



**BLANCANIEVES (SNOW WHITE)** is a Second Quarter 2017 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that remarkable film.

**15 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**Spain 2012 black-and-white 104 minutes intertitled live action feature silent musical dramedy Arcadia Motion Pictures / Nix Films / Sisifofilms AIE / The Kraken Films / Noodles Production Producers: Pablo Berger, Ibon Cormenzana, Sandra Rapia, Jerome Vidal**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance  
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**Points:**

- 1 Direction: Pablo Berger 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit Direction: Inigo Rotaetxe**
- 1 Editing: Fernando Franco**
- 2 Cinematography: Kiko de la Rica\***
- 2 Lighting: Xavier Sarasa**  
**Special Visual Effects: Jonathan Cheetham, Yusef El Khadir,  
Dave Goodbaum, Clare Heneghan,  
Sergio Paco Rubio, Sandra Picher, Ferran Piquer**
- 0 Screenplay: Pablo Berger**

- Music Recording: Maria Kantorowicz and Patrick Lemmens**  
**Music Mixing: Patrick Lemmens**
- 2 Music: Alfonso de Villalonga\*, Chicuelo\*, and Roman Gottwald\***
- 2 Production Design: Alain Bainée**  
**Set Decoration: Andrea Calvé\***  
**Set Dressing: Chan Canelo\*, Miguel Angel Delgado\*, Luis Doce\*, and Joxean Goya\***
- Props: Rosa Pariente, Montse Soler**  
**Costume Design: Paco Delgado\***  
**Makeup: Sylvie Imbert**
- 2 Sound: Felipe Aragó, Gareth Llewellyn, Sergio Teston**  
**Casting: Rosa Estevez**
- 1 Acting**  
**2 Creativity**
- 15 total points**

**Cast: Maribel Verdu (Encarna, the stepmother), Daniel Giménez Cacho (Antonio Villalta), Angela Molina (Dona Concha, Carmencita's grandmother), Pere Ponce (Genaro Bilbao), Macarena Garcia (Carmen at age 18), Sofia Oria (j)\* (Carmencita at age 9), Josep Maria Pou (Don Carlos, impresario), Imma Cuesta (Carmen de Triana, Carmencita's mother and Antonio's wife), Ramon Barea (Don Martin), Emilio Gavira (Jesusin), Sergio Dorado (Rafita), Jinson Anazco (Juanin), Itziar Castro (Tocino de Cielo), Michal Lajos (Manolin), Alberto Martinez (Josefa), Jimmy Muñoz (Victorino), Carmen Segarra (Cocinera), Oriol Vila (Joven Arrogante)**

**Director Pablo Berger's unique version of the Snow White story, BLANCANIEVES is a mixed blessing. Employing some of the most salient features of silent cinema, the film makes of its heroine a hybrid of Cinderella and a female Juan Gallardo, protagonist of Blasco Ibanez's novel known in English by the title Blood and Sand.**

**Like Juan, Carmencita would like to follow in her father's footsteps, though without his suffering and abominably loveless marriage. She's hindered in all**

respects by a narcissistic stepmother deriving from the Brothers Grimm tale. Encarna, played with exaggerated, hammy relish by Maribel Verdu, is irredeemably egoistical, making her original vocation as nurse not only a contradiction but a downright misplacement. Since young Carmencita's mother died giving birth to her, the child is raised initially by her grandmother, a flamenco enthusiast delicately played by Angela Molina, who dies in a rapture brought on by overexerting herself in a first communion celebration for her granddaughter. That leaves the semi-orphan in custody of Encarna, who assigns her living quarters in a chicken coop and the most menial tasks essential to maintenance of Antonio's luxurious estate.

Encarna herself is too preoccupied with acquiring a showy fashionable wardrobe and photogenic home decorations to devote attention to a child of someone else's creation. To maximize time for ostentatious household pursuits, she progressively diminishes her active role as health supervisor of a quadriplegic husband.

