“Vampires in Havana” Debuts in US..jpg

Cuban Artist Animates Mafalda and Vampires.jpg

English Is Still the Neighborly Tongue.jpg

Fidel on Cigars No More.jpg

First Canadian Studies Symposium Held in Cuba.jpg

My Kind of Town, by GLC Man in Havana.jpg

New Cuban Foundation for Third World Film.jpg

"Vampires in Havana" debuts in US

By Lionel Martin
Reuters News Service

HAVANA — Juan Padron objects to being called "Cuba's Walt Disney." Yet his genius for making animated cartoons that appeal to children and adults alike has won him a reputation far beyond this Caribbean island.

His new hour-long animated film, "Vampires in Havana," is to be shown this month at a San Francisco film festival. Padron won't attend; the U.S. government, he said, denied him a visa.

Interviewed at his apartment in Havana, he termed the U.S. move "very stupid," especially since such noted American film figures as Jack Lemmon, Gregory Peck and Robert Di Niro attended a similar festival in Cuba a few months ago.

A modest man of 40, Padron is often found at his drawing board in his small living room, with his two young children playing nearby.

He has made three full-length animated cartoons and more than 40 short films since becoming a director at Cuba's Film Institute in 1974.

Most of his works were produced by the institute but "Vampires in Havana" is a joint Cuban-West German-Spanish production and his latest animated short is a joint Cuban Film Institute-Quino production.

Quino's "Mafalda" comic strip, though not well known in the United States, has followers throughout much of the Spanish-speaking world. The Argentine cartoonist selected Padron to animate his work, believing only he was capable of capturing the rhythm and spirit of his jokes which appeal more to grown ups than to small children.

Padron's first "Quinoscopio" has already taken prizes at film festivals in Portugal, Spain and Cuba, and was selected as among the best 1986 animated cartoons by the Association International de Film de Animation.

Typical "Quinoscopio" humor is a two-minute joke featuring a stereotyped white hunter in Africa. A lion attacks and the funny-looking little hunter brings him down at his feet.

African bearers carry the dead lion, hanging from two poles, as the little hunter trudges behind them through the forest.

Suddenly, a supermarket checkout counter appears in the wild, with an African cashier in traditional turban and dress. As the lion is carried past, she grabs its tail, reads a price tag and punches her high tech electronic cash register as the hunter reaches into his pocket to pay.

The steady chuckles culminating in a roll-in-the-aisles punch line is characteristic of Padron's work. He demonstrated it in his earlier "Vampire" series.

In one episode, a laughable-looking vampire hides at night behind a wall as his intended victim, obviously drunk, weaves his way down the street. The vampire pounces, and seconds later, staggers off into the night, as drunk as his victim.

In another scene, an older vampire shows the tricks of the trade to his dumb-looking nephew. They climb stealthily through a window of a room where an attractive damsel is sleeping on her side in a big bed.

The older vampire points to her throat. The nephew looks at the throat and his eyes begin to wander. Suddenly he lunges forward, aiming not for the throat but for the backside.

In "Vampires in Havana," Padron's imagination runs riot.

The catalogue of the 1986 London Film Festival called it possible cult film material. Variety, the show business paper, said it was "very knowing in its hip allusions and a fount of gags and one liners ... (It's) not the sort of film one expects to be produced by a state-controlled film industry."

The story, unfolding in the 1930s, tells of a vampire who came to Cuba from Transylvania.

He invents a drink called "Vampisol" which allows vampires to live a normal life, even venturing out on a sunny day. (Sol is the Spanish word for sun). His nephew, given a daily ration of "vampisol," is not aware that he is a vampire and grows up as an ordinary Cuban boy.

A gang of Chicago vampires, gangster types out of old Hollywood movies, decides it wants the "vampisol" formula. So does a European Mafia syndicate. They both descend on Havana for a hilarious battle for the prized potion.

