



CINEMATECA BOLIVIANA

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FORGOTTEN CINEMA OF BOLIVIA

Diverse factors, basically economic, have prevented the Cinemateca Boliviana from sending filmographic material to the Seminary of "Forgotten Cinema in Latin America" in this General Congress (1982) of the F.I.A.F.

However, we want to sent to our colleagues of allx the archives a brief summary about the history of the bolivian cinema during the silent age, with the hope that it will contribute to enrich their knowledge about that phase of the cine-mas history.

This summary has been prepared by Mr. Carlos Mesa, Director of the Diffusión De partment of the Cinemateca Boliviana and specialist in cinema history of our country.

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From the total of the production of the silent period(1906-1936) more than 80% has disapeared or is in ownership of particulars or institutions which are reti-cent to lend the material for his exhibition to the critics and the public, so the references about this years are restricted to the press commentaries, conver-sations with the realizators, technicians and the stars of this films.

Toward 1904 the first "biographs" arrived to Bolivia. There~~re~~ are references of shots from 1906, year in which images of the ministerial cabinet of president Is-
mael Montes were filmed. During the second half of this decade some filmings mo-re which reflec parades, promenades, etc were done.

The first known bolivian cineast was Luis Castillo who realized his first expe-riencies as a simple testimony of the streets of La Paz, scenes without any ca-mera movements and only off surpassed transeunts. The impact in our society was important because of the immediate possibility of the film processing which could be seen after 2 or 3 days of his filmation.

Castillo had no cinematographic training an never pretended the personal work at a professional level. He was a skilfull technician who experimented with an un-known medium for his time and sociey. His first work(at least from which there is some notice in the press) was called "Vistas Locales" and was exhibited in January 1913 in the seat of the Bolivian government. Still the begining of the 20's he worked only in documental films about the classic happenings of the mo-ment: military parades, contests, road constructions, etc.

In the 2nd decade of the century, in which Bolivia was under the aegis of the li-beral an the republican parties with similar ideological points of view, appeared the italian Pedro Sambarino, José María Velasco Maidana and Arturo Posnansky, aus-trian archeologist living in Bolivia since 1904.

Sambarino arrived about 1923 from Buenos Aires were he had begun working as a simple proyector operator in a central hall. With a practical judgment he soon convinced the government to let him film a series of short motion pictures about the most important civil constructions of those years. In 1924 he established the Empresa Cinematográfica Pedro Sambarino with wich besides his official docu-mentals, he filmed "Corazon Aymara"(1925) the second long motion picture of the bolivian cinema.

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The theme is a love story based upon a theater play of Angel Salas. The film had success and leted forth the polemic which became usual those years around the presence an rol of the native indians among the society.

Sambarino worked in Bolivia till 1929, year in which he moved to Perú to coope rate with the well konwn director Enrique Cornejo Villanueva in the filming of "Luís Pardo".

The most important director of this years, is undoubteebly, José María Velasco Maidana, musician who like other bolvian artists, dedicated some years of his life to the movies. In 1923 he filmed the first long national motion picture, "La Profecía del Lago", from which nothing was known still not much. The film caused a very strong censure of the local bourgeosie who claimed because of its plot in which "imprudently" one of the indian servants of the family falls in love of the "míss" of the house and is corresponded.

The movies were at that time one of the most advanced mediums of communication in its thematic, pasing althogh superficially, some of the problems of a societ-ty divided racial an culturally. We must remember that the first american native novel: "Raza de Bronce" from Alcides Arguedas was published in 1918 and had still a conservative and racist point of view.

