cantinflas"

name, and the eventual adoption of the *peladito* costume and persona. The famous Cantinflas costume is revealed in an odd sequence: Moreno has a "surprise" in a large hatbox and makes Valentina close her eyes while he dons the *gabardina*, baggy pants, hat, etc. However, the shots of him rushing through the streets with the beribboned box containing (what we learn is) the costume suggest he purchased the complete outfit or at the very least assembled it from various purchases, not that it evolved organically, bit by bit. Otherwise, why would this be a shocking revelation to Valentina (and Shilinsky)?

[Variations of the same costume existed prior to its use by Cantinflas, a well-documented fact.]

c. Cantinflas and Shilinsky leave the *carpa* for the variety theatre circuit, but are ill-treated by star Manuel Medel. Eventually, Cantinflas conquers the middle-class theatre-goers. In one nice sequence, Medel and Cantinflas alternately are shown mugging as Agustín Lara sings and plays a song--Medel's comedy is greeted with yawns, while Cantinflas's actions provoke laughter.

d. in 1940, Cantinflas appears in *Ahí está el detalle*, and enrages the director (Juan Bustillo Oro) with his constant ad-libs. [Cantinflas conveniently overlooks the fact that Mario Moreno had already appeared in four feature films and numerous shorts prior to this.] Posa Films guarantees the comedian complete control over his movies, and Cantinflas fires director Alejandro Galindo during the filming of *Ni sangre ni arena*. By *El gendarme desconocido*, he's found the compliant Miguel M. Delgado who'll direct the majority of Moreno's pictures from then on.

e. Cantinflas is elected actors' union representative and participates in the strike against corrupt labour leader Salvador Carrillo, resulting in the creation of STPC.

However, his marriage is shaky: Valentina can have no children, and Moreno is unfaithful to her (his alleged paramours in the film include Miroslava and María Félix). By 1955, Valentina decides to leave him. Moreno angrily throws a liquor bottle at a large portrait of *peladito* Cantinflas, then his eye is caught by a copy of the script for "Around the World in 80 Days." Inside is a personal note from Charlie Chaplin, calling Cantinflas "the best and most beloved comedian in the world."

f. Cantinflas reconciles with Valentina, insisting she accompany him during the shooting of *Around the World in 80 Days*. The film is a great success and Cantinflas defeats Marlon Brando and Yul Brynner to win the Best Actor prize at the Golden Globes (identified in voiceover and by an on-screen title, although signs at the ceremony refer to it as the "Gold World Film Award"). Moreno tells Mike Todd he has decided to go back to Mexico to work.

One interesting and yet frustrating thing about *Cantinflas* is the use of actual names for most of the individuals involved. As a fan and historian of Mexican cinema, it's fascinating to see people like Jorge Mondragón, Jacques Gelman, Juan Bustillo Oro, etc., name-checked and impersonated. Less successful are the "celebrity" performers in cameo roles: Adal Ramones as



"Mantequilla" is 8th-billed (in a very large cast) but appears, without dialogue, for a few seconds at most. Joaquín Cosío plays Emilio Fernández but looks nothing like "El Indio" in the period specified

(1946), and the actors cast (in very fleeting cameos) as Jorge Negrete, Meche Barba, Vitola, Mapy Cortés, Tito Guizar, Pedro Armendáriz, Charito Granados, etc., bear little physical resemblance to their real-life counterparts. "Miroslava" and "María Félix" are impersonated by an attractive blonde and brunette actress, respectively, which is just about the extent of their physical similarity to the actual performers.

Even worse are the Hollywood performers. Charlie Chaplin is introduced as a portly, gray-haired, British-accented man who speaks to Mike Todd in the United Artists' commissary (which I'm not even sure existed), and his identity is only revealed "comically" as he says "my friends call me Charlie" and walks away, doing the "Chaplin" walk, carrying a cane and derby hat. Although I was aware from reviews that Chaplin was impersonated in *Cantinflas*, I'd have guessed this actor was playing Alfred Hitchcock instead. "Frank Sinatra," "Marlon Brando," and "Yul Brynner" (his name mispronounced as "Yul Brine-r") are even worse, looking nothing at all like their namesakes.

These are just minor annoyances though, and in fact the major players--Spaniard Óscar Jaenada, Michael Imperioli,

and Ilse Salas—are fine in their roles. Jaenada at times seems a bit too tall, thin, and handsome as Cantinflas, but he's got the voice and mannerisms down pat. The script is, however, somewhat inconsistent in the separation of the "Cantinflas" and Mario Moreno personas, especially in his younger years: what was the real Mario Moreno like? The 1955 scenes feature a mature Moreno, secure in his fame and wealth, who only lapses into "Cantinflas" when trying to defuse a tense situation, when unable to express his true feelings, or as a joke.

Unlike *No hay derecho joven*, *Cantinflas* doesn't downplay Mario Moreno's extramarital affairs. During the filming of *Un día con el Diablo*, he locks himself in his dressing room with two sexy "devil women," and he's later romantically linked on-screen with Miroslava and María Félix. Since the film ends in 1956, the issue of Moreno's natural/adopted son Mario Moreno Ivanova, born in 1961, doesn't come up.

One theme which loses focus about halfway through the movie is the relationship of Cantinflas to working-class Mexicans.



In 1935, when he moves to the Teatro Follies Bergere, Cantinflas leaves behind his loyal *carpa*

audience (although they eventually find him and are seen sitting in the balcony of the "variety theatre," cheering) and broadens his appeal. After that, the film shifts to the Cantinflas/Valentina and Cantinflas/union threads, and discussion of his popular appeal and image as a *peladito* vanishes. In a 1955 sequence, Moreno attends the fancy-dress dedication of a Diego Rivera mural he commissioned for the Teatro de los Insurgentes, and his working-class fans are forced to stand outside, peering in through the windows at the glamorous goings-on. In the same sequence, Valentina strongly criticises Moreno for his betrayal (of their marriage vows, but also of himself, his values and ideals). This sequence concludes with the aforementioned scene in which Moreno tosses a bottle at an image of Cantinflas, then picks up the script for *Around the World in 80 Days*.

One might consider his role in the Hollywood film as simultaenously a personal triumph and the ultimate rejection of his *peladito* character (since he plays a French butler!): Valentina even warns him "not to do Cantinflas in English." And although Moreno ultimately turns his back on Hollywood to stay in Mexico—and his popularity among Mexican audiences wasn't seriously diminished—his subsequent films were even further removed from his original underclass character (casting him as a priest, doctor, government minister, teacher, etc.).

