SAMUEL BRONSTON, HOLLYWOOD IN MADRID

If there is one name that stands out in the technical development of cinema filmed in Spain, and of Spanish cinema itself, it is undoubtedly Samuel Bronston, the mega producer who built an unforgettable film empire in the Region of Madrid, with colossal shootings and the arrival of top-level Hollywood stars and directors. Sophia Loren, Rita Hayworth, John Wayne, Charlton Heston, Bette Davis, Robert Ryan, Claudia Cardinale, Alec Guinness, Omar Shariff, Christopher Plummer, James Manson, Mel Ferrer, David Niven and Ava Gardner shone in films directed by Nicholas Ray, Anthony Mann, Henry Hathaway and John Farrow.

Despite the huge foreign filming that had already taken place in Spain, the moment that really marked the beginning of Spain becoming a kind of Hollywood was the arrival of the Russian-born producer Samuel Bronston in 1957, who set up his base of operations in Madrid.

Bronston's productions immortalised Madrid's landscapes in some of cinema's most memorable epics such as Captain Jones, King of Kings, El Cid, 55 Days at Peking, The Fall of the Roman Empire and Circus World. The Plaza de Chinchón, La Pedriza in Manzanares el Real, the Alberche beach in Aldea del Fresno, the mountains of Navacerrada or La Cabrera, the Ermita de los Remedios in Colmenar Viejo, the Royal Palace in Aranjuez, or sites in the capital city itself, such as El Retiro or the Royal Palace, became the scenes of duels, battles and passionate love affairs.



Circus World. El Retiro Park.



55 Days at Peking. Las Rozas.

# **REGION OF MADRID**

1 – Chinchón King of Kings Gircus World

2 — Manzanares El Real
King of Kings

The Fall of the Roman Empire

3 – Las Rozas
55 Days at Peking
The Fall of the Roman Empire
Savage Pampas

4 – Aldea del Fresno King of Kings Savage Pampas **5** Colmenar Viejo

6 La Cabrera

7 — Cabanillas de la Sierra

8 – Villamanta Savage Pampas

9 - Ciempozuelos
King of Kings

Pozuelo de Alarcón
Savage Pampas

El Clu

Aranjuez
Circus World
John Paul Jones

12 – Navacerrada King of Kings

The Fall of the Roman Empire

San Martín de Valdeiglesias
Assignment Terror

14 – Pelayos de la Presa Assignment Terror

## **MADRID CITY**

15 - Royal Palace

John Paul Jones

16 - El Retiro Park
Circus World

Conde Duque Military Headquarters
Assignment Terror

18 – Vicálvaro Circus World

La Cabrera

6

Former Price Circus
 El fabuloso mundo del circo

20 – Casa de Campo Assignment Terror

Chamartín Studios
Later called Bronston Studios.
(Now extinct)
El Cid
55 Days at Peking
The Fall of the Roman Empire
Circus World
Savage Pampas
The Pied Piper of Hamelin
Dr. Coppelius
Assignment Terror

Sevilla Films Studios (Now extinct)
El capitán Jones
Rey de Reyes
El Cid

CEA Studios (Now extinct)

The largest film studios in Madrid in the late fifties and early sixties, Sevilla Films, CEA and Chamartín, later known as Bronston, were lavishly decorated with castles and palaces. And in the shadow of that film empire, its resources were used for other productions, such as Savage Pampas or Dr. Coppelius, which counted with the participation of other important names such as Robert Taylor, Walter Slezak, Paul Naschy or Michael Rennie, filmed in Boadilla del Monte, Villamanta or San Martín de Valdeiglesias.



The Fall of the Roman Empire. Las Rozas.



El Cid. Manzanares el Real.

