

Film Close-Up: Jennifer Lopez

by Joey_Berlin

Jennifer Lopez caught her big break in 1997 when she was tapped to play a pop music starlet in the biopic "Selena." A decade later, the Bronx-born star is returning to the genre of musician biographies as a producer and co-star of "El Cantante," a film about the late salsa singer, Hector Lavoe. Lopez's real-life husband, Marc Anthony, portrays the Puerto Rico-born Lavoe, who was one of the founding fathers of New York's 70's salsa sound; however, his life was a tragic, drug-addled mess. Lopez plays Puchi, the sultry hellcat who became Lavoe's wife, as well as his protector and enabler.

JENNIFER LOPEZ - In 'El Cantante,' Jennifer Lopez plays Puchi, the sultry hellcat wife of salsa singer Hector Lavoe. CNS Photo courtesy of Eric Liebowitz. Off-screen, Lopez and Anthony had briefly dated in the late 1990s. The couple married in June 2004, a few months after she broke up with Ben Affleck. Busy Lopez continues to multitask. She has a clothing line, her own perfume, a fancy restaurant and a thriving recording career. Her first full Spanish-language album peaked at No. 10 earlier this year and Lopez, 38, is working on her fifth English-language studio album for release in September. She will also be going on tour later this year.

Q: There is a general trepidation in the movie business about working with dogs, kids, and one's own spouse. Was there any hesitation about working with Marc?

A: No, because I first got this script over five years ago. We weren't together at that time, but I knew he was the guy to play the role. At that time, I didn't know I was going to be in it. But I did know that it was going to be the first movie that I produced. When I asked Marc he said, "Of course! This guy's my idol."

Q: But you will admit that it can be awkward for married couples to work together, right?

A: Everyone forgets that Marc and I met while working! We did a duet on my first album. Luckily, we just have that together. We planned to do this film together, even before we were a couple.

Q: What is the legacy of Hector Lavoe?

A: In a sense, he was a quintessential artist. An artist is somebody who lives a life and they transform that life into painting or music, whatever, and it touches millions of people. He took what was in his life - the good times, the pain and suffering - and he transformed that. If you look at his songs, it was so much who he was and it was so much who everybody was, and that's why it was important to do this film.

Q: What caused his downfall?

A: The drugs. But with any sort of iconic artist, there's a bit of mystery about him. We tried to examine the reasons for what it could be. He lost his mother at an early age. His brother died. His son died. There was the enabling of him, and his penchant for drugs. But at the end of the day, we'll never know.

Q: A lot of people in America do not know about salsa. What do you want them to take away from this film?

A: One of the greatest joys of this movie is when people see it and want to learn more about him. That's happened with people I've shown the film to, people that I respect, people that don't speak Spanish. They are blown away by the music. It's great to expose his music beyond the salsa lovers and people who know Latin music.

Q: Has producing a film changed your career path?

A: Yeah, we have a film coming out called "Bordertown," which is about these murders in Juarez. And we have a film written by Don Roos, which he'll direct, called "Love and Other Impossible Pursuits." But I'm drawn to things that are relevant and important to say.

Q: It is no secret that the music industry is in a state of collapse. How are you dealing with all of the big changes?

A: It has changed, but when you love music and you love making music, it's not as if you're going to stop. The record companies and the artists are trying to figure out how we all fit in it, with the Internet and the crazy business stuff. At the end of the day we just want to make songs. I love making English and Spanish music and I love being married to a musician. It's the same thing with Marc. He makes music when he wants to make music.

Q: Well, you look great! How do you stay in such great shape?

A: Thank you. I don't have a secret. I try not to eat too much. When I'm a little heavier, I work out. When I'm too skinny, I don't.

Q: Finally, you and Marc have some epic fights in "El Cantante." Is that what your own fights are like?

A: Ha-ha, I'll tell you a funny story. There's a scene in the film where she comes home and discovers Hector's been doing drugs in the house. The director sets up two cameras, tells us to improvise, to just go at it. I decided to literally go after Marc, and in the second take, I decided to really push him. He wasn't expecting it at all. He was yelling for me to let go of his arm and he finally yells out, "Jennifer!"

The whole set just cracked up. They asked if we got into fights like that at home. No! No we don't.

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