

EN TU AUSENCIA

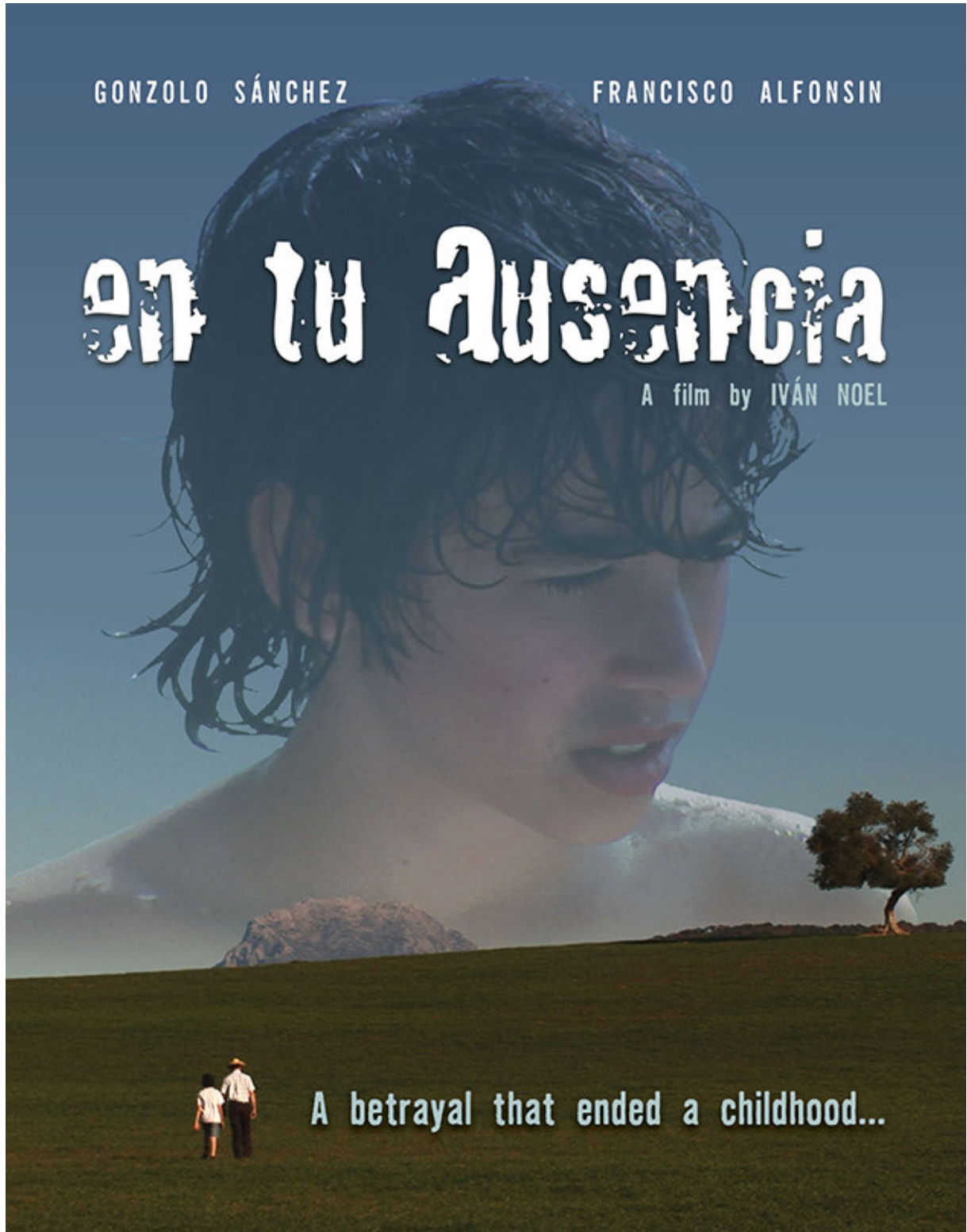
GONZOLO SÁNCHEZ

FRANCISCO ALFONSIN

en tu ausencia

A film by IVÁN NOEL

A betrayal that ended a childhood...



