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Mucho Mucho Amor

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Mucho Mucho Amor

Abstract

This is a film review of *Mucho Mucho Amor* (2020), directed by Cristina Costantini and Kareem Tabsch.

Author Notes

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Mucho Mucho Amor (2020), dir. Cristina Costantini and Kareem Tabsch

There's something to be said for going into a film relatively blind and being exposed to a large phenomenon of which you were previously completely ignorant. This was the case when I watched this biopic about Walter Mercado, a Puerto Rican entertainer. Mercado has a cult status which was the initial draw, for me, to this film. Born in the 1930s, he began his life in a rural town but was elevated to special status as a young boy when a neighbour witnessed him "bringing a bird back to life" (there's some similarity here to the miracles reported in hagiography). Mercado became known as a healer. With his mother's support and encouragement, he would sit on a chair in their home and receive guests who came looking for his blessing. This special status afforded Walter the cultural permission to break several norms, from how he dressed to how he spent his time.

Mercado began his formal career as a dancer, but acted on stage as well as in telenovelas. He continued to read palms and tell fortunes for friends, but eventually landed his own television show through chance when someone in the television studio asked him to perform his astrology

on air to help with a technical issue. His skill was quickly identified, and in response to public interest, he landed his first show committed to astrology. This show became a staple of daily life for Hispanic people and Mercado's astrological predictions eventually became syndicated and available in many different markets. Being a gender non-conforming person in Puerto Rico in the 1970s and 1980s gave Mercado a following, and he became a role model and example for many. Although Mercado's delivery is mesmerizing, his hair, make up, and costuming are a large part of his persona. Known for his capes, Mercado's wardrobe included items embellished with Swarovski crystals, and items designed by Versace.

One noteworthy part of Mercado's delivery was that it was exceedingly positive: his message was one of peace, love, and empowerment for his viewers, and this positive message is likely what helped him to become the most well-known psychic in the world. He also blended aspects of different religions in his own life, including Catholicism, Santeria, and Buddhism. The film is not without conflict; it isn't simply a celebration of Mercado's life without complications, chief of which is his relationship with his manager. Although not an express point of the film, another interesting topic it explores is how one navigates fame and one's own iconic status as one ages, especially as youth, looks, and performance have been a key part of your "brand" and your life.

Mercado is still popular today and the film has several moments in which it speaks to people like Lin-Manuel Miranda who grew up watching him and felt he was influential in their lives. The director also points to memes and other expressions among young people today (especially in the Hispanic community), who understand his influential role in their community and beyond as a gender non-conforming trailblazer and a popular culture icon.