



INTERVIEW ▶ Today, in «L'últim espoiler», we talk with film director Álvaro Rodríguez, who two years ago

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'L'últim espoiler' opens its doors today to Álvaro Rodríguez, Andorran film director who, at only 32 years old, already has three of his own short films under his belt, in addition to other audiovisual productions. All three have reached festivals such as the Sitges Festival and two of them even the Scream Fest in Los Angeles. We talk with him about this milestone, the difficult situation of cinema in Andorra or his next big project: directing his first feature film.

–How does the audiovisual come into your life?

–From an early age I consumed a lot of cinema in the family sphere, as we were very cinephiles at home.

–Did you see yourself becoming professional in this world?

–I went through many phases before I decided. At first I saw Jurassic Park and became obsessed to the point of wanting to be a paleontologist. Then the same thing happened to me with Indiana Jones, only in this case I got stuck with being an archaeologist, and with Saving Private Ryan, not that I wanted to be in the military, but I was drawn to the story. It wasn't until later that I realized that what I really wanted was to be the one telling those stories.

–When was this?

–It was when I tried to see what it was to study cinema. I trained at the 'Bande à part' film school, in Barcelona, where there was a teacher called Lluís Aller. We had classes with him for 12 hours a week and that's when I realized that I was freaking out about this whole world. But if I had to stick with an exact moment, I would say the filming of my first short film, Wolves, where I was able to meet an actor, Isak Ferriz. It was a brutal experience, as he was a professional actor and we were just students, but he quickly helped us.

–I guess that opened up a whole world of possibilities.

–And so much, especially with regard to festivals. In 'Bande à part' we had done some subjects where they already explained everything to do with the routes, but until you get inside one with a work of yours you don't really know what it is. I had just made four music videos and exercises for the university, then being able to present Wolves at the Sitges Festival was spectacular.

–If I'm not mistaken, no Andorran filmmaker had achieved this before.

–And it continues without anyone else having achieved it. The Sitges Festival is the most important in the world in fantasy cinema and in the official short film section they receive thousands of projects, selecting only about 25. That I entered with Wolves was brutal, although I didn't really know all that it meant. The short film that

Álvaro Rodríguez

DIRECTOR OF CINEMA



«Getting to the Sitges Festival with my three short films is the biggest award I've ever had»

wins is shortlisted for the Oscar and Goya awards, as well as competing in the Méliès d'Or award, where it wins the best European fantastic short film. The nicest thing is that when I went to present it, it was still being held at the Sitges Auditorium, where all the most relevant films pass and with a capacity for 1,500 spectators. Although for short films the audience is usually around 600 people, I remember it as one of the best moments of my entire life.

–A milestone that was repeated with your next two short films, Le blizzard and Under the Ice.

–It is the biggest prize on a professional scale that I have ever had. It is true that we went from screening the short films in the Auditorium to the Sala Tramuntana, which has a smaller capacity for 400 spectators, but the official section continues to function in the same way and the emotions are just as magical.

–As a filmmaker, how do you receive

this recognition?

–When I'm comedown I always try to think about this, because in the end short films are very expensive to make and you don't have a financial benefit as such. Then I think about it and say: «I've been to Sitges more than once, to Hollywood's Scream Fest and to other Oscar-qualifying festivals, so I've done something good so far.» You must continue on this path and never stop trying.

–Did you follow the same process of creation with all three? Or would you define yourself as a director «without method»?

–More than a fixed method, all three were born from different points. Wolves does it from a two-page script exercise I did in college that everyone really liked. It was a suspenseful exercise called Un cartucho de escopeta brilla and where a man had to save himself from two wolves inside the same house. What I did was to rewrite this script and move it to a historical moment that I really like, which is the Second

World War, and have the protagonist be a pilot of the Royal Air Force who had to escape from two nazis. The first time I already wrote a screenplay from scratch thinking of a short film as such was with Le blizzard, where I take up the context of the Second World War. While Wolves had elements of magical realism, Le blizzard, having already toured fantasy and horror genre festivals, I tried to look for more of that sci-fi and fantasy suspense edge. It was the one that had the best path, but I did find that it was too great for generic festivals and too light for pure horror. Sitges is indeed more open to these parallel visions, but for example BIFAN in South Korea is a place I've never been able to enter because it's a little wilder. That's why with my third short film, Under the Ice, despite touching on a personal theme, I make a pure horror sequence. It is the evolution of getting to know the different festivals during these years.

–What is this personal theme that we can find in Under the Ice?

