



Argentina Alfredo Friedlander

Cinema attendance and the number of films released (almost 300 features) stayed at the same level as last year. July saw a dramatic reduction in admission figures – approximately 2.5 million – due to swine flu. A surge in attendance over the last quarter of 2009 redressed this imbalance.

On average, half the films released were from the United States, including a number of co-productions with the UK. Second came Argentina and third France, with the rest mainly European productions, particularly from Italy and, to a lesser extent, the UK and Spain. Few films came from Asian countries.

As in previous years, the task of listing the exact number of Argentine releases remains almost impossible, as some films are shown once or twice a week in a single cinema. Their number should be around 75, a similar quantity to 2008.

The Cannes Film Festival featured no Argentine films, a sharp contrast to last year's five entries. There were few domestic releases at other festivals, but San Sebastián Film Festival did screen Juan José Campanella's **Secret of her Eyes** (El secreto de sus ojos)



Juan José Campanella's **Secret of her Eyes**

in its official competition. It is the story of a judicial employee, Benjamin Esposito (Ricardo Darin), who writes a novel about a murder that took place in Buenos Aires in 1974, in which he was an indirect protagonist. Writing the book leads him to investigate his own past during a period when Argentina's history was marked by violence and death. He also ruminates on his unexpressed love for a female supervisor (Soledad Villamil).

The 11th Buenos Aires International Film Festival (BAFICI) screened almost 400 films, some of which featured in the national and international competition strands. Miguel Gomes' overlong Portuguese feature, **Our Beloved Month of August** (Aquele querido mês de agosto), won the International Competition. The prize for the best local film went to Alejo Mogueillansky's **Castro**, about a man who flees Buenos Aires with his girlfriend, leaving behind a group of friends.

The 23rd International Film Festival of Mar del Plata returned to its original November slot with veteran filmmaker José Martínez Suárez as its new director. Hirokazu Kore-Eda's **Still Walking** won the International Competition while Amat Escalante's Mexican production, **Los Bastardos**, took the prize for the best film from Latin America. A third competition reserved to Argentine films saw Kris Nikilson's **Diletante** and Jorge Leandro Colás' **Parador Retiro** sharing the award.

The most important local production during 2009 was **Secret of her Eyes**. It was number one at the box office for over ten weeks in late summer and has gone on to become the biggest commercial success of the year, with attendance figures exceeding two million. It

was even able to displace *Ice Age 3*, which was released at the height of concerns over swine flu in the country.

Fernando E. Solanas, director of *The Hour of the Furnaces*, continued with his series of documentaries about Argentina. The fifth chapter, **Uprisen Land – Part I: Impure Gold** (*Tierra sublevada – Parte I: Oro impuro*), attacks the exploitation of Argentina's mineral resources, which the director states does not bring prosperity to the inhabitants of several provinces rich in precious metals. All it brings for locals is environmental contamination. Unfortunately, the film failed to perform well at the box office, unlike his previous film, *The Next Station*.



Mundo Alas: An Alternative Tour, directed by Sebastián Schindel, Fernando Molnar and Leon Gieco

Another striking documentary was **Mundo Alas: An Alternative Tour** (*Mundo Alas*) directed by Sebastián Schindel, Fernando Molnar and musician Leon Gieco. It is a touching film, documenting a tour organised by Gieco with a group of handicapped musicians and singers around several Argentine provinces.

There were some disappointing new films by acclaimed directors. Carlos Sorin's **The Window** (*La ventana*) was about an old man close to his death, while XXY director Lucia Puenzo's **The Fish Child** (*El niño pez*) told the story of a teenager from an exclusive suburban neighbourhood in Argentina who is in love with a Paraguayan maid. The film lacked strength, despite the presence of Inés Efrón, who was better cast in the comedy **Lovely Loneliness** (*Amorosa soledad*), co-directed by Martin

Carranza and Victoria Galardi, in which she plays a teenager abandoned by her boyfriend, who makes a resolution to stay single for the next three years in order to avoid heartbreak.

The comedy genre was also well represented by newcomer Hernán Goldfrid's **Hold On... Please!** (*Musica en espera*), about a composer (Diego Peretti) desperately seeking a song for a film. He finds the perfect tune when he calls his bank and is placed on hold. Unable to find the song that played whilst he was waiting, the bank manager (Natalia Oreiro) promises to help him on the condition that he will pretend to be her fiancé when her mother, played by the impressive Norma Aleandro, arrives from Spain.

Aleandro also appeared in Rodrigo Grande's **A Question of Principles** (*Cuestión de principios*), a dramatic story about a civil servant (Federico Luppi) who refuses to sell an old volume containing a photo of his father to Pablo Echarri's young supervisor, who needs this edition to complete his collection. Echarri was one of the main characters in another successful drama, directed by Marcelo Piñeyro. **The Widows of Thursdays** (*Las viudas de los jueves*), based on a local bestseller, is a mystery that takes place in a private country club where three yuppies are found dead in a swimming pool.

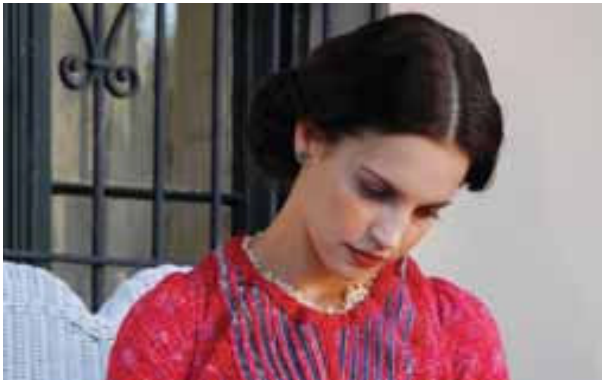


Marilú Marini in Diego Sabanés' **Made Up Memories**

Diego Sabanés' **Made Up Memories** (*Mentiras piadosas*) is loosely based on some short stories by the late Julio Cortazar, one of Argentina's greatest writers. An excellent atmosphere and fine performance by Marilú Marini and Claudio Tolcachir did not help the film at the box office.

Pablo Fendrik's first two films, **The Mugger** and **Blood Appears**, which had screened at Cannes Critics' Week in the past, were finally and almost simultaneously released in Argentina. Arturo Goetz starred in both films, with *The Mugger* impressing the most.

Mention should be made of Fernando Diaz's second feature, **The Stranger** (*La extranjera*), about an introverted woman, played by María Laura Cali, who lives in Barcelona and is obliged to return home in order to decide what to do with the ranch she inherited from her late grandfather. An excellent atmosphere and fine acting makes for a compelling film.



Teresa Constantini's **Felicitas**

Teresa Constantini's **Felicitas**, an historical drama based on a true story that took place during the 19th century, was something of a disappointment. A costly production by Argentine standards, it tells of the tragic end of Felicitas Guerrero, who was forced by her father to marry a wealthy older man. It performed quite well at the local box office but prospects for international distribution are slim.

The year's best films

Secret of her Eyes (Juan José Campanella)

Hold On... Please! (Hernán Goldfrid)

Made Up Memories (Diego Sabanés)

Mundo Alas: An Alternative Tour

(L. Gieco, S. Schindel & F. Molnar)

The Mugger (Pablo Fendrik)

Quote of the year

'I am very happy. Every time I enter a race my aim is to win. But it is true that there are races

in which one can feel proud from the very moment you have the possibility to compete. The possibility of being nominated for the Oscar is a very important issue.' **JUAN JOSÉ CAMPANELLA** on *Argentina choosing Secret of her Eyes* as its representative at the 2010 Academy Awards.

Directory

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