

# The Mexican Film Bulletin

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## ANOTHER YEAR!

And so another year of *MFB* comes to a close. Happy Holidays to all readers, and hopefully you'll be back for Volume 25 in 2019. After that, we have tentative plans to go on hiatus, but that's to be determined. In any event, you've got at least one more year of *MFB* to read!



## OBITUARIES

### Lucho Gatica

Singer Lucho Gatica died in Mexico City of pneumonia on 13 November 2018; he was 90 years old. Luis Enrique Gatica Silva was born in Rancagua, Chile in August 1928. He first became popular singing *boleros* in the early 1950s, and later in the decade moved to Mexico, where he lived for the rest of his life.



In addition to his musical career,

Gatica appeared in a number of motion pictures, sometimes as a musical star and other times in significant acting roles. His films include *A sablazo limpio* (with Viruta and Capulina), *Viva la parranda*, and *Me casé con un cura*. [Note: some sources erroneously indicate Gatica appeared in *Dimensiones ocultas* aka *Don't Panic* in 1986, but this is actually his son Luis, who was incorrectly billed as "Lucho Gatica."]

Lucho Gatica was married 3 times: first to actress Mapita Cortés (1960-1981, they had 5 children), then to Diane Lane Schmidt (1982-85, one child), and finally to Leslie Deeb (1986-2018, one child).



### Sofía Tejada

TV and film actress Sofía Tejada died on 2 November 2018; no details were

released to the press. Sofía Tejada, who also worked as a model, began acting in the mid-1980s. In the early 1990s she appeared in films such as *Asalto violento* and *Oro,*



*dolor y muerte*, but became well-known in the 2000s for her roles in *telenovelas* like "La Madrastra," "Hasta que el dinero nos separe," and series like "La Rosa de Guadalupe." She is survived by at least one daughter.



## FILM REVIEWS

### SAGA OF LA SOMBRA VENGADORA

La Sombra Vengadora was a masked superhero character created in 1954 by screenwriter Ramón Obón (Sr.) for producer Luis Manrique, possibly inspired by the success of *El Enmascarado de Plata* (1952).

Fernando Osés, a Spanish wrestler who had appeared in small roles and as a stunt man in some Mexican movies, was hired to impersonate the masked



hero, which he did, sporadically, over a period of 16 years. Ironically, although the Sombra Vengadora (like Huracán Ramírez) reversed the usual career path and went from the movies to the professional wrestling ring, Osés did not compete under this name, having retired from wrestling after an injury in 1954. Instead, Rogelio de la Paz appeared as "La Sombra Vengadora" from 1958-2011. His sons later entered the ring under a variety of names, including Hijo de Sombra Vengadora, Sombra Vengadora Jr. (who died in 2018), and Sombra Vengadora II (and even Mini Sombra Vengadora, his grandson!).

In his first seven film appearances, the Sombra Vengadora was not depicted as a combination professional wrestler/crimefighter: mostly, he was a full-time superhero, like Neutrón.

The process of the creation of the Sombra Vengadora is not clear. The U.S. radio/pulp magazine character "The Shadow" was known in Mexico under the name "La Sombra," and there had also been a Mexican comic strip character dubbed "La Sombra" in the 1930s (who even wore a costume which slightly resembled that of the later Sombra Vengadora, although this was probably a coincidence).

The first two Sombra Vengadora movies were, as noted above, probably inspired by *El Enmascarado de Plata* and by U.S. superhero serials, and the Sombra's costume was rather flamboyant and striking for the period, more like a superhero's than a professional wrestler's (particularly unusual were the "buccaneer"

boots, with folded-over cuffs, and the sash around his waist). (It might be noted that the Sombra's cape, while stylish, seriously impeded his fighting ability and was frequently discarded when brawls broke out)



Manrique apparently had a fondness for masked heroes (although he did produce movies in various genres, including *cabaretera* pictures and comedies): during his career, he made films featuring El Tigre Enmascarado, El Jinete Sin Cabeza, El Zorro Escarlata, and La Sombra, often (but not always) with Luis Aguilar “beneath” the mask.

[In reality, Aguilar only rarely appeared in costume, with the action scenes being handled by Fernando Osés, Eduardo Bonada and (probably) other wrestlers or stuntmen.]

Film audiences could be forgiven for confusion when, in the 1960s (in the ring) and the 1970s (on film), they saw a superhero wrestler whose costume was virtually identical to that of La Sombra: El Rayo de Jalisco. Not to be confused with the early Sixties Westerns *El Rayo de Jalisco* and *Juramento de sangre*, starring Aldo Monti as a non-masked cowboy, the masked Rayo (actually Maximino Linares Moreno) started wrestling under that name in 1960. He continued to appear in the ring until 1989, when he lost his mask to Blue Demon and retired shortly afterward (although his son had a ring career as Rayo de Jalisco Jr.). Since La Sombra lost his mask in a match in 1960 and El Rayo de Jalisco didn't appear until that year, it's possible there was some sort of informal agreement that Rayo could use a similar design. [In the cinema, the last time La Sombra was on screen was 1970 and the first Rayo movie was 1971, again avoiding a direct conflict between the two characters, although Rayo essentially replaced Sombra in the second and third “Campeones justicieros” movies.

La Sombra first appeared in four films in 1954, all directed by Rafael Baledón. The first two, shot in June

1954, were contemporary pictures shot in Mexico City. The latter two (shot in August 1954) were period films made in the state of México on the *hacienda* “La Encarnación” (at least 19 films were shot here in the latter half of the 1950s).



The Sombra returned for 3 period movies in 1960-61, teamed with another Manrique masked hero, El Zorro Escarlata. It's unclear who played who in these films (it's completely possible that Osés played both characters at times, although obviously not in the same scene!). In *La venganza de la Sombra* Eduardo Bonada was billed as La Sombra.



The 8th screen appearance of La Sombra is an extremely rare film, a Mexican-Brazilian co-production entitled *O Fugitivo de noite* (Fugitive of the Night). Brazilian sources indicate this is a drama about a boxer who, after killing a man in the ring, joins a gang of criminals. He also falls in love with daughter of the man he killed and secretly tries to help her become a singer and dancer. Antonio Orellana directed and Julio Porter scripted the picture, which was released later in the decade in Mexico as *Campeón de la muerte*. The cast includes Tito Junco, Lorena Velázquez, and Fernando Osés (who presumably plays La Sombra), although what part this character has in the narrative is unclear. It's not even certain he's called “La Sombra” in the movie--lobby cards show him wrestling wearing his familiar mask but in shorts rather than long tights. It's conceivable that Osés--who, like Orellana, was a



Spaniard working in Mexico--went along on the trip and just happened to have his Sombra mask with him and thus wore it in the picture.

The final movie appearance of La Sombra Vengadora was in the (relatively) all-star *Los Campeones justicieros* (1970), "courtesy of Señor Ramón Obón Jr." (Obón Sr. had died in 1965 and producer Luis Manrique in 1967, so presumably Obón's son inherited the rights to the character). Also in the cast are Blue Demon, Mil Máscaras, El Médico Asesino (albeit not the original, who'd died in 1960, but the wrestler known as Gran Markus), Black Shadow (Alejandro Cruz), and Tinieblas, plus some non-masked wrestlers.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 1954: *La Sombra vengadora*  
*La Sombra vengadora contra La Mano Negra*  
*El secreto de Pancho Villa*  
*El tesoro de Pancho Villa*  
 1960: *El correo del norte*  
*La máscara de la muerte*  
 1961: *La venganza de la Sombra*  
 1961?: *O Fugitivo de noite* [Mexico-Brazil, some sources list 1963 as production date]; Mexican release as *Campeón de la muerte*  
 1970: *Los Campeones justicieros*

### El Rayo de Jalisco films

- 1971: *Superzán el invencible*  
 1972: *Vuelven los Campeones justicieros*  
*El robo de los momias de Guanajuato*  
 1974: *Triunfo de los Campeones justicieros*



## La Sombra Vengadora

[The Avenging Shadow] (Prods.

*Luis Manrique*, 1954) Prod: Luis Manrique; Dir: Rafael Baledón; Scr: Ramón Obón [Sr.]; Photo: Agustín Martínez Solares; Music: Sergio Guerrero; Prod Mgr: Javier Bueno; Prod Chief: Luis Sánchez Tello; Asst Dir: Felipe



Palomino; Film Ed: Juan José Marino; Décor: Rafael Suárez; Camera Op: J. Antonio Carrasco, Carlos Carbajal; Lighting: Juan Durán; Makeup: Margarita Ortega; Sound Dir: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Rodolfo Solís; Music/Re-rec: Galdino Samperio; Sound Ed: Reynaldo Portillo

**Cast:** Armando Silvestre (*Rogelio*), Alicia Caro (*Margarita Fuentes*), Rodolfo Landa (*Dr. Henry Williams*), Pedro D' Aguillón (*Eduardo Mendoza*), Carlos Martínez Baena (*Prof. Everardo Fuentes*), Sara Guash (*cabaret owner*), Rafael Banquels (*waiter-henchman*), Carlos Múzquiz (*José Landetta "El Cortado"*), Roger López, Garye [sic = Yerye] Beirute (*Igor*), Lobo Negro [Guillermo Hernández] (*henchman*), "Indio Cacama" (*henchman*), Mano Negra, La Sombra [Fernando Osés], José L. Murillo (*henchman*), León Barroso (*announcer*), Guillermo Cramer (*guard-henchman*), Ángel DiStefani (*henchman*), Víctor Alcocer (*voice of Mano Negra*), Emilio Garibay (*henchman*), José Dupeyrón (*cabaret patron*), Stefan Berne (*henchman*), Jorge Arriaga (*Secret Service man*)

Notes: *La Sombra Vengadora* is very entertaining, full of action and serial-style "cliffhangers" (while *El Enmascarado de Plata* was released in serial form in the United States, there is no indication that *La Sombra Vengadora* was ever shown as anything but a regular feature film, or even that it was originally conceived as a serial). The music score is excellent, and the underrated Rafael Baledón turns in a fine directorial effort, making good use of location shooting, varying the camera angles during fight scenes, and minimizing the shortcomings of the plot.



*La Sombra Vengadora* concerns the efforts of mystery villain Mano Negra and his gang to obtain Professor Fuentes' formula for creating synthetic drugs. Fuentes is their prisoner, but refuses to cooperate (and is also pretending to be paralyzed), so the criminals have been kidnaping various scientists (most of them, oddly enough, with Anglo names) in an attempt to recreate the formula. Dr. Henry Williams and Fuentes' daughter Margarita are targets of the Mano Negra because of their association with the scientist. The criminals are opposed by Rogelio and Eduardo (friends of Drs. Fuentes and Williams and not agents of the police--Eduardo is identified as a "chemical engineer"), and mysterious superhero the Sombra Vengadora. In the end, the Mano Negra is exposed as the Igor, Fuentes' servant.

The film hints that Rogelio (Armando Silvestre) might be the Sombra: the two are never seen together, and in fact it becomes rather embarrassing to see Rogelio constantly disappear on flimsy pretexts, leaving Eduardo to face danger alone (until the Sombra shows up). [Since he's not the Sombra, does this mean Rogelio is simply a coward?] However, at the same time the film makes it

clear that Rogelio is not the Sombra, since the masked hero is clearly identified--at the beginning and end of the picture--as a scientist (whose face is never shown, of course).



The "guess-the-secret-identity" idea seems to have been carried over from Hollywood serials (notably the first "Lone Ranger" picture), and had already been the subject of a lot of wasted footage in *El Enmascarado de Plata*. Wisely, later Mexican masked hero movies generally dispensed with this plot device (the initial Neutrón trilogy to the contrary--coincidentally, Armando Silvestre was also a red herring in that series).

*La Sombra Vengadora* is a fun picture, although not without a few flaws and continuity problems (there is also a completely extraneous musical number featuring three dancers and two roosters, believe it or not).

The fights are good, with Osés executing a lot of spectacular leaps, flying drop-kicks, and other flashy moves.

Compared to some later *lucha libre* movies, *La Sombra Vengadora*'s fights are more in line with Hollywood action pictures:

lots of punching rather than awkward grappling, although as noted the Sombra is quite athletic at times.

Pedro D'Aguillón has a very inconsistently-written character as Eduardo; for example, in an early scene he valiantly (and effectively) fights back against a group of thugs, but when the Sombra arrives he steps back and lets the masked man do all the fighting. Then, when the danger is over and everyone else disappears, Eduardo turns into a whining coward, banging on the door and shouting for help. This happens again in the cabaret



brawl, and this split-personality continues to a lesser extent throughout the movie: sometimes he's competent, at other times he's a typical comic-relief buffoon (although D'Aguillón is a good enough performer to be entertaining in both modes). Armando Silvestre doesn't have much to do other than vanish for large chunks of time (to bolster his status as a candidate for the Sombra's secret identity), while Alicia Caro is just a damsel in distress without much other personality.

*La Sombra Vengadora* was made by an Estudios Churubusco crew and there are some imaginative sets (the Mano Negra's gang hangs out in a large room with a fake "brick" wall that's actually a door), but a fair amount of the film was shot on interesting locations around the city and in the outskirts.

The cliffhangers: (1) Eduardo is nearly run over by a car but the Sombra diverts it; (2) Eduardo and Margarita are trapped in a pit that's rapidly filling with water; (3) the Sombra jumps into a car full of villains, fights with them, then the car seems about to collide with an oncoming truck (this is never resolved: the next time we see the Sombra, he's at Margarita's house); (4) the Sombra leaps into a pile of hay that's subsequently riddled with bullets and set on fire (Alfredo Salazar "borrowed" this one for *Las mujeres panteras*, 1966); (5) Margarita is threatened by a poisoned crossbow bolt. These are not spaced evenly throughout the film, lending credence to the theory that *La Sombra Vengadora* was not a "cut-down serial," but just an *homage*.



