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Miguel Aceves Mejía 1915-2006

Miguel Aceves Mejía died of pneumonia and bronchitis on 6 November 2006. Aceves Mejía, whose trademarks were a streak of white in his black hair and the vocal style which earned him the nickname of "El Falsete de Oro" or "El Rey del Falsete," was born in Chihuahua in November 1915 (some sources cite 1917), and first began singing professionally in the 1930s in northern Mexico.



Towards the end of the decade, he and two other men formed the "Trío Los Porteños," performing various genres of music (the team appeared in *Rancho alegre* in 1940, Aceves Mejía's film debut). In the mid-1940s Aceves Mejía switched exclusively to *ranchera* music, and over the next decade made numerous records and a handful of musical guest appearances in movies (see

Filmography

below). His first starring role came in 1954, when he appeared opposite Rosita Quintana in *A los cuatro vientos*; Aceves Mejía and Quintana would be paired 5 times, and the stocky singer would also work opposite such stars as María Félix, Libertad Lamarque, Lola Flores, Marga López, and Lola Beltrán.

The majority of Aceves Mejía's films were *rancheras* or musicals, although he would occasionally appear in melodramas such as *Bajo el cielo de México*. In 1960-61, he was cast in a number of dramatic Westerns (as opposed to comedies), like *El asesino enmascarado* and *Camino de la horca*. He made 43 films between his first major role in 1954 and his last picture in 1962. His popularity in Argentina (reportedly, Juan Perón was a fan) led to the singer working in three Mexican-Argentine co-productions.

For reasons unknown, Aceves Mejía simply stopped making movies after 1962, but continued his singing career for many years (the same thing would happen to another *ranchera* performer, Demetrio González, a few years later).

Miguel Aceves Mejía is survived by his wife and son.

Filmography

1940: *Rancho alegre* (as part of the Trío Los Porteños)
 1947: *De pecado en pecado* (dubs José Pulido's singing), *Pecadora*
 1950: *Donde nacen los pobres*
 1951: *Ella y yo*, *Por querer a una mujer*, *Nosotras las sirvientas*
 1952: *La mentira*, *Cartas a Ufemia*
 1953: *Camelia*
 1954: *A los cuatro vientos*
 1955: *Música de siempre*, *Hay ángeles con espuelas*, *El Águila Negra en El Vengador Solitario*, *Tú y las nubes*, *Historia de un amor*
 1956: *Música de siempre*, *Tú y la mentira*, *Que seas feliz!*, *Que me toquen Las Golodrinhas*
 1957: *El Ciclón*, *Cuatro copas*, *Bajo el cielo de México*, *Rogaciano el huapangero*, *Guitarras de medianoche*, *La feria de San Marcos*, *El gallo colorado*, *Amor se dice cantando*
 1958: *Échame a mi la culpa!*, *Mi niño, mi caballo, y yo*, *Sabrás que te quiero*, *Tres angelitos negros*
 1959: *Me importa poco*, *Las canciones unidas*, *Viva la parranda*, *Viva quien sabe querer*, *Bala perdida*
 1960: *Los cinco Halcones*, *Martín Santos el llanero*, *Los fanfarrones*, *Dónde estás, corazón?*, *Paloma brava*, *El Buena Suerte*
 1961: *Camino de la horca*, *Los valientes no mueren*, *El asesino enmascarado*, *Asesinos de la lucha libre*, *El rey de la pistola*, *Viva Chihuahua*
 1962: *Los apuros de dos gallos*, *Dos gallos y dos gallinas*, *Si yo fuera millonario*



Daniel García "Huracán Ramírez" Dies

Wrestler Daniel García Arteaga, who played the character of "Huracán Ramírez" in the ring and in numerous movies, died of heart failure on 1 November 2006 ("Box y Lucha" magazine says he died at 11:50pm on 31 October) in Mexico City.

García was born in the Tepito *barrio* of Mexico City on 6 April 1926. In an interview published in *Santo Street* 15 (Fall 1997), García said he began his ring career as a boxer, but switched to wrestling in the early 1950s, using the names "Chico" García and "El Buitre Blanco," before Rodríguez Hermanos hired him to don the mask of Huracán Ramírez. García also indicated he worked in films before assuming the Ramírez character, in bit parts and as a stuntman.

The blue-masked Huracán Ramírez was originally portrayed by wrestler Eduardo Bonada, but Bonada didn't like working incognito (he usually wrestled without a mask and appeared in some movies as a wrestler-actor

under his own name)--the Rodríguez family allowed Fernando Osés, Jean Safont, Enrique Llanes and others to use the mask and name in the ring until García took over the role. For a number of years, his impersonation was exclusively in the ring, since the character wasn't used again in a film until 1962.

The "Huracán Ramírez" films were unlike most *lucha libre*-hero pictures: the first four were sports dramas centering around the family of Huracán's alter ego (played by David Silva), and the last two in which García appeared as the masked wrestler were also melodramas (but not direct sequels to the original four, nor connected to each other in any way--Huracán had a different alter ego in each of these movies).



"Huracán Ramírez" was featured in a comic book (in which he was a conventional crime-fighting super-hero) and radio series. 3 of García's 5 brothers were also wrestlers,

and his nephew--known as El Matemático--appeared in some of the films and spin-offs. Although García was still Huracán in the ring, someone else appeared in the role in the final three movies featuring the character (according to the "Santo Street" interview--some sources do suggest he was replaced only in the last picture). García retired from professional wrestling in 1988, and was replaced by "Huracán Ramírez Jr." (actually his great-nephew, the son of El Matemático).

In 1992's *Santo, la leyenda del Enmascarado de Plata*, García donned the silver mask to play his friend (and sometimes ring opponent) El Santo. García had another link with the Enmascarado de Plata--his youngest daughter married Santo's grandson "Axxel" (who has also wrestled as "El Nieto del Santo").

Huracán Ramírez Filmography

- 1952: *Huracán Ramírez**
- 1962: *El misterio de Huracán Ramírez*
- 1965: *El hijo del Huracán Ramírez*
- 1967: *La venganza del Huracán Ramírez*
- 1972: *Huracán Ramírez y la monjita negra*
- 1973: *De sangre chicana*
- 1979: *El Torito, puños de oro**
- 1982: *El Torito de Tepito**
- 1989: *Huracán vs. las terroristas** (video)

*Huracán Ramírez not played by Daniel García



Raúl Velasco Dies

Raúl Velasco, the host of various Mexican television programs--such as "Siempre en domingo," which ran for three decades--died on 26 November 2006. Raúl Velasco Ramírez was born in Celaya, Guanajuato in 1933. He worked for many years as an entertainment reporter and film critic for magazines and the newspaper "El Heraldito." In December 1969 he debuted as the host of a variety show

which later became "Siempre en domingo." The program aired Sundays evening in Mexico and internationally until April 1998, when Velasco had to undergo a liver transplant.

Velasco had cameo roles in a few 1960s movies (*Patsy, mi amor*; *Trampa para un cadaver*; *Alguien nos quiere matar*, basically playing himself), and in 1983 René Cardona Jr. directed *Siempre en domingo*, a feature-length film set against the backdrop of Velasco's variety show. Once again, the genial host played himself, introducing numerous musical acts, while his (fictional) assistants tried to locate a young woman who had written to Velasco stating her intention to commit suicide.



Jack Palance

Actor Jack Palance died of natural causes in California on 10 November 2006. Born Volodymyr Ivanovich Palahniuk in Pennsylvania in February 1919, Palance was a professional boxer before entering the armed forces in World War II. When he returned from the service, he attended college, worked in radio and on the stage, then moved into films. Among his most famous roles are the villainous Jack Wilson in *Shane* (1953), Charlie Castle in *The Big Knife* (1955), and Curly in *City Slickers* (1991), for which he won an Oscar as Best Supporting Actor. Although Palance made a fair number of European features during his career, his only Mexican film was *Flor de mayo* (1957), opposite María Félix. Shot in English and Spanish-language versions, the film is notable because the two stars did not speak each other's language and thus had to learn their "foreign" dialogue phonetically.



