

South American Cinema : A Critical Filmography 1915-1994 / ed. by TIMOTHY Barnard, Peter Rist. New York : Garland, 1996.

## Uruguay

### *El pequeño héroe del Arroyo del Oro*

The Little Hero of Arroyo del Oro

Uruguay, 1931 (released 1933), approx. 70', b+w, silent

Dir Carlos Alonso Ser Alonso, based on newspaper reports by José Flores Sánchez  
Cinematog Emilio and Humberto Peruzzi Prod Alonso Act Ariel A. Severino, Celina Sánchez, Juan José Severino, Vicente Rivero, Alberto Candeau

*El pequeño héroe del Arroyo del Oro* was the last of five silent features produced in Uruguay and remains the best Uruguayan film, a sort of primitive precursor to neo-realism. It was the only feature of Alonso's, an itinerant camera operator who, in the 1920s and '30s, travelled the country filming people, towns, and the countryside for silent newsreels of 10 to 20 minutes in length. *El pequeño héroe* was a considerable success, explicable in part because it reconstructed a murder which had captured popular attention and in part because it reflected a popular sensibility, gave oral history an image, and presented an immediate reality. The story was true: nine-year-old Dionisio Díaz, seriously wounded by a berserk stepfather and carrying his younger sister, walked several miles to a distant police post, where he died upon arrival. The film's early sequences depict daily life in the country; the drama then unfolds with a force which was no doubt impressive for the era. Uruguay at the time had only two million inhabitants, over half of them in Montevideo, and was undoubtedly less sophisticated than it would become. For the film's spectators it was a chance to see, like in a newsreel, the events they had read about in the newspapers, and the film was shot in the places where the events had unfolded, faithfully following the course of events.

With time Dionisio became a hero of such proportions that his story was taught in schools, and a sound version of Alonso's film, with a didactic voice-over replacing the intertitles, was released. The narrator hammered home what the images already showed more eloquently, and some tinny brass music was added to the soundtrack. The film's latter-day restoration was made from negatives of the day and two surviving prints, but the intertitles have been lost forever (the copy in the Cinemateca Uruguaya is the silent version without the intertitles). Nonetheless, the film still reveals that its language, elemental and unsubtle, was the one best suited to the task. Each sequence opens and closes like a descriptive unit. There are no cuts; the shots are elementally framed and the whole film maintains a rudimentary air which sustains the narrative development of this primitive drama. The film's actors were drawn from theatre; Alberto Candean was one of the leading theatre actors of the day, and others went on to distinguished careers.

*El pequeño héroe* was begun in 1929, finished in 1931, and first seen publicly in 1933. Without studios and with makeshift laboratories, Uruguayan cinema came late to sound film, in 1936. Thirteen features were made between that date and 1952, representing half of the total national output. At that time a public for national films still existed, with international cinema not yet dominating the screens and the public still curious to see its reflection there. Between 1936 and '38 two labs and three studios were founded: a national film industry seemed viable. The possibility of co-productions (with neighbouring Argentina), the country's strong economy, and the high rate of film-going (11½ times annually per capita in 1951, the highest in Latin America) all suggested the industry would grow. With few exceptions, however, the films produced were imitations of Argentine films, and the public grew to prefer the original to a copy. In the 1980s other, more promising projects were frustrated: the public was already abandoning the cinemas.

Manuel Marín Carril

## *Como el Uruguay no hay*

There's No Place Like Uruguay  
Uruguay, 1960, 9', b+w and colour

Dir Ugo Ulive (b. 1935) Anim Francisco Tastás Moreno

## *Carlos: Cine-retrato de un "caminante" en Montevideo*

Carlos: Film Portrait of a Hobo in Montevideo  
[Carlos]  
Uruguay, 1965, 31', b+w

Dir Mario Handler (b. 1935) Mus Ariel Martínez Sound Enrique Almada Prod Instituto de Cine de la Universidad de la República (ICUR)

## *Elecciones*

Elections  
Uruguay, 1966, 36', b+w

Dir Ugo Ulive (b. 1935) and Mario Handler (b. 1935) Cinematog Jorge Solé Sound Conrado Silva and Carlos Camano Prod Instituto de Cine de la Universidad de la República (ICUR)

## *Me gustan los estudiantes*

I Like Students  
Uruguay, 1968, 6', b+w

Dir Mario Handler (b. 1935) Mus Coriún Ahoronián; songs "Me gustan los estudiantes" (Violeta Parra) and "Vamos, estudiantes" (Daniel Viglietti) sung by Viglietti Prod Altoverde and Cinemateca del Tercer Mundo