### **La Sombra Vengadora contra la Mano Negra**

[The Avenging Shadow vs. the Black Hand] (*Prods. Luis Manrique, 1954*) *Prod:* Luis Manrique; *Dir:* Rafael Baledón; *Scr:* Ramón Obón [Sr.]; *Photo:* Agustín

Martínez Solares; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* Javier Bueno; *Prod Chief:* Luis Sánchez Tello; *Asst Dir:* Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed:* Juan José Marino; *Décor:* Rafael Suárez; *Camera Op:* J. Antonio Carrasco, Carlos Carbajal; *Lighting:* Juan Durán; *Makeup:* Margarita Ortega; *Sound Dir:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Rodolfo Solís; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed:* Reynaldo Portillo





**Cast:** Armando Silvestre (*Rogelio*), Alicia Caro (*Margarita Fuentes*), Rodolfo Landa (*Dr. Henry Williams*), Pedro D'Aguillón (*Eduardo Mendoza\**), Carlos Martínez Baena (*Prof. Everardo Fuentes*), Sara Guash (*Mano Negra's assistant*), Rafael Banquels (*henchman*), Carlos Muzquiz (*José Landetta "El Cortado"*), Roger López, Garye [sic = Yerye] Beirute (*Igor*), Lobo Negro [Guillermo Hernández] (*henchman*), "Indio Cacama" (*henchman*), Mano Negra, La Sombra [Fernando Osés], José L. Murillo (*henchman*), Guillermo Cramer (*henchman Jaime*), Ángel DiStefani (*henchman*), Víctor Alcocer (*voice of Mano Negra*), Emilio Garibay (*henchman*), Julio Macías, Humberto Rodríguez (*hotel clerk*), Guillermo Bravo Sosa (*hunchbacked doctor*), Victorio Blanco (*mailman*), Mario Sevilla (*policeman*). Jorge Arriaga (*Secret Service agent*)

\*erroneously referred to as "González" in one scene

**Notes:** *La Sombra Vengadora contra la Mano Negra* was filmed immediately after the first film in the summer of 1954, with the same cast and crew.

Unfortunately, the sequel is an inferior picture, with an even more confusing and contradictory plot, some major logical flaws, and a rushed conclusion.



It seems Igor was not the real masked villain Mano Negra (despite the denouement of the original movie), just his assistant. Dr. Fuentes tears his drug formula into four pieces and gives one piece each to Williams, Rogelio, Eduardo, and Margarita. The Mano Negra kidnaps Margarita and has her brainwashed by a hunchbacked European doctor. He also has a mysterious creature named "Zombie" that lurks around and (occasionally) kills people.

Zombie was not named in the first film, although there were scenes of floating "yellow" eyes and some people were slashed to death. In fact, the first movie deliberately misleads the viewer, as the Mano Negra refers to the "Man with the Yellow Eyes" (not "Zombie") in one scene. Although in retrospect the growling heard on the soundtrack would seem to be a tip-off, in one scene we see Mano Negra put on a pair of claw-gloves and he growls, suggesting he's the one clawing people to death.

As in the first film, in *Mano Negra* sometimes the yellow eyes are at human-eye level, and sometimes closer to the ground. Zombie receives orders via short-wave radio from the Mano Negra, manages to get into a locked jail cell to kill a captured henchman (and then escape, unseen), and later is literally invisible (chairs and tables in a well-lit room turn over by themselves as Zombie passes by--this is a cheat and never explained).

It's a real let-down when Zombie is finally revealed to be an ordinary (well, a smart) mountain lion (not even a black panther).



Both Zombie and Margarita (after she's brainwashed) are controlled via remote control, with the Mano Negra and his female associate giving orders via radio (Margarita has a receiver under her blouse and presumably Zombie has one on a collar). The villains can't see what's going on (although they can hear), but they do have a screen with a grid on it and little lights move around, apparently representing Zombie, Margarita, etc.

The Mano Negra is exposed as Dr. Williams; the Sombra unmask as Rogelio, but this is just a joke (the real Sombra gave him the costume as a memento). The final sequence is rather odd: as a farewell letter from the Sombra is read aloud, miscellaneous combat footage (planes flying, bombs dropping, soldiers charging) is superimposed over shots of the Sombra changing out of his costume into civilian clothes. Then we see the Sombra driving off in his automobile (if someone wanted to know his secret identity, all they'd have to do is write down the license number).

There are some rough spots: the finale is rushed and footage of the Sombra punching out and unmasking the Mano Negra is repeated from the first film, with a



closeup of Williams crudely replacing the original shot of Igor's face. It's never explained why Williams, a close friend and colleague of Dr. Fuentes, felt it was

necessary to establish a large criminal organization to steal the drug formula when it probably would have been easier to insinuate himself into Fuentes' confidence and get it that way.

There's also a confusing bit regarding the doctor hired to brainwash Margarita. He arrives at the tailor shop/hideout and gets his instructors from the Mano Negra via a loudspeaker. Margarita is brainwashed using a series of injections. Later, the doctor comes back to the

shop, then goes into a room and removes his (fake) hump and the rubber face-mask he's been wearing--it's the Mano Negra (we don't see his real face). A short time later, he dresses up as the hunchbacked doctor again and leaves, but only limps until he exits the shop and then runs away. The question is: is there a real doctor and the Mano Negra is impersonating him on this particular occasion, or is there actually no "real" doctor and it's always the Mano Negra? The first would seem more logical, since if the Mano Negra had brainwashing expertise there'd be no reason for him to pretend to be someone else to use it.

[In *La Sombra Vengadora* the Mano Negra wears a rubber face-mask twice (under his Mano Negra mask),



but this seems to be intended to hide his identity rather than to impersonate someone. Two people wear rubber masks in *El secreto de Pancho Villa*.]

The cliffhangers from the first film

are reduced in number: one dealing with deadly electrical equipment (in the nick of time, Dr. Fuentes turns off the current), and one in which the Sombra is nearly crushed under a descending elevator (luckily, the villains all leave the room after placing him there and pushing the elevator call button; this allows the Sombra to drop through the shaft's floor at the last second). These both occur in the first 30 minutes. Later, there are a couple of sort-of cliffhangers--Eduardo is nearly killed by Zombie and the Sombra almost wrecks his auto to avoid hitting a little boy in the street (as he drives away, you can see his car was actually damaged by hitting the curb)--but neither of these seems like a traditional cliff-hanger situation.

While the action scenes are still satisfactory, they aren't as good as the original movie's fights, and the slipshod script makes them almost the only bright spots in the picture. To be fair, there is one nice touch: the Mano Negra's hideout is located in the rear of a seedy tailor shop, guarded by a taciturn old lady who sits in the front room and incessantly operates a sewing machine. However, this also points out a difference between *La Sombra Vengadora* and the sequel--far too much of *Mano Negra* takes place on nondescript sets, especially Dr. Fuentes' apartment, which is like a bus station with constant comings-and-goings by most of the cast.

[Trivia note 1: Dr. Fuentes and Margarita lived in a large mansion in the first movie, but apparently moved to an apartment in the very brief period between that picture and this one. For the curious, their apartment is located in the Colonia Roma, right across the street from the Cine Estadio (on the corner of the *calle de Coahuila* and the *Avenida Yucatán* in Mexico City).]

[Trivia note 2: for some reason, most (all?) of the original lobby cards for *La Sombra Vengadora contra La Mano Negra* feature stills that are not from this movie. Instead, most (all?) are stills from *El secreto de Pancho Villa*--this is very obvious, because the first two Sombra films are contemporary pictures set in the city, while the next two are period pictures set in rural locations.]

[Trivia note 3: the copy of *La Sombra Vengadora contra la Mano Negra* that was shown on television recently is only 77 minutes long. Emilio García Riera's *Historia documental del cine mexicano* lists it as 84 minutes. Furthermore, the last 3 minutes of the TV print is a freeze-frame of the Sombra's mask, over which the entire credits (already seen at the beginning of the movie) are repeated. However, these are newly-created credits (spelling Carlos Múzquiz "Carlos Muquiz") and conclude with "© 2000 Cumbre Films." Consequently, it's possible this version was somewhat trimmed, which might explain a few of the abrupt transitions.]



**El Tesoro de Pancho Villa** [The Treasure of Pancho Villa] (Prods. Luis Manrique, 1954) Prod: Luis Manrique; Dir: Rafael Baledón; Scr: Ramón Obón [Sr.]; Photo: Agustín Martínez Solares; Music: Sergio Guerrero; Prod Mgr: Javier Bueno; Prod Chief: Luis Sánchez Tello; Asst Dir: Felipe Palomino; Film Ed: Juan José Marino, Abraham Cruz R.; Décor: Rafael Suárez; Camera Op: J. Antonio Carrasco; Lighting: Juan Durán; Makeup: Margarita Ortega

**Cast:** La Sombra [Fernando Osés], Alicia Caro (Sarita), Rodolfo Landa (Major Rodolfo Méndez), Víctor Alcocer (Pancho Villa), Carlos Múzquiz (El Coyote), Pascual García Peña (Laureano Enríquez), Felipe Montoya (Emilio Martínez), Chel López (old man), Gabriel Sánchez Tapia (Polilla), Carlos Suárez (Villista); José Pardavé (cemetery caretaker), Roger López, Guillermo Cramer, Indio Cacama; henchmen: Roberto G. Rivera, Lobo Negro [Guillermo Hernández], José Dupeyrón



**Notes:** not as readily available as the first two Sombra films or *El secreto de Pancho Villa*, *El tesoro de Pancho Villa* (not to be confused with the unrelated 1935 movie of the same title) has rarely been discussed in detail. Emilio García Riera's "Historia documental del cinema mexicano" suggested it was essentially the same movie as *El secreto de Pancho Villa*, something I cited in my "Mexican Filmography" and other places. A number of years ago I got a rather poor-quality VHS copy (from a TV broadcast, apparently) from someone (thanks!) and it appears the film was shown at the Mórvido Fest in 2013, but it's still not easy to find.

As it develops, although both films were made in the same location at the same time with mostly the same cast and crew, *El secreto de Pancho Villa* is in fact a direct sequel to *El tesoro de Pancho Villa*. Both films are completely unrelated to the first two Sombra movies, with the exception of sharing the same central character (who, logically, probably couldn't be the same person, given the 30+ year time difference in their settings).



An old man observes a group of *Villistas* burying a treasure of gold coins in a remote area; as the men depart, they are ambushed and massacred by bandits. Martínez, the leader of the *Villista* party, is mortally wounded but scrawls an "S" on a boulder in his own blood. Later, Pancho Villa speaks to the relatives of the murdered men, including Martínez's daughter Sarita and her little brother Polilla [= Moth]: the treasure they buried was to be used after the Revolution to help the people, and now it's lost. Villa assigns Major Rodolfo and soldier Laureano to investigate the case. Afterwards, a *Villista* officer (whose face is unseen) dons the costume of the Sombra.

The bandits, led by a masked man with a scar on his hand\*, want to find the gold. They visit Sarita's ranch, hoping she knows what the "S" meant; she doesn't. The Sombra arrives and fights the villains; Rodolfo and Laureano ride up and fight more of the villains outside. A fire breaks out [cliffhanger #1] but the Sombra rescues Sarita and Polilla, then departs (first asking Polilla to meet him later that night).

\*[A *Villista* officer (played by Carlos Suárez) acts suspicious and always wears gloves--could he be the

bandit leader? Wait, ranch hand Martín also has a scar on his hand! Apparently, scarred hands were quite prevalent in rural Mexico during the Revolution era.]

Sarita decides to relocate temporarily to her uncle Emilio's "Rancho S" (another clue?). The Sombra asks Polilla to find a map of the ranch and the boy does, only to run afoul of the bandits (who are at the ranch for some reason). The Sombra arrives and a fight breaks out in a barn; Polilla is knocked unconscious and falls on a



conveyor belt that moves him close to a spinning buzzsaw [cliffhanger #2] but the electrical wires are dislodged and the saw stops. The old man from the opening sequence fires a shot from outside the barn and the bandits all flee. The Sombra looks at the map but nothing obviously points to the location of the buried treasure.

Some more captures-and-escapes occur. Compadre Martínez's body vanishes from his grave. Later, Sarita is confronted by her "father" (complete with decayed horror-face) who demands to know where the treasure is hidden (wait, didn't you hide it?). The "ghost" tries this on Polilla, who instead bites the impostor's hand, driving him away in pain. The old man is mortally wounded while digging in the cemetery, but tells the Sombra that the clue to finding the treasure is there.

The *federales* take over Rancho S and arrest Rodolfo. The Sombra asks Pancho Villa for soldiers to attack the ranch but Villa can't spare them. Instead, he gives the Sombra various munitions which the Sombra, Polilla, and Laureano use to make the *federales* think they're under attack. The evil *federal* captain threatens to execute Sarita and the other women hostages but the Sombra rescues them. Finally Villa and his troops arrive and mop up.

The masked villain confronts Sarita and demands to know where the treasure is hidden. The Sombra arrives, defeats and unmasks him: it's *compadre* Emilio. The old man, before he died, buried a painting belonging to Martínez which reveals the location of the treasure. Villa and his men set off to recover it.

As the film concludes, Villa tells Polilla that the Sombra has vowed to wear his mask until all evil-doers are defeated and Mexico is at peace.

*El tesoro de Pancho Villa* is extremely episodic and there are at least 4 or 5 potential "cliff-hanger" situations which make one wonder if the film was intended to be a serial (or possibly television episodes, although it's rather early for that and the production values would seem to be too substantial). There is no evidence that this was the case, and the same thing



applies to all four of the original Sombra movies, which proves...nothing. Perhaps the movies were just made "in the style of" Hollywood serials as a sort of *homage*.

As mentioned above, the production values are surprisingly decent. Everything was shot on location (the locations themselves are quite good--fortunately Mexico in 1954 still had *haciendas* that looked like they did during the Revolution), there are a decent number of extras, the final *faux*-battle sequence is well mounted with lots of explosions, and overall the impression is quite satisfactory.

The action scenes are decent if not spectacular, but they're helped considerably by the direction, editing and music. The performances are all passable--no one gets to do much acting, since the pace of the film races right along, but everyone does what they were asked to do. Gabriel Sánchez Tapia as "Polilla" is a very natural child actor and plays an important role in the narrative; in contrast, Alicia Caro and Rodolfo Landa have little or nothing to do. Pascual García Peña's clowning is downplayed.



