LA RESIDENCIA

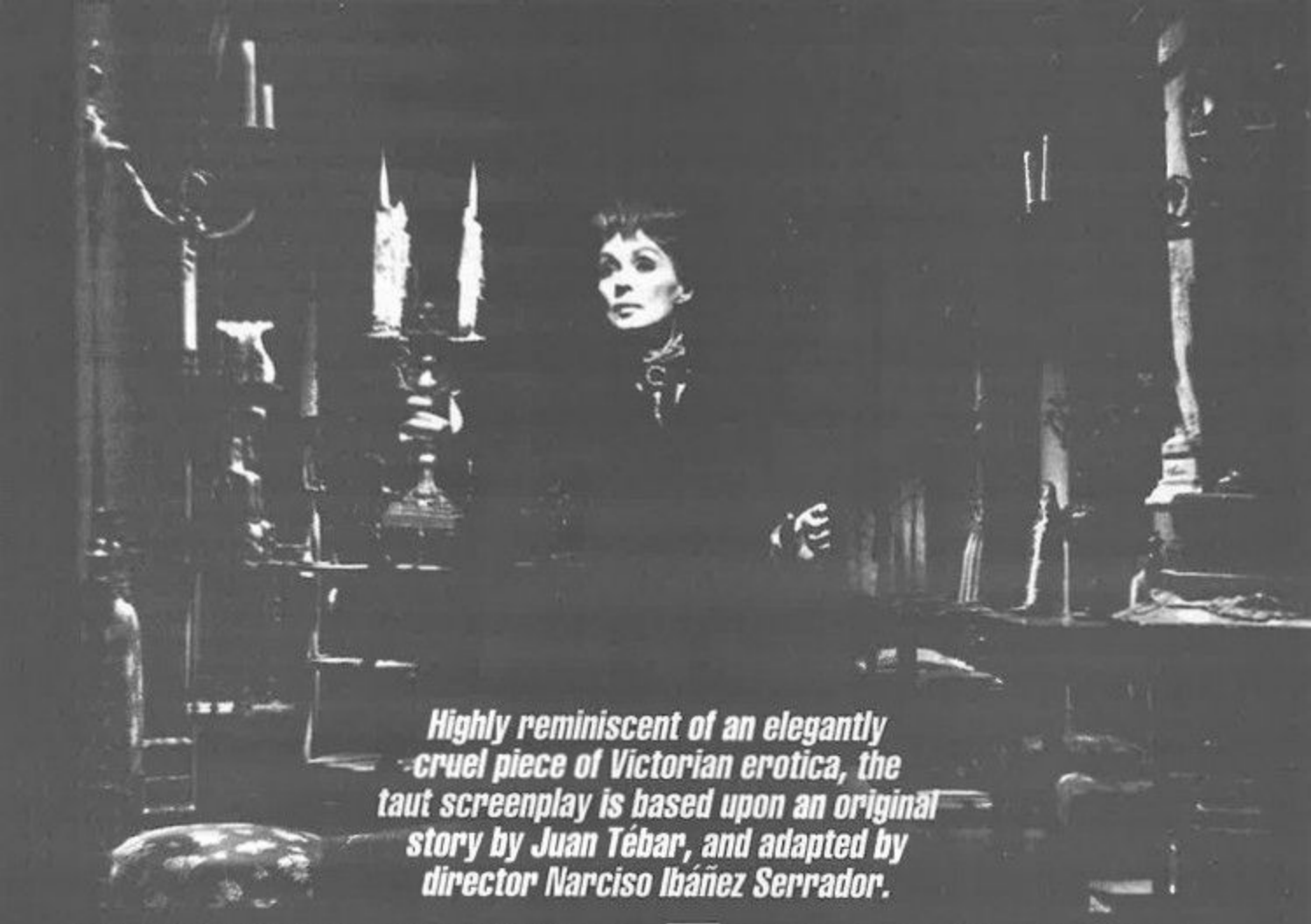
A Classic of Spanish Horror Cinema Revisited

Article and Interviews by
MICHAEL ORLANDO YACCARINO

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT, A DESPERATE, 15-YEAR-OLD GIRL escapes the confines of a female boarding school, somewhere in provincial France. She is to meet her illicit lover (the headmistress's son) even though she has been severely forbidden to do so. Their plan is to flee from this dreadful prison, to begin a new life together. A rendezvous is to take place in the darkened greenhouse where, during the day, tight-corseted girls tend to poisonous plants. She quietly enters the glass structure in search of the boy who will fulfill her destiny. Then, without a sound, a shadowy figure looms up behind her. As one hand of the intruder muffles the unfortunate girl's screams, the other plunges a dagger into her fluttering heart. Then the delicately sad melody of a music box fills the greenhouse as the murderer rocks the limp body in his deadly embrace....