When Padron was in his early twenties, he studied with the Australian artist and dramaturge, Harry Reade, and with Spanish cartoonist Juan Lopez.

In 1970 he created a comic strip called "Elpidio Baldes" which immediately became as famous as Mickey Mouse among Cuban children.

A short, rotund Cuban with a moustache and big cigar, Baldes is a fictional colonel who leads a cavalry squadron of the Cuban independence army fighting against Spain in the 1890s. He has been the hero of hundreds of comic strips, 20 animated shorts and two full length animated pictures.

The heros, of course, are the independence fighters and the Spanish colonists are the butt of the jokes.

Juan Padron, who is married to a Spanish-born educational psychologist, drives a 1975 Fiat and earns $2500 a year. Because of the Havana housing shortage, the family's apartment is tiny.

His work has been shown at film festivals throughout the Americas and Eastern and Western Europe. He has been told by foreign movie makers that artist-directors of his caliber earn 30 to 40 times more in other countries.

April 1987 WR culture 1416

Chosen by Quino

Cuban artist animates Mafalda and vampires

by Lionel Martin

Havana

JUAN Padrón modestly declines to be labelled as "Cuba's Walt Disney", though his animated cartoon films have won him an international reputation.

His new hour-long film, *Vampires in Havana*, a joint Cuban-West German-Spanish production, was shown last month at a San Francisco film festival. Padrón did not attend; the United States, he said, had denied him a visa.

He termed the US move "very stupid" since such noted US film figures as Jack Lemmon, Gregory Peck and Robert De Niro attended a similar festival in Cuba a few months ago.

Padrón, 40, often works at his drawing board in his small living room, his two children playing nearby.

In an interview at his flat, he spoke about his work, including some of the three full-length animated cartoons and more than 40 short films he has made since becoming a director at Cuba's Film Institute in 1974.

He has been described as "Cuba's Walt Disney" at film festivals and by foreign visitors. But when the label was mentioned in the interview, he objected to it, saying it might make people think he was arrogant.

Most of his works were produced by the institute. His other new work is an animated short, a joint production by the institute and Quino, an Argentine cartoonist whose *Mafalda* comic strip has followers throughout much of the Spanish-speaking world.

Quino chose Padrón to animate his work, believing he was capable of capturing the rhythm and spirit of the *Mafalda* jokes which appeal more to grown-ups than to small children.

Padrón's *Quinoscopio* — the first of eight planned — has already won prices at film festivals in Portugal, Spain and Cuba.

Typical *Quinoscopio* humour is a two-minute joke featuring a stereotyped white hunter in Africa. A lion attacks and the funny-looking little hunter brings him down.

African bearers carry the dead lion, hanging from two poles, as the hunter trudges behind them.

Suddenly, a supermarket checkout counter appears in the wild, with an African cashier in traditional turban and dress. As the lion is carried past, she grabs its tail, reads a price tag and punches her sophisticated electronic cash register as the hunter reaches into his pocket to pay.

In one episode of Padrón earlier *Vampire* series, a laughable-looking vampire hides at night behind a wall as his intended victim, obviously drunk, weaves his way down the street. The vampire pounces, and seconds later, staggers off into the night, as drunk as his victim.

In *Vampires in Havana*, Padrón's imagination runs riot.

The story, unfolding in the 1930s, tells of a vampire who came to Cuba from Transylvania.

He invents a drink called Vampisol which allows vampires to live a normal life, even venturing out on a sunny day. His nephew, given a daily ration of Vampisol, is not aware that he is a vampire and grows up as an ordinary Cuban boy.

A gang of Chicago vampires, gangster types out of old Hollywood movies, decides it wants the Vampisol formula. So does a European-Mafia syndicate. They both descend on Havana for a hilarious battle for the prized potion.

Padrón said that when he was in his early 20s, he studied with Australian artist Harry Reade and with Spanish cartoonist Juan López.

In 1970 he created a comic strip called *Elpidio Baldes* which immediately became as famous as Disney's Mickey Mouse among Cuban children.

