



Among Priests, Nuns, Devils and Shepherds

There were very few spaces for theater's development in New Spain; however, writers born in these lands contributed importantly to the development Spanish language comedy. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, born in New Spain (Taxco 1580 or 1581-Madrid 1639) wrote and produced his plays with great success in peninsular Spain, and some of his creations, such as *La verdad sospechosa* (The Truth Can't Be Trusted) or *Las paredes oyen* (Walls Have Ears) are considered among the heights of Spanish comedy. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, on the other hand, one of the towering literary figures of the 17th Century gave us *Los empeños de una casa* (Pawns of a House), one of the first comedies produced in Mexico City, and is considered one of the jewels of literature from New Spain.

From the 16th Century onward, based on the *autos sacramentales* it was the Franciscan and Jesuit monks who developed in this land the Christmas stories (*pastorelas*): a dramatic and religious genre with a didactic and moralizing intention that narrates the humorous vicissitudes of a group of shepherds on their way to Bethlehem to celebrate the birth of the son of God, who encounter several obstacles planted by Lucifer and its minions along the way. These pieces, written as farces, became very popular, they transcended the religious sphere and its representations are still a part of Mexican Christmas traditions.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



International Comedy Greats

During the first decades of the 20th Century, the viewing public clapped Mexican comedians in main tents and in variety shows. However, inside movie theaters –were French and U.S. distributors reigned supreme– it was the masters of international comedy who received all of the ovations.

The Mexican public was able to enjoy Max Linder's neurotic frenzy –the elegant French comedian, pioneer of film comedy–; Charlie Chaplin's melancholic and genial drifters humor; the acrobatic and intelligent inventiveness of the inexpressive Buster Keaton; the unbelievable adventures of that Yankee young man portrayed by Harold Lloyd, and the adventures of other stars in early Hollywood. The couple of Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel performed a highly physical and destructive comedy and were the bridge between silent films and films with sound.

For many years, comedians in Mexican cinematography looked to international stars for inspiration, and frequently actors –like Charles Amador and *el Chato* Ortín– contented themselves with copying situations, gags and characters from Chaplin, Keaton and Hal Roach short movies.

José Antonio Valdés Peña



Rural Comedy

During the first decades of the 20th Century, Mexico was a highly rural country; besides, the Mexican Revolution, mainly an agrarian movement, placed peasants front and center of the nation's political and cultural life. Thus, in Post-Revolutionary Mexican art, the countryside's universe—with its indigenous roots and its diverse languages and traditions—always great standing: novels of the Revolution described peasants' feats; muralist painters portrayed the great Zapatista mass as well as the indigenous world; cartoonist drew the traditions and habits of rural México; nationalist composers obtained inspiration from traditional *sones* and filmmakers filled their movies with characters representing people from provincial states, ranchers, *payos*, peons and landowners. Rural comedies were a genre in themselves and one of the most popular, so much so they became one of the pillars of the Mexican film industry.

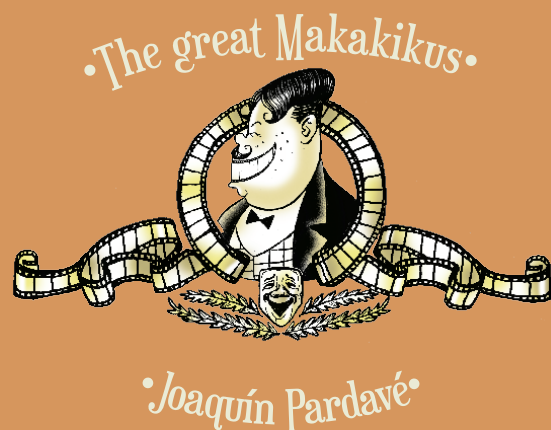
Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



Urban Comedy

Since the years of Porfirio Diaz's regime, the bustling activity of Mexico City (as well as the other national urban centers) operated as a counterpoint to the peaceful and harmonious rural life. In a centralist country such as ours, the capital city became a cosmopolitan crucible where richness, misery, political activity, stories and the nation's contradictions mixed. Starting from the third decade of the 20th Century, with the country's industrialization, cities grew unchecked and became the showcase for both the joys and miseries of Mexican people. This complex life of our great metropolis has been an unending source of themes for dramas as well as comedies in Mexican film history. Urban characters such as the scoundrel (*peladito*), the maid (*servienta*), the itinerant merchant (*abonero*), the handyman (*milusos*), the *lagartijo* or the *junior* became comedic archetypes with which the national public identified itself.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



Don Susanito, the “Baisano” Jalil y don Venancio

Joaquín Pardavé was one of the greatest figures of Mexican cinema's Golden Years. He was the leading actor of tens of memorable movies and he also distinguished himself as a scriptwriter, director and producer. He was the son of actors from Spain and began his career in theater with the zarzuela company of his uncle Carlos Pardavé. Along with his brothers Fernando, Andrés, Domingo and Julián Soler, he bridged the gap between *zarzuela* companies and variety theaters and the great national cinematographic industry.

Pardavé had outstanding talent. He was a stunning actor and a very competent screenwriter; also he composed several of the most popular songs of the Mexican repertoire, such as *Negra consentida*, *Varita de nardo*, *La Panchita*, *Ventanita morada* or *Caminito de la sierra*.

His movies were directed particularly to the nation's middle class, which he lampooned with affectionate irony. He always treated the values of “well-to-do families” with care and respect, but he was also able to mock the decadence of the class that grew during the Porfirio Diaz regime, and the aspirations of the so-called aristocracy of *nopal*.