Just over 30 years ago, director Narciso Ibáñez Serrador was shooting this scene for his first film, ***La Residencia*** (1970), in Spain, where it would become an instantaneous and long-running success. The following year, American International Pictures would give the film its U.S. première, crudely retitled as ***The House That Screamed*** (a.k.a. ***The Finishing School***) in an edited, dubbed version, as the drive-in second feature to the schlock opus ***The Incredible Two-Headed Transplant*** (1971). The film received mostly negative notices here. During the past few years, it has appeared, occasionally, on late-night television in an even more severely edited form. In the United States, many horror film enthusiasts have never even heard of this motion picture at all. And that is a genuine tragedy, for ***La Residencia*** is a masterpiece of the genre.

Highly reminiscent of an elegantly cruel piece of Victorian erotica, the taut screenplay is based upon an original story by Juan Tébar, and adapted by the director under the pseudonym of Luis Verña Peñafiel, a name which Serrador has frequently used for his literary efforts. It concerns a strictly administered boarding school for girls, many of whom, as their headmistress Madame Fourneau (Lilli Palmer) notes without overstatement, have "not led exemplary lives." Actually, the place is a convenient disposal for undesirables by their families, provided Fourneau is paid the requisite tuition in



Highly reminiscent of an elegantly cruel piece of Victorian erotica, the taut screenplay is based upon an original story by Juan Tébar, and adapted by director Narciso Ibáñez Serrador.

advance. It is not surprising that these "students" are often very disobedient—they have even unsuccessfully tried to poison her. So, Fourneau must sometimes practice harsh measures to maintain order. This might include periods of solitary confinement, spiced with a thorough whipping for good measure. But Fourneau appears to relish the rigors of her profession, sometimes even to an unhealthy degree. Not unexpectedly, several of her charges are reported to have escaped—but this proves to be not entirely true. Into this setting enters Teresa (Cristina Galbó). Although better behaved than the others, it is later discovered that she is concealing a questionable past of her own. Soon enough, she becomes involved with Luis (John Moulder-Brown), Fourneau's son, whose life has been completely dominated by his mother. Indeed, Teresa is not the first of the girls with whom he has become secretly acquainted. Aware of these clandestine meetings, Fourneau reprimands him repeatedly. For she will not allow him to waste his future with any of the guttersnipes under her command. Instead, Luis must find the kind of strong and capable young woman Fourneau herself was once, many years ago.

Top: Madame Fourneau (Lilli Palmer) is about to uncover the ghastly secret of her finishing school. Above: Director Narciso Ibáñez Serrador.

For all of the headmistress's efforts, little is accomplished in the way of refining her unruly pupils. This is displayed through a continual contrast between the girls' enforced domestication, and their own rebellious behavior: During evening prayers, a particularly disobedient student (Pauline Challenor) is flogged in a cell reserved for solitary punishment. As the spinsterish Mademoiselle Despres (Cándida Losada) conducts a routine ballet exercise, one of the soon-to-be-missing girls, Isabel (Maribel Martin), furtively meets Luis. During a needlepoint lesson, an illicit love scene takes place in a nearby barn between a student and a laborer. While Teresa is agonizingly interrogated, she is forced to serve a proper tea. And while cookery skills are honed in the kitchen, another girl plans her escape.

Teresa's tortured existence worsens when she becomes the target of Fourneau's chief lackey (Mary Maude) and a sadistic group of Sapphic underlings. Finally, she decides to leave, herself, and take her chances on her own. But, while attempting to escape through a window, Teresa encounters the unexpected. Later, during the film's unforgettable climax, the terrifying truth is revealed when ⇒

Above: While evening prayers are being said, darker deeds—including the whipping of a "difficult" student—are being committed in La Residencia. *Left, top: A rare, light-hearted moment, as the girls enthusiastically unpack a new student's clothes. Left, bottom: Madame Fourneau (Lilli Palmer, left) looks on as one of her students prepares for a secret rendezvous.*

Madame Fourneau investigates the disappearance of one of the girls. This leads the headmistress to the building's eerie attic, which contains the broken relics of her son's repressive childhood. Within a small room, she is shocked to be greeted by Luis, who proudly presents the results of his murderous efforts—a jigsaw corpse, consisting of pieces from the missing girls who most resemble his mother. Fourneau looks on, helplessly, at the decaying, mutilated body, just as much the creation of her own domineering love. The film ends with Luis locking his mother alone in the horrific chamber. Then, through the bolted door, her son requests, "Teach her to take care of me like you do." The final image is that of Luis's calmly insane smile, as Fourneau screams his name in utter horror.

Surely, by today's cliché-ridden standards, the plot of ***La Residencia*** could be considered somewhat predictable. But the real genius of the work lies in the consistent quality of its performances and technical elements. It is specifically due to these aspects that the film builds to such a genuinely frightening finale.

