



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
Official Selection - Un Certain Regard

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film festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2011

Strand Releasing presents

A film by Cristián Jiménez

BONSÁI

A STORY OF LOVE, BOOKS AND PLANTS

**Starring Diego Noguera, Natalia Galgani,
Gabriela Arancibia, Trinidad González, Hugo Medina**

Country of Origin: Chile/France

Format: 35mm/1.85/Color

Sound Format: Dolby Digital

Running Time: 96 Minutes

Genre: Comedy/Drama

Not Rated

In Spanish with English Subtitles

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SYNOPSIS:

Julio is a struggling young writer who has hit a wall. Unemployed and involved in a half-hearted relationship with his neighbor, things are finally starting to look up when he gets an interview with a renowned author to transcribe his latest work. Things don't go as planned, however, and Julio doesn't get the job. Instead of admitting the truth to his girlfriend, he pretends to be transcribing the novel when actually writing his own story. Searching for inspiration and a plot, Julio revisits a romance he had eight years ago when studying literature in Valdivia. As Julio's novel progresses, so does his fondness for the past and of the love he let slip away. Based on an internationally acclaimed novella, BONSÁI is a subtly affecting examination of the lies we tell ourselves in order to get by.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"The relationship between life and fiction is at the core of BONSÁI. Fiction can take the shape of a lie, but also a narration, a forgery, a personal ritual or a pot containing and shaping a plant. A truly unfit person, Julio's way is a search for a personality which satisfies himself. On this path, he resists authenticity as much as he resists productivity, which puts him at odds with the current mood of Santiago de Chile. A film is not only a story, but also an artifact. In this case, I aspire for the bonsai to be not just a plot element, but also an inspiration for its style: synthetic, ascetic, focused in detail rather than context, and endowed with a significant degree of lightness."

- *Cristián Jiménez*

BONSÁI is the second feature directed by Cristián Jiménez, after "Optical Illusions", which premièred at San Sebastian 2009 and was shown in Japan, France, Sweden, Lithuania, India, Italy, Venezuela, Brazil, Poland, the United States, Australia and Germany. The film had a commercial release in France, England, Australia, Russia, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Hungary, Poland, the United States and Chile.

CAST

Diego Noguera
Natalia Galgani
Gabriela Arancibia
Trinidad González
Hugo Medina

Julio
Emilia
Barbara
Blanca
Gazmuri

CREW

Director
Writer
Based on the novel by
Producer(s)

Co-Producer(s)

Associate Producer(s)

Cinematography
Casting
Image
Sound
Sound Design
Sound Mix
Art Director
Costume Designer
Image Postproduction
Sound Postproduction
UPM
A.D.
Editor
Original Music

With songs from:

Cristián Jiménez
Cristián Jiménez
Alejandro Zambra
Bruno Bettati (Jirafa)
Julie Gayet
Nadia Turincev (Rouge-International)
Natacha Cervi
Hernán Musaluppi
Pandora da Cunha Telles
Étienne Mallet
David Gauquié
Julien Deris
Nicolás Lesage
Inti Briones
Soledad Gaspar
Inti Briones Direct
Manuel Robles
Cristián Freund
Jean-Guy Véran
Jorge Zambrano
Mary Ann Smith
Daniel Dávila
Cristián Freund
José Luis Rivas
Waldo Salgado
Soledad Salfate
Caroline Chaspoul
Eduardo Henríquez
Pánico
Supersordo
Congelador
Emociones Clandestinas
Fiskales Ad Hoc
Tío Lucho

INTERVIEW WITH CRISTIÁN JIMÉNEZ

The general tonality of BONSÁI is melancholic and romantic, but in contrast, the male protagonist is a gawky and burlesque figure, a modern South American Buster Keaton...

One of the most difficult things for me with this film was to hit the right tone. The central story could be a drama or even a melodrama. Also, this was the first time I treated a love story in a serious way. Whether in my life or in my films sentiments have never been my thing. I believe that in contained emotion there is something much more intense and true than in emotions that are openly declared. Containing an emotion does not mean to eliminate, but only to filter and every filter is porous by definition. The challenge was to inject a measure of levity into this drama, to filter it through a layer of humor but without losing the emotion, to achieve a blending of this humor with the juvenile romance and its self-contained forms of pain and anguish.