Crowds of Madrid residents, hired as extras and crew, built the fiction of imperial Rome and Peking, on outdoor sets erected on land in Las Rozas, which managed to appear in the Guinness Book of Records for their length. And the development and training of Spanish technicians, who later participated in other prestigious Hollywood productions, as is the case of the winner of two Oscars, Gil Parrondo. Or a blockbuster opportunity afforded to Spanish actors such as Carmen Sevilla, Conrado San Martín, José Nieto, José María Caffarel or Antonio Mayans.

This guide suggests a route to follow in the footsteps of Bronston's locations in the Region of Madrid. It includes both his canonical films and those productions in which Jaime Prades, his associate producer intervened (whose collaboration has been confirmed, although he was not credited). This is a necessary tribute to one of the most important names in the history of cinema. A filmmaker with close ties to this region, whose wish, after his death in the United States, was for his remains to be laid to rest in the Madrid municipality of Las Rozas. His daughter Andrea placed the urn with his ashes under a plaque bearing a phrase from Shakespeare's Hamlet: "He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again."

# PMILLI DEROY WALTER COURT ROBER ROWN A MALTER COURT ROBER ROWN A MALTER COURT ROBER ROWN AND THE PROPERTY OF T

55 Days at Peking. Las Rozas



King of Kings shooting



Circus World, Chinchón,



Samuel Bronston, on the right, next to Jaime Paredes, Menéndez Pidal, and Charlton Heston during the shooting of *El Cid*.

# SAMUEL BRONSTON'S ROUTE IN THE REGION OF MADRID

After the filming of *El Cid*, Samuel Bronston purchased a rustic plot of land in the municipality of **Las Rozas**, opposite Las Matas, as a backlot for location filming. Immense sets of the besieged city of *Peking for 55 Days at Peking* and an impressive Roman Forum for *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, a set that entered the Guinness Book of Records in its own right due to its gigantic size, were erected there.

In turn, the mountains of Madrid also contributed their relief to Bronston's most successful production, *El Cid*, in municipalities such as **Cabanillas de la Sierra**, **La Cabrera** or **Colmenar Viejo**, where the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios appears to be San Pedro de Cardeña. Meanwhile, **Navacerrada** lent its exteriors for the passage of troops in *The Fall of the Roman Empire* or the crucifixion in *King of Kings*, or **Manzanares El Real**, where the Pedriza reservoir and meadow became the set for Nazareth, recreating the capture of the disciples or the revolt of Barabbas in *King of Kings*, or the great battle of the Eastern uprising against Rome in Armenia in *The Fall of the Roman Empire*.

The east of the region also lent its spaces to other Bronston productions, such as the now extinct Villamanta station or the current grounds of Ciudad de la Imagen in Pozuelo de Alarcón where the siège of the hermitage is recreated in Savage Pampas, or Castillo de La Coracera in San Martín de Valdeiglesias and Monasterio de Santa María La Real de Valdeiglesias in Pelayos de la Presa for Assignment Terror. In turn, Aldea del Fresno lent its Alberche beach for the filming of Savage Pampas, and for sequences on the River Jordan in King of Kings.

In the south, the semi-desert lands of **Ciempozuelos** were used to shoot part of the sequences of an encounter with the devil in *King of Kings*, while in **Aranjuez** different Bronston production scenes were filmed, such as those of Virginia's house or a walk along the Tagus in *John Paul Jones*, or the tent fire in *Circus World*, in front of the royal palace. And in the photogenic square of **Chinchón** important sequences were recreated for *Circus World*, such as the western show, or the famous sermon delivered on the mountain in *King of Kings*.

And of course, all Bronston productions were filmed in the municipality of **Madrid**, both at his studios and the Portland de Valderribas cement factory or the former *Price Circus*. Among these, of interest are the sequences filmed in El Retiro park for *Circus World*, to include both the parade in the carriage ride and the lavish finale for which the lake had to be emptied and cleaned, or when Bette Davis was sitting on her throne at the Royal Palace in *John Paul Jones*.



El Cid. Chamartín Studios.

For more information scan QR:



