

A witness to almost the entire twentieth century, Gilberto Martínez Solares represents an exceptional case in Mexican cinema. Self-taught, he started out as a studio photographer in the late 1920s, before entering the realm of cinematography. From 1938 and until the end of his life, he devoted himself to scriptwriting and directing films. He was prolific and eclectic in his work, and experienced every stage of Mexican cinema: from its dawn to its later development, boom, crisis, and rebirth. Martínez Solares also explored every cinematographic genre and brought to the screen everything from classic works of universal literature to popular comics. His film career can be divided into various stages. The first consists of the musical comedies featuring Mapy Cortés, elevating her to the “first Mexican movie star” status, through blockbuster films such as *Internado para señoritas*, *Yo bailé con Don Porfirio* and *El globo de Cantolla*—proving an unprecedented success, with audiences applauding at the end of each screening.

His second period comprised a number of urban comedies, melodramas, and dramas, all notable for their strong scripts, outstanding casts, and high production values. In the third phase, beginning in the late 1940s, Martínez Solares first directed Germán Valdés *Tin Tan*, freeing him from typecast “pachuco” roles and turning him into a mischievous, fun-loving, and endearing, urban antihero who made an instant rapport with the public. This successful pairing would change the course of the comedy genre in Mexico. His fourth period corresponds to Martínez Solares’s films made in the 1960s and 70s, which starred the most popular characters of the time: *Blue Demon*, *El Santo*, *Capulina*, *La India María*, and Juan Gabriel. The final stage of his career included action pictures and the so-called sexy comedies, as a co-director with his son Adolfo.

Martínez Solares’ films were never ignored by critics, who praised and slated them with equal vigor, eventually coming to regard *Calabacitas tiernas*, *El Rey del barrio*, *El ceniciento*, *El globo de Cantolla* and *Yo bailé con Don Porfirio* among the top-100 films in the history of Mexican cinema.

Like a film, an exhibition is the result of a joint effort and yearning, which in this case required extra determination given the challenge caused by Covid-19 pandemic. It was only possible thanks to the generous support of several institutions’ directors, archivists, private collectors, colleagues, and friends. We are grateful to them all. In particular, we would like to thank Malú Martínez Cantú, Adolfo Martínez Solares, and family, for their trust; also, to my dear friend Roberto Fiesco, for the loaning of 100 works from his private collection. The exhibition team dedicates the exhibition of “El ingenio foto fílmico de Gilberto Martínez Solares: 70 años de creación” to the memory of Pablo Marentes Martínez, grandson of Don Gilberto, and a very dear friend, who always supported this project, that is a sincere tribute, as well as an attempt to settle a debt of appreciation of this extraordinary photographer and cineaste.

**Elisa Lozano, December 2020**

## **Gilberto Martínez Solares in the Orbit of Mexican Film Production**

Mario Gilberto Martínez Solares (19 January 1906 – Mexico City – 18 January 1997) studied primary school alongside Roberto and Gabriel, Figueroa Mateos, and Alejandro Galindo. In 1919, he enrolled at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, in Mexico City's historic downtown); in time, several of his fellow pupils such as Miguel Alemán Valdés, Renato Leduc, Salvador Novo, and Xavier Villaurrutia went on to become leading political and cultural figures in Mexico.

In 1925, he started studying law at the Escuela Nacional de Jurisprudencia, and one year later, while still enrolled there, he took some courses at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes. However, a heart problem forced him to abandon his university studies, and to travel to Los Angeles, California, where he was diagnosed with a heart murmur.

At around that time, together with his brother Raúl, and Gabriel Figueroa, young Gilberto set up a photographic studio in central Mexico City, on the Avenida de los Hombres Ilustres (now called Hidalgo).

Shortly afterwards, he travelled to Hollywood in the hope of working as a photographer. When this attempt failed, he became an extra, and met future colleagues such as René Cardona André, Emilio *Indio* Fernández, Chano Urueta, and Ramón Pereda, which gave him the opportunity to observe the work of several directors in the Mecca of cinema, and to learn about photographic and lighting techniques. In 1931, Martínez Solares returned to Mexico, to resume his work at the photographic studio, and on November 12, he married Diana Cantú Garza, who became his lifelong partner. The couple went on honeymoon to Paris; once there, they decided to stay and live there for almost a year. In the City of Light, Gilberto set up a photographic studio, which helped him further his knowledge of lighting techniques, framing, and retouching images, with the art of movie star portraying in Hollywood as his standard.

During that period in Paris, he saw the superb films of René Clair *in situ*—works that strongly influenced his later comedies.

After taking stills for several films produced after 1935, Martínez Solares made his filmmaking debut on *El señor alcalde* (1938) and between that date and 1996, he directed a total of 150 movies, in addition to a further five as co-director, four of which alongside his son Adolfo Martínez Solares Cantú; his average of three films per year makes him the most prolific Mexican filmmaker in the industry. Of all these movies, Gilberto Martínez Solares produced fifteen, and co-produced one. It is worth noting here that his brothers Agustín and Raúl worked on 158 and 278 films respectively as cinematographers, several of which were directed by Gilberto.