A short, rotund Cuban with a moustache and big cigar, Baldes is a fictional colonel who leads a cavalry squadron of the Cuban independence army fighting against Spain in the 1890s. He has been the hero of hundreds of comic strips, 20 animated shorts and two full-length animated films.

The heroes, as might be expected, are the independence fighters while the Spanish colonists are the butt of the jokes. (Reuters)

English is still the neighborly tongue

WR 153

REPORT FROM CUBA

By LIONEL MARTIN
Reuters News Service

HAVANA — Despite 27 years of isolation from the United States, American bans on travel and trade, and attempts to give Russian a boost, English remains Cuba's second language.

It is the language of technology, tourism and textbooks, of baseball games and television movies. Even mangled into "Spanglish," it persists as a source of names for household appliances.

"Not only is it the most popular foreign language among ordinary Cubans, but it is virtually the only second language taught to the island's more than 400,000 secondary school students," a Cuban educator said.

English is required from seventh through 12th grade. The Ministry of Education, responsible for primary, secondary and trade schools, as well as adult education, employs about 5,000 English-language teachers, the educator said.

In the late 1970s, the ministry tried to give the Russian language a boost, in line with the island's close relations with the Soviet Union. It decreed that 30 percent of Cuban secondary school students study Russian.

The plan was dropped within a few years, however. By the early 1980s, nearly 95 percent of the students were enrolled in English classes.

The reason for the turnaround, the educator said, was the recognition that English is an international language, more important to Cuba than any other foreign language.

The classroom is not the only place where Cubans hear English. Some listen to English-language radio broadcasts from Florida and hear popular music with English lyrics. They can also see several British or American-made films each week on Cuban television, broadcast in English with Spanish subtitles.

As in many developing nations in the Spanish-speaking world, English is considered a necessity because it is the language of many textbooks and up-to-date reference materials.

English is the language that best serves Cuba's goal of fighting its way out of underdevelopment, according to a Cuban official. He pointed out that English is a key to learning about highly regarded U.S. technology.

Castro insisted on more

For Cuban university students in the sciences, humanities and engineering, two years of English is compulsory, and many choose to take more advanced courses.

Cuba's medical students, too, must study English during all five years of their combined premedical and medical training. A Cuban public health official said English studies were increased from two to five years in the mid-1980s at the insistence of President Fidel Castro.

Castro himself reads and understands English well. During a visit to the United States in 1959, when he came to power, he gave speeches and interviews in fluent though accented English.

But Castro avoids speaking English in public, saying he prefers to express himself in his native tongue, and he might have lost some of his fluency over the years.

A Cuban official explained that English is the language that best serves the nation's goal of fighting its way out of underdevelopment. Cubans greatly admire U.S. technology, he noted, and English is a key to learning about it.

When Cuba's engineering schools decided in 1972 to introduce a master's program, they turned to the Canadian University Service Overseas. Canadian professors gave classes in English, and the masters' candidates took intensive English courses.

The tourist trade is another key reason for learning English.

The Cuban tourism industry trains some guides and workers in French, German or other languages, but deems English a necessity for hotel and restaurant workers who deal with the public.

Although Cuba has had little direct contact with the United States since 1961, English has remained an influence, sometimes cropping up in Spanglish — versions of which appear in many Spanish-speaking countries and in Hispanic neighborhoods in the United States.

In Cuban Spanglish, someone who wants rum neat at a Havana bar, asks for an *estrai*, derived from *straight*. An automobile clutch is a *clock* in Cuba, rather than the Castilian *embrague*.

In baseball, Cuban fans call a double a *tubey* — from two-base, and a home run becomes a *jonron*, with the Spanish *j* pronounced like an English *h*.

Many Cubans politely say *sankyou* instead of *gracias*.

Since 1960, It has been illegal under U.S. law for any business to trade with Cuba. Yet, even now, the trademarks of famous American-made products have not been forgotten.

