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Friday January 8th, 7.30pm
Wild Tales (Argentina 2014. Cert 15)

dir: **Damián Szifrón**

starring: **Ricardo Darin, Leonardo Sbaraglia, Erica Rivas**

sponsored by **Gio Carchedi and Bar Unico**

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Most of us have been in situations where we feel powerless and frustrated by the unfairness of it all, to a degree that we might either lose control completely or find another way to unleash our resentment. In Argentine Damián Szifrón's festival hit *Wild Tales*, his protagonists simply choose to explode - regardless of the consequences. The result is a funny, dark, hugely enjoyable film that made quite an impact at the Cannes Film Festival 2014, despite (or perhaps because of) being such an unusual choice for the main competition; commercial, genre-orientated, a grotesque black comedy and an anthology to boot. *Wild Tales* ticks each of these boxes but is, above all, great cinema.

Writer-director Szifrón has admitted the influence of famous anthologies such as Spielberg's *Amazing Stories*, *New York Stories* (with its segments by Scorsese, Coppola and Woody Allen), and in literature, J. D. Salinger's *Nine Stories* - a list to which we should probably add, given Szifrón's background as a veteran TV director, the classic *Tales From the Crypt* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. As with the latter, Szifrón opens his film with a short, sharp prologue, in which a group of air passengers come to a collective and disastrous realisation about the pilot of their plane, thus perfectly setting the tone - vertiginous, giddy, fatal - for the otherwise independent five wild tales that follow. And despite their different genre trappings - road movie, melodrama, thriller - the stories also share Javier Julia's striking cinematography and Gustavo Santaolalla's equally excellent soundtrack, not to mention an altogether superb line up of



Argentine actors. Leonardo Sbaraglia (star of *Intacto*) plays the hot-headed businessman involved in a rapidly escalating road rage incident in '*El más fuerte*' (The Strongest One); Maria Cuerto (star of Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman*) plays the watchful wife whose husband tries to buy their son out of his responsibility for a fatal car accident in '*La propuesta*' (The Proposal); and Ricardo Darin (*Nine Queens*, *The Secret In Their Eyes*) is a man who slowly but surely loses everything trying to fight the system, after his car is unfairly towed away several times in '*Bombita*' (Little Bomb.)

That the co-producer of *Wild Tales* is Pedro Almodóvar's company El Deseo won't come as a surprise, since the film displays a politically charged variation of the grotesque that feels particularly Spanish and Goya-esque in flavour, familiar from the filmographies of Luis Garcia Berlanga and, more recently, Alex de la Iglesia and, of course, Almodóvar himself. The humour of *Wild Tales* is pitch black, its irony razor sharp, its sarcasm painfully perverse and its unpredictability ludicrous, violent but also biting funny, building a sense of the absurd in which everyday incidents can rapidly escalate into full-blown

Synopsis: An anthology of stories taking place in present-day Argentina. In '**Pasternak**' a group of air passengers slowly realise they have all been assembled on the same flight by the pilot, a frustrated musician who wants to take revenge on those he thinks have humiliated him and stalled his career, by crashing the plane. In '**Las Ratas**' (The Rats) a mafioso running for local government is killed with rat poison by a waitress at a roadside diner, in revenge for his past abuse of her family, which ultimately caused her father's suicide. '**El más fuerte**' (The Strongest One) tells the story of a road-rage incident in which the drivers - a businessman and a working-class man - end up killing each other. '**Bombita**' (Little Bomb) relates how an explosives specialist has his car repeatedly towed away unfairly: after his attempts to fight back cause him to lose his job and custody of his daughter, he finally blows up his own car and is sent to prison. In '**La propuesta**' (The Proposal), a millionaire tries to get his son off the hook after he kills a pregnant woman in a hit-and-run incident by paying the gardener to take the blame: the latter is shot dead by the dead woman's husband. '**Hasta que la muerte nos separe**' (Till Death Us Do Part) is the story of a bride who, realising at her wedding that her fiancé has been cheating on her with a work colleague, takes matters into her own hands, crashing the other woman into a mirror; as the guests start to leave the party, the newly-weds have wild sex on the cake table.

Credits

Simón	Ricardo Darin	Cuenca	César Bordón	Director	Damián Szifrón
Mauricio	Oscar Martinez	Salgado	Dario Grandinetti	Written by	Damián Szifrón
Diego	Leonardo Sbaraglia	Isabel	Maria Marull	DoP	Javier Julia
Romina	Erica Rivas	Casero	Germán da Silva	Editing	Pablo Barbieri, Damián Szifrón
Cocinera	Rita Cortese	Mario	Walter Donado	Music	Gustavo Santaolalla
Moza	Julieta Zylberberg			Art Direction	Clara Notari
Helena	Maria Onetto			Sound Design	José Luiz Diaz
Victoria	Nancy Dupláa			Visual Effects	

Argentina/Spain 2014. 121 mins

consequences without stretching our credibility. In fact, much of the pleasure of *Wild Tales* lies in watching a group of characters caught up in situations we can all relate to, pushed beyond their limits and into the realm of primal responses.

