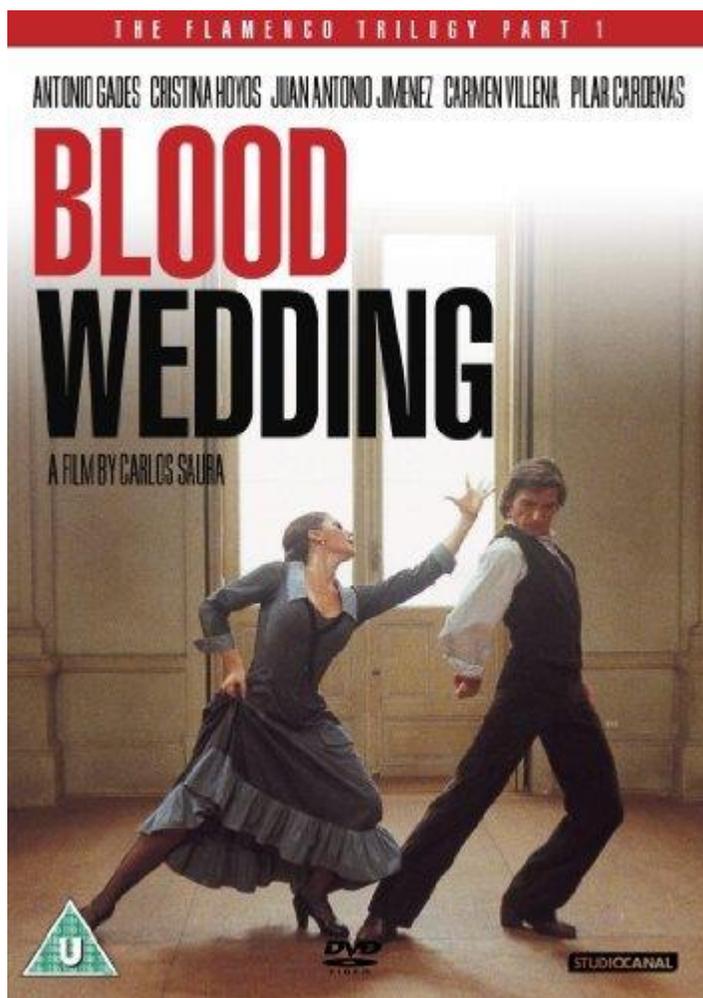


Blood Wedding



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by Carlos Saura. Produced by Emiliano Piedra. Screenplay by Antonio Artero. Based on the 1933 stage play by Federico Garcia Lorca. Cinematography by Teodoro Escamilla. Choreography by Antonio Gades. Original Music by Emilio de Diego. Edited by Pablo González del Amo. Key Costumer Francisco Nieva:

Cinematic length: 71 minutes. Distributed by Janus Films and others. DVD distribution: The Criterion Collection. Cinematic release: 1981. DVD release 2007. Check for ratings. Rating 90%.

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Cast

Antonio Gades as Leonardo

Cristina Hoyos as the Bride

Juan Antonio Jiménez as the Groom

Pilar Cárdenas as the Mother

Carmen Villena as the Wife

Also the dance company and the guitarists.



Review

Few films are as deliberately or as interestingly self-conscious as *Blood Wedding*. This makes for a film that is as much about making a film as it is about the made film which is an adaptation of Federico Garcia Lorca's 1933 play. This version adapts that play as a ballet. From the start we see the filmmaking process in almost every aspect. The manager begins this process by literally switching on the lights in the cast's dressing room as they arrive like office workers about to start a day's work, exchanging greetings and talking of inconsequential things. While putting on makeup the lead and chief choreographer Antonio Gades, talks of his motivations for becoming a dancer and of his early experiences. We are shown the dancers discussing the play and their roles while changing into costumes and then the warm up practice, in a bare old hall.

Then Gades announces that they will do a dress rehearsal and will not stop before the ending, no matter what.

What emerges is a flamenco ballet in which (except for costumes) everything has been pared back to the essentials. The bare old hall has no decoration, props are minimal. The musical accompaniment to singing consists of two classical guitarists and the casts' hand clapping and foot tapping. Even Lorca's play has been pared down. The original had many pagan supernatural elements which came close to being almost off the rails and an awkward clash with the intense central story: they are gone.