Without question, the authoritative and multilayered performance by film veteran Lilli Palmer, as the doomed headmistress, is the film's cornerstone. She presents Fourneau as a woman whose outward rigidity masks an obsessive need to control all that is around her. Ironically enough, it is the character's own sincere, but damaging methods of discipline that are the catalyst of the story's grisly secret. Palmer is supported by an international cast of young actors, who—although many of them were unknown novices at the time—are all completely convincing. Not surprisingly, several would go on to star in other notable horror features after the making of ***La Residencia***. Cristina Galbó would respectively unravel a *giallo* and flee rampaging zombies in Massimo Dallamano's ***What Have You Done to Solange?*** (a.k.a. ***Das Geheim-nis Der Grunen Stecknadel***, 1972) and Jorge Grau's ***No Profaner El Sueño De Los Muertos*** (a.k.a. ***Breakfast at the Manchester Morgue***, 1974); as a possessed murderess, Mary Maude came to exterminate a mad wax sculptor in ***The Crucible of Terror*** (1971); John Moulder-Brown would battle the undead in ***Vampire Circus*** (1971) for Hammer Films; and, in the surreal Spanish shocker, ***La Novia Ensangretada*** (a.k.a. ***The***

Blood-Spattered Bride, 1972), Maribel Martin would fall under the bloodthirsty spell of a female vampire. Because of the language disparity between the actors, ***La Residencia*** had to be dubbed, in order to create alternate Spanish and English-language versions of the film. Utilizing both Palmer's and Moulder-Brown's real voices, the carefully executed results do not greatly lessen the film's impact—an element which was appreciated by many of its critics.

The film cost 28,000,000 pesetas to produce (currently, the equivalent of approximately $185,000), a relatively sizable sum for a Spanish production of its kind, at the time. But this relatively large budget is evident in every aspect of the film's exceptional production values. This includes magnificent cinematography, by Manuel Berenguer, which evokes a decaying, menacing world of vibrant colors. A lushly orchestrated musical score, by Waldo de los Ríos, is unusually rich. Especially memorable is the sensuously melancholic waltz which frames the film. In addition, the score enhances the tension-filled scenes tremendously, as it becomes increasingly embellished with eerily synthesized sounds and a chorus of moaning voices as the proceedings become ever more unnerving.

The finished set based on a production sketch (see below) by Ramiro Gomez for La Residencia.

Besides its literate script, the narrative of ***La Residencia*** is advanced equally through the skillful execution of all of its visual elements. The period costumes, by Vitín Cortezo, are accurate in detail and appear believably "lived in." More important, they help to tell the story, as well. Madame Fourneau—as well as Irene and her wicked team of subordinates—is always immaculately groomed, and bound into a starched blouse and full-length skirt. It is only near the film's conclusion—when the ruination of Fourneau's dominion has become evident to all—that her usually well ordered appearance begins to come undone.

a clock spring which she herself later unwinds. Near the end of the film, Madame Fourneau chances upon her son's childhood rocking horse, now covered in peeling paint, bobbing to and fro near a recently disfigured corpse.

An intriguing document survives, regarding the importance of ***La Residencia*** to its creators. It appears to be a promotional piece, intended for English-language industry members only. What follows is an excerpt from that never-before-revealed material:

"It is our intention that ***The Finishing School*** will be, for us, a stepping-stone from which we can break into the international market...The present Spanish film production considered as "commercial" is created solely for the internal market...Few, very few, are the films which, in the entire history of the Spanish cinema, have gained normal box-office takings in foreign cinemas... (***The Finishing School***) has been made in an attempt to combine artistic success with the commercial. We know that this is very difficult, but, if we succeed, we will have won the first great battle."

To understand this sincere testament, one must be aware of the state of the Spanish film industry 30 years ago. Still under the repressive Franco regime, the majority of productions being made were frivolous comedies, featuring enough indigenous humor to render them unmarketable for foreign exportation. But the Spanish press knew, immediately, that ***La Residencia*** was an extraordinary work. A reporter from Madrid stated, optimistically, in *Variety*, "As a whole, the picture should do well internationally, thanks to its tight story, good direction, and competent acting." Although, as already stated, the film would prove this appraisal true for its release in Spanish-speaking countries only. When the trimmed, English-language version was released elsewhere, notices were middling, at best. ⇒

The entire film unfolds in and on the grounds of the forbidding mansion which houses the school. Designer Ramiro Gómez explained his conception for the setting: "I used the Neo-gothic as an architectural model. Although outdated at the film's time period, it was still applied to such sumptuous houses as the boarding school building." What is striking about the sets is their realistic, grimy appearance. Enhanced by dusty windows and cobwebbed ceilings, the bedrooms, dining hall, and classrooms are water-stained and deteriorating. A recollection by Cristina Galbó attests to the power of Gómez's thoroughly believable sets, "Throughout the shooting of this period film, I still remember eating with the cast in the studio dining room, and believing we had all gone forward in time to enjoy a meal in the 1960s."

Throughout the film, the theme of domination is strengthened by the inclusion of props representing various implements of control. In this way, ***La Residencia*** becomes an object lesson in those things that repress, as careful attention is given to keys, locks, and corsets. In fact, the last note of the musical theme, during the opening credit sequence, is visually and aurally punctuated by a close-up of the massive lock being fastened upon the school building's front gates. Furthermore, props are used metaphorically in several instances. While Luis is being lectured by his mother, he fondles

This production design sketch by Ramiro Gomez served as the template for the finished set (see above).