Antonio Villalta, former renowned bullfighter devolved into perpetual invalid, is Carmencita's father and Encarna's embittered sugar daddy. Semi-paralyzed but fully conscious, he's mired in lamentation for his deceased first wife, blaming their daughter for the premature demise of a flamenco-dancing spouse. This makes him easy prey for attractive, youthful Encarna, who wishes to become wealthy and famous at his expense. And proceeds to do so, since no one from Villalta's old entourage steps forward to thwart her schemes.

Acquiring rooster Pepe, Carmencita's sole companion, and a child obsessed with an imagined authoritative ideal father composed of equal parts public hero and private hermit, Encarna banishes both girl and pet to hereditary property status, a position where she intends to keep them indefinitely. This plot is partially defeated, however, when trespassing servant girl chases runaway poultry up a grand staircase to forbidden second floor territory. Eventually the pursuit leads Carmencita to discover her father's condition and location. The unanticipated revelation is mutual, with Antonio detecting his wife's charms and grace latent in the child.

A furtive relationship unites the two in common admiration for bullfighting and flamenco. Father mentors daughter in stances, psychology, and etiquette of the bullring. She, in turn, reawakens his zest for life and movement.

Their bonding is curtailed when huntress Encarna returns unexpectedly early one day and hears a recording, one she had not given anyone permission to play. Discovering in the same off-limits room Pepe the rooster, she uses the animal to blackmail her stepdaughter into discontinuing parental visitations, cooking the pet and implying she would do the same to Carmencita if her prohibition is violated again.

Hostile, yet terrified, the underage, unpaid housemaid acquiesces. Presumably she still receives food and a kind of board from her domineering stepmother, a sop thrown like a glass of water to Antonio.

Meanwhile Encarna plays dominatrix to subservient chauffeur. She subsequently murders a toadying admirer upon discovery of his failure to obtain cover girl prominence for her in a national magazine. Depriving her husband of social contact with his daughter and even essential nutrition, she ultimately “accidentally” kills and then mummifies him, using his lifeless corpse as model for a publicity photo shoot in which she herself stars. Household servants are given, for a fee, the privilege of posing with her late husband for snapshots. He is then discarded, buried ignobly in crude peasant fashion.

To eliminate a perceived future threat, the dead man’s teenage daughter is banished, her transporter instructed to eliminate Antonio Villalta’s offspring and potential avenger. This he attempts to do after an abortive foray into sexual assault, but fails to insure the victim is wholly deprived of life.

Along comes a caravan of dwarves who earn a livelihood offering comic relief as miniature bullfighters. One of them discovers a nearly drowned Carmencita, resuscitates her successfully, then transports the teen back to his mobile home. She joins this traveling comedy act originally simply in the role of recovering invalid. But when one of the troupe is mauled and mangled for the amusement of a crowd of rural spectators, the pampered guest enters the bullring herself displaying the expert combat form tutelage from Antonio provided her. Though otherwise suffering from amnesia, able only to employ mechanical details from incidents occurring in her former life before failed homicide erased her memory.

A new bullfighting star is born on the spot as Carmencita, who has lost recollection of her proper name, is dubbed Blancanieves, Snow White, by her hosts.

The man whose life she saved is anything but grateful, having forfeited his role as star attraction to her. Though it is calves, not bulls, Blancanieves battles, she's hailed as a rising talent, coming to the attention ultimately of the same impresario who handled the career of her late father. He seeks her out and offers an exclusive life contract which illiterate teen dupe gratefully accepts. This leads Blancanieves and companion dwarves to Seville's bullring, where her father was gored and crippled years earlier in an afternoon featuring skirmishes with six successive bulls.

