



***¡Bienvenido, Mr. Marshall!* (Welcome, Mr. Marshall) is a 1953 Spanish comedy directed by Luis García Berlanga. Below is Kino Ken's review of an English subtitled dvd release of that film.**

**15 of a total 20 points = \*\*\*1/2 = an outstanding film**

**Spain 1953 black-and-white 78 minutes subtitled live action feature comedy  
Unión Industrial Cinematográfica (UNINCI) Producer: Vicente Sempere Pastor**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**Points:**

- 1 Direction: Luis García Berlanga Supervising Direction: Joaquin Reig**
- 1 Editing: Pepita Orduna**
- 1 Cinematography: Manuel Berenguer**  
**Still Photography: Miguel Guzmán**
- 1 Lighting**
- 2 Screenplay: Juan Antonio Bardem\*, Luis Berlanga\*, and Miguel Minura\***
- 2 Music: Jesús García Leoz\***
- 2 Art Direction: Francisco Canet\* and Francisco Rodriguez Asensio\***

**Costume Design: Eduardo de la Torre**

**Makeup: Antonio Florido**

**Props: Federico del Toro and Luna y Mateos**

**2 Sound: Antonio Alonso**

**1 Acting**

**2 Creativity**

**Narrator: Fernando Rey**

**15 total points**

**Cast: Lolita Sevilla (Carmen Vargas), Manolo Moran\* (Manolo), José Isbert (Don Pablo, the mayor), Alberto Romeo (Don Luis, a gentleman-aristocrat), Elvira Quintilla (Señorita Eloisa, the schoolmistress), Luis Pérez de León (Don Cosme, the priest), Félix Fernández (Don Emiliano, the doctor / gambler), Fernando Aguirre (town secretary), Joaquin Roa (Julían, the prisoner), Nicolás D. Perchicot (apothecary), José Franco (Delegate General), Rafael Alonso (envoy), José María Rodríguez (José), Elisa Méndez (Doña Raquel), Matilde López Roldán (Doña Matilde), José Alburquerque (Florentino), Ángel Álvarez (Pedro), Manuel Rosellón, Enrique Macedo, José Rodríguez Lapuente (the three magi), Pepito Vidal (Pepito), José Vivó, Manuel Alexandre, Josep Castillo Escalona (secretaries), Joaquín Bergia, Rafael Cortés, José Riesgo (cowboys), Pablo Tallavi (Inquisitor), Aquilino Ballesteros (Juan, farmer), Francisco Bonilla (Rafael), Antonio Florido and Emilio Vidaurreta (steamroller machinists), Bernardino Laso (Genaro, bus driver), Emilio Santiago (barber)**

**Opening salvo of a re-energized Spanish cinema, Luis Berlanga's *¡Bienvenido, Mr. Marshall!* (*Welcome, Mr. Marshall*) served notice to the world that the Franco dictatorship had not completely snuffed out film talent in Iberia. Its satirical screenplay was devised by a troika consisting of film director Berlanga, soon-to-be feted director Juan Antonio Bardem, and Miguel Minura. The plot focused on preparations in a Castilian village for a visit by Americans presumed to be official administrators of Marshall Plan recovery benefits. Since Spain had been officially neutral during World War II, it didn't qualify for such funding. So villagers seen onscreen must resign themselves to "much ado about nothing."**

However, the story line permitted filmmakers to satirize Spanish bureaucracy, outmoded lecture-dominated elementary education, the American western, HUAC (House Un-American Activities Commission) hearings, the Spanish Inquisition, evangelical Catholicism, and classical flamenco.

The film opens with a lengthy travelogue introduction to the region and residents of Villar del Ri6, spoken by narrator Fernando Rey in rather pedantic fashion, though not without occasional sly quips about character foibles.

Most notable are the following four individuals: a deaf, utterly ineffectual mayor; small-time impresario Manolo; flamenco dancer / singer Carmen Vargas; and padre Don Cosme. The mayor is bald, ridiculously repetitive, utterly deferential to superiors, vulnerable to seduction from alluring females. Manolo, on the other hand, is glib, urbane, and pragmatic. Carmen is his prot6g6 and meal ticket. Don Cosme, a clerical conservative, supports the political status quo but is intent on conversion of Protestants, American Indians, and any other non-Spanish heathens coming his way.