The New York *Times* labeled ***La Residencia*** as "tepid, not divertingly chilling fare," while the New York *Daily News* dismissed it as a "dubbed piece of gibberish." This is hardly surprising, since that print deletes several key sequences necessary to the film's suspense-building structure and overall logic. Of course, also to be taken into account is the longstanding prejudice against the horror film, in general, by the press, let alone those of foreign origin. This negative commentary may have assisted in branding Serrador's film as an unsatisfactory and even misogynistic work. As has occurred with other underrated works of the genre, such unsupportable critiques are later proliferated only in film books, written by negligent authors whose incompetent evaluations hinder the reassessment these films deserve. Fortunately, with the passage of time, ***La Residencia*** is earning the worldwide reputation its excellence warrants. This is due to a recent appreciation for the European horror film in general, and the availability of fully-uncut versions of these works on video, laser disc, and DVD.

Three decades ago, Narciso Ibáñez Serrador created a film which benefitted from a combination of his technical expertise in visual media, and a love for the classics of fantastic literature. But, even moreso, the masterwork which resulted is evidence of an artist satisfied with only the best, from himself and the equally talented actors and craftsmen necessary to achieve it. Their consummate alliance created ***La Residencia***, undoubtedly more than worthy enough to be enjoyed for another 30 years to come. Ω

While searching for a missing student, Madame Fourneau (Lilli Palmer) uncovers something far worse.

An Interview with LA RESIDENCIA Director

NARCISO IBANEZ SERRADOR

By MICHAEL ORLANDO YACCARINO

NARCISO IBÁÑEZ SERRADOR—BORN IN Montevideo, Uruguay on July 4, 1935—inherited a passion for the arts from a long line of thespian ancestors. In fact, he began his career as an actor before starting a profession as a writer and director. During the infancy of Spanish television in the 1950s, he not only learned his craft, but also helped to define the medium, through years of delivering high-quality productions.

Director Narciso Ibañez Serrador.

Although little-known outside of the industry, today Serrador is a greatly respected and powerful figure in the European television community, with an impressive list of major awards garnered over a 40-year period. His only two films, ***La Residencia*** and ***¿Quien Puede Matar A Un Niño?*** (***Who Could Kill A Child?*** a.k.a. ***Island Of The Damned***, 1975) were enormously successful in his own and other Spanish-speaking countries. Known affectionately as "Chicho," he has been the president of the Madrid-based television production company Prointel, S.A. for many years. Here, in an exclusive interview, Serrador discusses ***La Residencia***, a milestone in an extensive and still active career.

Madame Fourneau prepares the girls for their shower in this lobby card scene from the American release of La Residencia.

FAX: How did your work in Spanish television lead to the development of ***La Residencia***, your first film?

SERRADOR: In Argentina, in 1958, I had created a series, called *Thriller*, in which classic short stories of suspense were adapted for television. We chose tales by such great authors as Poe, de Maupassant, Lovecraft, and Stevenson, as well as several original ones written by myself. Those programs were very successful in Argentina where they were broadcast under the general title *Obras Maestras Del Terror* (*Masterworks Of Terror*). In fact, in 1960, I wrote the screenplay for, and acted in an Argentinian film of the same name, based on the series, which featured three Poe stories. Later, in 1963, I traveled to Spain where I presented a similar format, quite successfully, for Spanish television (TVE), this time under

the title *Historias Para No Dormir* (*Stories To Keep You Awake*). The series' success meant that various producers offered me the chance to write and direct a story for the cinema. In 1969, I decided to do it, and that is how ***La Residencia*** came about.

FAX: ***La Residencia*** was an enormous success in Spain—even winning you the Antonio Barbero award for the best first work by a director. But, in the United States, it was inappropriately released as a drive-in double feature with a much lesser film, and received mixed reviews. Were you involved in the film's distribution in the U.S., a country where your work is little-known?

SERRADOR: I wrote and directed ***La Residencia***, but I had nothing to do with its distribution. At the time of its release, in 1970, Spanish cinema was practically ignored in North America, so the film was badly distributed and badly promoted. However, in Spanish-speaking Central and South America, it was a great success, since my works on television were, and are well-known there. The remainder of my endeavors have much more to do with television than the cinema, and so, my name is familiar among industry professionals in Europe.

FAX: Although ***La Residencia*** was lauded for its acting and technical achievements, it was condemned for its violence and lesbian overtones by the English-language press. Many of these elements were deleted from the AIP release. How do you respond to such criticism and censorship?

SERRADOR: I must begin by telling you that this is the first time I am hearing that the film had been cut—something I find very distressing. So, since I am not very familiar with this altered version, I do not know which parts of ***La Residencia*** have been censored. What I can say is that, in 1970, the film reached the height of what was then permitted, as far as eroticism was concerned in Spain. But, regarding the violence...well, in this country, with its long history of bloodshed, nobody paid too much attention to the scenes one might call "excessive."