**El Secreto de Pancho Villa** [The Secret of Pancho Villa] (*Prods. Luis Manrique, 1954*) *Prod:* Luis Manrique; *Dir:* Rafael Baledón; *Scr:* Ramón Obón [Sr.]; *Photo:* Agustín Martínez Solares; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr:* Javier Bueno; *Prod Chief:* Luis Sánchez Tello; *Asst Dir:* Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed:* Juan José Marino, Abraham Cruz R.; *Décor:* Rafael Suárez; *Camera Op:* J. Antonio Carrasco; *Lighting:* Juan Durán; *Makeup:* Margarita Ortega; *Dialog Rec:* Rodolfo Solis; *Music/Re-rec:* Enrique Rodríguez

**Cast:** La Sombra [Fernando Osés], Alicia Caro (*Sarita*), Rodolfo Landa (*Major Rodolfo Méndez*), Rafael Banquels (*Dr. Schmidt*), Víctor Alcocer (*Pancho Villa*), Carlos Múzquiz (*El Coyote*\*), Pascual García Peña (*Laureano Enríquez*), Roger López (*Emeterio Valverde*),

Gabriel Sánchez Tapia (*Polilla*), Carlos Suárez (*Capt. Arnoldo Rodríguez*), Georgina Barragán (*servant*), Guillermo Bravo Sosa (*head*), Roberto G. Rivera (*Chacal*), Lobo Negro [Guillermo Hernández] & José Dupeyrón (*henchmen*), José Pardavé (*cemetery caretaker*), Guillermo Cramer & Indio Cacama (*henchmen*)

\*this character is bandaged throughout the film so it may not be Múzquiz



**Notes:** this is a direct sequel to *El tesoro de Pancho Villa*, with the treasure recovered at the end of the first film serving as the focus of interest in this one. While the first picture took place at some time during the Mexican Revolution--as indicated by the battles between the *Villistas* and the *federales*--this one takes place in 1923, the year Pancho Villa was assassinated. Curiously, Polilla does not seem to have aged (or grown) a bit since the previous movie, even though at least several years must have elapsed.

Villa hides the recovered treasure, planning to use it "later" for



the "good of the people." Aware he might be murdered by his enemies, Villa wrote the treasure's location (in code) on five rifle bullets, and divided them among his trusted associates (including the officer whose alter ego is the Sombra). All five bullets are required to solve the puzzle.

After Villa's death (his assassination is depicted obliquely, showing the rifle barrels of the multiple assassins, but not Villa himself), a gang seemingly led by the Germanic Dr. Schmidt (although another, mystery boss later appears) try to accumulate all five bullets and unearth the treasure. To make it easier for them, each bullet contains a note with the name of another bullet-holder. Among those entrusted with a bullet was the now-deceased father of Sarita and her little brother, Polilla, who have inherited it. The others are the



Sombra, Major Rodolfo Méndez, Captain Rodríguez, and Captain Valverde.

After numerous attempts, the villains obtain 4 of the bullets--the Sombra has the fifth, and he agrees to turn it over in exchange for the freedom of Sarita and Polilla. However, the Sombra brings 25 bullets and mixes them up so that only he knows which are the correct ones. Schmidt and his mystery boss get the map coordinates to the treasure's location; they take Polilla along as a hostage. Sarita escapes and frees the Sombra, who--along with Rodolfo, Laureano and some leftover *Villistas*--attacks the gang. Schmidt is shot to death, while the Sombra unmasks the gang leader as Captain Rodríguez, who had previously faked his death at the hands of the outlaws to throw off suspicion.

[Ironically, in *El tesoro de Pancho Villa*, Captain Rodríguez--played by future Santo sidekick Carlos Suárez--was a red herring. He wasn't the villain that time, but now he is.]



*El secreto de Pancho Villa* has a lot of loose ends, continuity errors, and illogical aspects. Late in the film, the mystery gang leader becomes a fake Sombra to fool Polilla and Sarita. The two Sombras have a decent fight, during which the bad Sombra tries to unmask the good Sombra, but fails. The bad Sombra then has to flee from his own henchmen, who think he's the real thing! Unfortunately, this illusion is harmed shortly afterward: the real Sombra has discarded his cape and has a prominent bandage on one arm, while the fake Sombra wears the cape and has no bandage. Yet a few scenes later, the real Sombra has his cape back and his bandage is nowhere to be seen. The mystery villain wears the Sombra mask in the climax of the movie, but with civilian clothing so his men can tell the difference.

In another scene the fake Sombra confronts Polilla at the ranch belonging to the boy's grandfather, knocks him out, and steals Valverde's bullet that Polilla had retrieved from the swamp. After a few intervening scenes--none of which feature Polilla or the real Sombra--suddenly we

see the masked hero (the real one) and Polilla riding along together, with no explanation.

*El secreto de Pancho Villa* contains a number of horror elements. An early scene features Dr. Schmidt and a bandaged man whose face was apparently

destroyed in battle. At one point, this man--part of the gang--engages in a fight with the Sombra, falls into a table full of large bottles of acid



(!), and dies in agony, screaming and writhing in pain on the floor. His face is revealed as (quite good) skull-like makeup and his corpse is later shown in closeup. This character is supposedly "El Coyote," played by Carlos Múzquiz in the first film; although Múzquiz is billed here as well, his real face is never seen and it's unlikely he played the role this time. To confuse matters further, in one brief scene, late in the film, a bandaged man appears again, then dons the mask of the "talking head" (see below), except...two scenes earlier, we saw the fake Sombra take off his mask and put on the same "talking head" mask!

The disembodied head which appears in mirrors and windows, spying on people, is another bizarre aspect. [The head gives comic relief character Laureano a chance for one decent joke: he sees the head in a mirror, thinks it's his own reflection, and says "I wasn't so ugly as a child!"]

The head also shows up as a talking "death mask" in a box, and gives Schmidt and his henchmen instructions



about how to battle the Sombra! Late in the film the "head" is revealed to have a body attached, and (as mentioned above) is apparently supposed to be the mystery villain wearing a lifelike mask (Dr. Schmidt also impersonates another character wearing a human face-mask). None of the machinations of this are ever explained.

*The Pantano de las calaveras* (Swamp of the Skeletons) plays a role later in the movie: at one point, Capt. Valverde is attacked by an alligator and killed; later, Polilla sees what is apparently intended to be Valverde's decayed corpse...but only the top half, the

lower half having been eaten by the gators (who are represented mostly by stock footage, but a rubber



alligator does appear in two scenes)!

The action scenes aren't bad: Osés once again displays some athletic leaps and drop-kicks, but is far from invincible, getting

knocked out several times and shot (in the arm) once. Although the Sombra doesn't have an official sidekick, Polilla serves part of this function in a not-too obnoxious manner (and the movie concludes with the Sombra and Polilla riding off together, Polilla wearing a Sombra costume of his own!). The Sombra even has a super-intelligent horse, Rayo de Plata (like Zombie the cougar in *La Sombra Vengadora contra la Mano Negra*, this animal can follow very complex verbal instructions). The rotund Pascual García Peña provides comic relief, as he would in many of producer Manrique's masked-hero movie, and Alicia Caro has more to do this time than in *El tesoro de Pancho Villa*, although she's still mostly just a damsel in distress.



**Los Campeones Justicieros** [The Champions of Justice] (Cin. Grovas, 1970) *Exec Prod:* Rogelio Agrasánchez Jr.; *Prod:* Rogelio Agrasánchez; *Dir:* Federico Curiel; *Adapt:* Rafael García Travesí; *Story:* Rogelio Agrasánchez; *Photo:* José Ortiz Ramos; *Music Dir:* Gustavo César Carrión; *Music Themes:* Tino Contreras; *Prod Chief:* José Alcalde G.; *Sub-Di:* Manuel Muñoz H.; *Film Ed:* José W. Bustos; *Lighting:* Gabriel

Castro; *Camera Op:* Andrés Torres; *Makeup:* Carmen Palomino; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec:* Manuel Topete; *Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed:* José Li-Ho; *Union:* STPC

**Cast:** Blue Demon, Mil Máscaras, El Médico Asesino [Juan Chavarría], Black Shadow (*henchman*), Tinieblas "El Gigante," La Sombra Vengadora [Fernando Osés], David Silva (*La Mano Negra*), Elsa Cárdenas (*Elsa*), Jorge Pingüino (*leader of little persons*), Marisela Mateos (*Miss México*), Martha Angélica (*Miss Sonora*), Bety Velázquez (*Miss Nuevo León*), Maribel Fernández (*Miss Jalisco*), Yolando Riquel [later Rigel] (*Miss Puebla*), Juan Garza (*corner man*), "Pícoro" (*ring announcer*), ?Dorrell Dixon (*black wrestler*), Jorge Casanova (*pageant official*); little persons: Margarito Alonso, Filiberto Estrella, Gregorio Ramírez, Juan Mendiola, Jesús Fernández, Serafín Fernández, Aurelio Pérez, Jorge Hernández; wrestlers: Golden Boy, Domingo Bazán, Mario Texas



**Notes:** In 1970, producer Rogelio Agrasánchez assembled an all-star lineup of wrestlers for *Los Campeones Justicieros*--Blue Demon, Mil Máscaras, Tinieblas, and El Médico Asesino (not the original, who had died years before, but a replacement played by Juan Chavarría, better known as "Gran Markus"). El Santo was reportedly also supposed to appear but had other obligations (it would have been confusing to have him in the same film as El Médico Asesino, since their costumes are very similar). Fernando Osés donned the Sombra Vengadora costume one more time to join the gang. Villainous roles went to David Silva (Huracán Ramírez's original alter ego) as "Mano Negra" (a callback to the original Sombra movies perhaps) and Alejandro Cruz "Black Shadow."

*Los Campeones Justicieros* deals with the efforts of mad scientist Mano Negra to eliminate the wrestling superheroes who had "5 years earlier" defeated his evil plans. A foreign power is now willing to pay millions for the Mano Negra's scientific expertise, and he doesn't want the Campeones to meddle again. The villain's scheme to eliminate his enemies includes creating a horde of super-powered little persons and the kidnapping



of five beauty queens (who are all "proteges"--read, mistresses--of the Campeones --except for the Sombra's candidate, who is his niece). [Only the five actresses playing these contestants are billed, but there are other women representing other Mexican states who also appear in the pageant.] It seems like the Mano Negra could have simply moved to the USA or something to avoid the Campeones.



Mano Negra sends his little-person henchmen--each given the "power of 10 athletes"--after the Campeones several times, and it's amusing to see the masked wrestlers getting pummeled by four or five costumed mini-villains. However, as is par for the course in *lucha libre* films, few of the fights are conclusive, with the villains running away unharmed. The only successes Mano Negra's band actually achieves are kidnapping the beauty queens and abducting a pajama-clad Sombra (who's been knocked out by some sort of powder that squirts from his telephone) and later brain-washing him. In the end, Mano Negra takes a pill and disappears, then explodes?!



*Los Campeones justicieros* isn't great (the two "Campeones" sequels are more outrageous) although it has a decent, flashy climax with a lot of smoke, explosions, little persons flying through the air, and so on. There seems to have been an attempt to make the

film look classy (in the James Bond mode) by including scenes of motorcycles, speedboats, and airplanes (a motorcycle, auto, and boat all blow up). [As an aside, Blue Demon drives a Thunderbird and El Médico Asesino has a dune buggy, while the other wrestlers ride motorcycles.] The locations are varied and the only notable set is Mano Negra's lab, which is adequately furnished with scientific equipment (including freezing chambers for the beauty queens and a diving bell-type apparatus that initially gives the little people their super-strength). Also worth mentioning is the jazzy music score with a drummer working frenetically to accompany the action scenes: the music isn't always appropriate, but it's certainly loud and energetic.

The main selling point was the presence of five, count 'em five masked heroes, including four "names" (Tinieblas was a newcomer to films, at least in this persona, having previously appeared in movie roles under his real name, Manuel Leal).

While none of the heroic wrestlers is given much of a personality, the Sombra does have a minor on-screen romance (with Elsa Cárdenas, who turns out to be a traitor), and is later kidnaped and brain-washed by Mano Negra, so by default he attracts a certain amount of the audience's attention. However, Blue Demon and Mil Máscaras are more or less the "leaders" of the group.

The only arena wrestling scene in the film is a tag-team match featuring Blue Demon, Mil Máscaras and El Médico Asesino (Tinieblas and the Sombra just watch), but the Sombra does

go one-on-one with a black wrestler (Dorrell Dixon?) in an impromptu bout in Mano Negra's lab, a scene which has no bearing on the plot and appears to have been inserted just to showcase the Sombra's wrestling expertise (the Sombra actually kills his opponent!).

Curiously, in the opening wrestling match the heroes' opponents are "Los Hermanos Muerte," and one of these men is Fernando Osés (possibly why the Sombra isn't wrestling). However, when the three villainous full-sized wrestlers are later seen in Mano Negra's lab, Osés has been replaced by a different man. The Death Brothers duck out of the ring to allow their little person accomplices (in the rafters) to open fire on Blue, Mil and



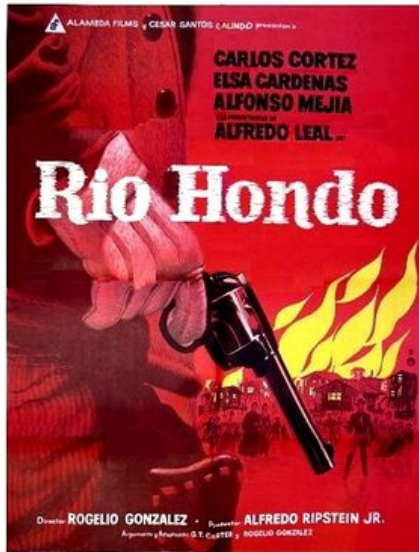
Médico (using a machine gun that appears to have been constructed from a transistor radio), but only Mil is even slightly wounded (a referee is also shot).

The final sequence concludes with Blue Demon going one-on-one with Black Shadow, which has an extra-filmic twist, since in real life the two men were formerly tag-team partners.



## GOOD, BAD AND UGLY WESTERNS

**Río Hondo** (Alameda Films—César Santos Galindo, 1965) *Prod:* Alfredo Ripstein Jr.; *Dir:* Rogelio



González;  
*Scr:* Glenn Thomas Carter\*, Rogelio González V.;  
*Photo:* Enrique Wallace;  
*Music:* Gustavo César Carreón [sic]; *Prod Mgr:* Enrique Estevez;  
*Prod Chief:* Enrique Morfín; *Asst Dir:* Felipe

Palomino; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Art Dir:* Salvador Lozano [Mena]; *Décor:* Ernesto Carrasco; *Lighting:* Miguel Arana; *Camera Op:* José A. Carrasco; *Makeup:* Elda Loza; *Sound Supv:* James L. Fields; *Music/Re-rec:* Galdino Samperio; *Dialog Rec:* Manuel Topete; *Sound Ed:* Raúl Portillo; *Union:* STPC

\*same story used for *The Quick Gun* (1964), credited to Robert E. Kent (screenplay) and Steve Fisher (screen story)

**Cast:** Carlos Cortéz (*Luis Cervantes*), Elsa Cárdenas (*Marta*), Alfonso Mejía (*Miguel Estrada*), Alfredo Leal (*José Urbina*), Tito Junco (*Lorenzo Valderrama*), Rodolfo Acosta (*Peña*), Carlos Navarro (*priest*), Sergio Jurado (*Camargo*), Héctor Godoy (*Rubén*), Juan Félix Guilmaín [aka Juan Ferrara] (*Martín Valderrama*), Manuel Alvarado (*Carmona*), Armando Acosta (*Delfino*), Lucía Guilmaín (*Estela*), Armando Gutiérrez (*Rocha*), Manuel Dondé (*town resident*), Salvador Lozano (*doctor*)

**Notes:** Mexican Westerns of the 1960s were a mixed lot. Some were fairly close approximations of Hollywood “B” Westerns, others were a combination of *ranchera*, Western, and/or Mexican Revolution stories, and--towards the end of the decade--the influence of

spaghetti Westerns began to be felt (this became more noticeable in the early Seventies).