Between 1943 and 1956, Gilberto Martínez Solares worked on thirteen productions as the exclusive director for CLASA, a renowned film studio in which the celebrated Germán Valdés Tin Tan began his career as an actor. He also worked for producers such as Felipe Mier and Óscar J. Brooks; he directed a number of films for Producciones Zacarías starring Gaspar Henaine Capulina, known as “The Champion of Family Humor” for his childish type of wit. His films for producer Jesús Grovas featured Antonio Espino Clavillazo, another popular comic actor.

In August 1978—in collaboration with his son Adolfo, Santos Soberón Salgueiro, and his son, Alejandro Soberón Kuri—Gilberto Martínez Solares helped set up Frontera Films, S.A., a company for which he directed successful comedies with a series of typical urban characters.

**Rosario Vidal Bonifaz**

## More than a Photographer of Chic Ladies

“Gilberto Martínez Solares is Mexico’s most elegant photographer,” wrote the poet Efraín Huerta in the early 1940s. He was right. By then, he had already accumulated two decades of experience, having started out in his adolescence as an assistant photographer on commercial shoots. There, he learned how to develop and print photographs, retouching techniques, and the fundamental importance of light, and its power to transform a face, and to recreate atmospheres. His brothers, Agustín and Raúl, accompanied him on this learning journey, as did Gabriel Figueroa, his childhood friend and close confidant that shared his aesthetic leanings. They shared both talent and passion for the still image, which soon made them stand out: the photographic studio’s owner transferred the business to the two friends before they had even turned 20 years old.

Unfortunately, the business folded. Gilberto headed to the United States, establishing himself in a glamorous Hollywood, where he started out as a film extra. In later years he recalled: “I had access to all of the important movies that were being made, I had the good fortune to work with Greta Garbo; I learned cinematographic and lighting techniques with Erich von Stroheim. Those were happy times.”

He formed a friendship with other young people who were starting out on their careers: Lupita Tovar and Canadian cinematographer and photographer Alex Phillips, under whose influence Martínez Solares probably became familiar with the works of Edward Steichen and George Hurrell, the latter working as a photographer for Metro Goldwyn Mayer at the time.

Alas, the Great Depression forced young Gilberto to return to Mexico. Supported by Amalia González Caballero de Castillo Ledón, he opened Foto Estudio Martínez Solares at Madero 43—an ideal location for its strong tradition as a center for photographers, as well as for elegant boutiques and stores.

After 1932, Gilberto began to work with portraiture and quickly earned a good reputation. He was feted by important figures from the world of theater and film, literature and contemporary dance, and was also popular among high-society women and families. He began to receive commissions to create advertisements for beauty products, using gorgeous film actresses as his models, targeting female motion pictures’ fans. He was at the cutting edge of fashion; ultimately, this was instrumental in the success of a film.

He was aware of the aesthetic trends of the time. Upon starting out, he flirted with pictorialism; so, his advertising images have hints of Edward Steichen, and his portraits show a strong element of the dramatic lighting found in George Hurrell’s work. Eventually, he created his own style, notable for his understated, balanced compositions revealing a certain sensuality and a careful attention to the poses, wardrobe, and make-up of his models.

The publication of Martínez Solares’ photographs in the most widely-circulated illustrated magazines helped gain him fame as “the photographer of chic ladies.” Nevertheless, he remained practically ignored in the annals of Mexican photography. In order to settle this long-outstanding debt, at least in part, we have a hundred of his images, up until now scattered across public archives and private collections, brought together for the first time in the Museo del Estanquillo, symbolically located a stone’s throw from his former studio.

## Literary Inspirations in the Work of Gilberto Martínez Solares

During an interview he gave as a veteran of Mexico's film industry, Gilberto Martínez Solares recalled: "[...] I liked reading and writing ever since I was a child; fortunately, I had excellent teachers who encouraged me, and told me I had a talent for it. This education provided the basis for my later interest in film. Even when I was a photographer, I considered much of my work to be bad or mediocre [from a dramatic perspective] [...] But that critical attitude gives you the drive to be someone who does things [...]."

Solid literary foundations, obtained in the classrooms of the different schools he attended as a child and a teenager, proved instrumental for Martínez Solares to gain familiarity with the dramatic potential of the cinematographic script, something that would enable him to undertake the film adaptation of several novels, stories, and plays, mostly with creative results and commercial success, starting with *El señor alcalde* (1938), his first work, a version of *El alcalde de Lagos*, a costumbrista novel by Jorge Ferretis from San Luis Potosí.

During the Golden Age of Mexican cinema and its corresponding raids on European and South American literature, Martínez Solares was one of the filmmakers of new literary adaptations that helped him consolidate a straightforward narrative style. Prime examples of such works include *La casa del rencor* (1941), an amalgamation of Emily Brönte's *Wuthering Heights* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*; *Resurrección* (1943), inspired by Leo Tostoy; and *La trepadora* (1944), a version of the homonymous novel by Rómulo Gallegos. And of course, during the numerically glorious period of his impressive filmmaking career, in other words between 1953 and 1964, Don Gilberto Martínez Solares continued showing signs of his interest in bringing literature to the screens with such varied productions as *Mulata* (1953); *El vizconde de Montecristo* (1954), the uproarious parody based on Alexandre Dumas's original; *Escuela para suegras* (1956); *Vuelta al paraíso* (1959); *Las Leandras* (1960); and *Marcelo y María* (1964), an adaptation for a Mexican audience of the bucolic novel *Daphnis and Chloe*, by the Greek author Longus, who wrote in the 2nd century AD.

