

Berlinale FILM CAPSULE: The Bar (Iglesia, 2017): Spain

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson.

Director Ã•lex de la Iglesia rehashes an oft-used scenario of a group of individuals held against their will in a life-threatening situation in his new film, *The Bar* (and yes, it is set in a bar). The titles roll with a peppy, â??warm and sunny dayâ?• jazz beat. The location is present day Madrid, Spain, on what seemingly could be any typical day in the city.

Iglesia wisely opens with the stunningly beautiful Blanca Suarez (kudos to JosÃ© Quetglas for Make-up) as Elena, waltzing through a fast-moving urban city-scape while conversing on her cellular phone about her romantic prospects while a business man initially crosses her path bearing the same lughole accessory. Ã•ngel AmorÃ³s serves as Director of Photography and his opening scene is nothing short of brilliant. A must-see!

Both these characters, Elena and the businessman, wind up in a nearby bar where quick transitions from Editor Domingo Gonzales reveal colorful characters in a slapstick-like manner. A few patrons are enjoying breakfast while a few others are enjoying their first espresso of the day. Costumer Paolo Torres outfits the group in rich, vivid attire. Short, rapid fire exchanges of dialogue compliment the character intros. Suddenly, a blast overwhelms the bar. Sound Designer, Sergio Burmann, creates a reverberation somewhere between gunshot and a medium-grade explosive.

Without missing a beat, a body is discovered lying outside the front door sidewalk with a gunshot wound to the head. A patron exits to discover what has happened when another, now identifiable, gun blast takes his life. The customers are visibly horrified and they watch helplessly. They scurry for cover. Brief pandemonium ensues. However, the trepidity begins to recede and an observation is made â?? the streets are empty. An eerie feeling has taken hold. Questions abound. Why is there no one on the sreets? Is there a sniper on a rooftop? Or could the perpetrator be somewhere in the bar?

The group quickly realizes they must work together to stay alive. From here the filmâ??s narrative oscillates between thriller and dark comedy while the characters oscillate between solidarity and egotism with moments of confidence and terror as they struggle to survive begins amidst outbursts of

greed and hatred, helpfulness and compassion.

In *The Bar* Iglesia sets forth an adventurous, often calamitous tale primarily set in the barâ??s basement rooms and the underground passageways of Madrid. Iglesia focuses his lens on these characters in a most intimate manner. The colorful charactersâ?? personality layers (and clothing!) are peeled as they try to stay alive. However, along the way, lives are lost. Yet, truths are revealed, self-discovery is made and inner strength is found. The film has a run time of 102 minutes allowing for some emotional depth in his supporting characters while bringing the character of Elena to full fruition.

Granted, the filmâ??s narrative does have its flaws and its characters, while colorful, do raise some eyebrows with larger-than-life personas while spewing forth some rather zealous dialogue. However, Iglesia slyly embeds a deep socio-political truth into *The Bar*â??s story line. Herein lies the beauty and magic of this film.

Highly recommended from the 67th Berlinale!

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Date Created
February 15, 2017
Author
hollywoodglee