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'The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez'

Mexican folk hero comes alive

THE BALLAD OF GREGORIO CORTEZ. Directed by Robert M. Young; screenplay by Victor Villasenor; adapted by Young from the book, "With His Pistol In His Hand," by Americo Paredes; music by W. Michael Lewis and Edward J. Olmos; produced by Moctesuma Esparza and Michael Hausman.

SAN FRANCISCO EDWARD JAMES OLMOS talks with great animation and passion about "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez." Well he might - it is as though the two were made for each other. "Cortez," based on the true story of a heroic Texas Mexican at the turn of the century and the stuff of ballads in Spanish and English thereafter, has been made into an exciting, enlightening

Olmos, who has been almost indelibly type-cast as the sinister, larger-than-life "El Pachuco" of "Zoot Suit," is an outgoing, serious minded man with a mission: to put the legend of Gregorio Cortez into its rightful place in the history of Mexican-U.S. struggles in the Southwest.

"Everyone has to walk in his (Gregorio's) shoes," Olmos explained. And we do as the story unfolds, told in the manner of "Rashomon" — the same events as seen through different eyes.

"At the turn of the century," the film's Prologue relates, "more than 50 years after Texas had, through war, won its independence from Mexico, two cultures - the Anglo and the Mexican - lived side by side in a state of tension and fear..."

Through the arrogance and racism of a self-appointed interpreter ("I talk Mexican good") played with convincing smarmyness by Tom Bower, a dreadful misunderstanding leads to the killing of Cortez' younger brother and the subsequent fatal shooting of the sheriff (Timothy Scott) by Cortez. (Typically, he is stereotyped as leader of the "Cortez Gang" although he is only a simple family man and rancher.)

A posse is formed which pursues Cortez - a skilled horseman - all over southern Texas. The posse is reinforced by the

Texas Rangers alongside and aboard the border railroad. Because it is history we know Gregorio Cortez was captured, tried and imprisoned — but the film maintains suspense by the way in which he is captured, by showing the formation and dissolution of a lynch mob and in the subtle gradations of character of both the Anglos and Mexicans.

Especially interesting is lawman Frank Fly as portrayed by James Gammon; admittedly racist, he nevertheless shows wit and fairness in the pursuit and capture of Cortez.

Filmed bilingually, many gem-like episodes flash past which highlight the rich but obscured culture of the Mexicans: the moment when Cortez overhears a Spanish translation of the news that his little family has been incarcerated; his meeting with a lonely Anglo cowboy (William Sanderson) who shares his food (neither understands the words of the other); the growing rage of