FAX: And how would the sexual elements in ***La Residencia*** compare to other films made at the time in Spain and elsewhere?

SERRADOR: As far as eroticism, the film would soon be surpassed by the other films, in all countries. Furthermore, I would not classify ***La Residencia*** as an openly erotic film. Sex is something which I deliberately used to flavor the film—that is, lesbianism is sensed, but not actually shown. I am not in favor of depicting crudely erotic scenes.

FAX: How do you respond to critiques like the following by the Los Angeles *Times*: "If ever there was a movie that rated an 'X,' ***The House That Screamed*** is it...a sadist and masochist's delight..."; or, from the New York *Daily News*, "The director milk's the lesbian thing for all its worth."?

SERRADOR: It could be that, in 1970, it was a film ahead of its time. But I certainly don't think it would be reclassified as an "X" today.

FAX: All of the performances in the film are excellent. What was your experience working with Lilli Palmer?

PUBLICITY

HOUSE THAT SCREAMED 1C

INTERNATIONAL ACTRESS — Lilli Palmer headlines the cast of American International's new screen shocker, "The House That Screamed," which opens ..... at the ..... Theatre. Sharing cast honors with her in the film are Cristina Galbo, John Moulder Brown and Mary Maude. It was directed by Narciso Ibanez Serrador in color.

SUSPENSE & HORROR FEATURED IN NEW LOCAL FILM STORY

Goosepimple lovers will be well provided for when they see American International's new screen shocker, "The House That Screamed," which opens ..... at the ..... Theatre.

Describing the bizarre events that occur in a semi-correctional school for teen age girls, as, one-by-one students disappear, the story develops into a suspenseful mystery, winding up to a white-knuckle finish as it reaches its last scene.

Starring Lilli Palmer, Cristina Galbo, John Moulder Brown and Mary Made, the film was directed by Narciso Ibanez Serrador, written by Luis Verna Penafiel.

ATTIC OF SPANISH VILLA IDEAL HORROR SITE FOR NEW FILM

One of the most shocking scenes of American International's new suspense-thriller, "The House That Screamed" takes place in the dimly-lit confines of a dusty old attic, a grisly sight best appreciated by goosepimple lovers who see it on the screen of the ..... Theatre when it opens on .....

However, the filming crew headed by Narciso Ibanez Serrador, the director and the photographer, Manuel Berenguer and production designer Ramiro Gomez found a natural location to shoot the scene in the very attic of the Spanish villa they had chosen to film the picture.

Climbing a spiral iron staircase, they found a lofted, beamed and buttressed ceiling covered with strings of cobwebs and a row of cluttered chambers laden with dust which dated back to the early 19th century when the house was built. The only daylight which could penetrate came from stained glass windows at each end which cast faint, multi-colored rays across the accumulation of aging bric-a-brac. Naturally it was selected as an ideal background for the nasty events demanded by the script.

Starring Lilli Palmer, John Moulder Brown, Cristina Galbo and Mary Maude, the film which describes the shocking events which take place in a plush semi-correctional school for girls was filmed in color.

EUROPEAN LOCATION FILMING PROVIDES RICH BACKGROUNDS

The value of filming a story on location in carefully selected sites in Europe is aptly demonstrated in American International's new screen shocker, "The House That Screamed," which opens ..... at the ..... Theatre.

Starring Lilli Palmer, Cristina Galbo and John Moulder Brown, the story relates the bizarre events which occur in a sumptious boarding school for rich wayward girls when, one-by-one, students disappear. Thus, the company, led by director Narciso Ibanez Serrador; cameraman Manuel Berenguer and production designer Ramiro Gomez chose a plush Spanish mansion surrounded by green forests as a background.

All the expensive period furnishings, richly panelled walls and artistic decor which might be found in such a boarding school were immediately available to the camera, eliminating the need to shop antique warehouses for props. The tables of rich ivory inlay; plush oriental carpets and hand-carved desks, chairs and buffets would make any collector drool . . . and they were all in place as if ordained into position by the script.

The spacious rooms also eliminated the need for set construction for they were of ideal size to represent those of a boarding school. They were high ceilinged chambers featuring large, ornate doors, stained glass windows and their staircases fringed by richly carved balustrades and newel posts.

"HOUSE THAT SCREAMED" FILMED IN HOUSE THAT SQUEAKS

The location site selected for filming of "The House That Screamed," American International's new screen shocker which opens ..... at the ..... Theatre turned out to be more fitting to the picture's title for the company's sound crew than expected.

A sumptuous 19th century Spanish villa, its aging parquet floors, vasting door hinges and creaking antique furniture provided the company's microphones with a plethora of squeaks, creaks, cracks and groans to punctuate the actors' dialogues and lend an authentic atmosphere to the film's story, a suspense shocker told against the background of its sombre, cavernous rooms.

Starring Lilli Palmer, Cristina Galbo, John Moulder Brown and Mary Made, the film was directed by Narciso Ibanez Serrador.

