

Latin rhythms fuel 'Mambo Kings'

Fresh off the boat and bus from Havana in 1952, brothers Cesar and Nestor Castillo head for the swankiest Mambo band in New York, The Polladuro. Soon Cesar is on stage with Latin master Tito Puente, performing a hot drum solo.

Like your favorite stupid musical, "The Mambo Kings" is wildly entertaining. If not especially plausible, fueled by the belief that anything can happen with talent and guts.

It's a mess of a movie fueled by hairy-chested heroes and hot Latin rhythms. Armand Assante has his flashiest role to date as Cesar, the more outgoing of the two brothers. He's disgustingly macho but loyal to family and friends. He remains wary of flashy managers who want to control his career.



tickets please

John Monaghan

Antonio Banderas, a regular in the films of Spanish director Pedro Almodovar, makes his American debut as Nestor. He can't seem to get Cuba or an old flame named Maria out of his head, even though he tries to share his brother's love of America and its opportunity.

IT BECOMES painfully obvious early on that guys dominate "The Mambo Kings." Marushcka

Detmers, a powerful international actress, is relegated to the role of Nestor's long-suffering wife who watches him reach the top on a love song written for Maria, the woman whose name he mumbles in his sleep.

Cathy Moriarty has even less to do as Cesar's girlfriend. She pops in and out of the film while never establishing much of a character. It's

implied that Cesar remains faithful to her, despite his opportunities to sleep with any woman that catches the flash of his siletto smile.

With first-time director Arne Glimcher lacks in basic storytelling he makes up in visuals and music. These keep "The Mambo Kings" plodding along through the soap opera elements of the plot, which was based on Oscar Hijuelos' Pulitzer Prize-winning novel.

Expect for a couple of graphic sex scenes, "The Mambo Kings" could have easily been made in the 1950s. The set design and clothes evoke the era, while the garish Technicolor compositions recall "Written on the Wind" and other campy melodramas by Douglas Sirk.

CHARACTERS cha-cha across the screen while the Castillo brothers band, The Mambo Kings, struggle to make a living as meat factory workers. On weekends, they play bar mitzvah, birthday and bachelor parties until they get offered a big break.

That break comes from none other than Desi Arnaz (grotesquely played by Desi Arnaz, Jr.), who gets the brothers a spot on the "I Love Lucy" show. In a brilliant bit of technical wizardry, the film will have you believing that Lucy is really performing a skit with them.

"The Mambo Kings" has simple goals and achieves them for the most part with style and flair. See it soon before you grow sick of Armand Assante, who is destined with this single film to become a household name and major American heartthrob.



Armand Assante (left) portrays Cesar Castillo and Antonio Banderas as Nestor Castillo in "The Mambo Kings," the story of two brothers who bring their music and dreams of love and fame from Havana to New York.

SCREEN SCENE

CAPITOL THEATRE, 121 University, Windsor, Call (519) 254-FILM for information. (44)

"Beneath the Valley of the Ultravivens" (USA - 1979), 9 p.m. March 16-17. Russ Meyer focuses on the chaotic sexual neuroses of a small California town in this vintage bit of campy exploitation, scripted by R. Hyde (better known as Roger Ebert).

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit, Call 832-2730 for information. (85)

"Black Lizard" (Japan - 1968), 7 and 9:30 p.m. March 20-21 and 4 and 7 p.m. March 22. Originally filmed in 1968, this wacky Oriental film not only recently found its way to the United States. Written by the great Yukio Mishima, who also appears in the film wearing nothing but a loincloth.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn, Call 943-2037 for information. (Free)

"Here Comes Kelly" (USA - 1943), 7 p.m. March 16. Just in time for St. Paddy's Day, Eddie Quillen stars in this story of an irresponsible Irishman who can't keep his job.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 2219 Woodward Ave., Ferndale, Call 544-3030 for information. (43; \$2 students and senior citizens)

Film noir double bill - "Laura" (USA - 1944) 7 p.m. and "Shock Corridor" (USA - 1963) 8:45 p.m. March 16-17. The restored version of "Laura" stars Dana Andrews as a police detective investigating the murder of a beautiful woman (Gene Tierney), whose painted image he finds himself strangely attracted to. "Corridor" is director Sam Fuller's gritty examination of a Pulitzer-hungry journalist (Peter Breck) who gets himself locked in an asylum so he can investigate an unsolved murder. The only problem is that he starts to go crazy in the process. Constance Towers co-stars.

"The Shining" (USA - 1980), 8 p.m. March 18. Jack Nicholson, locked in a mysterious hotel over the winter, goes nuts and takes off after the family with an axe in this adaptation of the Stephen King novel. Continuing an ambitious tribute to director Stanley Kubrick.

