

JOHN HOPEWELL

Last year, September's San Sebastián worked a minor miracle, staging a safe on-site festival as second-wave COVID-19 built in Spain. This year, on-site attendance will be up, though travel problems, caution and costs in Latin America, the U.S and Asia will prevent a full attendance.

That said, San Sebastián will be firing on its major cylinders – as a Spanish-language movie emporium, a new talent hub and launchpad for the local Basque industry. Following, nine takes on the most important film event in the Spanish-speaking world:

### Star Power: Cruz, Banderas, Bardem, Depp, Cotillard, Chastain, Tucci, Peters

Penelope Cruz and Antonio Banderas attend the Spanish premiere of *Official Competition*, Javier Bardem the world premiere of *The Good Boss*. Johnny Depp (contentiously) and Marion Cotillard accept career-achievement Donostia Awards. Jessica Chastain will grace *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*, the sole U.S. movie in main competition, Stanley Tucci and Clarke Peters the world premiere of *La Fortuna*. Mobbed by huge crowds, stars love San Sebastián. Their 2021 presence will be select, but still potent.

### Genre: The New Revolution

Following on Cannes winner *Titanic*, *Earwig*, from Lucile Hadzihalilovic, another female French genre auteur, weighs in as certainly one of San Sebastián's most anticipated titles. Expect more wows from women horror directors later this year, predicts San Sebastián Festival director José Luis Rebordinos. But there's another revolution in the making. San Sebastián used to prime straight-arrow arthouse. Now, *Earwig* and *La Abuela*, a classic horror play, both screen in competition. China's *Fire on the Plain*, another Golden Shell contender, is a thriller, as is *The Daughter*, out of competition. "It's not so much that auteurs now want to make genre movies, rather that they want to tell stories and are using genre to achieve it," Rebordinos says. Genre auteur movies look set to revolutionize Europe's former arthouse scene.

### Buzz Titles

*Official Competition* was well-received at Venice. There's good word on *The Good Boss* and two Compe-

# San Sebastián 2021: 9 Takes



*Du som er i himlen! As In Heaven.*

dition first features, both from women: Dane Tea Lindeburg's *As In Heaven*, a female-centric coming of age period piece made with a modern eye; and Romanian Aline Grigore's *Blue Moon*, a telling portrait of toxic masculinity – sexist, authoritarian, violent, self-pitying – in a shady modern-day hotelier clan. In New Directors, buzz titles take in Mar Peco's *That Weekend*, a mother-daughter drama with Western tinges; *Josephine*, from Spain's Javier Marco, a prison-set romantic drama with a fantasy streak, starring Julietta's Emma Suárez; and *The Rust*, from Colombia's Juan Sebastián Mesa, a critique of the frailty of rural economies, and the devastating fall-out.

### Johnny Depp

When San Sebastián announced a Donostia Award for the *Pirates of the Caribbean* star, it caused an international furor. Why prize a figure, critics asked, who lost a libel case against U.K. tabloid The Sun for calling him a wife beater? Depp has not been arrested, nor charged nor convicted of gender violence, San Sebastián retorted, reminding critics it had always fought "inequality." It will now team with (H)emen, the Basque association of women in the audiovisual sector and scenic arts, to organize a festival workshop tackling gender equality and the Depp controversy. "A division was occurring between people and collectives who, in my opinion, share common objectives," said Rebordinos.

### Movistar Plus: Upping the Ante on Film and San Sebastián

One hugely awaited San Sebastián title isn't even a film, but rather

six-part series *La Fortuna*, produced by Movistar Plus, AMC Studios and Mod Pictures, starring Stanley Tucci and "The Wire's" Clarke Peters and the first TV series from *The Others* director Alejandro Amenábar. A good-humored adventure thriller straddling the U.S. and Spain and past and present, *La Fortuna* is the biggest international co-production in Spanish history. *La Fortuna's* San Sebastián world premiere comes

weeks after Movistar Plus unveiled *Modelo 77*, from Alberto Rodríguez. The big question is now whether Movistar Plus will move into movie production with the same vigor it has show with drama series. It is certainly moving more into San Sebastián – creating a ground-breaking move San Sebastián Virtual Cinema on its platform.

