

## = The Mambo Kings =

The Mambo Kings is a 1992 French ? American drama film directed by Arne Glimcher . It is an adaptation of Oscar Hijuelos 's 1989 Pulitzer Prize @-@ winning novel The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love . The film stars Armand Assante and Antonio Banderas as Cesar and Nestor Castillo , brothers and aspiring musicians who flee from Cuba to America in the hopes of reviving their failed musical careers . The Mambo Kings marks the directing debut of Glimcher and features Banderas in his first English @-@ language role .

Glimcher purchased the film rights to Hijuelos 's novel in 1988 , before hiring Cynthia Cidre to write the screenplay . Various studios rejected the film , and after an unsuccessful pre @-@ production development at Universal Studios , the project moved to Warner Bros. , with Regency Enterprises and Le Studio Canal + agreeing to co @-@ finance the film . When Warner Bros. wanted Jeremy Irons and Ray Liotta in the lead roles , Glimcher had to convince executives to cast Assante and Banderas instead . Filming for The Mambo Kings took place in Los Angeles , on sets recreating 1950s New York .

The film received mostly positive reviews from critics , but underperformed at the box office , grossing only \$ 6 @, @ 742 @, @ 168 during its domestic theatrical release . For its original song " Beautiful Maria of My Soul " , The Mambo Kings earned nominations from several groups , including the Academy Awards .

## = = Plot = =

In the early 1950s , Cuban brothers and musicians Cesar ( Armand Assante ) and Nestor Castillo ( Antonio Banderas ) flee from Havana , Cuba after getting into a violent dispute with the mobster owners of a club where they performed . Eventually ending up in New York City , the brothers work at menial jobs while attempting to revive their musical careers . At a nightclub where Cesar briefly crashes the act of mambo star Tito Puente , they make new friends and connections , as well as meeting cigarette girl Lanna Lake ( Cathy Moriarty ) , who falls quickly into a love affair with Cesar .

Nestor , in the meantime , remains oblivious to other women while continually composing his ode to his lost Cuban love , Maria ( Talisa Soto ) . He writes version after version of the same ballad , " Beautiful Maria of My Soul " , until by chance one day he encounters Delores ( Maruschka Detmers ) , a shy but attentive young woman who wishes to become a schoolteacher . When she becomes pregnant , they decide to get married .

Fate intervenes one night at a club , where the Castillo brothers have a part @-@ time job . Nestor 's love ballad captures the interest of one of the customers , who turns out to be the Cuban bandleader and American television star Desi Arnaz ( played by his son , Desi Arnaz , Jr . ) . After a pleasant evening in Nestor and Delores 's home , Arnaz generously invites the struggling Castillos to sing and act on an episode of his smash sitcom series , I Love Lucy .

Fame does not last , however . Nestor is not as ambitious as his brother and desires nothing more than to own his own small club . He is in love with Delores , but lacks the passion he felt for his beloved Maria back home . Cesar , meantime , suppresses his true feelings , that a woman like Delores would actually be perfect for him . Cesar eventually reveals to Nestor that Maria left him for a Cuban mobster in exchange for cancelling a contract hit against Nestor .

There are tragic consequences one snowy night when the Castillo brothers ' car veers off the road and into a tree . Cesar , in the back seat of the vehicle , is barely hurt , but Nestor , having driven the car , is killed . The life of Cesar , shattered , is never the same . To honor his brother 's memory , Cesar opens his own small club , which is well received . Delores pays him a visit and asks him to sing Nestor 's song for her .

## = = Cast = =

Armand Assante as Cesar Castillo  
Antonio Banderas as Nestor Castillo

Cathy Moriarty as Lanna Lake  
Maruschka Detmers as Delores Fuentes  
Desi Arnaz , Jr. as Desi Arnaz , Sr.  
Roscoe Lee Browne as Fernando Perez  
Celia Cruz as Evalina Montoya  
Vondie Curtis @-@ Hall as Miguel Montoya  
Talisa Soto as Maria Rivera  
Tito Puente as Himself  
Thomas F. Duffy as Mulligan  
Frank Grillo as Machito

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

Arne Glimcher , an art dealer based in New York City and a fan of mambo music , learned that Oscar Hijuelos was writing a novel relating to the subject . In 1988 , Hijuelos sent Glimcher a manuscript of his novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* . Glimcher purchased the film rights before the novel was published one year later . He hired Cuban @-@ born screenwriter Cynthia Cidre to write the script . Cidre spent a year and a half working on the screenplay , and after 24 drafts , she had stripped the story down to cover only half of Hijuelos 's 407 @-@ page book . When asked about the modification of his novel in the film adaptation , Hijuelos said , " My only concern was that the Cuban culture be treated with respect and the music be authentic and accurate to the period . "