Although the basic concept and structure of the film are rather flawed, the execution is generally good. Production values are excellent: Sebastián del Amo brought along many of his crew from *El fantástico mundo de Juan Orol* (as well as a large portion of that film's cast), and the cinematography, sets, costumes, and so on are lush and evocative. Pop music (notably boleros) accounted for a large portion of *Juan Orol*'s music score, and in *Cantinflas* "appropriate" period songs are used to buttress the emotions in several dramatic scenes: this is somewhat clichéd, but not offensively so.

Overall, *Cantinflas* is reasonably entertaining and well-made, although it is not without flaws.



No hay derecho joven [It Isn't Right, Young Man] (Laguna Prods., ©2005*)

Exec Prod/Prod: Elart M. Coello, Manuel J. Hinostrero; *Line Prod:* Jesús Frago Montoya (1st Unit), Arturo Hooper (2nd Unit); *Dir:* Dean St. Gilbert (aka Gilberto de Anda, 1st Unit), Marco Briones (2nd Unit), Leonidas Zagarra (3rd Unit); *Scr:* Dean St. Gilbert, Marco Briones and Paula Sánchez, Leonidas Zagarra; *Photo:* J.E. Polo Zavala (3rd Unit), Mario Becerra Hernández (1st Unit); *Music:* Joseph Julián González; *Script and Dir Consultant:* J.E. Polo Zavala; *Film Ed:* M.R. Reyes, Luis Edgar Cano; *Sound Ed:* Mark Friedman; *Prod Mgr:* Tony Rubio (1st Unit); *Asst Dir:* Graciela Sánchez Basurto (1st Unit), Paula Sánchez (2nd Unit); *Makeup:* Esther Lomeli Munguía (1st Unit), Fabiola Orozco (2nd and 3rd Units); *Art Dir:* Raúl Cárdenas Ascencio (1st Unit)



*production began in 1994

Cast: Mario Ramírez (*Mario Moreno*, *Cantinflas*), Angelines Santana (*Valentina*), Julio Alemán (*San Pedro*), Gilberto de Anda (*Luzbel*), Itati Cantoral (*Justicia*, *defense attorney*), Carlos Yustis (*parking valet in Heaven*), Luis Alvarez Zaldivar (*Mario's father*), Gladys Rayo (*Mario's mother*), Martha Irene Martínez (*actress in Heaven*), Vitali (*guardian angel*), Eugene (*celestial guardian*), José Aguilar "Cantinflín" (*nurse*), Cantinfillas (*showman*), José Arquimedes (*post office chief*), Roberto Payares "Cantimfillias" (*Chupamirto skit man*), Gabriela Licht (*woman in park*), Javier Cenizo (*fat schoolboy*), Ricardo Rayo (*Bebito*), Lucio Arroyo (*army sgt.*), Armando Dorantes (*cantina drunk*), José Estrada (*boxer*), Arturo Hooper (*boxing manager*), José Casán (*Lt. Colonel*), Andrés Zeña (*referee*), Luis Alfonso (*carpa owner*), Gonzalo Checa (*Valentina's father*), Elart Coello (*cantina man*), Osiris (*bolero dancer*), Carmen Dehasa (*tango dancer*)

Notes: as occasionally happens, the story behind this movie is probably more interesting than the film itself. I remember seeing a trailer for *No hay derecho joven* on a Laguna tape around 1996, but the title itself never appeared on the Laguna website or anywhere else until

2006, when it was released on DVD. Legal problems, I wondered? Now, after finally seeing the picture, it is clear more was involved than "simple" legal issues.

Leonidas Zegarra (shown below, with Mario Ramírez on the set of the movie) is a Peruvian filmmaker who is fairly well-known (if not appreciated--as Zegarra notes on his website [<http://www.leonidaszegarra.com/>], "no other person exists in this country [who] has received so many insults or derogatory nicknames") in his own nation, but largely invisible outside of it (his name doesn't even appear



in The Internet Movie Database). According to Zegarra (on his website), around 1993 he was contacted by the "president" of IMCINE (unnamed, but he indicates it was a woman, and no woman held that post until

2007) who gave him a copy of a biography of Cantinflas. Zegarra decided to make a movie based on the late comedian's life, and received permission from the Fundación Mario Moreno Reyes, run by Eduardo Moreno Laparade, the nephew of Cantinflas. For unspecified reasons, Zegarra went to the USA to make his film--titled *Cantinflas no ha muerto*--and received financing from video distributor/producer Laguna Productions.

Hired for the title role was young Mexican actor Mario Ramírez Reyes (Zegarra identifies him as the "nephew" of Cantinflas, but this is apparently incorrect, as Ramírez makes no such claim on his website). Ramírez has since gone on to have a long and fruitful career as an actor, director, editor, and writer, with a lot of film, TV, and live work on his resume (see www.marioramirez.com). Contacted via his Myspace page, Mario was kind enough to respond to my inquiry about this movie's rocky production history:

"In 1994 I arrived in Los Angeles, California, contracted to present a theatrical show in which I would imitate the idols of Mexican cinema, one of them Cantinflas. A representative of the film distributing company Laguna Films told me they were planning to make a film biography [of Cantinflas]. The movie began to shoot at the end of 1994 in Los Angeles, California, and the project had various directors (Leonidas Zegarra, Marcos Briones, and J. Polo Zavala); the story changed every year depending on the director and the demands of various relatives of Sr. Mario Moreno Reyes. The project finished shooting in Mexico City under the direction of Gilberto de Anda."

Angelines Santana was cast as Valentina, the wife of Mario Moreno, while the supporting roles were filled with local talent. But all was not well: Zegarra writes that there was "tension" on the set and he visited various *videntes* (seers or clairvoyants) in Venice, California. He learned to his dismay that he had been cursed! The director brushed off this warning but was later shocked to

receive threatening telephone calls from Mario Arturo Moreno Ivanova, the adopted son of Cantinflas (and bitter legal enemy of Eduardo Moreno Laparade), who insisted Zegarra and his producers had no rights to the life story of Mario Moreno. Finally, Zegarra says the witchcraft employed against him provoked an argument with the film's producer on the last day of shooting, prompting Zegarra to resign from the project and return to Peru, "exhausted, without money, without work." [Fortunately for Zegarra, he was able to rebound and has made a reputation for himself directing low-budget films like *Poseída por el diablo* and *Vedettes al desnudo*.]

No hay derecho joven, however, was not yet complete. The film's credits list three "units," three different directors--plus the "Directorial Consultant" J.E. Polo--and three different sets of writers. The "First Unit" footage was shot in Mexico City, with actors Julio Alemán, Itatí Cantoral, and Gilberto de Anda (who also directed the scenes, under the pseudonym "Dean St. Gilbert"), while the "Third Unit" is Zegarra's original crew in the USA. The contributions of the "Second Unit," led by Marco Briones, are unclear, although this footage was also done in California. As it stands now, the "First Unit" sequences take up approximately 50% of the 90-minute running time of *No hay derecho joven*, including the last 20+ minutes.

