

Locarno Film Festival
Official Selection



ZAHORÍ

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
MARÍ ALESSANDRINI

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MARÍ ALESSANDRINI WITH LARA TORTOSA SANTOS CURAPIL CIRILO WESLEYSABINE TIMOTEO PABLO LIMARZI FEDERICO LUQUE COLO SUSINI FRANCISCA CASTILLO CAROL JONES MICHAEL SILVA
CINEMATOGRAPHER JOAKIM CHARDONNENS EDITORS MYRIAM RACHMUTH MARÍ ALESSANDRINI SOUND CLAUDIO VARGAS ADRIEN KESSLER MIKAEL BARRE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR NADIR MEDINA ART DIRECTOR ANA CAROLINA VERGARA
COSTUMES MARIA SOL MUÑOZ PRODUCTION LE LABORATOIRE CENTRAL EL CALEFÓN CINESTACION NORTE PRODUCTIONS ASSOCIATE PRODUCTION SELVA FRIA
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LA RÉSIDENCE
CINÉFONDATION



ZAHORÍ

A FILM BY MARÍ ALESSANDRINI

WITH

Lara Tortosa Santos Curapil Cirilo Wesley
Sabine Timoteo Pablo Limarzi
Federico Luque Colo Susini Carol Jones Francisca Castillo

PRODUCED BY

Le Laboratoire Central, El Calefón, Cinestación, Norte Productions
Associate producer : Selva Fría

PRESS KIT

PRODUCTION

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SYNOPSIS

The steppe of Patagonia is swept by a grey wind... Mora, 13-year-old, wants to be a "gaucho". She rebels against school and affirms herself to her parents, Swiss Italian ecologists, whose dream of autonomy turns into a nightmare. Mora will go deep into the meanders of the steppe to help her only friend Nazareno, an old Mapuche who has lost his horse, Zahorí.

INTERVIEW WITH MARÍ ALESSANDRINI

A first feature film is often very personal. This seems obvious for ZAHORÍ since you grew up in Bariloche, in the heart of Patagonia.

Yes, for the character of Mora, I drew on my childhood memories, my relationship with school, the pressing desire I had to escape. But the film is also nourished by my adult life, by all my experiences. For example, there is a part of me in Mora's parents. I started with my memories, but I also wanted to confront myself with the contemporary reality of the steppe. I made several trips to the area to do research. I travelled all over Patagonia for the casting, a long process that allowed me to spend time with its inhabitants.

You have made two short documentaries in Patagonia. Preparatory work for your first fiction?

Absolutely, these films were thought of as such from the start. With FELISA I went to meet the inhabitants of the steppe to understand their way of life, their fear of dying alone. In the end, it became the portrait of an old Mapuche woman. The character of Nazareno was nourished by this experience. For BUSCANDO PATRIOTAS I accompanied children on their way to school. I made a somewhat experimental film in which I ask them if they like school, what they learn there, what they want and imagine. I thus updated my vision of school, which I had traumatic memories of! This research allowed me to dive into writing with more social and historical knowledge. For me, there is an anthropological necessity in fiction. I need this link with reality, even if I will transform it later. In the case of ZAHORÍ, in order to go towards the tale and the western.



The steppe landscapes are indeed reminiscent of the Western. How did you deal with this reference?

At the heart of the genre is the relationship of men to the landscape, with a mythical dimension that I find essential. Landscapes are omnipresent in ZAHORÍ, obviously filmed in scope and always in relation with the characters, their living conditions or their emotions. Some live in harmony with this environment, others remain strangers to it like the missionaries or the parents. This intimate relationship with the steppe forges the bond between Mora and Nazareno. In short, ZAHORÍ is a Western in reverse. In the geographical sense, since we are in South America; but above all by what it tells: the unusual meeting between a young girl and an old Indian. Here, Mora's emancipation in her intimate relationship with the steppe replaces the conquest of the West.

It must be said that Patagonia is an inspiring place, very particular...

The colonization model imposed by the Spaniards was essentially urban, which led to leaving huge territories unoccupied, including Patagonia. Especially in the steppe, there are Europeans since the 19th century, the original indigenous peoples and those who have taken refuge there, evangelists and Mormons, outlaws...

This cultural mix is part of the identity of Patagonia. There are individuals who flee from society, for different reasons. Even today, it is a place where people come to hide or start a new life. The steppe remains a wild and remote land, abandoned by the government.

Shooting a first feature film in the steppe, with children and animals, was a bold move. What was the most difficult part?

I was unconscious, passion blinded me! It was a very difficult film to produce. It was a long process, which took almost eight years. I had to do several castings over time for young actors. I chose Lara Tortosa when she was 10 years old, so that she would be the same age as Mora at the time of shooting. For the animals, I worked with a man who specializes in non-violent training. He spent a lot of time with the mare Zahorí, and then with her and Lara, to establish mutual trust. There is no second take with animals. A horse does what it wants. And if you force it, it gets nervous. Once, Zahorí galloped away on the steppe. It took us twenty-four hours to find her. The shooting was a huge challenge, a test of endurance. The living conditions are very harsh with the sun, the wind, the sand... The equipment flies away and breaks. There are no roads to reach certain places, we had to cross rivers in 4WD. By being obliged to drive at 30km/h, we also lose a lot of time in travelling. You have to like this kind of adventure! Moreover, we shot in the middle of an economic crisis: with the devaluation of the Argentine peso, every week we had a little less money. Fortunately, we finished just before the pandemic.