A small but not insignificant number of Mexican Westerns in this era had an international component, usually via the inclusion of Hollywood performers. These films include *Los bandidos* (Robert Conrad, Jan Michael Vincent), *Los asesinos* (Nick Adams), *Super Colt 38* (Jeffrey Hunter), *El pistolero fantasma* (Troy Donahue), *El sabor de la venganza* (Cameron Mitchell), *Un tipo difícil de matar* (Slim Pickens), among others. *Río Hondo* features no Hollywood actors, but it is a remake of a 1964 Western, *The Quick Gun*, with Carlos Cortéz in the Audie Murphy role, Alfredo Leal replacing Ted de Corsia, Tito Junco in Walter Sande's role, Alfonso Mejía instead of James Best, and Elsa Cárdenas in the part played by Merry Anders. Presumably this was a case of someone (Robert E. Kent?) selling the script to Alameda Films, rather than an unauthorised remake.

Carlos Cortéz (sometimes billed as “Cortés”) appeared in Mexican films from the early 1960s until the mid 1970s. As Carlos Cuttler, he attended the Culver Military Academy in Indiana, graduating in 1957; he then went to the University of Miami, where he seems to have begun his acting career, appearing in several campus and local plays. By 1960 he was working in Mexican cinema (sources indicate he had a minor role in the Hollywood film *Splendor in the Grass* as well): nearly a dozen of his pictures were Westerns, but he also worked in dramas and comedies, including *Amor y sexo* (with María Félix), and *Las amiguitas de los ricos*. His screen roles seem to have dried up by the early Seventies, but Cuttler/Cortéz apparently continued (continues?) to live in Mexico City (if the Internet can be believed).



Gunfighter Luis left the town of Río Hondo after killing the two sons of wealthy don Lorenzo; although Luis claims it was self-defense, most of the town blames him. 2 years later, he's on his way back to claim the ranch his late father left him, but runs into old outlaw acquaintance Urbina and his gang on the way. Urbina says his men are going to attack Río Hondo, loot the



bank, and molest all the women (most of the able-bodied men are away on a cattle drive or something). Luis refuses to join Urbina, departs, and kills two men that Urbina sends after him.

In Río Hondo, Luis is coolly received, even when he warns them of Urbina's plan. His former sweetheart Marta, who disapproves of his profession of gunfighter, is now engaged to Miguel, the town sheriff. Don Lorenzo and his nephew Martín try to provoke Luis into a gunfight, but he refuses. Luis helps organise the remaining men in town to defend it against Urbina, but Lorenzo and Martín try to murder him (in an excellently staged, long fight scene in a barn) so his heroism won't redeem him in the eyes of the residents. Luis is forced to kill them both in self-defense, and Miguel locks him in the town jail.

Urbina and his gang arrive in town. Miguel challenges Urbina to a duel and the outlaw leader agrees, but when Miguel starts to draw, all of Urbina's men open fire and kill him! [This is pretty shocking and unexpected.] In the ensuing battle, virtually all of the townsmen are killed: only Rubén and the priest (plus Marta and all the women, who have taken refuge in the church) are left alive. Rubén frees Luis.

Luis promises Urbina to lead him to the money from the bank (which has been hidden elsewhere in town) in exchange for Marta's freedom (she was going to be raped by the bandits if the hiding place of the money wasn't revealed). Gradually Luis--with some help from Rubén--kills most of Urbina's men. Urbina agrees to a duel with Luis, but cheats once more: his henchman Peña is behind Luis. However, before Peña can ambush Luis, he's shot to death by Marta. [Shades of *High Noon*.] Luis beats Urbina to the draw and kills the outlaw. Luis renounces violence: he and Marta will help Río Hondo rebuild.

*Río Hondo* is well-produced (although, unlike *The Quick Gun*, it wasn't shot in colour--Mexican cinema didn't convert to all-colour until after 1966) with a decent exterior town set and substantial if not lavish interiors, an explosion (Urbina's men use dynamite to blow up a

flaming barrier established by the townspeople), a satisfactory number of extras, etc. Rogelio A. González was an actor and writer turned director whose biggest films were probably those he made with Pedro Infante: after writing some of Infante's biggest hits of the late Forties (including *Los tres García*, *Los tres Huastecos*, *Ustedes los ricos*, *Angelitos negros*, etc.), González directed 8 of Infante's 1950s movies, helming numerous other pictures in various genres until the early 1980s (he died in 1984). While González was not especially noted for his directorial style, his films are competently made on the whole and *Río Hondo* is a good example of this. The set-ups are varied, editing is crisp, dramatics are effective (rather than over-stated or, conversely, flat).

The performances are satisfactory for the most part. Good, minor bits are given to performers playing the townspeople--including Manuel Dondé, Manuel Alvarado, and Armando Acosta--who are pressed into service in the battle against Urbina's outlaws. They do their best but are clearly terrified and unsuited for combat, and most of them are unceremoniously killed by the bandits. Carlos Navarro and Rodolfo Acosta, two "name" performers, don't have a lot to do, but Tito Junco makes the most of his limited screen time. Juan Ferrara--under his real name, Juan Félix Guilmaín--has one of his earliest screen roles but is killed off fairly early.

*Río Hondo* seems to have been Alfredo Leal's film debut. Leal began a career as a bullfighter in the late 1940s, eventually working in both Mexico and Spain, but switched to acting in his mid-30s and worked in that profession until his death in 2003. Leal would play some sympathetic roles, but was often cast as suave, crafty villains as in this picture. He and Carlos Cortéz play well off each other, with Leal as Urbina trying to seem more reasonable than he really is, and Cortéz as Luis pretending to be hard-boiled and pragmatic rather than heroic.



**Los Gavilanes Negros [The Black Hawks]**  
(Filmadora Chapultepec, 1965) Prod: Pedro Galindo;  
Dir: Chano Urueta; Adap: José María Fernández

Unsaín; *Story*: Pedro Galindo Jr., José Ma. Fdez. Unsaín; *Photo*: Jorge Stahl Jr.; *Music*: Antonio Díaz Conde; *Music Arr*: Rubén Fuentes; *Prod Mgr*: José de Jesús Fernández; *Prod Chief*: Fidel Pizarro; *Asst Dir*: Moisés M. Delgado; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Decor*: Raúl Serrano; *Makeup*: Felisa L. de Guevara; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec*: Javier Mateos; *Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed*: José Li-Ho; *Camera Op*: Salvador de Anda; *Lighting*: Horacio Calvillo; *Union*: STPC

**Cast:** Luis Aguilar (*Fernando Gutiérrez*), Fernando Casanova (*Gavilán who is horse trainer*), Pedro Armendáriz Jr. (*Gavilán who is pharmacist*), Irma Serrano (*Lucha Martínez*), Ramón Bugarini (*Juan Cruz*), Guillermo Rivas (*Cirilo Cruz*), Carlos León (*Braulio*), Notahel [sic] León (*Cruz henchman*), Armando Acosta (*bartender*), José Luis Fernández (*Cruz brother*), Felipe del Castillo, Carlos Guarneros "Don Cuco," Julio Ahuet (*leader of rowdy cowboys*), René Barrera (*Brígido, henchman and rowdy cowboy*), Manuel Vergara "Manver" (*Cruz henchman*), Marco Antonio Arzate (*Cruz henchman*), Julián de Meriche (*town doctor*), Victorio Blanco (*Lucas, watchman*), Margarito Luna (*Fernando, bank teller*), Emilio Garibay (*Cruz henchman*), Regino Herrera (*father of sick boy*), ?Víctor Velázquez (*comisario*)

**Notes:** this is a mediocre Western at best, written, acted, and directed with absolutely no style, energy or originality. As García Riera writes, the uncaring attitude of the filmmakers can be discerned by the fact that two of three protagonists--the characters played by Fernando Casanova and Pedro Armendáriz--are not even given names! [note: for the purposes of the following synopsis, I will refer to them as "Casanova" and "Armendáriz."] Although not poorly produced, the bland Churubusco sets and flat, high-key lighting make this look like a Western TV show, and the routine plot (littered with loopholes and gaffes) is not much better. The best thing about the movie is...the natty costumes of the heroes!



Womanizing storekeeper Fernando, horse trainer Casanova, and pharmacist Armendáriz are also the masked heroes known as the "Gavilanes Negros." When danger strikes, townspeople summon their aid by shooting off fireworks (!). After disposing of a gang of rowdy cowboys, the Gavilanes return to their normal professions. [The Gavilanes do differ from most TV Western heroes--whose exploits were aimed at a youthful audience--in one way: they make little or no attempt to capture the villains, instead shooting them down without a second thought!]



Casanova visits a nearby town to sell some horses. The villainous Cruz brothers--who own most of the town--rob and beat him instead. He escapes death with the aid of the town doctor and saloon singer Lucha, who tend his wounds and help him leave town. Some time later, the Gavilanes return to settle the score with the Cruz gang. Fernando gets a job as a pianist in the saloon (owned by Juan Cruz) and romances Lucha. Casanova--disguised as an old man with a long white beard--and his "grandson" Armendáriz arrive and make it known that they're rich and want to buy a ranch. The Cruz brothers arrange to sell them one (planning to murder them afterwards, so they'll have both the land and the money). The Gavilanes rob the town bank (owned by the gang) and use the money to "buy" the ranch (they also give a large donation to the town priest, who faints!). Cruz henchmen try to murder Casanova and Armendáriz as they sleep (but of course don't notice they're shooting wadded-up blankets in bed--nor do they search for the deed, although specifically ordered to do so by Juan Cruz).

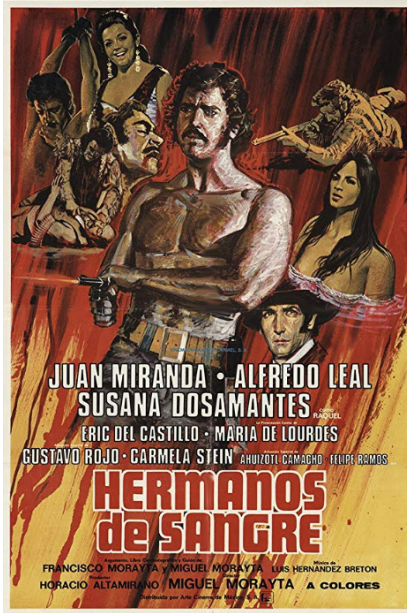
Fernando is late for a Gavilanes meeting (he's with Lucha) and arrives just in time to see Casanova and Armendáriz captured by the Cruz gang. Naturally, the outlaws don't shoot their enemies at once, nor do they remove the masks of the Gavilanes to learn their secret identity ("the boss will have that pleasure"), instead locking them up in the town jail. Fernando thus has time to concoct some primitive smoke bombs (although it was Armendáriz who was the "scientist" of the group, at least



he's the only one we've seen using chemicals prior to this point) and free his pals. The Gavilanes Negros have a final showdown with the Cruz brothers and their henchmen, and of course the heroes prevail (killing Juan and his brothers). Fernando is nearly trapped into a wedding with Lucha, but Casanova and Armendáriz--in their Gavilanes outfits but without their masks--break up the ceremony at gunpoint and "abduct" their friend.

Luis Aguilar certainly holds the record in Mexican cinema for playing masked Western heroes, but *Los Gavilanes Negros* has to be one of the lamest examples of this genre. Although the cast features a lot of familiar faces, no one is given much personality: Aguilar is a cheerful womanizer, Serrano is desperate to get married, and that's about it. Both Serrano and Aguilar get to sing some, Casanova has one extended (and boring) scene where he conducts a "humorous" monologue with a horse who appears to respond to his questions (by shaking its head and stamping its hoof), and Armendáriz is seen briefly performing his duties as a frontier druggist. Ramón Bugarini and the rest of the villains aren't very interesting, although Bugarini does try to rape Serrano in one scene and angrily knocks his brother (Rivas) down when the latter fails to catch the Gavilanes. The action scenes, with the exception of one acceptable brawl early in the film, are nothing to write home about, either. One gaffe which is amusing but again illustrates the slipshod nature of this picture is the appearance of René Barrera in this early fight scene--between the Gavilanes and some rowdy cowboys--and his later, completely different role as one of the Cruz gang members. He even wears the same clothes!

Quite forgettable.



**Hermanos de sangre\*** [Blood Brothers] (Cin. Carmel, 1972) Prod: Horacio Altamirano; Dir: Miguel

Morayta; Scr: Francisco Morayta, Miguel Morayta; Photo: Jorge Stahl Jr.; Music: Luis Hernández Bretón; Prod Chief: Antonio Guajardo; Asst Dir: Manuel Ortega; Film Ed: Gloria Schoemann; Art Dir: Roberto Silva; Decor: Carlos Arjona; Makeup: Elda Loza; Camera Op: Guadalupe García; Lighting: Antonio Alvarez; Sound Supv: James L. Fields; Dialog Rec: Francisco Alcayde; Re-rec: Ramón Moreno; Sound Ed: Abraham Cruz; Union: STPC

\*re-released as *Regreso sangriento* [Bloody Return]

**Cast:** Juan Miranda (*Juan Sandoval*), Alfredo Leal (*Jaime Cervantes*), Eric del Castillo (*El Tiro Largo*), Susana Dosamantes (*Raquel Cervantes*; *Rosario Cervantes*), María de Lourdes (*Alondra*), Gustavo Rojo (*Martín*), Carmen Estein (*Julia Antuñez*), Ahuizotl Camacho (*Juan as a boy*), Felipe Ramos (*Lt. Andrés Antuñez*), Juan Garza Salazar (*El Gato*), Jesús Gómez Murguía (*Sgt.*), Rodrigo Arredondo Puebla (*Pluma Roja*), Federico Falcón (*Ramón Sandoval*), Marcelo Villamil López (*Raúl Cervantes*), Jorge Arriaga (*Mapache*), René Barrera (*El Chueco*), N. León (*Frankenstein*) (*Rómulo*), Fernando Pinkus (*man in cantina*), Laura Martínez Montiel, Roberto Ruiz Vázquez, Marta Ivone González, Erika Sagoyán, Ángel Wade, Gregorio Acosta, Ignacio Villalbaz, Araceli Larseka

**Notes:** one of various "adult" Westerns made in Mexico in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Hermanos de sangre* is mildly entertaining but nothing special. The original version possibly--based on stills--contained several nude scenes of Susana Dosamantes, but the version I have seen (the Videovisa release) has been edited and the only nudity is a (brief) shot of Juan Miranda's buttocks (and nobody needed to see those again). Regardless, the film is fairly well-made but the acting is sub-par, the dialogue is extremely awkward, and the music is corny.