A los cuatro vientos [To the Four Winds]

(Internacional Cinematográfica, 1954) *Prod*: Sergio Kogan [uncredited]; *Dir-Scr*: Adolfo Fernández Bustamante; *Photo*: Víctor Herrera; *Music*: Federico Ruiz; *Songs*: Tomás Méndez, José Alfredo Jiménez, Rubén Fuentes, Cuco Sánchez, Pepe Guizar; *Prod Chief*: Fidel Pizarro; *Asst Dir*: Moisés M. Delgado; *Film Ed*: Jorge Bustos; *Art Dir*: Guthrie Gerzso; *Makeup*: Ana Guerrero; *Script*: Ícaro Cisneros; *Sound Supv*: James L. Fields; *Dialog Rec*: Javier Mateos; *Music/Re-rec*: Galdino Samperio; *Sound Ed*: Antonio Bustos; *Spec FX*: Jorge Benavides

Cast: Rosita Quintana (*Paloma Vargas*), Miguel Aceves Mejía (*Pablo Gálvez*), Joaquín Pardavé (*padrino*), Norma Ancira (*Pablo's lover*), René Cardona (*Emilio*), Alberto Catalá (*stage manager*), Eduardo Alcaraz (*designer*), Carlos Riquelme (*doctor*), Guillermo A. Blanch [*sic*, Bianchi] (*café owner*), María Valdealde, Patricia Morelos, Eva Calvo, Pepe Nava (*stage doorkeeper*), José Muñoz (*waiter*), Robert Meyer (*Pérez, Emilio's asst.*), José Chávez Trowe (*Chávez, carpenter*), León Barroso (*jeweler*), Jorge Casanova (*man in theatre*); Ignacio Fernández Esperón "Tata Nacho," Mario Talavera, Tomás Méndez (*themselves*), Mariachi Vargas, Mariachi Pulido, Ballet de Ricardo Luna, Amalia Mendoza "La Tariatúri" (*dubs Rosita Quintana's singing in latter sections of film*)

Notes: this is a familiar "performing duo splits up when one becomes famous and the other doesn't" melodrama,

loaded with a variety of complications that keep the



protagonists separated and feuding until the final scene. Rosita Quintana, born in Argentina, was one of a group of non-Mexicans (cf Elvira

Demetrio González) who embraced the *ranchera* musical genre; in *A los cuatro vientos*, she's teamed with real Mexican Miguel Aceves Mejía (in his first major film role), and between them they perform songs by a virtual Who's-Who of *ranchera* composers. Quintana gets the lion's share of the screen time (after all, she was the star and the wife of the producer!), but Aceves Mejía proved himself to be a reasonably good actor and would go on to appear in a lot of movies over the next 8 years.

Paloma, Pablo, and their *padrino* are impoverished singers who perform on the street and in restaurants for tips. When one of their clients, impresario Emilio, talks during their song, Paloma indignantly stops and returns his money. She does accept his card and later, over Pablo's objections, decides to visit Emilio at his theatre. Emilio signs Paloma to a singing contract, and hires Pablo and their *padrino* as backup musicians. This irritates Pablo--as does Emilio's failure to include any of Pablo's compositions in the show--and he breaks up with Paloma in a jealous rage, walking out despite her attempts to explain (she's pregnant with Pablo's child and needs financial security). Paloma becomes a star. When Pablo visits the theatre, Emilio hints that he is having an affair with Paloma, that she doesn't love Pablo anymore but she'd give up her career out of pity for Pablo (who wouldn't allow himself to be supported by her). Pablo punches Emilio and stalks away.

Emilio, remorseful, anonymously sends Paloma songs Pablo had written for her. He also tracks down Pablo, working with his *padrino* in a carnival. Paloma visits the "hall of mirrors" where Pablo is performing as the "Phantom Singer" and tries to explain, but Pablo angrily refuses to talk to her. Paloma crashes through a mirror trying to catch him and is hospitalized; she suffers a miscarriage. Later, caught in the rain while praying at her infant's grave, she loses her voice.

Paloma eventually recovers the ability to sing (she's tricked into trying by Emilio and her *padrino*, who has moved over to her side now). She gives an interview claiming she doesn't love Pablo anymore and he only reminds her of an unpleasant time in her life. Pablo, angry, claims his share of the royalties from his songs and buys a diamond-emerald necklace Paloma had admired when they were poor. He sends it to her with a sarcastic note. Later, Paloma attends a banquet to receive an award, aware Pablo and his *mariachis* will be performing. Pablo

says "I'd like to introduce a great singer, one of the best interpreters of my songs..." but when Paloma stands up, Pablo says "--Lupe Lara!" Humiliated, Paloma breaks into the other woman's performance and forces her to leave the stage.

Later, Emilio meets Pablo and explains everything, including his own deceitful actions. As the film concludes, Pablo walks onto the stage as Paloma is singing and they perform a duet, then reconcile.

As with many melodramas, the basic problem could have been solved if one or both of the protagonists had simply been willing to listen to the other for about 30 seconds. Instead, Pablo refuses to allow Paloma to tell him she's pregnant with his child (two times!) and storms away, pushing her down in the street the first time and (indirectly) causing her to have a miscarriage the second time. And yet he continues to regard himself as the injured party! Paloma, for her part, only hardens her heart against Pablo after she loses her baby and her singing voice, and never gives in to Emilio's romantic overtures. However, in the latter sections of the film she is portrayed as just as proud and unbending as Pablo, and it is Pablo who has to make the "first" move and apologize.



The cast is generally satisfactory, although René Cardona and Joaquín Pardavé don't break any new ground: Cardona's role hearkens back to *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (cad who

loves the heroine, then nobly reforms) and Pardavé is a typical sidekick with an unfunny shtick (he's always hungry). Quintana and Aceves Mejía are adequate, although the script makes them rather unpleasant characters. Perhaps the most amusing bit is Eduardo Alcaraz as a very effeminate dress designer, rather shocking for the time (this is much more like '60s-'80s cinematic stereotyping of gays).

The production values, direction, etc., are OK but nothing special. One curious scene takes place in a jewelry shop, and appears to have been shot using back projection!? One wonders why they didn't take the trouble to construct a set?

An adequate musical melodrama.



Martín Santos, el llanero [Martín Santos, the Plainsman] (Cin. Grovas, 1960) *Exec Prod*: Adolfo Grovas; *Prod*: Jesús Grovas; *Dir-Scr*: Mauricio de la Serna; *Story-Adapt*: Fernando Galiana; *Photo*: Rosalío Solano; *Music Dir*: Manuel Esperón; *Prod Admin*: Adrián Grovas; *Prod Chief*: José Luis Busto; *Asst Dir*: Valerio Olivo; *Film Ed*: Rafael Ceballos; *Art Dir*: Ramón Rodríguez G.; *Decor*: Adalberto López; *Camera Op*: Urbano Vázquez; *Lighting*: Antonio Solano; *Makeup*:

Concepción Mora; *Dialog Rec*: Nicolás de la Rosa; *Re-rec*: Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound Ed*: Teodulo Bustos; *Union*: STPC; Eastmancolor

Cast: Miguel Aceves Mejía (*Martín Santos*), Lorena Velázquez (*Blanca*), Alfredo Sadel (*Rafael Miranda*), Adilia Castillo (*Rosalba*), Luis Aragón (*Padre Gustavo*), José Dupeyrón (*Crisóstomo*), José Chávez T. (*Nicandro*), Armando Acosta (*drunk in cantina*), Manuel Dondé (*Manuel*), Humberto Dupeyrón (*Juliancito*), Hilda Vera (*Tita*), Aurora Walker (*doña Eugenia*), Celia Tejeda, María de la Paz Cabello, Rosa Rodríguez, María Socorro Gancy, Ernesto Torrealba y su conjunto Los Araucanos, Victorio Blanco (*party guest*), Inés Murillo (*wedding guest*)

Notes: as Emilio García Riera pointed out, this is actually an uncredited adaptation of Miguel de Unamuno's novel "Nada menos que todo un hombre," filmed numerous times in Spain, Argentina, and Mexico (the most recent Mexican version was *Todo un hombre*, 1982). A high-society woman marries a *nouveau riche* man she doesn't love (or even like) for financial reasons (in this case, to save her family estate, but in other versions it's because her father incurred large debts, etc.), but of course she eventually falls for him.