How did you find the rhythm of the film?

The script already had a rhythm. I write in a very visual way, by imagining the cutting of the scenes. Then I worked a lot beforehand with the amateur actors. I wanted to find the rhythm of the steppe, which has to do with the way its inhabitants are, their way of speaking and moving.

From the initial idea to the final result, how did this project evolve?

At the beginning, there was the idea of a friendship between an old man and a young girl or boy. The character of Mora is finally a girl who wants to be able to do everything that boys do. The film was also more choral. The evangelists played a more important role. I had to give up several scenes due to lack of resources. The film thus evolved towards a more raw and minimalist narration. We had to find solutions without giving up quality.

The presence of the two evangelists seems incongruous, almost comical...

It seems unreal, but it is very realistic. Whether it's the baptism scene in the river or the scene with the boy who is not allowed to play soccer - because kicking a ball is like kicking God's head in! The evangelists come up with a truth that they think is unique and universal, without imagining that people already have their own spirituality. They take advantage of the fact that the steppe is a marginal, abandoned place. They approach the inhabitants by offering their help. I had a very negative view of these people that made me angry. I had to make the effort to understand them, to love them, to finally present them under a rather comic aspect, without animosity.

You started out as a photographer and contemporary circus artist. How did you get into film, and why did you decide to study in Geneva, at the Haute Ecole d'art et de design (HEAD)?

I started photography when I was 12 years old, then the performing arts when I was 16, in a traveling circus. I was doing staging, photography and aerial acrobatics. It was contemporary circus, with video projections, etc. At 26, I felt it was time to move on to another stage in my artistic career and cinema became an obvious choice. There is no university in Patagonia and as I especially like European auteur cinema, I went to Europe. First in Austria, then on tour with a circus in Barcelona, Rome, Marseille... I went to see an Argentinian friend in Lausanne and that's when I heard about the HEAD. I had not planned to come to Switzerland, but it is quite coherent: there are many Swiss immigrants in Patagonia. The typical dish in Bariloche is fondue! Unconsciously, I found a kind of "home", with the lakes and the mountains.

What did you learn while making this first feature film?

First of all, always choose a subject that is really close to your heart, because every project is a journey full of pitfalls: the roots must be deep for them to resist. Second, find a balance, adopt a wiser and more distant position, less passionate, so as not to burn your wings. I couldn't make a film like ZAHORÍ again. The energy it requires is too immense.

Interview by Mathieu Loewer



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I grew up and lived in the last city before entering the steppe, Bariloche. My parents are of Italian and Russian origins; they immigrated to Patagonia after fleeing Buenos Aires and the dictatorship. Since my childhood the steppe has haunted me. As a teenager I've made my first photographic portraits. Later as an adult I've travelled through these isolated villages with a circus. That's how I got to know the boarding schools and its children, who have marked me forever. The population of the steppe is mainly "gauchos", native or western peasants, only men. Few women live there and some of them end up leaving the steppe, due to the often-macho environment. So, Mora's dream of becoming a "gaucha" is utopian.

ZAHORÍ speaks of passages, from childhood to adulthood for Mora, and from life to death for Nazareno. It is an initiatory journey, punctuated by the trials that Mora has to face, her desires, thoughts and her femininity in conflict with her environment. Mora will make a choice that is contrary to the expectations of her family and school. By playing on two poles that exert a certain violence on her - her parents' crisis, and the school violence - I want to show the pressures exerted on her, and the revolt they provoke in her. The space where Mora can flourish is the steppe where her only friend, Nazareno, lives. The friendship between Mora and Nazareno looks at integration and highlights, from the point of view of a young foreign girl with an old Mapuche, the history of the encounter between immigrants and natives, between different generations, but also between men and women.

After Nazareno's death, Mora inherits his "knowledge" and has to go on alone and take her destiny in her hands in the "gaucho" territory. Nazareno was born in the steppe. He can speak the disappearing native Mapuche language; he embodies the wisdom and loneliness of these habitants. Mora's friendship lights up his heart, but sends him as well back to his painful memories of Perla, his wife who has returned to Italy. The girl awakens in him his need for brotherhood. The film follows Nazareno in the days leading up to his death, getting closer to what he lives and feels, through increasingly blurred look, haunted by the ghosts of his lost love.

The parents reflect my generation, my friends, myself; they show the fragility of the form of life they have chosen. Uprooting mixed with the desire to find a life of one's own, raises questions such as: where to live, what to eat, and what to teach our children? They left Ticino and decided to live elsewhere, to try an alternative life and to raise their children in Argentina. I show a family in crisis, which tries to live on the steppe but cannot. An isolated family that is desperately looking for itself.

