

San Sebastian: 10 Takes on 2019's Edition

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Opening today with Roger Michell's *Blackbird*, the San Sebastian Film Festival marks the highest-profile film event in the Spanish-speaking world. Here are 10 early takes on 2019's edition:

1. A FESTIVAL OF DISCOVERIES

"Every festival has its own personality. Venice is now a platform for big star-driven U.S. movies, Cannes for very high-quality cinema. We search for new talent and if you want to see movies from Latin America, come to San Sebastián," says festival director José Luis Rebordinos. Five of its main competition movies are first or second features, such as David Zonana's pointedly elegant Mexican upper/working class gulf drama *Workforce*, and Belén Funes' *A Thief's Daughter*, a vision of low-income youth, juggling love, broken families and bills. "We can't compete with the world's biggest festivals for big world premieres, but we can snag first features," Rebordinos says.

2. STARS AND BARS

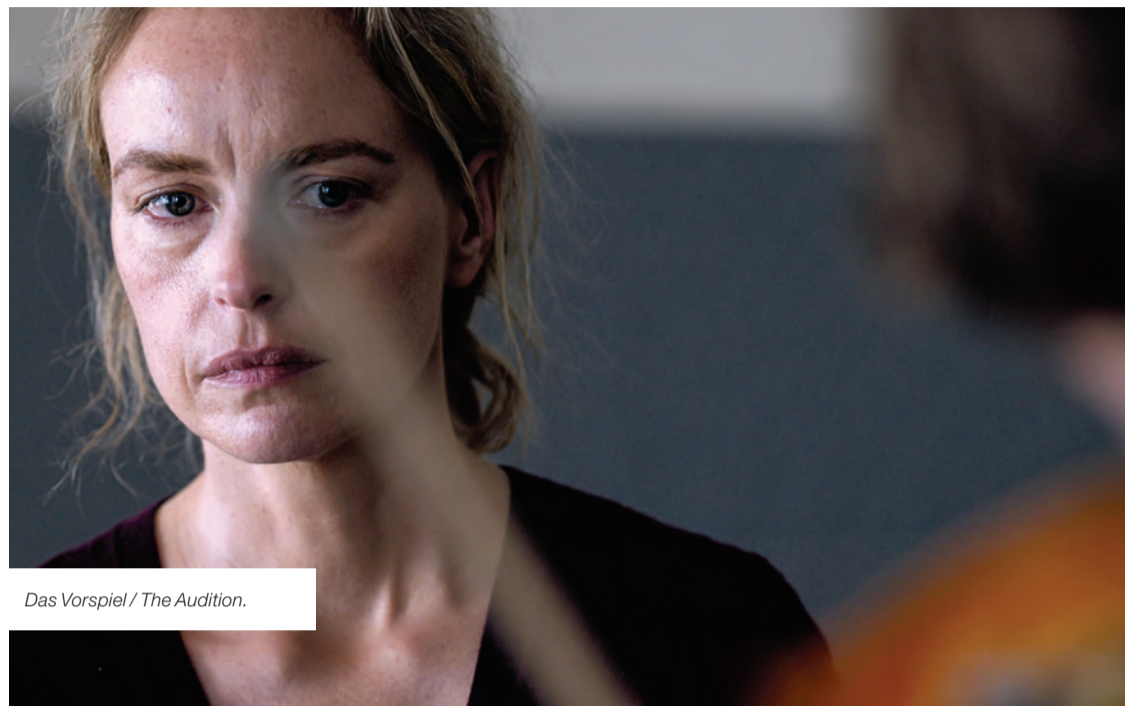
Penelope Cruz, Costa Gavras and Donald Sutherland receive career achievement Donostia Awards; Javier Bardem will present the ocean protection-themed *Sanctuary*. Kirsten Stewart talks "Seberg." Most stars sample the extraordinary Basque pintxo tapas in San Sebastián's old quarter. Many, unsurprisingly, find a reason to return.

3. WOMEN REALLY MAKE THE GRADE

"I totally agree with Venice's Alberto Barbera when he says there shouldn't be quotas," says Rebordinos. That said, 35% of competition movies and an eye-catching 57% (8 of 14) of New Directors titles are directed by women. The latter may be some kind of record for a major festival's main sidebar.

4. STREAMERS BUILD PRESENCE

Movistar+, Spain's biggest pay TV/SVOD platform, has scored a competition berth for its first ever original film: Alejandro Amenábar's period



Das Vorspiel / The Audition.



Vida perfecta.

plea for political tolerance *While at War*; for the second year running, Netflix has a movie in official selection, *Diecisiete*; HBO unveils footage of its highly awaited *Patria*, a vision of the impact of the Basque conflict.

5. BUZZ TITLES

There's large anticipation for *The Prosecutor*, *The President and the Spy*, Justin Webster's latest venture into what he terms "character-driven narrative non-fiction series" after his two Daytime Emmy wins for Ama-

zon's *Six Dreams*. It's noteworthy just how many buzz titles are from women in competition: *A Thief's Daughter* Alice Winocour's *Proxima*, with Eva Green, and Canadian Louise Archambault's *And the Birds Rained Down*; In New Directors, *Shattered Night* and *The Innocence*, charting a teen daughter's bruising liberation from small-town herd mentality. San Sebastian's also showcases Movistar+ Original Series *Perfect Life*, an affecting, sometimes laugh-out-loud 2019

Canneseries winner, from Leticia Dolera.

6. INDUSTRY CONSOLIDATION

San Sebastian's Europe-Latin American Co-production Forum is now firmly established, with *Ventana Sur*, as the key art film meet exploring that axis. San Sebastian accredited 1,698 industry delegates last year, not much below Locarno or indeed Venice, The caliber of producers attending has grown. Companies with 2019 projects: Gullane,

Tu Vas Voir, Campo Cine, Patagonik, Malbicho Cine, Tarea Fina, Storyboard Media and Magma.

7. BASQUE INDUSTRY GROWTH

Once, San Sebastián supported Basque Cinema, now Basque Cinema bulwarks the festival, and its filmmakers have the confidence and ambition to fan out from a base of finely-wrought art films (*Jordi's Letters*) into international co-production (*Window to the Sea*), mainstream Basque-language plays (*Agur Etxebeste*) and even Castilian Spanish swings for the national market (a large political metaphor *The Endless Trench*, and *Double Plus Fifteen*, admired at Malaga).

8. YEAR-ROUND NEW TALENT HUB

San Sebastian Festival was once, well, a Festival. Now it is evolving, into a year-round cultural and industrial force, which above all primes new talent, seen, for example, in its new New Technology Start Up section, with a €500,000 (\$550,000) grant dangled by the Basque Government for new companies setting up in the Basque Country.

9. NAVARRE CELEBRATES ITS LOCATIONS

Since the 1950s, Spain has been a favorite European big shoot locale. One key reason: locations. Celebrating its 10th anniversary, the Navarre Film Commission, part of one of Spain's fastest-growing film-TV regions, hold an exhibition at San Sebastian of 18 of its hugely contrasting locations and the titles shot there. The settings are extraordinary and still part of a relatively undiscovered Spain.

10. THE ZEITGEIST

Movies naturally point up the Zeitgeist. Eight of the 15 Horizontes Latinos titles turn on violence, five of the six Films in Progress picture broken families, riven by civil conflict, prejudice and big city emigration. Multiple movies plumb conflictive parent-child relations. Parents fail children who then fail as parents. One example: Judging others and herself by narrow standards of musical excellence, Anna in competition entry *The Audition* is still seeking to prove to her long dead mother that she merited not being forgotten.

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