**Eduardo de la Vega**

## Music, Mirth, and Mapy: Gilberto Martínez Solares's Musical Comedies

Between 1942 and 1943, Gilberto Martínez Solares directed four romantic-musical comedies that defined an era: *Las cinco noches de Adán*, *Yo bailé con don Porfirio*, *Internado para señoritas* and *El globo de Cantolla*. In each of them, the female lead was Mapy Cortés, a Puerto Rican actress and vedette who arrived in Mexico at the start of that decade.

Audiences of all ages enjoyed the refreshing, upbeat stories. The excellent casts, splendid settings, and musical numbers by the best Mexican and foreign talents helped make these productions hugely successful, locally and abroad.

Mapy, the female star, was already famous as a dancer and a soprano in zarzuelas before coming to Mexico. Martínez Solares saw something in the actress that set her apart: the distinctive ambivalence of the movie star. Mapy was both naïve and naughty; innocent, but sensual; cheerful, yet whimsical. Showing great vision, he decided to turn her into the top-billing young star of the time.

The filmmaker successfully merged both facets of the artist into a single story. In theory, it sounds odd that an actress can interpret a young woman who is both a starlet and the daughter to a good family; a vaudeville artist and an unassuming debutante in the Porfirian era society; a well-bred girl and a seasoned conga dancer; all of that in a conservative Mexican society, and without having to lead a double life. In her roles in Mexican movies, Mapy achieved all this with great success. Martínez Solares created a star that Hollywood tried, but failed, to steal from Mexican cinema.

*Un beso en la noche* (1944), a comedy with a psychoanalytical angle, marked the end of the collaboration between the filmmaker and the actress.

**Xochitl Fernández**

## ***Su última aventura* and the Era of Sophisticated Comedies**

The Mexican film industry, booming in the mid 1940s -due in part to its paradoxically benefitting from World War II-, brought in foreign personalities that strongly enhanced its cosmopolitan feel. This turned our film industry into the most important one in the Spanish-speaking world, which ended up dominating the vast number of movie theaters across South America, considered the “natural market” of Mexican film.

Casts of Mexican films —and its Mount Olympus of movie stars— were enhanced by actors from Spain, Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and a long etcetera. In fact, many of them built their entire careers in Mexico. This was not the case, however, with most of the Argentinean actors who arrived in Mexico in the mid 1950s. Almost all of them had outstanding artistic backgrounds in their homeland, and arrived in Mexico during a crucially important period in their country’s political history: the rise of Peronism. Some of them left Argentina due to their political dissent, while others came over as goodwill ambassadors of the new regime, rivaling in number the host of exiled Spanish actors who came to Mexico since 1939.

The popular Argentinean actor Luis Sandrini arrived in Mexico accompanied by a prestigious couple of scriptwriters: Sixto Pondal Ríos and Carlos A. Olivari, who had not only succeeded at the box office in their home country, but had also created the version of *Los martes, orquídeas* (Francisco Mújica, 1941), bought by Hollywood and turned into a vehicle for Rita Hayworth and Fred Astaire (*You Were Never Lovelier*, William A. Seiter, 1942).

Carrying such prestigious letters of introduction, they were hired with the highest salary every paid by the Mexican film industry for a script, none other than the Mexican version of the script of *Persona honrada se necesita* (Mújica, 1941), renamed *Su última aventura*—strictly speaking, the first remake produced in Mexico—directed by Martínez Solares in 1946 for Producciones Mercurio, a visionary company that also produced Roberto Gavaldón’s *La otra*, practically at the same time, before going defunct.

After trying out various genres, Martínez Solares found that sophisticated comedies were the perfect vehicle to show the Mexico that the incoming Miguel Alemán administration was keen to promote: a prosperous country for the middle and upper classes, which had swapped ranchera music for international rhythms such as the *bolero* and the *samba*; the urban modernism of Mexico City, with the Paseo de la Reforma as its emblem, an avenue that could lead to mansions in the Colonial Californiano style, in the upscale Polanco neighborhood, with their lavish stairways, libraries, reception rooms, and boudoirs. Those stylish properties provided the setting for the last adventure of a kind-hearted gangster (Arturo de Córdova) and his naïve secretary (Esther Fernández), for whom poverty is synonymous with honorability and decency.

The internationalist and sumptuous style of this movie was continued with *Cinco rostros de mujer* (1947), a melodrama once again adapted by Pondal and Olivari, and with De Córdova topping a cast composed mainly by foreign actresses: Pepita Serrador, Ana María Campoy, Miroslava, and Tita Merello, Sandrini’s romantic partner, awarded with the Ariel for her only film role in this country. The Academia Mexicana de Artes y Ciencias Cinematográficas nominated *Cinco rostros de mujer* for Best Picture; it would be the only time that Martínez Solares’ work was put forward for such prizes, before being enshrined in the popular imaginary thanks to the hilarious comedies starring *Tin Tan*.