Consequently, although the specific details are still vague, it appears *No hay derecho joven* was caught in the legal crossfire between the son and nephew of Cantinflas and had problems with its initial director and script, resulting in a 12-year delay between the start of production and its eventual release on DVD.

No hay derecho joven begins in Mexico City, as an ambulance takes an elderly man to the hospital, where he dies. [The un-billed actor playing Mario Moreno is only shown briefly.] A short time later, the spirit of Cantinflas ascends to Heaven. A long line of



people is waiting (Cantinflas takes a ticket from a machine--his number is over 25 million, and a sign shows number 25 is "now being served."), so the comedian uses his patented double-talk to move to the head of the line. St. Peter, discovering the ruse, sends Cantinflas to purgatory to contemplate his sins while he waits his turn.

Purgatory turns out to be a small house, where Moreno/Cantinflas is joined (at her request) by the spirit of his late wife Valentina. Together, they see various episodes from the comedian's life unfold. [These scenes are subsequently intercut with sequences unfolding in Heaven, where St. Peter, Lucifer, and Justice watch the life of Cantinflas on a celestial TV set (with a disappointingly-small screen: this is Heaven?) in preparation for the "trial,"

where the admission of Cantinflas into Heaven will be approved (or not).]

The footage of Moreno's life is a mix of "straight" biography (he wants to become an actor but his parents object) and comic skits in which Moreno appears as Cantinflas (he's a cabbie, a soldier, a bartender, a post office worker). No real distinction is made between these two types of scenes, so that it appears they are all "real life" (except for footage of the actor actually in a *carpa* on stage, for example). Finally, Cantinflas is recalled to Heaven for his personal Judgement Day. The "prosecutor" is the Devil, who says Cantinflas deceived people, lived by



his wits, didn't do any honest work, disrespected authority, and set a bad example for others. Justice, the defense attorney, responds by claiming Cantinflas represents the unconquerable spirit of man, the love of

freedom and the hatred of unjust authority; he made millions happy with his comic behavior. [She really lays it on thick, suggesting a frantic attempt to please Moreno's heirs with flattery.] St. Peter finds in favor of Cantinflas, who is admitted to Heaven to spend eternity with Valentina. The Devil asks Justice for a date.

What of *No hay derecho joven*, the film? In the first place, this is not a "factual" biography of Mario Moreno. The picture conflates Mario Moreno the man and "Cantinflas" the character. Although there are scenes in which Moreno appears "as himself," the movie also contains sequences allegedly from Moreno's life--his military service and his brief jobs as a bootblack, bartender, and a post office worker, for example--in which he adopts the "Cantinflas" persona. Thus, *No hay derecho joven* tries to have it both ways, showing Moreno as he develops the "Cantinflas" character for his acting career and yet suggesting he was "Cantinflas" in real life as well (even though this is at odds with the more serious Moreno shown in the scenes with his wife Valentina and elsewhere).

The biographical facts of Moreno's early life are sketched with some degree of accuracy--particularly interesting is the movie's admission that similar characters existed in the *carpa* environment (one, "Chupamirto," is even shown in the movie--in another *carpa* sequence, a Manuel Medel-lookalike appears) and were assimilated by Moreno into "Cantinflas." However, the career flashbacks stop before Moreno becomes famous and the film contains no scenes dealing with his later life or career. [The only exception is a dance sequence identified as a scene from *El bolero de Raquel*, although it actually bears little or no resemblance to the actual movie.] His relationship with Valentina Ivanova is portrayed as an enduring love; an odd scene depicts the childless couple with a young boy who waves goodbye and vanishes. It is not surprising that this (apparently) authorized biography contains no references

to Moreno's extra-marital affairs and alleged illegitimate offspring.

The framing story is also curious: Mario Moreno dies in Mexico City, but when he arrives in Heaven, he's the much-younger "Cantinflas." And the "trial" which judges his fitness for admission to Heaven is not based on his actions as Mario Moreno, but rather on the moral qualities of the fictional character he created. In other words, God will judge us on our public image, not on our true character? This is theologically unsound, since it suggests bad people whose crimes are never discovered and are perceived as kind and honest are more deserving of Heaven than individuals with a poor public image who perform numerous acts of charity behind the scenes!

The patchwork nature of *No hay derecho joven* is obvious on-screen: the Los Angeles-shot scenes are clearly low-budget work, with hand-lettered signs and no-name performers in supporting roles (the photography is pretty good, though), while the Mexico City footage is slick and features various familiar faces. [One thing that bothered me--perhaps out of proportion with its importance--was the fact that the "angels" are wearing their wings upside-down!!]

As Mario Moreno and "Cantinflas," Mario Ramírez is quite good. As noted above, most of the time he's "on" as Cantinflas and in a way this is a shame (although his impersonation is pretty good), because he's a good actor and his scenes as the "real" Mario Moreno show the potential this movie could have had as a "factual" biography. Angelines Santana (who slightly resembles a young María Rojo) is satisfactory as Valentina, although she has relatively little to do. The "name" actors--Alemán, de Anda, and Cantoral--are all seasoned pros and turn in satisfactory

performances. Gilberto de Anda, although he hams it up a little bit, is rather funny as the Devil, flirting with the sexy defense attorney "Justice," making snide remarks, drinking, and napping during the screening of Moreno's life story.



There are a few amusing in-jokes inserted in these scenes. For example, Cantoral's character says she liked Cantinflas in *Around the World in 80 Days* (a bizarre choice, given that this was a non-Mexican movie), but the Devil says he prefers *Un día con el Diablo*, "with Andrés Soler playing me." A short time later, a discussion about the identity of an actor in a movie prompts several guesses (Miguel Ángel Ferriz, Ángel Garasa), and the Devil suggests "Julio Alemán?" to which St. Peter (played by Alemán) replies "No, he was just a baby [then]."

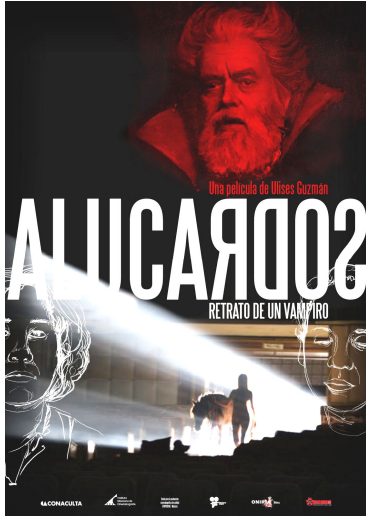
Considering the troubled production history, *No hay derecho joven* actually turned out fairly well. Although it's not a real biography of Cantinflas, it's still a moderately entertaining piece of work and worth viewing.

