



INTERVIEW ► Today, in 'L'últim espòiler', we talk with Pau Riera, co-founder of 'Contraban Productions' and

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"L'últim espòiler" opens its doors today to Pau Riera, journalist and producer. His first major project in the audiovisual industry came from the book *Rivalidades Cròniques*, awarded as the best book of the year in the 'No Llegiu 2020' contest and for which Riera was in charge of all the photography. It was that same year where, together with David Haro and Jaume Planella, he created the production company 'Contraban Productions', with which they have already created several projects. They are now in the production phase of the short film *La Dama Blanca*, a story that draws on the reinterpretation of an Andorran legend.

-If we talk about audiovisuals, what is the first memory that comes to your mind?

-I came to audiovisual through books, as I am an only child and I read a lot as a child. Once I was aware that what I was reading could later be seen in real people or in cartoons, I was done with the hobby. I have to tell you, however, that I have always been more of the written word, since at the time I studied journalism and arrived in this world of rebound. About the first memory as such... maybe I was about eight or nine years old, watching some movies. I think it would be around Christmas time, which is when this hobby of going to the cinema is more common.

-The differences between the journalistic and cinematographic worlds are quite obvious.

-Totally. I started to study journalism because what I had always wanted was to tell stories, but I have never been a journalist who follows current affairs, but I have always been more about discovering everything that is behind the news. I had a job in Barcelona where I was a journalist and producer at the same time, since the stories I told made us record them as well. That was how I saw that I also liked the organization of being able to explain them with professionals who knew how to do it, and after that I came back to the documentary *Entre montanyes*, directed by David Haro.

-And how do you remember this first contact with the audiovisual world?

-Like an adventure and a vacation. I think it wasn't an archetypal project as such because half the team that came from Mexico and they were film technicians were mixed with half the team from Andorra who were more focused on the creative side. This mix was a brutal learning curve for everyone. Both for the people from outside who saw how people live in this country, since we spent two and a half months living in Aina, and also for us, because we were able to learn how a film production should be.



«It's really complicated to raise a feature film in Andorra with money only from here»

-One of your most special successes was as a result of being the photographer of the book *Rivalidades Cròniques*, awarded as best book of the year in the 'No Llegiu 2020' competition. What can you tell us about this proposal?

-To summarize, the book shows 10 European cities through their football teams. I was a photographer because I was less good at it than Jordi Brescó and he wrote because he was better at it than I was. What we did is go to different derbies that we knew would change the life of the city in the days leading up to the dispute. After previous pre-production work such as, for example, closing interviews with the protagonists. We were traveling all over Europe and once we finished, we started doing all the work of writing and editing the photographs.

-I imagine that it must be very gratifying to see that one of your first projects receives such acclaim from specialized critics.

-We presented the project five days before we were closed at home due to the pandemic and in one year we managed to sell the entire edition of 2,500 copies. The truth is that the review was very positive and I think the book is a good way to explain the history of a territory through football. There are projects similar to this, as it can also be done through gastronomy or any other sport, but we are very happy with the result and wish we could do a second part.

-You were also the founder of 'Contraban Productions' together with David Haro and Jaume Planella. Why this production company?

-It was born basically to support the documentary *Entre montanyes*, since we did not have a society behind it or a platform that could later present it to festivals or host and retain the rights. We thought that the best option was to create this production company and with the learning of this project we saw that we wanted to dedicate ourselves to this world.

It served as a refuge for us to make short fiction films or other projects such as the historical memory of the Sant Ermengol documentary.

-Do you always work with your own projects or do you accept others from outside?

-At the moment we are open to everything. The important thing is to work and for people to know what our work is like and to make a name for yourself in the sector. What we are clear about is that both the projects born from 'Contraban Productions' and those we accept must always have a social background, as it is one of our maxims. We have done our own fiction and documentary projects, we have accepted commissions such as Sant Ermengol, we have a documentary in semi-production about the case of the Besolí-Ramos family... I tell you, if we can give a social vision and it fits us, we will join right away, if it doesn't cost a little more to be able to do it. Our first short film, *Silencio*, talks about sui-

cide; the second short film, *Hiedra*, focuses on abuse and paternalistic relationships, *La Dama Blanca* revolves around social concepts and problems, etc.

-As a producer, what would you say is its distinguishing feature?

-I don't know if it's a differentiating feature, but it is typical of us: the social background. It's true that I also don't think there is a distinctive feature as such in other production companies, although there are some, such as 'Imminent Productions', which are more focused on participating in international productions or carrying out projects with a larger budget here. In the end, we must not close any doors because the common goal is to grow the industry in the country. It is also true that if we as a producer receive a corporate proposal from a company or institution, whether from Andorra or abroad, we will not say no to it because it is advertising. As long as there is this social background we will move for-

ward.

