

# Young directors here learning language of film

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT

Special to The STAR

During the recent Puerto Rican Film Week at the Institute of Culture, it was evident that our young professionals are learning the language of film. They also are carrying that extra cargo of ideological content with all its pitfalls.

It is easy for an alert, agile and inventive camera to catch the eye, but will it catch the mind, or at least the heart? And will it keep them at attention once they are caught?

During the last night of the festival my attention did wander occasionally from the sweetness and nostalgia of "Un Abajito y Queriendo," a TV special by David Ortiz; the sheer tropical beauty of "Pinones," another TV special by Diego de la Texera of Sando Films; the one-track direct purposefulness of "Denuncia de un Embeleco" by Taller del Tirabuzon Rojo; the ramblings through surrealistic corridors, tombs and landscapes of "Cinco Cuentos en Blanco y Negro" by Victor Cuchi and Jacobo Morales, just as my eye had also wandered from the reiterated lessons to civic mindedness in the Division of Community Education films, the hectic sometimes unexplained movements of "La Palomilla" by Efraim Lopez

Neris, the theatrically slow yet ponderous crime hunting of "Arocho y Clemente" by Miguel Angel Alvarez, the childish skits of Machuchal's "El Curandero del Pueblo" and the uninspired camerawork of the Viguei documentaries.

The only piece which held my eye steadily was the economical "The Return" by Jose Artemio Torres perhaps because it really is a good short one-act play with a surprise ending. The piece is also the only one in the film week series which doesn't bother to explain itself didactically, though it has a great lesson. It has faith that the intelligence of the audience will find it. May the author remember that lesson in future productions here. He produced "The Return" in an English film school.

I do remember "Potemkin"—my eyes were glued to the screen for three continuous showings. I couldn't help it. By the way, about 40 years ago I didn't initially get the Soviet revolutionary message in "Potemkin"—it came later, when I read about it. What got me was the exuberant humanity of the film itself, especially those steps with the fleeing crowd and the runaway baby carriage. In "Potemkin", art came first, with its universal humanity—then came the ear-

nest message or extra cargo of ideology.

Ideology is rampant in "Un Embeleco", but it plays fair with the audience: we knew we were seeing a socialist film, no talkative holds barred. The magnificent views of the smoke-and-gas-pewing refinery with the whirling wind accompaniment and black vultures crying in flight, also the discharging drainpipes were a very explicit message. But it was ramblingly repeated about five times too many by talkative natives of the area, as well as by a commentator.

However, "Embeleco" is amazing because of its economical effectiveness: it was shot in about three days with only about 3,000 feet of film. Make-do doesn't always make small. A little planning could have made it even bigger and as cheap to produce.

"Pinones" is a nice rambling ecological-love story. It shows love for our mother-earth-the-mangrove here threatened by the usual bogey men, never seen in believable cinematic or dramatic terms, but always discussed from afar as we discuss God, to un-pinpointed one. What makes the film stick in the mind are the old people saying: "We stay here. We'll go away only when we're dead..." These dramatic sequences

were unplanned by the filmmakers—they were smart to accept chance, but why did they talk-talk around the drama? They could have hired a \$100-a-day bulldozer to "threaten" the old people believably if symbolically for the film.

Similarly rambling is the sweet and healthy singing group which frolics in "Un Abajito y Queriendo" followed by a very poetic and imaginative color camera which dares to look straight at the sun with very pictorial effects. Since nostalgia palls after a large dose, a final piece shows the group as slaves and at the end a chain is broken patriotically to remind us to duty. TV specials do have limits set on their contents by the usual bogey men or Mafia, the money men of TV this time: Federal funds paid for this "discussion of a community problem" as its director explained.

But I wonder, do those bogey men insist that "Pinones" and

"Un Abajito" should contain so much caramel? Are they really against stronger comedy or drama if it is done believably? Believable movies can make money also.

I did like the rambling short pieces in "Cinco Cuentos en Blanco y Negro," but I didn't quite capture their explicit meaning as a whole. As one viewer said on the way out, "You need a doctorate in theology to understand 'Cinco Cuentos.'" As for me it's okay to film dreams. But the recurrent images of "Five Cuentos" are erotic in ways which suggest paradises lost by the film producer, men now near middle age. They seek children and Lolitas now because children and Lolitas are closer to the wombs of earth and away from the finality of tombs. Life is a circus, anyway.

All in all, the Institute's "Puerto Rico film week" was a success. It gave us an idea about where we are in film art both with and without government aid.

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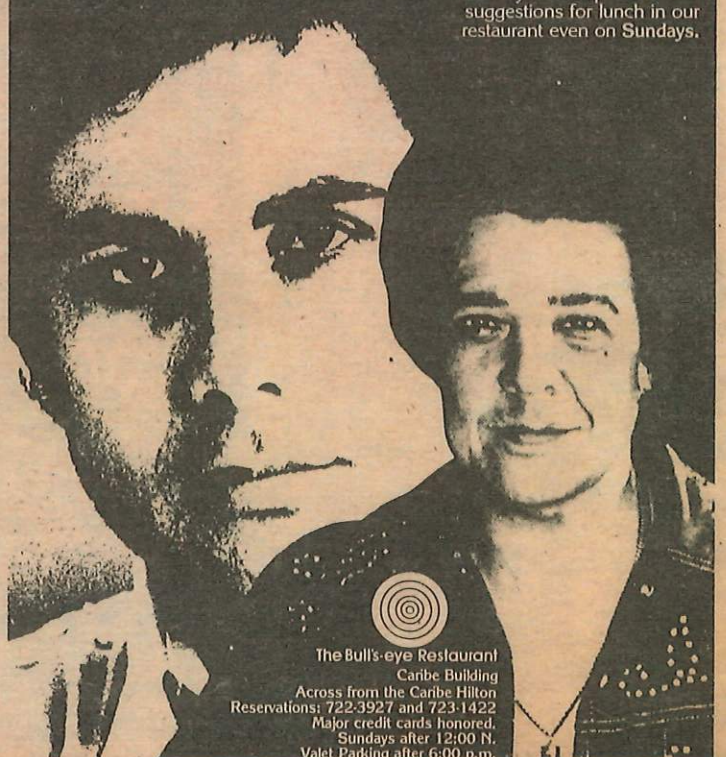
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