



**Welcome María\*** (Anglove Corp., N.V., 1986/©1987) *Prod:* Mario Arturo Moreno; *Dir:* Juan L[ópez] Moctezuma; *Scr:* Juan L. Moctezuma, Rubén Arvizu; *Photo:* Nadine Markova; *Music:* Miguel Ángel Alonso; *Line Prod:* Mark Headley; *Unit Prod Mgr:* Paul Martin Benson; *Assoc Prod:* Rubén Arvizu; *Asst Dir:* Esmeralda Reyna, Ross Kettle; *Film Ed:* Jerome F. Brady; *Camera Asst:* Davie Carruthers, Rodrigo Prieto; *Makeup:* Kelly Rubin

\*this is sometimes cited as *Bienvenido, María*, but the version I saw carries the English title

**Cast:** María Victoria (*María*), Bob Copeland (*Ezekiah*), Christian Cañada (*Miguelito*), Allison Ernand (*Meche*), Rubén Arvizu (*Freddy*), Eduardo Vidal (*Pedro*), Daniel Flurry (*Danny*), Elvía Gaitán (*waitress #1*), Emanuel Shipow (*Halim*), Martín Guardaparranca (*Charles*), Carlos Nieto (*Manuel Gaytán*), Alejandro Abdalah (*Raphael*), Jesús Brook (*Johnny*), Juan A. Carralero (*Juan*), *Border Patrolmen*: Ron Stein, Miguel Ángel Alonso, Javier Smith, Mark Allan, Keith L. Foster Jr.; *La Migra*: Mario Arturo Moreno, Carlos Rodríguez; Esmeralda Reyna (*Maggie*), Guillermo Medina (*dancer*), Andrea Muller (*Millie*), Patricia Carrión (*bakery lady*), Anna Fuentes (*waitress #2*)

**Notes:** produced by the son of Mario Moreno "Cantinflas," and screened at the Acapulco Film Festival in 1987 (and reviewed in *Variety* as a result), *Welcome María* received little or no theatrical distribution and was practically a "lost" film until released by Cinetu on DVD in the USA.

It's hard to determine what the target audience of this DVD release was. The title is in English, but the DVD case blurb (not to mention the company name and the rest of their product) is clearly aimed at a Hispanic audience. Even more curious is the film itself, which has a lot of English and Spanish dialogue, with no sub-titles for either language. Consequently, only bilingual audiences will really understand everything that's going on! Apparently a version with English sub-titles was prepared (and in fact a 35mm print of this was recently for sale on Craigslist in Las Vegas!), so perhaps one with Spanish sub-titles (for the English dialogue) was also made. In any case, the DVD has nothing. Otherwise, the print is in excellent shape and the movie--although made on a relatively low budget--does not look especially cheap and boasts very nice photography. [A trivia note, cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto got his first feature film experience here, assisting Nadine Markova.]



Despite its short running time (under 80 minutes), *Welcome María* seemingly runs out of gas about two-thirds of the way and has to bring in a secondary plot to fill in the rest of the time. It's hard to find anything in either section which resembles any of Juan López Moctezuma's previous work: there are no fantastic or horrific elements, the film was shot completely on location and in a realistic fashion, and none of the director's "stock company" performers appear. The latter is possibly a function of the movie being shot in Los Angeles, with only two Mexican cinema veterans, star María Victoria and (in a brief cameo) Carlos Nieto. The performances are all satisfactory, although Christian Cañada's dialogue was apparently post-dubbed, but none of the other leading players (Copeland, Cañada, or Ernand) seems to have any other credits. In any case, López Moctezuma turns in a competent directorial effort, but this is the least personal of his films and could have been directed by just about anyone with the same result.

*Welcome María* begins like other didactic Mexican movies about immigration to the USA. Against images of the Statue of Liberty, followed by footage (probably from another film) of Border Patrol officers shooting people crossing the Rio Grande, an off-screen narration says immigrants from Europe were welcomed to the USA, but the Mexican experience has been different. He adds: "This situation, aggravated with the passing of time, has resulted in uncounted tales of injustice and suffering. This is just one more of these stories..."

Actually, *Welcome María* is only peripherally a tale of *indocumentados* and the problems they face in the USA. After the first few moments, the protagonists have no more problems with "La Migra," and their experience in California is relatively benign. So much for "injustice and suffering."

Ezekiah, a Navy veteran who lives on a ramshackle farm in the desert, sees a group of wetbacks crossing a nearby field. "Poor devils. frying pan into the fire," he not understand Spanish.] A up and a gun battle breaks several *mojados*. The rest and her son Miguelito covers for them when the

The next day, Ezekiah snake. María sucks out the Freddy stops by and learns other medical problems

(who speaks Spanish), learns María's story. She lived in Mexico with Pedro, Miguelito's father, but when the oil boom collapsed (five years earlier), Pedro emigrated to the USA. He stopped writing, so María has come to look for him.

