



73

Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin

Panorama

the Castle

a film by **Martín Benchimol**



Synopsis

Having worked as a housekeeper all her life, Justina inherits from her former employer a mansion in the middle of the Argentinian pampas. Under one condition: she must never leave. In this modern fairytale, Justina and her daughter Alexia will face the challenges of keeping that promise alive.



Interview with Martín Benchimol

How did the *The Castle* project come about?

I met the protagonists while I was making my previous film, *The Dread*. We turned down a narrow dirt road and stumbled upon the castle. I was amazed to find this huge old mansion with castle towers sitting in the middle of nowhere. When I knocked on the door Justina came out dressed in her work clothes. The first thing I asked was if I could meet the owner. That story reveals in itself one of the film's main themes: my class prejudice made me blind to the fact that Justina herself might be the owner.

She asked me in, and we spent the whole day talking about the history of the house while she showed me around. This was six years ago or so; Justina and her daughter Alexia, who was fourteen at the time, were just settling in. The meeting was so exciting I even considered to postpone the shooting of *The Dread* and to get started the film with Justina and Alexia right away instead. Luckily it didn't happen, because the six years between our first meeting and the start of the shooting allowed us to forge a strong friendship which was the main key in the making of *The Castle*.

What themes were you most drawn to develop in the film?

As in many Latin American countries, social climbing is practically impossible in Argentina, there is an idea that economic salvation only happens thanks to extraordinary events. Justina's story represents a mistake, a crack in the system. It is completely disruptive to comprehend that she, a working-class woman from Chaco-Paraguay, could be the owner of a property with the characteristics of the castle.

Since magical salvation is unreal, and even somehow a trap, the film gradually morphed into a failed fairy-tale. So when the fantasy collapses, we're left with the real, tangible human relationships. And it's this mother-daughter relationship I was most drawn to, watching them together at time when they are both on a journey to free themselves in different ways.

So, how would you define *The Castle*, then? A documentary with elements of fiction? A fiction told in the language of documentary?

When Justina told me her story, I felt there was something dramatically very powerful which needed to be told with a particular narrative cadence. *The Castle* tells its story through the present, when the house is already significantly run down, when Alexia isn't a child anymore and is looking to make her own way in life. But that present is a construct, because it condenses many events we shared over the years before shooting.

So, is it more a fiction than a documentary?

In a way, I think both genres are a good fit.

When I started writing the script, I had to constantly go back and forth to the castle and ended up spending a considerable amount of time with Justina and Alexia, talking about the past and about their plans for the future. *The Castle* was built with them, alongside them. It depicts their lives closely from somewhere very close to their experience while allowing itself to depart from reality and resolve things differently.

There are some scenes that are pure observation, and others where we acted out past situations that they'd told me about, or that we'd lived through together. And then there are scenes that depict an imaginary future.

The writing process was extremely dynamic, and in my opinion, documentary because the protagonists were telling and reinventing their own lives.

I think the difference between this and many other films—and this isn't a value judgment, but an objective one—is that *The Castle* doesn't share that process of creation with the audience. The only witnesses are the ones who contributed to its creation: Justina, Alexia, and myself. The audience is given access to what seems like a crafted and contained story. Maybe that's why it feels more like fiction.

Technical info

The Castle

Martín Benchimol

Argentina / France 2023

Spanish

World Premiere Panorama Berlinale 2023

78 min / Colour / DCP

Produced by: **Mayra Bottero, Gema Films**

Coproduced by **Sister Productions**

Producers: **Mayra Bottero, Gema Juárez Allen, Clarisa Oliveri**

Coproducers: **Heidi Fleisher, Julie Paratian**

Protagonists: **Justina Olivo y Alexia Caminos Olivo**

Script: **Martín Benchimol**

Cinematographers: **Nico Miranda, Fernando Lorenzale**

Editor: **Ana Remón**

Sound designer: **Sofía Straface**

Original Score: **José Manuel Gatica**

Coproducer WIP Latam San Sebastián Award:

Nephilim Producciones

With the support from **INCAA, Cinémas du Monde, Centre National de la Cinématographie, Region Nouvelle Aquitaine, World Cinema Fund + Europe, San Sebastián International Film Festival, IDFA Project Space, Campus Latino**



Director's Biography

Martín Benchimol (b. 1985) is an Argentine film director, screenwriter and cinematographer.

He has directed two feature documentaries. “El Espanto” (The Dread, 2017), premiered at IDFA where it was awarded the IDFA AWARD for Best Film; and “La gente del río” (The River People, 20212) premiered at DOK Leipzig.

In 2022 he premiered the short film “Un corazón más contundente” (A Robust Heart), produced by Sandbox Films (U.S.A.) and PFilm (U.K.), in the IDFA short film competition.

Martín is a graduate from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), where he teaches filmmaking at the Documentary Graduate Program. He also collaborates with the Guadalajara Film Festival as guest director in Doculab, a training space for documentaries in editing stage. Since 2021 he has been teaching at the C.C.C. (Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, Mexico) as head of the Documentary Creation Clinic.

EL CASTILLO is Martín's solo feature film debut.

Filmography

2012 **La gente del río / The River People** (63')

2017 **El Espanto / The Dread** (67')

2022 **Un corazón más contundente / A Robust Heart** (12')



Gema films

gemafilms.com

info@gemafilms.com

Gema Films is an Argentina-based production company created in 2009. We are interested in films with a strong authorial voice that explore narratives and experiment with the fabric between reality and fiction. We work with established and emerging directors and artists. Among our recent works are PORNOMELANCOLÍA (2022, Manuel Abramovich); PRIVATE FICTION (2020, Andres Di Tella); LINA DE LIMA (2019, María Paz González), THEATRE OF WAR (2018, Lola Arias) and OSCURO ANIMAL (2016, Felipe Guerrero).

The company's director, Gema Juárez Allen, is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and of the Eurodoc and EAVE professional networks.

Sister

sisterprod.com

info@sisterprod.com

Julie Paratian created SISTER Productions (an anagram of RESIST) in 2011 with emphasis on an international, feminist and militant approach. She has produced around thirty documentary and fiction films noticed in major festivals including the Armenian candidate for Oscars 22, SHOULD THE WIND DROP by Nora Martirosyan (Cannes Official selection), HER JOB by Nikos Labot (TIFF, Best first Greek film - Hellenic Awards) and, THE CHALLAT OF TUNIS by Kaouther Ben Hania, (Acid Cannes, Best First Film - Namur).

In 2023, the company is producing several fiction and documentary projects as delegate producer and in coproduction with Slovenia, Argentina, Canada, Ireland, USA and Greece.

Sales agent

LUXBOX

+ 33 171.37.99.34

info@luxboxfilms.com

Press info

Brigitta Portier

brigittaportier@alibicommunications.be

alibicommunications.be/international-press