–The death of my father, whom I lost eight years ago. At the time I was grieving, but for several years now I had recurring nightmares where he was alive and there was a feeling of guilt on my part that I didn't really understand where it was coming from. The idea arose from this and is about a child whose father dies and the whole process of denial that goes through in such a situation. The story has a real ghost, but as the plot progresses you find out that it is not a dead person who is chasing the boy but his father, then this terror becomes a more emotional fact. It was a complicated project because of these gender changes, plus later my mother also died from an illness. It's a short film I dedicate to both of them, although it's a bitter-sweet feeling, but it's the most personal of them all and the one I'm most proud of.

–I imagine that turning over this box of feelings in a project that will be shown to the public must not be easy.

–Any project you present to the public



“ **Film is an extremely competitive industry, where only the best continue to work** ”

is never. I remember the video clips I recorded with the group Persefone, with which I suffered blood, sweat and tears. It's true that with *Under the Ice*, I don't know if it's out of habit, I've been more relaxed. What was very hard was the whole writing process, as I was clear that it was a dedication to my father, but there was also the responsibility of dedicating it to my mother as well. I tell you, it's a bittersweet feeling because better things could have turned out, but overall I'm happy.

–With him you also made the jump to the Scream Fest in Los Angeles, where you had previously been with *Le blizzard*. What was it like to relive this milestone?

–It's a tremendous illusion. Scream Fest is held at the Chinese 6 Theaters in Hollywood, one of the most classic cinemas in the world. Despite not being as big a festival as the Sitges Festival, films like *Paranormal Activity* have come out there. There are many producers who come to see the short films and I know directors who, thanks to screening there, have ended up making a film. With *Le blizzard* I also went to Canada's Fantasia Festival, probably the second most important in the world, but I have to tell you that neither this nor *Scream* I was able to travel in person and it's a shame. In addition, there are certain larger festivals that have a large contingent of journalists specializing in short films. For example, I discovered two months later on IMDB a review of *Le blizzard* by someone who had seen it at a festival. This is exciting, as long as they are not too destructive! [laugh].

–Let's talk about Andorra. Is there enough commitment to cinema or are there a lack of resources?

–This first aid of 100,000 euros is a step forward, but it is still insufficient. I would like to believe that both the politicians and the people are beginning to be aware that many more resources are needed, because the environment in Andorra is brutal and you can set up very large productions, if you don't look at the tourist effect that *Game of Thrones* has produced in Girona after shooting there. I understand that it is a small country, that has the resources it has and that, although culture is necessary for everyone, it is not vital and if there are other conflicts they must be dealt with first, such as the problem of housing you talked about in your article the other day. In addition, it must be taken into account that in Spain a small or medium production does not fall below two or three million, so my question is: «Who do they want to help? Are the people of Andorra indifferent to it and all they want is for the country to show off?». For my first short film I was not given any public subsidy and it was hard, but for the other two I was able to count on it, although I had to make such a large investment that it is now unthinkable that it can raise another project.

–This conflict has led to many filmmakers being forced to leave the country in order to open a path in the industry.

–The directors here cannot believe that each one will shoot a film a year because it is unthinkable. The ins-

titutions must support the talents that are beginning to stand out in the country, as long as the technicians of the ministries are aware and knowledgeable of what the merits are in this area. Not all festivals are valid, there are some online where you pay 20 euros for registration and you already have a selection in Mozambique, for example. I'm telling you, we have to understand that Andorra will not always be our cradle and if I raise a project it won't be thanks to the help or money of people in the country, but from a production company outside of here.

–Does it cost more and more to be part of this world?

–It has always been difficult. Cinema is an extremely competitive audiovisual sector, where only the best start filming and continue to work. There are very famous people who have made three incredible films, but the fourth one was so messed up that they never made another film.

–And within this competition, what does Álvaro Rodríguez have to differentiate himself from the rest of the filmmakers?

–How difficult! [laugh]. Maybe I would tell you that my imagination, I feel like a pretty free person when I write and create. It won't be the most Hollywood, but I feel like there's a part of me in everything I do and that makes me very happy and proud.

–Looking back, would you be able to stay with one moment of your entire professional career?

–Mmm... yes. The first time I went to the Sitges Festival with *Wolfe* and the day my mother saw my last short film.

–A last teaser of your next work that you can reveal us?

–I'm working on my first feature film and now I'm coming across the two-page, which is a summary of the idea to be able to sell it to different production companies. It is a project that takes place mostly in a single space, an ambulance, and where they go to look for an extremely injured woman, but they do not understand how she can live with the magnitude of her injuries. Everything starts as a thriller that ends up becoming a horror and, although there are few characters, the story grows more and more. It's complicated to write, but I'm already specifically looking to make it a much simpler film to shoot. I suffered enough with short films and I think that when you make the jump to a feature film you have to be aware that the more you control everything, the better it will turn out. And although horror is not the genre I consume the most, it is where I feel most comfortable. By the way, I didn't say it, but the title of the film in the American version will be 911, while in the closest version it will be titled 112. ≡

