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OBITUARIES

JACOBO ZABLUDOVSKY

Jacobo Zabłudovsky, for decades the most famous television anchorman in Mexico, died on 2 July 2015 after suffering a stroke; he was 87 years old. Zabłudovsky was born in Mexico City in May 1928; his parents were Jewish immigrants from Poland, and his older brother Abraham



had been born there. In 1950, Zabłudovsky became the first regular TV news broadcaster in Mexico, and eventually became the face of Televisa's nightly news show "24 Horas." He retired from this program in 1998, but continued to work in broadcasting and

print journalism until shortly before his death. To give an idea of the length and importance of his career, he received a PECIME award for 25 years as a journalist...in 1969!

Jacobo Zabłudovsky can be seen in cameo roles in several Mexican films, including *Conserje en condominio* (1973).



JOAN SEBASTIAN

Singer-songwriter Joan Sebastian died on 13 July 2015 after battling cancer multiple times since 1999; he was 64 years old. José Manuel Figueroa was born in the state of



Guerrero in April 1951 and became a professional singer and composer as a teen, but didn't achieve lasting success until the mid-1970s. He changed his artistic name to "Joan Sebastian" in 1977.

Sebastian wrote over 1,000 songs in different genres, and

won numerous Grammy awards during his career.

Although he was primarily a musical performer, Joan Sebastian appeared in a handful of films and *telenovelas* as an actor, including *La sangre de nuestra raza*, *Sangre de rey*, and "Tú y yo" (1996). In the latter *telenovela*, he co-starred with his ex-wife Maribel Guardia. Sebastian had eight children, although two of his sons met violent deaths.

Sebastian was first diagnosed with cancer in 1999. Over the years he would undergo treatment and recover for a time, but the illness repeatedly returned and finally took his life in July 2015.



CANACINE AWARDS 2015

The Cámara Nacional de la Industria Cinematográfica y del Videograma (CANACINE) presented its annual awards on 6 July 2015 at the Teatro Roberto Cantoral in Mexico City.

Guten tag Ramón: Best Film, Best Director
(Jorge Ramírez Suárez)

Óscar Jaenada: Best Actor (*Cantinflas*)

Lisa Owen: Best Actress (*Los insólitos peces gato*)

Sebastián Aguirre: Best New Actor (*Obediencia perfecta*)

Karen Martínez: Best New Actress (*La jaula de oro*)

Aleks Syntek: Best Musical Theme Song
(*Cantinflas*)

Cantinflas: Most Popular Mexican Film
Internationally

La dictadura perfecta: Most Popular Mexican
Film in Mexico, Best Publicity Campaign

H2O MX: Best Documentary

Ramona (dir. Giovanna Zacarías): Best Short

Maleficent: Box-Office Champion in Mexico

Güeros: Mexican Film That Won Most Awards
Internationally

Emmanuel Lubezki: Outstanding Career

La leyenda de la momias de Guanajuato: Special
Mention, Animated Feature

Don Enrique Alagón Río: Posthumous Career
Award



La sangre de nuestra raza [The Blood of Our Race] (Prods. del Rey, 1980) *Prod*: Arnulfo Delgado; *Dir-Scr*: Federico Curiel; *First Treatment*: Armando Guerra; *Story*: Manuel Plascencia; *Photo*: Antonio Ruiz; *Music*: Rafael Carrión; *Prod Mgr*: Luis Quintanilla; *Asst Dir*: José Luis González de León; *Film Ed*: Ángel Camacho; *Camera Op*: Febronio Tepozte; *Makeup*:

Antonio Castañeda; *Sound Supv*: Ramón Moreno; *Re-rec*: Jesús González Gancy; *Sound*: Abel Flores; *Union*: STIC



Cast: Federico Villa (*Rubén Vega*), Silvia Manríquez (*Rebeca Vega*), Joan Sebastián (*Enrique Morales*), Lilián González (*Lilián*), Álvaro Zermeno (*Trinque*), Norma Lazareno (*Norma*), Mercedes Castro (*singer*), Los Humildes (*band*), Jesús Campos (*Jesús Campos*), Billy Cárdenas (*Billy*), Leopoldo Ortiz "*Chimbombín*," Francisco Tostado (*Mike, foreman*), Simón López (?*Simón, Lilián's husband*), Rubén Rentería, Luis Quintanilla (?*Luis, man with bad leg*), Olivia del Valle (?*daughter of Luis*), Manuel Plascencia, Jaime Gómez, Francisco Sañudo (*Paco, Norma's husband*), Felipe de Jesús, David Barragán, Rosendo Macías, Guillermo Ramírez, Pedro de Lucio, Tello Estrada, Javier Márquez, Manuel Serrano, J. Ascención Cardoso, Jesús Sánchez, J. Eduardo Martínez, Javier Mesa, J. Luis González de L., Ivonne Salazar (*dancer*)

Notes: another tale of Mexican immigrants in the USA, with the typical Arnulfo Delgado roster of musical performers in both dramatic and musical-guest roles (although curiously the songs are mostly concentrated in the last third of the picture). The extended sequences in Tijuana (as the protagonists prepare to enter the USA) and the amount of footage spent showing the *ilegales* trekking into the USA from Mexico are significant (so that a lot of melodramatic things can go on). While the USA is (as usual) depicted as rather unfriendly to Mexicans (although no overt racism is depicted--in fact, no Anglos even appear!), Tijuana isn't portrayed in a very positive light either: the protagonists are propositioned, beaten



up, insulted, even unjustly arrested while there!

La sangre de nuestra raza has unusual writing credits, with director Curiel listed as having written the "definitive script" (*guión definitivo*), Armando Guerra the "first treatment," and Manuel Plascencia receiving credit for the

screen story. The script is oddly structured, with--as noted above--a long build-up and then a rushed conclusion. Characters are also introduced and then discarded, never to be mentioned again.

The film suffers from having two rather unsympathetic protagonists. Rubén Vega is irascible, suspicious, and combative. He repeatedly challenges people whom he perceives to be insulting or threatening him or Rebeca (and gets beaten up twice! The only fight he wins is with factory foreman Mike, and that's because Rubén sucker-punches him). Rebeca is annoyingly ingenuous, and the script insists upon making virtually every male in the movie--El Trinque, Enrique, Mike, and Tony Campos--fall for her at first sight. Silvia Manríquez is an attractive actress, but she's not magically beautiful. The result is that there is little audience empathy and identification with Rubén and Rebeca.

Rubén and his sister Rebeca arrive in Tijuana from Santiaguillo, Michoacán. Their father, living in Los Angeles, sent for them and gave them the name of a man who can get them across the border: Trinque. After various unpleasant adventures (culminating with Rubén being beaten up while trying to save Rebeca from being raped, and then both of them being arrested while the criminals escape!), friendly hotel manager Enrique helps them find Trinque. The *pollero* flirts with Rebeca and agrees to take them across the border. Their companions include two young boys, an older man and his grown daughter, and a husband-and-wife team. Trinque cuts a hole in the border fence and they enter the USA, but must walk through the night to meet their contact.

The older man has a hard time keeping up: on an earlier attempt to reach the USA, he was accidentally shot in the leg by the Border Patrol (the shots were aimed at the *mojados'* feet to scare, not harm them). Trinque has little patience but Rubén helps the man. However, Trinque's contact arrives and warns them that La Migra is out in force--he suggests they return to

Mexico and try the next night. They decide to keep going, but one of the group--the man's wife, who is pregnant--starts throwing up, to Trinque's disgust.



Rebeca and the old man's daughter help her, but (after screaming for a long time) she has a miscarriage.

They press onward. The old man collapses and is left behind with his daughter. Rubén helps the sick woman (Lilián). Eventually, Trinque's contact Billy reappears with two other men in a car, but instead of helping the new arrivals, they knock out Rubén, kill Lilián's husband, and fatally stab Trinque. Then they rape Rebeca and Lilián.

The young boys run to a nearby highway and flag down a passing van for help, causing the rapists to flee.

The man in the van takes the group to his house and later drives them to Los Angeles, to the home of Norma and Paco, the aunt and uncle of the boys. Norma and Paco get them all (including the boys) jobs in the tortilla factory run by Jesús Campos, where they will make the princely sum of \$1.50 per hour. [Rubén, Rebeca, and Lilián move



into a house together—there is some suggestion this house is owned by Norma and Paco.] Rebeca is sexually harassed by factory foreman Mike, who is then knocked out by Rubén, getting them all fired. Rebeca and Rubén

learn their father has been arrested and deported: “poor old man, who knows what those ‘pale faces’ made him suffer.” Meanwhile, Enrique from Tijuana (remember him?) arrives in Los Angeles (he’s been corresponding with Rebeca). His “papers are in order.” Sr. Campos informs them that his factory was raided and La Migra took away all of his illegal employees, including Mike, so they can come back to work for him (Enrique too).

Enrique, Rebeca, Rubén and Lilián celebrate by attending an event where Mercedes Castro sings (badly) with a *mariachi* group, then visit the Hollywood Palladium to hear Los Humildes perform. Enrique

kisses Rebeca but she pulls away. Later, Lilián tells Rubén she thinks Rebeca was thinking of the assault they suffered: “I lost everything I had—my child, my husband, my honor,”



but it was worse for Rebeca because she isn’t as mature as Lilián. Eventually, Enrique and Rebeca form a couple, as do Rubén and Lilián.

Sr. Campos reports his son Tony is arriving to join the family business. “Since he returned from Vietnam, he’s been off the rails [*descarrilado*].” Tony flirts with Rebeca, telling her that—after risking his life in Vietnam—he just wants to enjoy life now. She is conflicted: although she likes Enrique, she isn’t sure she loves him, and Tony’s hedonistic lifestyle has its attractions for her. Lilián tells Rubén what’s going on, but before Rubén can solve the problem in his usual way (by punching Tony), they get a phone call: Tony has been killed in a car wreck, and Rebeca is in the hospital in grave condition.