In this years Velasco established the "Urania Films" prduction company and realized the short "Amanecer Indio", to begin thereupon his most important work which is at the mean time the key film of the bolivian silent age in movies:

"Wara Wara"(1930). It is an ambitious project which requieres a laige cast and the cooperation of noteworthy intellectuals of the moment, so the script belongs to the novelist Antonio Diaz Villamil, with the performance of the painter and novelist Arturo Borda and the sculptreess Marina Nuñez del Prado. With Velasco, technicians almost adolescentx like Mario Camacho and José Jimenez begun their work and later they begun to work independently. "Wara Wara" is an epic history of the Spanish conquest and its encounter with the indian civiliza-tion of the Andes. The central point is the Sacred Lake of the Incas, the Titicaca and of course the knot of the argument will lean in a love story between the captain of the Spanish detachment and the daughter of the local chief. The film which requiered big "sets" adapted to the filmation and was the most expensive and complex of the epoque, had an absolute success in Bolivia so that it was compaired by the press commentarists with any one of the foreign productions that reached the country by that time.

In 1926 Arturo Posnansky, great knower of the Bolivian architecture, enroaded in the movies and created the "Condor Mallcu Films" production company. Posnansky worked in tight cooperation with Luis Castillo. The most important film of those cineasts was "La Gloria de la Raza" in which they used important tricks and tabletop models which will become improved in "El Ocaso de un Im-perio" which was an idealized sight of the disappearance of the Tiahuanacu cul-ture, with reconstructions in tabletop models which alternate with shots of the ruins excavated yet. In the antropological field they filmed the short "Los Urus" about an almost extinguished group of indians of the Titicaca Lake. The decade of the 30thies is marked by the Chaco"war which confronted Bolivia and Paraguay between 1932 and 1935. Behind the conflagration were the natio-

nal interests because of the large territory called El Chaco and behind them the interests of the british and norteamerican petroleum enterprases, because of the reserves of petroleum of the zone.

Towards the end of 1931 "Hacia la Gloria" from Mario Camacho and José Jiménez in cooperation with Paul Duran was exhibited. Its the story of an abandoned boy in the La Paz River who is raised by an indian family. The young man joins the air force, fells in love of a society young lady and dies heroically in an aeronautic battle commanding his plane. There was premonition of war and the end of the film adequates to the belicists spirit wich reigned in the country. The film was veered in different colors according to the action (red the war, blue=love, sepia the daily, etc) and had to be adapted to sound, including mimics, to contend with the american sound films which arrived precisely this year to Bolivia.

The silent period closes with Luis Bazoberry who does the first sound film, although its really a sound band with voice in off and music effects which were adapted years later in Barcelona. It's the film konwn as "Infierno Verde" although its real tittle is "La Guerra del Chaco", filmed between 1934 an 1935, copaginated an finished in Spain in 1936. Being one of the documentals of the war it's of a worthy value, although cinematographically not very exceptional. In the film we can see very few war scenes and its most important part is dedicated to the days after the war and the signature of the peace agreement in Buenos Aires.

From the ending of the 20's up to the war 3 or 4 documentals were filmed all of them silent long motion pictures among which "La Campaña del Chaco" is the most important an whose realizator practically is Maria Camacho although probably also Velasco participated. The film material has never been seen as it was an assignment of the army who is the actual owner.

In the decades of 1920 and 1930 the documental movie has great importance in the bolivian cinema. Thorugh documental long motion picture of which there is any notice is "El Centenario de Bolivia"(1925) from Sambarino which shows a relatively huge image of the Bolivia of that time, although the most important part has been dedicated to the conmemorative acts of the date. A curious document is the filmation of the support to the United States in the figure of its President Calvin Coolidge, realized in 1926 in opportunity of the north-american promise of mediation in the problem of the Litoral with Chile.

Two really important pictures are "El Fusilamiento sw Jaúregui"(1927) from Luis Castillo and "La Sombria Tragedia del Kenko"(1927) both pictures about the trial and execution of one of the Jauregui brothers, accused of having killed ex-president José Manuel Pando in 1917. The trial with political connotations (liberal oposint to republicans) was one of the most noisiest of the contemporaneus history and served to proof the efficiency of bolivian justice. Both films reflect the most upsetting moments, including the shooting.

Finally its worth to insist about the trascendency of the documental pictures about the Chaco war, already commented, which leave for posterity the images of the bloodiest and absurdest war in which Bolivia became involved.

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