

Strand Releasing presents

LION'S DEN

A film by PABLO TRAPERO

Official Competition, Cannes Film Festival 2008
Official Selection, Toronto Film Festival 2008

Country of Origin: Argentina/In Spanish with English Subtitles

Shooting format: Super 35mm / Color

Aspect Ratio: 2:35

Sound: Dolby SRD

Running Time: 113 minutes

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Synopsis

Julia wakes up in her apartment, surrounded by the bloody corpses of Ramiro and Nahuel. Ramiro is still alive; Nahuel is dead. Both have been, obscure and simultaneously, her lovers and one made Julia pregnant.

Julia is sent to a prison housing mothers and pregnant inmates. There she spends her first days absorbed and aloof.

Two characters enter her life. One is Marta, a fellow inmate who has reared two children in prison and who becomes her guide and counselor; the other is Sofía, Julia's own mother, an ambiguous character who Julia meets up with again after many years. Sofía attempts to repair the mistakes of the past; she helps her daughter, gets her a good lawyer, sends her baby clothes, and slowly reestablishes her relationship with Julia.

The legal case involving the death of Nahuel, has two possible guilty parties: Julia and Ramiro, both in prison in different penitentiaries. Their testimonies are contradictory, one incriminating the other.

The child is born, a baby boy whose name is Tomás. Bringing up a child in prison is difficult. At the same time, Julia begins to feel that she is a mother almost against her will. She understands that the only thing that matters to her is this new being that accompanies her now, that there is no life for her beyond that of her child.

Julia decides to visit Ramiro in the Men's prison where he is held. The events of the night of the crime remain muddled for both, just as their feelings towards each other.

In the trial, Ramiro's testimony will prove crucial to determine Julia's sentence.

Her friend Marta becomes her ally; her mother, her opponent. One attempts to teach her how to be a mother to her child in the least appropriate place; the other wishes to take over bringing up of the child, so that he should grow up outside prison, in freedom. The duel between Julia and Sofía expresses the dilemma of what is better for the child, to be brought up in prison next to his mother or without her, but in freedom.

After several years in prison, Julia, grown accustomed to the prison environment, has become hard, a woman who must struggle to recover her freedom and that of her son.

Short Synopsis

After Julia is sent to the penitentiary for the murder of her lover, she gives birth to a son. Bringing up a child in prison is difficult, but Julia understands that the only thing that matters to her is this new being that accompanies her now, that there is no life for her beyond that of her child. Her fellow inmate Marta becomes her ally; her mother Sofía, her opponent. One attempts to teach her how to be a mother to her child in the least appropriate place; the other wishes to take over rearing the child, so that he should grow up outside prison, in freedom. The duel between Julia and her mother expresses the dilemma of what is better for the child, to be brought up next to his mother in prison, or without her, but in freedom.

Cast

Martina Gusman as Julia
Elli Medeiros as Sofia
Rodrigo Santoro as Ramiro
Laura García as Marta

MARTINA GUSMAN as JULIA

Martina Gusman studied Combined Arts at the University of Buenos Aires and acting in Carlos Gandolfo's school. In 2002 she co-funded Matanza Cine with Pablo Trapero, the independent film production company where she took part in the following projects:

El Bonaerense, second feature of the director, 2002, (Production Coordinator)
Sarasa, Pablo Trapero's documentary telefilm, 2002 (Producer).
Ciudad de María, Enrique Bellande's documentary feature film, 2003 (Executive Producer).
La mecha, Raúl Perrone's feature film, 2003 (Executive Producer).
Familia rodante, Pablo Trapero's feature film, 2004 (Executive Producer).
Géminis, Albertina Carri's feature film, 2005 (Executive Producer).
Mi mejor enemigo, Alex Bowen's feature film, 2005 (Co-producer).
Dí buen día a papá, Fernando Vargas' feature film, 2005 (Co-producer).
Mbya tierra en rojo, documentary feature directed by Philip Cox and Valeria Mapelman, 2005 (Executive Producer).
Nacido y criado, Pablo Trapero's feature film, 2005-2006 (Executive Producer).
La rabia, Albertina Carri's fourth feature (2007-2008, Executive Producer)
Intersección, Telefilm by Pablo Trapero 2007 (Executive Producer).
Lion's Den, feature by Pablo Trapero 2007-2008 (Executive Producer).

Along her work in the production field, in 2005 she participated of the cast of **Nacido y Criado** and in 2007 a leading role in **Lion's Den** by Pablo Trapero.

ELLI MEDEIROS as SOFIA

Elli Medeiros was born in Montevideo, Uruguay. Her mother, Mirtha Medeiros, decided to become an actress after Elli was born, and when she was admitted into Uruguay's Escuela Nacional, had to take her along, so Elli attended drama school & classes by Spanish teacher Pepe Struch before kindergarten. Mirtha graduated and quickly became a very busy actress and Elli was regularly hired each time a child was needed in a play or a TV show. Her first part, at age 4, was Madame Butterfly's son, in the production of Puccini's opera at the Montevideo Opera. Elli's father, José Luis Medeiros, vanished from her life when she was five.