[Final note: the Laguna DVD of this movie includes optional English sub-titles, a nice touch.]

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Alucardos: Retrato de un vampiro [Two Alucarda Fans: Portrait of a Vampire] (IMCINE-



CONACULTA-FOPROCINE-Filmoteca de la UNAM-Oniria Films ©2010) *Prod:* Ulises Guzmán, Edna Campos; *Dir:* Ulises Guzmán; *Scr:* Ulises Guzmán, Edna Campos; *Photo:* Arturo de la Rosa (recreated scenes); *Music:* Pablo Gay; *Prod Mgr:* Edgar Díaz; *Asst Dir:* Jocelyn Guzmán; *Final Edit:* Román Jiménez; *Film Ed:*

Román Jiménez, Harumy Villareal; *Additional Photo:* Ulises Guzmán, David Martínez R., "Mike" Miguel Nevado, Román Jiménez, Javier Olayo, Davidcito Martínez, Pavel Lara; *Animation:* Harumy Villareal; *Direct Sound & Sound Design:* Gabriel Soriano, Sofia Monroy

Cast: Manolo Durán (*Manolo*), Eduardo Casares (*Lalo*); **Recreated scenes:** Juan Carlos Colombo (*Juan López Moctezuma*), Luis Romano (*Lalo*), Óscar Olivares (*Manolo*), Mikel Mateos (*Lalo as a boy*), David Castillo (*Manolo as a boy*), Christina Mason (*Francisca*), Claudia Figueroa (*nude woman*), Alejandra Salcido (*adolescent Manolo*); **Interviews:** Eduardo Mondragón, Jorge Victoria, Eduardo Ruiz Saviñon, Bertha Ortega, Jorge Ayala Blanco, Alexis

Arroyo, Carlos Monsiváis, Tina Romero, Eduardo Moreno Laparade, Alessandra Moctezuma, Liliana Ortiz Durán, Mauricio Matamoros, Rebeca



Jiménez Calero, Luis López Moctezuma, Xavier Cruz, Eduardo Terán Gilmore, Bertha Sandoval, Roberto Aymes, Carlos Montaña, Pedro Díaz del Castillo "El Güero"

Notes: *Alucardos* is a curious but interesting documentary. Part of the film examines the life and career of director Juan López Moctezuma, utilising archival footage, photographs, video clips, and contemporary interviews with family, friends, critics, and co-workers. This is intercut with the story of two super-fans of the

director's most famous film, *Alucarda*, Manolo and Lalo. The two threads coincide because in the early 1990s Manolo and Lalo met Juan López Moctezuma in unusual circumstances and forged a friendship that lasted until the latter's death in 1995.

Juan López Moctezuma was involved in various "cultural" activities—notably radio—prior to his debut as a film director with *La mansión de la locura* (1972). He followed this with *Alucarda* (1974), which has since become a cult film, and a handful of other feature films. In the latter part of the 1970s, López Moctezuma relocated to Spain to work for the new Televisa Spanish affiliate. Upon his return to Mexico and the USA, he began to suffer from physical and mental illnesses—in *Alucardos*, one of his daughters says he had a stroke and was later diagnosed with advanced Alzheimer's, in addition to what was apparently profound depression—and eventually wound up in a mental hospital in Mexico. Manolo and Lalo, tipped off to his location by a telephone call from a mysterious woman named



"Francisca," took López Moctezuma from the hospital: over a period of a few days, they showed him parts of his films, took him to visit the locations where the movies had been made, and (it seems) gave their new friend a renewed lease on life. After López Moctezuma's death, the two young men became the director's heirs, receiving many of his personal and professional possessions.

Manolo and Lalo's lives before their acquaintance with Juan López Moctezuma are also examined. Although both are apparently successful health-care professionals as adults, their childhoods were difficult. Manolo's gender uncertainty resulted in a certain amount of social difficulty; viewing *Alucarda* at a young age impressed him significantly, and he began to collect material about the film, the director, the titular character, and the actress (Tina Romero) who portrayed her. Lalo suffered the trauma of the violent death of his mother at the hands of her boyfriend; sent to an orphanage, he escaped and was essentially homeless (living in an abandoned car). The two young men met and became fast friends, and Manolo's fascination with *Alucarda* was transmitted to Lalo.

Alucardos is not told in a traditional documentary style. Only roughly chronological (with a lot of jumping around), the film mixes current interviews (with Manolo and Lalo, as well as López Moctezuma's acquaintances) with recreated scenes (of Manolo and Lalo's youth, of their encounter with López Moctezuma, and of a cabaret performance at "El Hijo del Cuervo"—a famous club in Coyoacán—in which the director dresses as Dracula and tells a story, accompanied by live musicians). There are also clips from *La mansión de la locura* and *Alucarda*,

home movies and behind-the-scenes footage, video clips of López Moctezuma's television and radio appearances, photographs, newspaper clippings, animation, etc.

The film does not attempt to present a comprehensive picture of López Moctezuma's life and career, but rather an impressionistic view. Exact dates are not given, his final films are ignored, and various aspects of his personal and professional life are presented either vaguely and in passing, or left out altogether. One bit of footage which isn't clearly identified features López Moctezuma in the same "Dracula" costume/makeup



worn by Juan Carlos Colombo in the "Hijo del Cuervo" scenes, but which appears to be from a dramatic television program (there's another bit of footage showing a bearded man confronting a naked woman with fangs which might be from the same source).

Although most of *Alucardos* is supposedly true, the film adds a bit of mystery with the character of "Francisca," who is depicted in the recreations but whom Manolo and Lalo admit they never met. At one point, a member of the crew of *Alucarda*—who has considerable burn scars on his face—describes how the fiery finale of the movie got out of hand (in her interview, Tina Romero says she was overcome by smoke and rescued by one of the "monks" in the scene) and an actress playing a nun was badly burned. She's identified as "Francisca," a friend of the director's, and the viewer therefore assumes she's the same (scarred) Francisca who telephones Manolo and Lalo, but this loose end is left dangling.

While a more conventional and complete documentary about Juan López Moctezuma would still be welcome, both the content and the eclectic formal aspects make *Alucardos* extremely interesting, informative, and entertaining.