Martín Santos, el llanero is set in Venezuela and co-stars two singers from that country (Alfredo Sadel and Adilia Castillo), but it seems to have been filmed entirely in Mexico (on a *hacienda* in Cuernavaca), with the exception of a few stock shots of Caracas. The mostly Mexican cast dresses up in "typical" Venezuelan costumes and some of them even attempt Venezuelan accents--neither Lorena Velázquez nor Aurora Walker, who plays her mother, makes the effort, but Aceves Mejía starts out with a pretty heavy accent only to lose it later (and neither Sadel nor Castillo has much of an accent). The songs--Aceves Mejía, Castillo, and Sadel all have multiple numbers--are largely Venezuelan in nature as well. In case this all seems odd, it should be noted that Venezuela was a major export market for Mexican cinema in this period, and various Venezuelan performers (such as Sadel, Amador Bendayán, Joselo, and Guillermo Rodríguez Blanco aka "Julián Pacheco") were brought in to bolster the box-office appeal of Mexican movies.

This particular quirk aside, *Martín Santos, el llanero* is a routine rural melodrama of only moderate interest. Martín, a humble horse trainer and rancher, is liked by all. He befriends Juliancito, the young brother of Rosalba, who runs a large ranch--an illness (or accident?) left Juliancito unable to walk unassisted, but Martín vows to help him recover. Rosalba offers Martín the post of administrator on her estate, but he is too proud to accept her offer. Furthermore, he is wary of Rosalba's possible romantic interest in him, since he loves Blanca, the heir to the region's largest *hacienda*. Blanca is engaged to petroleum engineer Rafael, but they can't get married until his career is established, since Blanca's fortune has largely evaporated due to mismanagement of her property and her own spendthrift ways.

Oil is discovered on Martín's land and he is suddenly a rich man. Learning Blanca is in danger of losing her land,

he makes her an offer: marry him and he will pay her debts and put the *hacienda* on a paying basis once more, investing his own money in new equipment, etc. He knows Blanca doesn't love him, but is gambling she will eventually succumb. Blanca reluctantly agrees, breaking her engagement to Rafael. Martín keeps his end of the bargain, and the *hacienda* prospers once more, but Blanca remains aloof. [Unlike some of the other versions of the novel, in this film it is clear Blanca and Martín do not sleep together.] However, she becomes jealous of Martín's friendship with Juliancito, and thinks her husband may be having an affair with Rosalba. Martín arranges for Juliancito to receive medical attention in Caracas; when Rosalba is summoned to the hospital by the doctors, Martín decides to go with her. Blanca gives him an ultimatum: if he goes with his "lover," she'll leave him (Rafael has offered to run away with her). Martín departs. Juliancito will be cured of his infirmity, and Rosalba thanks Martín for everything he has done for them. She also informs him that Blanca really loves him. When Martín comes home, he is greeted by a changed Blanca, who vows to make up for her previous cold attitude and become a real wife.

There is nothing particularly fresh or distinctive about *Martín Santos, el llanero*. Blanca's rationale for marrying Martín is a little strained--in an ironic scene, she says she would be letting her ancestors and descendants down if she loses the family estate, whereas her "poor" servant is "free" of any such obligations ("you were born and will die on land you don't own"). Martín, for his part, admits his marriage offer is partly in revenge for Blanca's earlier disdainful treatment, but he also confesses he hopes she'll fall in love with him over time. Lorena Velázquez is more convincing as the snooty heiress than she is in the final scenes when she repents; Aceves Mejía is satisfactory in his role, but his character isn't given a lot of depth and the fact that Martín is so noble and well-liked makes the viewer actually dislike him a bit. The rest of cast is satisfactory without being especially noteworthy.

The production values are adequate: the film was shot almost entirely on location, and the color photography is fine.

Basically just a routine rural melodrama with a lot of songs.



La venganza de Huracán Ramírez [The Vengeance of Huracán Ramírez] (Cin. Romá, 1967)

Prod: Juan Rodríguez Mas; *Dir*: Joselito Rodríguez; *Scr*: Joselito Rodríguez, Juan Rodríguez Mas; *Photo*: Ezequiel Carrasco; *Music*: Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Chief*: Enrique L. Morfin; *Asst Dir*: Moisés M. Delgado; *Film Ed*: Fernando Martínez; *Art Dir*: Francisco Marco Shillet [sic]; *Decor*: Carlos Arjona; *Makeup*: Carmen Palomino; *Sound Supv*: Enrique Rodríguez; *Sound*: Rodolfo Solís

Cast: Pepe Romay (*Pancho "Manotas" Torres*), Titina Romay (*Margarita aka "Margot de Córdoba"*), David Silva (*Fernando Torres*), Carmen González (*Laura*), Carlos Piñar (*Pepe Chico*), Jean Safont (*Landrú*), Freddy Fernández (*Pichi*), Tonina Jackson (*Tonina*), Carolina

Barret (*Mary*), Marco Antonio Arzate (*Landrú's bearded assistant aka "El Hombre de la macana"*), José Luis Caro (*Hernández*), Karina Duprez (*Gina*), Arturo García, Víctor Sorel, Nemorio Callejas, Mario Agredano, Salvador Saldivar, Dulce María Romay, Ana Elisa Romay, Emma Rodríguez, Queta Carrasco (*guest at Pepe Chico's party*), Oscar Grijalva, Seik [sic] Mar Allah, Mario Prado, Felipe del Castillo, Guillermo Maldonado, Manuel Trejo Morales, "Mago" Septien (*match announcer*), "Picoro" (*ring announcer*), José Antonio Valdés, Joselito Rodríguez (*rent collector*), Los Novelistas (*band*), Daniel García (*Huracán Ramírez*)

Notes: perhaps in reaction to the popularity of *El Santo* and *Blue Demon* movies with fantastic themes, Joselito Rodríguez made a passing gesture at horror in the fourth "*Huracán Ramírez*" movie, *La venganza de Huracán Ramírez*. However, this science-fiction/horror sub-plot is almost lost in the proliferation of other sub-plots in the movie, which also includes 3 wrestling matches, 3 songs by Titina Romay, and a food fight. And, par for the course for the series, *Huracán Ramírez* himself makes only brief appearances--entirely in the ring--thus hardly qualifying as the "hero" of the movie. [note: for some reason, the original posters for this film show Huracán dressed in a red mask and outfit, when his real costume was blue!]

The various plots (constantly intercut) are as follows-- (a) wrestler-scientist Landrú and his two assistants have been experimenting with animal hormones. For most of the movie, the experiments seem to consist of injecting cats and watching them go wild. [These scenes are distasteful because it appears the animals are really being abused in order to make them act "vicious."] Landrú injects his assistants and himself with ever-greater doses of poison to make themselves immune to the side-effects of the hormones (or so he thinks...).