Lorca's story set in the rural southern Spain of 1900, concerned a disastrous wedding. The bridegroom's mother adumbrates the events with her intense and dramatic talk of her other dead son knifed in the street, the male penchant for violence and her uncertainty about the wedding, although she yearns for grandchildren. 'The bride' jilted by Leonardo, explains how she turned to 'the bridegroom', for solace as he was "like water," meaning that he was apparently refreshing and cleansing. Leonardo however was in comparison like a river, carrying her away in her emotions and desires. The play develops the theme of how marriages should be about passion and attraction, not a combination of convenience or amiability. The bridegroom is wealthy and a steady worker and the marriage will unite their families' estates and wealth. Leonardo, now married with one baby and the wife pregnant again, turns up at the wedding, elopes with the bride and they are pursued by the bridegroom and his henchmen.

Death (disguised as an old beggar woman) and the Moon (disguised as a woodcutter) conspire with each other and then the humans to ensure that the earth will have blood, seemingly that of the bride and Leonardo. Even such powerful forces however, cannot get their exact own way. Amazingly in a play Lorca does not depict the duel where the antagonists knife each other. Perhaps he thought with some justification that the play was already overly intense. Gades does depict this duel in a dance that acts as the film version's climax and is followed by the bride's remorse as the denouement. Lorca adds much after the duel, the mother's philosophising, the bride's explanations and comments by several wedding party members. Gades and Saura pare this and the paganistic elements back and focus on the romantic triangle and the wedding gone wrong. By doing this they create the ancient vibrant culture of Southern Spain.

Their treatment works, if you like flamenco and films that reveal their seams. If you don't...



Antonio Gades

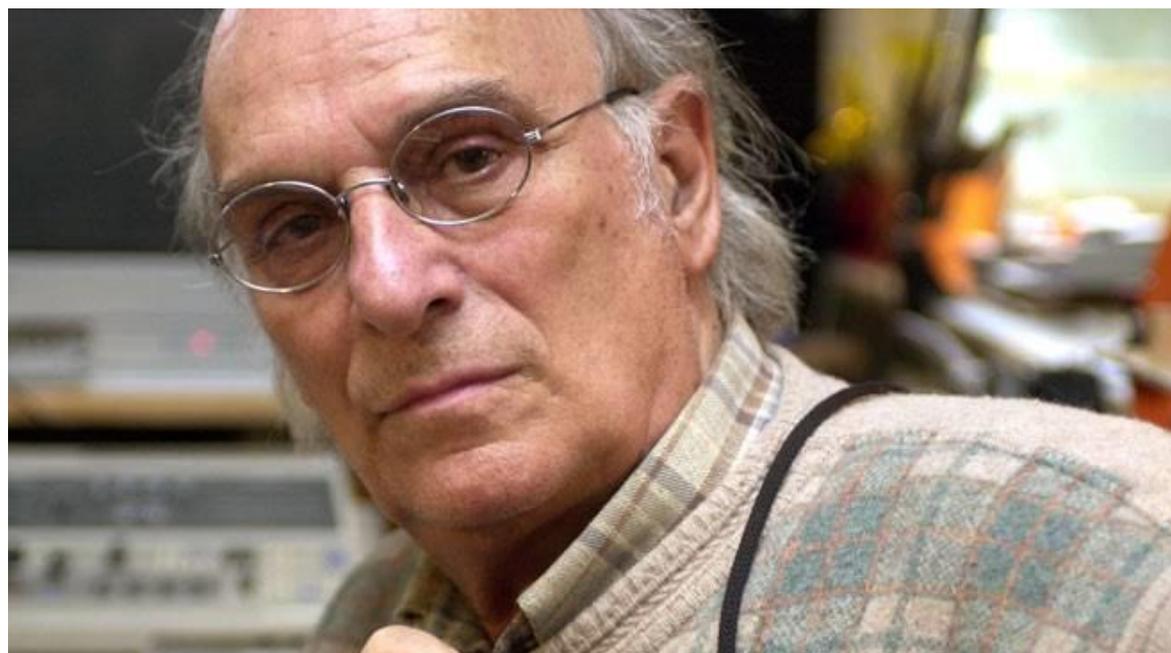


Above: Cristina Hoyos as the Bride. Below: the principals dance





Celebrating the wedding



Carlos Saura