He managed to perform with ease comedic characters; he knew how to steal the scene from the bravest leading actor, he stole the lights from the most luxuriant rumba dancer and he could hold his own in nonsense dialogues with none other than Mario Moreno *Cantinflas* himself. With Doña Sara García he made up the most popular dramatic and comedic marriage in the history of Mexican cinema. Since he was young, Pardavé performed as an old man; nevertheless he died at 55 years old. He was a comedic genius and is still our great tragicomic actor.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



The *Pachuco*

During the 1920s, some charismatic African-American musicians (such as Cab Calloway) began to dress up with *zoot suits*: flamboyant suits with lengthy jackets with shoulder pads, wide pants with a high waistline, open shirts, key chains and wide brimmed hats. This outfit became fashionable among young men of Mexican origin who lived in the United States, and eventually, over time, they became a cultural marker of the Chicana culture.

During the Second World War, the U.S. industry required an army of temporary workers, and thus it recruited tens of thousands of Mexican workers. These *braceros* did not integrate completely to the American way of life; they hung out with their countrymen and the Chicano communities and felt great nostalgia for their land and their traditions. Nevertheless, the interaction with American culture left a mark on them: they adopted fashion choices and ways of speaking; they incorporated English terms (they spoke *Spanglish*); they adopted aspirations, mental structures and ways of being typical of American society, and many of them wore *zoot suits*.

In the 1940 and 1950s, the most educated sectors of Mexican society distrusted this transcultural phenomenon and they referred to them in derogatory terms, calling them *pochos*, *cholos* or *pachucos* (according to some historians, *pachuco* is a distortion of the term *pochos*). However, the *pachuco* soon became a new Mexican archetype, fun and filled with cultural references; some comedians working in Mexican films adopted it and made it memorable.

The *pachuco* and movies were a fundamental element in the complex and inevitable transculturation process between Mexico and the United States.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



An Army for Messing Around

In Mexican comedic culture (a direct descendant from Spanish comedic culture) messing around (*el relajo*) plays a very important part.

El relajo (The mess) is the suspension of all seriousness; it is a rupture in social and formal norms. In order for the cancelation of social protocols to be successful (and even dangerous), the man who messes around needs friends, stooges and accomplices. In this sense, *Cantinflas* jokes around with Medel; *Tin Tan* puts on a show with the Carnal Marcelo; Manolín sings along with Schilinsky; Sergio Corona dances with Alfonso Arau; Capulina engages in a pie fight with Viruta; Chabelo plays coppers and robbers with his Tío Gamboín, and Madaleno plays with Los Xochimilcas.

To maintain a playful atmosphere in its comedies, the Mexican movie industry employed an army of comedians of every level to fight in the same trench as the stuffiest of rich men and the raunchiest of rogues. The list is long.

All of these actors enriched Mexican movies with their ingenuity and their talent; many of them filmed incredible scenes and many of them managed to create lovable characters.

Even though most of them were listed as supporting cast in the credits of most movies, they truly were first-rate actors.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

•Eyes that dance and listen•



•Dance, my king•

¡Mambo!

Dance culture in our country dates back to Prehispanic times, and through the ages it has become even richer. Mexican films picked up on several dance manifestations in México – from popular traditions to ballroom dancing– and enlisted choreographers and first class dancers. This *troupe* became even richer with the arrival of Cuban stars of tropical music, which excelled at danzón, rumba, mambo and other Caribbean rhythms in fashion.

The national cinematographic industry opened up a space for personalities who stole the limelight at popular dancing halls and helped propel talented dancers such as Adalberto Martínez *Resortes* and Roberto Cobo *Calambres*, among others. These artists transferred all the flavor, drama and humor present in dance halls like the Salón Los Ángeles, the Colonia or México into the big screen.

Dance and music featured in movies of Mexican Films Golden Years are a reflection of the country during the 40s and 50s. *Rumbera* movies tell a tale of a very active night life, which appeared as a result of urban growth; many comedies show the importance that learning to play an instrument, sing and dance European rhythms had for the upper classes, as well as the weight that music and popular dances had for popular neighborhoods. Likewise, rural movies, which were rife with mariachi and traditional dance sequences, are a reflection of a more rural atmosphere.

Great personalities of dance culture as well as memorable composers, musicians and performers were immortalized in these movies, as well as the performances of multitalented actors and actresses, who could act, sing and dance.

Rocío Echeverría



Black Comedy

Black comedy plays on cruel and brutal situations: death, murder, kidnapping, catastrophe, plagues, genocide, war, torture, mutilation, terminal illnesses and other horrors.

In México, black comedy has been a staple mood since Colonial times, however it was during war time –during the many conflicts of the 19th Century as well as the Mexican Revolution–, that it was pursued systematically through songs, *corridos*, jokes and a lengthy and sinister compendium of anecdotes.

Mexican movies pick up on the tradition of national black comedy and many of our movies include scenes that seek to make people laugh through the most sinister of situations. In the final sequence of *A toda máquina* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1951), after an motorcycle accident, *frenemies* played by Pedro Infante and Luis Aguilar are transported to a hospital in an ambulance. Pedro has a severe injury in his stomach and when he is asked: “Does it hurt?”, he responds stoically: “Only when I laugh”. “So”, says Luis: “then let me tell you some jokes”.

Some of the greatest productions in our national film history are masterpieces of black comedy: *El esqueleto de la señora Morales* (Rogelio A. González, 1960), *Los cuervos están de luto* (Francisco del Villar, 1965); *Mecánica nacional* (Luis Alcoriza, 1971), *Llámame Mike* (Alfredo Gurrola, 1979) and *Un mundo maravilloso* (Luis Estrada, 2006).

