



Alex Baker
Sinead O Connor
The Wolf Is Getting Married (Carl Tio/Morjac)



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Francisco Barreiro
by Rachael Scott
18 March 2011

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One of the biggest hits on the independent cinema circuit last year was We Are What We Are. Quickly nicknamed "The Mexican Cannibal Movie", this impressive debut by Jorge Michel Grau revolves around a family of cannibals left in a state of flux when the head of the family dies.

The responsibility of the weekly food shop is now designated to the eldest son Alfredo, played by talented young Mexican actor Francisco Barreiro, and he's none too happy about it.

Amidst family squabbles headed by a domineering matriarch, a frisky brother and sister combo, and his own burgeoning homosexuality, Alfredo must come to terms with his new role as the bringer of the bacon.

We Are What We Are has a lot more to say than the average horror flick. It ticks the genre boxes with scares and gore, but it also paints a picture of a corrupt, greedy and selfish Mexico.

Rachael Scott spoke to Barreiro about the difficulties in playing an extreme meat-eater and the underlying messages within the film.

You're a new face to British film audiences. Can you tell us about yourself please?

I was born in Mexico City on the morning of 15 February 1983. I'm an actor and visual artist. I graduated from the acting school CasAzul in 2005 and have collaborated in over 15 theatrical productions and five feature films in Mexico. I like making plays with my partners Gabino and Luisa in their company Lagartijas tiradas al sol (Lizards lying in the sun), riding bikes with my girlfriend, reading in bed, and eating tacos in the street.

Tell me about your character – what are the major concerns in his life?

Alfredo is very confused about his family and the social situation he is living in. He has a lot of doubts about his cannibalism and for this reason he refuses the responsibility of being the new leader of his family.

We Are What We Are is much more than a horror film about cannibals. How does the story reflect contemporary Mexico?

The film, from the beginning, tries to critically reflect on contemporary Mexico. The film speaks candidly about the country's corruption, the inefficiency of the police force, marginalised classes and people, poverty and social abandonment, and the country's overpopulation and chaos. The director Jorge Michel wanted the cannibalism to serve as a social metaphor for Man being the only real predator to Man.

What does the film say about Mexican families in general? And do you consider this particular portrait of a family something universal or specific to Mexico?

We Are What We Are reflects on a social situation very common in Mexico and all of Latin America. Mothers are the centre of the family because the father is absent. Whether because of irresponsibility, work, alcoholism or migration, families are breaking apart and this eventually affects the social structure of a country. I think Jorge Michel wanted to discuss this matriarchy and that women are the ones left to repair and take control for ultimate survival.

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social metaphor for Man being the only real predator to Man."

Alfredo seems to fear the gay boy he pursues into a nightclub as much as he desires him. Is he scared of coming out of the closet or upset that he has to kill the man he desires?

Alfredo neither fears coming out of the closet nor killing the young man/lover. What he fears is the ultimate responsibility he has for bringing home food to his family, now that his father has died.

Alfredo clearly feels desire and attraction to this young man, but he also fears that he is falling into the same path as his father who would have sex with prostitutes then bring them home to kill them. When he eventually realises he has to continue living and that this is what it takes to do so, he makes the decision to bring this young man home and carry out what has to be done for his and his family's survival.



One critic in Sight & Sound said that the film suggests social exclusion of gays and the destitute is more of a monstrosity than cannibalism. Do you agree?

I think more than an exclusion of homosexuals in particular, Jorge Michel wanted to talk about the urban communities in Mexico which are most neglected, unprotected and excluded. Alfredo and his family, who are also socially excluded, only prey on those that are most susceptible - abandoned street children, prostitutes and young gay men. These are the groups who, when they go missing, are not investigated by the government and therefore can easily go missing without recourse.

Although Mexico has legally passed a law allowing gay marriage, gay youth and communities around the country remain persecuted and Mexico City remains the only place in the country where it is socially acceptable to be gay.

Jorge Michel Grau has said that when he watched his film he found things he thinks he could have done differently and better. Once your films have been released do you revisit them and think about how you could have perfected your performance?

