

## Document Citation

Title	<b>How a Sundance step spawned a 'ballad'</b>
Author(s)	Ray Loynd
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	6/13/1983
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Sundance Film Festival, Park City, Park City, United States
Film Subjects	The ballad of Gregorio Cortez, Young, Robert M., 1983



Ballad of Gregorio Cortez

# HOW A SUNDANCE STEP SPAWNED A 'BALLAD'

**By RAY LOYND**

Public broadcasting money and The Sundance Institute combined to nurture and bring to flower a \$1,300,000 indie, "The Ballad Of Gregorio Cortez." A chance viewing of the film at a USC film class by a staffer at Embassy Pictures resulted in a distribution deal by Embassy.

Directed by Robert Young and starring Edward Olmos as the entitled truelife subject of the biggest manhunt in the history of

**Texas, the picture is the first independent production to be born out of The Sundance Institute and illustrates the synergism among filmmakers there.**

Independents and mainstream filmmakers gather at Sundance every June to talk, dream, examine, and question each other's work. According to director Young, who embarks this month to The New Film Festival in Munich as a rep for the independent American film-

maker, conception and development of "The Ballad Of Gregorio Cortez" would not have been possible without Sundance.

It was there, two Junes ago, that Olmos came upon a rough draft script by Victor Villaseñor, encouraged Young to restructure and expand its drama, and began discussing distribution and marketing with indie distrib guru Charles Lippincot, a teacher-guest at Sundance. Olmos, the striking Pachuco character in the play and film, "Zoot Suit," is now working with Embassy on the marketing campaign, for release Sept. 30.

The story of this indie production is unique not only because of the Sundance connection but because the picture's release will mark the first time a film which first aired over PBS — in June, 1981, under the American Playhouse banner — will be released for theatrical distribution.

Most of the production budget came from the Corp. for Public Broadcasting, with additional funds supplied by The National Endowment for the Arts. As a condition for dealing with PBS, the production had to guarantee the station one national airing while being free to open the film in one city.

San Antonio, where many descendants of the legendary

Cortez live, was selected and the filmmakers rented a house for \$5500 for one week. Reaction was strong, said Young, but "when we shopped it to the majors, such as Warners and Universal, no one felt he knew how to handle the marketing and distribution."

Olmos, a native of the L.A. barrios, felt sufficiently strong about the picture that he rented The Los Feliz Theatre for \$250 on a Labor Day weekend last year and gathered 300 people to attend the screening. He repeated another screening the following weekend. Screenings continued until guests started donating money to reimburse Olmos.

"There was a groundswell," said Young. "Eventually, the L.A. Times' Charles Champlin came, liked the movie, and took it to his film class at SC." From there the film's journey ended with a pickup by Embassy, after one of their staffers talked Norman Lear and Jerry Perenchino into taking a look.

But the groundswell happened, said Young, as a result of what Olmos studied and learned at Sundance. "It was Lippincott's advice and support that helped Eddie (Olmos) get the thing going."

Young's contribution as an adaptor was to veer the tone of

the original script from what he calls "hate elements and too much anger" to a structurē that tells the 1901 manhunt story through the viewpoint of several Mexican and American characters.

That decision evolved from Sundance students and filmmakers discussing the project and rethinking its story.

True to an indie's budget, talented guild members involved made no more than scale. In Olmos' case, compensation was some \$10,000 and in director Young's, it was \$44,000. Notwithstanding the specific five-week shooting schedule and six-week preproduction period, both men devoted close to a year to the project. Line producer was Michael Hausman, who served as line producer on "Amadeus," "Ragtime," "Silkwood," and "Rich Kids" (the latter directed by Young). Cinematographer was Local 659 member Ray Villalobos.

Young, whose 30-year directing career is divided between studio and indie work ("One Trick Pony" to his Cannes Best First Feature-winning "Alambriستا!"), said the contract with PBS on "Ballad Of Gregorio Cortez" has now changed as a result of the Embassy pact.

