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Hear me roar: Andrea Palma lures Ninón Sevilla to her Mexican bordello of bad blood.

Aventurera

Dir. Alberto Gout. 1949. N/R.

101mins. In Spanish, with subtitles.

Ninón Sevilla, Tito Junco, Andrea Palma.

In the newly prosperous Mexico of the late 1940s, all classes rubbed shoulders, gawking at flamboyant floor shows in urban cabarets. The splendid 1949 *Aventurera*, which has been recently rediscovered, concerns dancer-cum-hooker Elena (Sevilla), who flits through the nation's rigid socioeconomic system with loads of campy style. During the film's first ten minutes, Mom's infidelity and Dad's suicide propel Elena from a proper (and stifling) middle-class life in Chihuahua to hunger and unemployment. She eventually lands a clerical position at a nightclub, and is promptly put to work as a prostitute and performer by Rosaura (Palma), a tough

Joan Crawford-faced madam. Elena is an exploited woman alone in a macho society, but rather than play the victim, she takes the bull by the horns, delivering one of the most full-bodied and vampy displays of vengeful bitchery you'll ever want to see. And Sevilla overacts superbly, whether onstage or on the make.

Amid all the catfights, Elena performs *muy* suggestive numbers surrounded by a slew of pretty señoritas. Deep down, you know that these sequences are the picture's reason for being, but the surrounding drama is so laden with coincidence and overemphatic music cues that the pleasure quotient runs high throughout the whole outrageous enterprise. This may be your last chance for a memorable summer camp experience. (Opens Wed 21; Film Forum)—Howard Feinstein

Sex Mex

Checking in with Ninón Sevilla, the bombshell star of *Aventurera*

Fifty years ago, Cuban-born Ninón Sevilla, with her Grable-like gams and bleached-blond hair, was the reigning rumba queen of postwar Mexican movies. *Aventurera* (*The Adventuress*, 1949; see Reviews) is her most famous cabaretera, a spicy Mexican mix of campy musical and erotic melodrama. In it, Sevilla plays a *fichera*, a victimized B-girl, dressed in the latest French fashions, skimpy dance costumes and her famous fruit-and-feather head-dresses. No wonder she's been compared to every other sexy camp icon, from Marlene Dietrich and Carmen Miranda to Maria Montez and even Rita Hayworth. Actually, in *Aventurera* she more closely resembles Marisa Tomei in *The Perez Family*.

"You know, along with the mambo, the samba and the merengue, I brought Perez Prado [the Cuban mambo king, also in *Aventurera*] to Mexico in the '40s," Sevilla reminisces, speaking from her home in Mexico City. "There were offers from MGM and Columbia to come to Hollywood, but I didn't want to leave."

Even now, Sevilla speaks little Eng-

lish. She laughs when I tell her the middle-aged gentleman who's helping me translate let out a wolf whistle in response to her 47-year-old publicity stills. Now the widow of a prominent Mexican doctor, Sevilla explains that a vacation from movie-making in 1958 marked the end



Mambo queen: Sevilla acts up.

of her film career and the beginning of nearly 40 continuous years as a lead actress in Mexican *telenovelas*, "but as an actress only, no singing or dancing." (These days, she leaves that to her son, Zenaro, leader of the popular salsa group Trapiche.)

Sevilla appeared at the Telluride Film Festival screening of *Aventurera* in 1994, and, she was the subject of a special salute at the 1995 Cannes

Film Festival. Will she make an appearance here in New York? "Yes!" she says, laughing again, "if they invite me!"

Back in his *Cahiers du Cinema* days, François Truffaut wrote, "We must count Ninón Sevilla among the women who dare." Half a century hasn't changed that a bit.—Leslie (Hoban) Blake

Aventurera is at Film Forum through September 3.