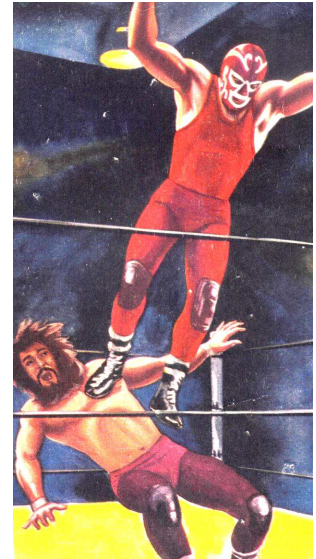
(b) Fernando Torres, who wrestles as "Huracán Ramírez" and also owns a wrestling arena, is in financial difficulty. He signs a contract with Landrú for a series of matches pitting the "French" wrestler and his henchmen against Huracán and his father, the burly (but by now fairly elderly) Tonina Jackson. Landrú resorts to dirty tricks in



the first two matches, tossing a powder into his opponents' eyes in the first and coating Huracán's mask with a corrosive chemical (activated by sweat) in the second. Fortunately, Huracán prevails (helped in the second match when his son Pancho dons the Huracán costume and substitutes for his father). Landrú shows up for the third match incognito, as the masked "Vampiro Sangriento." He injects himself with the animal hormones in plain view of everyone! This gives him super-strength but Huracán wins and unmasks his opponent. Landrú's face is hairy and monstrous, but eventually (after a series

of odd, almost surrealistic dissolves) returns to normal, but the hormone kills him. The end.

(c) the film also spends (wastes) a lot of time on Pancho, a college engineering student working in an auto repair shop during the semester break. He makes friends with Gina, the owner's daughter, and incurs the wrath of shop boss Hernández, Gina's rejected suitor. Before the final wrestling match, Landrú and his men--believing Pancho is Huracán Ramírez (because who would think the middle-aged, tired-looking Fernando could be him?), inject him with a chemical that leaves him helpless. Fernando's angry response in the match



with Landrú actually justifies the film's title, since he gets vengeance for his injured son on the villain who harmed him. (d) meanwhile, Fernando's daughter Margarita begins a pop singing career under the name "Margot de Córdova." She's discovered in a record shop by a young man who gets her a spot on a television show. He's actually Pepe Chico, the son of the network head, but lets Margarita think he's just Pepe's "friend." Margarita's relationship with Pepe makes her unofficial boyfriend Pichi jealous. However, when Margarita learns Pepe's true identity, she thinks she's been misled and returns to Pichi. [The character of Pepe Chico and his (unseen) father seem to be based on Emilio Azcárraga, father and son, who ran Televisa. Pepe Chico's last name is even given as "Izcárraga" or "Lizcárraga."]

(e) but wait, there's more! One final sub-plot involves obnoxious *gringa* Mary, who has attached herself to Tonina Jackson. She loans him money to pay the wrestling arena's debts, and declares herself part owner of the cafe run by Fernando's wife Laura as a result. She decides "time is money" and the cafe should offer the "American quick lunch," which causes the expected conflict between herself and Laura.

La venganza de Huracán Ramírez isn't poorly made but rarely have 90 minutes been crammed with so many disparate elements. Sub-plots (d) and (e) run neck-and-neck for the "most annoying" honors. Titina Romay is introduced gushingly as a "great new young discovery" but her singing is weak at best; her relationship with Carlos Piñar is unbelievable (she never even gets his name but follows his direction unquestioningly), and Freddy Fernández is mostly a pain to watch as her jealous boyfriend. On the other hand, Carolina Barret's performance as the middle-aged *gringa* also grates on the nerves exceedingly, and the final food fight is hardly a hilarious climax to this part of the film.

The Landrú plot has some major holes (such as his ultimate purpose, how a wrestler became a scientist or a scientist became a wrestler, why he enters into a contract with Fernando in the first place, and so on) and is quite derivative of earlier wrestling movies (*Ladrón de cadáveres*, for example), but if it had been developed and made the main point of the movie, this would have been a more mainstream *lucha* adventure. As it stands, the picture is a comedy-melodrama with sports drama and science-fiction overtones (and music!). Hard to think of an audience for that particular combination.



Huracán Ramírez y la monjita negra [Huracán Ramírez and the Little Black Nun] (Cin. Romá, 1972)

Exec Prod: Juan Rodríguez Mas; *Dir-Scr:* Joselito Rodríguez; *Story:* Mario Duncan; *Photo:* Agustín Jiménez; *Music:* Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Chief:* Armando Solís; *Asst Dir:* Américo Fernández; *Film Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Decor:* José González; *Lighting:* Luis Medina; *Camera Op:* Andrés Torres; *Makeup:* Dolores Camarillo; *Sound Op:* Rodolfo Solís; *Sound Ed:* Reynaldo P. Portillo; *Agfacolor*

Cast: Pepe Romay (*José*), Titina Romay (*Sor María de la Divina Concepción*), Tere Velázquez (*Deborah de Iturbide*), Jean Safont (*Sansón Pérez "el Elegante"*), Queta Carrasco (*Mother Superior Brigida*), Juan Garza (*René Ancira*), Carmen Manzano (*?Sor Rita*), Carlos Bravo (*"Carlillos" (doctor)*), Luis del Río (*specialist*), Carlos Nieto (*Said Slim*), Roberto Meyer (*Padre Bernabé*). Carlos Rincón G. (*hotel clerk*), Ethel Medina, Martita Rangel (*Martita*), Guillermo García, Xavier Alcaraz, Juan José Laboriel (*Sor María's father*), ?Juan Rodríguez Mas (*secret policeman #2*), Joselito Rodríguez (*cab driver*), Marcelo Villamil (*debt collector*), "Picoro" (*ring announcer*), Mirón Levine (*antique dealer*); *wrestlers:* Doctor "Z," El Nazi, El Matemático, Tony Salazar, Valentino, El Águila, La Mosca, Sheik Mar Allah (*referee*), Daniel García (*Huracán Ramírez*)

Notes: the first "Huracán Ramírez" film to break with the original series continuity (that is, dispensing with "Fernando Torres" [David Silva] and his family), *Huracán Ramírez y la monjita negra* further marginalizes the



character of the masked wrestler, who is neither seen nor referred to until one hour of the 90-minute movie has elapsed. Most of the picture revolves around the comic (and occasionally melodramatic) antics of Sor María, a "Newyorican" novice nun sent to a Mexico city convent.

Sor María shakes up the impoverished convent with her energy and ideas, earning the distrust of the Mother Superior. With the aid of the mute José, a foundling raised in the convent-orphanage who now serves as the handyman, María tries to earn money to purchase food and medical care for the orphans. Deborah de Iturbide, the convent's wealthy benefactor, donates money but insists José come to work for her as a training partner for her live-in "friend," wrestler Sansón.

Sor María, born in New York, is the daughter of Puerto Ricans who were killed in white-on-black violence. Her mother's parents still live in Harlem, and María is saving her money so they can travel to Mexico and be present when she takes her final vows. Padre Bernabé, the priest in charge of the convent, reassures Sor María that racial prejudice doesn't exist in Mexico: "we Mexicans love everyone--whites, blacks, yellows, and reds."

Deborah gives Sor María various objects of art to sell for the benefit of the convent, directing her to wealthy collector Said Slim, who pays more than the going rate. María is unaware the artworks contain smuggled diamonds. However, she becomes suspicious of Deborah's attraction to the handsome and muscular [so we are told] José, and urges him to quit his job with the rich woman. This enrages Deborah, who withdraws her financial support of the convent. The Mother Superior falls ill. Just when all seems lost, masked wrestler Huracán Ramírez makes a cash donation to save the day.