The Frigidaire and Delco

A refrigerator is commonly called by the brand name Frigidaire even though it is manufactured in the Soviet Union.

A blender is called an Osterizer, another American trademark. The distributor in a car's motor, no matter what make, is called a Delco, the name for those manufactured by General Motors.

In explaining the importance and influence of English in Cuba, one government official remarked, "We will always be a neighbor of the United States and someday relations will improve so it is a good idea for us to know English."

WR-116

Desperately seeking a state of their own


Goodbye to all that


Cannes bathers bask while nearby forests burn

BOLIVIA

Collapse of a House of Tin

In recent years, the twin pillars of the Bolivian economy have been cocaine and tin. The illicit cocaine trade was jolted in July, when President Víctor Paz Estenssoro heeded a Washington request and invited U.S. troops to participate in raids on Bolivian drug labs. Now Paz Estenssoro faces a crisis over tin. When more than 5,000 miners marched toward the capital city of La Paz last week to protest present layoffs and future mine closings, Paz Estenssoro responded by declaring a state of siege. Bolivian soldiers promptly halted the advance. Meanwhile, police arrested at least 162 persons, including labor leaders and heads of radical left-wing parties.

The firing of 7,000 miners and the proposed pit closings were part of a desperate government plan to rescue Bolivia's tin industry. Collapsing prices have plunged the country's 21 nationalized mines deep into the red. Paz Estenssoro wants to shut two of the mines and lease most of the rest to worker-run cooperatives. The moves could cost an additional 8,000 jobs.

The state of siege, which includes a nationwide midnight-to-6-a.m. curfew and bans on union and political activity, was the second that Paz Estenssoro has declared in the past twelve months. The President took a similar step in September 1985 to halt a general strike that protested economic austerity moves.

FRANCE

The Flames of Paradise

Bikini-clad bathers on the French Riviera looked up last week at black-and-orange skies. For five days, the worst forest fires in more than a decade devastated some 25,000 acres of the Côte d'Azur and the inland hills. At least four persons died, and hundreds more were treated for injuries and smoke inhalation.

Authorities blame a rash of fires this year on arson, severe summer drought and the seasonal mistral wind that has whipped flames across dry southern forests. After touring the area, Prime Minister Jacques Chirac proposed a two-year program to improve the region's ability to fight and prevent fires. But for much of the south, the proposal came too late.

INDIA

And Now, Gurkhaland

Darjeeling, an Indian district in the Himalayan foothills, is home to some of the world's best tea. It is also home to 600,000 Gurkhas, an ethnic group that has feelings of second-class citizenship. They have mobilized under the leadership of the Gurkha National Liberation Front to seek an autonomous state within India.

To reinforce these demands, G.N.L.F. Leader Subash Ghising has ordered strikes and violent protests that have led to 19 deaths this summer and huge losses in the tea industry. Says he: "We will lay down our lives but not give up our demands for a separate land and identity."

Gurkha soldiers, renowned as some of the world's most valiant fighters, have been deployed in recent years to quell disorders arising from militant Sikh demands for an independent state. Today Sikh soldiers patrol Darjeeling to prevent further Gurkha agitation.

SOVIET UNION

Home for a Wild Card

Its NATO code is Blackjack, and like the card game whose name it shares, the Soviet bomber has kept everyone guessing. The Pentagon has warned for years about its imminent deployment, predicting that the long-range supersonic plane, with its ability to fly at low altitudes, will allow Soviet bombers to strike with deadly accuracy at the U.S. and return to a Soviet base without refueling. Last week a study released by Norway's Foreign Policy Research Institute indicated that Blackjack may soon be in business.

The report said the Soviets are building a 2.9-mile-long airstrip—the length the Blackjack would require—on the remote Kola Peninsula, which borders Norway. The new bomber, which would fly too low to be vulnerable to a space-based defense system, may be part of the Soviet answer to the Reagan Administration's Strategic Defense Initiative.

