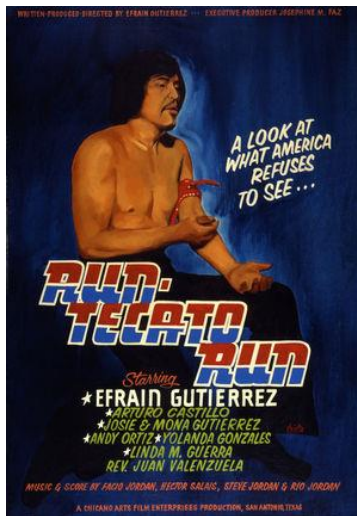


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Breaking Boundaries: First Chicano filmmaker to screen 'Run, Tecato, Run' Saturday, Sept. 26



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Daniel A. Flores | Staff Writer

Ricardo Jordan, son of legendary Rio Grande Valley accordionist Esteban “Steve” Jordan, only knew Efrain Gutierrez as a family friend who used to come by the house.

“Growing up, we didn’t really know how major a role (Gutierrez) played,” Ricardo said. Gutierrez’s initial feature, “Please, Don’t Bury Me Alive!,” is considered the the first Chicano film, according to Chon Noriega, professor in the UCLA Department of Film, Television and Digital Media.

“I think that ‘Please, Don’t Bury Me Alive!’ is an amazing film, bridging Mexican and U.S. cultural traditions, but also presenting a raw, yet complicated political vision coming out of the 1970s Chicano Movement,” Noriega said.

Noriega began searching for Gutierrez in the 1990s.

“When I started looking for Efrain, it was clear he was the first Chicano feature film director, but both he and his films were missing,” Noriega said. “There was a lot of legend built up around Efrain, the films and their impact at that time. But without being able to see the films, there was no way to write the history of what Efrain had done.”

Gutierrez’s three features produced in the 1970s reflect the culture and language of the predominantly Hispanic population of South Texas, according to Noriega.

“They’re not Hollywood wanna-be attempts at universal stories,” Noriega said. “Instead, they draw upon bilingual speech and local culture, but also storytelling forms that were part of the Chicano movement, like teatro.”

His legacy was proof it was possible to succeed basing a film about Hispanics and without the traditional, established financial methods, Noriega said.

“What that meant, though, is that he had to be the screenwriter, producer, director, distributor and lead actor — all in one. It also meant he had to create a way to get his films into theaters,” Noriega said. “At the time there were still several hundred Spanish-language theaters in the U.S., but the quality and quantity of the films coming from Mexico had really fallen off and audiences were shifting to television.

“Efrain was able to access these theaters ... essentially rent out the theaters from the owners and keep the box office for himself. He then used the Chicano and Spanish-language media to promote the films.”

Noriega has worked to make Gutierrez’s process and art is acknowledged through academia and preserved.

“My primary role was to work with Efrain on recovering his films, raising money to restore them, and then to bring them out on DVD so that a new generation could see them,” Noriega said, adding that preservation efforts expanded to Gutierrez’s logistical process, as well. “I made sure that the films and his papers were archived for future generations of students and scholars to study. The paper trail for this business model — including all the agreements with theater owners — is now archived at Stanford University, and his films are archived at UCLA.”

Gutierrez’s 1979 film, “Run, Tecato, Run,” will screen at Cine El Rey at 7 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 26 along with a Q&A with Gutierrez.

“‘Run, Tecato, Run’ is the third film he shot, and in some ways it is his attempt to focus more on redemption than a critique of the social order (as in ‘Please, Don’t Bury Me Alive!’) or of masculinity (as in ‘Chicano Love in Forever’). Here he looks at drug culture, and finds within the Chicano indigenous heritage the spiritual and cultural resources to heal,” Noriega said. “It’s a personal film in many ways, speaking to the experiences of drug culture on his friends and family, and it crystallizes his belief in the arts as a way to address to the fundamental issues facing his community.”

The late Steve Jordan scored “Run, Tecato, Run,” and his sons’ band, Rio Jordan, will perform to the close the night.

“My dad was the perfect guy to cater to something that out there, because his music was always ahead of his time, as well,” Ricardo said. “There were a lot of people breaking boundaries as far as cinema of cinema and music.”

Gutierrez’s 18-minute documentary, “La Onda Chicana,” will also play with the film. It features performances by Little Joe y La Familia, Los Chachos, Snowball and company with Laura Canales, and Johnny Elizondo y La Fabrica.

IF YOU GO:

WHEN: 7 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 26

WHERE: Cine El Rey, 311 S. 17th St., McAllen

COST: Pre-sale \$20, Door \$25

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