

Some Famous Mexican Films

Since 1896, México's film industry has produced more than 5,000 films. These works cover a full range of genres. Unless otherwise noted, all of the movies listed below can be ordered with English subtitles from online vendors. In chronological order, they are:

El Automovil Gris – This 1919 film depicts the rise and fall of a gang of robbers in the years immediately following the Mexican Revolution. The movie falls into the traditional cops-and-robbers genre

El Compadre Mendoza – This 1933 film focuses on a life-and-death choice that must be made by a not particularly admirable estate owner during the Mexican Revolution. Featured are two major stars of the era, Emma Roldan and Alfredo del Diestro.

Alla en al Rancho Grande – This 1936 film was the prototype of the *Rancheria* movies. The film stars the singing cowboy, Tito Guizar and perhaps the most glamorous of all Mexican film actresses, Esther Fernandez. Another interesting Fernandez film, which does not have English subtitles, is *Rio Escondido*.

Maria Candelaria – This award-winning 1943 film stars Dolores del Rio, one of the greatest of Mexican actresses. She plays an Indian who loses her livelihood and eventually her life as a result of communal prejudices and violence.

Nosotros los Pobres – This 1947 picture remains one of the most widely viewed in the history of Mexican cinematography. The main actors include Pedro Infante, a singer and actor who dominated the Mexican screen for many years. The movie depicts the struggles of a poverty-stricken urban family that endures much tragedy and tribulation only to emerge united and strong.

Los Olvidados – This 1950 film provides a far less romanticized view of poverty than does *Nosotros los Pobres*. Regrettably, none of the versions I found have English subtitles.

El Gendarme Desconcido - No list of Mexican movies would be complete without one film of Mario Moreno, known to generations of Mexican by his screen name, *Cantinflas*. In this 1941 film, he triumphs over adversity and a skeptical café owner who doubts he would be a fit husband for her daughter.

Canoa – This 1975 film is a violent retelling of the murder of several University of Puebla employees during the tumultuous year of 1968. This also was the year of the massacre of hundreds of political protestors at the Plaza de Tlaltelolco in Mexico City. That latter subject is addressed in a grim film without English subtitles, *Rojo Amanecer*.

Como Agua para Chocolate – This 1992 production is the Mexican film that has been viewed by more people north of the Rio Grande than any other. In focusing on the lives of a Mexican family living along the northern frontier during the first three decades of twentieth century, the film explores issues of politics, love, gender roles, and history. This is my favorite Mexican film.

Cronos - This 1993 film, directed by Guillermo del Toro, focuses on a 400-year old metal scarab that grants its possessor eternal life, but only at a price. The director followed up this sci-fi horror movie with a relocation to Hollywood, where he made the *Hellboy* movies, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and even a *Hobbit* movie or two

Amores Perros – This 2000 film offers a violent picture of a Mexico City characterized by sharp socio-economic divisions in which tragedy never lies far from the surface. This film served as the inspiration for the Academy Award U.S. film, *Crash*.

Presunto Culpable – This 2008 film tells the story of a Mexico City street vendor unjustly convicted and of the years-long struggle to free him. Initially, the Mexican government banned the film from public exhibition, thus ensuring that when the ban inevitably was struck down by a court, the multiplexes would be packed with people paying to see the picture.

Roma – This 2018 film, directed by Alfonso Cuarón, uses a black-and-white film that take the viewer back to the Mexico City neighborhood in which Cuarón grew up: Roma. Back then, this part of town was not the gentrified place it subsequently became. *Roma* is not yet available on DVD.

...and a few more comments

Mexico's cinema has had many famous players, such as Esther Fernandez, Pedro Infante, Dolores del Rio, and Tito Guizar. In México, actors and actresses very often remain active in their profession long after their hair has turned grey.

Outstanding examples are Alfredo Del Diestro and Sarah Garcia. Many of their films can be ordered online. Six of Garcia's films are available on a single DVD titled *La Abuelita de México*. One of her last films not on that disk, *Mecanica Nacional*, is somewhat satiric. She filmed until her death at eighty-five years of age after a sixty-three-year career. Alfredo del Diestro's most noted work includes the three films that are part of the revolutionary trilogy: *El Compadre Mendoza*, *Vamos con Pancho Villa*, and *El Prisoner Trece*.

Mexican cinema does not place as much emphasis on happy endings does its northern counterpart. While *Star Trek* and *Men in Black* movies always end with the heroes alive and well, Mexican movies often do not. Some suffering and tragedy are expected in films just as they are expected in life.

I think that the best general history of Mexican cinema is Carlos Mora's *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society 1896 – 2004*.