HOUSE THAT SCREAMED 1B

YOUNG INTERNATIONAL STAR — John Moulder Brown shares cast honors with Lilli Palmer, Cristina Galbo and Mary Maude in "The House That Screamed," American International's new screen shocker opening ..... at the ..... Theatre.

HOUSE THAT SCREAMED 2D

DRAMATIC DUO — Lilli Palmer, portraying the operator of a semi-correctional boarding school for girls in "The House That Screamed" which opens ..... at the ..... Theatre soothes the back of a punished student, played by Pauline Challenor. Released by American International Pictures, the film was directed by Narciso Ibanez Serrador in color.

LILLI PALMER, A STAR WHO MUST JET BETWEEN SETS

Actress Lilli Palmer, who has been one of the busiest screen stars in the international film industry set could have used a pair of seven-league boots in addition to the dramatic talents with which she had been endowed. Her career has been marked by the film assignments which keep her shuttling across the Atlantic to and from Hollywood, England and the countries of Europe.

The star, who headlines the cast of "The House That Screamed," American International's suspense shocker opening ..... at the ..... Theatre makes her home "on top of a mountain in Switzerland" but doesn't get too much time to enjoy it.

Born Maria Lilli Peiser, she cannot remember a time when she was not interested in acting for her mother was an actress also. She attended the Ilka Gruening Drama School and made her stage debut at the age of sixteen in a play called "Die Enerne Jungfrau," a part which required her to stand on her head. However it was her dramatic ability which caught the attention of Alexander Korda, later, who took her to London for a screen test. A contract with Gaumont British followed and a series of film roles including "Secret Agent," "The Man With A Thousand Faces," "Thunder Rock" and "The Gentle Sex."

In 1943, she accompanied her new husband, Rex Harrison to Hollywood, where she was starring roles in "Cloak And Dagger" and "Body And Soul."

The Hollywood-Europe rotation hit a steady pace then as she worked in such films as "The Counterfeit Traitor," "The Pleasure Of His Company," "The Amorous Adventures Of Moll Flanders," "Operation Crossbow," (for which she was the Best Actress award at the San Sebastian Film Festival), "Nobody Runs Forever" and, recently, American Internationals "Asylum."

After completing her work in "The House That Screamed," which was filmed in Spain, Miss Palmer's next assignment was another film for American International, "Murders In The Rue Morgue," in which she shares star honors with Jason Robards, Herbert Lom, Christina Kaufmann and Michael Dunn. Like "The House That Screamed," her new assignment is also filmed in Spain.

HOUSE THAT SCREAMED 1A

MOTHER AND SON roles in the new local film, "The House That Screamed" which opens ..... at the ..... Theatre are portrayed by international stars, Lilli Palmer and John Moulder Brown. Released by American International, the film was directed by Narciso Ibanez Serrador in color.

TOP SPANISH TV DIRECTOR DEBUTS IN THEATRICAL HORROR SUSPENSE FILM

After winning 11 international TV awards in Spain, Narciso Ibanez Serrador made his debut as a writer and director of theatrical film with American International's new screen shocker, "The House That Screamed," which opens ..... at the ..... Theatre.

Starring Lilli Palmer, Cristina Galbo, John Moulder Brown and Mary Maude, the film is a tense, goosepimply tale of suspense and horror centered around a semi-correctional school for girls in southern France.

Prior to his efforts on "The House That Screamed," Serrador had won a top reputation as a writer and director of suspense TV programs in the Spanish-speaking world.

Produced and directed by Narciso Ibanez Serrador, "The House That Screamed" also stars Cristina Galbo, John Moulder Brown and Mary Maude. It tells the story of a semi-correctional school for teen age girls where a series of disappearances develop into a suspenseful story of murder and horror.

A page from the American International Pictures pressbook for La Residencia, *now retitled,* The House That Screamed.

SERRADOR: Wonderful. Lilli Palmer was an extraordinary actress—and you know that I come from a family where there are five generations of actors. I think actors form a special race. You see, even if we are meeting for the first time, or a language barrier may separate us, this bond allows us to understand each other easily, in spite of all that.

FAX: How close was the finished film to your original conception?

SERRADOR: Before I start to direct anything, whether for television or the cinema, I carefully study what I am going to undertake. Even at that early stage, I practically see the program for the film by projecting it in my own imagination. In fact, I don't just see it, I hear it, as well: the music, sound effects, silences—which are all media for expression, as important as the actual image itself. After this, all that's left to do is to make it. So, if the result is negative, it is ⇒

not because I have made a bad film, but because I imagined it badly to begin with.

FAX: Which elements of the film still please you?

SERRADOR: I feel that several aspects of ***La Residencia*** remain very strong—the overall atmosphere of the film—several specific moments, for example: the contrast played out between the praying and whipping scenes, and the way in which the two murders are dealt with. Here, I believe I may have used the slow-motion technique in such a scene before Peckinpah did.

FAX: The "look" of the film is one of its many outstanding points. The realism of the unkempt clothing and decaying building help to add suspense. How much of this, as well as other production elements, were you involved in?

