

"The Other Conquest" brings in both Latino and non-Latino audiences to the box office. F2

History (and Some Marketing) Conquer Box-Office Adversity

Movies • High audience turnout for the Mexican epic 'The Other Conquest' follows a careful marketing strategy with a crossover appeal.

By LORENZA MUÑOZ
TIMES STAFF WRITER

"The Other Conquest," an epic about the 16th century Spanish invasion of Aztec Mexico, got off to an impressive start at the box office, bringing in both Latino and non-Latino audiences, a feat two other recent Hispanic-themed films couldn't accomplish.

Mexico's highest-grossing drama, directed by first-timer Salvador Carrasco and released April 21, grossed nearly \$400,000 in 74 theaters during its first five days. It had especially strong showings at mainstream theaters like the Norwalk AMC, where the film brought in about \$23,000 per screen; Hollywood's Galaxy Mann, \$19,000; the



ANDREA SANDERSON

Elpidia Carrillo and Iñaki Aierra star in Mexico's "The Other Conquest."

Pacific Theater in Commerce, \$16,000; and in art houses like the Monica Laemmle in Santa Monica, where it took in \$13,000.

Releasing an epic foreign film in so many theaters was a gamble. But Mitch Goldman, head of the distribution company Hombre d'Oro, said he wanted to prove that the right Spanish-language

film could make money if it's handled correctly.

Goldman noted that the early success of "The Other Conquest" is important in light of the failure of two previous Latin films, "Santitos" and "The Price of Glory." "Price's" showing even prompted a front-page Wall Street Journal article implying that white audiences

were not ready to see Latinos on the big screen. But Goldman maintains that if a film is marketed well and released on a small scale initially, it can make money and appeal to white audiences as well as Latinos.

"The size of the campaign for a foreign language film was quite significant," said Bob Laemmle, owner of the Monica Laemmle. "With 'Santitos' they didn't even bother coming to us. [Goldman and his group] in their wisdom tried to combine both English and Spanish [campaigns]. There is no reason you have to bypass the normal art-house theaters when you are trying to reach the ethnic audience. The fact that the Monica showed as strong as it did shows the wisdom of going after both."

"The Other Conquest," an intense and often bloody epic that tells the story of the Spanish conquest from the Aztecs' perspective, was a surprise hit in Mexico. The movie grossed more than \$2 million—a significant amount by Mexican box-office standards.

Please see 'Conquest,' F21

'Conquest': Movie's Careful Marketing Pays Off

Continued from F2

Neither New Line Cinema, which distributed "Price," or Latin Universe, which distributed "Santitos," "did the right marketing job," said Goldman, former president of distribution at New Line. "They did not do the right theaters, they bought Spanish-language and no English-language television. To assume that Mexican people only watch television in Spanish is stupid and arrogant. They did everything wrong."

(New Line Cinema declined to comment on Goldman's assertions. After the release of "Price" at the end of March, New Line officials said they fully backed the film and rejected criticism of its marketing campaign. The boxing film, which stars Jimmy Smits, has earned about \$3.2 million at the box office so far.)

"Santitos" director, Alejandro Springall, was so infuriated by Latin Universe's marketing strategy that he bought back the theatrical rights to the movie and is now trying to get it re-released in the art-house market.

"I always thought it was a mistake to publicize this film just in the Spanish mediums," Springall said.

(After the release of "Santitos," Latin Universe President Ted Perkins acknowledged making mistakes in marketing the film, noting, "We went through a steep learning curve. . . . We have to reintroduce this whole new message of seeing movies in Spanish in multiplex theaters.")

Goldman's marketing and publicity team at Hombre d'Oro, led by Richard Ingber, Linda Goldenberg and Gabriel Reyes, spent about \$1 million on "The Other

Conquest." They bought English-language ads during popular TV shows such as "60 Minutes" and "The Today Show," in addition to Spanish-language ads on Univision and Telemundo.

They also advertised in Los Angeles' major English and Spanish newspapers starting three weeks before the film opened. They augmented their marketing campaign with a grass-roots campaign that began months before the film opened, showing screenings of the film to students, professors, union members and journalists.

In Norwalk, the movie's lead actor, Damián Delgado was besieged by autograph-seekers when he made an appearance Saturday night at the theater. Several shows sold out at the theater, according to AMC executives.

"The grosses were great," said Sonny Gourley, head film buyer for AMC theaters. "We are looking to play this movie across the country as soon as the distributor rolls it out."

The film, however, did not do well in outlying areas such as Simi Valley, Santa Paula, Camarillo and Temecula, and questions remain about the film's appeal to suburban markets.

Goldman said they intend to continue a heavy marketing push in both English and Spanish for the movie. The distributor is getting calls from theater owners in Chicago, San Francisco, New York and Texas who are interested in bringing the movie out to their region.

"On a regional basis they may have a hit on their hands," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of Exhibitor Relations Co., which tracks box-office numbers.