Huracán, managed by Sansón's former trainer René Ancira, is actually José. Surprise! He defeats Sansón in the ring--although the crooked wrestler tries to have Huracán replaced by an impostor, a ploy which fails--and agrees to a tag-team rematch.

Sansón's men abduct Sor María from ringside, but Huracán rescues her--leaving René, his partner, to hold off their two opponents!--then returns to the ring and defeats Sansón. The diamond-smuggling ring is smashed. As the film concludes, Sor María takes her final vows and is greeted by her grandparents, brought to Mexico by José/Huracán.

With apologies to a certain website I enjoy reading, here is a list of *What I Learned* © from this movie (and others like it):

- (1) all convents, orphanages, and churches are poor
- (2) doctors are kindly but operations, medicine, and hospitals are very expensive
- (3) young novice nuns are unconventional, inventive, energetic
- (4) Mother Superiors, bishops, etc. are conservative and gruff but ultimately good-hearted
- (5) it is easy to smuggle diamonds into Mexico City, but delivering them across town must be done clandestinely



(6) rats are invisible until you kill them [this refers to an early scene where Sor María chases a rat around with a broom]

Huracán Ramírez y la monjita negra isn't a bad film, and--to be fair--was advertised as a comedy rather than a *lucha* action picture. The acting is broad but within



acceptable limits, and the production values are satisfactory.

Trivia notes: in addition to casting his children Pepe and Titina in

the leading roles, director Joselito Rodríguez himself appears in an extended cameo, his granddaughter Martita Rangel (presumably the daughter of Marta Rangel) also has a small part, Ethel Medina was also a member of the family (I believe), and one of the actors playing a secret policeman strongly resembles Juan Rodríguez Mas, the oldest son of Joselito Rodríguez. Another curious bit of trivia is the character name "Saíd Slim"--this is almost certainly a in-joke reference to Saíd Slim Karam, a Lebanese-Mexican who worked as an executive producer and production manager on a number of films in the 1950s and 1960s (although not for the Rodríguez family).



De sangre chicana [Of Chicano Blood]



(Cinematográfica Romá, 1973) *Exec Prod*: José A. Rodríguez*; *Dir*: Joselito Rodríguez Jr.*; *Scr*: Adolfo T[orres] Portillo, Ramón Obón, Joselito Rodríguez; *Photo*: Xavier Cruz; *Music*: Sergio Guerrero; *Prod Mgr*: Óscar Magaña; *Asst Dir*: Javier Durán; *Film Ed*: Raúl Casso; *Art Dir*: José L. Garduño; *Camera*

Op: Alberto Arellanos; *Makeup*: Antonio Ramírez; *English Dialog Dir*: Mike Fernández; *Spanish Dialog Dir*: Pepe Romay; *Sound Engin*: Víctor Rojo; *Dubbing Rec*: Ricardo Saldivar; *Union*: STIC

*both of these are *aka* Pepe Romay

Cast: Pepe Romay (*Raúl Martínez*), Susana Cabrera (*Susana*), José Chávez Trowe (*Refugio Martínez*), Elizabeth Dupeyrón (*María Martínez aka "Mary Martin"*), Mario Balandra (*Juan Martínez*), Aida Araceli (*Mauro's wife*), Coloso Colosetti (*Golden Bull*), Armando Acosta (*Mauro Campos*), Marcelo Villamil (*Tom*), Mike

Fernández (*Gino Sanguinetti*), Tom Pope, Juan S. Garza (*"Yaqui" Garza*), Bernice Cortés (*?Rosy Campos*), Efraín Gutiérrez, Steve Wooldridge, David Peña, Josephine Paz, Raquel Hill, Walter Bowen, Jorge Piña, Karl McNeal, Guillermo Espinosa, Pamela Slocum, Buryl Nichols; *wrestlers*: Huracán Ramírez, El Matemático, Johnny Lezcano, La Mosca (Speed Fly), El Psicólogo, Green Monster, Sheik Marala, Daniel García (*Huracán Ramírez*)

Notes: unlike Santo, Blue Demon, etc., "Huracán Ramírez" was a character created and owned by a single entity (the Rodríguez family), which explains why he only appeared in their movies. However, given the popularity of the character in the ring and in ancillary media (comic books, for example), it's hard to understand why Joselito Rodríguez and his offspring failed to capitalize on this in films--the original "Huracán Ramírez" series consisted of just four pictures between 1952 and 1967, followed by five additional, unrelated appearances in the 1972-1989 period. Furthermore, most of these movies were undistinguished melodramas rather than action pictures, and Huracán himself (the masked wrestler, as opposed to his civilian alter ego) was relegated to minor roles. *De sangre chicana* is a perfect example of this--Huracán Ramírez appears only in rather brief wrestling scenes in the latter half of the film.

Although this may have disappointed *lucha* fans, *De sangre chicana* is actually a rather interesting melodrama about Mexican-Americans in the United States. The plot borrows from *Huracán Ramírez* (a young man wrestles as Huracán to help his family finances, but hides his identity from his own father) but is actually more reminiscent of *Los desarraigados* (1958), an earlier picture about the identity crisis suffered by Mexican-Americans. Shot on location in San Antonio (with some interiors apparently filmed at the Estudios América as well), *De sangre chicana* is reasonably entertaining. Pepe Romay (as "Joselito Rodríguez Jr.") makes his directorial debut in a satisfactory manner.

Refugio Martínez is a Mexican who has lived in San Antonio for many years, operating a small restaurant. Refugio, a widower, has three children: medical student Raúl [Raúl attends Our Lady of the Lake University, an actual Catholic college in San Antonio which has a significant number of Hispanic students], engineering student (so he thinks) Juan, and María, who works in a clothing store and prefers to be called "Mary Martin." Refugio's assistant in the restaurant is Susana, a self-proclaimed "radical" who paints "Yankees Go Home" on walls and constantly battles with *gringos*, including sympathetic cop Tom.

Unbeknowst to his father, Juan has actually dropped out of school and is a member of a loose-knit gang of petty criminals which is constantly in conflict with another gang of *gringo* hoods. The latter gang beats up Refugio one night when they can't locate Juan. Juan and his gang plan to rob a pharmacy, but are overheard by a member of the rival group.

To help his father, Raúl--a collegiate wrestling champion--accepts an offer from promoter Gino Sanguinetti to turn pro. Raúl tells his father he's been

hired to assist another doctor, and won't neglect his studies. He adopts the mask of "Huracán Ramírez" to further protect his identity. His father is suspicious, however.

Meanwhile, María has fallen in love with wrestler "Golden Bull." After he departs for a long road trip, she discovers she's pregnant. When the wrestler returns, María eagerly goes to see him, and catches him in bed with another woman! (Ironically, Golden Bull's new lover is black) Dashing into the street, María is struck by a car and hospitalized. Raúl and Juan learn the truth.

Raúl, as "Huracán," coincidentally wrestles that evening against Golden Bull for the championship. Despite being out-classed ("Golden" is a heavyweight), Raúl wins, thrashing the other man in revenge for his mistreatment of María. Juan, meanwhile, misses the planned robbery since he's at the hospital with María--his friends are arrested, and believe he betrayed them (it was actually the *gringo* gang). Juan is later mortally wounded by the *gringos*, and dies in Raúl's arms. Refugio and his friends have prepared a party to celebrate Raúl's graduation from medical school, unaware Juan is dead and María is in the hospital.