On her deathbed, Rebeca apologises to Rubén and Enrique: “bad luck has always followed me.” She urges Rubén to marry Lilián and return to Michoacán, because

“it’s like hell here.” As the film concludes, a bus heads back to Mexico, presumably carrying Rubén and Lilián.

Rebeca’s final statement about the USA being “hell” seems rather self-serving. To be fair, she was raped by 3 men (who, however, she had indirectly paid to smuggle her across the border). But after that she and her friends are (a) picked up by a kindly stranger who takes them into his home, then drives them to Los Angeles, (b) greeted warmly by Norma and Paco (whose only connection is that they’re related to two boys who traveled with Rebeca and Rubén for 2 days) who (c) get Rubén and Rebeca jobs, and (d) find them a decent (and free?) place to live. Rebeca doesn’t personally experience any racism, nor is she personally threatened by La Migra (although her father is deported and she narrowly misses deportation in the tortilla factory raid), so her life in the United States doesn’t seem too hellish (being groped by Mike aside—but she was groped in Tijuana as well, so that’s not something that happens exclusively in the USA). Her death is an indirect result of her poor decision (to cheat on good guy Enrique with flashy jerk Tony), and so her condemnation of the United States feels a little unfair.



La sangre de nuestra raza doesn’t provide any compelling economic reasons for the characters’ immigration to the USA. Rubén and Rebeca cross the border to be with their father, and Luis and his daughter (the pair who are left behind during the journey) say they need to get to Los Angeles to visit Luis’s son, who has cancer; no specific reason is given for Simón and Lilián, or the two boys. One assumes that a desire for more money

is the root cause of immigration (although in some Mexican movies alternate reasons are provided, such as personal conflicts in Mexico), but it’s not overtly stated here.

The performances in *La sangre de nuestra raza* are serviceable.



As noted above, both Federico Villa and Silvia Manríquez are handicapped to a certain extent by their characters as written; Joan Sebastian and Lilián González are fine, in more sympathetic roles. Sebastian (*sans* the moustache he would sport in his later career) does a song around the one-hour mark (prior to that, the only music was a Federico Villa song over the credits and the tropical instrumental to which Ivonne Salazar dances). The outdoor event

featuring Mercedes Castro is a low spot, musically: this was obviously shot at some sort of real gathering, and Castro is filmed in medium long shot throughout, with occasional cutaways to Sebastian, Villa, and Manríquez in the audience. The song itself is not performed well at all, although the recording may be partially to blame. The concert at the Hollywood Palladium featuring Los Humildes is interesting, with a fair amount of hand-held camerawork, numerous people dancing, and a catchy tune (“Muchacha Muchachita”). Álvaro Zermeno, although he was a singer as well as an actor, doesn’t get to sing here. He’s satisfactory as “El Trinquete” (probably short for *trinquetero*, a hustler or swindler), although it’s unclear if his intentions towards Rebeca are honourable or not.



The production values are fine: everything was shot on location in Tijuana and Southern California, which adds a real touch of verisimilitude. On the other hand, much of the dialogue sounds post-dubbed, which tilts the film in the other, unreal, direction. Federico Curiel doesn’t worry about directorial style, he just gets the action on the screen in an understandable manner.

◆◆◆ WOMEN PLAY PIANO

Nocturno de amor [Nocturne of Love] (CLASA Films Mundiales, 1947*) *Exec Prod:* Fernando Marcos; *Prod:* Salvador Elizondo; *Dir-Scr:* Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Additional Dialog:* Javier Villaurrutia; *Story:* Luis & Raquel Alcoriza; *Photo:* Raúl Martínez Solares; *Music Score/Music Dir:* Raúl Lavista; *Musical Compositions:* Raúl Lavista, Juan Bruno Tarraza, Margarita Lecuona, Beethoven, Saint Saens, Schumann, Chopin; *Prod Chief:* Alberto A. Ferrer; *Asst Dir:* Alfonso Corona Blake, Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir:* Jesús Bracho; *Makeup:* Sara Mateos; *Music Rec:* Jesús González G.; *Dialog Rec:* Rafael [Ruiz] Esparza; *Re-rec:* José de Pérez
*shooting began December 1947; the end title carries a 1948 date

Cast: Miroslava (*Marta Reyes*), Víctor Junco (*Pablo Aguilar*), Hilda Sour (*Andrea Villar*), Carlos Martínez Baena (*Prof. Laborda*), Miguel Ángel Ferriz (*don Julio Reyes*), Alfredo Varelas Jr. (*Ramón*), Francisco Reyguera (*Prof. Sandoval*), Juan Bruno Tarraza (*cabaret pianist*), Tongolele (*dancer*), La Orquesta Filarmónica de México, José Ives Limantour (*himself, conductor*), Paul Loyonnet (*himself, pianist*), Ignacio Retes (*Héctor Valdés, piano student*), Juan Orraca (*Juan*), Guadalupe del Castillo (*Prof. Laborda’s servant*), Roberto Y. Palacios (*café owner*), Herminio Kenny (*Adalberto*), Elodia Hernández (*Andrea’s friend*), Julio Daneri (*guest at Andrea’s salon*), ?Mirón

Levine (*guest at Andrea’s salon*), Lilia Prado, ?Ramón G. Larrea (*scholarship judge*), Felipe Flores (*cabaret emcee*)

Notes: although I’d seen this film years ago, I only remembered one thing about it, the cringe-inducing scene in which Víctor Junco accidentally slams Miroslava’s hand in a car door. Upon recent re-viewing, *Nocturno de amor* proves to be a decent melodrama with a bit more psychological nuance than most, probably thanks to Luis and Raquel Alcoriza’s screen story. The car-door scene is still shocking, but—since I knew it was coming—it didn’t have the same visceral impact as it did originally.

1943—Pablo Aguilar and Marta Reyes are piano students of Prof. Laborda. Pablo is dedicated but impoverished, while Marta is the daughter of wealthy don Julio, who gave up music to become a successful businessman and hopes Marta will achieve the fame he couldn’t have. Pablo and Marta fall in love, although Pablo loves music above all else while Marta puts her love for him above her love for the piano. [This will cause problems, wait and see.]



Pablo and Marta compete for a European scholarship (although since this is set in 1943—in the middle of WWII—one wonders exactly where in “Europe” the winner will be studying). Marta deliberately plays badly because she wants Pablo to win, but this backfires when Pablo, his pride wounded, drops out of the contest in protest. Marta goes to Europe and becomes a famous concert pianist, returning to Mexico in 1947. In the meantime, Pablo has become a popular player and composer of “popular” music, but finds it unfulfilling (except financially). Marta, acclaimed for her classical performances, pities him and still loves him. They eventually wed.



Marta arranges a concert in which she and Pablo play dual pianos, but afterwards he is jealous because she receives the most attention. He goes off with Andrea Villar, a wealthy patron of the arts. She promises to help establish him as a classical pianist. The marriage between Marta and Pablo falters due to his insecurity about his music and her insecurity about their relationship; Pablo urges Marta to accept a contract for an extended concert tour of South America and the USA. While she’s gone, Andrea encourages Pablo to practice and holds a “salon” where he can play before influential music critics and others. However, Marta returns early from her tour and

inadvertently disrupts the event—she only wanted to support her husband, but everyone’s attention turns to her and Pablo is ignored and angry. He asks for a divorce.



Marta pleads for a reconciliation; during their discussion—in her parked car—Pablo accidentally slams the car door on one of her hands. She’ll recover but will never be able to play professionally again.

Pablo is given the opportunity to play a concert. Marta listens to him on the radio, then realises he’s not playing well. [People like



Andrea and Prof. Laborda in the audience also frown, but—like Pablo’s non-musician friend Ramón, I couldn’t tell the difference!] She rushes to the theatre and watches from the wings. Her presence inspires Pablo to play well (although before the concert

he’d told Prof. Laborda that he was glad she wasn’t there, since she made him nervous) and they embrace after the concert.

Nocturno de amor, to its credit, doesn’t follow the usual film-melodrama pattern of “if each person would just



listen to the other one, their problems would be solved.”

There aren’t any misunderstandings here, it’s that Pablo and Marta have two different points of view. As noted above, Marta seems to love playing the piano but it is also clear that she is a surrogate for her father, who

apparently wasn’t good enough to be a concert pianist and went into business instead. The idea that don Julio is vicariously living his dream through his daughter is blatantly verbalised several times, although it isn’t presented as a bad thing and Marta doesn’t appear to resent having been guided into this profession. Still, fairly early in her relationship with Pablo, she openly tells him that love is more important to her than music. Everything Marta subsequently does for Pablo turns out badly, but her intentions are good.

Although Pablo tells Marta he puts music above everything, even their relationship, this is not actually his problem. Instead, he’s overly sensitive at first, then adds envy of Marta’s fame to the mix when she returns from Europe. At almost any point in the film Pablo could have swallowed his pride and moved forward with his own career, but he won’t do that. [There is also the issue of his poverty, which forces him to “waste” his time on popular music rather than studying and practicing classical music,

but this is a subsidiary issue and becomes irrelevant later, when the obstacles to his success are his own attitudes and behaviour.]