Our exit from this dog-eared universe comes courtesy of the exhilarating '*Hasta que la muerte nos separe*' (Till Death Us Do Part) which thrusts us into the middle of a volatile wedding reception that vividly descends into chaos, revealing in the process just how thin the membrane of familial and social convention can be. Just before the official 'waltz', the bride discovers that the groom is having an affair with one of his colleagues, also a guest. Distress and a sexual epiphany ensue, paving the way for a dizzying payback in which the bride's whiplash response not only perfectly encapsulates the forms of cathartic vengeance and destruction that all the characters in these stories reach for, but also colourfully displays the film's most attractive trait - which Szifron calls 'the undeniable pleasure of losing control.'

Another view

Revenge is served cold and sometimes hot but always deliciously in this collection of six darkly comic shorts from Argentina's Damián Szifron, which ought to be a strong contender in the foreign language category when Oscar night rolls round. Each of the tales - Pasternak, The Rats, Road To Hell, Dynamite, The Bill and Till Death Us Do Part - sees the preyed upon become predator and when these worms turn, they bite.

From chance encounters on a plane, which may be more than they appear, to the frustrations of a man whose car is towed and the cracks in a couple's relationship that begin to show even before their wedding cake is cut, Szifron takes each situation and twists it into a tale of the unexpected. Elsewhere, a diner waitress toys with vengeance, road rage could prove fatal and a car accident leads to sinister scheming. Szifron has the sensibility and unpredictability of Roald Dahl, pushing his characters until they snap but never quite in the way we imagine they might.

*To go into plot detail would be to spoil the treats in store but perhaps the biggest surprise of all is that this phalanx of stories doesn't have a weak point. It's customary for film collections to sag somewhere - although that is more true of portmanteau films with different directors - but Szifron's cutting edge never blunts. His Argentina is a place where corruption rules over a land of bureaucracy and money can buy you anything, except perhaps the ability to be more cunning than the next man. Violence is everywhere, but Szifron suggests more than he shows, keeping the emphasis on humour rather than horror. The one exception is that tale of accident scheming - *The Bill* - which although still comic, suggests the less funny territory where this sort of off-the-chart vengeance can lead.*

*The writing is taut and cast members including Argentine cinema favourites such as Ricardo Darín and Leonardo Sbaraglia make a lasting impression as they dance close to the edge. There is real craft in terms of staging too, with one short ending on a memorable freeze frame that had the San Sebastian cinema I attended hooting with delight, while another features the sort of outrageous slapstick that makes *Itchy & Scratchy* look tame. You can sense cinematographer Javier Julia smiling as he*

captures the chaos with some clean and crafty camerawork, with Szifron carefully judging when it will be funnier for us to be able to 'see it coming' and when to keep his cards close to his chest. The result is unflagging and ferociously funny.

Amber Wilkinson, Eye for Film

Programme change

The release date for **Mr Kaplan** (scheduled for March 18th) has not been confirmed by the distributors, which means the film is not likely to be available. Consequently, the programming committee has decided to replace it with **Theeb** (Jordan/UAE/Qatar/UK 2014), a beautifully filmed story set in Western Arabia during World War I.

New Releases

We have also selected the 3 films from those released since the programme was selected, to fill the gaps in the season left for the purpose. The films (subject to confirmation) are

The Wolfpack (USA, 2015): In New York, the six Angulo brothers and their older sister live with their parents in a Lower East Side apartment that they are not allowed to leave because their parents feel the world beyond is unsafe. Home-schooled, they go outside only once or twice a year under strict supervision. Film is their shared passion and, unable to explore the world themselves, they do so via the medium of cinema, making endless lists of films, staging elaborate recreations of their favourites scenes & memorising dialogue. Their inexperience of the world is so profound that when they finally start to get a taste of freedom, the expectations they've built up through film-watching don't always translate to reality; but they are nevertheless determined to escape the prison their father has constructed and leave their inner worlds for the real one.

Tangerines (Estonia, 2013): The first Estonian film to be nominated for a Best Foreign Language Oscar, *Tangerines* takes place during the short but brutal war between Georgia and Abkhazia in 1992. In a neutral Estonian village over the border most villagers have fled the encroaching conflict, but Ivo, an elderly farmer, stays behind to help his friend Magnus with the harvest, before it goes to waste. A deeply affecting anti-war movie, *Tangerines* takes a simple story and weaves it into a rich drama, deftly balancing pathos, black humour and a pacifist critique of unnecessary violence.

The Lesson (Bulgaria/Greece, 2014): Margita Gosheva is excellent as the initially uncompromising Nadezhda, a teacher in a small Bulgarian town who's troubled by petty thefts in her classroom and is trying her best to uncover the culprit. But financial woes are stacking up in her own life, after her unemployed and hapless husband spends money they don't have, and she must utilise all her energy to ensure that their house isn't repossessed.

Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov won the New Directors Award at San Sebastian in 2014 for this hard-hitting social realist drama

The screening dates will be announced as soon as possible

Our next screening: January 15th, 7.30pm The Green Prince (Israel 2014. Cert 15)

Based on the New York Times bestselling memoir *Son of Hamas* by Mosab Hassan Yousef, *The Green Prince* is a unique cinematic experience: a story of loyalty and betrayal, of political intrigue and unthinkable choices, but above all it is a story of great hope. A feature-length documentary adaptation and produced by two times Oscar winning producer Simon Chinn (*Searching For Sugar Man*, *Man On Wire*) and Oscar winning producer John Battsek (*One Day In September*), *The Green Prince* is directed by Israel Film Academy Award winner Nadav Schirman (*The Champagne Spy*), and is proof that often fact is greater than fiction.