A couple of trivia points: director Miguel Morayta and his son Francisco (also an actor) collaborated on the script. The cast includes Gustavo Rojo and his wife Carmela Stein (credited on-screen as "Carmen Estein")--their daughter Ana Patricia Rojo (who wasn't yet born when this film was made) became a child actress and currently plays (mostly) villainesses on *telenovelas*.

Because he's up in a tree, young Juan Sandoval is spared when three outlaws arrive at his family's ranch and murder his father, mother, brother and sister. When he learns what has occurred, their neighbor Raúl Cervantes shoots his wife Rosario and then kills himself, leaving their children Raquel and Jaime orphaned.

Time passes. Raquel now runs the family ranch, while Jaime is the secret leader of a gang of bank robbers that includes the town sheriff Tiro Largo ("Long Shot"). Jaime, attracted to saloon singer Alondra, discards his former girlfriend Julia. A stranger arrives in town and after he defeats some of Jaime's henchmen in a brawl, is offered a job on the ranch by Jaime. The stranger is, of course, Juan. He is looking for the men who killed his



parents and also wants to know who ordered their deaths. At least two of the murderers are in Jaime's gang (including Tiro Largo). Alondra knows Juan's identity--he was raised

by her Indian tribe and she was sent to town "undercover" to help him in his quest for justice. Juan and Raquel fall in love or at least in lust.

Jaime and his gang--along with Juan--steal a shipment of gold belonging to the army, but Juan and Tiro Largo double-cross the outlaws and hide the loot. Juan tries to force Tiro Largo to reveal who hired him but is captured by Jaime and the others, whipped, and left in the desert to die. He's rescued by Pluma Roja, one of his Indian friends. The truth is revealed: Raúl Cervantes learned his wife had been unfaithful to him with Ramón Sandoval, so he had Sandoval killed and then shot his wife. Jaime and Raquel are Ramón's children, and thus half-brother and sister to Juan. This doesn't stop Juan from killing Jaime in a final showdown; when Raquel appears, she and Juan shoot each other to death.



There is nothing really surprising or unique about *Hermanos de sangre*, and despite the presence of many veteran performers in the cast, they can't make much out of the often stilted dialogue of the script. Director Morayta includes a few "tricks"--a "blood-spatter" wipe

and red-tinted screen as Juan remembers his parents' deaths, and a bedroom scene done with stills--but these aren't really that interesting. The production values are satisfactory but otherwise this is mediocre at best.



## Lo blanco, lo rojo y lo negro [The White, the Red and the Black]

(Estudios América, 1977) *Exec*

*Prod:* Jorge Durán Chávez; *Dir-Scr:* Alfredo Salazar;

*Photo:* Javier

Cruz R.;

*Music:* Ernesto

Cortázar Jr.;

*Prod Mgr:*

Enrique

Gutiérrez; *Film*

*Ed:* José J.

Munguía; *Art*

*Dir:* Fernando

Ramírez;

*Makeup:*

Victoria Celis;

*Sound:* Ricardo

Saldívar;

*Sound Ed:*

Enrique

Murillo; *Spec*

*FX:* Federico

Farfán; *Union:*

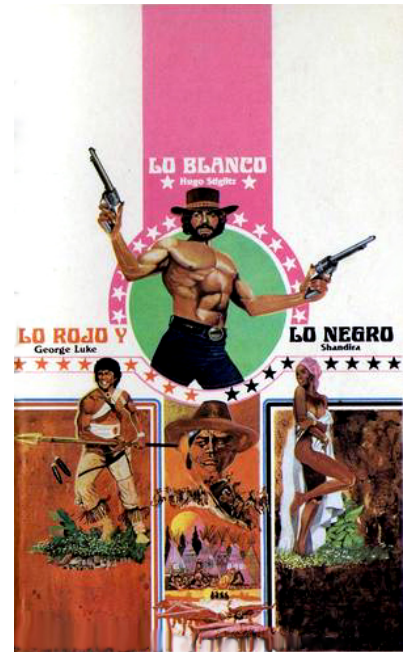
STIC

**Cast:** Hugo

Stiglitz (*Chris Harris*), Jorge Luke (*Ningano*), Shandira (*Yara*), Carlos East (*ambusher*), Juan Antonio Edwards (*Jim Harris*), Rodrigo Puebla (*Gitano*), Héctor Godoy (*Matthew Holden*), Alfredo Whaley Barrón (*Víctor Kazko*), Martha Elena Cervantes (*Constanza Holden*), Polo Salazar (*judge*), Carlos Houman (*Santiago*), José de la Luz Murillo (*Sheriff*), Andrés Nájera Tavira, Lulú Torres, Xóchitl del Rosario [coordinator of special action], Alfredo Gutiérrez (*cantinero*), Agustín Fernández (*saloon tough guy*), Farneso de Bernal (*doctor*), ?Ramiro Ramírez (*Tuerto*)

**Notes:** *Lo blanco, lo rojo y lo negro* is a mostly conventional Western written and directed by Alfredo Salazar. Salazar plays a bit with narrative and genre conventions, but not enough to make this a significantly "different" Western in any way.

The film introduces its 3 protagonists in alternating opening sequences. Ningano is a Chiricahua Indian, who surreptitiously enters a sort of fort and spies a man with an eyepatch and a tattoo of a snake on his hand, then steals away. Gunfighter Chris and his younger brother Jim are traveling via stagecoach to visit their married sister Constanza, who has called for their assistance in their conflict with the local boss Kazko. Yara and her father Tomás are panning for gold. They've been grub-





staked by Santiago, who lusts after Yara but has been rejected by her.

Ningano captures the eye-patch guy (Tuerto) and hangs him up over a ravine until he names his two accomplices in a massacre of Ningano's village (only shown much later, in flashback). Tuerto fingers Kazko and Santiago as the other two men, but this doesn't save him: Ningano cuts the rope and Tuerto plunges to his death. Meanwhile, Santiago shoots Tomás from ambush and steals his gold. [This is the last we see of Yara's story for a while.]



Gitano, Kazko's henchman, leads a raid on the Holden farm (Constanza is married to Matthew Holden and they have 3 children), murdering everyone and leaving an Indian lance and moccasin as false evidence. Chris and Jim arrive in town, and Jim is harassed by some men in the saloon when he refuses to drink liquor (he has an ulcer). Ningano intercedes and then Chris arrives; a brawl breaks out and Ningano pins one man's hand to the bar with a knife. Chris, Jim and Ningano show up at the Holden ranch and find the bodies. One of the young boys lives long enough to say "Gitano..."

Ningano captures Kazko and stakes him out on an anthill to die.

This causes the local authorities, urged on by Gitano, to form a posse to track down the "Indian" they assume is responsible.

Jim dies of the injuries he

suffered in the saloon incident. Ningano is ambushed and left for dead by the man with the knife wound in his hand. This man later boasts of killing Ningano and is shot to death by Chris. Chris hunts for Ningano, but Yara found him first and is nursing him back to health. Chris decides to stay with them. Santiago shows up and



tries to rape Yara, but Chris and Ningano intervene, and Ningano kills him with a pointed stake.

The posse is still searching for Kazko's killer. They pursue Chris, Ningano and Yara; Chris realizes Gitano is one of the men who murdered his sister and her family, and shoots him to death. The posse eventually gives up when the pursuit enters the desert. Chris, Ningano and Yara nearly die but as the film concludes they reach the other side where a waterfall and a large pool of water awaits.

Perhaps the most unusual thing about *Lo blanco, lo rojo y lo negro* is the fairly early dispatching of most of the villains: there is no mastermind whose death is postponed until the climax of the movie, and although Kazko, Tuerto and Santiago are (rather improbably) linked, the film is not "about" Ningano's quest for revenge specifically. Furthermore, Chris coincidentally encounters Gitano (he wasn't looking for him) and Yara doesn't even know Santiago murdered her father, so their "revenge" component is extremely light. Aside from agitator & liar Gitano, the posse chasing Ningano and the others (on false information—also, he just happens to be the only Chiricahua Indian they come across!) is trying to enforce the law to the best of their ability, not acting like a bloodthirsty mob (Kazko is the one who makes the most racist remarks in the film, claiming "the only Chiricahua you can trust is a dead one").

Other than this, the basic plot and the way it's worked out are fairly routine and there are no surprises and not much action.

Very little is made of the multi-racial makeup of the protagonists. In

one scene Yara remarks on Chris's friendship with a Native American, and he says "I think all races are equal. There's just people I like and people I don't like." Chris and Yara have an affair (and, in a bizarre, thirst-fueled fantasy, Ningano dreams he's swimming nude with Yara). As the posse gives up, one man says "who would a white, an Indian, and black rely on to give them help?" and another posse member replies: "No one except each other."

There are only a few bits of nudity and gore.

Shandira has multiple nude scenes (bathing in the river, fending off Santiago's rape, in bed with Chris, and the show-nothing nude swim with Ningano), Martha Elena Cervantes is seen partially nude, and a Chiricahua woman is stripped in the massacre scene. The actual gore is restricted to the knife scene in the saloon brawl: the death of Kazko, the Holden family and Santiago are



mildly gruesome (and Gitano is shot in the forehead) but not especially bloody.

*Lo blanco, lo rojo y lo negro* was shot in the state of Durango and a couple of the town scenes were filmed on what appears to be a standing "Western town" set there; the actual locations and the photography are generally good. Salazar even includes some nice running insert shots as the posse chases the trio (this chase goes on far too long, however).

Ernesto Cortázar Jr.'s score is variable. There's too much stereotypical old-timey "Western" music (harmonica, etc.) and when Yara takes her nude bath there's hokey, bawdy honky-tonk music on the soundtrack. However, later in the film there is what



sounds like library music from earlier action movies (which is pretty good but makes the rest sound worse).

Hugo Stiglitz's

dialogue was dubbed by someone else, while Jorge Luke seems to have done his own lines; the rest of the cast, I'm not sure (although Wally Barrón and Rodrigo Puebla sound like themselves). The performances are decent throughout.

Alfredo Salazar's direction is satisfactory, avoiding too many arty flourishes—it's professional and adequate for the purpose. He directed less than dozen feature films, and these fall into a number of different genres: Western/masked hero/monster, comedy, *ranchera*, ghost story, historical/religious, action, drama.

Trivia note: *Ulzana's Raid* (1972) was another film—directed by Robert Aldrich—about the Chiricahua Indians. Joaquín Martínez (born in Mexico) played Ulzana (an actual person; Gerónimo was also a Chiricahua), while Jorge Luke played a Native American scout helping to track him down. This U.S. film was shot in Arizona, and Martínez and Luke are the only major Mexican film performers in the cast.



**La fichera más rápida del oeste** [The Fastest Bargirl in the West] (Prods. Latinas Americanas-JR Cinevideo Prods.-Galáctica Films, 1989) *Prod:* Jorge Rubio Salazar; *Assoc Prod:* Orlando R. Mendoza, Luis Bekris, Rafael Villaseñor Kuri; *Dir-Scr:* Víctor Manuel "Güero" Castro; *Photo:* Raúl Domínguez; *Music:* Javier Batiz; *Prod Mgr:* Javier García Mata; *Asst Dir:* Rubén González; *Film Ed:* Sergio Soto; *Camera Op:* Mario Becerra; *Choreography and Costumes:* Los Imperio;

*Makeup:* Graciela Muñoz; *Re-rec:* René Ruiz Cerón; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Jerry*), César Bono (*Perro Amarillo*), Manuel "Flaco" Ibáñez (*Maestro Ibáñez*,

*bandleader*), Arsenio Campos (*Paco Jones*), Lorena Herrera (*Bobby*), Guillermo de Alvarado "Condorito" (*Pepe Navajas*), José Natera (*Keiko Jones*), Irene Arcila (*Mimi*), Carlos Yustis (*Shorty aka Omar*), Laura Tovar (*bargirl*), Carlos Rotzinger (*Joker*), Pedrín Orozco



(*Macario López Tarso*), Gastón Padilla (*Sr. Madera*), Jaquelin Castro, Armando Ramírez, Enrique Imperio, Juan Imperio, Víctor Manuel Castro (*judge*), Jorge Ortín (*townsman*), Mario Zebadua "Colocho" (*mayor*), Karla Barahona (*bargirl*), Alejandra Castillo, Perfecto González "Peluche," Beatriz Arroyo, J. Antonio Wilhelmi "Willie" (*gambler*), Alejandra Sáenz, Ángel A. Rodríguez "Chanate," Fidel Abrego "Chamuco," Patricia de Alvarado, César Valdez, Zaura Cecilia, Jorge Guzmán

**Notes:** I was pleasantly surprised by this movie, which is well-produced and quite amusing at times. It's no *Blazing Saddles*, but *La fichera más rápida del oeste* isn't bad at all (note: the title is mildly misleading, since Lorena Herrera plays a bargirl for about one minute).