If I had the opportunity I would of course perfect all of my work in the film. It is always hard to look at your previous work without realising how it could be better, but these are things you improve with each new film. You insert your opinion more, you stick to your gut reactions about what is right for your character and you trust your impulses. That being said, I am happy with my work in this film and I owe much of this to my fellow actors.

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It can't be easy playing a cannibal... What do you find helps you get into a difficult role?

I work a lot and very deeply. I need to know and understand my character in the most specific way so that little by little I can become that person, rather than just interpreting him.

I don't believe in creating characters by putting or adding things on. I believe in the opposite - taking away to arrive to the most inner and pure being of the person. Only once when I understand the true state of this person and when I begin to lose feeling of myself, do I know I am ready.

How easy did you find it switching off from playing Alfredo?

Honestly it was not very easy to shed the character of Alfredo. It was a very intense experience to become the character, and to enter that profoundly I needed to severely reduce my interactions with family and those closest to me for three months. For many weeks we worked strictly at night, so I also had to readapt to working again during the daytime. Emotionally, of course, it is also very exhausting playing such a character and that always requires some time to recuperate.

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Can you talk about your favourite scene in the film to shoot, and also the most difficult?

The most difficult scene, and therefore one of the most enjoyable, is towards the end of the film where I am shot in the shoulder trying to save my siblings. In this scene I had to detonate a small explosive hidden underneath my shirt by pressing a small button hidden on the fingertip of my left hand. I needed to be extremely concentrated because not only was it an incredibly emotional scene, but also a very technically coordinated one which had to be handled with much precision. The hardest was when Jorge Michel said we only had two takes to get it right.

***We Are What We Are* has been critically acclaimed. What's it like being part of such a successful project?**

I feel very proud to be a little part of such a grand project and one that is filled with such young talent. It is an honour to be a part of this film, and I feel hopeful and filled with much expectation for the other great projects to come.

"It's hard to imagine what kinds of roles I would like to play when my first major one was a gay cannibal. [Smiles]. I'm sure there will be many more interesting ones to come."

What's the worst thing that's happened to you at an audition?

Auditions are always hard because you are forced to put yourself in a situation with very little prep time or scenery and in conditions which are not so optimal for acting. Although I have been acting for seven years, I still suffer in auditions. Most of the time casting directors do not have the sensibility or time to understand or communicate who your character is or what your character needs to translate, and this is hard for all actors, I think.

What has been your favourite experience meeting a fan?

Thankfully I haven't had the opportunity of making fans yet. I've been approached for my work in theatre, but for the most part I'm not recognised for the characters I play. When we presented the film in the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico City I was in the back of theatre waiting for the Q&A to start. Those who couldn't stay began to leave and passed right by me without recognising me. I suppose it was physically a much bigger transformation than I think.



If you could play any role in film or television history, what would it be?

It's hard to imagine what kinds of roles I would like to play when my first major one was a gay cannibal. [Smiles]. I'm sure there will be many more interesting ones to come.

Please finish these two sentences. Acting saved me from...

Indifference.

Five years from now I'll be...

Living somewhere in the world with my wife and my children making art, film and theatre.

Has making *We Are What We Are* altered your view of the type of work you'd like to do in the future?

I have a lot of interest in working with independent cinema in Mexico and other parts of the world. I'm interested in unique stories, playing characters where I'm asked to take risks and experimenting with myself in general. I look for roles where I can reach the absolute limits of my capabilities. I look for characters that are pushed to the extreme and I like the ability to be able to interpret that.

What's next for you?

First of all, I am getting married in April, so I am very excited for that. I will then be

working again for the third time with Mexican filmmaker Nicolas Pereda on his next feature film, *Greatest Hits*. In May I begin a theatrical tour in Europe and North America with our theatre company Lagartijas tiradas al sol of our play *El Rumor del Incendio*. In October a retrospective of our plays will be held in Paris. Late 2011 and early 2012 I begin my first two films in the U.S.

We Are What We Are [2010]

Studio: Chelsea Cinema

Released: 21 March 2011

ASIN: B00450AGFU

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