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DON QUIJOTE DE ORSON WELLES (DON QUIXOTE OF ORSON WELLES) (SPANISH-B&W)

An El Silencio production. Produced by Patxi Irigoyen. Editor-head of post-production, Jess Franco. General supervisor, Oja Kodar. Dialogue adaptation, Javier Mina, Franco; editing, Rosa Maria Almirall, Fatima Michalczik; music, Daniel J. White; associate producer, Juan A. Pedrosa; with the participation of Fernando Rey.

Original shoot: Produced by Oscar Dazingers, Alessandro Tasca, Francisco Lara. Directed, written by Orson Welles. Camera (black & white), Jose Garcia Galisteo, Juan Manuel de la Chica, Edmond Richard, Jack Draper, Ricardo Navarrete, Manuel Mateos, Giorgio Tonti; editors, Maurizio Lucidi, Renzo Lucidi, Peter Pareshelles, Ira Wohl, Alberto Valenzuela. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Directors Fortnight), May 16, 1992. Running time: **118 min.**

With: Francisco Reiguera (voice of Jose Mediavilla), Akim Tamiroff (voice of Juan Carlos Ordonez), Orson Welles (voice of Constantino Romero).

Orson Welles' "Don Quixote" has been among the most eagerly anticipated films among cinephiles for more than 30 years, but "Don Quixote of Orson Welles" is not what they have been waiting to see. An unquestionably earnest effort to approximate the film Welles might have created had he ever finished editing his highly personal, near-mythic adaptation of Cervantes' masterpiece, this Spanish venture is perhaps best described as a documentary about other people's ideas concerning Welles' intentions. In any event, result is a travesty that will please no one, least of all Welles enthusiasts.

Entire history of Welles' "Don Quixote" is too complicated and lengthy to recount here. But using his own money, the director began shooting it around 1955 and, between his many other activities, continued lensing in bits and pieces for some years thereafter. He reportedly edited numerous sequences, and possibly multiple potential versions, but never completed final editing or postproduction on a cut he considered definitive.

Several years ago, the Cannes Film Festival presented 40 minutes of material from the picture that had been put together by Costa-Gavras under the auspices of the Cinematheque Francaise, and last year L.A.'s American Cinematheque held a private showing of somewhat different footage.

In 1990, a Spanish team led by producer Patxi Irigoyen and director Jess Franco (second unit director on Welles' "Chimes at Midnight" and the unfinished "Treasure Island") acquired the rights to all the known "Don Quixote" footage from Oja Kodar, Welles' longtime companion who controls the rights to his unfinished works, and Suzanne Cloutier, who held much of the footage. Sole holdout was film editor Mauro Bonanni, who withheld, at least, an edited sequence featuring Don Quixote jousting with a cinema screen.

Result, then, purports to present all the pertinent footage shot by Welles in something resembling proper order. Working from Welles' notes, indications on his 62-minute soundtrack of narration and dialogue, Kodar's advice and other sources, and gathering footage shot in 35m and 16m, Franco and company put together a semblance of a film.

Given the uniqueness of Welles' editing style, especially in his later period, it is highly questionable that anyone else could ever fairly complete one of his unfinished works in satisfactorily representative fashion. But even putting aside that concern, the reconstructionists have placed the work they love in a highly unfavorable light on two major counts.

First, the visual quality of the copy unspooled in Cannes is appalling. At the earlier screenings of footage in Cannes and L.A., "Don Quixote" had a brilliant, high-contrast black & white look that was unmistakably Wellesian and satisfied viewers even in a very rough assembly.

Here, the material appears, for the most part, like third-generation dupes. Many of the images are very fuzzy, and there is an annoying preponderance of seemingly lab-generated effects, including freeze-frames, animation and artificial zooms. Very little of the footage has the breathtaking clarity of the scenes or stills seen previously.

Second, the dialogue and commentary has been dubbed into Spanish by new actors. Original soundtrack featured Welles himself speaking the lines of the two main characters, as well as delivering the narration. The loss in this regard is incalculable, on top of the fact that anything resembling lip synch has been thrown to the wind.

Combination of murky images and wrong-headed soundtrack

makes for a trying two hours, even for someone who has long awaited the chance to see this legendary work. The impulse to evaluate Welles' own accomplishments through the thick veil draped around it should be resisted, since all critical intuition leads to the conclusion that this document badly represents Welles' intentions.

For the record, however, "Don Quixote of Orson Welles" begins with documentary-like footage of Welles, camera in hand, being driven around Spain. Following an introduction to Spanish cities and Cervantes' work, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, aboard thin white horse and diminutive mule, respectively, ride onto the contemporary Spanish landscape, bantering as they go and becoming involved in numerous semi-humorous incidents.

The two are swept up in a modern religious procession, the knight errant tilts briefly at windmills and fights some hooded warriors, and Sancho becomes separated from Quixote for quite some time, only to find the destitute knight in a modern city, whereupon the two consider going to the moon.

Only two sequences that come across with any sense of exhilaration is a stunning running of the bulls, which reveals dozens of men getting trampled and tossed about, and a charming village interlude in which Sancho dances for a group of children. Despite the handicaps of the presentation, one has the sense of Akim Tamiroff as the perfect Sancho Panza.

At a few points, notably during the bullfight, Welles himself appears onscreen, implicitly as the man who Sancho notes will make Quixote and him famous by putting them in a film. Final bit of Wellesian narration states, "This film was directed, written and produced by a man whose ashes were scattered over Spain. His name was Orson Welles."

At the Cannes screening, producer Irigoyen claimed that a better print of "Don Quixote of Orson Welles" would be available in a few weeks, and that an English-language version is in the works. Perhaps these devel-

opments will represent substantial enough improvements to warrant a reevaluation. But why an unsatisfactory version should have been rushed before the public in Cannes is unfathomable.

— Todd McCarthy