I really like this idea of a modern and South American Buster Keaton. I once read an article saying that Aki Kaurismäki was a mix of Buster Keaton and Bresson, and that made me laugh. I owe a lot to Kaurismäki. But he loves nostalgia, and that is not true for me. That is why I did not want melancholy to be an enemy of the present. Even though the main character often seems transfixed in his perplexity, the hope for a future always remains alive. And caring for a bonsai is in a way a wager on the future.

What explains the strong contrast between the passionate, too close for comfort relationship Julio has with Emilia and the one with Blanca, in which he seems to choose not to invest himself? What is the nature of this relationship that does not seem to have any future at all?

Emilia is Julio's first love. Everything he experiences with her he experiences for the first time. You might think that what we see is an idealized version of this story; that is the way memory works. But I prefer to think that at the age of 20, love affairs are lived directly rather than idealized, especially if the lovers put such importance on the imaginary in their lives.

The relationship between Julio and Blanca is more contingent and fragile. They are neighbors who are at slightly different stages of their lives. Both certainly refrain from admitting what their relationship means for each of them – he perhaps more than she.

There is something practical in this relationship of mutual companionship. But that is exactly what permits Blanca to become the instrument that mobilizes Julio's memories and fears and pushes him towards what we suspect he has always wanted to do – write.

I wouldn't say that Julio decides not to become too invested but rather that he completely refuses to take any decision at all and that he prefers to let himself be dragged along by events.

That is very much a South American attitude, but also a way of life that is put into question by the new political and economic ethics. Finally, beyond the differences between the relationships I would say that they are both in one another's shadow, so to speak. There could be no Emilia without Blanca and no Blanca without Emilia.

You decide not to show the parting [between Julio and Emilia] and to maintain a sort of ambiguity about the reasons for it.

I think that the break-up between Julio and Emilia is a dark episode. That has to do with the forces and momentum of youth, with its visceral character.

All external manifestations that these people live out internally and that drive them towards separation are only weak echoes of something more profound and nebulous. In this sense, it seems to me there is no sense in making them explicit. I prefer the viewer to remain with the predominant sensation that they leave one another because they are young. On the other hand, Julio does not really understand why they separated and does not know how to transform the situation until he confronts his own desires. I find our hero's perplexity more important to describe than the psychological reasons that bring him to this rupture. And perhaps his desire to tell this love story derives from the same lack of answers.

Why did you choose to intersperse or alternate the two different levels of narration rather than putting them in sequence?

I am more interested in the contrast between the two times, two cities, two distinct moments in the life of a character, two women, two energies, two predominant colors, rather than the progressive accumulation of events of a single storyline.

I think that in this manner, one stays more interested in the search for differences and similarities between the young Julio and his adult version – the old problem of identity, of being or not being the same person little by little as the years pass. In life, time only has one direction: forward. But in fiction, luckily, a story can move both forward and backwards. And in this case, it allows us to have a new emotional charge with the passing of the years and the surfacing of a new point of view.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1975 in Valdivia, Chile. Before becoming a filmmaker, Cristián Jiménez wrote short stories and studied sociology in Santiago, Heidelberg and London. As a child he dreamt of being a stand-up comedian. BONSÁI is his second feature film, which was selected for the Cinéfondation Residence 2010.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2011	Bonsái
2009	Optical Illusions
2009	Tiempo Libre
2008	199 Recetas Para Ser Feliz (Co-Writer and Producer)
2006	XX
2004	El Tesoro de los Caracoles
2003	Hong Kong

ABOUT THE CAST

DIEGO NOGUERA (JULIO)

Born in Santiago de Chile, Diego Noguera is an actor, theater director and composer. He has performed in such plays as "The Stable Brothers", "Cobain" and "Woyzeck", and directed, among others, three versions of Calderon de la Barca's "Life is a Dream". He has also composed music for theater and film. Noguera was the male lead in the movie TURISTAS by Alicia Scherson, FIRST DAY OF WINTER by José Luis Torres Leiva and now BONSÁI by Cristián Jiménez.