## When Mirth Turns Pink: Divas in the Golden Age of Martínez Solares

During the 1950s, at the conclusion of the Mexican Miracle period ushered in by president Miguel Alemán, Mexican cinema entered a downward spiral, as evidenced mainly by the wearing out of genres and characters that had risen in the so-called Golden Age of the industry. However, Gilberto Martínez Solares, a sharp director, saw the opportunity to continue his career's upward trajectory: "I have come to believe that the film industry is not in crisis [...]. Despite the financial difficulties, audiences like to go to the movies to forget their troubles, even if only momentarily."

During this period, apart from his films starring Germán Valdés *Tin Tan* (an average of two per year) and other comic actors such as Adalberto Martínez *Resortes*, Antonio Espino *Clavillazo*, and Gaspar Henaine *Capulina*, Martínez Solares also worked on many projects where female stars had the first credits: in musical comedies, one of his favorite genres, he filmed *Mi querido capitán* (1950), with Rosita Quintana. With Ninón Sevilla he made *Mulata* (1953), the director's belated incursion into the *rumbera* genre, and *Club de señoritas* (1955), an amusing film about two of the burning issues of that time: women's right to vote and the burgeoning of television.

Gorgeous Ana Bertha Lepe, who came fourth in the 1953 edition of Miss Universe, starred in the following musical comedies: *Ahí vienen los gorriones* (1952), inspired by a Chava Flores song; *Contigo a la distancia* (1954), "based on a beautiful melody in vogue" by Cuban song-writer César Portillo; *Qué lindo chachachá* (also from 1954) and *La feria de San Marcos* (1957), in which her co-stars were singers Miguel Aceves Mejía, Pedro Vargas, and José Alfredo Jiménez. The actress, born in the Mexican State of Jalisco, also interpreted a rural hero in *El tesoro de Chucho el Roto* (1959) and appears alongside *Tin Tan* in three comedies: *El vizconde de Montecristo* (1954), *Lo que le pasó a Sansón* (1955), and *Paso a la juventud* (1957).

At the end of the decade, the sensual Lilia Prado topped the bill in three expensive tropical melodramas inspired by Hollywood: *Besos de arena* (1957), *Kermesse* (1958), and *Vuelta al paraíso* (1959), filmed in color, in natural settings.

Martínez Solares' fame is inextricably linked with Germán Valdés *Tin Tan*, but during his prolific career he made some other very good comedies, and embarked on other genres supported by the strong personality of Ninón Sevilla, the sensuality of Lilia Prado, and the classical Mexican beauty of Ana Bertha Lepe, just to mention a few of the many female talents with whom he continued to crowd the movie theatres.

## Gilberto and Germán

Two words define Germán Genaro Cipriano Gómez Valdés Castillo, popularly known as *Tin Tan*: unique and exceptional. He was a personage of incalculable popular impact, and cultural richness. He always was ahead of this time, by habitually using Spanglish, and making fun of himself and of cinema, the medium that launched him to stardom and ended up devouring him.

He was accompanied on his journey by very close people, such as his mother Guadalupe Castillo; Pedro Meneses, his boss at the XEJ radio station in Ciudad Juárez; the ventriloquist and impresario Paco Miller, and his half-brother Jorge Maulmer. The latter two gave him his artistic name: *Tin Tan*. Other important people in his life were his “carnal”—or blood brother—Marcelo Chávez, and Humberto Gómez Landero, who directed his first five films, starting with *El hijo desobediente* (1945). And of course, Gilberto Martínez Solares, a filmmaker with a great talent for comedy, who first directed him in *Calabacitas tiernas* in 1948. Last but not least, his long list of collaborators included the exceptional dialogue writer, Juan García *El Peralvillo*, and actors such as Andrés Soler, Famy Kaufman *Vitola*, René Muñoz *Tun Tun*, José Ortega, Joaquín García *Borolas*, Ismael Pérez *Poncianito*, and Wolf Ruvinskis.

Martínez Solares had the foresight to gradually extricate Germán from his Pachuco character and recreating him as a sort of urban anti-hero, as an icon of the capital’s unruly youth, also portrayed by comics like *Pepines* and *Chamacos*, Audiffred’s cartoons, and Bismarck Mier’s characters: *Poca Luz* and *Huele de noche* in *Padrinos y vampiresos*.

Martínez Solares and *El Peralvillo* provided Germán with other tools, for him to create hilarious and endearing characters with no trace of priggishness or schmaltz, in subversive and funny storylines with keen social awareness, showing another face of the city, in the same way as Ismael Rodríguez and Pedro Infante, Alejandro Galindo and David Silva, Roberto Gavaldón, Luis Buñuel, and Alberto Gout all did, depicting a broad cross-section of Mexican society caught in the vortex of President Alemán’s modernizing project.