## Pre-production:

Art department, Offices, Conference rooms, clerical services, Mail room,  
Data processing, casting, Scenic shop, Storage, Wardrobe, Sewing areas,  
Lumber yard, carpentry, Paint and Prop shops.

# Production:

10 new state-of-the-art film/video sound stages from 2,500 to 35,000 square feet with hard and soft cys, including special effects, motion control and insert stages, makeup, dressing rooms, commissary, executive dining room, lounges, standing and working kitchens, transportation, mobile video units, blue matte, front and rear projection, camera, sound, grip and lighting departments and satellite communications.

# Post-production:

Lab services, optical effects, tape and film screening rooms and editing suites, computer graphics, duplicating, sound transfer, effects, recording, re-recording, mixing, titles, film to tape transfer, audio sweetening, shipping, expediting and refrigerated film/tape vaults.











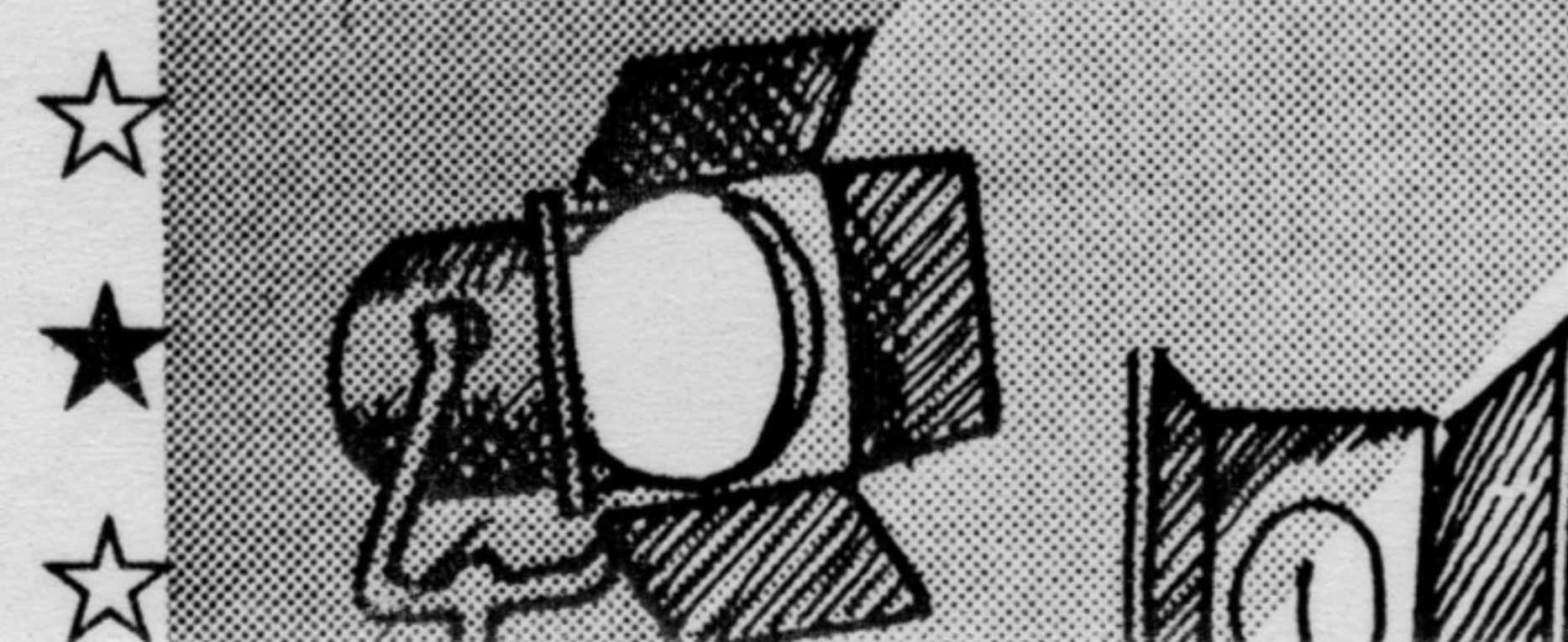








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