The script is witty, relying on risqué puns and topical (and thus anachronistic) references for much of its humor. Some examples--

a) the town undertaker is named "Gayosso" (possibly Cayosso), a reference to the best-known funeral service company in Mexico

b) when two men are killed, Shorty changes the "population" sign for the town to read "4169," and smirks "What a horny [*cachondo*] town!" "41" is Mexican slang for homosexual, and "69" is, well, a universal sexual reference.

c) the town council decides to appoint Shorty the new sheriff, since he's the only one dumb enough to take the dangerous job. "Shorty, what's your [real] name," one woman asks. "Omar," he replies. "Now we have Omar Sheriff!" she says. [Get it? Omar Sharif?]



d) Jerry and Perro Amarillo see a man drowning (*ahogando*) in the river. "He should weep," Jerry remarks. "Why?" asks Perro Amarillo. Jerry replies, "So he can *desahogarse*." [*Desahogarse* means to "let it all out," or "make yourself feel better by unburdening yourself," but in this case is used as a pun on *ahogar/desahogar*. [I smiled at this.]

The production values are good, using a large Western-town set (in the state of Durango) filled with plenty of extras, and there are even two well-mounted musical

production numbers! The cast is loaded with familiar faces;

Herrera and Guzmán are adequate as the (mostly straight)

leads, and most of the humor comes from the supporting cast, especially César Bono, José Natera, and Pedrín Orozco. "Flaco" Ibáñez, despite third-billing, has virtually a cameo role as a saloon bandleader who appears mostly in the two musical sequences. This is not to say that this is a perfect movie, however--there is no nudity and the plot is stretched very thin.

Jerry and his Native American companion Perro Amarillo--also his half-brother--are on a quest to find a certain man, identified by a patch over one eye. They find the man but are captured by his band of outlaws--Macario, Keiko, Navajas, Joker--and are about to be hung when female bounty hunter Bobby shoots the ropes and frees them. All of the principals soon find themselves in the same town. The one-eyed man, Paco Jones, makes plans with saloon-owner Mimí to establish a chain of saloons-brothels-gambling joints across the West. Meanwhile, all of the saloon girls are attracted to Perro Amarillo.



While in bed with several of the bargirls, Perro Amarillo tells them the story of his quest. Years before, Paco Jones raped a young Indian woman (although she clawed out one of his eyes in the process). She became pregnant and a warrior of her tribe married her and

became the adoptive father of her child, who grew up to be Jerry. Perro Amarillo was born several years later, to the Indian brave and his wife. The half-brothers have been sent to find and kill Paco, to avenge the dishonor of their mother.

Bobby falls in love with Jerry, but he isn't interested in her because she's dirty and smells. [He also calls her *chamaco* (boy) a few times, so perhaps he didn't notice her long blonde hair and hourglass figure!] Mimí and the other bargirls give Bobby a bath and dress her up in a fancy gown, and now Jerry pays attention. He tells Bobby of his intention to kill his own father, Paco.



However, during a final showdown on the street, Paco suddenly begins to age. [The audience earlier learned he was taking an Indian elixir to stay young, but that this would eventually fail to work.] He either dies or just collapses (it isn't clear) and is carried off by his gang. Bobby and Jerry embrace; Mimí laments the loss of her plan to franchise her saloons, but Perro Amarillo says he will become her new partner.



*La fichera más rápida del oeste* is good-natured and while there are traces of the "sketch" or "Laugh-In" style of filmmaking which ruins many a 1980s Mexican comedy--the camera wanders around a room and various characters tell brief jokes or stories with no relevance to the "plot"--there are no major deviations or delays. There isn't, however, much physical comedy (Shorty getting repeatedly hit in the face by the swinging doors of the saloon is about it), with most of the humor (or attempts at humor) coming from the dialogue or the characterizations of the particular performers. Some of this is more successful than others--the judge's habit of

spitting on people as he talks is not amusing, while the saloon bartender's gay act is funny.

Much better than I expected, this is uneven but the good far outweighs the bad.



## **PESEROS, PEPENADORES & POLÍTICOS**



**Los peseros** [The Mini-Bus Drivers] (Prods. Monte, 1982) *Exec Prod:* Roberto Iglesias; *Prod:* Reyes Montemayor; *Dir:* José Luis Urquieta; *Scr:* Carlos Valdemar; *Orig. Idea:* Reyes Montemayor; *Photo:* Francisco Bojorquez; *Music:* Héctor Sánchez; *Prod Mgr:* Jorge Rivas; *Asst Dir:* Alejandro Rodríguez; *Film Ed:* Enrique Murillo R.; *Camera Op:* Silvano Zúñiga; *Makeup:* Guillermina Oropeza; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Saldívar; *Sound:* Roberto Martínez; *Sound Ed:* Oscar Figueroa J.; *Union:* STIC

**Cast:** Roberto "Flaco" Guzmán (*Pedro*), Rafael Inclán (*Beto*), Eleazar García "Chelelo" (*Eleodoro*), Rosenda Bernal (*Anita*), Lucila Mariscal (*Conchita aka "Doña Pelos"*), Rómulo Lozano (*Melquiades*), Noé Murayama (*Cmdte. López*), Tito Junco (*don Justo Ramos*), Rodrigo Puebla (*López's asst.*), Norma Plata (*Lupe*), Jorge Reynoso (*Poncho*), Alejandro Ortiz, Adrián Montemayor, Roberto Iglesias, Jorge Rivas, Alfredo "Alacrán" Jiménez, Capt. Jesús T. Espejo (*himself*), José Luis Urquieta (*cabbie*), Eleazar García Jr. (*Federico, bus driver*), Graciela de la Peña, Jorge Pineda "El Colorín," Velia Torre, Elsa Rodríguez, Tropical Caribe, Los Rurales del Bravo, Mariachi Cocula, Manuel Martínez, Jorge Alberto Rivas, Grupo "Liberación" de Virgilio Canales, Ventura Cantú, Roel Martínez "El Picudo"

**Notes:** this is pretty entertaining comedy-drama, bolstered by some fine action sequences and a strong cast. The script manages to juggle two and one-half plots effectively, and the Monterrey location shooting adds a fresh touch.

Brothers Pedro and Beto, pickpockets by profession, have been released from prison and want to go straight,

but crooked cop López demands constant pay-offs (none of this is shown, only referred to later on). [This is similar to the basic premise of *Cadena perpetua*, 1978.] Pedro and Beto defend themselves against a beating by López and his two henchmen, and López accidentally loses an eye. Fleeing for their lives, Pedro and Beto decide to visit an uncle in Monterrey and seek assistance in crossing the border to the USA.

However, in Monterrey they learn their uncle is dead. Luckily, they make friends with Eleodoro and Melquiades, two *peseros* (mini-bus drivers). They also become acquainted with doña Pelos, who runs a restaurant, and her two attractive nieces, Anita and Lupe. Eleodoro and Melquiades are the guardians of young Jaimito, whose mother deserted him; the men believe one of them is Jaimito's father, but the social services department threatens to put him in an orphanage when he reaches his 10th birthday unless some proof of a blood relationship can be established.

Pedro gets a job in a steel plant, while Beto joins the ranks of the *peseros*. Eleodoro and the other drivers are agitated because their union is led by the corrupt don Justo. Eleodoro decides to run for union president himself, and this causes Justo and his henchmen to begin a campaign of threats against the rebellious drivers. Meanwhile, López and his men arrive in Monterrey on the trail of the fugitive Pedro and Beto.

The crooked policemen abduct Pedro and then capture Beto. Pedro is tied to a conveyor belt that leads to a rock-crushing machine (I think--whatever it is, it will be fatal for Pedro), but Eleodoro and the other *peseros* arrive to save their comrades. López and his surviving assistant (one died in a fall while pursuing Pedro) are killed when their car crashes and burns.



Eleodoro wins the election and don Justo is arrested. Pedro and Beto marry Anita and Lupe, respectively, and decide to settle down in Monterrey. And to make everything perfect, Jaimito's mother sends a letter naming Eleodoro and Melquiades legal guardians of her son (but still doesn't identify which one is the boy's real father).



As mentioned earlier, *Los peseros* contains several nice action sequences, including a brawl in a restaurant, a car chase (which includes such staples as cars hitting a pushcart full of fruit, cars driving on the sidewalk, cars flipping over, and cars smashing through a pile of cardboard boxes), and an exciting chase through the grounds of a steel mill (concluding with Pedro and López's aide Poncho slugging it out on a high steel beam, then both falling to the ground--Poncho doesn't get up). José Luis Urqueta (who makes a cameo appearance early in the movie) didn't have the kind of resources available to Hollywood action directors, but these scenes are very well done, among the slickest I've seen in Mexican cinema of this era.

The performances are all good. Guzmán and Inclán play it more or less straight, and Chelelo tones down his comic antics as well. Rosenda Bernal is quite attractive, and even the villains--Junco and Murayama--have rather multi-dimensional characters.

For example, López is very bitter and depressed at the loss of his eye (who wouldn't be?) and when



don Justo (who has a young mistress) loses the election and is arrested, he looks like a sad old man, not a vicious, snarling criminal.

*Los peseros* isn't perfect, of course. The songs hold up the plot a bit (the film clocks it around 92 minutes, without the songs it would have been much shorter) although some of the music is pretty catchy, and maybe the "Jaimito" sub-plot could have been dispensed with (although it isn't overly sentimental and doesn't take up much time). On the whole, this is a solid piece of entertainment.



**Los pepenadores de acá** [The Trashpickers from Over There] (Cin. Cervantes\*, ©1982) *Exec Prod:* Luis Quintanilla; *Dir-Scr:* Ícaro Cisneros Rivera; *Story:* Rosario Coss; *Photo:* Fernando Alvarez Garces "Colín"; *Music:* Ernesto Cortázar [Jr.]; *Asst Dir:* Damián Acosta; *Film Ed:* José J. Munguía; *Camera Op:* Manuel Tejada; *Asst Camera:* Febronio Tepozte; *Makeup:* Lucrecia Muñoz; *Sound Op:* Guillermo Carrasco; *Re-rec:* Ricardo Zaldívar [sic]; *Union:* STIC

\*some sources--and posters--cite Prods. De Marco as well, but only Cin. Cervantes (presumably Martha Elena Cervantes) is credited on-screen.

**Cast:** David Reynoso (*Rafael "el Gorilón"*), Martha Elena Cervantes (*La Profana*), Norma Lazareno (*Rutilla*), Freddy Fernández "El Pichi" (*Fito*), Antonio de Hud

(*Chilaquil*), Javier López "Chabelo" (*Ciriaco*), Jorge Reynoso (*Lico*), Rocío Brambila (*Rosa*), Nora Veryán (*Albina*), Lourdes de Montecristo, Abelardo y Luis Pulido "Los Dos Oros" (*singers*), María Elena Orendain, Carlos Oroná, Edmundo Arizpe, Patricia Martínez, Patricia Páramo, César Parra, Arturo Albo, Luis Quintanilla (*husband*), Fuensanta [Zertuche] (*sexy woman*)



**Notes:** although I am a fan of the movies directed by Ícaro Cisneros--particularly those he made in Mazatlán--*Los pepenadores de acá* is not one of his better films. The plot is thin and has a ridiculous "feel good" conclusion, there is far too much "comic relief" (interminable "drunken" conversations between Chabelo and Freddy Fernández), and the structure and pacing are off. On the positive side, the photography is nice. There are also some interesting extra-filmic aspects.

For example, the very concept of *pepenadores*--people who make their living sorting through trash for recyclable materials (paper and cardboard appear to be their preferred commodities) they can sell--is probably a bit unsettling for many viewers. Although the movie only peripherally addresses the issue, the *pepenadores* in real life in some cases have developed political clout after organizing. This doesn't mean that the "profession" isn't dirty, low-paying, and dangerous (because it is). *Los pepenadores de acá* (shot in Cuautla, Morelos) makes its point clear: the trash-pickers are very far down in the socio-economic order, so much so that Gorilón--a *cargador*, an unskilled worker who manually moves boxes, barrels, packages, etc., around the market and streets--considers his life to be considerably better than that of the *pepenadores*. Of course, in typical urban melodrama style, the film tries to have it both ways, by depicting the solidarity, good-hearted sense of community, salt-of-the-earth nature of its protagonists,

even though they live in shacks and pick through trash to make a living.

Gorilón learns his stepfather and Gorilón's ex-girlfriend (who were living together) have been murdered. His friend Chilaquil advises him to go on the lam, since he'll be suspected of the killing. Gorilón is discovered at the municipal dump, asleep, by some of the women who work there, including hard-working La Profana and man-hungry Albina. La Profana suffers from periodic headaches (migraines?) and is saving her money for medical treatment. [Gorilón later tells her that the government provides free medical care but she scoffs at him.] The other resident *pepenadores* include drunkard Fito, his wife Albina, their teenage daughter Rosa, Fito's equally inebriated *compadre* Ciriaco, and the muscular Lico. Lico has impregnated Rosa and promises to marry her when he gets enough money; however, he is also trying to set himself up as a pimp for a bargirl, and sleeps with Rutila after she gives him a gold ring she found in the dump.

Gorilón moves in with La Profana. One day, he discovers a newspaper featuring a photo of his pal Chilaquil, but since both he and La Profana are illiterate, he can't read it! Finally, someone who can read is located--Rosa (who attended school through the third grade, hooray)--and she translates the story: Chilaquil was the real killer of Gorilón's step-father, and has been arrested for the crime.



This means Gorilón is free to return to his home and job. He wants to take La Profana with him, but she is reluctant to leave the dump. [This isn't as far-fetched as it sounds; in the film La Profana's fear of drastically changing her lifestyle is believably depicted.] Meanwhile, Rosa's parents discover she is pregnant and try to learn the identity of the baby's father, beating her when she refuses. Rutila, jealous of La Profana's romance with Gorilón, convinces Rosa to identify the newcomer as the culprit. A violent confrontation results, and La Profana has one of her "attacks" and collapses; Fito drunkenly attacks Gorilón with a knife, but only succeeds in cutting the other man's hand.

However, a short time later, they all visit La Profana's shack, where she is recovering (she apparently went to a real doctor, finally). Rutila apologizes, Fito apologizes, Lico admits that he's the father of Rosa's baby and promises to marry her, and so forth. The question of whether Gorilón will move back to his own home and resume his old job is left unresolved. [However, the impression is that he will not, given the warm feelings this final scene is supposed to generate. On the other hand, since most of the *pepenadores* in the movie (except La Profana) dream of escaping their poverty-stricken life, Gorilón and La Profana would be pretty dumb to voluntarily stay there, when a better life is theirs for the asking.]

As mentioned above, one of the annoying facets of *Los pepenadores* is the alleged "comic relief"--basically, 4 or 5 long dialogue scenes between the drunkards Fito (Freddy Fernández) and Ciriaco (Chabelo). Only one of these sequences is even fitfully amusing (Fito, at Ciriaco's prompting, goes to a cemetery at night and offers to sell his soul to the Devil in exchange for riches; Ciriaco, posing as the Devil, tricks his friend into offering something other than his soul--his butt, to be exact--to escape a life of poverty). A trademark of the films directed by Ícaro Cisneros are his long dialogue scenes that only peripherally advance the plot, but the "drunk talk" scenes in *Los pepenadores* set some kind of record for pointlessness.