Nocturno de amor feints in the direction of another melodrama staple, the protagonist’s relationship with “another woman,” but once again confounds our expectations. Andrea Villar is set up as a stalking horse: she’s an attractive, wealthy woman (albeit slightly older—in real life Hilda Sour was 2 years’ older than Junco and a decade older than Miroslava, but was still only in her early thirties when this film was made) who, it seems, might intend to “steal” Pablo from Marta. But Andrea makes it clear to Pablo that she’s primarily interested in fomenting his career, and any sort of romantic relationship would occur later (she could be waiting because Pablo is still married to Marta at this point or perhaps she would only be attracted to him “that way” if he becomes a famous concert pianist). She doesn’t do anything underhanded, she doesn’t disparage Marta, she really does help Pablo’s career, and she goes away quietly when Marta and Pablo reconcile. Hardly a typical melodrama “bad woman.”



Víctor Junco, the younger brother of actor Tito Junco, spent a few years in minor roles before being (relatively briefly) elevated to romantic roles in the latter half of the 1940s opposite the top female stars of the era (Dolores del Río, María Félix, María Antonieta Pons, Miroslava, Elsa Aguirre, Ninón Sevilla, Gloria Marín, etc.). As he grew older, Junco became a character actor, often playing middle-aged establishment figures as well as villains. [Curiously, Tito Junco started out in gangster and other unsympathetic roles, but in his later career was often cast as more kindly characters.] In *Nocturno de amor*, Junco appears grumpy or irritated throughout the film, and smokes an incredible number of cigarettes.



Miroslava is at the height of her beauty in this picture, evolving from a fresh-faced teen to an exquisitely gowned and coiffed young woman. [One of her dresses is black with a spider-web motif, a hilariously, wonderfully gaudy look.] The script gives her a little more

emotional range than Junco is allowed, although her character Marta is still the model of self-abnegation for love, saying (in essence, not an exact quote) “I’ll give up anything for love! I don’t mind that Pablo’s smashed my

hand and ended my career, I'll live vicariously through his piano playing!"

The test of the cast is fine, with Carlos Martínez Baena doing his usual "kindly old mentor" routine (there's a nice scene where he chokes up while remembering his late wife), Alfredo Varela Jr. as Pablo's (mildly) comic sidekick, Francisco Reyguera as an eccentric, elderly professor, etc. Chilean import Hilda Sour is fine as Andrea Villar, and there is an amusing cameo by Herminio Kenny as an Agustín Lara-inspired "poet of



music" who hires Pablo to transcribe and orchestrate his compositions. Also in the cast is a young, unbilled Ignacio Retes in one of his earliest screen roles as Pablo and Marta's fellow piano student.

The Orquesta Filarmónica de México appears in numerous concert scenes shot at the Teatro Metropolitano in Mexico City. Actual conductor José Ives Limantour plays himself, and French pianist Paul Loyonnet (who had retired from concert performances in 1932 but came out of retirement in the post-WWII period, eventually relocating to Canada) appears in the opening sequence. It's not known who does the classical piano playing for Junco and Miroslava—both actors mime their playing, but obviously their music isn't what's heard on the soundtrack. One suspects Juan Bruno Tarraza (who has a cameo role in a cabaret sequence) doubled for Pablo's performance of his "popular" song.

The cabaret sequence also features a rather awkward



dance by Tongolele, and is the first indication of a very mild theme contrasting popular music with classic music. Marta and her friends have gone to the

cabaret after her successful concert debut in Mexico, and the club emcee proudly announces the presence of a "famous pianist" among the patrons: Marta starts to stand up, but the emcee then introduces Pablo Aguilar, now a well-known performer and composer of pop songs. Prof. Laborda confesses to Marta that Pablo does this to earn money, but still yearns to play classically. The idea that Pablo is conflicted emotionally because he's "sold out" his art crops up a few times later in the film—in one scene, Marta's father condescendingly dismisses a new song

Pablo has written—but is never really developed. The film's main theme is Pablo's insecurity and Marta's constant desire to "help" him.

The production values of *Nocturno de amor* are fine. This is a glossy, "cosmopolitan" movie which is almost a Mexican version of pre-war Italian "white telephone" films: everything takes place in luxurious, upper-class locations, everyone is well-dressed, and so forth. Even Pablo's "poverty" is genteel, university-student "poverty": he and Ramón (a medical student) share a large, not particularly shabby or dirty room, and while they complain about not having enough money, apparently aren't in danger of having to drop their studies and actually get a job. The direction, editing, cinematography, etc., are slick and professional, in a zero-style way.



Andante [In a Moderately Slow Tempo]* (Uranio Films, 1967) *Exec Prod:* Julio Bracho; *Assoc Prod:* Mercedes Carreño, José Lorenzo Zakany Almada; *Dir-Scr:* Julio Bracho; *Photo:* Alex Phillips [Mexico], Alex Phillips Jr. [Europe]; *Music Dir:* Raúl Lavista; *Prod Mgr:* Günter Eulau, Cyril Grize, Günther Köpf, Jorge A. Villaseñor, Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir:* Gusti Klenner, W. Sánchez; *Film Ed:* Jorge Bustos, Joaquín Ceballos, José Liho; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano; *Decor:* David Anton; *Camera Op:* Hanns Matula, E. Urbano Vázquez; *Makeup:* Sara Mates; *Sound Engin:* Enrique Rodríguez; *Union:* STPC; Eastmancolor

* [that's the dictionary definition of "andante"—I don't know if the filmmakers intended this translation or not.]

Cast: Mercedes Carreño (*Marta; Gigi; Judith; Óscar's mother*), Guillermo Murray (*Óscar Lawrence*), Graciela Doring (*Erika*), Alberto Galán (*psychiatrist*), Andrea Palma (*Victoria*), Alex Phillips [III] (*Óscar as a boy*), Erich Nikowitz, Josef Krastel, Nothanael León "Frankenstein" (*Óscar's guardian*), Marcelo Villamil (*concert goer*), Víctor Alcocer (*dubs Vienna doctor*), Jorge Bracho y "La máquina del sonido," **Pianists:** Aurora Serratos, Guillermo Salvador, James Stafford

Notes: one of the rare Mexican films shot in locations other than Mexico, the United States, Spain, and Central/South America, *Andante* takes place largely in Europe, with scenes taking place in Vienna, Paris, and “the Alps.” The Mexican scenes are relatively brief, and



include one on the beach at Acapulco (Meche Carreño para-sails, of course) and another in Mexico City (Guillermo Murray’s character drives around Mexico

City until he reaches the Conservatory where Carreño is practicing). The bulk of the film takes place in Vienna (more touristy views) and the Alps (nice scenery), and while some interior scenes were shot in Mexico (Marcelo Villamil can be seen as an extra in the “Emperor Concerto” sequence when Óscar’s mother drops dead), others were clearly filmed on location (with local actors dubbed into Spanish).

Conductor Óscar Lawrence is informed that his pianist has fallen ill, so the second part of his concert—a Mozart piece for 2 pianos and orchestra—must be cancelled. He



reluctantly agrees to allow young Mexican music student Marta to participate (Óscar plays the other piano) and the performance is a success.

Óscar and Marta see the sights of Vienna together and he makes a date to meet her the next day, but stands her up. For some reason, her face reminds him of someone, and this is psychologically disturbing. He goes to Paris to see his psychiatrist. While there, he sleeps with prostitute Gigi, who strongly resembles Marta. Gigi is murdered by her pimp, and when Óscar is asked to identify the body, he discovers her face has changed and no longer evokes the same reaction. The psychiatrist urges Óscar to return to Vienna, meet Marta again, and try to determine who she reminds him of. However, Marta has gone home to Mexico.

Unable to get an immediate, direct flight, Óscar drives through the Alps. He picks up Judith, whose car has gone over a cliff. What do you know, her face is the same as Marta and Gigi! [Gigi wore a long, strawberry blonde wig, and Judith has a horrible short hairstyle.] She says she’s the only child of a wealthy father and has led a hedonistic,

selfish life. Óscar drops her off at her family home, which is currently closed for the season, but promises to return the next day. When he does, he’s informed by the tearful gardener that Judith died a week earlier, in an automobile accident in the Alps!

In Mexico, Óscar tracks down Marta and they are married. He promises to feature her in a concert, anything she wants. Marta suggests Beethoven’s “The Emperor Concerto” but Óscar shouts “Anything but the Emperor Concerto!” They return to Europe, and Marta tries to



ascertain why Óscar hates the Emperor Concerto. At his childhood home, Marta is coldly received by housekeeper Victoria, but the older woman eventually

grows to trust her. Óscar says he has a childhood memory of attending a performance of the Concerto during which the pianist (who looks just like Marta, Gigi, and Judith) dropped dead on stage! Victoria tells Marta that the woman was Óscar’s mother—she had an affair with Óscar’s father and when she died, Óscar was adopted by his father and his wife.

The psychiatrist, Marta and Óscar’s assistant Erika conspire to cure him. He’s lured to the home of his mother, and has a flashback to her funeral. The servant who accompanies young Óscar forces the boy to look into the coffin at his mother’s corpse: “Never forget your mother’s face!” Óscar collapses, but when he recovers he’s completely cured. Marta performs the Emperor Concerto to great acclaim.

Andante starts off rather slowly. The idea that Marta would be plucked from the audience to play a concert—they don’t even pull her aside to ask her, the impresario grabs her arm and hauls her up on the stage—and that she’d be able to competently perform whatever piece chosen (actually, the impresario says he had heard her play that piece before, what’re the odds?) is

extremely far-fetched. Even more awkward are the glances Marta and Óscar exchange as they’re playing,



with sappy voice-over conveying their romantic “thoughts” to us. Then there’s a fairly long sequence of them riding through Vienna in a horse-drawn carriage, followed by Óscar running away to Paris to avoid seeing Marta again. The “Gigi” scenes are also clumsy and

artificial, but the film picks up steam once Gigi is murdered by her pimp, and while the “Judith” section is completely illogical (adding a supernatural aspect completely absent from the rest of the movie), it’s amusing enough. Marta’s attempt to discover Óscar’s secret (which he doesn’t even know himself) holds the audience’s interest, even if the psychiatrist’s confident assertion that Óscar will be “completely cured” when he awakes seems like pure conjecture.