Various studios rejected the project , until Glimcher persuaded Tom Pollock , chairman of Universal Studios , to financially back the film on a low budget . Before production could begin however , Pollock insisted that footage from the television series *I Love Lucy* be a key part of the film . Following Lucille Ball 's death in 1989 , Glimcher was unable to secure the rights to use footage for the film . After Universal cancelled production of *The Mambo Kings* , the project moved to Warner Bros. ; Glimcher met with the studio 's president Terry Semel , who introduced him to producer Arnon Milchan , who agreed to co @-@ finance *The Mambo Kings* with his production company Regency Enterprises and the French @-@ based film studio Le Studio Canal + . The film was given a production budget of \$ 15 @.@ 5 million .

= = = Casting = = =

Armand Assante and Antonio Banderas were Glimcher 's ideal choices for the roles of Cesar and Nestor Castillo . Prior to *The Mambo Kings* , Assante had appeared in a number of films but had not yet broken out as a major star ; Banderas , a Spanish actor , had moved to Los Angeles , California , hoping to make an international debut with his first English speaking role . Warner Bros. , however , wanted to cast Jeremy Irons as Cesar and Ray Liotta as Nestor . Both actors had received critical acclaim for their performances in *Reversal of Fortune* and *Goodfellas* respectively , and the studio felt that they would appeal to a wider audience .

Through a translator , Glimcher told Banderas to work on improving his English for one month before performing a screen test opposite Irons . The Spanish actor , lacking the ability to speak English , learned his lines phonetically . Despite Irons 's excellent screen test , Glimcher thought he was wrong for the part and insisted on Assante ; he thought the charm and seductiveness of Assante made him perfect for the role , and the studio eventually gave in .

Annabella Sciorra was originally cast as Nestor ? s new love interest Delores , a role that eventually went to actress Maruschka Detmers when Sciorra was forced to pull out . Detmers was given the role just two weeks prior to filming . Glimcher cast Cathy Moriarty as Cesar 's girlfriend Lanna Lake based on the actress 's performance in *Raging Bull* .

Desi Arnaz , Jr. was chosen to portray his father , Desi Arnaz , in a scene in which the Castillo brothers appear on an episode of I Love Lucy . In preparing for his role , Arnaz , Jr. dyed his hair black and wore an ID bracelet , ring and pin , all of which had belonged to his late father . " I wasn 't trying to look exactly like him , " he explained . " It was more about getting his essence and mannerisms . " In an effort to re @-@ create the mambo world of the 1950s , Glimcher hired musicians Tito Puente and Celia Cruz to appear .

= = = Filming and design = = =

The Mambo Kings was filmed in Los Angeles , California , which was used to create a 1950s @-@ era New York City . The Palladium Ballroom , a long @-@ gone New York City concert hall , was recreated and serves as a centerpiece in the film . In describing the look of the film , production designer Stuart Wurtzel stated , " There are lots of photographs and some film from that period . ... There 's a film called Mambo Madness from 1955 with some footage of Tito Puente and Desi Arnaz we looked at , and we got pictures from the Cuban Society in New York and from libraries . The Cuban community has been enormously supportive of the film , so we 've also been privy to the private archives of many people . " Ann Roth served as costume designer , using vintage textiles to create the custom @-@ made wardrobe . The I Love Lucy segment of the film was filmed at Ren @-@ Mar Studios , the former site of Desilu Productions . The set of the Ricardos ' living room was re @-@ created , with film editors intercutting footage with Banderas , Assante and Arnaz , Jr. with an actual episode featuring Lucille Ball . "

= = = Music and soundtrack = = =

Assante and Banderas did their own singing , and studied to master the instruments their characters use in the film . Assante practiced on drums , preparing for a scene in which his character plays a musical number with Tito Puente . Banderas worked to mimic the correct posture and finger placements for his character 's trumpet performances , while the actual playing was performed by Arturo Sandoval .

Music supervisor Robert Kraft used existing music from the 1950s , all of which had to be re @-@ recorded , as they were originally recorded in mono sound . The song " Beautiful Maria of My Soul " was written for the film by Glimcher , and composed by Kraft . The motion picture soundtrack features a number of original master recordings , re @-@ recorded tracks and mambo music from Arturo Sandoval , Tito Puente and Celia Cruz . The soundtrack was released by Elektra Records .

= = Release = =

The Mambo Kings was distributed by one entity , Warner Bros. , who originally planned to release the film on December 25 , 1991 . It first premiered at the Miami Film Festival on February 7 , 1992 before being released theatrically on February 28 , 1992 .