The cast is fairly good, although some of the performers--presumably because they're playing eccentric characters--take advantage of this to overact horribly. David Reynoso is very good as the simple, sensible Gorilón, and his son Jorge is amusing as the vain womanizer Lico.

[MFB Vol. 5 No. 3 (November 1998) features an article on the career of Ícaro Cisneros and several reviews of his films.]



¿Nos traicionará el presidente? [Will the President Betray Us?]\* (Cin. Filmex, 1987) Prod: J. Fernando Pérez Gavilán Mondragón, Arturo Pérez



Gavilán Mondragón; *Dir*: J. Fernando Pérez Gavilán; *Scr*: Víctor Ugalde, Fernando Pérez Gavilán; *Orig Novel*: Juan Miguel de Mora [*¿Traicionará el presidente? Una novela que podría ser historia*, 1982]; *Photo*: Fernando Colín; *Prod Coord*: Antonio Aguirre Espinoza; *Asst Dir*: Jesús Fragoso; *Film Ed*: Rogelio Zúñiga; *Prod Design*: Jesús Fragoso Montoya; *Art Dir*: Ana Ma. Vera Martínez; *Camera Op*: Agustín Meza; *Makeup*: Estela Sánchez; *Sound Op*: Abel Flores; *Sound Ed*: Óscar Figueroa; *Script Clerk*: Javier Vera; *Union*: STIC

\*also released as *Intriga contra México* [Intrigue Against Mexico]

**Cast:** Alberto Pedret (*President [Francisco]*), Martha Roth (*Martha*), José Carlos Ruiz (*Gen. Jacinto Peña*), Bruno Rey (*Lic. Francisco López Pérez*), Antonio Medellín (*Erasmus González*), Eduardo Liñán (*Salvador Elizondo*), Manuel Guízar (*Sec. Terán*), Nuria Bages (*Sra. Peña*), Luis Couturier (*Col. Robert Perkins*), Eduardo Vilches, Evangelina Elizondo (*Sra. Rodríguez*), Julio Alvarado, Jorge Bais, Xavier Massé (*man who tips off UAP*), Blas García, Óscar Fentanes (*labor agitator*), Jorge Fegan (*Gen. Arnoldo Villa*), José [Nájera] Zambrano (*Jorge Larrea*), Guillermo Herrera (*security official*), Regino Herrera, Justo Martínez, Guillermo Romo, Jorge Zepeda, José Villa, Raúl Ocampo, José Lorenzo Feijoo, Rafael Sante, Gerardo Moscoso, Victorio Milstein, Alfredo Rosas, René Pereyra, Miguel Ángel San Román, Rogelio González [Grau], Esteban Franco

**Notes:** *¿Nos traicionará el presidente?* is an interesting political thriller, based on a 1982 novel by Juan Miguel de Mora. Some of the elements are dated today (such as references to U.S. anti-communism and excursions into Central America, and oblique references to military rule in Argentina, which began in 1976 and lasted until 1983) but there are others which remain relevant (references to using undocumented immigrants as political pawns, for example).



One major premise of the plot is no longer relevant: at the time of the novel's publication and the film's release, Mexico had what the plotters in the movie call a "peculiar" political system: the current President personally selected his party's next candidate for the presidency, a process called *tapado* (the actual naming of the successor was the *dedazo*). Since the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) won every presidential election from 1929 until 2000, the "chosen one" was virtually guaranteed the presidency. Mexican

presidential elections have been more competitive since 2000, with two winners from the PAN, one from PRI and the latest (AMLO) from MORENA. Thus, the plot of *¿Nos traicionará el presidente?* is no longer feasible (the original novel's sub-title was "*Una novela que podría ser historia*"--A Novel That Could Be History), although the idea of Mexico being pressured by external forces and exploited by foreigners and greedy Mexicans is perennially popular.

U.S. Col. Perkins and Argentine-accented Col. de la Plata go through a series of photographs of Mexican Army officers, deciding who to approach. They choose General Peña, telling him that they want Mexico to change its foreign policy to be more in line with that of the USA, to combat "communism" (Perkins says "a Communist is anyone



who isn't in agreement with the greatest democracy in the world") in Latin America, and renounce non-intervention. Peña insists the Mexican military is loyal, but to the "Constitution of 1916," not to a single man (like the President). The two foreign officers state their plan: other members of their group will pressure the current Mexican President to name their choice as his successor. If he does, Peña will become Secretary of Defense, and then president, six years later. If the President refuses to be coerced, Peña will lead a military coup and take power at once. Perkins refers to military uprisings in Mexico in 1929 and 1938, and Peña replies that it's a sign of "maturity" that there hasn't been one in the past 50 years.



Meanwhile, the President receives threatening notes, accompanied by a rattlesnake and a bomb. These are merely "warnings" to show the President how vulnerable he is. The Secretary of Foreign Relations informs the President that "massive repatriation of *indocumentados* is under way," as a form of pressuring the Mexican government. Later, a presidential guard is drugged and another box is left for the President; it's a jack-in-the-box with a note reading

“It could have been a bomb.” President calls in his friend Salvador to investigate.

[¿*Nos traicionará el presidente?* may seem a bit odd to non-Mexicans in its depiction of the presidency in Mexico. Sometimes the President acts as one would expect, giving orders to subordinates, meeting with influential men, and so on. At other times, his life looks more like that of a head of a large business: he isn’t constantly surrounded by bodyguards or aides—even driving around, unaccompanied, in a vintage sports car—and his residence is nice but not spectacular.]

The President and Salvador pretend to agree to the plotters’ demands. Their choice is cabinet member Erasmo González, which shocks the President since González always supported progressive issues. The President immediately sends González to China as ambassador. The new ambassador from “Nueva Estremadura” (a thinly-veiled Argentina) tells the



President his reputation will be ruined by a campaign accusing him of corruption unless he capitulates; the President orders him out of the country. Cabinet

member López Pérez reveals himself to be the plotters’ next choice, telling the President that “it’s better for me to be president than to have a foreign military governor” of Mexico, an attitude called “defeatist” by the President.

The President’s young military aide is the one who has been planting the notes, bombs, audio recordings, etc., in the President’s office and bedroom; he says he did it for money and commits suicide.

Finally, the President decides to address the nation via television and radio. He goes on the air and expounds the entire plot: “We Mexicans have experience with outside aggression...some military, some we suffer economically but no less grave. And it is due to this bitter story, that includes the loss of more than half of the national territory, that there is only one thing a President of Mexico cannot do—betray the country to foreign interests.”

As he speaks, General Peña mobilises troops in Mexico City. Colonel Perkins and de la Plata are arrested. López Pérez flees and is reported to have been killed in a traffic accident.

General Peña and the Secretary of Defense arrive at the President’s office. Peña says he was never a part of the plot; he mobilised the troops in case the President decided to go along with the “soft coup” and betray Mexico. The President of the United States calls and congratulates the President on dealing with “undesirable

individuals” from the USA. The President orders González back to Mexico: he will be the new candidate (and thus the next president).

[¿*Nos traicionará el presidente?* essentially alternates scenes featuring the President and those showing the foreign plotters and General Peña, with a few brief sequences that focus on others. The “mystery” of who’s been leaving the messages takes up a certain amount of time, although it’s fairly obvious when you think of it—literally no one else had the access that the President’s aide did. The President’s wife is tossed in as a red herring briefly: she and their 4 children live in the residence, apparently in another wing, since the President and his wife are estranged and didn’t divorce for political reasons, but she’s not actively hostile to her husband.

One brief sub-plot is introduced, mostly to paint López Pérez as an unsavory character even before he’s exposed as part of the foreign scheme. The cabinet member calls the head of Mexico’s security and asks him—as a favour --to break up a strike against a factory owed by “a friend.”

The security chief argues against it, indicating his men have other things to do (like investigating the plot against the President), labour unrest is not his area, and so on, but



finally agrees: since López Pérez might be the next president, it’s not a good idea to deny his request. A group of plainclothes agents attack the strikers, destroying their encampment and beating the fleeing men and women.

This is one of a handful of scenes in the film which are critical of Mexican politics and government. At one point, Peña is talking to another officer, who says: “It doesn’t matter [who the new president will be], it’s still the Party. Things go on as before...[well] things get worse and worse.” Later, Peña says “we’ve given [the *gringos*] the country on a silver platter.” In another sequence, the President talks to a group of prominent men about the flight of Mexican capital overseas. He asks them if they want their children to be educated elsewhere, to marry foreigners, to forget their Mexican culture and even their language.

While the “Nueva Estremadurans” (= Argentines) are active participants in the plot, most of the film’s ire is reserved for the USA. In a pre-credits sequence, the President of Mexico and his Secretary of Foreign Relations discuss articles in the San Diego Union and New York Times.

Secretary: Our anti-*contadora* aid has blocked their plans [in Central America]. They are also bothered by



our protectionist measures for industries, which block their products and capital.

President: When will they understand that it's much better to reach an understanding with democratic governments than to help military dictators?

Secretary: Democratic governments don't interest them--they aren't so obedient...they suggest we radically change our exterior politics.

President: That, never...[it's a] question of principles...



A strange and rather irrelevant scene--except to show the breadth of the campaign against the President--features a reporter at the "US AP" (presumably a wire service) who meets with a source (their entire conversation is in English, with Spanish sub-titles). The visitor relates an anecdote: Mexico's president attended a banquet and ordered the seating arrangements to be changed so his back would be to the wall. Reporter: "That means he's gone crazy!" Visitor: "Yes, that's the point you have to get across."

In another sequence, the Secretary of Foreign Relations says political candidates in another country have visited the U.S. embassy, "probably to decide who will win. That country is now just a colony." The President: "Do you think the election will have any moral value for the rest of the world?" Secy: "Absolutely none."

Speaking to Peña and some other military men, Col. Perkins says "We are disposed to give help in any way," and when he's asked "if you are referring to the government of the United States" and "Are you saying you will help us

stage a military coup and recognise the junta that takes power?" Perkins: "Yes, to both questions." However, it's not clear that Perkins is an official representative, an agent of the CIA (the President reads aloud from Victor Marchetti's 1974 book "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence"), or a right-wing military man who's joined an unofficial organisation. The U.S. President

(obliquely, not overtly) disavows Perkins and the plot at the end, but of course he would.

The performances in *¿Nos traicionará el presidente?* are solid. Alberto Pedret, born in Spain in 1929, moved to Mexico in 1945. He started working in films in the early 1950s but has a relatively small number of screen credits for such a long career; however, he has also done a lot of radio work and dubbing for films and television, both live-action and animation. Curiously, Pedret and Martha Roth were also cast as man-and-wife in *Violencia a domicilio* (1989), directed by J. F. Pérez Gavilán. Pedret is very good as the President (his last name is never given but his first name is Francisco), projecting pride, irritation, anguish, etc., when required. The fact that Pedret was not a famous actor with an established screen image is helpful in creating the character. José Carlos Ruiz is also quite fine as General Peña, keeping the audience guessing about his allegiance until the very end; the other major figure is Eduardo Liñán as the President's friend Salvador, and he is also satisfactory.

Curiously, the actor (?Eduardo Vilches) who plays Col. de la Plata has a very strong Argentine accent, but Luis Couturier as *gringo* "Col. Perkins" speaks relatively unaccented Spanish.



## LOOKING FOR AN OSCAR



**Roma** (Netflix--Participant Media--Esperanto Films--Pimienta Films, 2016) *Assoc Prod:* Carlos Morales, Sandino Saravia Vinay, Alice Scandellari Burr; *Prod Exec:* Maya Scherr-Willson (Pimienta Films), Alejandra A. García (Esperanto Films); *Dir-Scr-Photo:* Alfonso Cuarón; *Music Supv-Image Archive Supv:* Lynn Fainchtein; *Post-Prod Supv:* Carlos Morales; *Prod Mgr:* Ana Hernández; *Prod Coord:* Aletia Molina; *Asst Dir:* René U. Villareal; *Film Ed:* Alfonso Cuarón, Adam Gough; *Prod Design:* Eugenio Caballero; *Art Dir:* Óscar Tello; *Escenógrafo:* Gabriel Cortés; *Décor:* Bárbara Enríquez; *Camera Op/Collab Cinematographer:* Galo Olivares; *Spec FX Supv:* Alejandro Vázquez; *Spec FX:* Sergio Jara; *Spec Makeup Chief:* Roberto Ortiz; *Stunt Coord:* Gerardo Moreno, Tomás Guzmán; *Visual FX Supv:* Sheldon Stopsack, David Griffiths; *Direct Sound:* José Antonio García; *Sound Des:* Sergio Díaz, Skip

Los personajes y sucesos de esta película son ficticios, toda semejanza con personas y hechos de la vida real será meramente una coincidencia.

Lievsay; *Costume Des*: Anna Terrazas; *Makeup-Hair Des*: Antón Garfías

**Cast:** Yalitza Aparicio (*Cleogardia "Cleo" Gutiérrez*), Marina de Tavira (*Sra. Sofía*), Diego Cortina Autrey (*Toño*), Carlos Peralta (*Paco*), Marco Graf (*Pepe*), Daniela Demesa (*Sofi*), Nancy García García (*Adela*), Verónica García (*Teresa*), Andy Cortés (*Ignacio*), Fernando Grediaga (*Dr. Antonio*), Jorge Antonio Guerrero (*Fermín*), José Manuel Guerrero Mendoza (*Ramón*), Latin Lover (*Profesor Zovek*), Zarela Lizbeth Chinolla Arellano (*Dra. Velez*), José Luis López Gómez (*pediatrist*), Edwin Mendoza Ramírez (*medical resident*), Clementina Guadarrama (*Benita*), Enoc Leaño (*politician*), Nicolás Pérez Taylor Félix (*Beto Pardo*), Kjartan Halvorsen (*Ove Larsen*)

**Notes:** *Roma* has gained a lot of international attention recently, with numerous critics placing it on their "Best Films of 2018" list and the film being short-listed for Best Foreign-Language Film in the 2019 Oscars. However, not all of the criticism has been favourable, with a number of viewers criticising the sparse plot, slow pace, and other aspects. Partially financed by Netflix, *Roma* ran afoul of that company's policy of (extremely) limited theatrical release (to preserve the film for its streaming subscribers). There was a fair amount of controversy about this in Mexico, where the major cinema chains didn't want to show the picture because of the very brief window provided by Netflix: director Alfonso Cuarón noted that his movie was being shown in more cinemas in Poland than in Mexico!