**Rafael Aviña**

## Other Important Comedy Actors

It is for good reason that Gilberto Martínez Solares is commonly associated with Germán Valdés *Tin Tan*, yet the director also worked with other comedy actors. From the beginning of his career, and over the course of his entire life, he channeled the talents of actors such as Joaquín Pardavé, Adalberto Martínez *Resortes*, Fanny Kaufman *Vitola*, Antonio Espino *Clavillazo*, René Ruiz *Tun Tun*, Eulalio González *Piporro*, Fernando Soto *Mantequilla*, and Joaquín García *Borolas*, in dozens of films.

Gilberto Martínez Solares himself once said: “I have never believed that a single person, whatever their star power, can carry a film single-handedly, because if they do not interact with someone with akin histrionic skills, they lose their tone. Therefore, I always cast the finest comedy actors.”

**Elisa Lozano**

## Fighting Tooth and Nail

*Lucha libre* already enjoyed popularity in small neighborhood arenas, but this uniquely Mexican combination of wrestling and culture truly mushroomed in the 1950s, thanks to a multitude of comic strips, photoromances, early television broadcasts, and films, where the sport-cum-performance featured characters and settings from a wide range of genres: crime, horror, comedy, sci-fi, melodramas set in poor neighborhoods, ranchera comedies, films about the Mexican Revolution, and so on. Gilberto Martínez Solares latched onto the comedic potential of *lucha libre* at a later stage, in 1965, when he directed the duo of Gaspar Henaine *Capulina* and Marco Antonio Campos *Viruta* in *Cada quien su lucha*.

In 1968, Martínez Solares directed *Las sicodélicas*. Filmed in Peru, it tells the story of a bunch of seemingly angelic sisters, who are actually ruthless murderers who seduce millionaires in order to extort them; among them, the wrestler *Halcón Verde* (*Green Hawk*), who they hurl into the sea from a light aircraft after he refused to pay up for their protection racket. That same year, Solares directed *Blue Demon y las invasoras*, a film about voluptuous aliens that land by the Lagunas de Zempoala, with the mission of finding and seducing ten alpha males to take the place of their planet's menfolk, who went extinct by a virus infection. There was also an adult version of the film, called *Blue Demon y las seductoras*, featuring nude women.

The following year, Martínez Solares directed two films in a row with the biggest stars of the genre: *Santo y Blue Demon contra los monstruos* (shot in February-March) and *El mundo de los muertos* (shot in March-April). In the first of these productions, the heroes of the ring face a legion of monsters—including an evil double of *Blue Demon* himself—created in the laboratory of Doctor Bruno Halder (Carlos Ancira). In the latter film, a quarrel dating back to Colonial times between swordsmen Caballero Enmascarado de Plata (The Silver-Masked Knight) and Caballero Azul (The Blue Knight), the evil witch Damiana's henchman, resurfaces between their masked descendants 300 years later. Both movies were box-office hits, and are still popular favorites when broadcast on television reruns.

Always catering to the tastes of audiences, Martínez Solares once again directed *Santo and Blue Demon in Misterio en las Bermudas* in 1977; now adding the popular *Mil Máscaras* to help unravel the mystery of an underwater city where people never grow old.

The *lucha libre* film genre has always been much-loved by Mexican audiences. Don Gilberto, as an expert in comedies, had no qualms about unintentional humor, and in allowing himself ambitious plotlines that required considerable budgets. However, his endeavors in the arena finally came to an end with *Ángel del silencio* (1978), a drama written by two veteran wrestlers: Guillermo Hernández (*Lobo Negro*, or *Black Wolf*) and Fernando Osés, about a deaf-mute young foundling, played by Rogelio Guerra, who becomes a wrestler to help the orphanage where he lives.

## Hippy New Year: Gilberto Martínez Solares and 1960s Cinema

In 1960, the outlook for Mexican cinema was bleak. The crisis that had begun years before worsened for various reasons: profit-seeking producers, weak scripts, and a lack of new figures. Nevertheless, during the 1960s Gilberto Martínez Solares managed to direct more than 30 films of diverse genres, themes, and quality. He made *ranchera* comedies with popular singers, as well as Spanish-folklore inspired comedies, but most notably a series of movies about the issues, tastes, amusement, and sexual awakening of the Mexican youth from different social classes.

With cases featuring stars and singers crooning to the latest rhythms, these productions ranged from the romanticism of *Una joven de dieciséis años* (an adapted version of *Los martes, orquídeas* by Sixto Pondal and Carlos A. Olivari, who also wrote *Cinco rostros de mujer* and *Su última aventura*), with Patricia Conde and Julio Alemán as the leads, to simple and amusing dramas such as *Mi héroe*, with the same actor, this time accompanied by Angélica María. He also made moralizing melodramas in urban settings, such as *Juventud sin ley* and *Los perversos* where marginalized youth—the “New Wave” rebels—commit crimes out of necessity or for pleasure.

Fernando Luján and Fanny Cano played the leading roles, with a supporting cast of Golden Age figures, such as Arturo de Córdova, Marga López, and Roberto Cañedo, portraying characters faced with the incomprehension of adults.

At the end of this decade marked by contrasts, social upheavals, and countercultures; student protests around the world and the emergence of the hippie movement, Gilberto Martínez Solares directed *Las sicodélicas*, a black comedy about a pack of seductive women, who live in a liminal zone between innocence and sensuality, love and death. This was a visually attractive film with eye-catching costumes, and the participation of Los Shain's, an early rock-and-roll band in Peru, in a good example of a film's aesthetics keeping up with its own title.