De sangre chicana surprisingly does not contain a lot of *gringo*-bashing. There are unpleasant *gringos*--Golden Bull (in real life, I believe Coloso Colosetti is Argentine but he's a *gringo* here) and the rival gang--but there isn't a lot of talk about racism or discrimination (the *gringo* gang



does make some racist remarks, and after they beat him up--for stealing car stereos on their "turf"--Juan tells his father the attack was

racially motivated). Instead, the movie examines the psychological attitudes of Chicanos themselves. Raúl tells his girlfriend he'd fight for the USA in a "just war" but wouldn't go out of his way to help any "Americans," yet he would not fight for Mexico but would risk his own life to help a member of *la raza*. He says "we're like a nation within an nation...Aztlán," but laughs as if that concept was too far-fetched. Raúl also refers to his father's friend Mauro (who has assimilated and even has a *gringa* wife) as a "coconut," "brown on the outside but white on the inside." María is the opposite, a self-hating *chicana* who changes her name, refuses to wait on *chicanos* in her father's restaurant, yearns for the blonde, blue-eyed Golden Bull, and (in some scenes which are actually touching) anticipates the birth of her blonde child. She belatedly repents and embraces her Hispanic heritage, although the rationale is confused: she apparently believes Golden Bull dumped her because she was a *chicana*, but since his new girlfriend is African-American, this seems unlikely (or it's a clever bit of irony). Refugio, in contrast to his friend Mauro, has resolutely refused to assimilate, and doesn't

even speak English. [It's interesting to note that actor José Chávez Trowe did speak English, appearing in various Hollywood films as a result.] He loves his children but refers to them as "three *chicanos*" and bemoans the fact they're U.S. citizens and have abandoned Mexican culture.

The acting and production values of *De sangre chicana* are fine; first-time director Pepe Romay doesn't try anything fancy, but his work is satisfactory. Ironically, the Huracán Ramírez aspects of the plot are mostly irrelevant--the film could have easily been re-written to exclude this entirely. The San Antonio locations are effective. Overall, a fairly decent piece of work.



It Happened in 1938



Cada loco con su tema [Every Madman Has His Mania] (Grovas Oro Film, 1938) *Dir-Adapt:* Juan Bustillo Oro; *Story:* Humberto Gómez Landero, Juan Bustillo Oro; *Photo:* Lauron Draper; *Music:* Max Urban; *Prod Mgr:* Luis White; *Prod Chief:* Enrique Morfín; *Film Ed:* Mario González; *Art Dir:* Carlos Toussaint; *Decor:* Lusi Bustos; *Miniatures:* Ismael Carrasco, Manuel Muñoz, Arnulfo Huerta; *Makeup:* Fraustita

Cast: Enrique Herrera (*Julio César Napoleón*), Joaquín Pardavé (*Justiniano Conquián*), Gloria Marín (*Josefina Larios*), Antonio R. Frausto (*Serafín del Monte*), Alberto Martí (*Dr. Germán Casca*), Natalia Ortiz (*Augusta*), Eduardo Arozamena (*Severo aka Cedronio Conquián*), Adela Jaloma (*Lucrecia*), Francisco Jambrina (*Arturo Íñigo*), Alberto Galán (*Dr. Luis Jiménez*), Wilfrido Moreno (*José Ramírez, notary*), Roberto Banquells (*Anselmo Cordero*), Victoria Argota (*Etelvina*), Elvira Gosti (*Clarita*), Humberto Rodríguez and Honorato Bassoco (*policemen*), Gerardo de Castillo (*Pedro*), Crox Alvarado (*notary's secretary*)

Notes: *Cada loco con su tema* is a "old house" mystery-comedy, a genre that dates back to the silent era (and literature of the same period, cf "Seven Keys to Baldpate"). Sadly, Enrique Herrera (a Cuban actor who played mostly comedic roles but also occasionally took dramatic parts) is no Bob Hope (*The Cat and the Canary*, *The Ghost Breakers*) or even Red Skelton (*Whistling in the Dark*), and while Joaquín Pardavé is fitfully amusing, he has a mostly one-joke role as a doggedly-eccentric character (who, after an early scene, vanishes for more

than an hour). The rest of the cast isn't bad--Eduardo Arozamena and Natalia Ortiz are especially good, while Alberto Martí adds another to his long list of villainous parts and Antonio R. Frausto demonstrates his versatility by playing a comic sidekick quite unlike most of his other screen roles--but too many of the characters have little to do. The picture is far too long (two hours) and poorly-paced. This is all too bad, because the sets are excellent and some of the scenes are rather entertaining.



The version I saw came from a "De Película" television broadcast, and several of the reels were of much lower quality than the others; the total running time was a bit shorter than García Riera's cited 123 minutes (although it's barely possible some of this was the result of Televisa speeding up the movie almost

imperceptibly to fit a time slot, since in at least one scene the dialogue sounds odd).

Julio César Napoleón, an author of mystery novels, overhears a radio broadcast and mistakenly thinks intruders have entered his home. When no "killers" can be found, Julio César is convinced he's having hallucinations, so Dr. Jiménez suggests a stay at his sanatorium in the countryside. Jiménez also recommends closing one's eyes and stating "it doesn't exist" when a hallucination appears. If all else fails, the psychiatrist mentions his "cure" for



such problems--constantly surrounding a patient with the things he fears, so he'll become desensitized. Julio César prepares to depart, but decides to register under an assumed name--"Justiniano Conquián," the hero of his latest book--to avoid publicity. He and his secretary Serafin depart.

Meanwhile, an eccentric taxidermist whose real name is Justiniano Conquián receives a visit from a notary. Justiniano's uncle has left him 6 million pesos in his will, but Justiniano must spend a month at the "Castillo de las ánimas" (Castillo of the Spirits)--without going insane or dying--to collect the money. Coincidentally, the Jiménez asylum and the Castillo de las ánimas are located in the same rural area. [The exterior shots of the two buildings are represented by nice models, the "miniatures" referred to in the credits.]

At the Castillo de las ánimas, the other Conquián heirs learn of Justiniano's inheritance. Led by Dr. Casca, they conspire to drive Justiniano insane so they will get the fortune. The only hold-out is Josefina, Justiniano's half-sister (although they have never met), and she is locked up by major-domo Severo and his wife Augusta, who are also involved in the plot.

"Justiniano Conquián" arrives at the Castillo, but it is really Julio César, who thinks the building is the

sanatorium and the residents are other "patients." At first he believes the strange things he sees--a skeleton in his bed, a "stuffed" gorilla whose eyes move, etc.--are hallucinations, but he later decides the other people in the house are actors hired by Dr. Jiménez to cure him of his fears. Josefina escapes and warns him of the plot, but Julio César still isn't convinced.



The real Justiniano finally shows up and--due to his vague manner--the other plotters don't realize exactly who he is, but they assume he's another potential heir. Two of the Conquián relatives are strangled in their beds, each clutching a tuft of hair

from the "stuffed" gorilla. [Julio César, believing it's all a farce, tells the others that the murder victims will undoubtedly "come back to life in time for breakfast."] The gorilla attacks Julio César and Josefina (at one point using a pistol!) but is mortally wounded by the mystery writer, who exposes him as Pedro, Severo's son.

Severo is actually another Conquián relative, who wanted all of the inheritance for himself. Julio César, Serafin, Justiniano, and Josefina subdue the murderous heirs and wait for the police to arrive. Since Julio César isn't really Josefina's half-brother, they give in to their romantic impulses and kiss at the fade out. [Josefina, embarrassed, points at the screen and says "what about them?" Julio César replies, "oh, the public? They don't exist, they don't exist!"]



Cada loco con su tema could have been much better than it is. As García Riera comments, the dialogue scenes appear designed to carry out every conversation to the ultimate degree: the same "jokes" are repeated over and over, the same "existential" nonsequiturs are

belabored ("If he's me, and I'm me, then who is he? Who am I?" etc.) endlessly. Enrique Herrera's character is neurotic and self-centered for most of the movie, only to (improbably) turn heroic shortly before the climax. On the positive side, the murderous "gorilla" is quite entertaining: the gorilla suit is weird-looking, and the gorilla itself is properly menacing and never clumsy or bumbling. The plot is actually fairly clever, with two groups of plotters trying to achieve the same goal (although Severo also wants to eliminate the members of the first group). And the "Castillo" sets are very nicely done, properly atmospheric and rather elaborate.

