

San Sebastian's Dramatic TV Series Build

JOHN HOPEWELL,

It seems symptomatic of something that the first big hit of the 2020 San Sebastian Film Festival has been a drama series not a film, HBO Europe's *Patria*, which played to heated applause very late on Friday night.

Cineuropa calls it an "extraordinary HBO series"; Aitor Gabilondo is "a master of emotion," proclaims El Español.

Seven drama series play at the 2020 San Sebastian Film Festival, a historic record. Movistar Plus' *Riot Police* and HBO's *We Are Who We Are* screen in their entirety at San Sebastián's Official Selection, another first.

None of this seems a coincidence. Traditionally the highest-profile film event in the Spanish-speaking world, the Spanish movie marathon, which kicks off today, is one contender now as also its most important drama series showcase as well.

This year the San Sebastián Film Festival's TV cup runneth over. Why is another matter. Following, five suggestions:

San Sebastian Festival's Backers

The Festival's two major sponsors, Telefonica pay TV division Movistar Plus and public broadcaster Radio Televisión Española (RTVE), are TV companies. In Spain, local series have mesmerized local audiences for the last 25 years. Over 2011-16, only three shows - *The Pillars of the Earth*, *The Witch* and ABC's *Resurrection* - made the cut of Spain's top 10 most-watched dramas of the year, according to audience research company Geca. That's also one reason why Movistar Plus, when it sought to produce exclusive original content which marked itself out from competitors, turned to drama series, releasing its first, *Velvet Collection* in Sept. 2017. Since then, no telecom in Europe has driven into drama series production with the energy of Movistar Plus, which has produced 21 original series, 13 returning seasons and one original film, Alejandro Amenábar's *While At War*.

TV Series' Business Logic

Making drama series in Spain has another business logic. Their market is the biggest single accessible language market in the world: 477 million Spanish-speakers, only trumped by Mandarin. Spanish series are also proving that great shows can come from anywhere and being watched everywhere, the business model of Netflix, whose Francisco Ramos will be the subject of a festival conversation on Sept. 23. Bowing April 3, *Money Heist Part 4 (La Casa de Papel)* was watched by 65 million Netflix households in its first four weeks. Little wonder that in 2019, Netflix produced more hours of original productions in Spain (163) than any other country outside the U.S., apart from South Korea (238), but on a par with the U.K. (160), according to an Omnia analysis.



Alardea.



Dime quién soy.



Patria.



El Estado contra Pablo Ibar.

now world premieres at San Sebastián. Sisters smackdown drama *Hermanas*, the first episode of *Escenario 0*, a stage play to TV anthology, bows two days later in the San Sebastián's Festival's Made in Spain.

Series' Ever Greater Spectacle

As competition bites hard, TV operators are scaling up, to meet the ever larger creative ambitions of their key talent. So they often have something to show: RTVE Gala screening for example is female Conquistador drama *Inés of My Soul*, one of its most ambitious series ever, fruit of pioneering international co-production and collaboration with streamer Amazon Prime Video. *Tell Me Who I Am*, which receives its Movistar Plus Gala today, wears its production values on its sleeve from the get go, in its multiplicity of period crowd scenes whether street protests or the audience at a political meeting in 1934 Madrid or an ocean liner docked at a port which opens Ep. 2. Such scenes are also much better seen in a cinema.

The Film to TV Diaspora

Above all, San Sebastián's TV shows remain very much cinema. When Netflix first plowed into making non-English language original series abroad, beginning in Latin America with Mexico's *Club de Cuervos*, shown by Gaz Alazraki in 2015, it largely sought out a generation of cineastes to make the shows, in order to mark them apart from more traditional TV fare. That talent diaspora from film to TV continues, helping to shape its premium fiction. *Riot Police* and *We Are Who We Are* mark the first full-blown showrunner work of Spain's Rodrigo Sorogoyen and Italy's Luca Guadagnino, two of Europe's most acclaimed filmmakers. *Alardea*, the EITB Gala screening, is the first TV series from David Pérez Sañudo, whose first feature, *Ane*, which plays New Directors, is one of the buzzy debuts at this year's San Sebastián. The same is true of producers. Playing the Festival's Zinemira Basque Showcase, *The Miramar Murders: The State vs. Pablo Ibar* is backed by the very same companies - San Sebastian's Irusoin, Seville's La Claqueta - behind "The Endless Trench," one of the biggest recent movie hits at the San Sebastian Festival.

In *Riot Police*, Sorogoyen adopts one movie style and point of view for its opening episode, turning on a bungled eviction, then reverts to another for the rest of the series, creating a series which is often woundingly intimate but paints a broad canvas portrait of society which is corrupt from the top down. The series' first scene even has the protagonist father's cheating at a family's general knowledge quiz, and called out by his daughter, a police internal affairs agent. Showing series, San Sebastián is often merely reaffirming, in a mass audience context, its commitment to film as art.

Emilio Mayorga contributed to this article.

AGENDA

INDUSTRIA

10.00 - 20.00 - ONLINE
IX Foro de Coproducción Europa-América Latina
Citas *one-to-one* con los proyectos seleccionados en el IX Foro de Coproducción Europa-América Latina (Con acreditación de industria)

12.00 - 13.00 - ONLINE
Reunión Red estatal de clusters audiovisuales
Participan: responsables de los clusters audiovisuales de Navarra, Euskadi, Catalunya, Galicia y Canarias, junto a una representación del Ministerio de Cultura compuesta por Adriana Moscoso, directora general de Industrias Culturales (ICC); Beatriz Navas directora del ICAA (Instituto de Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales); Elisa Rodríguez, subdirectora general de Promoción y Relaciones Institucionales; y Carmen Paez, subdirectora general de Promoción de Industrias Culturales del Ministerio. - (Cerrado)

12.00 - 18.00 - ONLINE
VI. Ikusmira Berriak
Citas *one-to-one* con los proyectos seleccionados en el programa de residencias Ikusmira Berriak (Con acreditación de industria)

12.15 - 12.45 - KURSAAL - CLUB DE PRENSA
Presentación ALIA
Presentación ALIA (Alianza Industrial Audiovisual) - (Con acreditación de industria hasta completar aforo)

HBO Europe Comes to Fruition

"We're keeping with that strategy of making few projects," Miguel Salvat, HBO España's commissioning editor of original programming, said at early September's Conecta Fiction Reboot. It puts series through meticulous development. But HBO Europe's banner series are ever more now coming to fruition. Announced at San Sebastian in 2017, and originally scheduled for a May 17 premiere, put back by COVID-19, *Patria*, charting the impact of the Basque conflict on two once inseparable women friends,