DIRECTOR'S SPEECH

Speech notes about In Your Absence: Newcastle Dance City Showing.

Speeches are only worth it or welcome if the film is any good. We like to hear about how a film was made if we were touched by it. In this case I'll take the risk, and go ahead and tell you a few things. The other 'problem' I had was about how honest I should be. There is of course the option of just taking of all those positive things, making it sound like a very pro project, some kind of glossiness. But, in keeping with the spirit of the film, I think, I will be frank and tell you of where the film ACTUALLY came from – even though it might have some sniggering in the back seats.

The real background in a few simple words:

- This is my first feature movie. It is, in fact my first movie full stop.
- We had no support of any kind, nor financial, nor technical, production, or post-production.
- The budget for it is about the same it would cost to buy a suit for the lead actor in a bigger production.
- We shot the entire film without a script, no dialogue, no shooting script.
- No artificial lighting was used, and no makeup.
- Only 2 of the 15 actors had acted before.
- Every single scene except for 2 sentences was improvised by the actors. They would never know where the scene went until I told them as we were shooting (we later took my voice out of the soundtrack)
- I had no permission to shoot the film anywhere.
- As we were 5 in the entire technical team, I had to make up names for the end credits, since I was not able to write a music short enough for them.
- I myself was the director, the producer, held a cameo role, wrote music, played it, recorded it and mixed it. I edited the movie, was the only location manager, casting agent, and director of photography. The original director of photography was fired after he tried to kill me with a bottle of Jerez wine at 2 am one morning.

That any one person should do all this is usually synonymous with either artistic pretentiousness or a cinematic disaster, or both.

Having said all this, and before some of you shuffle off inconspicuously towards the exit to save two hours of your lives, here is the other side of the coin:

- I'd been thinking about this film for about 10 years before making it.
- I have had literature published. I won a major national prize in France during my photographic period there. I have a degree in film music composition, was finalist winner of the Brit songwriting competition 4 years ago, and also recorded the Rodrigo guitar concerto with an orchestra as a soloist at the same time. I was a school music and drama teacher for almost 14 years, and ended up running my own department. I finally I had a great little story in my hands which all gave the confidence to make a movie.

So, I sold the only property I had, re mortgaged everything else, and proceed to spend absolutely everything, leaving me only with the clothes I have on today.

Next I cast the film: in a butcher's shop in fact, which where I found the lead boy actor, telling jokes in front of a waiting crowd of ladies. I then found Paco under a stone somewhere.

I spent a full year location hunting, literally about 300 days of driving, walking, talking, contact making, climbing etc until I found the exact perfect places.

I prepared my group of actors for well over 6 months, to teach them to NOT act, but be themselves in front of a camera and a fretting director.

If I worked without any kind of a script its because, I HAD written one, but it always got in the way of creativity for me. It killed the very spontaneity I was looking for. Which meant sometimes if the shooting plan of the day was for a village elder's conversation, we would instead film a scene 30 km away because the clouds were perfect just then. It's the sort of freedom which a big budget disallows.

I obviously knew my story back to front, and had already composed most of the music, I knew which images I needed for which themes.

In other words, my improvisations were not improvised at all. I put everything in place so that many happy artistic accidents could take place, and they did.

I was of course, terrifically lucky to fall on the likes of Gonzalo, the lead boy actor whose natural talent and unflinching energy and motivation was a pillar in the film. He learned to play the guitar

during the shoot, and astoundingly grew to play so well, you will hear his guitar in all the musical tracks of the film – quite feat, you will hear, for a 12 year old.

Also Francisco, whose personality was so utterly close to what I wanted, and whose intelligence and subtle acting was, in itself, another pillar in the film. Not to mention Ana, whose real life shyness was so strong she never uttered a word to me during the whole shoot – yet would transform in front of the camera to an almost alarming extent.