When a delegation from the capital arrives with news Americans will soon be coming to spend money freely in Villar del Campo – completely ignoring each correction of the community’s name made by its mayor – listeners are stunned and worried. When will they arrive and how can they best impress them?

Disagreements among leading citizens lead to scuttling most ideas proposed in a brainstorming session. Aristocratic Don Luis, whose ancestors were murdered by American Indians, doesn’t want the visitors welcomed or honored in any way. They should be jailed, not celebrated. Doctor Don Emiliano, most scientifically-oriented of the assemblage, proposes a scheme to highlight colored jets of water in the plaza fountain. This is ridiculed, because the effect would only awe at night and the visitation would most likely come during the day. The priest fears contact between Protestant Americans and Villar del Ri6’s Catholics might result in apostasy among locals, lured into vice by new wealth. Aside from a community band reception featuring patriotic American tunes, this council can only resolve to turn the question of how to entertain potential funders over to Manolo, who has lived in Boston and understands tastes of modern Americans.

Manolo’s answer is a smorgasbord of dazzlements. Besides resurrecting the fountain decoration plan and maintaining a marching band greeting, he wants walls whitewashed, false fronts attached to businesses and houses to make

them appear larger and more Moorish, installation of Victorian-style gas lanterns along each street to resemble Hollywood's idea of quaintly picturesque European towns, plenty of colorful banners stretched across balconies and the main thoroughfare, narrowing of wide passages between buildings to make them more aged in appearance, and entertainment from a troupe of flamenco dancers in traditional costumes to be trained by the superb Carmen Vargas herself. Men are to be given extemporaneous instruction on bullfighting, something normally not practiced in this stretch of central Spain.

Expecting some gift in return, each citizen reports to the mayor and assistants what one thing he or she most desires. Responses get duly recorded by Eloisa, the schoolmistress. Probably one of the few literate adults present.

On the night before a scheduled grand entrance by Americans, dreams of several townsfolk are revealed to voyeuristic audiences. The mayor imagines himself sheriff of a Wild West frontier town menaced by Manolo and three cowboy sidekicks. Farmer Juan pictures Three Wise Kings, one outfitted in a less than becoming Santa Claus suit, flying over his property in an American plane which parachute drops a huge sack of presents. Don Cosme experiences a nightmare where he's kidnapped by American Protestants, subjected to grilling by hard-boiled police detectives, then turned over to Ku Klux Klan Inquisitors acting on behalf of HUAC, who sentence him to be hung.

The finale of all this nonsense is unfortunately rather a let-down of dreams deferred, stereotypes busted, and boring normalcy re-established. Perhaps censors insisted on this.

Music by Jesús García Leoz alternates between pastiches of American evergreens and what sound like quintessential Spanish or Andalusian Gypsy themes. He very effectively intertwines these to seesaw between native and foreign elements. The score is particularly impressive accompanying dream sequences, where melodramatic excess is the order of the day.

Set decoration is another highlight of this film. A realistic Spanish hamlet in contemporary Castile gets overhauled into an archaic, bucolic Andalusian settlement with Moorish architecture. Costumes are similarly transformed from modern shorts and skirts into antique flowing dresses, monteras atop heads, formal sashes around waists, and embroidered jackets.

The third standout element of *Welcome, Mr. Marshall* is its admittedly verbose screenplay, which sometimes drops into sheer incoherent babblings

and squawks. Inserted barbs are commonplace, mostly directed at characters pretending to be other than what they really are. Throughout, mindless bureaucracy and ritual are skewered. It's no accident Villar del Río has a deaf mayor and dozing secretary. Neither the church nor the state plans improvements for the area, the latter preferring merely to send along hints of future transportation connections to the outside world via re-paved highways and a new railroad line passing through town.

Cinematography is mostly unremarkable, save in dream sequences where madcap expressionism runs rampant.

Antonio Alonso's sound recording is especially refined in scenes involving overlapping speeches of mayor and showman. It's also superbly calibrated in scenes where the community's elected headman is in conversation with advisors or visitors.

*Welcome, Mr. Marshall* packs plenty of humor into its seventy-eight minute runtime. It's thoroughly engaging after a slow, rather static monologue. Stick that out. You'll be rewarded.

This film is recommended exclusively for adults. It contains one obscenity, a couple profanities, and gobs of cartoonish violence in the Wild West nightmare episode.