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



Lessons from Luis Buñuel

Between 1937 and 1945, after the defeat of the Second Spanish Republic during the Second World War, Mexico gave refuge to European refugees. Among those, there were a number of intellectuals and artists who had ties to the Surrealist movement, an aesthetic and literary project based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, which looked for the sources of artistic creation in the depths of the unconscious. Among these were writer Benajmin Péret, painters Wolfgang Paalen, Alice Rahon, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo, sculptor José Horna, photographer Kati Horna, and filmmaker Luis Buñuel. All of them worked in our country and made fundamental contributions to our culture.

Luis Buñuel, one of the most original and brilliant creators of the 20th Century worked for many years in the Mexican film industry. Some his most important works –*Los olvidados* (1950), *Él* (1953), *Nazarín* (1958), *El ángel exterminador* (1962) and *Simón del desierto* (1965), among others– were filmed in Mexico. Most of Buñuel's movies are filled with irony and sarcasm, and in them are countless scenes of black comedy and the absurd.

Between 1929 and 1931, Buñuel was a renowned member of the Surrealists and was an active supporter of the Second Spanish Republic, and he was always loyal to it. The director's humor reflects his own artistic tendencies: it delves into the dark corners of the human psyche; among his favorite subjects one finds desire and sexual repression; he systematically uses free association of ideas, and his humor is very much macabre, absurd, provocative and oneiric. Also, many of his comedic subjects –such as a critique of social norms and his rejection of the Catholic Church– are related to his political ideas.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



Political Humor in Mexican Films

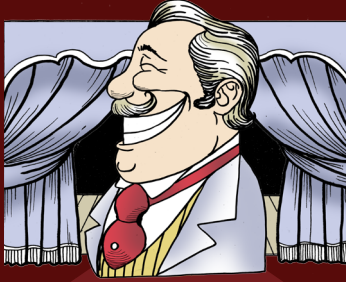
The regime that came out of the Mexican Revolution developed a presidential model, authoritarian and vertical that could not stomach criticisms. Because of this, even though our country has had a strong tradition of political humor, very few political satires in film were produced during the 20th Century.

For many years, very few moviemakers dared to touch the presidential figure, and even when they dared to do so, they did it obliquely, with metaphors, talking around, or generalizations and they went after minor figures. Even comedians –like Jesus Martínez *Palillo*– who in variety theaters were very direct in their criticism of Ministers and Presidents, were always on a lower key when in the big screen. Some of the most critical movies of the Post- Revolutionary period were independent productions, like *El brazo fuerte* (Giovanni Korporaal, 1958). However, despite the government's control and censorship efforts, some of the movies filmed during the Golden Years had an evident critical intention and important comedic episodes.

Starting from the 1960s, a few independent moviemakers produced movies with political intentions whose plots were critical of some aspects of the system of power, among them *Tívoli* (Alberto Isaac, 1974), *El Águila descalza* and *Calzonzin inspector* (Alfonso Arau, 1971, 1973) and *Llámame Mike* (Alfredo Gurrola, 1979). Some productions even dared to satirize the regime, albeit subtly, in particular *Las fuerzas vivas* (Luis Alcoriza, 1975).

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

•Humor in national cinema•



•The beginning•

Crying and laughing are the two gestures that both define and distinguish humanity independent of race, religion or geographical location. Crying moves us to solidarity and compassion; laughter enjoin us to a deeper communication and friendship.

Humor, like art and gastronomy, projects a people's character and sensibility. Mexicans' sense of humor is unique and recognized around the world: everyone is surprised by the ironic and playful tone with which we talk about Death in our famous *calaveras*, but let's not forget our very own brand of double entendre, Yucatan's *bombas*, *jarochos* verses, the signs on public buses and even headstones have a twist.

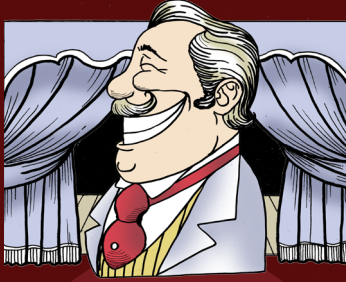
Some time ago we decided to form the Patronato del Museo Internacional del Humor, with the explicit aim of creating a space dedicated to the conservation, study, dissemination, creation and understanding of humor. We wanted to have a place of reunion where we could enhance our national self-esteem through the memory of the comedic traditions, especially our own, so optimistic and joyful as they are. We presented that proposal to Rafael Tovar y de Teresa, who by then presided over Conaculta, and even though he seemed enthusiastic about the project, he considered it must begin with an exhibition on humor in national films. We loved his idea.

Coordinated by Alejandro Pelayo, Cineteca Nacional's director, we put together a collaborative team with members of that institution and another group of specialists. In the beginning there were a great variety of ideas and proposals, analysis and discussions, but we all agreed since the beginning that we needed an exhibition that fulfilled the golden principle of culture: gather information, beauty and good humor. An exhibition that will give its visitors moments of aesthetic enjoyment, amusement and joy, but will also allow them to remember the stages of the creation of our nation through laughter.

Our visitors will judge if we managed to give them that.

