

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Strange fruits</b>
Author(s)	Tom Allen Tom Allen
Source	<i>Village Voice</i>
Date	1978 May 08
Type	review
Language	English English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Motion pictures -- Cuba Motion pictures -- Cuba
Film Subjects	La última cena (The Last Supper), Alea, Tomás Gutiérrez, 1976

# Strange Fruits

By Tom Allen

Village Voice 5/8/78

**THE LAST SUPPER.** Directed by Tomas Gutierrez Alea. Produced by Santiago Llapur and Camilo Vives for the Cuban Film Institute. Screenplay by Alea, Tomas Gonzalez, and Maria Eugenia Haya. Released by Tricontinental Film Center.

**WE WILL ALL MEET IN PARADISE.** Directed by Yves Robert. Screenplay by Jean-Loup Dabadie from a story by Dabadie and Robert. Released by First Artists.

## FILM

which leads to unrest, which leads to a cruel, bloody suppression. The film's ponderous set piece, taking up almost half its running time, concerns the Count's whimsy of sitting down for a Holy Thursday meal with 12 of his slaves. The master is locked into sermons of Christian and Franciscan transcendentalism; the slaves, into their immediate needs for more freedom, food, sex, and rest. Unlike the similarly static, sit-down confrontations in the films of Ousmane Sembene, the contradictions in Alea's mismatched dialogue are not enriching. In the same space of time, Bunuel would have led a hundred barbed sorties on the absurdity of a pious Christian sitting down to sup with his chattel. Alea, however, keeps to a somber, didactic posture of a dry historian.

However discreet Alea might be at depicting the inevitable bloody climax, at bottom line *The Last Supper's* commercial appeal is to those masochists, both black and white, who savored the strange fruit of *Mandingo* and *Drum*.

• • •

Tomas Gutierrez Alea's *The Last Supper*, a strange story about an abortive slave uprising in late-18th century Havana, has been chosen to begin a commercial run at the 68th St. Playhouse this Friday, May 5, the same day a delegation of Cuban filmmakers is expected in town. *The Last Supper* will also be a kind of stalking-horse for A Festival of New Cuban Cinema, a repertoire of eight recent Cuban films that will be shown the next week May 14 to 21, at the Beacon Theatre.

The intricate film scheduling, coordinated with a series of public and media appearances, has an air of solidity to it: The U.S. feds are not likely to bust this show as they did the First New York Festival of Cuban Films in March 1972. That act of political barbarism, which involved confiscating prints as they were being carried into the Olympia Theatre, intolerably limited American perception of Cuban film. Only one movie, T. G. Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment*, into which some read an untypical, ambivalent attitude toward the socialist revolution, eventually drifted back into circulation. One had to fight the impulse to make deductions about a national cinema from the one extant film in American distribution.

Next week, the latest Alea film, *The Last Supper*, will once again be the only new Cuban film in town. But unlike *Memories*, the new film is set in the safe past and deals with the utterly noncontroversial topic of slavery. It is a crude cultural parallel to the hundreds of East European and Soviet films that all seem to be about the noncontroversial Nazis in the safe past. Any controversy about *The Last Supper* is more likely to be aesthetic than political.

Alea's film is a document that begins with a written paragraph attesting to the historical truth of the actions depicted and that ends with images of a single slave escaping by transforming himself into such primal forces as flying birds, falling rocks, galloping horses, and rushing streams. A bit of poetic license around macumba lore isn't objectionable in itself, but it does to point up the essential contradiction at the core of *The Last Supper*. Historical reality and mysticism can be a difficult mix.

Basically, the plot introduces the population of a sugar plantation between an Ash Wednesday and an Easter Sunday almost two centuries ago. The owner, a count with some odd ideas about Catholic mysticism, raises the expectations of a select group of slaves,