[As an aside, the “Judith” sequence is yet another cinematic example of the urban legend known as “The Phantom Hitchhiker” (*The Mexican Film Bulletin* vol. 10 #8 lists 5 previous examples, from 1947-1993, and I’m fairly sure I found at least one additional film since then).]

Andante is not really “about” classical music or musicians, this is just a framework for the psycho-drama about Óscar’s fixation on Marta’s face and his phobia



regarding the Emperor Concerto. Although there is plenty of classical music on the soundtrack, the only extended musical sequence is the

one that opens the movie. The classical music is balanced out a bit by some contemporary rock music, notably in the Paris club scene (giving “Gigi” and other young people a chance to dance frenetically)—this music was presumably supplied by (the director’s son) Jorge Bracho y “La máquina del sonido” (Jorge Bracho was also a sometimes-actor and a member of the rock group “Los monjes”).

Director Julio Bracho gave his sister, actress Andrea Palma (real name, Guadalupe Bracho), a supporting role, while the Phillips family was also well represented: cinematographers Alex and Alex Jr., and Alex III (who later became a musician and actor himself) as young Óscar. To round out the nepotism review, Meche Carreño and her then-husband José Lorenzo Zakany Almada co-produced the film.

The production values of *Andante* are fine. Relatively few Mexican films (then or now) were shot in Europe (Spain excepted), and Julio Bracho went out of his way to prove to audiences that he really, really went to Vienna, the Alps, and Paris, with extensive footage of Guillermo Murray and Mercedes Carreño in these locales. This results in numerous scenes of buildings, streets, and statues, which have a certain historical interest today.

The opening concert sequence—shot in Vienna—is interesting because the concert-goers (Austrian extras) are virtually all blonde, Nordic types, and Mercedes Carreño—with her long, black hair—stands out (she’s also wearing a white dress, in contrast to the mostly dark formal wear of the people around her). As Marta and

Óscar play, Bracho frequently cuts to closeups of people in the audience, especially attractive young women (for some reason), and he repeats this pattern in the Paris club sequence. Otherwise, Bracho doesn’t impose a particular visual style on the movie, despite its psychological theme: everything is shot in a very bright, high-key fashion, with few if any odd angles or particularly noticeable editing techniques.

This is mostly a two-actor film: Graciela Doring, Alberto Galán, and Andrea Palma provide satisfactory support, but the bulk of the drama is handled by Guillermo Murray and Meche Carreño. Carreño’s four roles are



trumpeted in the opening credits as something of a *tour-de-force*, but in fact, other than “Marta,” her other characters are distinguished mostly by their hairstyles; Carreño is fine playing a sensitive young woman (as she did in virtually all her movies in this period), but she’s not exactly Peter Sellers in terms of multi-role versatility. Murray doesn’t really invest much in his part as a neurotic conductor, seeming too stoic and normal.



CASTAWAYS

8 hombres y una mujer [8 Men and a Woman]

(Prods. México, 1945) *Exec Prod.:* Eduardo Quevedo B.; *Prod.:* Francisco Ortiz Monasterio; *Dir-Adapt.:* Julián Soler; *Dialog.:* Antonio Monsell; *Story.:* Ramón Obón; *Photo.:* Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Music.:* Francisco Argote; *Prod Chief.:* Luis Busto; *Asst Dir.:* Jaime Contreras; *Film Ed.:* Rafael Portillo; *Art Dir.:* Jesús Bracho, Edward Fitzgerald; *Décor.:* Rafael Suárez; *Camera Op.:* Armando Stahl; *Makeup.:* Enrique Hutchinson; *Dialog Rec.:* Rafael [Ruiz] Esparza; *Music Rec.:* Manuel Esperón

Cast: Domingo Soler (*General Pánfilo Villegas*), Malú Gatica (*Eva*), Leopoldo Ortín (*Perico Bracero*), Andrés Soler (*Juan de Dios*), Manolo Fábregas (*Rubén, the Poet*), Miguel Arenas (*don Diego Colorado y del Mazo*), Alejandro Erbeya [Ciangherotti] (*El Che Giménez de Ulúa*), Roberto Hinojosa (*José Figueiras, the Brazilian*), Paul Cambo (*Max Prestein, the Scientist*), Roberto Cañedo (*ship’s officer*)

[It should be noted that the Cine Nostalgia print of this film has newly-generated credits (apparently the original copy of the film was damaged). Presumably the new credits are accurate.]

Notes: moderately entertaining “desert island” comedy with some political satire and a rather dark undertone.

Because they are so engrossed in a marathon game of poker, 8 travelers on an ocean liner mistake a lifeboat drill



for a real submarine attack and are left behind when their ship sails on. The men are self-important General Villegas, meek Juan de Dios, farmer Perico, existential poet Rubén, pompous

Spanish aristocrat don Diego, Argentine "El Che," José the Brazilian, and (German Jew?) scientist Max Prestein (the first four men are presumably Mexicans). After days at sea, the men are starving and Rubén volunteers to commit suicide with the General's pistol so the others can survive by eating his body! Fortunately, just then they spot a nearby island. Although it is deserted, the island is hospitable for human life, and over the span of two years the 8 castaways create a comfortable, Robinson Crusoe-like existence for themselves. The only thing missing is female companionship, but the men all agree that women are more trouble than they are worth.

This is put to the test when a light plane crash-lands on the island. The pilot is an attractive young woman, Eva, who says her craft ran out of gas; she tells them they are a few hundred miles off Mexico's Pacific Coast. Although



they vow not to romance her, seven of the eight men immediately break their promise (Rubén is the only hold-out), causing conflict among the castaways and

consternation on Eva's part. The men decide peace can only be restored to their society if Eva marries their "leader," and a presidential election is proposed: the General and Perico are the two candidates. Perico wins because he's hidden most of their stored food and farming implements (leaving only fruit to eat); the General, who still has his pistol, considers a coup but is mollified when the men agree to a rotating presidency of one week's duration.

Eva, however, isn't agreeable to being passed around from "president" to "president" each week; she seizes the General's gun and installs herself as the island's dictator, forcing the men to work hard and impressing upon them the key virtue of her leadership: chastity. Rubén refuses to participate and is locked up; Eva releases him and commands him to kiss her. This kiss seemingly unhinges

the poet's mind. When the men rebel against Eva's dictatorship and sail away in the lifeboat, Rubén leaps overboard and is feared drowned. However, he washes up on shore and is reunited with Eva.

The 7 men return to the "pleasures" of civilisation (represented, ironically, by stock footage of war). Some years later, Eva, Rubén and their two children are surprised when a ship arrives at the island: the seven men have returned to live in peace and harmony...and have brought their own wives this time!

8 hombres y una mujer alludes to World War II—a false "submarine attack" heralds the lifeboat drill, and there is the aforementioned stock footage of wartime fighting and destruction at the end—but the primary "political"

content revolves around the presidential election.

Neither the General nor Perico has a specific platform, other



than "vote for me or I'll shoot you" (General) and "vote for me and I'll return your food" (Perico). The electorate consists of 5 men (the 8 castaways minus the two candidates and Rubén, who doesn't participate), who parade around carrying two-sided banners (one for each candidate). There aren't any ideological jokes but the concept of "democracy" is parodied savagely.

This also raises the aforementioned dark side of the film's premise. Although Eva eventually gets the upper hand and frees herself from constant harassment, this requires the possession of the island's only firearm: none of the men (except Rubén, who's "anti-woman" and nervously hostile in her presence) behaves in a gentlemanly manner. They all force their attentions on her, albeit in a superficially polite way (which is to say,

they don't literally try to rape her). However, she is objectified from the very first and the men don't bother to ask her if she'd mind being the wife of a different "president"



each week (they have her count the ballots, but apparently she doesn't know that the entire purpose of electing an island "president" is to choose her husband).

While *8 hombres y una mujer* doesn't go so far as to have Eva acquiesce to her harassment (or even act in any way flirtatiously, except—towards the end—with Rubén), there are a few conflicting signals given. For example, on Eva's second day on the island she is accosted by most of the men, each time rejecting their advances firmly, but then immediately there's a cut to Eva—dressed in a sarong and *bandeau* style top—happily dancing a Brazilian samba



as the men play music and sing! There are almost no scenes in which Eva interacts in a friendly fashion with the men, and yet when they all vanish (leaving the island while she's asleep), she searches for them frantically, calling for her "friends" before collapsing on the beach in sorrow.

Malú Gatica, a Chilean actress and

singer, worked in Mexican cinema in the latter half of the Forties after making a few films in South America. She's attractive here and gets to sing one song, but her character is, as noted above, treated in a somewhat confusing fashion (and, rather surprisingly, she's off-screen for much of the "presidential election" section of the movie). The script doesn't do Manolo Fábregas any favours either: although he's the romantic lead by default (tellingly, he's the only



male who doesn't sport a huge, bushy beard after 2 years on the island), he vacillates between being a cold "woman-hater" and a stammering fool when confronted by Eva's open desire for him.

The rest of the cast is satisfactory, with Domingo and Andrés Soler playing more or less to type, as does Miguel Arenas. Leopoldo Ortín, noticeably thinner than one remembers him from his late Thirties-early Forties starring roles, is adequate. Alejandro Ciangherotti (billed as "Alejandro Erbea" for some reason) and Roberto Hinojosa are a stereotypical Argentine and Brazilian, respectively (although this is chiefly limited to their accents and musical preferences).

