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‘Instructions Not Included’ Director Rejects Tyler Perry Comparisons

Hector Batista for Fusion



JORGE RIVAS ([@thisisjorge](#)) - 09/16/2013, 03:55AM / Updated 10/21/2013, 09:45PM

“Instructions Not Included” has made close to \$27 million dollars in domestic sales as of this weekend. Now entering its third week in theaters, [the film continues to break box-office records for a Spanish-language film in the U.S.](#)--and it will undoubtedly make millions more when it opens in Latin America.

[The film’s director, writer and star Eugenio Derbez](#) is being compared to Tyler Perry, with some dubbing him the “Latino Tyler Perry” because both filmmakers share some cinematic-style similarities and both write, produce, direct and star in their own films.

And now with the success of “Instructions Not Included,” both directors can take a relatively low-budget film and turn out an extraordinary profit.

“It took me 12 years to complete the film,” Derbez told Fusion. “Especially for raising the money because it's truly an expensive film for Mexico.”

“It was a \$5.5 million dollar film and the average for a Mexican film is \$2.5 million dollars, so it was really hard to raise the money,” Derbez said.

Pantelion Films, the studio that released “Instructions Not Included,” insists the film is about a father’s love for his daughter. But it’s also about a Mexican man’s experience coming to the U.S. and the storyline includes many references to a new immigrant trying to survive in a world in which he doesn’t have the proper authorization to enter the country legally and doesn’t understand the language.

The success of the film has everything to do with the culmination of all those elements brought together by a Derbez, a seasoned Mexican comedian with a loyal following.

Undocumented immigrants and Latinos in general don’t see too many representations of themselves on screen and Derbez’s character in “Instructions Not Included” is a positive comedic representation of an average looking Mexican man who goes on to have a successful (and lucrative) career in Hollywood. The film also comes at a time when the country is in immigration reform talks and in era where undocumented immigrants have been criminalized and vilified in states like Arizona.

“The success of the film comes at a watershed moment in recent American history, the U.S. is reacting politically and culturally to a demographic shift,” said William A. Nericcio, professor of English and Latin American studies at San Diego State University.

Nericcio says evidence of this is the “rabid outbreak across the United States in popular right-wing media against Mexicans and undocumented workers” that came after Latinos helped elect President Obama in 2008.

Derbez’s film totally went against that anti-immigrant narrative and the success of the film points to how hungry people were to see representations of themselves on screen.

The Tyler Perry Comparison Derbez, 52, is known for his comedic work that spans across two decades and over-the-top telenovela like topsy-turvy film includes lots of comedy and slapstick heavy scenes.

English-language entertainment industry publications have called Derbez the “Latino Tyler Perry” because of some of his exaggerated characters and storylines. And also because Derbez has had a long career and a loyal following that will follow him all the way to theater box offices.

Derbez doesn’t agree with the comparisons to Perry.

“I don't think so but maybe they are saying because Tyler brought all his audience to the theaters and now I am bringing the Hispanics to the theaters,” Derbez told Fusion. “I would love to be not just a Hispanic director-actor, I'd love to be just one more in the general market.”

Perry is the 16th top earning male celebrity in Hollywood, just behind producer Jerry Bruckheimer, in this year's *Forbes* Magazine list. Like Derbez, Perry writes, produces, directs and stars in films his films and also has a budding TV empire.

The 2006 film “Tyler Perry's *Madea's Family Reunion*” that helped make Perry a household name across ethnic groups in the U.S. had a production budget of \$6 million and the film made [a whopping domestic total gross of \\$63 million](#).

But Perry has received criticism from both critics and black civil rights organizations because they argue the director has built his empire based on over-the-top stereotypes of African-Americans.

Spike Lee famously called Perry's work “coonery and buffoonery” and cultural critic Touré called it “cinematic malt liquor.”

“Tyler Perry is definitely serving an audience that is underserved by Hollywood. Especially black southern women who do not see themselves at all in Hollywood fare,” [Touré said in a CNN interview in 2011](#).

The success of Derbez's low-budget film now has industry insiders paying attention to see how they can replicate the film's success.

But the question is will Latino moviegoers now only get \$5 million dollar comedy films that are low-risks for Hollywood studios to fund?

Or will we see films with larger budgets and more complex storylines that are universal, like “*La Bamba*,” “*Selena*” or “*Stand and Deliver*?”

If we consider the economic model of supply and demand the future is dismal for complex storylines.

“I was thinking about the future of Latino filmmaking and I was wondering if it's going to be ‘*Beverly Hills Chihuahua 4*,’” says Chon Noriega, director of the Chicano Studies Research Center of the University of California, Los Angeles. “You have to realize ‘*Beverly Hills Chihuahua* made about \$300 million dollars, ‘*Instructions not included*’ has nothing on this film.”

“It made a quarter of a billion dollars worldwide and then went on to make \$60 million in DVD sales. What going on there?” Noriega said.

Weaved into Derbez's film are a number of nostalgic references to beloved Mexican superstars that came before him.

“There are just few gifts in the film for my audience, for my personal Hispanic or Latino audience, like Lola La Trailera and la India Maria,” Derbez told Fusion. “Small references that if you are not related, it doesn't matter, the story continues. But for my audience there are gifts in the inside of the story.”

And there is a market ready and willing to receive these gifts.

When looking at the moviegoing audience by race/ethnicity, Latinos were the largest group of moviegoers last year, as they represented 18 percent of the moviegoing population, but accounted for 25 percent of all movies seen in 2012, [according to a recent Nielsen study](#).

That same study found that going to the movie theater seems to carry a particularly positive cultural significance for Latinos. Members of that group were considerably more likely than non-Latinos to consider movie-watching a way to spend time with their family and friends.

“Now the industry is realizing there's a big huge audience that nobody has taken care of,” Derbez told Fusion.

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