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Last flamenco trilogy film is no Carmen, Saura says

By HEATHER HILL
of The Gazette

Carlos Saura doesn't expect *El Amor Brujo*, entered in the Official Competition at the Montreal World Film Festival, to be as wildly successful as *Carmen*, the 1983 production that took the world by storm and won awards and nominations for awards from Hollywood to Cannes.

"It's impossible to have the same success as *Carmen*," Saura, 54, said in an interview with *The Gazette*. *Carmen* is something that happens once in a lifetime — although," he adds laughing, "I hope twice."

While the same ensemble of dancers, led by Antonio Gades and Cristina Hoyos, appears in all three films, Saura said each movie in the trilogy is "totally different."

"*Blood Wedding* was the 'purest' in the context of dance film," Saura said. "*Carmen* had other elements — a mixture of dance, Bizet's music, the dual story of the characters."

El Amor Brujo, inspired by the ballet music of Manuel de Falla, is "an experiment in direction, where the story is as important as the dance," said Saura.

Although the three films seem to have evolved whereby the scenario and cinematography have gained the upper hand over the choreography, Saura said he and Gades have agreed that for the record each movie is the result of an equal team effort.

Give it a rest

Saura, who has brought the art of flamenco to more people than any other man in history, plans to give dance movies a rest: "I have to talk to Gades, but for the moment it would be difficult to make another such film immediately. Perhaps in a year or more..."

His current movie, *El Dorado*, is about a 16th-century Spanish expedition to find the fabled Aztec gold. Shooting on Saura's first historical film starts in January in Costa Rica, and, as in most of his 21 movies, Saura is using actors who are unknown outside Spain. He decided, after the many financial problems of his second movie (*Tears for a Bandit*, a 1963 co-production between Italy, France and Spain), that he would make only "small films," employing three or four Spanish actors,



CARLOS SAURA
"Experiment in directing"

over which he had complete control. The exception in this *modus operandi* was Geraldine Chaplin.

Chaplin, the daughter of comedian Charlie Chaplin, and Saura lived together for about seven years and made movies together. Chaplin starred in *Cria*, his only other movie besides *Carmen* to make a dent in the North American market.

"I always thought of her when I wrote the scenario," said Saura, describing that period of his career as "very stimulating, very exciting."

But he observed that his present wife, Mercedes, is *not* an actress: "I lived with an actress once — not twice." Again laughing: "That's a joke, but the stories of the movie still go on (after the cameras stop)."

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In the opening scene of *El Amor Brujo* (*Love the Magician*), the camera shows us a soundstage in chiaroscuro, moving from the sun-filled open garage door to the jumble of lighting equipment and diffusing sheets to the set of the gypsy village where the story takes place.

The sliding garage door grinds shut, the extraneous equipment disappears from view and for the rest of the final film in Carlos Saura's flamenco trilogy, we are held in a

cinematic theatre which natural light never penetrates.

El Amor Brujo is a most theatrical movie, filled with colors like grease-paint and melodramatic close-ups. It is the story of two mismatched pairs of gypsy lovers, caught up by the custom of childhood betrothal and by fierce, elemental love, scarred by murder and rematched by witchcraft. Their story and its (happy) resolution is enacted against the background of gypsy life — the women washing clothes, sorting flowers for sale, nursing babies; the men playing cards and teaching their boys knife-fighting. Woven in and out of the story of the lovers are scraps of flamenco, a harsh emotional blend of song and dance that really is an acquired taste. And that, ironically, is the weakness of *El Amor Brujo*.

In *Carmen*, the second movie in the trilogy (the first was the simple, stylistically pure *Blood Wedding*), flamenco was given an attractive, natural face: we saw the dancers of Antonio Gades's troupe rehearsing, horsing around, falling into and out of liaisons, jealousies, rivalries that meshed indelibly with the Prosper Mérimée story. We also saw them perform to Georges Bizet's catchy music in perfectly filmed set pieces that left us gasping and thrilling for more. (Who could forget the dance in the tobacco factory?)

Moving slowly

But in *El Amor Brujo*, we see flamenco dancers moving slowly and stagily as actors, their faces gripped with the frowning, ecstatic concentration of the solo performer. Antonio Gades, the movie's choreographer, and Cristina Hoyos play the star-crossed lovers with a fullblown maturity that the camera unhappily exaggerates. Only the luscious Laura del Sol, who is emerging as a screen actress in her own right, has naturalness in her mime and movement.

The movie's one major dance is staged beside a blazing fire (the village sorceress has decreed that fire will drive away the malevolent ghost of the murdered husband). In it, Hoyos and company succeed in stirring us as much as the dark, idiosyncratic music of Manuel de Falla — and this controlled, experimental choreography of Gades — will allow.