French actor Paul Cambo had left occupied France for a South American tour with Louis Jouvet's theatrical company in 1941; Cambo stopped off in Mexico to make 3 films, and he (and Jouvet) wouldn't go home until the war was over. Early in *8 hombres y una mujer* it seems

Cambo's character might serve the same role as "the Professor" in "Gilligan's Island" (inventing various devices to make the castaways' lives easier) but this idea is dropped fairly quickly. "Max Prestein" speaks fluent Spanish with a "European" accent, but his exact nationality is unclear.

There are a couple of lines worth quoting. One is mildly amusing in its casual racism: when Eva's plane lands on the beach, the castaways are some distance down the beach, and look at the wreck through binoculars. Someone says the pilot who climbs out of the burning plane is "black" (Eva's face is smudged by smoke), and the reply is "A black in an airplane? Impossible!" Later, there's a linguistic joke, as "El Che" asks Eva "What would I be without you?" using the South American form *vos* (rather than *tú*, which is prevalent in Mexico and Spain): "what would I be *sin vos*?" Eva, replies, "you'd be *afónico* [voiceless]," as if El Che had said *sin voz* (without a voice).

The production values of *8 hombres y una mujer* are fine. There's a slight blooper early in the movie, as the ocean liner's life preservers read "S.S. Mazatlán," but the film's opening shot (stock footage) of the ship itself shows the name painted on the bow is something else (it's illegible but it's not "S.S. Mazatlán"). The lifeboat scenes are studio-shot with back-projection and are fine (the boat and the background move with the motion of the waves). Although some of the interior scenes (in the huts) on the island may have been done in the studio, the exteriors were clearly shot on an actual beach and surrounding area.



Blanca Nieves y sus 7 amantes [Snow White and Her 7 Lovers] (Peliculas Rodriguez, 1980) *Exec Prod:* Ismael Rodríguez Jr.; *Dir:* Ismael Rodríguez; *Adapt:* Francisco Cavazos, Ismael Rodríguez; *Story:* Ismael Rodríguez; *Photo:* Ángel Bilbatúa; *Music:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Sound Dir:* Víctor Rojo; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Asst Dir:* Román Hernández; *Prod Mgr:* Tonatiuh Rodríguez; *Art Dir:* Germán Ramírez; *Script*

Clerk: Alejandro Todd; *Camera Op:* Armando Castillón;
Union: STIC

Cast: Sasha Montenegro (*Blanca Nieves*), Erick del Castillo (*El Norteño—Juventino Sánchez Parra*), Rafael Inclán (*El Zopilote—Santiago Ibáñez Manríel*), Carlos Riquelme (*don Carlitos—Carlos Gómez del Campo; brother of don Carlos*), Noé Murayama (*El Fedayín—Gilberto Navarro González*), Chóforo [Raúl Padilla] (*El Chavo—Álvaro Chávez Pérez*), [Héctor] Cholo Herrera (*El Yucateco—Antonio Herrera Méndez*), Güero Castro (*Flor—Florentino Flores Floreado*), Luis Manuel Pelayo (*television newscaster*)

Notes: although this is not a remake of *8 hombres y una mujer*, the basic premise is still the same (one woman on a desert island with a bunch of horny men) and *Blanca Nieves y sus 7 amantes* even includes a scene in which the protagonist dances as the men play various improvised musical instruments, something which had occurred in the earlier movie as well. In *8 hombres...*, the plot hinges on the woman obtaining possession of the island's only firearm, while in *Blanca Nieves...* all of the guns are tossed into the sea by don Carlitos, to avoid bloodshed among the men. There is also a slight coincidence in the final moments of each film: in *8 hombres...* Eva calls the (now departed) men her *amigos* (friends), and in *Blanca*



Nieves..., after all 7 men are dead and buried, she refers to them as her *cuates* (roughly, pals) and thanks them for desiring her—e.g., in both films the female protagonist

spends the whole movie fending off the unwanted sexual and romantic advances of the men, but after they're no longer a threat, she thinks of them kindly!

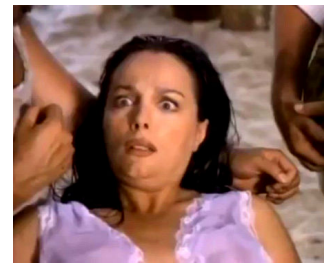
Of course the later film is much more explicit than the 1940s picture, but it is also interesting to note that *Blanca Nieves...* is also slightly more balanced in its depiction of the sexual politics on the island. The men in *8 hombres y una mujer* don't take Eva's wishes into account at all, and she only gains the upper hand when she takes possession of the island's sole firearm. Despite the fact that the males in *Blanca Nieves...* are all violent criminals, they treat Blanca with a bit more respect: she's still expected to provide sexual services, but those proposing forcible rape and alternating physical "use" of Blanca on a daily basis (in *8 hombres...* it was to be weekly) are overruled by the others. Blanca is given the opportunity to choose her "permanent" partner from among the men. She manipulates them skillfully, proving she's more intelligent than they are.

As *Blanca Nieves...* opens, a young woman is given a package and ordered to deliver it to "Escorpión" in Panama; her code name "in this operation" is "Blanca Nieves." This is never explained or even alluded to later. The dialogue doesn't overtly indicate she's a drug mule, but this is one explanation (or she could be delivering some other smuggled or stolen item, or secret intelligence, or...?). A newscast then identifies 7 convicts who escaped in a boat from the penal colony on the Isla Marias: bank robber El Norteño (who stole \$2 million in dollars, not for *malinchismo*—i.e., he preferred foreign currency to Mexican money—but because he feared "another devaluation of the *peso*"); hitman El Zopilote; harmless-looking senior citizen don Carlitos (who sank a shrimp boat and caused the deaths of over 40 crew members); "terrorist" bomber El Fedayín; medical student El Chavo (who murdered 16 prostitutes and buried them in his garden); El Yucateco (who wiped out his in-laws); and gay Flor (who killed various other gay men).

The seven fugitives are living on a deserted island, waiting for the brother of don Carlitos to arrive in a shrimp boat and take them to safety. However, since they've been there for 7 weeks, the men fear they're stranded. [And yet later it is made clear they can leave the island, since they still have the boat they stole and enough fuel to reach the mainland.



They don't go because they know they'll be identified and arrested when they dock.] Tempers are growing short: despite the relatively comfortable life they are leading, six of the men miss female companionship (and Flor misses male companionship). In an amusing bit, El Chavo has a collection of "Playboy" magazine nude pinups he rents to the other men for "personal" use.



One day, Blanca Nieves washes up on the beach. When she recovers consciousness, she says her ship sank. The men give her a little time to recover, then make plain their intention to rape her, each man getting her one day of the week (Flor says she can have his day, Sunday, as a "day of rest"). However, after some discussion, they agree that Blanca can choose her mate: each man will have a chance to convince her of his suitability.

In her "interviews" with the men over a couple of days, Blanca tells each one that he is her choice, but it's too dangerous to tell the others right away. Instead, each man is advised to dispose of his rivals, leaving Blanca and the "chosen one" alone on the island. El Norteño, who has \$2

million in a Miami bank, offers to pay El Zopilote to eliminate the others. As it develops, most of the men accidentally kill themselves, often while plotting to murder their fellow fugitives (the last two standing, El Zopilote and don Carlitos, stab each other to death). Blanca is now alone and safe...until the brother of don Carlitos and his shifty-looking shrimpboat crew show up, too late to save the escaped convicts, but not too late to "rescue" the sexy Blanca...

Director Ismael Rodríguez had a long and illustrious career in Mexican cinema, although upon a closer look his



filmography alternates between successes and failures, daring experiments and routine commercial product, pretension and vulgarity.

He's perhaps

best known for his numerous (16) Pedro Infante vehicles, including the famous *Nosotros los pobres* and Infante's last movie, *Tizoc*. Rodríguez's movies from the mid-Sixties onward were increasingly derivative and/or eccentric: *Autopsia de un fantasma*, *El ogro*, *Mi niño Tizoc*, *Nosotros los feos* [the latter two titles openly evoking his earlier Pedro Infante films], and so on. However, beginning with 1978's *Ratero*, Rodríguez made a string of interesting pictures--*Ratero*, *Blanca Nieves y sus 7 amantes*, *Burdel (Cada quién su madre)*, *Corrupción*, and *Yerba sangrienta!*—which combined exploitative elements with some socio-political commentary.

Blanca Nieves... is directed in a workmanlike fashion, but the different characters—although rather stereotypical—are each given distinct personalities, and



their conversations with Blanca allow them to elaborate a bit on their back stories. Héctor "Cholo" Herrera did not have a very substantial film career (although he did win a 2009 Best Co-Starring Actor Ariel for

his role in *Lake Tahoe*), but was very well-known for his live performances. In one scene in *Blanca Nieves...* he entertains the others with jokes and stories, probably a nod to his non-film work.

Eric del Castillo plays his *norteño* character rather broadly, Carlos Riquelme is his usual kindly old man, and Güero Castro a stereotypical effeminate Mexican cinema gay. Curiously, although Noé Murayama's character is nick-named "El Fedayín," he's apparently not intended to

be of Middle Eastern origin. In one scene he tells Blanca he'll be greater than "Carlos el terrorista" (aka Carlos the Jackal), although he admits only one of his 10 bombs ever exploded. Rafael Inclán's "El Zopilote" is a more serious, restrained version of his familiar *chilango* act. Raúl Padilla "Chóforo" has the sides of his head shaved, making him resemble Ignacio López Tarso's serial killer in *El profeta Mimi* (both characters were loosely based on famed real-life murderer Goyo Cárdenas).