Edmundo González Llaca y César Roel

•Humor in national cinema•



•With you bread and onion!•

The Evolution of Comedy in Independent Mexico

The evolution of comedy in Independent Mexico During the first decades of Independent Mexico, theatrical life was poor. Almost through the entirety of the 19th Century people preferred Spanish costumbrist dramas performed mainly by Spanish actors who spoke with a thick accent. Even if there were a few local theater writers – like Ignacio Rodríguez Galván and Manuel Eduardo de Gorostiza– who spoke about Mexican themes for the first time, the Eurocentric and classist prejudices limited the consolidation of national comedic characters and archetypes.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

• Oh, those were the times, don Simón! •



• Circus stories •

The Clown Becomes Mexican

At the beginning of the 20th Century, the circus was one of the few forums where clowns, mimes, funny jugglers and other comedic showmen could develop. In fact, in their youth many of the great idols of movie comedies in the international film industry worked first at the circus or created circus-like characters for vaudeville or variety theater: Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and W.C. Fields, for example. Several of Mexican comedic idols also began their career in the circus, among them Manuel Medel, Mario Moreno, Adalberto Martínez and Antonio Espino. The future *Cantinflas* began his career as a mime in the circus tent and even made a film in 1943 about this. Also, the travelling circus tradition is the direct antecedent of the Mexican tents in popular neighborhoods.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

•Oh, those were the times, don Simón!



•Zarzuela's country

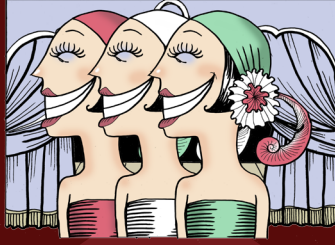
Zarzuela in Mexico

Zarzuela, the musical theater genre that is a Spanish version of the French *ópera-comique*– had great success in Mexico. With Cuban and Spanish zarzuela companies arriving in our country also came talented comedians, among them María Conesa, a comic singer who left an important mark.

During the Porfirian *Belle Époque* both *vaudeville* and variety theater were at their peak. Vaudeville is a light comedy born in France in the 18th century, sometimes picaresque, without any pretension or dramatic depth that included song, dance and comedic scenes. On the other hand, variety theater was a comedic spectacle that combined music, dance numbers, songs, theatrical scenes and comedic dialogue.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

• Oh, those were the times, don Simón! •



• Variety theatre •

The Greatness of a Small Genre

Coming from Spanish theater, variety theater in Mexico happened in sessions every hour; however, unlike its original model centered on comedic expressions of the bourgeoisie, popular types and their particular expressions dominated the stages of variety theater. During the first decades of the 20th Century, with the beginning of the Mexican revolution and the occurrences that struck the nation also had an impact on this so called small genre, and it transformed into something more than just an entertainment. It became a powerful tool for criticism against power using tools as grotesque farce, political satire and sung parody, expressions that gave voice to the people (and several times that voice was so loud that the comedian ended up in prison, as it happened on many nights to Jesús Martínez *Palillo*). In the middle of the 20th century, movies and other popular entertainments surpassed variety theater in popularity, causing its decline and eventual disappearance.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

•Oh, those were the times, don Simón!•



•Comedians of the big tent•

The Mexican Tent

“They were sheds built with worn-out wood, covered by tarp, and people sat in church like benches. The stage was so small and infinite thanks to cardboard scenery that recreated cityscapes to perfection, so recognizable for the people in attendance. These big tents were the real entertainment of the people, where the porter, the tortilla seller, the scoundrel and even a rich guy or two found abandonment and joy; people recognized the characters that filled the stage. Big tent humor was dished out in doses, through tandas that included comedians, a singer, a magic number, some trained animals and even some sleigh-of-hand. And the laughter sprung out of the clash of social archetypes (the scoundrel against the rich guy, the vagrant against the policemen), that collided frequently using language filled with double entendre (some times yellow, sometimes not) that portrayed the confrontations and fights of those years”.

Testimony given by Mrs. Leonor Peña Correa

•pioneers of Mexican comedy movies•



•Comedy in silent films in Mexico•

The *Round Trip* of Leopoldo Beristáin

Leopoldo Beristáin was the most celebrated comedic actor in the small genre in Mexico at the beginning of the 20th Century.

His characterizations of popular types –the *lépero*, the *ranchero ladino* and the *payo*, among others– gave him fame and fortune. In 1920, he portrayed one of his characters in the big screen, in the movie *Viaje redondo* (it is lost today), which is why he deserves to be considered the first comedian in Mexican film history.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

•Pioneers of Mexican comedy movies•



•Comedy in silent films in Mexico•

The Anniversary of the Death of Enhart's Mother-in-Law

When it was first exhibited, this movie was billed as “the first full length comedy in Mexico”. It was filmed during August 1912 by Salvador, Guillermo, Eduardo and Carlos Alva –best know as the Alva brothers–, pioneering cameramen in Mexican cinematography. The lead actor was clown Vicente Enhart, who by then was having success in the Teatro Lírico along with his comedic partner, Vicente Alegría.

The movie, which by no means is a full-length film (it barely totaled 20 minutes), shows the adventures of the famous clown in his race against time to both honor his recently deceased mother-in-law and also make it on time to his show at the Teatro Lírico. In the film, the comedian gets in trouble with the police, with flower vendors and even with cemetery personnel. The weight put on the comedian's personality, the frenzied rhythm of the film and the use of the city as a cosmopolitan backdrop are evidence that the directors were drawing on the influence of French producer Pathé's comedies as well as genre pioneer Max Linder.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

•Pioneers of Mexican comedy movies•



•Comedy in silent films in Mexico•

Charles Amador, *Charles Aplin*: The Fake Mexican Chaplin

Charles Amador was a Mexican comedian who began his career as an extra in Hollywood. Even though little is known about him, he eventually obtained great fame imitating the drifter walk created by Charlie Chaplin. In 1923, Amador claimed to have filmed two movies emulating the famous figure, but by 1925 he had already done several dozen films with that characterization, which is why Chaplin, tired of dealing with his imitators, took Charles Amador to court. The Mexican's defense challenged, unsuccessfully, the originality of Charles Aplin as a character, and the court decision was final: Amador had to stop acting like Aplin. After that, nothing more is known of him.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

•Te voy a hacer tus calzones...