Ezekiah drives María and Miguelito to Los Angeles in his battered pickup truck. María goes to Pedro's last known address but he's long gone; a woman in a shop says Pedro moved away with a *gringa*. Ezekiah gets a large quantity of coins and calls every "Pedro González" in the telephone book ("Holy cow, there's hundreds of them!") with no luck. María and Miguelito decide to stay in the city and keep looking, despite Ezekiah's offer of free room and board in his desert shack.

María and her son look for work and a place to stay. [In an in-joke, they pass a bar adorned with a caricature of Cantinflas--from *Por mis pistolas*--and Miguelito says "Look, Cantinflas!" His mother says, "Yes, he's very funny, right?"] Restaurateur Manuel befriends them. [In passing, he shows them his military medals: "The Mexicans and the blacks, always [sent] to the front [as] cannon fodder. Many medals [but] many more dead."] Manuel recommends a place for them to stay, but the landlady is gone. Instead, María is assisted by Cuban-American Meche, who convinces her boss Halim to hire María as a cook in his club. Meche also works there, and both women are required to dance with the clients (María frowns on this, but Meche says it is just dancing).

Time passes (we later learn it's been 8 months). A friend of Meche's uses the post office computers to locate Pedro, and María goes to see him. Pedro says he lived in constant fear of "La Migra" until he met and married *gringa* Peggy (apparently he was never married to María in Mexico). Now he's a legal resident. María chews him out for a while, then departs. [In an interesting bit of dialogue, María tells Pedro his son Miguelito attends school-- "they let illegals go to school here."]

[So much for the main plot. But wait, that only took about an hour. What next?] María sees biker Danny abusing Meche one day, hitting and kicking her in the street. María and some men chase Danny away, but he vows revenge. Meche confesses that Danny (her ex-boyfriend) and his gang are involved in drugs, and they are afraid she'll rat them out. Meanwhile, Halim allows María to sing in his club and she's a big hit (in an odd bit that goes nowhere, both Ezekiah and Manuel are in the audience during her performance, but they don't approach her after the show or anything). María tells Meche she doesn't like living in constant fear of arrest and deportation, but "things are so bad in Mexico" that she has decided to stay, for Miguelito's sake.



They don't know what they're doing, jumping from the says. [All of Ezekiah's dialogue is in English, and he does truck arrives to collect the Mexicans, but the police show out: the truck driver (who has a rifle) is shot, as are are arrested. Later than night, Ezekiah discovers María hiding outside his shack. He gives them shelter and police drive by to check.

treats his guests to a picnic in the desert, but is bitten by a poison and treats him with herbs. Some time later, Dr. his friend has not only recovered from the bite, but his have been eased by María's treatment as well. Freddy

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One of Danny's henchmen abducts Miguelito when he, María and Meche visit the zoo (Meche may have been the initial target). Meche lies to the cops, and later agrees to exchange herself for Miguelito. María is fearful she will never see her friend again, but as the film concludes, Meche shows up, somewhat the worse for wear (it is strongly implied she was gang-raped by the bikers). The film concludes on a freeze-frame as Meche's voice is heard saying, "No, María, nothing is easy for us in this country."

*Welcome Maria* pays lip-service to the theme of "suffering immigrants," but--unlike many films dealing with the same topic--depicts almost none of this suffering. The characters all talk about discrimination, exploitation, and the fear of deportation, but "La Migra" and the Border Patrol disappear after the first five minutes, María readily finds friends, a place to live, and a job, and the melodramatic problems experienced by María and Meche have nothing to do with their status as

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Latinas or (María's case) *indocumentadas*. OK, you could say Pedro's marriage to a *gringa* was indirectly the result of his illegal status, and thus contributed to the breakup of his relationship with María, but we don't get any sense that he would have returned to María if he had not married Peggy. Take the hint, María, he moved away and stopped writing to you! In Meche's case, Danny is a *gringo* and makes some vaguely racist remarks but his main problem with Meche is that she dumped him and he doesn't trust her to keep her mouth shut.

To be fair, *Welcome María* doesn't take the easy way out, avoiding the easy solutions: María and Miguelito could have returned to Ezekiah, María could have developed a relationship with Manuel, she could have reconciled with Pedro (if he didn't have that blonde wife and child), she could have become a famous singer and "gotten her papers" as a legal resident, she could have been deported or voluntarily returned to Mexico. Instead, the film is open-ended, with María remaining in the USA, but still as an *indocumentada*. In fact, it's a little surprising that the picture indirectly paints such a negative image of Mexico. Freddy says "they're dying of hunger [there]. That's why they're fleeing to the States by the thousands," and María is willing to endure a life of constant insecurity rather than go home.

Not a bad film, *Welcome María* is fairly well-paced (except, in typical Mexican cinema fashion, for the insertion of musical numbers which bring the narrative to a dead stop) and acted. Is it something special? No. Is it horrible? No. It's somewhere in the middle.