A curious picture, alternately tedious and entertaining, but certainly worth watching as a rare, early Mexican "horror comedy."



Canto a mi tierra (México canta)* [I Sing to My Land (Mexico Sings)] (Prods. Virgilio Calderón, 1938) *Prod:* Virgilio Calderón; *Dir:* José Bohr; *Story-Adapt-Dialog:* J. Díaz Morales, R.A. Hinojosa; *Idea:* Xavier Dávila; *Photo:* R[aúl] Martínez Solares; *Music Arr/Dir:* J. Sabre Marroquín; *Prod Mgr:* A. Guerrero Tello; *Asst Dir:* Mario de Lara; *Film Ed:* Lupita Marino; *Art Dir:* Mariano Rodríguez; *Sound:* [Rafael Ruiz] Esparza; *Sound Ed:* Carlos Savage; *Songs:* J. Sabre Marroquín, José Bohr, A. Esparza Oteo, Pepe Guízar

*although most sources list this film's title as *Canto a mi tierra*, the DVD I have seen has what appears to be the original credits and the title is listed as simply *México canta*.

Cast: Pedro Vargas (*Pedro*), Nancy Torres (*Leonor*), Carmelita [Bohr] (*Maruca*), Pedro Armendáriz (*Antonio*), Rafael Icardo (*Simón*), Alberto Galán (*Héctor de la Maza*), "Los Cuatro Vagabundos"--Jorge Treviño (*blacksmith*), Arturo Manrique (*telegrapher*), Irving Lee (*iceman*), Manuel Esperón (*teacher*); Ernesto Finance (*don Fernando*), Jorge Mondragón (*Mario Arévalo*), Pepita González (*Pepa*), Víctor Junco (*room service waiter and man in theatre lobby*), Blanca Matrás, Carolina Barret (*woman at hacienda listening to Pedro*), Alonso Sordo (*radio announcer*), themselves: Carlos López "Chaflán," Raúl de Anda, Arturo de Córdova

Notes: although one of the greatest popular singers in 20th-century Mexico, Pedro Vargas had only a sporadic film career, limited mostly to musical guest appearances. Stocky, balding, and moon-faced, Vargas was hardly a matinee idol (neither was Agustín Lara, another musical giant) but he did project a rather easy-going if phlegmatic personality on screen, and in a few 1950s movies he was given a bit of additional "acting" to do. In *Canto a mi tierra* Vargas is the center of the plot, but (perhaps wisely) has to do almost nothing but sing. Unfortunately, his repertoire doesn't include many well-known songs, and he

even repeats one number several times.

Actually, the film's "plot" is so thin as to be almost nonexistent, and about a third of the running time is taken up by a recreation of a musical show, and probably half of the



remainder is also devoted to songs by Vargas or the "Cuatro Vagabundos," leaving little room for drama. Still, the performers are generally entertaining and both Nancy Torres and Carmelita Bohr are unusually attractive actresses, although not necessarily in physical terms. Torres has an overbite and at times looks more like a character actress, but she possesses a certain vitality which is hard to define. Bohr (the director's step-daughter) is

vivacious and cute--it was while working on this film that she met her future husband, Pedro Armendáriz (and the couple would later have a son, Pedro Jr.). The "Cuatro Vagabundos" are billed this way only, but are a comedy-music team consisting of Manuel Esperón, Jorge



Treviño, Irving "Mister" Lee, and Arturo Manrique. They're actually pretty funny and entertaining.

Theatrical producer Héctor de la Maza is ready to premiere his new musical, "México canta," but can't find a tenor for the lead. He and his grown daughter Leonor visit the countryside for a rest, and Leonor discovers Pedro--the foreman of the ranch owned by their neighbor Antonio--is a wonderful singer. Pedro is convinced to go to the capital and he becomes a smash hit in the show. However, before he can declare his love for Leonor, she tells him she's going to marry Antonio. Pedro decides to renounce his newly-won fame and fortune and return to the rural life. [There are several sub-plots: one involves the telegrapher, iceman, blacksmith, and schoolteacher from the town near Antonio's ranch, who eventually crash Héctor's show and become stars on their own. The other plot involves Maruca, Antonio's younger sister, whose unrequited love for Pedro is not resolved in the movie, which ends rather abruptly.]

One of the most unusual aspects of *Canto a mi tierra* is the presentation of "México canta." Although clearly intended to be a stage spectacle, a large portion of what is shown is actually filmed sequences, including a montage contrasting "old" Mexico with "modern" Mexico, Pedro Vargas in fishing boats on Lake Pátzcuaro, Vargas singing in the ruins of Chichén-Itzá, and Vargas dressed as an Aztec warrior at the Teotihuacán pyramids! These are intercut with shorter scenes actually taking place on the stage (including one in which the Cuatro Vagabundos sing while wearing stolen caveman costumes!).



Also of interest--and not mentioned in either García Riera's *Historia documental del cine mexicano* or Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro's book on José "Che" Bohr--are the cameo appearances by various movie stars arriving at the premiere of "México canta." They're interviewed by radio announcer Alonso Sordo, and include Carlos López "Chaflán," Raúl de Anda, and Arturo de Córdova, as well as several other personalities I can't identify. Curiously, Bohr's next movie, *Una luz en mi camino*, also featured numerous star cameos.

Not a great film but worth watching for a variety of reasons.



La China Hilaria (Prods. México, 1938) *Prod:* Alfonso Patiño Gómez [uncredited]; *Dir:* Roberto Curwood; *Adapt:* A. Patiño Gómez; *Story:* Fidel Solís;

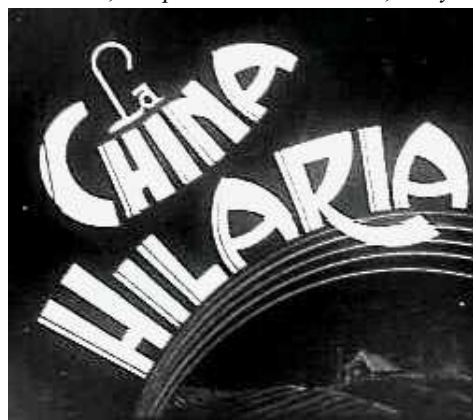


Photo: Raúl Martínez Solares; *Prod Chief:* Manuel Sereijo; *Asst Dir:* Luis Abbadie; *Sound:* Eduardo Fernández
Cast:
Alicia Ortiz ("La China")

Hilaria), Pedro Armendáriz (*Apolonio López*), Gilberto González (*Carlos*), Manuel Buendía (*Antonio*), Gustavo Aponte, Mine Ayala, María Elena de la Cruz, Ernesto Velázquez (*Goyo*), Alfonso Bedoya (*Isidro*), María Luisa Bermejo (*dubs Hilaria's singing*), Conjunto Metropolitano de Felipe Bermejo, Manuel Dondé (*campesino*), José Torvay (*gambler*), José Elías Moreno (*man with Carlos when he is killed*)



Notes:

Robert Curwood, born in Romania, worked briefly in Mexico during a peripatetic filmmaking career that took him to Russia, France, and

Hollywood. *La China Hilaria*, the second of three Mexican pictures he directed, was apparently never released theatrically, but later appeared on television and is available on DVD from Excalibur/Vanguard. The DVD print is in surprisingly good shape, although there are scratches and other print damage evident; the dialogue for the first five minutes of the movie seems to have been lost (people's lips move but nothing is heard) although there is music on the soundtrack (this was most likely in the original print and not done for the DVD).

