



THE HEIRESSSES

Directed by Marcelo Martinessi

Starring Ana Brun, Margarita Irún, Ana Ivanova

UK release date | 10th August 2018

Running time | 98 minutes

Certificate | 12A

Press information | Saffeya Shebli | saffeya.shebli@thunderbirdreleasing.com | 020 7377 1407

Sales information | Dave Woodward | dave.woodward@thunderbirdreleasing.com | 020 7377 1407

SYNOPSIS

Chela and Chiquita, both descended from wealthy families in Asunción, Paraguay, have been together for over 30 years. But recently, their financial situation has worsened, and they begin to sell off their inherited possessions. When their debts lead to Chiquita being imprisoned on fraud charges, Chela is forced to face a new reality.

Driving for the first time in years, she begins to provide a local taxi service to a group of elderly wealthy ladies.

As Chela settles into her new life, she encounters the much younger Angy, forging a fresh and invigorating new connection. Chela finally begins to break out of her shell and engage with the world, embarking on her own personal, intimate revolution.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MARCELO MARTINELLI

In your previous films you explored several less known events in the history of your country, Paraguay. How did you come across the story of Chiquita and Chela? Is their story linked to a particular moment or aspect of Paraguayan history?

It is impossible to talk about Paraguayan cinema without being aware of the years of darkness, many decades without any possibility of filmmaking. During the 60's and 70's, while the rest of Latin America narrated its own stories on the big screen, my country remained invisible. That's why building our own cinematography is a key challenge for my generation. When I wrote the story of Chela and Chiquita, I realized that I was trying to create a dialogue with that time of obscurity and with a society that doesn't want to change, one that prefers to remain hidden, clinging to its own shadow.

The most recent coup d'état (2012) made it evident that there has always been a romance between our petit-bourgeoisie and the authoritarian regimes. And I'm not only talking about the strong characters who shaped their time with boots and rifles until the late 80's. These new 'democratic' leaders, who now share the benefits of corruption and drug trafficking, also need complicity in our society to provoke the same fears and keep the same silences.

Personally, I am interested in the everyday life that occurs outside these areas of power, even within the ruling class. And it was irrelevant to place *The Heiresses* at a specific moment in our political history because the feeling of living in a giant prison remains the same. And this is essentially a film about confinements.

Can you tell us more about the social setting of the film, the bourgeois families both women descend from?

The worst thing about a regime that protects and at the same time represses, is that it creates individuals for whom it is impossible to escape from that logic. Paraguay is one of the most unequal countries in the world, and these women belong to that protected / privileged elite that has its roof and food secured. But the story unfolds as they begin to lose those assurances and cannot find a way to adapt to a new reality. The protagonist still needs to have her branded car, her servant, her little luxuries. And even if the car is old or the servant is not very experienced, she does everything she can to preserve her comfort. That's why the ordinary process of having a job and making money puts her in another position. All of a sudden, desire arises as a new landscape, almost unknown, but full of possibilities.

What was your inspiration for the film, and did you have any artistic influences that had an effect on your filmmaking?

I grew up in a world shaped by women: mother, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, ladies in the

neighbourhood. I wanted my first feature to get into that female universe that interests me even more since I started watching Fassbinder films.

One of my aunts always had a tray with her, like the one we used in the film. On it, she had sparkling water, still water, coffee, a small notebook, her rosary, her pills,. In the journey of approaching a fictional character, I wanted to work with a similar tray, as a guide to think about the likes and obsessions of the protagonist, but also to understand her limits. The tray becomes the way of relating to her inner circle, with the strong contradiction between comfort and control that is fundamental to her personality.

There is a Paraguayan writer, Gabriel Casaccia, who is perhaps my strongest influence in trying to portray the Paraguayan bourgeoisie. His first novel was published in the 50s, when our literature only narrated heroes. However, he took away from the Paraguayan characters the pretentiousness and gave them humanity in return.

Something similar is being done now with Paraguayan women, through the construction of an imagery that places them in the role of heroines during the wars, strong and resilient. It becomes very dangerous when that's their only place. It's a trap that aims at shaping their role in today's society. Honestly, I think that many women do not want and shouldn't have to carry such a burden. They deserve the opportunity - naturally given to all men - to be a little irresponsible.

You have managed to assemble an incredible set of female cast. How did you find your actresses? Both your leading women as well as the group of older ladies?

More than casting I just chat with people, get to know them better and discover if I will be able to work with them. This process was crucial for 'The Heiresses'. We needed women that could naturally move, talk and relate to each other with certain social codes that are difficult to imitate. So I didn't want the actresses to perform characters far away from who they are. My role was to guide them through specific situations and together we discovered this new woman that was inside them and made her come out. I know so little about acting methods and I'm so afraid to work with them, that all I wanted was to get to know the actresses and rehearse as much as possible. More for my own need than for theirs.

I found all three main actresses had in common one thing, when they came to meet me. They were open to new challenges. And for a director, those moments in the life of an actor are full of an intensity that is very interesting to work with.

Angy brings new perspective to Chela's life, she is the catalyst for change. How did you develop her character, and what does it mean to you?