CUBA

Fidel on Cigars: "No More"

To smoke or not to smoke? For Fidel Castro, that is no longer the question. The Cuban President, who turned 60 last month, gave up his beloved stogies a year ago. Last week he urged others to follow his lead. "I haven't taken a single puff since last Aug. 26," Castro said. "I don't miss it, and I feel better."

Castro's resolve has sparked a nationwide anti-smoking campaign. But the leader may find Cubans, who earn some $100 million a year from tobacco exports, reluctant to stop lighting up. Said one comrade who joined Castro's forces in the 1950s: "I would follow Fidel into battle and die for him, but I'm not giving up smoking cigars."

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!CUBA-ENGLISH (ATTENTION CANADA):
FIRST CANADIAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM HELD IN CUBA (1998)

HAVANA, Dec.5 (Reuter) - Cuba's growing interest in Canadian culture and literature was highlighted this weekend during the islands first symposium on Canadian studies.

The symposium took place within the Second Annual Congress of Cuba's Association of the English Language Specialists (GELI).

Three hundred Cubans, twenty five Candians, professors from the University of Edinburgh and several professors from England attended the Congress.

The Canadian ambassador, Mark Entwhistle, spoke about Canada to the gathering and noted that Canadian-Cuban trade had increased and that 100,000 Canadians visited Cuba as tourists each year.

David Morrison, a Canadian diplomat, said the embassy had provided help to the symposium by providing books and other materials about Canada.

"There is an increased interest by Cubans in Canada," he said.

Although GELI is an association of English language specialists, French- Canada was not forgotten. The keynote address to the convention, delivered by Ben Shek, Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto, took French-Canada in English literature as its theme.

"Cuba and Canada have good relations which were never broken as they were in the case of the United States," Shek said, adding, "I think it is quite normal for these academic and cultural relations to develop."

Ian Martin of York Univeristy said "there is a lot of professional brotherhood between Cubans and Canadians and with the creation of the Cuban Assocation of English-Language Specialists, these relations are becoming more concrete.

Martin said GELI now had ties with the English Teachers' Associations of Quebec and Ontario.

"Countries that have more access to English are able to develop themselves and make use of English to build stronger international relations and Canadians and Canada are here to help the Cubans in any way that we can," Martin said.

While both the Canadian and British ambassadors spoke at the GELI congress, the United States diplomatic mission in Havana did not send any official observer.

Madeline Monte, President of Geli said her organization was denied membership in the world's most important English-language teachers' assocation two years ago because international assocation's headquarters is in the United States.

The organization told the GELI that it cannot accept membership fees from the Cubans because of the provisions of the thirty-two year old U.S economic embargo on trade with Cuba.

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THE GUARDIAN
Saturday April 13 1985

WR-103

My kind of town, by GLC man in Havana

From Lionel Martin in Havana

HOSPITALS and schools in Cuba give a better service than those in Britain, Mr Ken Livingstone, the leader of the Greater London Council, said yesterday during his two-week visit to the Carribbean island.

"As you walk around the streets of Havana it is quite obvious that the average person here is healthier than the average person in Britain and is getting a better education and better health care."

He told the Guardian: "I think if you brought people from London, Manchester and Glasgow, they would be stunned, given what they would expect to find in the sense of what they see on the television screens about the Third World.

"Here there seems to be a lot of basic contentment simply because what little there is, is adequately shared around and those tremendous inequalities one finds in other Third World nations are simply not here."

After receiving a gold medal as an illustrious guest of the city of Havana, he said he was impressed by the optimistic mood and confidence of the Cuban people.

"It is really a quite remarkable and very pleasant society," he said. "I am struck by the lack of materialism and the fact that increasingly people are talking in terms of what they do for each other and for the country as a whole.

"I find that such an attractive change from the sort of individualism which I think so many people really get caught up in and find so unfulfilling as a way of life. Here there is such a boundless enthusiasm."