NATALIA GALGANI (EMILIA)

Born in Santiago de Chile, Natalia Galgani graduated in 2008 from the Escuela Teatro Imagen theater academy under the supervision of Gustavo Meza. Following her graduation, she worked primarily as a dancer in various Chilean productions. In 2009, she acted and assistant directed the theater production "Fiesta" which was invited to the official selection of the Iberoamerican Festival of Performing Arts Miradas in Santos, Brazil. BONSÁI is her debut as a screen actress.

GABRIELA ARANCIBIA (BARBARA)

Born in Artofagasta, Chile, Gabriela Arancibia graduated from the theater academy of the University of Chile in 2009. Her principal teachers were Fernando González Mardones, Aliocha de la Sotta, Alexis Moreno and Marcos Guzmán. She currently works as an actress on the stage as well as in TV and cinema. She has also taught acting, focusing on physical and vocal work as well as on acting theory, at the Universidad de Playa Ancha, Valparaíso.

TRINIDAD GONZÁLEZ (BLANCA)

Trinidad González is an actress and founder of the company "Teatro en el Blanco" that has brought its productions "Neva" and "Diciembre" to more than 25 countries in the Americas, Asia and Europe. In 2007, she won the Altazor award as best actress for her work in "Neva". She also directed the productions "Fiesta" and "Insomnia". Currently, she works as an actress, director and dramaturg of Teatro en el Blanco's new production, "La Reunión". Besides the stage, she has acted in several films such as PECADOS, THE BLACK PIMPERNEL, AUSENTE and QUIERO ENTRAR. She also teaches acting at several academies and universities.

HUGO MEDINA (GAZMURI)

Hugo Medina will celebrate his 50th anniversary in theater this year with a production of King Lear. In his career, he has appeared in more than 100 theater productions in Latin America and Europe. He has acted in 25 films, 15 of them features, and innumerable TV programs and series. He was awarded the prize for best actor at the Film Festival San Sebastian for his role in PRISIONERO DESAPARECIDO. In 2007, he won the Altazor award as best actor of the year and has just been nominated once again for this prestigious honor.

ABOUT THE BOOK "BONSAI" AND ITS AUTHOR

An international prizewinning sensation, *BONSAI* is the lightest, yet also the most complex, 90 pages you will read this year. Part love affair (yet on the very first page writer Alejandro Zambra informs us "in the end she dies and he remains alone"), part metafictional game (the protagonist eventually starts to write a novel suspiciously similar to the one we're reading), and part meditation on how books are like bonsai trees (they both rely on containers to make sense), this book is perfect for a lengthy discussion. *BONSAI* has more metaphors and aphorisms than most books twice its length, and had all of Chile reading.

[www.booksmith.com]

ALEJANDRO ZAMBRA

Born in 1975, Alejandro Zambra is a Chilean writer. He has published the novels "*Bonsai*" (2006), "*The Private Lives of Trees*" (2007) and the forthcoming "*Ways of Going Home*" (2011). His books have been translated into French, English, Italian and Dutch among other languages. In 2010 he was selected as one of the best Spanish language novelists by *Granta* magazine. He has also published poetry and essays.

ABOUT THE MUSIC IN *BONSÁI* AND ITS AUTHORS

Caroline Chaspoul and Eduardo Henriquez live and work in Paris. Founding members of franco-chilean indie rock band PÁNICO in the mid 90's, they released four albums and collaborated with several Chilean and Argentinean artists before they settled in Paris in the early 2000's, from where they released three more Pánico albums. They recently composed the music for the experimental documentary *FROM ROCK TO ETERNITY* from directors James Schneider and Benjamin Echazarreta, shot in the Atacama Desert. Their collaboration for *BONSÁI* – their first original soundtrack for a feature film – started when they met Cristián Jiménez in Paris. Since then, they have begun composing incidental music for a variety of film projects.