La dictadura perfecta [The Perfect

Dictatorship] (Bandidos Films-Eficine-IMCINE-FIDECINE, 2013) *Exec Prod:* Sandra Solares; *Prod-Dir:* Luis Estrada; *Scr/Story:* Luis Estrada, Jaime Sampietro; *Photo:* Javier Aguirresarobe; *Music Supv:* Lynn Fainchtein; *Line Prod-Prod Mgr:* Andrea Gamboa; *Asst Dir:* Martín Torres; *Film Ed:* Mariana Rodríguez; *Prod Des:* Salvador Parra; *Makeup:* Felipe Salazar

Cast: Damián Alcázar (*Gov. Carmelo Vargas*), Alfonso Herrera (*Carlos Rojo*), Joaquín Cosío (*Agustín Morales*), Osvaldo Benavides (*Ricardo Díaz*), Silvia Navarro (*Lucía Garza*), Flavio Medina (*Salvador Garza*), Saúl Lisazo (*Javier Pérez Harris*), Tony Dalton (*don Pepe, head of Televisión Mexicana*), Salvador Sánchez (*chief kidnaper [General]*), Enrique Arreola (*sec'y. of government*), Arath

de la Torre (*Vargas' godson*), Dagoberto Gama (*state prosecutor*), Noé Hernández (*chief of security*), Sonia Couoh (*nanny of twins*), María Rojo (*doña Chole*), Luis Fernando Peña (*El Chamoy*), Gustavo Sánchez Parra (*El Charro*), Sergio Mayer (*President of Mexico*), Hernán Mendoza (*El Mazacote*), Livia Brito (*"Jazmín"*), Itati Cantoral (*"Lucrecia Lascurain"*), Jorge Poza (*"Rafael Lascurain"*), Kiara Coussirat (*Ana Garza*), Karol Coussirat (*Elena Garza*), Roger Cudney (*U.S. ambassador*), Ingrid Martz (*sec'y. of V-P of TV MX*), Johanna Murillo (*sec'y. of Director of TV MX*), Javier Escobar (*El Mapache*), Sophie Alexander-Katz (*reporter*), José



Concepción Macías (*witness*), Claudia Piñeda (*girl who accuses Morales*), Juan Pablo Medina (*boyfriend*), Jorge Zarate (*colonel*), Humberto Busto (*hotel clerk*); *scandal reporters:* Guillermo Larrea, Juan Martín Jauregui, Luciana González de León; Javier Zaragoza (*cameraman*), Tony Flores (*Tony Cuevas, El Zar*)

Notes: a black comedy about Mexican politics, *La dictadura perfecta* follows *La ley de Heródes*, *El Infierno* and *Un mundo maravilloso* in Luis Estrada's multi-film examination of contemporary Mexican society. All of these films were directed and co-written by Estrada, co-scripted by Jaime Sampietro, and starred Damián Alcázar. Despite some difficulties—*La ley de Heródes* was nearly "dumped" by IMCINE until Estrada bought back the rights to insure a sufficient release, and *La dictadura perfecta* was largely shunned by Televisa after the tone of the film became obvious—Estrada has been extremely successful, critically and at the box-office, with his caustic cinematic observations of his native land.

The film opens with a parody of the standard printed disclaimer: "In this story, all the names are fictitious. The acts, suspiciously truthful. Any resemblance to reality is not mere coincidence." "Televisión Mexicana" is a thinly veiled clone of Televisa, and director "don Pepe" physically resembles current CEO Emilio Azcárraga Jean. The President of Mexico (played by Sergio Mayer) looks very similar to current Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (and Mexican observers indicate Mayer also imitates Peña Nieto's speech patterns and accent). As the film concludes, state governor Carmelo Vargas marries a *telenovela* actress and is elected president—then-governor Peña Nieto married *telenovela* actress Angélica Rivera and became president. Various occurrences during the film

are also based on well-known events in recent Mexican history, including a notorious child-kidnaping, falsification of police actions, etc.

This makes *La dictadura perfecta* something of a *film à clef*, although Estrada and Sampietro mix-and-match different characters and scandals to reflect a wider picture of dysfunctional Mexican politics and society. So this isn't simply a lightly fictionalised retelling of "how Televisa got Enrique Peña Nieto elected President of Mexico."



When the U.S. ambassador arrives to present his credentials to the new President of Mexico, the Mexican leader expresses hope that the immigration issue will be resolved. He assures the ambassador that it would be good for both sides: "Mexicans will do the dirty jobs even the blacks won't do [in the U.S.A.]." This clumsy remark sets off a social media storm of mockery, and both the President's advisors and the management of giant media conglomerate Televisión Mexicana (TV MX)—which supported the new chief executive's election—search for a way to stem the tide of ridicule. A surveillance videotape showing state governor Carmelo Vargas enthusiastically receiving a briefcase full of money from a druglord provides a welcome distraction. Disturbed by the sudden negative attention, Vargas makes a deal with TV MX for "public relations" assistance, paying them handsomely (with public monies). TV MX dispatches producer Carlos Rojo, correspondent Ricardo Díaz, and a technical crew to Vargas' state to plan a positive publicity campaign.

Vargas is thoroughly corrupt and crude, but dreams of becoming president of Mexico. The leader of the local opposition, Agustín Morales, thinks Carlos has come to do an exposé of the venal Vargas administration. Taking the



podium in the state legislature, Morales verbally attacks Vargas and is nearly killed by an assassin. This complicates TV MX's attempted whitewash, and Carlos tells Vargas and his aides that they need another "distraction" to occupy the public's attention. Fortunately for them, two

cute little twin girls are abducted from their family's home in the state, and this becomes a national *cause célèbre*. TV MX devotes endless broadcast time to the story, signing the distraught parents to an exclusive contract.

Eventually the ransom is paid, but the mysterious head of the kidnap gang (later revealed to be a general in the Mexican armed forces) discovers doña Chole, the woman he'd had caring for the children, has escaped with them. The girls are returned to their parents. Carlos is upset because this was done without notice—and thus the media coverage wasn't satisfactory—so Vargas and his police force stage a fake assault on the gang's hideout to "rescue" the children (the real gang members had already been murdered by the ringleader for allowing doña Chole to leave), with TV MX covering it live.

Agustín Morales receives copies of the contracts between Vargas and TV MX and threatens to make them public, but is smeared with rape allegations and then murdered. Vargas kills his own godson when he discovers the young man was the source of the leak.

So, everyone (everyone still alive) is happy: Carlos is promoted to vice-president in charge of the TV MX news division, Ricardo becomes the anchorman of the evening news broadcast (replacing the long-time anchor who began laughing on the air when the President made another gaffe), the little twins are signed to appear in a juvenile *telenovela*.

Vargas shaves off his moustache, marries a TV MX actress (the star of "Los pobres también aman"), and—several years later—is elected president of Mexico.



La dictadura perfecta links corrupt Mexican politics with the media (and more specifically, the near-monopoly held by the largest TV network in the country). Neither group has an ideology, both are solely motivated by greed for power and money. At no point does anyone working for TV MX express any qualms about their assignment to lionise Carmelo Vargas, an openly corrupt politician (who literally murders his own godson in front of Carlos): it's just business.