Elli attended the Uruguayan American School, and when her mother remarried & they moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, she attended the Instituto Bayard, a British school. When she was fourteen, her mother and stepfather moved to Paris, and she had to learn French in a couple of months so she could attend high school. She tried several schools, including an art school, l'Ecole des Arts Appliquées, but dropped out before getting a "baccalaureate" to start her first band, the Stinky Toys, the first French punk band, playing several London punk festivals along with the Clash and the Sex Pistols. Elli appeared on the cover of *Melody Maker* and landed a record deal. After two albums, the Stinky Toys split. Elli and Stinky Toy Jacno then released several albums as the techno pop duo Elli & Jacno. Their last was the score to Eric Rohmer's movie, "Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune."

Elli then went solo, her music becoming more personal and more Latin. She scored several mega hits in France, including "Toi Mon Toit," and "A bailar Calypso." After a break, Elli decided to go back to acting and school, working with Andreas Voutsinas, who was Lee Strasberg's assistant for twenty years and created the Paris Actor's Studio, le Théâtre des Cinquante.

After working with some of the most interesting French directors (like Tonie Marshall and Olivier Assayas), as well as very promising newcomers (Marion Laine, Brigitte Coscas, Christophe Rodriguez), Elli released a new album in 2006.

RODRIGO SANTORO as RAMIRO

Rodrigo Santoro, one of Brazil's most talented and famous young actors, can be seen in writer/director David Mamet's film "Redbelt," and in Steven Soderbergh's epic biopic "Che." In 2009 Rodrigo will star in "The Post Grad Survival Guide" with Michael Keaton and Carol Burnett.

He also appeared in "I Love You Phillip Morris" opposite Jim Carrey and Ewan McGregor, and in "300," for which he earned an MTV Movie Award nomination for Best Villain. Rodrigo was also seen on ABC's hit series "Lost," in which he played Paulo.

Rodrigo was part of the star-studded ensemble cast of the romantic comedy "Love Actually," starring alongside Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson, Colin Firth, Liam Neeson, and Laura Linney. Prior to this film, Rodrigo made his American debut in the highly sought after role of Randy Emmers in "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle," directed by McG, starring Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore and Lucy Liu.

He starred as the "mystery man" opposite Nicole Kidman in the Baz Luhrmann-directed commercial for Chanel.

"Carandiru," a Brazilian film directed by Hector Babenco, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and subsequently broke all Brazilian box office records. It was Brazil's entry in the Foreign Film category for the Academy Awards.

Rodrigo has won eight Best Actor awards, including the first ever award for Best Actor from the Brazilian Academy of Arts and Film, for his portrayal of a young man forced into a mental institution by his parents in "Brainstorm," the critically acclaimed film by director Lais Bodansky.

He was also acclaimed for his performance in the Miramax film "Behind the Sun" directed by Walter Salles ("Central Station"). The film was nominated for a Golden Globe in 2002 for Best Foreign Language Film.

In 2003, Rodrigo appeared opposite Helen Mirren, Olivier Martinez and Anne Bancroft in "The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone," directed by Robert Allan Ackerman, for Showtime. Based on the novella by Tennessee Williams, "The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone" was nominated for five Emmy Awards in 2003.

Crew

Direction

PABLO TRAPERO

Producers

PABLO TRAPERO
YOUNGJOO SUH

Co producer

WALTER SALLES

Associate Producers

JUAN PABLO GALLI
ALEJANDRO CACETTA
JUAN VERA

Executive Producer

MARTINA GUSMAN

Production Director

AGUSTINA LLAMBI CAMPBELL

Screenplay

ALEJANDRO FADEL
MARTÍN MAUREGUI
SANTIAGO MITRE
PABLO TRAPERO

Cinematography and Camera

GUILLERMO NIETO

Sound

FEDERICO ESQUERRO

Editing

EZEQUIEL BOROVINSKY
PABLO TRAPERO

Art Direction

COCA ODERIGO

Costume Design

MARISA URRUTI

Director

PABLO TRAPERO (San Justo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1971) began his international career in 1999 when he released his first feature, “Mundo Grúa.” The black and white 16mm film was a turning point in Argentinean Cinema and encouraged dozens of young directors into their first features. “Mundo Grúa” was released internationally at Venice, harvesting awards and critical acclaim through film festivals around the globe.

In 2002, his second feature, “El Bonaerense” premiered at Un Certain Regard in Cannes, again with critical and audience acclaim. That same year, he opened his own production company in Buenos Aires, Matanza Cine, from which he has produced ever since—not only his own features but also those of other Argentinean and Latino American filmmakers. As a producer, he was behind features and documentaries such as “Ciudad de María” by Enrique Bellande; “La Mecha” by Raúl Perrone; “Géminis” and “La Rabia” by Albertina Carri; “Mi mejor Enemigo”; “Dí Buen día a Papá,” and “Mbya, Tierra en Rojo.”