Showing impressive energy, Gilberto Martínez Solares kept up a steady workflow—he made seven films in 1967 alone. While the writer Fernando Benítez published *Los hongos alucinantes*, a research into Mexico's traditional cultures, the director did his part, embarking on his own journey into the brave new hippie world in *El misterio de los hongos alucinantes*. This provides yet another example of his innovative spirit and ability to attract audiences to movie theaters.

**Elisa Lozano**

## **Chanoc**

The first edition of *Chanoc* hit the newsstands on 15 October 1959, with adventures set on the high seas and in the deepest jungles. This comic strip started out its life as a film script by Martín de Lucenay that was rejected by the studios. For the illustrations, Publicaciones Herrerías commissioned Ángel Mora, who added his signature style for each new installment, gradually adding new characters, including the fisherman Patalarga, the boy Merecumbé, the cannibals Puk and Suk, and the intermittent presence of Sabio Monsiváis.

The comic was so successful that it reached a print run of 1.2 million copies. As a result of its huge popularity, *Chanoc* enjoyed the same fate as similar characters and was brought to the silver screen in 1966, with the lead role played by the newcomer Andrés García, directed by Rogelio A. González. After its triumphant debut, the comic book hero returned with a series of films directed by Gilberto Martínez Solares. In the first two of these—*Chanoc en las garras de las fieras* (1970) and *Chanoc contra el tigre y el vampiro* (1971)—the actor Gregorio Casal replaced Andrés García in the leading role; Germán Valdés *Tin Tan*, meanwhile, played the sly Tzekub Baloyán, Chanoc's godfather and fellow adventurer, originally acted by Chano Urueta (who was also a director). The following two films: *Las tarántulas* (1971) and *Chanoc en el foso de las serpientes* (1974) had a new protagonist, the animal tamer, and stuntman, Humberto Gurza. In the final installment, Ramón Valdés took the place of his brother *Tin Tan*—who had died one year previously—in the roles of Tzekub.

Rafael Pérez Grovas continued to produce films of Chanoc's adventures after these titles, always remaining faithful to the aesthetic and narrative formula of *lucha libre* films, which, as in the comic book versions, depended more on the viewer's imagination than the film-making capacity of an industry in decline.

**Héctor Orozco**

## **Satánico Pandemónium**

In 1996, a bizarre new B film was released: *From Dusk Till Dawn*, directed by Robert Rodriguez and produced, written, and starring Quentin Tarantino. This was an ultra-violent thriller of black humor, horror-gore, and crazed vampiric farse that condensed the concerns of the two film-makers, who tried to deep dive into the world of carnage and brutality.

A core part of the film is set in a nightclub called Titty Twister—a den for vampires thirsty for blood that speak Spanglish; heavy-metal-loving bikers, uncouth truck drivers, and the chief vampire: the beautiful exotic dancer played by Salma Hayek, called Satánico Pandemonium.

Tarantino and Rodríguez took this name from one of the most unusual, daring, and over-the-top Mexican films dating from the times of Luis Echeverría's presidency. It was a no-holds-barred period, when the Mexican film industry was able to introduce themes of social protest, and all kinds of other unimaginably crude topics previously cut by the censors, like orgies and lesbianism in a convent, in the film *Satánico Pandemonium*, directed by the already-veteran Gilberto Martínez Solares in 1973, with a script he co-wrote with his son Adolfo Martínez Solares, inspired by a plot by the producer Jorge Barragán.

*Before they kill you, they will torture you in a thousand ways. They will ram a funnel down your throat and fill you up with molten lead that will ooze through your entrails. Your flesh will be torn into a thousand pieces and your screams will echo across the valley...*

The words spoken by Luzbel, played by Enrique Rocha, condemns the beautiful Sister Mary (Cecilia Pezet), who has been tempted -literally and metaphorically- by the devil, do not only presage and summarize some of the horrors awaiting the character, but are also a violent allegory of the erotic and soft porno materials surrounding this blood-soaked narrative of mutilations and stabbings, which propound sexual repression dramas where blood, tears, and screams suggest other kinds of sexual secretions.

The peculiar thing is that all the violent and sexual acts take place in the sick mind of the novice nun, falling rapidly ill with the plague, in a small parish (in the surroundings of Tepoztlán, Morelos) during the years of the Inquisition. That is, the images of a young nun seducing Sister Mary, who in turn strips off her clothes to flay herself and wrap herself in a rope of thistles that cause her back and waist to bleed. Or the scene where Pezet loses her virginity to Satan had everything that would invite religious censorship at the time, especially due to its explicit subtitle: *La sexorcista*.

This delirious and unusual film not only is a radical departure from Don Gilberto Martínez Solares' other film work, but also stands apart from the Mexican cinema of that time.

**Rafael Aviña**

## Martínez Solares and La India María

During the 1980s, Gilberto Martínez Solares helped establish a Mexican film star capable of pulling in movie theater audiences in their droves, something not seen since the best times of Mario Moreno *Cantinflas*. The actress in question was María Elena Velasco, *La India María*, and her case was exceptional on two counts: she was a woman in an industry dominated by chauvinism, and she embodied an indigenous woman in a country with deep-seated racism. *La India María*, her charming and likeable character, brought delight to several generations of Mexicans with her hilarious adventures.