The film was released on VHS and laserdisc on September 2 , 1992 , and on DVD on August 17 , 2005 . The DVD includes an unrated version of the film that restores one deleted scene . Other features include a behind @-@ the @-@ scenes featurette and an audio commentary by Arne Glimcher .

= = = Reception = = =

The Mambo Kings was well received by critics . The film currently holds an 83 % " fresh " rating on the online review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes , based on a total of 24 reviews .

Film critic Peter Travers of Rolling Stone wrote that the film " runs on pure emotion " , and that it " celebrates the mysterious power of a music that can make you feel like dancing and bring you to your knees . " Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun @-@ Times wrote that the film 's " story is as old as the movies , but The Mambo Kings is so filled with energy , passion and heedless vitality that it

seems new , anyway . " Ebert and his colleague , Gene Siskel , gave the film a " Two Thumbs Up " rating on their syndicated television program , Siskel and Ebert and the Movies . Rita Kempley of The Washington Post praised the film 's director , writing that " Glimcher shows an epicure 's taste in his choice of both cast and crew . The look of " The Mambo Kings " is doubtless richer than the text , which is , however , strengthened by Glimcher 's nostalgia for the teenage , eager America of the 1950s . " Owen Gleiberman of Entertainment Weekly wrote , " The Mambo Kings is most fun when it practically dares you to swoon . It 's a movie you don 't have to believe to enjoy . " Betty Goodwin of the Los Angeles Times praised the film 's visual style : " The innocence of the pre @-@ MTV ' 50s mambo scene is expressed through meticulously real details and honest styling . "

Desson Howe of The Washington Post wrote a mixed review , writing that the film is " beautifully filmed and flashily edited " , but that it " has nothing to offer . " Vincent Canby of The New York Times , gave the film a negative review , writing , " There are times when the director doesn 't even seem to know where to put the camera . Scenes unravel without dramatic point . No amount of breathless editing and fancy graphics can disguise the amateur nature of the enterprise . " In The Philadelphia Inquirer , Roger E. Hernandez criticized the film for its portrayal of Cubans . Hernandez wrote , " The main problem here was the accents . The characters were supposed to be Cuban , but , with the exception of salsa star Celia Cruz , none sounded it . " Kenneth Turan of the Los Angeles Times criticized Glimcher 's direction , writing in his review , " ... when it comes to directing dramatic sequences , he is on his own and lacking in resources to make what drama there is come to a coherent or meaningful point . "

Desi Arnaz , Jr. voiced his support of the film , stating that he and his sister Lucie Arnaz , " loved the story being told in this movie . " Arnaz , Jr. said , " It is an amazing saga of people in search of the American dream . It is my father`s story . It is the story of many people who came to this country with hopes and dreams . " Tito Puente praised the film prior to its theatrical release , stating , " I 've seen the movie twice , and I loved it the second time . The first time I couldn 't get into it . I was watching for too many details , I guess . But now I 've seen it a second time , and I think it 's great . "

#### = = = Box office = = =

In its first week of release , The Mambo Kings grossed \$ 319 @,@ 793 , having been released in 32 theatres in North America . The film earned an additional \$ 299 @,@ 418 in its second week . After three weeks of release , The Mambo Kings grossed \$ 2 @,@ 192 @,@ 258 domestically . At the end of its theatrical run , the film had grossed \$ 6 @,@ 742 @,@ 168 , well below its \$ 15 @.@ 5 million budget .

#### = = = Nominations = = =

The song " Beautiful Maria of My Soul " received a Best Original Song nomination at the 65th Academy Awards . It was also nominated at the 50th Golden Globe Awards for Best Original Song , and at the 35th Grammy Awards for " Best Song Written Specifically for a Motion Picture or for Television " category . The film received a second Grammy nomination for " Best Instrumental Composition Written for a Motion Picture or for Television " for the song " Mambo Caliente " which was composed by Arturo Sandoval .

#### = = Stage play = =

The Mambo Kings inspired a musical stage play of the same name in 2005 . It was produced by Daryl Roth and Jordan Roth , with lyrics by Arne Glimcher and music by Carlos Franzetti . The Mambo Kings premiered at the Golden Gate Theatre in San Francisco , California , opening on May 31 , 2005 . The stage version featured Esai Morales and Jaime Camil as Cesar and Nestor Castillo , with supporting performers including Christiane Noll , David Alan Grier , Cote de Pablo and Justina Machado . The production cancelled plans to open on Broadway theatre after a critically panned

tryout engagement in San Francisco .