Frankly, *Roma* is much more of a "festival" film (and in fact it won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and has been nominated for numerous other prizes) than one aimed at mass audiences, either in Mexico or elsewhere. Shot in black-and-white with no "name" performers, the film is set in 1970-71 Mexico and makes considerable use of its setting (although the plot isn't intrinsically linked to its time period): many of the details will be incomprehensible to foreign viewers (and probably to most Mexicans under the age of 50). However, the film's basic themes can be understood by all, which to some extent explains its popularity among the international *intelligentsia* (who are, no doubt, also

entranced by Cuarón's film form, which is definitely worth the attention).

Cleo, a young indigenous woman from Oaxaca, works as a servant in the household of Dr. Antonio. The family includes his wife Sofía, his mother-in-law doña Teresa, and their four children: Sofi, Pepe, Toño, and Pedro. Cleo goes on a date with Fermín, a friend of her fellow servant Adela's boyfriend Ramón; Cleo and Fermín have sex and she becomes pregnant. Fermín vanishes at the news; when Cleo finally tracks him down, he denies being the father and threatens Cleo with physical violence if she contacts him again.



Meanwhile, Dr. Antonio abandons his family for another woman, but his children are told he's doing medical research in Canada. Cleo and doña Teresa visit a furniture store to purchase a crib for Cleo's baby but are caught in a violent confrontation between student protesters, the police, and plainclothes police hit squads: many people are killed. Cleo goes into labour and her baby, a little girl, is born dead.

Sofía takes her children to the beach and insists the depressed Cleo come along but "as a guest," not a servant. While there, Sofía reveals the truth about her husband to the children. Shortly before they depart for home, Cleo saves the lives of Sofi and one of her brothers who are in danger of drowning, even though Cleo herself cannot swim. Once back on shore, the shaken Cleo confesses that she didn't want her own baby to live.

The family returns to their home in Mexico City. Antonio has removed some furniture and the house is different, but the family will adjust. Cleo resumes her place as the beloved family servant.

There are two basic thematic aspects of *Roma*. First, it's a woman-centered (one might say "feminist" but I won't presume to put that label on it) film. Second, it's an examination of racial/socio-economic relations in Mexico (specifically, but feel free to extrapolate to anywhere else on the globe that seems to fit).

At one point in *Roma*, Sofía tells Cleo to remember that "women are always alone." There are virtually no sympathetic adult males in the film: Ignacio, the family chauffeur, does his job but has no personality to speak of, and Adela's boyfriend Ramón is slightly helpful to Cleo at one point, but that's about it. Dr. Antonio, even before he abandons his family, is frequently absent (he



also chain-smokes, which is a mark of villainy—in 2000s cinema, anyway). He leaves his wife for a younger woman, deceives his children (which means his wife has the responsibility of breaking the news to them), and pays no child support. This last at least has the positive aspect of causing Sofía to leave a teaching job she dislikes for a full-time job in publishing. We don't get much more information on Antonio's personality or the state of his marriage to Sofía, so our impressions are based on the picture Cuarón paints (more like, sketches) of Antonio, and it's a negative one. When Sofía and the children spend Christmas at a relative's *hacienda*, one of the men makes a drunken pass at Sofía and insults her when she turns him down, one more negative male image in *Roma*.



The other major male figure is Fermín, who admits he had an impoverished adolescence and used various drugs before he was “saved” by martial arts training. Later, when Cleo asks if he and a large crowd of young men are training “for the Olympics,” he says “something like that.” What they’re training for is, as it develops, the police death squads known as the “*Halcones*” (the Falcons), who viciously attack student protestors. [The film doesn't really explain who they are, so those unfamiliar with this period of Mexican history may be confused.] One of the few movie-style coincidences in *Roma* is the appearance of Fermín in the furniture store during the riot sequence: he brandishes a pistol and comes face to face with Cleo but doesn't speak and just runs away. This appearance answers the question of the purpose of Fermín's training, but it still seems too movie-fake.

In contrast to the men, both Cleo and Sofía are admirable figures but still recognisably human and flawed. *Roma* is not a film that allows its characters to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings, so the viewer has to deduce what Cleo and Sofía are going through by observing their actions. Cleo seems like a decent, trusting young woman who's deceived by that dirty rat Fermín, but in point of fact we don't get much insight into their relationship at all. They decide to go for a walk in the park rather than see a movie, and suddenly they're in bed in a hotel (where Fermín does a nude martial arts routine with a shower rod). Is this the same day? A week later? A month later? When Cleo finally realises she's pregnant, she says it's been three months

since her last period, and when she tells Fermín that's the last she sees of him for at least several months. We do not see them together as a couple, so it's unclear if he seduced her, or it was a mutual decision, or what.

Sofía assures Cleo she won't be fired for getting pregnant, and in fact the whole family is rather accommodating to her: Sofía takes her to the hospital to determine if she's pregnant, introduces her to a kind lady doctor, etc., culminating with the unfortunate trip to the furniture store to buy the crib.

Cleo seems rather passive on the whole, but summons the courage to undertake an extended journey to find Fermín and confront him. [And, perhaps coincidentally, demonstrates that she has great inner strength: she's the only person who can perform the physical feat that Professor Zovek challenges a huge crowd of athletic young men to do. No one notices this] It's also clear that Cleo behaves one way when in the presence of her employers and others of their social class (including doctors, etc.) and another when she's with her friend Adela. They speak the Mixtec language to each other, and seem like any two carefree young women interested in young men, movies, and so forth. We get only vague hints of Cleo's life before she arrived in Mexico City: brief references to her village and her mother,. There's no indication how long she's been working for the family, for instance.

Unlike the relatively sparse male cast, there are a number of female characters in *Roma* who provide support to Cleo. Sofía, as noted above, is generally sympathetic to Cleo (she loses her temper at one point, but on the whole is a decent boss, as is doña Teresa). Fellow servants Adela and Benita are Cleo's friends; Dr. Vélez is an exemplary medical professional, kind and not condescending. So there's a certain air of female solidarity in *Roma*, understated but obviously present.



The second major motif present in *Roma* is its depiction of socio-economic, cultural and racial relations in Mexico. At the risk of over-simplification, Mexico's three main “racial” categories—whites, *mestizos* (of indigenous and white, largely Spanish, heritage), and indigenous people (*indios*)—have also been separated socially and economically, with the whites on top, the *mestizos* in the middle, and the indigenous people at the

bottom. However, the divisions are not always clear: there's a saying that "an *indio* ceases to be an *indio* when he/she wears shoes" (as opposed to *huaraches* or going barefoot); similarly, speaking Spanish as a first language "elevates" one above the indigenous people like Cleo, who speak a native language and Spanish.

It's not entirely clear in *Roma*, but one assumes that Antonio, Sofía, and their family are white, Fermín is *mestizo*, and Cleo is an indigenous person. Cleo, a servant, is theoretically lowest in status (although her living conditions are certainly better than those of Ramón—who lives in a shanty in a slum, where presumably Fermín lives as well). Her work is strenuous and continuous (caring for 3 adults and 4 children in a very large house) but we do not see her being mistreated or abused. Indeed, the children are emotionally attached to her and she seems to sincerely care for them as well.



A more critical reading of *Roma* would suggest that Cleo's treatment by the family is exploitative and paternalistic, in turns. No indication is given of how much she's paid, how much time she gets off, etc., but there are numerous scenes of her working endlessly, getting up before the family awakes and staying up after they've gone to bed. In one scene, Adela and Cleo half-jokingly turn off the light in their room because doña Teresa can see it and will complain about the expense. The final shot of the film shows Cleo climbing an exterior staircase to the roof of the house to do the laundry, a set of stairs which seems to go on forever. A jet flies over, signifying an outside world that Cleo will never experience. What will happen when the children grow up and move away? Or when Cleo is physically unable to do the work required of her?

There's no overt racial commentary in *Roma*. Cleo and Adela converse in the Mixtec language and in Spanish, interchangeably, but the only person to comment on this is Pepe, the family's youngest child, who says "stop talking like that!" because he can't understand them. Cleo's interactions with the medical staff at the hospital are not characterised by any overt racism or condescension: *Roma* isn't "about" racism so it doesn't hammer its point home in this way; the viewer is left to observe and draw his/her own conclusions. This is fine

but for the uninitiated the conclusion might be that racism isn't an issue in Mexico, and there are those who would dispute that.

What is clear—overtly in one sequence, subliminally in others—is that Mexico is a nation in which there is considerable socio-economic stratification. When Cleo sets off to find Fermín, she has to take a bus to an outlying neighbourhood that has unpaved, muddy streets, where people live in shacks and have few if any public utilities (a politician is heard making a speech about this, but offers only platitudes). This contrasts strongly with the upper-middle class neighbourhood where she lives, the lavish *hacienda* where the family spends the holidays (the many guests accompanied by their many servants), and the glimpses we see of the modern Mexico City downtown and its shops, cinemas, restaurants, and so forth. However, even in these latter scenes we're aware of the numerous vendors on every street, selling snacks, knick-knacks and toys to make a precarious living.



Alfonso Cuarón and Guillermo del Toro are the two Mexican film directors with the highest international profile currently. While del Toro makes most of his movies outside Mexico (even his debut feature, *Cronos*, had an Argentine and a Hollywood actor in two of the three main roles), Cuarón has alternated his projects between domestic (*Sólo con tu pareja*, *Y tu Mamá también*, *Roma*) and foreign pictures (*A Little Princess*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Gravity*, etc.). *Roma* is not only a very "Mexican" film, it's one that—as I noted above—seems almost deliberately designed to appeal to a very narrow audience (or a broader audience that will miss many of the subtleties).

A fair amount of commentary has focused on Cuarón's technique: long takes, leisurely pans across the screen (including at least one 360-degree pan, I didn't count), traveling shots, and so on. I've no strong opinion about this style: it neither bothered nor impressed me unduly: although certainly some of the various panoramic shots are quite beautiful and/or visually interesting, I didn't find that this enhanced (or detracted from) the overall impact of the film. Perhaps it did, subconsciously, and I simply didn't notice it.

I have not read any interviews with Cuarón so I'm not sure what justification he gives for shooting the film in black-and-white. Because it's a period film, or that's the



way he remembers things, or because his (mostly excellent) recreation of 1970-71 Mexico would look “fake” in colour? Pawel Pawlikowski indicates his most recent films (*Ida*, *Cold War*) were shot 4x3 and in black-and-white to emulate Soviet bloc cinema of the early 1960s, but that’s obviously not Cuarón’s reasoning (Mexican cinema was all-colour by the late Sixties).

Production values are excellent. Performances are all fine although the general “feel” of the film is rather cool, with relatively little melodrama allowing for flashy ACTING!!

Trivia notes: in the cinema sequence when Cleo reveals her pregnancy to Fermín, they’re watching a 1966 French film, *La Grande Vadrouille*. Mexican actor Claudio Brook can be seen in the footage (he’s one of the pilots in the airplane with the nun). The Silvia Pinal comedy *La Hermana trinquete* (1969) is showing at the Cine Metropolitan in another scene. The family watches a television show with Loco Valdés, Alejandro Suárez and Héctor Lechuga: presumably this is “Ensalada de locos.”

Zovek (played by wrestler/actor Latin Lover) appears in (recreated) television footage and in the sequence when Cleo finds Fermín doing martial arts training. Professor Zovek [Francisco Javier Chapa del Bosque] (1940-1972) was a real-life physical culture guru and escape artist who was at the peak of his career in the period covered in *Roma*. He starred in two films and two comic book series that portrayed him as a mystical superhero.



*Roma* is an excellent film, but not one that I found transcendent or especially profound. There were parts I didn’t like at all, and Cuarón’s deliberate pace makes some scenes drag on interminably. I wouldn’t characterise the film as a whole as “pretentious” or “self-indulgent” (although it is apparently semi-autobiographical), but the director’s style and the film’s minimal “plot” mean some audiences will be bored and others will be entranced. I liked it for several reasons: it’s well-made and stylish, and the setting (Mexico in the early 1970s) is one with which I have a certain familiarity so I was constantly seeing things of interest (often in the background). If this was, for example, identical in nearly every aspect except it was set in 1970 France I’d probably still find the period details fascinating (that’s just how I am) but they wouldn’t have the same resonance for me. Those who have little or no

knowledge of Mexico, especially in this time period, won’t “get” these references, and will have to be satisfied with the “story” and the film form.



## MEXICAN BOX-OFFICE RESULTS, 2018 (TO DATE)

With just over a week left in 2018, the top-grossing film in Mexico in 2018 is *Avengers: Infinity War* (over \$60 million USD), with *Incredibles 2* lagging far behind (\$37 million). *Overboard*, starring Mexican comic actor Eugenio Derbez and featuring a number of other Mexican performers (Fernando Luján, Omar Chaparro, Jesús Ochoa) but with no Mexican production investment, was #6 on the list (\$26 million) and *The Nun*, starring Mexican Demián Bichir but again not a Mexican film or co-production, earned the #8 slot at \$22 million.

The two most popular Mexican films of the year were the comedies *Ya veremos* (#21 overall, nearly \$10 million), and *La Boda de Valentina* (#26, \$8 million). Third place was another comedy, *Una mujer sin filtro* (#35, \$5.4 million), closely followed by the animated *La leyenda del Charro Negro* (#37, \$5.35 million). *Hasta que la boda nos separe*, another comedy, earned \$4.3 million (#44 overall).

The rest of the Mexican films in the top 100 included *A ti te quería encontrar* (#61, \$2.3 million) and *Más sabe el Diablo por viejo* (#63, \$2.2 million), *Loca por el trabajo* (#70), *Todo mal* (#86), *Te juro que yo no fui* (#90), *Marcianos vs. Mexicanos* (#94) and *Recuperando a mi ex* (#100).

To summarise: 13 Mexican feature films in the top 100 in the Mexican box-office in 2018; 11 live-action comedies and 2 animated films. It’s possible these numbers might change slightly (*Mi pequeño gran hombre* earned nearly \$700,000 in the first week of December, so it might crack the top 100). This should not suggest Mexican audiences only like comedy films--Hollywood (and elsewhere) supply plenty of action movies,



## HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL MFB READERS!



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