But, aside from the fact that her films dressed up as farses, with witty dialogues and slapstick humor entertained millions, it is notable how Velasco became that rare thing in Mexico's film industry establishment: she was a woman in complete creative control of her productions, not only as an actor, but also when developing plots and working as a scriptwriter, director, and producer.

Two of the films she made with Gilberto Martínez Solares were pivotal in her career. Velasco played the leading role in his film *Okey, Mister Pancho* (1981), and *¡El que no corre... vuela!* (1982), which tell the story, respectively, of the outlandish and bizarre adventures of “La India María” as an undocumented migrant in the United States, and as a rural immigrant in Mexico City. These two films are of particular importance, because they marked the beginning of Velasco's work developing and adapting plots, under the guidance of Martínez Solares.

**Hugo Lara Chávez**

## The “Divo” of Juárez

In the early 1970s, the young singer-songwriter Alberto Aguilera Valadez, originally from Parácuaro, in the state of Michoacán, by then already known as Juan Gabriel, had achieved remarkable popularity thanks to *No tengo dinero*, a song that sold two million records and was translated into several languages.

He followed up this success with titles such as *Me he quedado solo*, *No se ha dado cuenta*, and *Será mañana*. Adding to this achievement, he also wrote melodies sung by Angélica María, Estela Núñez, and Lupita D’Alessio. This popularity made him an attractive prospect for film producers; so, and in 1975, Juan Gabriel made his debut in the film *Nobleza ranchera* (Arturo Martínez) alongside Verónica Castro. This film passed largely ignored, however. Perhaps that explains why, when Gilberto Martínez Solares approached him with a proposal to act in *En esta primavera*, the title taken from another of Juan Gabriel’s musical hits, the singer refused. But the director’s ample experience and friendliness ended up persuading Juan Gabriel to participate in this dramatic story, in which he performs several of his own songs, this time accompanied by the Spanish vedette Estrellita, and Mexican actress Merle Uribe... and even Gilberto Martínez Solares himself in a number of sequences.

With Adolfo Martínez Solares as the cinematographer, and also co-author of the script, *En esta primavera* was filmed in locations in Mexico City, such as the Ciudad Universitaria campus, the Hotel del Prado, the Panteón Español, and Parque Hundido. It premiered on 1 February 1979 in the Chapultepec and Alameda movie theaters, where it played for just five weeks. The homonymous album containing the entire movie soundtrack was a best-seller.

**Elisa Lozano**

## The Final Years

By the 1980s, Martínez Solares began to work with comedy actors and vedettes on sex comedies out of a mixture of conviction, inertia, and circumstance. These films were produced by Frontera Films, supported principally by his son Adolfo, who collaborated as producer, co-scriptwriter and, for the last films, also as co-director.

Don Gilberto's sex comedies were frequently top box-office earners and his exclusive actor, Alfonso Zayas, became enormously popular for his roles in *El ratero de la vecindad* (1982), and *Tres mexicanos ardientes* (1986). He even outperformed international releases such as *Rocky III* with *El vecindario 2*.

Besides, Don Gilberto also directed and wrote films inscribed in other genres: *El peleador del barrio* (1981), a melodrama on a boxing theme with Jorge Rivero, and *Rosita Álvarez, destino sangriento* (1983), a story set in rural Mexico, starring singer Beatriz Adriana. *El ratero de la vecindad* (1982), an inferior remake of his classic *El rey del barrio* (1949), was a case apart.

As he approached the end of his life, Martínez Solares wanted to move toward "New Mexican Cinema" with fresh themes and different production values. In this period, he directed *Ondina / Más allá del deseo* (1988), a romance with touches of fantasy, with English and Spanish versions. He directed the following films in close collaboration with his son Adolfo: *Diario íntimo de una cabaretera* (1988), *Mujeres infieles* (1994), and *La mujer de los dos* (1995), a promotional film of the Los Temerarios, a Mexican band.

He died on 18 January 1997, and never saw the premiere of his final picture, *Crisis / Maten al candidato* (1997), starring Héctor Bonilla, José Alonso, Lisa Owen, and Manuel Ojeda, a political thriller that echoed Mexican presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio's assassination. This film has some admirable qualities and represents a dignified end of the career of this veteran director and essential figure in the history of Mexican cinema.

**Hugo Lara Chávez**

## Don Gilberto Martínez Solares: In Memoriam

As a child, once I entered a movie theatre and saw a particular comedy actor—one that my parents forbade me from seeing at the time, known by the curious name of *Tin Tan* (also spelled *Tin-Tán*). He said things and made gestures that are still crystal clear in my memory, and made me burst out laughing. However, as the obedient son I was, I left the theatre and waited outside until the film ended, and the next one, which I was going to see with one of my brothers, began. Even so, I was fascinated by the extravagance and nerve that I had witnessed for the first time in my life. A seed was planted.