All of the actors in *Blanca Nieves...* deserve some special sort of credit for their willingness to



appear nude. Sasha Montenegro has two nude scenes, which was sort of expected, but it's a bit of shock to see Eric del Castillo receiving a nude massage, which is followed later by a extended sequence in which the men all bathe in preparation for "officially" meeting Blanca. There's not a huge amount of full frontal, but there's a bit, and all of the performers are clearly and obviously actually naked. None of this is in any sort of sexual context (Montenegro's nude scenes are "erotic"—she swims in both of them—but in an artistic fashion, and the male nudity is all played for humour).



WESTERNS

Tierra de rencores [Land of Grudges] (Filmadora



Cerro de la Silla, 1986)
Exec Prod: Manuel Pérez Cárdenas;
Prod: Julián Garza Arredondo;
Dir: Jaime Casillas; Scr: Manolo Cárdenas;
Story: Julián Garza (based on the *corrido* "Nomás las mujeres quedan");
Photo: Agustín Lara; Music:

Rafael Carrión; Prod Mgr: Javier García Cantú, Rafael Ulises Loza, Homel Vela Garza; Asst Dir: Javier Durán; Film Ed: Francisco Chiu; Camera Op: Silvano Zúñiga; Action Scenes: Alejandro de la Peña, Gerardo Soublette;

Makeup: Graciela Muñoz; *Sound Op:* Guillermo Carrasco; *Dialog Rec:* José Luis Núñez; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldivar; *Script Clerk:* Lourdes Álvarez; *Union:* STIC

Cast: Álvaro Zermeno (*Jesús Quintanilla "El Jesse"*), Rebeca Silva (*Aurora*), Gregorio Casals (*Arredondo*), Eleazar García "Chelelo" (*Majuela*), Edna Bolkan (*Sanjuana*), Roberto Cañedo (*Refugio Pérez*), Wally Barrón (*don Ernesto García*), Alfredo Gutiérrez "El Turco" (*El Barbas*), Alfonso Munguía (*Remigio Pérez*), Humberto Elizondo (*Epifanio García*), Carlos Rotzinger (*cmdte. of rurales*), Ada Carrasco (*Grandmother Pérez*), Manolo Cárdenas (*Anselmo Pérez*), Julián Garza (*El Texano*), Lupe Tijerina (*federal agent*), ? Leo Villanueva (*federal agent*), Luis Garza (*Hilario Pérez*), Claudia Cañedo (*Adelaida García*), Armando Duarte (*Domingo García*), Gerardo Zermeno, Laura Tovar (*Doroteo's wife*), Mundo Miranda, Raúl del Valle, Clarissa Ahuet (*Celina*), Tello Mantecón, Roel Martínez "El Picudo," Rogelio García Rangel, Roberto Iglesias, Pepe Treviño, Manuel Martínez "El Patillas," José Carlos Correa, David Duarte, Alfredo Rodríguez, Apolonio "Polo" Dávila, Mario Telles, Rafael Ulises "El Panda," Alfonso Murillo, Francisco Pérez, Los Invasores de Nuevo León, Hermanos García

Notes: Jaime Casillas had an unusual career in Mexican cinema. Born in 1936, he entered the film industry in the 1970s as a writer (having previously written plays and been a theatre critic, among other positions) and directed



his first feature in 1975, *Chicano*, starring his brother Gregorio Casal (at left--another brother, Mario Casillas, was also an actor). *Pasajeros en tránsito* followed in 1976, again with Gregorio Casal in a leading role: both of these films were serious

dramas with political overtones. Casillas directed and wrote the period drama *Memoriales perdidos* (1983), winning 2 Arieles for his screenplay and story (Claudio Brook won the Best Actor Ariel and the Set Decor also received the prize), and yet his next two directorial projects were strictly commercial efforts, Westerns made for the Nuevo León-based Cerro de la Silla company ("Cerro de la Silla," or "Saddle Hill," is a prominent geographic landmark in the state). Casillas, who died in 2008, later worked in various industry posts but his only other credit as a director was 2000's *La fatua*, about which little information is available (it may have been a short).

What inspired Casillas to switch from "serious" to "commercial" cinema? This is hardly the only such case, of course. The career of Arturo Ripstein includes *La ilegal* with Lucía Méndez, and Felipe Cazals directed *Burbujas de amor* (Lorena Herrera and Lina Santos), but these can (probably) be explained away as two prolific directors needing some ready cash and/or wanting to keep busy,

whereas Jaime Casillas obviously did not make his living as a film director and certainly wasn't a journeyman "director for hire." It's also possible that the producers signed Gregorio Casals for *Tierra de rencores* and he recommended his brother as director (and the producers liked his work enough to hire him again the following year for *La leyenda del Manco*, even though Gregorio Casals was not in that picture).

Tierra de rencores is a competently-made, fairly predictable rural action film (actually, more of a Western, discussed shortly) which kind of falls apart in the last third but is still slick and entertaining. Based on a *corrido* ("Nomás las mujeres quedan"—Only the Women Remain), the story of an inter-family feud with high mortality is reminiscent of 1975's *La dinastía de la muerte*.

I use the term "rural action film" generally to refer to the numerous 1970s and later productions, often set in northern Mexico (but not always): generally these are pseudo-Westerns (some are more narco-action movies), but have contemporary vehicles and weaponry.

According to an on-screen title, *Tierra de rencores* takes place in 1949, but it's difficult to understand why. Aside from a truck in the



opening scene and a tractor briefly shown later, there are no motor vehicles, no modern conveniences like telephones, and no weapons other than rifles, shotguns, and pistols. One might say, "well, this takes place in a rural area, so that explains why everyone rides horses," but surely in 1949 somebody had a truck or a car. Several federal agents, searching for escaped convicts, also arrive on horseback after what appears to have been a long journey, and El Jesse takes more than a day to travel from his ranch in Tamaulipas to the site of the García-Pérez feud in Nuevo León, both instances where motor vehicles would have been quicker, given the urgency of their missions.

Consequently, *Tierra de rencores* might technically qualify as a "rural action film," but in virtually every other aspect that matters, it's a Western (or, with minor changes in costuming and location, the same script could have easily been made as a dramatic *ranchera*).

Convicts Arredondo, El Texano, and El Barbas shoot their way out of a prison. They travel to a small town where the wealthy don Ernesto García and his family have been engaged in a long feud with the Pérez family. Don Ernesto facilitated the men's escape so they can tip the scales of the deadly rivalry in his favour: he orders them to kill Doroteo Pérez, the most competent gunman in the other family. Doroteo is shot to death by Arredondo in a duel as the former emerges from the church immediately

after his wedding! This inspires the Pérez family to ask for help from Jesús Quintanilla “El Jesse” (presumably a reference to Jesse James), a retired gunfighter. Jesús isn’t for hire, but somehow, from the vague descriptions of the 3 escaped convicts now working for García, he identifies them as the men who murdered his wife and child years before. Meanwhile, Regino Pérez is caught romancing



don Ernesto’s daughter Adelaida: he’s flogged, married to Adelaida (to “save her honour”), accused of robbery, and lynched (with the complicity of the corrupt local commander of *rurales*).

Jesús kills El Barbas and one of the García boys in a fair

fight. After Sanjuana Pérez reports Domingo García tried to rape her (but was dissuaded when she smacked him in the groin with a log), Jesús abducts Domingo from the García ranch and forces him to apologise. El Texano decides to leave town, but is confronted by Jesús on the road and also succumbs to “lead poisoning.”

However, Jesús is then arrested by the *rurales* on trumped-up charges; he’s beaten (his gun hand is stomped—this seems like it will be a problem but is forgotten after about 2 minutes; he’s later shot in the leg and shrugs that off, too) and tossed into a cell. Sanjuana and Jesús’s ranch foreman Majuela rescue him, but in the meantime the Garcías attack the Pérez home and murder all of the remaining male members of the family.



Jesús shoots don Ernesto and his two surviving sons.



Jesús and Arredondo have a duel on horseback and the latter is killed. As the Pérez and García women bury their dead, Jesús and Majuela depart for their ranch. Sanjuana Pérez joins them.

Tierra de rencores has a few nice, nihilistic

touches. When Jesús first arrives at the Pérez home, he mentions that he didn’t see a single child on the ranch, and Sra. Pérez says there aren’t any: the current Pérez men are killed before they have children. After her Pérez sweetheart is hung, his widow Adelaida García de Pérez joins the Pérez family, which also includes Doroteo’s widow. The conclusion of the film depicts the black-clad women at the cemetery, including Aurora, whose exact familial role is unclear: she’s a member of the García family and has some authority, standing up to don Ernesto,

but she is on good terms with the Pérez women. Is she don Ernesto’s wife? His sister? In one scene, Epifanio Pérez argues with her and makes it clear she’s not his mother, but who is she? (She also has an affair with Arredondo.)

As noted above, after a well-paced and constructed opening, the latter portions of the film have some flaws. Things seem to happen too quickly and without proper build-up. The commander of the *rurales* starts off as a strait-laced law enforcer somewhat hostile to don Ernesto, and then suddenly becomes his henchman (it’s implied he’s been paid off, but we never see this). The *federales* wander around aimlessly and provide an off-and-on Greek chorus, but serve no particular purpose in the narrative. Majuela is briefly introduced when the Pérez



representatives visit Jesús at his ranch, but is left behind when his boss goes to intervene in the feud; later, for no particular reason, he (with another ranchhand) joins Jesús under very unclear circumstances (it’s almost as if the

editing continuity was screwed up). At one point, Arredondo says Jesús is just as good as he is (at gunfighting), but he has “a plan” to take care of him: is this getting Jesús arrested by the *rurales*? Additionally, the final showdown between Jesús and Arredondo is not very suspenseful or well-staged, with the two men just riding past each other multiple times and firing their weapons, mostly in long shot.