And when I had my little nervous breakdown in the middle of the shoot, fell on the floor weeping, and called my mummy, the team went on shooting the scenes without me.

I don't want to go much into my artistic intentions in the film, as either they speak for themselves or don't exist, but will point out these brief points:

- This is a coming of age film, yet I wanted to avoid like the plague the usual sentimentality so often associated with them, and especially avoid what most directors avoid in their depictions for the sake of the politically or socially correct. Thus, I refused to shy away from the most intimate aspects of a young teenager: if their sexuality, and often their confused sexuality has real importance, as it tends to, I would include it. Not to manipulate, or for shock value, but because not mentioning it when you deal with that specific age, is like a lie through omission.

- It deals with a boy's guilt for past events, which he is the only one to know about, and how that guilt so desperately needs an outlet, an understanding person. And finally how seemingly anodyne events can have a very profound impact on a youth at that crucial stage of development.

Finally, being a musician, my aim was to create a much closer harmony between the pictures and the music, so that neither one accompanies the other, but they act together to form one effect.

I am proud to present this film to your and hope very much you will enjoy it, and perhaps you might tell myself and Paco if we have come any near the ideal I just mentioned.



CRITIQUES

'Director Noel shoots the gloriously sunlit countryside around the village of Jerez with the eye of a painter while showing his expertise at playing with audience expectations. It is this sure-handed way with what turns out to be a surprising narrative, the naturalism of the local townspeople in their first acting roles, and the almost dangerous sensuality of the cinematography, that marks *In Your Absence* as a very impressive first film'.

ALAN FRANEY, DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER OF VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL.

'It's not often you watch a movie that captivates you even before the first syllable of dialogue is uttered, as in *In Your Absence*' SEATTLE WEEKLY

'A crazy impressive debut from newcom director Ivan Noel'

'The young actor who plays Pablo gives an incredible performance in this coming of age drama. Great set decoration and beautiful cinematography stand out in this film' CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

'Very bleak, but the experience lived with me for days'

Fift highest voted film in 2008 Vancouver Film Festival in its category.

'The film's backdrop defines 'summer' in its absolute perfection, and the pairing of fine-tuned imagery and diverse mood setting music makes the film both an aural and visual delight.' REDEFINE MAGAZINE.



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In Your Absence, or *En Tu Ausencia*, is a surprising first-time effort by director Iván Noel that emanates beauty in more ways than one. Set in a pristine stretch of Spanish countryside, *In Your Absence* is filmed amidst a breath-taking setting full of enveloping blue skies, abundant sunflowers, flowering fields, and rolling hills. The film's backdrop defines "summer" in its absolute perfection, and the pairing of fine-tuned imagery and diverse, mood-setting music makes the film both an aural and visual delight.



Young actor Gonzalo Sánchez Sejas fills a heavy role with ease. He plays an emotionally-endowed 13-year-old named Pablo whose father has recently passed away. Naive and vulnerable, Pablo has become a bit of an outsider in his own town since the tragedy, and he has only his mother and one friend. So, when a foreigner's car unexpectedly breaks down, Pablo befriends him, despite the numerous warnings from the villagers telling him to do otherwise.

In Your Absence is a film that is powered by unpredictable human interactions. Noel manages to keep viewers captivated by dropping hints about, rather than flatly stating, definitive characteristics of the film's three main characters, and this slow reveal keeps a rather slow-paced film brimming with tension. One constantly wonders what each character will do next, and often wonders wrong. A million possibilities are hinted at for every subtle action, making *In Your Absence* suspenseful in an unpredictable way.

With so many possibilities looming on the horizon, the most crucial point of *In Your Absence* lies in its conclusion, and it doesn't disappoint. Everything makes perfect sense at the end — a comfortable resting place for a film with a plethora of acceptable endings.

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STILLS