Isidro and Hilaria are sweethearts, but he departs to pick cotton in Texas to earn enough money for their wedding. Time passes and Isidro fails to return. The pregnant Hilaria is forced to leave her small town. Some time later, known as "La China," she's the lead singer of a female trio which performs at cockfights. [The film does not make it clear at all that Hilaria is pregnant--she certainly never looks it--but in a later scene she tells her friends "fortunately" her illegitimate child died at birth!]

Although courted by many, including the wealthy don Carlos, Hilaria still believes Isidro will come back.

Gambler Apolonio is attracted to Hilaria and insists he will wait as long as it takes for her to fall in love with him. One day, Isidro returns and confesses to Hilaria that he has married someone else. Apolonio wagers everything he owns on his prize rooster "El Tapatio," planning to retire with Hilaria and move to Puerto Vallarta on the beach! However, the jealous Carlos bribes the *amarrador* (the man who ties the blade on the rooster's leg before cockfights) to sabotage Apolonio's gamecock, and the bird loses.

Carlos presses his case with Hilaria, giving her money to pay for her mother's medical needs. However, the villain's dirty trick at the cockfight is exposed and he is stabbed to death by his own accomplice. As the film concludes, Apolonio watches Hilaria sing.

La China

Hilaria is not that badly made: there are plentiful extras, the location shooting and sets are fine, and the film has a real flavor of rural Mexico in certain scenes. Curwood even includes



some interesting tracking shots, hardly standard for a low budget movie. Nonetheless, the film is extremely slow and spends far too much time on each sequence. For example, a rather irrelevant scene in which Apolonio plays cards is strung out interminably (ending in a brawl when cheating is detected), as are the preliminaries of the cockfights (people betting, etc.). Of course, if *La China Hilaria* had been paced more briskly, it wouldn't have even lasted the 77 minutes it now does!

The performances are generally good, although very little character development is given to anyone other than Hilaria and Apolonio. Alicia Ortiz is satisfactory (her singing was dubbed, however) and Pedro Armendáriz is assured and confident in a stereotyped part. The songs are rather good.

This is a curiosity piece, mostly of historical value, but isn't bad if you can tolerate the plodding pace.



Juntos pero no revueltos [Together But Not Involved] (Prods. Sánchez Tello, 1938) *Prod:* Alfonso Sánchez Tello; *Dir-Scr:* Fernando A. Rivero; *Story:* Ernesto Cortázar; *Photo:* Lauron Draper; *Music Dir:* Manuel Esperón; *Prod Chief:* Enrique H. Hernández; *Asst Dir:* Felipe Palomino; *Film Ed:* Emilio Gómez Muriel; *Art Dir:* Mariano Rodríguez; *Interior Decor:* Luis Bustos; *Makeup:* Fraustita; *Sound Engin:* Roberto Rodríguez

Cast: Jorge Negrete (*Rodolfo del Valle*), Rafael Falcón (*Carlos*), Susana Guízar (*Esperanza Robles*), El Chicote (*El Salpicaderas*), Agustín Isunza (*Lic. Juan*), Lucha María Ávila (*Luchita Robles*), María Porras (*doña Paz*),

Hernán Vera (*Lázaro, husband of Paz*), Manuel Esperón (*Maino Esperoff*), Jorge Treviño (*Pietro Martinini*), Arturo Manrique (*Professor*), Irving Lee (*"blind" beggar*), Elisa Christy (*Norma*), Bohemia [aka Virginia] Serret (*Raquel*), Miguel Inclán (*Col. Sisebuto Corrales*), José Arias (*policeman*), Guadalupe del Castillo (*La Rorra*), Laura Marín (*La Beba*), Josefina Betancourt (*La Nena*), Cliff Carr (*Mister Kimball*), Emilie Egert (*Mrs. Kimball*), Arturo Soto Rangel (*judge*), Juan García Esquivel (*radio station pianist*), Jorge Marrón (*Esperanza's uncle*)

Notes: this is an entertaining film with an impressive cast (many of them radio or variety theatre performers),



but it is too long and over-loaded with obtrusive musical numbers.

In the provinces, the "disgraced" Esperanza is given a handful of money and banished by her strait-laced uncle.

Esperanza and her little sister Luchita travel to Mexico City, and rent a room in the *vecindad* managed by doña Paz. The other residents include:

radio singer Rodolfo and his room-mate Carlos, a tourist guide

chorus girls Norma and Raquel

the "Professor" (who lives off the earnings of a group of street kids) and his room-mate, a false "blind" beggar

"Italian" opera singer Pietro and his pianist Maino cabbie El Salpicaderas

retired military officer Col. Corrales

three elderly spinsters

verbose lawyer Juanito

Rodolfo is attracted to Esperanza. Although he loses his radio job (for refusing to sing popular tunes), he tries to help the impoverished newcomer and her sister. Rodolfo learns Esperanza is pregnant but continues to love her. The three spinsters, on the other hand, are scandalized and move out. Lawyer Juanito, acting as Rodolfo's manager, gets him a contract to sing on the stage; as Rodolfo is making his debut, Esperanza goes into labor and has her child. The Professor's children failed to sell a lottery ticket and this wins the big prize, which is shared among all of the residents of the building.

Juntos pero no revueltos contains some minor sub-plots as well, mostly comedic in nature. Carlos is hired as a guide for *gringo* Mr. Kimball and his wife; Mrs. Kimball initiates an affair with Carlos, and her husband is none the wiser (in one sequence Mr. Kimball frowns when Carlos seems to be singing directly to his wife, but when Carlos switches his attention to other women at the party, the *gringo* is mollified). There is a very brief hint of conflict between Carlos and Rodolfo over Esperanza (Rodolfo catches Carlos in Esperanza's room, but he was merely checking on her health); in fact, the film concludes in a very odd fashion with Carlos declaring his devotion to the adolescent Luchita! There is another sub-plot dealing with

El Salpicaderas, who constructs a car out of stolen parts in his room ("the first automobile manufactured in Mexico"). Unfortunately, a dispute with the lawyer ends in the car's destruction (but the winning lottery ticket results in the purchase of a new auto, and El Salpicaderas gets a fancy chauffeur's uniform).

For a 1938 movie, the sexual innuendos of *Juntos pero no revueltos* are mildly shocking. We have an unwed mother (Esperanza), infidelity (Mrs. Kimball), suggestions of "free love" (Carlos and Rodolfo have casual romantic relationships with Raquel and Norma), and even some hints of gayness. Perhaps it's just my 21st century sensibility, but the Professor and the fake "blind" beggar live together, sleep together, and exhibit the sort of physical and emotional familiarity that appears a little gay to me. [Rodolfo and Carlos are room-mates but they sleep in separate beds and are clearly heterosexual. Pietro and Maino also live together but don't display the same intimacy as the Professor and his pal.]

The performances are generally good and most are rather multi-dimensional. As noted earlier, many of the performers came from radio or variety theatre backgrounds, so we're exposed to comic songs by Treviño, Manrique, and Lee (Manrique and Treviño were a team known as "Panseco" and "Panque"--puns meaning "Dry Bread" and "Bread With [Butter]", and Treviño, Manrique, Esperón and Lee were billed as "Los Cuatro Vagabundos" in *Canto a mi tierra*, also 1938), and El Chicote, as well as a tango and "waltz" by Falcón, two numbers by Negrete (including "Negro es mi color" by Ernesto Lecuona, sung in blackface makeup), a "tropical" number by the Professor's child performers, a "Virginia reel" dance number, and "Las mañanitas" by most of the cast. Most of these are fairly entertaining but they do take up a lot of time.



The production values are decent, the *vecindad* itself is a large and elaborate set and there are some scenes shot on location as well.

This isn't a great classic but it is a well-made, entertaining picture.



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