"Pink Floyd at Pompeii" (Britain - 1975), 8 and 10:30 p.m. March 20-21. The British rock band recorded live in the Roman amphitheater at Pompeii. Much of their legendary

"Dark Side of the Moon" album is presented here.

MAPLE THEATRE, 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield, Call 855-9090 for show times. (46; \$2.95 twilight)
"Mississippi, Missala" (USA - 1992). A likable if not overly inspired story about an African-American man and an Indian-American woman who find themselves embroiled in scandal that threatens to unravel the delicate balance between their two cultures. From director Mira Nair ("Salaam Bombay").

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor, Call 669-8397 for information. (55; \$4 students and senior citizens)

Ann Arbor Film Festival - The entire week is filled with special events paying tribute to the 30th anniversary of this nationally-known celebration of independent films from around the world. A conference takes place in the morning and afternoon on March 18. Juried festival offerings fill the bill March 17-21, while award-winners are screened at 5, 7 and 9 p.m. March 22. Don't miss it.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17380 Lahar, Detroit, Call 537-1133 for information. (42.50)

"Yankee Doodle Dandy" (USA - 1942), 8 p.m. March 20-21 (organ overture begins 7:30 p.m.). James Cagney won an Oscar for his vivid portrayal of song-and-dance man George M. Cohan. Michael Curtiz directed this star-spangled tribute, which also features Walter Huston, Joan Leslie and Jeanne Cagney.

STATE WAYNE THEATRE, 35310 Michigan Ave. West, Wayne, Call 326-4600 for information. (42; \$1 children and senior citizens)

"Diary of a Mad Man" (USA - 1954), March 18-22 (call for show times). Hitchcock's classic '50s thriller finds Ray Milland trying to arrange the murder of wife Grace Kelly. The film was shot in 3-D, but won't be shown that way during this screening. Still, it's a treat.

"Flying Tigers" (USA - 1942), March 18-22 (call for show times). John Wayne heads the famed Flying Tigers in this World War II actioner set in China.

— John Monaghan

'Country' lacks strong plot

A terrified soldier fallen to the muddy ground on a battlefield in France during World War I. That's a brief scene, a nightmare of a British veteran, that resonates through the film "A Month in the Country."

With a pronounced stammer, Colin Firth plays the veteran, one of those walking wounded survivors of the war. Taking a commission to uncover a Medieval mural hidden by layers of paint on a church wall, he heads for Yorkshire, his hands trembling so badly he has a difficult time lighting his cigarette on the train.

Things don't get any less stressful for the man when he arrives at the church, met by a surly cleric who makes it clear he doesn't want the painting uncovered.

The sour-faced minister doesn't have much choice since it's a requirement of a larger bequest from a wealthy congregation member. Revealing the religious painting will only distract the congregation from worship says the reverend. But while it's at it, Firth might as well add a bit of color to some of the more faded sections of the ancient work.

A SECOND project, funded by the same benefactor, is under way on the grounds surrounding the small country church. A second veteran, played by Kenneth Branagh, has been hired to dig up the body of an ancient ancestor buried outside the church grounds. Branagh is using his funded purpose to underwrite his

pass the popcorn



LeAnne Rogers

own personal archeological scheme on the site.

A more outgoing and friendly sort of chap, Branagh seems initially to have survived the war better than Firth. But he's developed a strong fondness for trenches.

Branagh sees the irony of being one of those who survived the war "intact" and bitterly wonders if it wouldn't have been easier to deal with the loss of a limb or some other visible wound.

Rather reluctantly, Firth is sort of adopted by the local stationmaster's family and even roped into substituting for the father to preach to a small church service. He doesn't provide the usual fire and brimstone sermon the congregation gets from the stationmaster.

"A Month in the Country" is one of those films that really doesn't have a strong plot. It's really a character study. Firth and Branagh are young men who are weighed with grief at their experiences and haunted by their memories of war.

THE LARGEST part of their emotional energy is spent trying not to

deal with those memories. Both are drained and unable to move on to the rest of their lives with any success.

Firth develops a strong attraction for the reverend's rather young wife and is barely able to speak, let alone express those feelings. There is an aura of sadness about these young men that rarely seems to lighten.

Even the cleric, who lives with his wife in a large house with few furnished rooms, isn't the usual rural pastor disappointed in seeking a larger parish. His sourness stems from his disappointment that his congregation members don't share his religious devoutness.

He ministers to people who view him as useful insurance in getting divine intervention for good weather and crops.

"A Month in the Country" is available on video cassette at area stores.

— LeAnne Rogers

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