### Open for Business

This year, much of France's international industry will roll into San Sebastián. It could hardly be otherwise. Venice business revolves around its lineup; Toronto 2021 was hobbled by travel restrictions; the AFM will play out online. All over Europe, producers and sales agents yearn to sit down with potential partners and clients. Much film business cannot be conducted just by Zoom. San Sebastián is as near to Paris as Cannes, an easy train ride to a stunning resort. Expect a considerable French and continental Europe presence this year.

### Local Heros: Spain's Powerful San Sebastián Presence

San Sebastián 2021 boasts the strongest Official Selection Spanish film presence in years: Seven titles, four in main competition, and *Official Competition* segueing from its Venice premiere. But what's really striking about this year's Spanish film lineup is the films' shared high production standards and marked diversity, says Rebordinos. That's seen in competition contenders. A post-Basque conflict reconciliation drama, *Maixabel*, from Iciar Bollain, is "openly political," says Rebordinos. Fernando León de Aranoa's *The Good Boss* weighs in as a

workplace comedy skewering the frequent farce and facade of claimed positive labor relations; Paco Plaza's *La Abuela* looks much more mainstream, but upscale, a demonic possession shocker of substance. A fiction-doc hybrid, Jonas Trueba's *Quien lo impide* extolls the vision and virtues of Madrid millennials.

### Hot Ticket Projects

Launched in 2012, San Sebastián's Europe-Latin America Co-Production Forum has fast consolidated as the festival's industry centerpiece, framing the latest projects from may of the hottest arthouse directors and producers in Latin America. This year is no exception: Hernán Musaluppi is backing *El viento que arrasa*, from Argentina's Paula Hernández (*Sleepwalkers*) and Chile's Story Board and Sebastián Lelio Cristian Leighton's *El porvenir de la mirada*. Brazil's Desvia Produções is behind Johnny Ma's *Chin-Gone, Alemania* is backed by Tarea Fina and *La Sucesión* by Pasto, and Gema Films. New Argentine Cinema icon Diego Dubcovsky produces Romina Paula's *People by Night*. It's a powerful lineup. Expect many of these titles, in a few years time, to be playing major festivals.

### Basque Talent Build

It's a mark of just how far the Basque industry has come this decade that one piece of news this year is that there is no Basque director in main competition, though there is a Basque production, Iciar Bollain's anticipated *Maixabel*, produced by Koldo Zuazua's top Basque outfit Kowalski Films. The power of the Basque industry will be felt in multiple other ways too. The San Sebastián ecosystem of the Festival, Tabakalera, Filmoteca Vasca and Elias Querejeta Zine Eskola is still growing. Its latest move, a high-powered drama series development lab, 2deoseriak, will be presented at the Festival. The Leire Apellaniz produced *The Sacred Spirit* scored heavily at Locarno. A new generation – Mikel Gurrea, Alauda Ruíz de Azúa, David Pérez Sañudo, Esti Urresola – have films in the works. Public broadcaster ETB is driving into premium fiction and targeting youth audiences, yoking Basque roots and innovation.

## AGENDA

### INDUSTRIA

12.00 - 13.00 – KURSAAL – CLUB DE PRENSA

**Mia Presenta INFORME MIA 2021 y Mentoría MIANIMA 21/22**  
Ponentes: Representantes de MIA: Myriam Ballesteros (Presidenta) y Paloma Mora Iñesta (Vicepresidenta)  
Doctoras e Investigadoras: Sara Álvarez, Susana García y Maitane Janguitu. (Invitaciones disponibles: info@animacionesmia.com + Con acreditación de industria y prensa)

17.00 - 18.30 – KURSAAL – CLUB DE PRENSA

**Jornada Series: Identidades y diversidad. Historias que alteran estructuras**

En colaboración con Europa Creativa Desk MEDIA Euskadi. Moderación: Valeria Vegas, periodista, escritora y autora de la biografía de La Veneno. Participantes: Bob Pop, creador y guionista de "Maricón perdido". Diego del Pozo, responsable de contenidos de ficción en Atresmedia. Adrián Silvestre, director de *Sedimentos*. Claudia Costafreda, guionista de "Veneno". (Con acreditación, prioridad Industria).

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