Tierra de rencores has a large cast of familiar faces, including Álvaro Zermeno in his “second career” as an action star (his “first career” was a fresh-faced Western & *ranchera* performer in the Sixties); his craggy features and tough demeanour are slightly under-used here (and his back-story is quite sketchy), but he’s a stalwart hero.

Chelelo, on the other hand, is largely wasted as his sidekick. Wally Barrón is fine as the main villain, playing his usual pompous bad, sleazy guy. It’s almost a running joke that Roberto Cañedo’s 1980s roles would see him as a kindly old grandfather whose death at the hands of the villains would provoke a violent response by the hero: at least in *Tierra de rencores* he hangs on until the ranch massacre, relatively late in the movie. The supporting cast is a virtual who’s who of the era: Alfonso Munguía, Humberto Elizondo, Armando Duarte, Alfredo Gutiérrez, Carlos Rotzinger, Edna Bolkan, etc. Given special billing (in a nothing role) is Lupe Tijerina of the musical group “Los Cadetes de Linares,” who made the *corrido* “Nomás las mujeres quedan” famous (this is



presumably played in the final scene, but the version of the film I saw had a garbled soundtrack here and I can't be sure). The only "live" musical numbers are essentially background music played by other groups, however.



La leyenda del Manco [The Legend of the One-Armed Man]* (Filmadora Cerro de la Silla, 1987) *Exec Prod*: Javiera Garza; *Prod*: Julián Garza Arredondo; *Dir*: Jaime Casillas; *Scr*: Manolo Cárdenas; *Story*: Julián Garza; *Photo*: Agustín Lara; *Music*: Rafael Carreón; *Songs*: Julián Garza (4); *Prod Mgr*: Marco Antonio Hidalgo; *Asst Dir*: Manuel Cristino; *Film Ed*: Francisco Chiu; *Art Dir*: Francisco Magallón; *Camera Op*: Silvano Zúñiga; *Makeup*: Guillermina Oropeza; *Stunt Men*: Alejandro de la Peña, Gerardo Soublette; *Sound Ed*: Ernest Guillén; *Sound Op*: Guillermo Carrasco; *Re-rec*: Ricardo Saldivar; *Union*: STIC

*television title: *Condenados a duelo* [Condemned to a Duel]

Cast: Julio Alemán (*Jesús Cantú "El Pata de Palo"*), Eleazar García "Chelelo" (*Fernando Marichalar "El Manco"*), Rebeca Silva (*La Chata*), Julián Garza (*Gorgonio*), Yirah Aparicio (*campesino's wife*), Jesús González "Chis Chas" (*Salinas*), Luis Garza (*henchman*), Humberto Elizondo (*comisario*), Carlos Rotzinger (*Torelli*), Armando Duarte (*henchman*), Agustín Bernal (*Sam*), Rafael Carrión, Chinto de la Rosa, Antonio Escobar, Rogelio García Rangel, Beto Garza, Carlos Gómez, Alejandro Rábago, Violeta Silva, Leo Villanueva, Inés Murillo (*older woman in flashback*), Antonio Cámara, Los Invasores de Nuevo León, Las Palomitas del Norte

Notes: shot just over a year after *Tierra de rencores* by mostly the same personnel (and with a fair number of repeat performers), *La leyenda del Manco* is not as cohesive and serious as its predecessor, but is a little less conventional and still manages to be fairly entertaining. This film does look and feel different than *Tierra de rencores*, and some of this may be attributed to a difference in shooting locations: *Tierra de rencores* was

shot in Nuevo León, while *La leyenda del Manco* was filmed in the states of México and Morelos.

Some time back, I developed an unofficial taxonomy of Mexican Westerns. Earlier films, although set in Mexico, very strongly resemble U.S. B-Westerns—a good example is the "Mauricio Rosales, el Rayo" series starring Antonio Aguilar in the 1950s, which if viewed with the sound off might easily be mistaken for a Hollywood Western. Other, later films were influenced by spaghetti Westerns, and fall into two broad categories. There are "Anglo-name" Westerns which are usually set in the USA and,



as the nickname suggests, feature *gringo* characters (or at least characters with *gringo* names). The other category are films set in Mexico, with Mexican characters (and even the signs on the buildings are in Spanish). But the basic *mise-en-scene* of these two later types is the same: they look like they are taking place in the late 19th-century in the southwest USA, down to the buildings and costumes, and make little attempt to recreate any sort of realistic "Mexican" milieu. *La leyenda del Manco* falls into the third category, in that it looks like a Hollywood Western but is set in a Westernised "Mexico."

La leyenda del Manco is yet another in a string of Mexican Westerns about differently-abled people—*El tunco Maclovio*,

Jacinto el tullido, *El hijo de Jacinto el tullido*, *La sombra del Tunco (manco, tunco, and tullido* are different terms for those who are lame, maimed,

missing an arm or leg, etc.). This film raises the ante by featuring two protagonists missing limbs: "El Pata de Palo" (= Peg-Leg) and "El Manco" (missing a hand). Julio Alemán had previously starred in *El tunco Maclovio*, and his character's ranch foreman in this movie is named "Maclovio," which might be an in-joke (or just a coincidence, Maclovio is a not uncommon name).

It is somewhat easier to fake a missing hand (even an arm) than to have an actor portray someone who is missing a leg (particularly in pre-CGI days). Alemán is mostly



filmed from the waist up, but there are a small number of shots of him standing or riding which do show his wooden peg-leg. They're brief and he doesn't move very much, which indicates his real leg was probably strapped up behind him (very uncomfortably, one imagines) for these scenes. The illusion isn't bad. Chelelo, on the other hand (get it, other hand?) has a typical movie-prop "hook" on a cup which covers his real hand and thus makes one arm look much longer than the other.

La leyenda del Manco is a reasonably well-made and entertaining film, but has a disconcertingly inconsistent tone. The narrative cuts back and forth between footage of Jesús Cantú and Fernando Marichalar, bringing them together at the end, but while the Cantú scenes are more or



less "serious," the sequences featuring Chelelo as Fernando are largely light-hearted in nature (with a couple of noteworthy exceptions). This is not to criticise Chelelo's "dramatic" acting

ability, which he had demonstrated before and does so again here, in several spots-- the script itself depicts him as a genial trickster, so it's not simply "Chelelo being Chelelo" to the detriment of an otherwise serious storyline. For example, Fernando (a) wins a comic drinking contest, (b) wins a comic horse race, (c) donates his winnings to the town (only for them to discover the money is counterfeit, with his own picture on it!), (d) sells a fake treasure map to a crook, and (e) defeats a much younger and more muscular wrestler in a humorous wrestling match. Confronted by outlaws multiple times in the film, Fernando merely shoots their pistols out of their hands!

Fernando does display a more serious attitude a few times: after his little-person sidekick Chilo is killed, in his discussions with La Chata about his vendetta against Jesús, in the final showdown sequence, and in one extremely dissonant (in terms of overall tone) scene in which Fernando confronts two men who've been flogging some *campesinos*. With the aid of his sidekick Sam, Fernando graphically slices the soles of the men's feet with his hook, then forces them to walk away! Did I mention that this sequence comes shortly after one in which--as Fernando and Sam dine in an outdoor *fonda*--Sam consumes huge quantities of food then burps loudly, and Fernando dances comically with a woman as *Los Invasores de Nuevo León* play a sprightly tune in the background?

So we've got Fernando's mostly amusing antics contrasted with: the abduction, beating, and rape of two different women; various *campesinos* being flogged as their families watch; another *campesino* shot down in cold blood; Jesús shooting 2 men to convince criminal Torelli

to surrender; Jesús killing Gorgonio and 3 other men. Never a dull moment in this movie.

La leyenda del Manco alternates between scenes of hook-handed Fernando traveling around the countryside with his sidekick Chilo (and later, after Chilo's death, with massive *indio* Sam) getting into good-natured mischief, and footage of one-legged lawman Jesús Cantú tracking down (sort of) a gang of outlaws led by Gorgonio. Fernando is searching for Jesús: he explains (in flashback) that Jesús stole his girlfriend and, when Fernando challenged him to a gunfight, shot Fernando in the left hand, requiring its amputation. [When *cantina* owner La Chata mentions that Jesús lost a leg, Fernando replies "that



wasn't me," and it's never explained what happened to Jesús.] Gorgonio's men murder a *campesino* and abduct his wife. After raping and beating her, they send her off into the wilderness, barefoot, to serve as bait for Jesús (or

something). Jesús finds the woman and takes her to town, but she dies. Later, Fernando humiliates 3 of Gorgonio's henchmen while they're in La Chata's *cantina*; he leaves town and the outlaws return with their boss, burning the *cantina* and abducting La Chata (Gorgonio later beats and rapes her).

Jesús stumbles onto Gorgonio's hideout and kills the outlaw and his gang, rescuing La Chata as a bonus good deed. Jesús keeps trying to leave La Chata behind, but she refuses to give up and eventually he takes her back to his ranch and promises to marry her (he also resigns from his "government agent" position—it's never clear exactly what law enforcement agency he works for). Fernando bids Sam goodbye and arrives in Agua Colorada, the nearest town to Jesús's ranch. They meet and Fernando challenges him to a gunfight the next morning. That night, La Chata begs Fernando to forget his old grudge for her sake, but he refuses. When Fernando and Jesús confront each other the next day, Jesús beats his old friend to the draw, but it doesn't matter: Fernando's pistol was not even loaded. He dies. Jesús and La Chata ride off, leaving Fernando's corpse in the street (you'd think they'd have buried him, given that he was their friend and essentially committed suicide so they could have a life together, but no...).