He also saw a lesson for a future Labour government on how to cope with pressure from the United States if it tried to prevent nuclear disarmament.

"You can come to Cuba and see a nation of just a fifth the population of Britain, formerly more dependent on the US in terms of its economy, that has been able to resist American pressure for 25 years to produce a society that I find very attractive indeed," Mr Livingstone said.

"It gives me a lot of encouragement that if we can elect a Labour government in Britain that has the will to stand up to the Americans we will be able to do it.

He recognised that the country fell into the Russian orbit but he saw no evidence of Soviet control "What I think strikes me in comparison with those Third World countries that are in the American orbit is that the strings are much, much less here."

He had found striking similarities between London and Havana in terms of the daily problems being faced with residents reporting the same difficulties to their local councils. But he also found an interesting departure. "In Cuba they have only just started to build a local government structure over the last 10 years or so—before that it was very centralised state—and there is much enthusiasm here. In Britain our local governments are being deprived of their historic authority."

Arts & Entertainment

WR-122 COLTURE

New Cuban foundation for Third World film

By Lionel Martin
Reuter News Service

HAVANA - A new film foundation and school has been opened in Cuba and hailed by outstanding moviemakers from around the world as a milestone for Latin American cinema.

The foundation, headed by the Colombian Nobel prize winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, aims to help make the Latin American film industry more dynamic and enhance cooperation among filmmakers in the region.

The sister project, the film school, begins its first course this month, with 230 students from Asia, Africa and mostly Latin America.

Fernando Birri, the Argentine film director who is heading the school, called it "a factory and laboratory for the eye and ear" and a "productive center of creative energy for audiovisual images."

Participants believe that talent, as well as socially significant third world themes, must be discovered, encouraged and given both financial and creative support.

They say they also seek to challenge what they view as a U.S. and Western European monopoly of international film distribution.

Many non-Latin American moviemakers have recognized the importance of the foundation and school, among them some of the famous actors and directors – like Francis Ford Coppola and Harry Belafonte – who were in Havana last month for the eighth festival of New Latin America Cinema, a film trend that stresses social and political awareness.

At the foundation inauguration December 15, messages of support were read from some of the world's most illustrious directors: Francesco Rossi of Italy, Ingmar Bergman of Sweden, Britain's Peter Brook; Akira Kurosawa of Japan, and Canadian animated filmmaker Norman McClaren.

The Foundation for New Latin American Cinema and the International School for Cinema and Television are private.

Though not controlled by the Havana, the government did renovate and donate quarters for the foundation – an old mansion in the La Coronela section of Havana – and the school, in Santiago de los Banos, south of the capital.

President Fidel Castro, who attended the inauguration, told reporters that Cuba would contribute about $1 million a year to the project. The foundation and school will have to pay for hard currency expenses, such as plane fares and teachers' wages.

The foundation has ambitious plans.

Among its projects is a series of films about Nicaragua "as a gesture of solidarity."

Directors of those films will be Santiago Alvarez of Cuba, Miguel Littin of Chile, Jorge Pons of Mexico, Jorge Sanjines of Bolivia and Geraldo Sarno of Brazil, all well known exponents of the "New Latin American Cinema."

The foundation will also sponsor a full-length documentary on the popular Panamanian leader, Omar Torrijos, who died in a plane crash in 1981 which many Latin Americans believe was caused by sabotage. A Panamanian, Pedro Rivera, will direct.

A television series based on five Garcia Marquez stories is also on the foundation's agenda. They will be made by directors from Cuba, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Argentina.

The new school, on the outskirts of Havana, has projection and editing rooms, studios, and a sizable tract of farmland where vegetables will be grown.

It also has a running track and a new olympic-size swimming pool which Castro said, half in jest, "can be used for learning underwater photography."

Birri, the Argentine filmmaker with the flowing patriarchal beard and omnipresent black fedora, said the school will be divided into three levels.