Over time, I found out who directed that film and almost all of the masterpieces of that great comedy actor, as well as many others in the bawdy genre known as “rumberas” (which sometimes had no rumba dancing at all), as well as movies about vampires, *lucha libre* wrestlers, and everything else imaginable, which I became a fan of in my later years.

However, my subject here is not the director’s multifaceted and prolific oeuvre that was so seminal for Mexican cinema. To my enormous surprise and joy, I discovered that my close friend Malú Martínez Cantú was the daughter of that mythical director—a free spirit and bon-vivant who could yet be serious when needed; never predictable, and often crazy (a quality I love)—who made the films I had enjoyed so frequently and still do, whenever the opportunity arises. In 1990, I left Guadalajara to live in Mexico City, and Malú invited me to spend New Year’s Eve at her house. It was the first time I had spent it away from my home. There, I finally met Don Gilberto Martínez Solares in the flesh and blood for the first time. That New Year celebration became an oft-repeated ritual.

The guests were Gilberto and Adolfo, his sons, the musician Freddy Noriega, along with their whole families: we were all family and will continue to be.

Don Gilberto was already an old man; I don’t remember his exact age but I do recall his originality, his slightly rough charm, and his intelligence. We all arrived early and only said our goodbyes in the early hours. They were long evenings and we had time for many things. Pancho and Emiliano, Marentes, were excellent piano and guitar players, while the rest of us sang along and some danced. Sometimes we even had time to play Maratón [a Mexican version of the Marathon board game, which tests general knowledge], a testament to Don Gilberto’s intact memory. He won many times; I don’t think I ever did. But his powers of memory and his sense of humor were evident in many other ways. Almost everyone else around were close acquaintances and family, and probably knew all the anecdotes. I was the newcome, and sometimes we sat together away from the others, and I listened to his stories with rapt attention. He spoke in depth about the time Don Gabriel Figueroa, “El Indio” Emilio Fernández, and he spent in Hollywood to learn how to make films, in the prime of their youth. He told one story about “El Indio” and Greta Garbo, that was both outlandish and atrocious, but in his telling was hugely amusing, and makes me laugh to this day. He also recounted the years when he had a photographic studio with Don Gabriel Figueroa after they returned to Mexico, and regaled me with stories about actors, directors, cameramen, and a varied cast of characters who populated that extraordinary universe of that Mexico of yesteryear, and much else besides that I never hope to forget, although I am afraid, I am failing here. I know that he was a man of his time, what a good man was back then; a gentleman who had passions and whims, and a tireless creator; his highs were stratospheric, and his lows could also be intense, of course. He remains a lynchpin of twentieth-century Mexican culture, without a doubt, and we should all grateful to him.

I don’t know how many opportunities I had to see him, and have conversations with him: the last time must have been two or three weeks before his death, in 1997. I fondly retain the memories of those encounters. He was friends with many figures that I consider legendary, and whom I got to know through his stories; heroes of one of the most fascinating periods of our country’s history. And Don Gilberto was always at the heart of the action, never a spectator.

**Fernando González Gortázar**

## Gilberto and Germán

Two words define Germán Genaro Cipriano Gómez Valdés Castillo, popularly known as *Tin Tan*: unique and exceptional. He was a personage of incalculable popular impact, and cultural richness. He always was ahead of this time, by habitually using Spanglish, and making fun of himself and of cinema, the medium that launched him to stardom and ended up devouring him.

He was accompanied on his journey by very close people, such as his mother Guadalupe Castillo; Pedro Meneses, his boss at the XEJ radio station in Ciudad Juárez; the ventriloquist and impresario Paco Miller, and his half-brother Jorge Maulmer. The latter two gave him his artistic name: *Tin Tan*. Other important people in his life were his “carnal”—or blood brother—Marcelo Chávez, and Humberto Gómez Landero, who directed his first five films, starting with *El hijo desobediente* (1945). And of course, Gilberto Martínez Solares, a filmmaker with a great talent for comedy, who first directed him in *Calabacitas tiernas* in 1948. Last but not least, his long list of collaborators included the exceptional dialogue writer, Juan García *El Peralvillo*, and actors such as Andrés Soler, Famy Kaufman *Vitola*, René Muñoz *Tun Tun*, José Ortega, Joaquín García *Borolas*, Ismael Pérez *Poncianito*, and Wolf Ruvinskis.

Martínez Solares had the foresight to gradually extricate Germán from his Pachuco character and recreating him as a sort of urban anti-hero, as an icon of the capital’s unruly youth, also portrayed by comics like *Pepines* and *Chamacos*, Audiffred’s cartoons, and Bismarck Mier’s characters: *Poca Luz* and *Huele de noche* in *Padrinos y vampirosos*.

Martínez Solares and *El Peralvillo* provided Germán with other tools, for him to create hilarious and endearing characters with no trace of priggishness or schmaltz, in subversive and funny storylines with keen social awareness, showing another face of the city, in the same way as Ismael Rodríguez and Pedro Infante, Alejandro Galindo and David Silva, Roberto Gavaldón, Luis Buñuel, and Alberto Gout all did, depicting a broad cross-section of Mexican society caught in the vortex of President Alemán’s modernizing project.

**Rafael Aviña**