The production values of *La leyenda del Manco* are satisfactory. Much of the film was shot on location, but it appears a substantial "Western town" set was also utilised for some exteriors. The only glaring anachronism I noticed was a modern jukebox in La Chata's *cantina*, but it isn't turned on and some viewers might not even recognise

what it is. There are sufficient extras, the costumes are fine, and so on. Jaime Casillas didn't direct a lot of films, but his work here is professional and while there aren't too many stylistic flourishes, he does move his camera and vary the angles, which elevates this well above the lowest



rung of point-and-shoot filmmaking.

Chelelo is the most entertaining performer, of course, but most of the supporting cast are also adequate. Rebeca Silva is gowned and made-up in glamorous fashion for the first

half of her scenes, then spends the rest of the movie (after she's been assaulted) with a big bruise on her face and her hair in disarray, recovering her composure (and glamour) at the very end. Julio Alemán wears a very fake-looking beard in the early sections (was he undercover? or just unable to find a razor for a long time?); he's adequate as "Pata de Palo," although his scenes are subordinate to those featuring Chelelo, and there's no clear narrative thread for him, he seems to just be wandering around aimlessly. Julián Garza, best-known as a performer and composer, collaborated on a number of films in the '80s and early '90s—like *Pistoleros famosos*, *La sucursal del infierno*, *La metralleta infernal*—writing screen stories, producing, and acting (usually villainous roles). He doesn't have much to do in *La leyenda del Manco* except look mean (his brother and singing partner Luis Garza plays one of his henchmen—curiously, the musical numbers in the movie are performed by others).

La leyenda del Manco is uneven but it still provides a fair amount of entertainment.



GASLIGHTING

El calabozo [The Dungeon] (Prods. Barba Loza, 1993)
Prod: Ramón Barba Loza; *Dir:* Miguel Ángel Rodríguez;
Scr: José Arturo Cosme; *Photo:* Agustín Lara; *Music:*
 Richard Cuervo; *Prod [Mgr]:* César Brindis; *Asst Dir:*
 Mario Cisneros; *Film Ed:* Cuauhtemoc Ponce; *SpFX:* José
 Aguilera; *Mkup:* Ricardo Mora; *Re-rec:* Marco A.
 Morante; *Sound Ed:* Miguel Larraguivel

Cast: Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (*Gabriel Favela*), Diana Ferreti (*Beatriz*), Agustín Bernal (*monster*), Roberto Montiel (*Dr. Mario Aburto*), Socorro Albarrán (*Martha*), Antonio Raxel (*Inspector*), Lisbeth Olivier (*Lupita, Inspector's secretary*), Paola Gaer (*sensual dancer*), Martha Elena Cervantes (*Carmen*), Octavio Acosta (*Dr. Jaime*), Roberto Munguía (*hospital doctor*), Mario Cisneros (*office bldg gate guard*), Sammy Ortiz (*security officer*), Los Rastrillos (*band*), Octavio Castillo (*Mr. Atkinson*), César Brindis & Adrián Quijada (*employees*), Olivia (*cadaver*)

Notes: around 20 years ago, the box art of this direct-to-video film [not the fake action-oriented art on the DVD case that can be seen now on Amazon] caught my eye—a dungeon, a creepy-looking little person—but then I lost track of it at my local video store for several years, and I wasn't even sure I'd remembered it properly! Finally, the tape reappeared on the shelf and I rented *El calabozo*, and while it isn't a lost classic of the *videohome* genre, it is unusual—if highly confusing--and consequently worth watching should the opportunity present itself.

Businessman Gabriel Favela is not a nice guy. When his partner Mario refuses to sell their company--arguing that the buyer will increase the price of the medicines they make so only rich people can afford them--Gabriel murders Mario by planting a bomb in his car. Then, immediately after he gets "news" of his partner's death, he decides "heck, the police won't want to interview me or anything" and rapes his secretary Martha. Then he goes home and abuses his meek wife Beatriz. In fact, he abuses her so much that he wakes up the next morning, covered in blood, next to her axe-butchered body! Gabriel puts her corpse in a duffel bag and disposes of it in the countryside, then returns home to find all traces of gore mysteriously gone.



Collapsing in shock in the shower, Gabriel awakes in a coffin during his own funeral. No one can hear his screams as he's buried. He later awakes--covered in rats!--in the titular dungeon (which looks rather like an abandoned, partly-constructed building). A scarred dwarf brings him some food, but tells Gabriel "nobody gets out of here." The rest of the film features alternating scenes of Gabriel in various locations, without any particular structure:

--a staggering Gabriel, dressed in a suit, demands admittance to his office; his secretary Martha doesn't recognise him, says Gabriel is dead, and calls security.

--in the dungeon, Gabriel spots a monstrous-looking man who laughs at him, before vanishing in flames.

--a feverish Gabriel lies in bed, being nursed by Beatriz.

--Gabriel wanders through a cemetery and is confronted by the reanimated, burned corpse of Mario. Although he apologises for murdering his partner, the monster man appears and says "it's too late!" and shows Gabriel his own tombstone.

--back in the dungeon, Gabriel tries to bribe the little person to free him, but is told "you're dead."

--Gabriel is in a hospital, hallucinating.



--Gabriel is home, restrained in his own bed. Beatriz appears and calls him "Victor," claiming she's his wife Patricia. Gabriel struggles and Beatriz calls in Carmen, who gives him a sedative. Gabriel is attacked by a little doll (previously seen belonging to Beatriz) and the monster man opens the bedroom door to scare him.

--back in the cemetery, Gabriel is confronted by dead Mario and dead Martha. The dwarf bites him on the leg! The monster man says "now you're going to know the true



hell!" and the dwarf drags Gabriel off to the dungeon. In a music video-like sequence, a sexy woman does a dance in a circle of fire, accompanied by a hip-looking band. The fire dies down and the woman collapses; Gabriel starts to

pick her up and she turns into the monster man!

These scenes are sort of incoherent but are reasonably well-staged and begin to convey the idea that Gabriel is just imagining his experiences in "hell." There's no attempt at developing any kind of linear narrative flow: in the final cemetery scene, the monster man's statement about Gabriel experiencing "true hell" and having him dragged off would seem logically to be the lead-in to the *calabozo* sequences, and yet we've already seen all such scenes, with the exception of the music video.

The film has now reached the "reveal" section, where everything is explained. A police inspector arrives in his office and is informed a deranged man was picked up on the highway. The Inspector and a doctor interview him, and the man says "I'm Víctor Fernández. No, Gabriel Favela!" He tells them a tale of being abducted by a dwarf and a monster man, and admits he murdered Mario and Beatriz.

However, Mario, Beatriz and Carmen arrive at headquarters and say Gabriel developed mental illnesses (including a dual personality) after under-going plastic surgery. [This was alluded to in one of the bedroom scenes, when "Patricia" showed "Víctor" his face in a mirror—it is very slightly different. Mario shows the Inspector a photo of Gabriel "before" but the audience doesn't see this.] They explain away the marks on his wrists as self-inflicted, and admit they injected him with sedatives prescribed legally by Mario. The Inspector tells them Gabriel will be sent to a medical hospital, but he subsequently orders a full range of blood tests.

Back home, Mario and Beatriz deliver expository dialogue: Gabriel tried to murder Mario but the car bomb killed Martha instead. Beatriz, already holding a grudge against her husband over an abortion she was compelled to undergo years before, conspires with Mario to drug Gabriel and have him undergo a series of experiences in a fake "hell" to drive him insane.

The Inspector tells the medical examiner that, although no drugs were found in Gabriel's blood, the case is suspicious and will be investigated. The film ends with a freeze-frame on the insane Gabriel.

The "drive someone insane" plot dates back to at least the 1938 play "Gas Light" (aka "Angel Street," filmed in the UK in 1940 and the USA in 1944 as *Gaslight*). *Noche de fieras* (1989) had a similar premise, with Hugo Stiglitz plotting to drive Olivia Collins mad—this film shows how the villain utilised special effects technicians to create the elaborate effects necessary, whereas in *El calabozo* Mario merely alludes to the illusions and performers involved. Exactly how these effects (and Gabriel's reaction to them) could be controlled so exactly is never discussed.

The chronology and logic of events is still unclear. When was Gabriel drugged (and thus, when did his hallucinations begin)? The suggestion is that he was drugged when he got home the first time, i.e., he really struck Beatriz, then passed out, and when he awoke to find her corpse, this begins the fantasy. This all occurs after the opening sequences, in which Gabriel and Mario have an argument, Mario is killed, and Gabriel rapes Martha. But if it—as explained later—it was Martha rather than Mario who died in the explosion of Mario's auto, then how did Gabriel get news of Mario's death and then rape the very-alive Martha?



Although *El calabozo* isn't badly made, there are several technical issues. During the argument between Gabriel and Mario that opens the film, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez is "off-mike" throughout, so that his dialogue is barely audible, whereas Roberto Montiel can be heard clearly. This is extremely noticeable and annoying. Late in the film there's another, less intrusive example of this. Also, after Gabriel rapes Martha, she is seen nude, from the rear, clutching the remnants of her dress. This contrasts with a scene in which Gabriel takes a shower (in fact, he takes 2) and is clearly still wearing his underwear. Also the "sensual dancer" (Paola Gaer, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez's girlfriend in real life) wears a thin, white leotard through which her distinctly non-supernatural underwear is visible.

Although a "fake-supernatural" film with a fair number of loopholes in the plot, *El calabozo* is moderately entertaining.



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