The public is a mass to be manipulated, fooled, and exploited, although at the same time it is feared. The beginning of the film suggests that social media are dangerous because they cannot be controlled—in a brief montage early in the picture, Mexicans are shown laughing at images of their feckless President on their smartphones, YouTube, etc., which provokes an urgent reaction from the government and TV MX. In contrast, television is depicted as untruthful, calculated, patronising and powerful: there are a number of scenes showing viewers sitting entranced in front of TV sets, absorbing not only the (fake) news broadcasts, but also the endlessly repetitive *telenovelas* about servant girls who fall in love with their

employers (Vargas himself is shown to be one of these devoted fans).

Although Mexicans will undoubtedly recognise more of the references to actual persons and events in *La dictadura perfecta*, even foreigners can see how layered and nuanced the film really is. For example, Estrada and Sampietro don't belabour the point about the sinister, pervasive influence narco-trafficking has on Mexican society (that



was the point of their previous movie, *El infierno*), but there are clear hints about this. Vargas is shown receiving drug money in the hidden-camera video early in the film; when Carlos and his crew arrive in Vargas' state (unnamed, but

probably intended to be Durango), they're greeted by the sight of hanged bodies on a highway overpass, and are confronted by an armed drug gang (the leader allows them to pass since they're working for Vargas, first asking for an autographed photo from star reporter Ricardo Díaz). Carlos is shown arranging a faked news scene showing *narcos* under arrest (he says they aren't authentic looking and asks "casting" to send some new faces); later, after the bogus "raid and rescue" of the kidnaped twins, the camera shows (planted) automatic weapons and drugs in the hideout, linking the (trumped up, as we later learn) crime with the drug trade.

Despite his top-billing, Damián Alcázar as Carmelo Vargas isn't the protagonist of *La dictadura perfecta*, appearing in relatively few scenes. More attention is paid to Carlos Rojo (Alfonso Herrera), who (as noted earlier) doesn't seem to undergo any sort of crisis of conscience with regards to his actions, but who seems likeable and receives a certain amount of audience sympathy as he has to constantly adapt to changing circumstances. Agustín Morales is the moral center of the film—at least, we're not shown anything which would suggest he's cynical or corrupt himself—but is ultimately defeated by the combined forces of TV MX and the government. All of the performances in the rather large cast are solid. It's nice to see "professional *gringo*" Roger Cudney in a small but flashy role in the film's opening sequence, and veteran Salvador Sánchez is always a welcome addition. Saúl Lisazo is also good as the smarmy TV MX anchorman who is eventually undone by his inability to conceal his contempt for the dim-witted Mexican president.

Technical aspects and production values are fine throughout. The music score is composed of "ironic" classical music. Cinematographer Javier Aguirresarobe is Spanish, and has had a significant international career, shooting films such as *Blue Jasmine*, *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* (and *New Moon*), *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, and

The Road. His work on *La dictadura perfecta* is slick and professional.

As mentioned above, Mexican audiences will see much more in *La dictadura perfecta* than viewers unfamiliar with contemporary Mexico, but this is quite entertaining regardless of one's national origin.



ROBERTO GÓMEZ BOLAÑOS ON THE BIG SCREEN



Charrito (Televisine, 1980) *Dir-Scr*: Roberto Gómez Bolaños; *Photo*: José Ortiz Ramos; *Music*: Nacho Méndez; *Prod Mgr*: Antonio H. Rodríguez; *Asst Dir*: Javier Carreño; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Art Dir*: Salvador Lozano; *Camera Op*: Felipe Mariscal; *Makeup*: Carmen Palomino; *Sound Ed*: José Li-Ho; *Union*: STPC

Cast: Chespirito [Roberto Gómez Bolaños] (*Charrito*; *Dr. Chapatín*), Florinda Meza (*teacher*), María Antonieta de las Nieves (*Estrellita Pérez*), Rubén Aguirre (*director*), Víctor Alcocer (*producer*), Raúl "Chato" Padilla (*municipal president*), Gilberto Román (*leading man*), Horacio Gómez Bolaños (*assistant director*), Benny Ibarra & Arturo García Tenorio (*Hermanos Brother*), Angelines Fernández (*makeup artist*), Claudia Ivette (*Palmira*), Fernando García Valdez, Óscar Lazo de la Vega, Gabriel Fernández Carrasco

Notes: *Charrito* is a surprisingly good little comedy, albeit hampered by its music—three forgettable songs are inserted, and the score itself is hokey, intrusive, and imparts a TV "feel" to the film. Otherwise, those who only know Roberto Gómez Bolaños from his television work (which was cheaply produced and somewhat repetitive and simplistic) may be surprised by the relatively slick and confident comedic tone of this feature.

Charrito was the third starring film for "Chespirito" and the second which he'd directed. Although none of his movies utilised his most famous TV characters, *El Chanfle* had featured almost the entire television cast, *El Chanfle II* dropped Carlos Villagrán ("Quico") and Ramón Valdés, and Edgar Vivar also disappeared with *Charrito* (although he returned for *Don Ratón y don Ratero* and *Música del viento*). Florinda Meza, María Antonieta de las Nieves, Rubén Aguirre, and Raúl "Chato" Padilla continued their

association with Gómez Bolaños (Angelines Fernández has a small role as well) in this film; added to the cast are veteran Víctor Alcocer (very good as the penny-pinching film producer), Gilberto Román, Benny Ibarra (who'd actually been in *El Chanfle II*) and Arturo García Tenorio. One of Chespirito's brothers, Horacio Gómez Bolaños, also has a substantial role.



Some added interest comes from *Charrito*'s filmmaking plot and setting. There are some unrealistic bits but a fair amount of the technical aspects of making a motion picture are reasonably accurate.

In one scene, we get a good look at the harness worn by actors who're "lynched" in movies, for instance. In another scene, the director "cuts around" Charrito's inability to pick up an "unconscious" Estrellita, saying "we'll resume the scene with her already in his arms."

Perhaps the most blatant bit of fudging was necessitated by the plot: rather than shooting a Western on the back lot, the company travels to a small town to make their film on location. Of course, (illogically) the "small town" is obviously represented by a "Western town" set and looks like no actual Mexican town, ever! Even though *Charrito* has a contemporary setting (shown are several cars, a bicycle, electricity, modern equipment, and so on), the people in this town dress like they're in a period Western, no other autos are shown, and the real-life outlaw duo "Hermanos Brother" (i.e., the Brother Brothers) ride horses and dress and act like Old West-villains.