SERRADOR: The film's "look" was obtained thanks to teamwork, carried out as much by Vitin Cortezo in the costume design as Ramiro Gómez, who planned and constructed the sets. As far as editing, music, and cinematography are concerned—in the same way as all the other productions I have done—my suggestions were followed very closely.

FAX: Which filmmakers and artists have inspired you the most?

SERRADOR: Regarding my television work, I consider myself to be a "self-made man," having started as a young man in the medium, which, itself, was only just beginning at that time. The significant influences on my work have been, above all else, literary, and I could give you a long list of favorite authors stretching from Poe to Dostoevsky, and O. Henry to Bradbury.

FAX: Do you feel that your artistry has been influential to filmmakers in your own and other countries?

SERRADOR: I think that both ***La Residencia*** and ***¿Quien Puede Matar A Un Niño?*** have influenced some producers, but I don't feel it would be right to mention them, because I could be wrong. On the other hand, the majority of my television work has had a decisive influence on television scriptwriters and directors, both in Spain and Latin America.

FAX: Are there any uncompleted or never-realized projects in your career?

SERRADOR: No. I am capable of getting down to work on a project only if I'm absolutely sure that it will be brought to completion.

FAX: Are you currently working on any new productions?

SERRADOR: At the moment, I continue to produce *Uno Dos Tres*—a great game show on TVE—which has been broadcast for nearly the past 30 years. It is, without doubt, the most popular program here in Spain. The program is also being produced simultaneously in England, Portugal, and Belgium. Additionally in Spain, I have released several new television series more recently, such as, *Hablemos de Sexo* (*Let's Talk About Sex*), a program about sexual education; *¡Luz Roja!* (*Red Light!*), about the dangers of drugs and other addictions; and *Waku-Waku*, an ecological show about different animals, as well as oth-

An Interview with Actress

MARY MAUDE

By MICHAEL ORLANDO YACCARINO

EVEN THOUGH BRITISH ACTRESS MARY Maude was only 20 years old when chosen for the plum role of Irene in ***La Residencia***, she already possessed a varied career in the arts. In this exclusive interview, she details the creation of that character, and her memorable experiences on the set.

FAX: What was your professional experience before the making of ***La Residencia***?

MAUDE: I had trained as a ballet dancer from the age of 11 until I was 17. And it was during that time that I appeared in several BBC TV "classic" children's serials, such as *What Katy Did* and *Jane Eyre*. Shortly after leaving ballet school, I was asked to take the lead in a new TV adventure series called *Freewheelers*. It was immediately after completing three seasons of the show that I was asked to audition for ***La Residencia***.

FAX: What was that process like?

MAUDE: Apparently, Serrador had come here to London to look for a number of young women to appear in the film. So, I was interviewed, along with several others, in a hotel. Interestingly enough, I seem to recall that it was not altogether clear which roles Serrador was casting for, or if he had specific characters in mind. But, only a few days later, I was asked to go to Madrid to do a screen test. When I arrived, I learned that principal photography had already started, and the majority of the key roles had been cast.

FAX: Except for that of Irene?

MAUDE: Well, actually, that was not the case. A well-known Spanish actress, Serena Vergano, had been selected to play Irene, and had already shot one scene. However, either Serrador, Lilli Palmer, the actress herself, or perhaps all three, were not pleased with the results. Regardless, Vergano had left a day or so before I arrived in Madrid. My screen test consisted of a scene Vergano had already shot—in fact, it was a rather dramatic one which appears late in the film. It's the one in Lilli Palmer's study, when I question her as to the strange goings-on at the school, and am then forced to hand over my keys.

Irene (Mary Maude) investigates the murderous goings-on in La Residencia.

FAX: Obviously, the screen test must have been a success.

MAUDE: More so than I initially realized. The very next day, it seemed to be assumed that I was to play Irene! But, since no contract had been agreed to, and I had planned on being in Madrid for a few days only, I insisted on returning to London prior to beginning shooting. By the way, the whole incident, concerning my substituting for Vergano, was played-up in several Spanish newspapers.

FAX: How long did principal photography take to complete?

MAUDE: Just over four months, as I recall it.

FAX: And where was it shot?

MAUDE: After all of the interior filming had been finished at Estudios Roma and Estudios Moro in Madrid, location work was done at Las Comillas Palace in Santander, Cantabria in Northern Spain, which served as the exteriors for the boarding school.

FAX: Can you describe the atmosphere on the set throughout the production?

MAUDE: ***La Residencia*** was, in some ways, the epitome of what filming is depicted as, but seldom is—that is, a lot of temperament flying about, endless rumors, and speculation as to casting and performance. Serrador was very committed to the film—it was his, and he behaved in an extremely autocratic way.

FAX: Did you speak Spanish before the making of this film?

MAUDE: Not at first. But I decided, early on, that learning the language was of paramount importance in order to answer Serrador on his own terms. He knew exactly what he wanted from a scene, and often how

ers. Fortunately, all of them have achieved great success.