•como los usa el ranchero•

Te los comienzo de lana ...

A rural comedy, *Allá en el rancho grande*, (1936) directed by Fernando de Fuentes, was the movie that consolidated the industrial bases of the Mexican film industry and opened up its borders. Also, this was the film that cemented this genre's conventions, which had been so successful among the Mexican audience, still very much tied to rural traditions. Rural comedy is a film genre that denied the bloody reality of the Mexican Revolution and instead offered an idyllic vision of life in the countryside; conflict was solved through sung *coplas* and the protagonists always wore their best regional dresses, in the central altiplano, the Bajío or the coast. The long tail left by *Allá en el rancho grande*, culminated with *Dos tipos de cuidado* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1952), the genre's pinnacle which brought together two of the biggest stars of *ranchero* song (Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante), and served as a the final flourish of a fantastical world that no longer resonated with an urbanized Mexico after the presidency of Miguel Alemán.

José Antonio Valdés Peña



... Te los acabo de cuero

Following an ambitious trilogy criticizing the Mexican Revolution, which included *El prisionero número 13* (1933), *El compadre Mendoza* (1933) and *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1935), director Fernando de Fuentes made *Allá en el Rancho Grande* (1936), a film that created the groundwork for rural comedies. Lorenzo Barcelata's songs, the *sarapes*, Esther Fernández's beauty, a performance of the *Jarabe tapatío* dance by none other than el *Indio* Fernández... all of it masked a fantastical vision of a country that was struggling to move forward after the Revolution. The beautiful imagery captured by Gabriel Figueroa, inspired by Mexican *escuela plástica*, gave the Mexican film industry its first international prize at the Venetia Film Festival in 1938.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

So, as one would say...



Cantinflas and other pelados

Cantinflas' *Pelado*

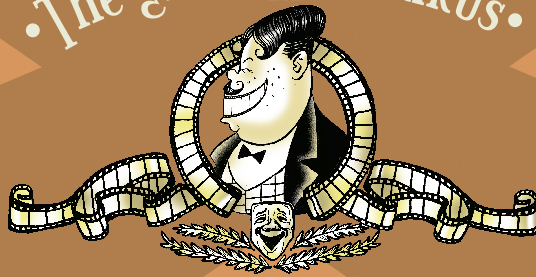
Cantinflas is a mixture of two comedic characters with a long history: the town talker, often not making much sense (a character that comes from Spanish picaresque), and the national *pelado* (that comes from the class system in New Spain). It is a direct descendant of the Periquillo Sarniento, the talkative hero of the first Mexican novel, written by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi in 1816, and of Chupamirto, a drunkard who dressed in shirt, sagging pants, sash and cap, and who was the main character in comic strip printed in 1927 in the *El Universal* newspaper, created by J. Collantes and the cartoonist Jesús Acosta. Several other comedians got their inspiration from this *pelado*, among them José Muñoz Reyes, Mario García and Amelia Wilhelmy *la Willy*. None of them, however, had as much success as Mario Moreno had with his Cantinflas.

Some testimonies say that Cantinflas way of speaking came from a real person, likeable and incoherent; as for the name, Mario Moreno himself once said that it came from a spectator who shouted mocking his way of speaking “¿cuanto inflas?” [slang for “how much do you drink?”].

Cantinflas, in essence, is the man who has been stripped of everything and defends himself with his few resources: his wit and his mastery of popular rhetoric.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

•The great Makakikus•



•Joaquín Pardavé•

Porfirian Nostalgia, Émigrés and Family Melodrama

Joaquín Pardavé (1900-1955) was a man of many facets: actor in several registers –although comedy was his favorite– filmmaker, scriptwriter, producer, composer and singer. Son of Spanish actors, he started in variety theater and soon jumped into movies along with Cuatezón Beristaín in the movie *Viaje Redondo* (1919), a comedy that made him famous.

Pardavé's movies move along three lines: nostalgia for Porfirian times, upholding Porfirian high-class virtues, personified by one of his most famous characters: gentleman don Susanito Peñafiel y Somellera, lead actor of *México de mis recuerdos* (Juan Bustillo Oro, 1943), crowning jewel in this respect. The second thematic line took him closer to family melodrama, with films like *La familia Pérez* (Gilberto Martínez Solares, 1948) or *Gendarme de punto* (Joaquín Pardavé, 1950), films where he portrayed kindly men, victims of ungrateful kin. Finally, we have movies where he portrayed immigrants and exiled persons to Mexico, a subject matter he centered around the Lebanese and Spanish communities with movies like *El baisano Jalil* (1942) and *Los hijos de don Venancio* (1994), *dramedies* that talk about the need of maintaining an identity in a foreign country.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

•Your pachucote is here!•



How do you say window in English?

Tin Tan

Germán Genaro Cipriano Valdés Castillo was born in Mexico City in 1915, but moved to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua in 1932; there he came in contact with U.S. popular culture. His career as comedic actor was atypical by national standards, since he did not start in big tent shows, in variety shows, nor as a radio dj. In his programs he alternated between jokes, sardonic commentary, songs and parodies of famous people.. There he consolidated his *pachuco* character, called *Topillo Tapas*. Germán Valdez was a natural crooner, and well-rounded showman who knew how to act, sing, dance and perform comedic sketches. Along with his friend, Marcelo Chávez, known artistically as the Carnal Marcelo, he staged a highly successful song and comedy show.