As a director, between short and TV films, he’s also done “Familia Rodante,” “Nacido y Criado,” and “Intersecciones,” a documentary feature (2007). “Lion’s Den” is his fifth feature.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTED)

2008 – “LION’S DEN”

Feature – S35mm – Color
Production, Screenplay and Direction

2006 – “NACIDO Y CRIADO”

Feature – S35mm – Color
Production, Screenplay and Direction

2004 – “FAMILIA RODANTE”

Feature – S16mm to 35mm color
Production, Screenplay and Direction

2002 – “EL BONAERENSE”

Feature – 35 mm color
Production, Screenplay and Direction

2001 – “NAIKOR”

Documentary – DV CAM
Production, Screenplay and Direction

1999 - “MUNDO GRUA”

Feature - 16mm
Production, Screenplay and Direction

1995 - “NEGOCIOS”

Short 16mm.
Production, Screenplay and Direction

1992 - “MOCOSO MALCRIADO”

Short 16mm.
Production, Screenplay and Direction

Facts and Figures - The Background for Lion's Den

- In Argentina, of the total number of homicides committed by men, only 7% result from killing in the heat of passion. In the case of women, 72% are crimes of passion.
- Schooling of women in prison on admittance: 37% have no schooling; 42% finished elementary school; 9% graduated from high school; only 2% took courses after graduating from high school or went to the university.
- Women's Prison Unit No. 31 in Ezeiza, "Nuestra Señora de San Nicolás" (Our Lady of St. Nicholas) was inaugurated in 1996 after a prison riot in Unit 3, until then the only Federal Prison for Women. The reason given for the new prison was to protect pregnant inmates and mothers incarcerated with their children.
- In 1997 a law extended - from two to four years - the maximum period of permanence for children inside the prison. At present, Unit 31 houses 114 children under 4 years of age; 63 were born inside the prison and 37 have never ventured outside its walls.
- Only 40% of the women behind bars have a prison sentence; the other 60% have cases pending with no Court decision passed.
- Children brought up in jail acquire the habits of life in prison and many times develop a dread of open spaces. They also manifest phobias such as refusing to open or close doors. While children brought up on the outside play "hide and seek," children reared behind bars play "visiting hours."

Production Notes

LION'S DEN was shot in the province of Buenos Aires, between September and December 2007. In an unprecedented event in Argentinean filmmaking, most of it was shot inside maximum-security prisons, with real inmates as extras.

Some of the characters of guards, matrons and keepers, were also played by real staff of the Bonaerense Penitentiary System.

The set was brought behind bars and the whole cast and crew coexisted with the penitentiary system for most of the production.

To obtain the permits to work in these places and with these actors, often seemed more the task of a Court than that of a film. Legal authorizations, stamps, files, signatures from diverse authorities were required.

We want to thank that location and its people, inmates and staff:

Unidad Penitenciaria N° 1 de Lisandro Olmos
Unidad Penitenciaria N° 8 de los Hornos
Unidad Penitenciaria N° 18 de Gorina
Unidad Penitenciaria N° 33 de Los Hornos
Unidad Penitenciaria N° 46 de San Martín
Unidad Penitenciaria N° 47 de San Martín
Unidad Penitenciaria N° 48 de San Martín
Unidad Penitenciaria N° 51 de Magdalena

Director's Notes

"Look Daddy, they're pink," said Mateo when he was four years old. I took my eyes from the highway and found these enormous concrete blocks, prison units. One of them was indeed, painted.

Those words from my kid on the chromatic detail of the walls, were the germ for "Lion's Den." Units that house mothers with their children. Children that loose their freedom to be close to their mothers. Mothers that would do anything for their children's welfare even when confinement conspires against that elementary right.

Everything became hard to understand.

It's tough to find direct answers to these absurd questions.

While researching we discovered that this reality is the product of a known and repeated scheme through penitentiary systems in many countries.

The strange thing is that few agree on the maximum age for a child to grow up in prison. Some understand it's a year and a half, nursing; others, until they are six years old. In Argentina, it's until they are four. Contradictions exist everywhere, but there is one certainty: societies turn their backs on this situation, and very few dare to raise their voices defending one position over the other. It's tough to see children in jail and it's even tougher to legislate for these innocent kids. Despair against confinement can be endured if, for at least a few seconds, a feeling of hope or solidarity crosses the day.

From these brief instants are born stories that light those lives. Wall and bars loose their density and prison keepers become babysitters.

For all this, "Lion's Den" intends to build, not only a cinematographic tale but also room for debate and reflection.

Motherhood, solitude, love, confinement, and hope are the themes of this film.

Pablo Trapero on "Lion's Den"