The character of Angy has changed a lot throughout the process. She became more evident to me when I realized the strong cinematographic presence of the actress Ana Ivanova and the unsettling feelings she could bring to a world that had remained dormant for such a long time. In many ways, this is a story of women who relate to one another through gossip. I like the Portuguese word for gossip, 'fofoca'. Chela is worried about what their friends are saying about her, Chiquita tells stories about the other inmates in prison and in Pituca's character, scandalmongering reaches its maximum expression. However Angy is not a gossip. She speaks of herself, of her stories, of the men she has met. This attitude separates her from the common 'fofoca', as she's more direct and also extremely physical. That is why her character brings the possibility of breaking with the inertia, of a change that seems fascinating and dangerous at the same time.

You tell the story of elder women, a group rarely represented in cinema. Can you tell us more about this personal attachment to a stage of life that you have not experienced yet? How is this generation important to you?

Born in Paraguay in the 1970s, we are children of a lost generation. The military man who took total power of the country in 1954, promoted the cult of his personality, prohibited books, tortured and murdered young people or sent them into exile. He was in power until 1989.

Our parents, those who remained in the country, had to spend their youth under the shadow of a regime that did not allow them to be themselves. Their best years were moulded by fear and a generation, naturally, tends to reproduce its values and its forms. These women, without being guilty, are the product of a time that we thought was over. But recent history shows us that this isn't the case. That's why I'm interested in seeing them, exploring that universe that remains a mystery to me.

I have seen cinematic representations of women belonging to this social class, many times made as a caricature. But I grew up hiding behind doors or under tables, eager to hear their conversations. So I tried to portray them with an intimacy and curiosity, totally aware at the same time, of the enormous contradiction of not ever being able to fully understand them.

You show us a female universe where men are nearly completely absent. What is your point of view and your position in this world?

In the Paraguay of my youth, there was only one way of being a man, shaped by the military and the Catholic Church. This does not leave much room to be oneself, so a lot of us grew up stuck between borrowed identities. I also believe that one of the serious problems of societies as macho as the Paraguayan, is that man is expected to have all the answers. And that is frustrating. No one teaches us to enjoy the pleasure of having doubts and asking questions.

What was your challenge to film your movie in just a few key settings - the house full of memories, the women's prison, the car?

This is a small film, made on a human scale. We knew we wouldn't have time and resources to work in many locations and the story itself didn't need it.

At first, we realised that the world the protagonists belonged to is very hermetic, in a real and also symbolic sense. And that was significant to keep the story inside their house or their car. However, once Chiquita goes to prison, a slow process of connexion with the outside world begins. The film peeks into the outdoor settings and hears exterior sounds but assumes them to be part of another reality.

You end the film in an open way, hinting at a departure and a new beginning for your protagonists. Can you tell us more about the end of the movie?

It was difficult for me to finish the film with an open ending. Mainly because when I started writing the script, I did it driven by a pessimistic vision about the future of my society. This made it impossible to think of a way out. But in the huge learning process of making a film, unexpected paths are crossed.

I had a clear starting point of the story but allowed the characters to find an ending. Then, beyond the feelings of confinement that triggered the writing process, and even beyond the darkness I was perceiving as the only possible future for my country, these characters showed me that there may be an open door to a new beginning. It was a beautiful and unexpected discovery.

MARCELO MARTINESSI BIOGRAPHY

Paraguayan director and screenwriter. Studied communication at the Catholic University of Asunción and cinema at the London Film School. His short films that revolve around literature and memory have been shown at the Berlinale, Clermont Ferrand, Kinoforum among other festivals. He was executive director of the first public TV in his country from the beginning of the project in 2010 until the coup d'état of June 2012. Capturing his nation's trauma during that political chaos he wrote and directed 'La Voz Perdida', Best Short Film at Venice Film Festival in 2016.

FILMOGRAPHY

2009 Karai Norte (short)

2011 Calle Última (short)
2013 El Baldío (short)
2016 La Voz Perdida (short)

CAST

CHELA
CHIQUITA
ANGY

ANA BRUN
MARGARITA IRÚN
ANA IVANOVA

CREW

DIRECTED BY
PRODUCED BY

MARCELO MARTINESSI
SEBASTIAN PEÑA ESCOBAR
MARCELO MARTINESSI

CO-PRODUCED BY

CHRISTOPH FRIEDEL
CLAUDIA STEFFEN
AGUSTINA CHIARINO VOULMINOT
FERNANDO EPSTEIN
JULIA MURAT
HILDE BERG
XAVIER ROCHER

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
EDITOR
ART DIRECTOR
COSTUME DESIGN
SOUND

MARINA PERALES MARHUENDA
LUIS ARMANDO ARTEGA
FERNANDO EPSTEIN
CARLO SPATUZZA
TANIA SIMBRÓN
DANIEL TURINI

COLOUR GRADING
SOUND MIXING
PRODUCTION
CO-PRODUCTION

FERNANDO HENNA
RAFAEL ALVAREZ
CAIQUE (SHADE - ICA)
ARIEL HENRIQUE
LA BABOSA CINE
PANDORA FILMPRODUKTIONS
MUTANTE CINE
ESQUINA FILMES
NORSK FILMPRODUKJSON
LA FABRICA NOCTURNA PRODUCTIONS
LUXBOX

WORLD SALES