Germán Valdez began his movie career with a short film called *El que la traga, la paga* (Paco Miller, 1943), and later on he had some musical participation in movies such as *Hotel de verano* (René Cardona, 1944). Later, director Gilberto Martínez Solares offered him the leading role in the movie *El hijo desobediente* (1945). After the success that *Calabacitas tiernas* (Gilberto Martínez Solares, 1949) had, *Tin Tan* became, along with *Cantinflas*, the most popular comedian in México.

It is worth nothing that *Tin Tan* did not typecast himself; after a time, he let go of the *pachuco* outfit and portrayed a wide variety of charming and playful characters.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



Piporro

Eulalio González was born in Nuevo León in 1921. He began his career as a radio dj in a Monterrey radio station, and by the middle of the 1940s he moved to Mexico City to work as an actor in radio dramas for XEW station. In a radio drama aired in XEQ, starring Pedro Infante and called *Ahí viene Martín Corona*, Eulalio played the part of a man from the North of Mexico called el *Piporro*. Thanks to that role, Eulalio became famous and from then on, with help from Pedro Infante, he jumped to variety theater and then the movies.

His character, *Piporro*, despite his permanent contact with a steamrolling U.S. culture, remained faithful to his roots. It was a sort of counterpoint to the transcultural pachuco.

Eulalio González was also a good composer and an extraordinary comedic singer. Among his movies, it is worth mentioning *Necesito dinero* (Miguel Zacarías, 1952), *Ahí vienen los gorriones* (Gilberto Martínez Solares, 1953), and *Espaldas mojadas* (Alejandro Galindo, 1955). He had numerous musical hits, including songs such as *El taconazo*, *El Corrido de Agustín Jaime* and *El ojo de vidrio*.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



The Joke of the Fierce Women

In macho culture, a strong and domineering woman is a brave, radical and heroic figure (as well as being endearing and frightful). In patriarchal logic, a woman who fights for her rights is portrayed frequently as an anti-natural phenomenon, as a failure of society. In *La liga de las muchachas*, Consuelo Guerrero de Luna and Magda Donato lead a female cast set upon rejecting men because they “are good for nothing”.

For macho culture, a man who allows himself to be dominated by his wife –a *mandilón*– is laughable, while the woman who assumes macho codes and canons to crush men –who in turn do everything in their power to oppress her– is fierce and a never ending source of comedic situations. In the cultural codes of Mexican humor, fierce women, bosses, manly matriarchs and “the true *machas*” are one of the few comedic archetypes that have a longstanding tradition in national literature and film. Such is the case of Sara García –with her gun on her belt, her baton and her cigar– in *Los tres García*, and in *Los tres huastecos*; or of Niní Marshall in *Mi campeón*, or Lola Beltrán in *Los líos de Barba Azul*, among others.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



La liga de las muchachas

In the Mexican chauvinism, women occupy a secondary role and are severely limited by the clearly defined social roles they are supposed to enact. During the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, certain feminine archetypes took hold that are still being used today: the faithful girlfriend, the doting mother, the ideal wife, the matriarch, the matron, the parrot, the spinster, the *china*, the *adelita*, the *soldadera*, the desirable woman, the lost woman, and the femme fatal (the one who enjoys her sexuality freely). Since the beginning, Mexican films used all of these archetypes and portrayed them in its productions, from *Santa* (Antonio Moreno, 1932), to *El derecho de nacer* (Zacarías Gómez, 1952).

In this misogynist, limited and oppressive environment –one that puts value on beauty and little else–, women comedians had to carve out a place for them through talent, intelligence, perseverance and insolence.

Great female comedians have appeared in national films: Amelia Wilhelmy and Delia Magaña (*La Guayaba y la Tostada*), Dolores Camarillo Fraustita, Fannie Kaufman Vitola, Consuelo Guerrero de Luna, Blanca de Castejón, Carmen Salinas and María Elena Velasco *la India María*. Also, several other character actresses like Sara García and Prudencia Griffel, and other divas, such as Silvia Pinal, Amalia Aguilar or Ninón Sevilla, who also played superb comedic roles. All of them broke the mold on what a well-behaved woman should be, and thanks to that, they brought joy to many.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

•Eyes that dance and listen•



•Music, maestro!•

Comedians and Songs

Mexican music is extremely diverse and it picks up on European, African and indigenous traditions. Mexican song has a long history dating back to Colonial times. During the 19th Century, national composers promoted their work through concerts, printed music sheets and especially, oral tradition, and in the 20th Century, Mexican songs have become popular through radio, records, movies and television.

Since the beginning of sound films, producers have relied on the music industry, and thus many Mexican movies took advantage of certain song's popularity to guarantee their commercial success; some movies even share a title with musical pieces, and several of the most memorable scenes in national films are those in which the lead, a supporting actor or a guest breaks out in song.

The humorous song repertoire in Mexican films is diverse and heterogeneous, and it uses popular and traditional *sones* to classical music and international hit songs.

In Post-Revolutionary Mexico there was an upsurge of songs with composers such as Alfonso Esparza Oteo, Tata Nacho, Joaquín Pardavé, Agustín Lara, Luis Arcaraz, Francisco Gabilondo Soler *Cri Cri* and Salvador *Chava* Flores. Since the movie industry was a hub for talent, practically every one of these musicians had a part in it, directly or indirectly, composing funny songs for movies.

Many actors were also accomplished singers, and they knew how to make their interpretations have a humorous edge. That way, many comedians – *Tin Tan*, Pedro Infante, *el Piporro*, Óscar Pulido, Manolín and Schilinsky, to name a few – left a mark in the silver screen with some of memorable music pieces that were not only performed great but also great films were made.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



I'm Not Bragging... But What Does It Matter What I Think Against What the Mirror Says...

The complement and counterpoint to the *pelado* is the *señorito*. While the *peladito* has been stripped of everything, the rich kid is born to everything. That character is also part of the cultural legacy of Spain. The dictionary defines the *señorito* as the “son of a man of importance”, and as “a young man of leisure”. According to the classical archetype, this is the useless heir of an wealthy (or middle class) family, or a descendant of a gentleman that has lost all notion of nobility; he has some education but despises work; he is a pariah who feels he deserves everything: social standing, wealth and love.

In New Spain these arrogant young men were known for their adventures. Also, these rich kids were all over Mexican literature of the 19th and cartoons of the 20th century, all idle and overbearing in all their variations: the *catrín*, the *pollo*, the *conquistador*, the *petimetre*, the *botarate*, the *estirado*, the *lagartijo*, the *rotito*, the *calavera*, the *junior*, the *chavo de la Ibero*, etc. The *señorito* has a lot of narcissism and in essence, is a character that is equal parts odious as well as humorous. When he loses his social standing and falls from grace he becomes a great comical character; in fact one of the first characters of national literature is the main character of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's *Don Catrín de la Fachenda*.

National films also used this archetype and many comedians developed variants of these high-class pariahs: from the *calavera* by Fernando Soler to the greatly narcissistic gigolo of Mauricio Garcés. Luis Buñuel takes up the rich kid who falls from grace theme in his movie *El gran calavera* (1949), y by Gary Alzraki in *Nosotros los Nobles* (2013), among others..

• Eyes that dance and listen. •



• Baile, mi rey •

*“Resortes Resortin de la Resorterera
at Your Service Wherever...”*

Among the greatest dancer that worked in the national film industry one has to highlight Adalberto Martínez *Resortes*. Adalberto was born in the crowded neighborhood of Tepito in 1916. He began in circus at 15 and soon started working in the big tent. He had a comic streak and great talent for dance. He frequented the dance halls and obviously always made a splash. Along with his friend Juan Flores, he created a tap duet called *Los Espontáneos*. In 1939, he staged at the Teatro Apolo his own spectacle called Pachuco’s Review, with which he had enormous success; in 1943 he was hired to work in a special presentation at the Teatro Follies; his movie debut was playing one of the stellar roles in *Voces de primavera* (Jaime Salvador, 1946). In his filmography one sees films such as *Al son del mambo* (Chano Urueta, 1950), *¡Baile, mi rey!* (Roberto Rodríguez, 1951), *El beisbolita fenómeno* (Fernando Cortés, 1951), *Rumba caliente* (Gilberto Martínez Solares, 1952), and *El rey de México* (Rafael Baledón, 1956).

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

• Eyes that dance and listen. •



• Baile, mi rey •

The *Relajo* of Rumberas

The Mexican film industry congregated a considerable amount of talent from all over Latin America and the Caribbean. Musicians such as Dámaso Pérez Pardo and tropical dancers like María Antonieta Pons, Ninón Sevilla and Amalia Aguilar were among the stars that arrived from Cuba.

During the regime of president Aleman –a time when Mexico City consolidated itself as a cosmopolitan metropolis, during the Movie industry’s Golden Years– rumbera films boomed. Those were movies that, in an exotic environment developed dark themes, typical of noir cinema with a touch of social melodrama. These films were peppered with fun tropical dance numbers were the voluptuous vedettes showed off. This *relajo* of all the dancers who shook to the rhythms of mambo, chachachá or rumba was the crucial counterpoint to the dark and melodramatic plotlines of rumbera movies.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



Black Comedies

Black comedy plays on cruel and brutal situations: death, murder, kidnapping, catastrophe, plagues, genocide, war, torture, mutilation, terminal illnesses and other horrors.

In México, black comedy has been a staple mood since Colonial times, however it was during war time –during the many conflicts of the 19th Century as well as the Mexican Revolution–, that it was pursued systematically through songs, *corridos*, jokes and a lengthy and sinister compendium of anecdotes.

Mexican movies pick up on the tradition of national black comedy and many of our movies include scenes that seek to make people laugh through the most sinister of situations. In the final sequence of *A toda máquina* (Ismael Rodríguez, 1951), after an motorcycle accident, *frenemies* played by Pedro Infante and Luis Aguilar are transported to a hospital in an ambulance. Pedro has a severe injury in his stomach and when he is asked: “Does it hurt?”, he responds stoically: “Only when I laugh”. “So”, says Luis: “then let me tell you some jokes”.

Some of the greatest productions in our national film history are masterpieces of black comedy: *El esqueleto de la señora Morales* (Rogelio A. González, 1960), *Los cuervos están de luto* (Francisco del Villar, 1965); *Mecánica nacional* (Luis Alcoriza, 1971), *Llámame Mike* (Alfredo Gurrola, 1979) and *Un mundo maravilloso* (Luis Estrada, 2006).

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)



The Smile of the Unconscious

André Breton and his colleagues discovered that humor was a liberating tool that challenged norms and broke off conventional relations with the world. Following on Freud's footsteps, surrealists experimented with the connections between laughter and the unconscious, and they played with the free association of ideas (as incongruous as these could seem at first glance), with logical accidents, with nonsense, verbal errors, and the exploration of dreams, random actions and irrational juxtapositions. These twists are ever present in Buñuel's Mexican films.

One must not confuse humor through the absurd with surreal humor: they are different phenomena, although they have some points of contact..

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

•The Exterminating Angel•



•Surreal humor•

Luis Buñuel's Humor

Being one of the most important filmmakers in history does not mean one has to forego humor. In twenty full length films by Buñuel in México between 1946 and 1965, there are some of the highest expressions of humor in national film history; scenes in which the roots of the Spanish filmmaker, his ties with Surrealism and his astonishment with a country as fantastical as ours all came together. Thus, a *pastorela* like the one in *La ilusión viaja en tranvía* (1953) acquires epic magnitude in its primitive recreation of the fight between good and evil. In *Subida al cielo* (1951), a trip by bus through the jungle transforms into an erotic dream personified by Lilia Prado. In *Ensayo de un crimen* (1955), the buñuelean humor is much more subversive in the sequence in which Archibaldo de la Cruz has his way with Miroslava and the mannequin at the same time. In *Nazarín* (1958) it turns sacrilegious in a scene in which a suffering Christ starts having a fit of laughter. Finally, before beginning his international career, Buñuel gave the Devil the beauty of Silvia Pinal in *Simon del desierto* (1964), a chronicle of a saint that is dragged unrelentingly to his own hell by his own demons.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

What time is it?



Between Satire and Censorship

Comedy, since the times of the great Molière, has been a filter for expressing opinions about the reality around us. And in political farce, staged in big tents, vaudeville and in films, audiences found a way of criticizing and mocking the political class and rulers of their time. As for its filmic expression, political comedy can express itself according to the censoring or permissive disposition of the moment. There are important examples like *El brazo fuerte* (Giovanni Korporaal, 1958), a satire in which a mediocre bureaucrat is mistaken for a powerful politician; *Calzonzin inspector* (Alfonso Arau, 1973), a farce that came out of Ruis's political humor; *Tivoli* (Alberto Isaac, 1974) a film that mocks the corruption of local government which represses nightlife while looking for a moral renovation, and *La ley de Herodes* (Luis Estrada, 1999), a movie that debuted right at the moment of a historic change in our country's democracy and that is keen in criticizing a dying political system's corruption. As was said before, many of these movies suffered from censorship and its very existence turned them into a crucial part of the long struggle for total freedom of expression in our country.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

• From movies to the TV and back to the movies. •



• I saw you on TV. •

Comedy in the Comfort of Your Own Home

Television in Mexico came into the home at the beginning of the 1950s. One of the most important tools in the conquest of that new species called the TV viewer was humor.

At the end of the 1960, some comedic serials have had an enormous impact: *Los Beverly de Peralvillo* reproduced plentiful urban settings that the viewing public identified with; *Hogar, dulce hogar*, was a middle class favorite; *Los Polivoces* and *Chucherías* were betting on social satire; *Ensalda de locos* was the pinnacle of a delirious and anarchic humor, and *La carabina de Ambrosio* was almost a comic review. On the other hand, *El Chavo del Ocho* conquered Spanish-speaking America with its innocent humor in which children triumphed in a world of adults. Nothing could have been possible without the talent of figures such as Sergio Corona, Luz María Aguilar, Chucho Salinas, Manuel “el Loco” Valdés, Héctor Lechuga, César Costa, Leonorilda Ochoa, Guillermo Rivas *el Borrás* and Roberto Gómez Bolaños *Chespirito*, among many other actors who, thanks to the magic of videotape are still coming into our homes.

José Antonio Valdés Peña

• A tequila, please, •



• before fists start flying •

Since the consolidation of the nation's film industry (during the third decade of the 20th Century), our movies have been one of the main platforms for comedic culture in México. During the Mexican film industry's Golden Years (*la época de oro*) in particular, a great number of humorous movies produced garnered mass public acclaim both locally and internationally and are now an important part of our cultural heritage.

Mexican cinema enthroned humorists such as Mario Moreno *Cantinflas*, Germán Valdés *Tin Tan*, Joaquín Pardavé and Manuel Medel, among many others. The big screen popularized some lovable archetypes such as the *payo de rancho*, the *peladito dislógico*, the *lépero*, the *lagartijo*, the *hijo de papi*, the *pachuco*, the transcultural immigrant and the *mujer broncada*. Movies such as *Ahí está el detalle* (Juan Bustillo Oro, 1940), *El gran calavera* (Luis Buñuel, 1949) or *El esqueleto de la señora Morales* (Rogelio A. González, 1960) are considered classics of our national film history. Few other cultural products need the joint effort of so many talents as moviemaking does. In order to create scenes that make viewers laugh, producers, scriptwriters, actors, stage designers, technicians, directors, camerapersons and others must all work together. The success of national comedic films would be unthinkable without the participation of a whole troupe of supporting comedians as talented as Fernando Soto *Mantequilla*, Fannie Kaufman *Vitola*, Óscar Pulido, Armando Soto la Marina *el Chicote*, Carlos López *Chaflán*, Héctor Ortega, Rafael Inclán... the list goes on.

This abundance of collective talent would not be possible would not have existed without the comedic culture that runs deep in Mexican society, dating back to Colonial times and which also has strong ties to the Spanish *Siglo de Oro* literature and picaresque narratives.

This exhibition pays homage to national comedy films and, specially, to its great protagonists.

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)

• Eyes that dance and listen. •



• Music, maestro! •

En la esquina de mi barrio... Chava Flores

In Mexico's comedic song repertoire for the 20th century, Salvador *Chava* Flores songs are front and center, an urban chronicler of the first degree. He was born in the traditional neighborhood of La Merced in 1920, and Chava began his career as a self-taught composer.

At the beginning of the 1950s he scored his first successes with songs like *Dos horas de balazos* and *La tertulia*. *Tin Tan*, Pedro Infante and Manolín, among others, played his songs in films, and Salvador even had a role in movies like *En la esquina de mi barrio* (Fernando Méndez, 1957), *Rebelde sin casa* (Benito Alzraki, 1960), and *¿A qué le tiras cuando sueñas mexicano?* (Arturo Martínez, 1979).

Rafael Barajas (*el Fisgón*)