[Note: somewhat annoyingly, most of the characters in *Charrito* have no given names (even "Charrito" is just the protagonist's nickname). For the sake of the following synopsis, I've decided to use the first names of the various performers in some cases.]



A film company is making a Western in a small Mexican town. A veteran character actor known as "Charrito" has been hired as the villain. When asked why a Mexican *charro* appears in a film otherwise populated

by "Texas-style cowboys," the director replies: "Haven't you ever seen a cowboy movie? The good guy is always tall, handsome, Anglo-Saxon. And the bad guy is always short...ugly, Latino." Unfortunately for the filmmakers,

Charrito is clumsy and unlucky, ruining take after take despite his best efforts.

[The producer boasts that he's paying Charrito a very low salary, but the director says "with the money we're spending on re-takes, we could have hired Marlon Brando." Later, when Charrito asks to take a bathroom break, the producer says "No!" and when asked why by the uncomfortable actor, replies "Because you're not Marlon Brando!"]

Stranded in a tree as part of a practical joke by the crew, Charrito accidentally meets Florinda, the local schoolteacher who has to hold classes outside because the town has no school building. [The town looks fairly prosperous and there certainly should be some place where classes could be held other than in a forest, but once again...plot reasons.] Florinda's father is the municipal president (or sheriff, or something) and he demands money from the producer for permission to shoot in his town. Instead, the producer offers to hold the "world premiere" there and donate the ticket proceeds to the school fund. [Since presumably those in attendance would be townspeople, in essence they'd be financing their own school building. No one thinks of this.]

Charrito and Florinda are attracted to each other, but she (for unexplained reasons) agrees to go on a date with leading man Gilberto. However, she soon realises he's self-absorbed (always talking about his bullfighting career), and returns to Charrito's side. [At least Gilberto isn't depicted as making an unwelcome sexual advance to her. He's not really an unsympathetic fellow, and in fact Florinda steals his car and leaves him stranded in the woods!]

Adding to the drama are the Hermanos Brother, two inept outlaws who several times mistakenly think Charrito is a real badman. Finally realising the truth, they assault the film's "wrap party" in the local *cantina*. Everyone but Charrito and Florinda flee, but the diminutive actor uses various pieces of film equipment to defeat them. For reasons not clear at all, the director decides to edit the film in a deliberately "bad" fashion and show it at the premiere. "Perhaps we're making a 'festival' film," he says, cryptically. The assistant director, in on the plot, replies "It could be interesting to see how the meaning of a film can be changed by altering the order of the scenes" [in the editing process]. Naturally, as always happens in such cases, the "bad" film—complete with Charrito's ruined takes, speeded-up footage, footage run backwards, editing which makes characters give rude responses to questions, and so on—is a hilarious comedy hit.

The producer says they must make a sequel, like "*Superman 2*, *Rocky 2*, and *El Chanfle II*" but the director informs him that Charrito has quit acting and vanished. However, the audience sees Charrito teaching school in the town's new schoolhouse, then leaving on a bicycle and sidecar contraption with Florinda and their infant child.

Charrito's comedy comes in a variety of styles: slapstick, sight gags, character-based. Perhaps the only

major type of comedy which is largely absent is verbal: there are very few dialog-based jokes and puns (the “Hermanos Brother” is a rare example). Certainly there are pratfalls aplenty—in one sequence, Charrito is hiding in a tree right next to Florinda’s schoolbell, which deafens him and smacks him multiple times as it rings—but not to the exclusion of all else.

Some of the sight gags are constructed in very slick, efficient ways. Early in the movie, Estrellita and Gilberto are being filmed in closeup as they clinch; the camera pulls back, showing us that she’s standing on a box because she’s so much shorter than he is. In a subsequent scene, Estrellita is on the ground while Gilberto is forced to stand in a hole! The producer asks “what happens when there’s a scene where they’re walking together?” and the director replies “We have a portable hole.” There is also a running gag in which Charrito leaves the town *cantina* to return to the hotel (and vice versa), getting on a horse (or in a car) and then riding/driving...right across the street, where he dismounts or parks.

The allegedly-funny “bad movie” is not very humorous at all, with the exception of Charrito’s ruined takes, which don’t rely on formal tricks (fast-motion, reversed film, editing) for their humour (one such bit that made me laugh was when Charrito, wearing a large sombrero, shoots his two pistols in the air and blows his own hat off).

The humour also arises from the characters. The vain Estrellita erupts into furious, rapid-fire verbal tirades against her co-stars, the director, etc., repeating the same string of abusive comments each time. The producer constantly grouses at how expensive things are; the director is long-suffering but professional; Charrito is innocent and apologetic but can also be sly and devious. One of the Hermanos Brother listens to his brother, then always says “*lo mismo digo yo*” (I say the same thing), albeit in a different tone of voice to fit each occasion.

There isn’t any blue or adult humour in *Charrito*, although there are a couple of bits of bathroom-style vulgarity (which would reach its pinnacle in *Música del viento*, with a plot centered on involuntary flatulence). In one sequence, referenced above, Charrito says he has to go to the bathroom, and asks where it is. “Anywhere you want for miles around,” the director replies. Charrito goes behind a large boulder and squats, unaware a stick of dynamite has been planted on the other side of the rock, for an upcoming scene. He strains to go to the bathroom and the dynamite explodes: the charge is too small to destroy the boulder, and Charrito looks around sheepishly as if his bodily functions were responsible for the loud noise!

As noted above, there are 3 songs in the film, two performed by Florinda with her students (I fast-forwarded through them, sorry). The third is part of the Western film being shot: a “can-can” by 4 *cantina* dancers segues into a song by Estrellita, about her various foreign lovers. To indicate her “British” lover she makes a gesture as if she’s

wearing a monocle, but when she sings about her “German” lover, she and the 4 chorus girls all give the Nazi salute!

The performances in *Charrito* are all satisfactory or better. Gómez Bolaños and his TV associates are experienced and smooth, although the most nuanced role is that played by Chespirito himself (gee, I wonder how that happened?), who’s really quite good. (He also makes a cameo appearance as one of his TV characters, the elderly “Dr. Chapatín.”) The non-“stock company” performers are also solid pros—perhaps the least convincing is Claudia Ivette, who plays smart-aleck kid “Palmira.” she is supposed to be cute and funny but is mostly annoying (and her post-dubbed dialogue grates as well). Technical aspects are fine.

Charrito is for the most part a very slick comedy (many, many times better than anything Capulina had done in the last decade or more, for instance) by a talented comic writer, performer, and director.



Don Ratón y don Ratero [Mr. Mouse and Mr.