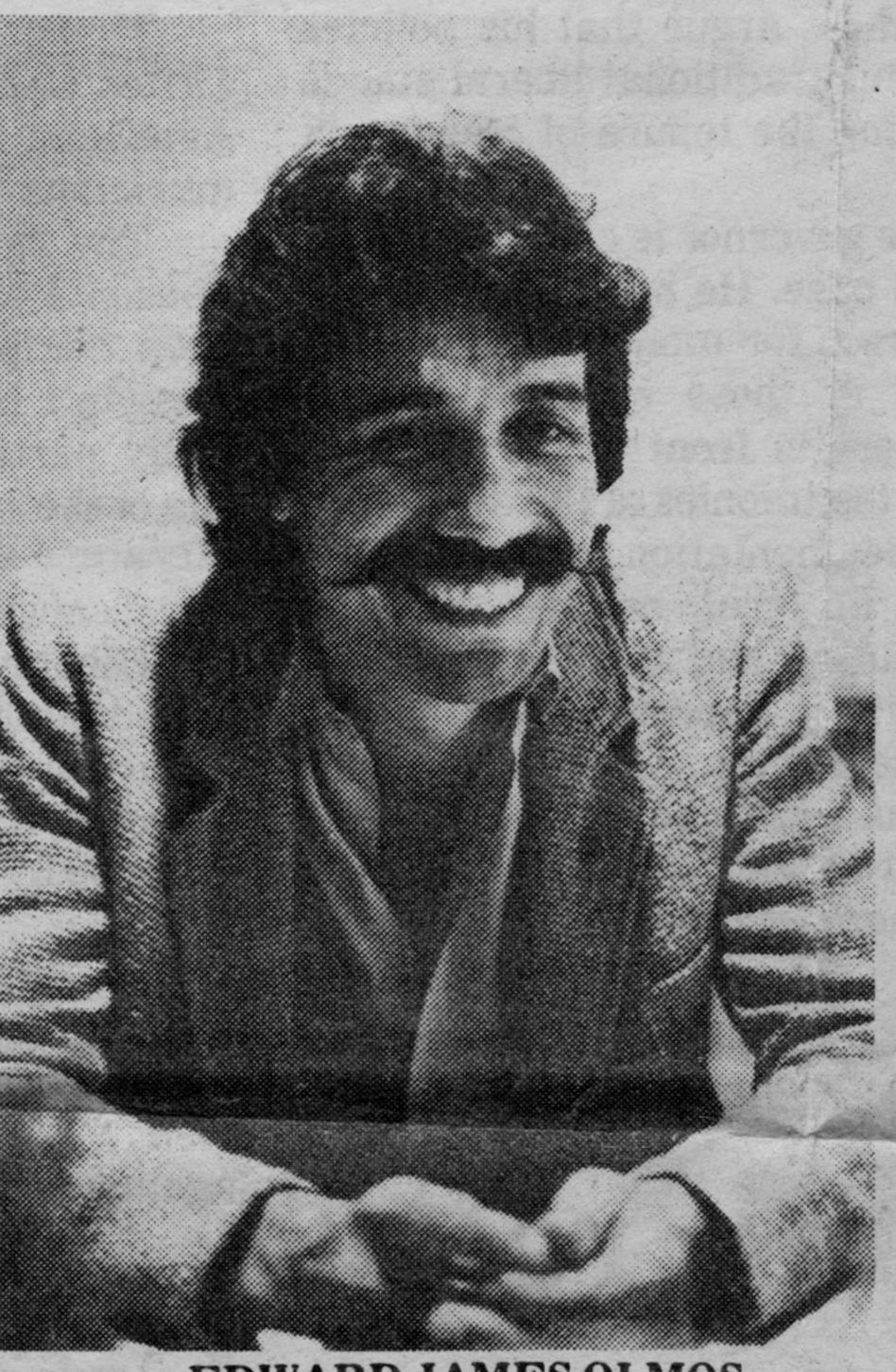
the young Mexican woman interpreter (Carlota Munoz) and her subsequent activism; the dawning realization of Cortez, "Is that why my brother is dead?"

Above all, the great performance of Edward James Olmos, despite his disclaimer that "I'm more of a stylist than actor."

A skilled musician and former nightclub entertainer born and raised in East Los Angeles, Olmos co-wrote the very compelling musical score. But that's not all. He became involved in production, distribution, location scouting, script revision and casting as well.

"I have spent three years of my life on this project because it relays an intercultural awareness through art. I want to continue to make more humanistic films like 'The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez' films which entertain yet provide a new experience for the spectator," says Olmos.

-PELE DE LAPPE



EDWARD JAMES OLMOS

Pele de Lappe photo





GREGORIO Gonzales jail en route to prison, followed by his family (above). At left, Cortez (Edward James Olmos) eludes the Texas Rangers.

Bergman's last?

A lush look back on his family

FANNY and ALEXANDER. Direction and script by Ingmar Bergman. Cinematography by Sven Nykvist. With Pernilla Allwin, Bertil Guve, Ewa Froling, Gunn Wallgren, Erland Josephson, and others.

BERKELEY

FROM THE opening shot of the 10-yearold Alexander's angelic face aglow in a soft candlelight, Ingmar Bergman, in a work he has called his last, has created an uncommonly beautiful film.

"Fanny and Alexander" is the glossy tale of a tumultuous year in the life of a wealthy family in turn-of-the-century Uppsala, Sweden. It's told with a sense of mystique, and a gentle touch primarily through the eyes of young Fanny and Alexander.

The cinematography alone is breathtaking from the artfully lit interiors of three strikingly different homes to the closeups of both cherubic and cadaverous faces to the still-life frames opening many scenes that look as if they belong on a museum wall.

As in any Bergman film, the characters dwell on a variety of heady themes-life and death, aging, sex-but the tone is almost playful, and immensely gratifying.

Alexander's adventures in the puppet workshop of an old Jewish merchant are as wonderful as any scene put through a camera can be. And the fate of the film's heavy, a cold, moralistic bishop, is highly inventive.

At the movies...

PAULINE AT THE BEACH. Directed by Eric Rohmner (no writer credited). A

French film with English subtitles. An attempt to make this a "sophisticated" French sex farce. So-called "summer fare" falls pretty flat. The philosophical, psychological discussions (seemingly endless) are elegantly delivered cliches, and the action, such as it is, is on the same low, pretentious level. (Why the writer is omitted from the credits is not explained, but seems wise—for his or her sake.)