FAX: Regarding the making of ***La Residencia***, are there any particular incidents that remain with you?

SERRADOR: When Lilli Palmer first read the script, she said that there were three sequences too many. When I reviewed the ones in question, I realized that she did not appear in any of them. So, I thanked her for her advice, but told her I planned to shoot them anyway. And so I did. But, when I saw the whole film practically finished, I got rid of those three scenes. It was only then that I realized just how clearly superfluous they actually were—of course, exactly as my dear, admired friend, Lilli Palmer, had already indicated.

FAX: In closing, are there any thoughts you would like the viewer to be aware of in experiencing ***La Residencia***?

SERRADOR: It was a very positive experience since, although it was my first film, it ran for 13 months at the Roxy cinema in Madrid, where it premièred in February of 1970, thus becoming Spanish cinema's best box-office success. Before its opening, nobody among us could foresee that it would become so popular—even I reached the point where I began to have doubts about the finished film. For this reason, I have subsequently thought that it is better to be led by one's own intuition than by others' opinions, which can ultimately confuse the message you want to bring to the audience.

FAX: I'm sure I haven't touched upon everything you would like to say about this marvelous film.

SERRADOR: Firstly, I would like to thank you very much for your interest in this old and much-loved film. But secondly, although you tell me that you are sure I have not said all I wanted to, I am going to finish by telling you something...your intuition has failed you! Ω

to get it. I now know this to be a talent not found in many more internationally famous directors.

FAX: Your performance in ***La Residencia*** is unforgettable. Was the role of Irene conceived as complexly as you so indelibly portrayed her?

MAUDE: Thank you. Yes, Irene was pretty well developed, on paper, for the most part. That is to say, she was written as a thoroughly nasty piece of work. But I tried to explore the reasons as to why this was the case. I saw all the girls at the boarding school as society's rejects—survival of the fittest reigned among them. And Irene was not only fit, but intelligent and very bored, as well.

FAX: A rather lethal combination, I'd think.

MAUDE: Absolutely. In addition, I tried to show that Irene was also vulnerable and, in many ways, exploited by the headmistress to dominate in her place.

FAX: Was it enjoyable work, embodying the villainess of the piece?

MAUDE: Oh, most definitely! It was the first time I had played a "baddie" and discovered quickly what fun it is—and, to a certain extent, easier.

FAX: Even so, you were capable of giving her a great degree of psychological depth at the same time.

MAUDE: I attempted to bring to Irene a feeling of desperation—much as I would imagine a present-day, teenage gang leader might feel. Irene made the rules and, within their context, they had a certain honor—even if these laws were fundamentally flawed and unacceptable to mainstream society.

FAX: Serrador spoke very highly of Lilli Palmer's professionalism. What was your experience working with her?

MAUDE: Lilli Palmer was a shadowy figure. She did not concern herself with the other actors and, as I remember it, I probably had only one or two conversations with her during the whole production. She was always elegant, pleasant, and rather aloof and, looking back on it, possibly lonely. I might add that she commanded great respect from Serrador, which was in marked contrast to how he behaved with everyone else.

FAX: As you know, both the Spanish and English-language versions of ***La Residencia*** had to be dubbed. What are you thoughts regarding this?

MAUDE: Both Spain and Italy have—or did at that time—a different attitude toward dubbing than ours. It was considered not only necessary, but, possibly, an advantage, as opposed to a necessary evil. Unfortunately, I did not dub my own voice, as I was working on something else at the time. I regret this, as I feel that only half the performance is mine. It is my understanding that the English dub was not very good. But, then again, the Spanish one wasn't much either.

FAX: So, then, you have seen the finished film?

MAUDE: Only once, at the Madrid premiere. And that, as you know, was 30 years ago.

FAX: Do you feel that ***La Residencia*** was ahead of its time, regarding its strong quotient of sex and violence?

MAUDE: Well, was it really? After all, this was the '70s and, during the '60s many films had been much more violent and sexually explicit than this one.

FAX: What lasting impressions do you have of this production?

MAUDE: I remember ***La Residencia*** with great affection. There was enormous solidarity among all the young actors, as we reveled in our different languages and cultures. Madrid was a lively and sun-filled city, and I loved the Spanish people. In fact, I adopted several Spanish characteristics from the experience—particularly, the temperament which earned me the reputation as, *"Maria, tu eres mas Española que las Españolas!"*

FAX: How did you career progress after the making of ***La Residencia***?

MAUDE: During the five years following it, I appeared in many films—besides the majority, which were made in the U.K., there were two done in Spain, one in France, and one in the USA.

FAX: And besides your acting?

MAUDE: I also got married and had two children. I now combine an acting career with financial journalism and research. Ω

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I must express my deepest thanks for those who offered me their personal reminiscences on the making of ***La Residencia****: Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, Ramiro Gomez, Mary Maude, and Cristina Galbo.*

Teresa (Cristina Galbo, right) is interrogated by sadistic Irene (Mary Maude).