–Now you are launching the short film La Dama Blanca. What can you tell us about this story?

–The project was born because Mr. Ricard Fiter proposed to us to treat his book Un andorrà lluny del poble in some cinematic way, which was the first Andorran fiction book written by someone from here and published in the country. The process we followed is to refine its essence and from there, start writing the entire script. We have gone further along the path of a reinterpretation of a legend of Sant Julià de Lòria with which Mr. Fiter has a strong relationship and what we want to discuss are certain issues that concern a part of Andorran citizens through of fiction

–Has it been easy to get here? One of the main concerns when starting a project is everything to do with financing.

–Totally. Returning to the differentiating features, in this case I would say that we are unique in the way we approach projects. I don't know if it's due to a lack of professionalism and experience or that we have a different way of thinking, but we started writing and considering the whole production without having the financing locked in. This is a priori a mistake, because there comes a time when you have to start filming or do certain processes without having this part closed. It has been a parallel process because it is really very slow to build a project in Andorra and the rest of the people who work in this industry will tell you that.

–And how was the whole creation process?

–We presented the treatment to Mr. Fiter, who initially had to approve it, and then we started looking for funding and thinking about how to take it forward. Subsequently, we have been knocking on most of the country's doors, both public and private, and we have been fortunate to have a very encouraging return. Everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, wanted to participate and we have the support of the Government, of the different municipalities, of several Andorran companies... We want at least every sector of the industry to be represented and we have a sponsoring collaborator in each of them. We have spent a lot of time coming up with a very strong communication and marketing strategy, since the world



of short films does not have an economic income and if it does, it is only used to cover expenses. We are aware that we cannot ask to ask and that is why we offer communication, advertising and presence in social networks, in the media, in the whole part of distribution and presentation, etc. To add people, we were clear that we had to be able to offer something different, which in this case is the fact of being able to count on Jordi Sánchez and Marc Ribera in the main cast, in addition to Núria Montes and Raquel López in the Andorran part. This attracts a lot of attention because it is not very usual to see this type of people working in the country for a purely Andorran project.

–You have in mind the idea of it becoming a feature film.

–Yes, this is a matter of production strategy. We've always wanted to do it, but as Álvaro explained to you last week or to other people you've talked to, it's really complicated to raise a feature film in Andorra with the money here, unless someone gets enlightened and wants to do some own project paying for everything. This has not happened and I don't think it will happen, but we must be aware that the European world of production lives on subsidies and each country has its own. If you look at the

films that are coming to the market on a European scale, at least 50% of each one is subsidized. The strategy we have followed when shooting the short film is to make a product that works from start to finish as a single block and which, at the same time, is part of a future film. It's not that we have to re-record everything, but this footage will already serve as part of the feature film that will come later.

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

–Obviously there is a lack of resources, but these will not arrive, why not. Andorra has been looking for its own path for years and I think that in order to have more resources, it should bet on the film industry from here, bringing external productions to this magnificent set that we have as the environment is landscape. We need to encourage the Ministries of Finance, Tourism and Culture to create a kind of network, since, in my case, I am a newcomer in this industry and it is a fact that I have missed. And it's not because they don't want to help, it's because there's no meeting place. We must bet on a Film Commission in the country, which I know is being worked on and has been present in various approaches



of the current and previous Governments, but it is time for it to become a reality and to create this kind of cinematographic association of the people who are involved in the sector. Maybe Andorra discovers that by bringing a Netflix production for three weeks, it gets an economic, touristic and cultural benefit for the country.

–It also seems that it is increasingly difficult to make a hole in this industry and be able to live without worries.

–On the one hand, it is all due to the fact that there is an economic problem, since making a good film is associated with an economic cost, but, on the other hand, it also comes down to the technological accessibility that we have had in the last 10 or 20 years, in addition to the ease of consuming culture. This fact makes many people want to replicate what they see and consume, and with technological accessibility it is very easy to achieve this.

– Documentaries, short films, television programs... what is left for Pau Riera to do?

–I've been in this world for a few years and having the opportunity to

produce everything we're producing is already a very big goal. The goal is obviously to make the feature film, but it is not an obsession that I have very clear. What I want is to continue learning, growing and being able to tell stories, as well as being able to decide and determine what each story needs to be told properly.

–A last teaser of your next work that can get us ahead?

–About La Dama Blanca I can tell you that we are creating a very elaborate production design that will take us to Andorra in 1942 and that I think will surprise a lot. As for the script, we want to keep it a secret, but I can assure you that it will create debate and controversy. In the end we have come precisely to this, to shake everything up. And about future projects... there are things both here and maybe in Barcelona, since we don't limit ourselves to having talent from outside. There are many people to discover and grow, and our goal is to unite this symbiosis between countries and cultures with Andorra as another agent in the cinematographic and audiovisual world both on a European and global scale. ≡

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