



## Controversy and comedy in the world of Spanish film

Madeline Smith

Managing Editor

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### Festival of New Spanish Cinema

Friday, Sept. 9–Saturday, Sept. 10

Metro Cinema (8712–109 St.)

As the director of the Festival of New Spanish Cinema, Marta Sanchez has been busy preparing to launch the third annual celebration of Spanish films for the past several months, but that doesn't mean the country that has given birth to the art she promotes is slowing down. Over the phone from her office in the centre of Barcelona, Sanchez is suddenly interrupted mid-conversation by music coming through her windows from the streets.

"Everyone is on vacation right now. All day you can hear the laughing and drinking, and

everyone is in a bikini ... I just want to be on vacation!” she says with a laugh.

While Spain has a reputation for its lively, carefree culture, the country’s cinematic efforts don’t necessarily revolve around the party atmosphere. The touring festival, making one of its two Canadian stops in Edmonton this weekend, includes films with dark examinations of difficult subject matter, combining movies that explore issues like incest with the country’s own disturbing brand of horror.

“Filmmakers here talk about very difficult topics — very, very difficult,” Sanchez explains.

“There are topics that filmmakers or other nationalities don’t treat so much ... I find that it’s very risky — the choices of the stories are very risky, and I like that. It brings a different perspective.

“In Spain, horror is very popular in the international market — we have very good representation doing horror, which is amazing,” she says. “So we’ve put together a new horror film (for the festival) called *Kidnapped*, but we’re also rediscovering a classic cult film called *Who Can Kill a Child*, which is probably, under my point of view, if not the best horror film made in Spain, at least one of the best ... It was once censored, and in the U.S. they had to change the title of the film because you couldn’t mention that children could be killed — it’s been a bit controversial.”

At the same time, Sanchez maintains that her home country’s films aren’t entirely painful and bleak. Even when Spanish movies address challenging subject matter, the esthetic choices the filmmakers make often create a sense of depth and beauty to offset the heartbreaking plots.

“At this festival, we’re showing *80 Days*, which is a difficult love story between two women when they encounter each other at 70. But it’s a beautiful film, and very touching. We also have a documentary about Alzheimer’s ... but this film is very different because it portrays the perspective of the sick person ... it’s very shocking.

“There are also others that are just light, pure entertainment, like *Lovestorming*, which is similar to *The Hangover*. You need to mix profound and serious films with some fun.”

With the prevalence of the American entertainment and movie industry, Sanchez acknowledges that it’s sometimes difficult for overseas audiences to access and experience Spanish films. The festival has become an important part of educating foreign audiences about the diversity that exists within the community of Spanish filmmakers, and the different forms of art they create.

“For many reasons, we often think of Spanish filmmaking in a very one-dimensional way, which comes from the director (Pedro) Almodóvar. And Almodóvar is great and I love him and his work, but I think there is more to Spanish cinema than just him,” Sanchez says.

“We’ve noticed in North America, it’s very difficult to access these films. The channels are very narrow, and it’s very difficult to see films from abroad — apart from the Toronto Film Festival and maybe openings in Vancouver, the movies don’t get anywhere else. So in Canada, all the movies in the festival are premieres — for me, it’s amazing that they’re premieres.”

While the festival is a showcase of the latest frontiers in Spanish film, Sanchez is convinced that the collection of movies ultimately offers what you would expect from any movie: the potential to be moved, and to leave the cinema with a different sense of perspective.

“A good film, when you leave that movie theatre, you talk about it and you think about it. For many reasons: because it touched you intellectually or emotionally, or you just had fun, or you were scared. That’s a good movie,” Sanchez asserts.

“I want audiences to just go with the trip, go with the story. I want the filmmaker to take people’s hands and say, ‘come with me!’ ”