An envious recovering dwarf switches identifying signs on bullpens at the arena, causing full-grown, aggressive Satan to come out as challenger for a sold-out performance by Blancanieves. Despite repeatedly failing to follow fatherly advice to never take eyes off the bull, Carmen instead parries its charges between bows to admiring fans in the stands, resulting in a stalemate. Led by a patron of the late Antonio, spectators urge the bull's life be spared. This wish is granted. Going inordinately quickly from exultant heroine basking in acclamation by newfound fans to stricken idol, Carmen accepts a poisoned apple from her thinly disguised stepmother, envious of being pushed off the cover of a magazine by the more popular Blancanieves, despite an editor's pledge to make Encarna the featured personality. The woman has no compunction about a second excursion into homicide. Will she succeed anew?

Though the film's director must be commended for willingness to experiment with black-and-white photography, utilization of intertitles and irises in silent cinema style, and effective musical accompaniment created by full orchestra, the final result lacks soul and depth. Trying to avoid a commonplace conclusion, Berger instead offers a bleak substitute, suggestive of necrophilia. While this is not necessarily discordant with transgressive underpinnings of old Teutonic legends, it does leave a bitter taste in the mouths of viewers, who are apt to find the film's conclusion far from admirable or uplifting. This and voyeuristic scenes involving sadism and familial vampirism make BLANCANIEVES

completely unsuitable for viewing by minors, restricting potential audiences solely to adults. An unusual and self-defeating exclusiveness for a musical.

As for acting, top honors go to gracefully nimble Sofia Oria as the juvenile Carmencita. Once she morphs into Macarena Garcia's uninspired and completely vapid eighteen-year-old Carmen, the film loses much dramatic impact and nearly all charm. Treating an assassination attempt as ravaging seduction is similarly repulsive, further alienating audiences.

Character motivations are overly simplistic, stereotypes being showcased at the expense of developed shadings, though Angela Molina's Dona Concha is an effectively subtle performance. Unfortunately, grandmother and granddaughter are dispensed with far too early in the film, leaving the bulk of the drama to less competent and engaging performers. Another notable exception, Daniel Giménez Cacho's Antonio, is similarly dispensed with all too soon, his displays of paternal pride and affection sorely missed in later stages of the drama.

Cinematography, production design, costuming, and music are all of superior quality, making deficiencies of screenplay and acting more annoying by contrast.

Sound, when utilized, is of superlative quality. Lighting is also exceptionally fine, allowing optimal visual clarity and definition.

Frequent homages can be found to earlier films. One example is the dining scene where Carmencita and Encarna sit at opposite ends of a radically elongated set of tables recalling a similar setup in *Citizen Kane*. Another is a murdered companion's final float in a luxury swimming pool, recalling the fate of William Holden's gigolo in *Sunset Blvd.* An overhead blimp outside the arena in Seville reminds audiences of a similar scene in Hayao Miyazaki's *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Passage of time depicted through falling leaves of a calendar is a concept borrowed directly from Fritz Lang's 1928 *Spione (Spies)*. Note also Berger's impresario in this film is reminiscent of puppeteer Stromboli in Disney's *Pinocchio*. While these are all welcome sidebars for film enthusiasts, less winning are editing insertions of whirling praxinoscopic images used as scene transitions. Such devices tire quickly both eye and brain, distracting rather than enhancing.

The music of this film, rich in emotive power and rhythmically propulsive, considerably augments its impact. Subtitling lyrics would have been helpful for listeners whose first language is other than Spanish.

A film definitely not suitable for anyone under the age of eighteen, **BLANCANIEVES** fails to achieve classic status due largely to injected scenes of tasteless borderline obscenity, overuse of stereotyping, and an extremely disappointing conclusion. Even frequently stunning cinematography is insufficiently rewarding to counterbalance these defects.

Bonuses on the Cohen Media dvd release are a two-minute trailer, a thirty-minute making-of documentary, a four and one-half minute featurette titled "Blancanieves: Live Concert in Barcelona & Madrid," a five-minute First Day of Shooting featurette, and a two-minute Director's Introduction. Only the making-of documentary is substantive, unfortunately. The other extras are superficial and unenlightening.

**BLANCANIEVES** is worth viewing once as a novelty, but lacks outreach to viewer empathy, insuring it's most unlikely to become a callback or nostalgic favorite.