Selva, the "cowboy woman", is a ghost of the steppe, a ghost linked to the desires of Nazareno and Mora. The Evangelical missionaries, teachers and students are inspired by people I have met. Characters who carry authenticity and a form of strangeness or absurdity.



In the movie, I wish to bring a political dimension by showing an education that is outdated and not adapted to the life of the people in the region. A policy which highlights the isolation of the people, stalked by the presence of the American Evangelists, who today colonize most of Latin America – a very problematic colonization, as all colonization has been. The film takes on a certain violence in the relationships between adults and consequently between children. This violence is increased by the dysfunctions of the school, the family and by the problems that many peasants encounter. ZAHORÍ reflects in a way, the loneliness and perplexity of the population in their daily lives.

I give great importance to the musicality of the sequences, the rhythm, and the emotional suspension that it allows. The presence of different musical registers - Italian variety, English religious hymns and "Gaucho" folklore – allow to mix different styles, eras, and to show the agglomeration of origins, influences, and social classes which feed and coexist in the steppe of Patagonia.

The film also emerges as a re-appropriation of the codes and image of the western. A diverted western, where we discover a young girl in apprenticeship, emancipating herself from her condition as a woman, from her origins, where the transmission happens between a man and a girl. A western that works on the interweaving of two stories: an old Indian man is looking for his horse; a young girl is trying to integrate into the steppe, and tries to assert herself there.



The encounters between the protagonists are interwoven and echo each other. They cross the grey valleys and bear witness to their existence. It is the desire for love, loneliness, and death that leave a mark in ZAHORÍ.

Marí Alessandrini



BIOGRAPHY OF MARÍ ALESSANDRINI

MARÍ ALESSANDRINI grew up in Patagonia. At a very young age she started working in photography, scenic arts and contemporary circus, travelling in South & North America. At the age of 26, she left Argentina to study cinema in Europe. Marí graduated in Film Direction and Visual Arts at the University of Geneva - HEAD.

Alessandrini made several documentaries and short fiction films selected in Internationals Festivals & Art Centres. She was chosen by the Cinéfondation from Cannes Film Festival to develop her first feature ZAHORÍ that she shot in the Patagonian steppe. The film won The Pardo 2020 "The Films After Tomorrow" at Locarno Film Festival, Swiss selection.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2021 **ZAHORÍ**, Fiction, 105'
Award / Pardo Locarno Film Festival, "Films after tomorrow", 2020
Residency / Cinéfondation du Festival de Cannes
Locarno Film Festival 2021, Concorso Cinesi del presente
- 2015 **BUSCANDO PATRIOTAS**, Documentary, 35'
FID, Centre Pompidou, Tabakalera, Cultural Clash...
- 2010 **DRAGONA Y SUS CACHOROS**, Fiction, 18'
Festival de Cannes Short Film Corner, Cinémathèque de Paris, Guanajuato...
- 2009 **FELISA**, Documentary, 24'
Award / Best short Film, Festival du cinéma des peuples «ânûû-rû âboro »
Visions du réel, FID Marseille, BAFICI...
- 2008 **NADIE EN EL ESPEJO**, Fiction, 15'
Clermont Ferrand, L'Alternativa, La Corrida...



ARTISTIC LIST

MORA	Lara Tortosa
NAZARENO	Santos Curapil
HIMEKO	Cirilo Wesley
MITIA	Sabine Timoteo
TOMASSO	Pablo Limarzi
UNCLE STEPH	Federico Luque
EDDY	Colo Susini
SELVA	Carol Jones
PERLA	Francisca Castillo
NIGHT GUARD	Michael Silva

TECHNICAL LIST

SCRIPT & DIRECTOR	Marí Alessandrini
PRODUCERS	Le Laboratoire Central, Nadejda Magnenat El Calefón, Juan Maristany, Linda Diaz Cinestación, Dominga Sotomayor, Omar Zúñiga Norte productions, Valentina Novati
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS	Selva Fría, Marí Alessandrini, Joakim Chardonens Le Laboratoire Central, Pierre-François Sauter, François Bovy
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Joakim Chardonens
EDITING	Myriam Rachmuth, Marí Alessandrini
SOUND EDITING & DESIGN	Adrien Kessler
MIX	Mikaël Barre
ART DIRECTOR	Ana Carolina Vergara
COSTUMES	Sol Muñoz

TECHNICAL SHEET

ORIGINAL VERSION	Spanish, Italian, English, Mapuzungun
SUBTITLES	French, English, Spanish, German
GENRE	Fiction, Drama
DURATION	105'
PRODUCTION COUNTRIES	Switzerland, Argentina, Chili, France
AWARDS	Pardo 2020, "Films after tomorrow" Locarno Film Festival Cinéfondation Festival de Cannes, Script Residency
FESTIVAL WORLD PREMIERE	Locarno Film Festival 2021, Official Competition Cineasti del presente



LINK TRAILER

<https://vimeo.com/567531628>