Thief] (Televisine, ©1983) *Dir-Scr*: Roberto Gómez Bolaños; *Photo*: Luis Medina; *Music*: Nacho Méndez; *Prod Mgr*: Antonio H. Rodríguez; *Asst Dir*: Mario Llorca; *Film Ed*: Carlos Savage; *Art Dir*: Carlos Granjean; *Camera Op*: Manuel Santaella; *Choreog*: Gabriela Said;

Makeup: Ana Julieta Rojas; *Sound Ed*: José Li-Ho; *Re-rec*: René Ruiz Cerón; *Union*: STPC

Cast:

Chespirito
[Roberto Gómez Bolaños] (*Ratón Pérez*; *Dr*:

Chapatín), Florinda Meza (*Aftadolfá*), María Antonieta de las Nieves (*Mamá Rufián*), Edgar Vivar (*Kilos*), Rubén Aguirre (*Rufino Rufián*), Benny Ibarra (*Seco*), Alfredo Alegría (*Vinagre*), Raúl “Chato” Padilla (*Boxer*), Angelines Fernández (*servant-spy*), Arturo García Tenorio (*Pequeño Rufián*), Lupita Sandoval (*nurse*), Horacio Gómez Bolaños (*husband of Aftadolfá*), Gabriel Fernández Carrasco, César Sobrevals (*police official*), José Luis Padilla, Maika Montalvo

Notes: Chespirito re-assembled most of his TV regulars for his fourth feature film, a period comedy of the “Roaring Twenties.” Fairly well-produced and at times amusing, *Don Ratón y don Ratero* unfortunately loses steam in the latter half, relying on too many slapstick comedy sequences whose humour is overly reliant on camera tricks, sound effects, and confusing action.

Gangster Kilos suspects rival Rufino had one of his men shot, despite the non-aggression pact between the two



gangs. He decides to hire a hitman, a Mexican who learned his trade in Chicago but has just returned to Mexico City after being deported. Unfortunately, the assassin dies after eating tainted shrimp, leaving a widow, Aftadolfá. She asks Kilos for a job singing & dancing at his nightclub, and brings along exterminator Ratón Pérez to eliminate the mice infestation there. The cleaning woman in Kilos' office is a spy for Rufino, and mistakenly thinks Ratón is the hired killer. This prompts Rufino to attempt to assassinate Ratón first. After numerous near-misses, all the interested parties assemble one evening at Kilos' nightclub; Ratón accidentally unleashes a plague of mice, which precipitates a brawl and the eventual arrest of all the gangsters.

Don Ratón y don Ratero begins well, with amusing introductions to the cast of characters. Kilos has two primary henchmen, Boxer and Seco, while Rufino is accompanied by his prim but deadly elderly mother, his hulking and dim-witted brother Pequeño, and the nervous Vinagre. Aftadolfá (it's difficult to determine if her is



name "Atadolfá" or "Aftadolfá," since it's pronounced both ways) is clueless about her husband's real occupation, but doesn't seem to dislike him in any way (she doesn't grieve for long, though, after his sudden death). Ratón Pérez is yet another sincere, mild-mannered

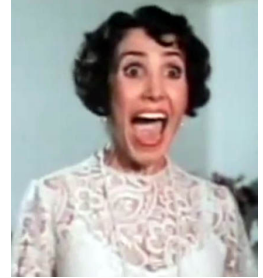
Chespirito protagonist, proud of his profession (he only kills mice that "look dangerous," trapping the others alive for eventual sale to scientific research companies). Sometimes he acts a bit dumb, but for the most part he's depicted as a reasonably normal, likeable human being.

The film contains a slightly larger dose of vulgar and verbal humour than its predecessor, *Charrito*. A standard gag in Mexican cinema (and probably *carpas*, etc.) is to have someone stutter and the word-fragments form vulgarities (or suggest the person is going to say a bad word). In *Don Ratón...*, Vinagre stutters in fear and says things like "ca-ca" (poop) when he's really trying to say *casa*. In another sequence, Seco accidentally drinks Ratón's rat poison and "dies." Ratón can't understand it, claiming the poison is harmless to humans or at the worst would "cause a case of diarrhea." Sure enough, Seco wakes up at his own funeral and has to dash off to the bathroom. Later, Seco is taken to the hospital and the nurse says he has to have his intestines washed (i.e., an enema): when Dr. Chapatín enters the room holding a fire hose, Seco thinks this is going to be inserted into his body.

Another example which is actually rather funny occurs early in the film: a mouse crawls up Aftadolfá's leg, under her skirt. "He's going UP," she says. Ratón can't lift her skirt, so he baits a mousetrap with a piece of cheese and holds his hand up there. "I hope he'll prefer the cheese," Ratón says. Naturally, Aftadolfá's husband comes home

to see Ratón on his knees with his hand up Aftadolfá's dress!

One of the most effectively constructed running gags deals with the wakes of various members of the Kilos gang. The first two instances are nearly identical: the widow shrieks in sorrow, Kilos says there's a check for her in his office; she thanks him; he walks away and she suddenly shrieks in sorrow again, making him jump. The third time this occurs, the widow is Aftadolfá, who shrieks in sorrow. Kilos doesn't stop to talk to her, so she gets up, walks over to the coffin, and taps him on the shoulder. She introduces herself as the dead man's wife, and Kilos says a check is waiting in his office. She thanks him and goes back to sit down, but pauses and returns, taps Kilos on the shoulder, and asks for the address.



He gives it to her, she goes back to sit down, but pauses again, returning to tap Kilos on the shoulder—and then she shrieks in sorrow! The capper is the fourth instance, Seco's funeral. This time the "widow" is a man, who shrieks in sorrow (with a woman's voice). Kilos and Boxer look at each other, puzzled, then shrug. (It should be noted that Seco is not depicted as effeminate, so this joke is extremely unexpected and effective).

It's too bad the whole film isn't this well-executed, although there are a number of other good gags. A hospital sequence is clumsy, and the final nightclub "brawl" (after people see the mice and scream, fights also break out) isn't amusing at all. There is too much fast-motion, reverse-motion, shouting, "funny" sound effects, and dashing about with no particular purpose.

The performances are all satisfactory, with María Antonieta de las Nieves standing out in a distinctive character role (whereas most of the rest of the cast play their parts straight). The production values are fine, although the period is mostly evoked through costuming (a few vintage cars are utilised, which is nice). Perhaps worth noting is the complete absence of any "folkloric" Mexican aspects: this is a "cosmopolitan" film which (although the dialogue makes it clear this is Mexico City and the characters are all Mexicans) could easily have been dubbed into another language and set in Chicago or Paris or somewhere. This may very well have been a deliberate decision by Roberto Gómez Bolaños, who knew his television programs were internationally popular and wanted to make sure his motion pictures would also "travel" well.



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