

San Sebastián 2024: Big Names, New Talent

JOHN HOPEWELL

In terms of stars — Cate Blanchett, Johnny Depp, Javier Bardem, Tilda Swinton, Pamela Anderson — and auteur power — Pedro Almodóvar, Sean Baker, Costa Gavras, Edward Berger, Mike Leigh, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Joshua Oppenheimer, François Ozon, Mohammad Rasoulof, Walter Salles, Maite Alberdi — this year's San Sebastián Festival promises one of its biggest editions ever.

Yet it's the Spanish festival's wealth of new talent and rising names in its industry competitions sets it apart. Here are seven things to expect from the Fest, which runs Sept. 20-28 at the stunning Basque seaside resort:

Blanchett, Almodóvar, Bardem, Depp, Swinton, Anderson

Blanchett, Almodóvar and Bardem will collect career achievement Donostia Awards, with Blanchett talking up Guy Maddin's Cannes hit *Rumours*, set for U.S. theatrical release via Bleecker Street on Oct. 18; Almodóvar and Swinton will present Venice success *The Room Next Door*. Depp will unveil *Modi*, his second film as a director and first out from his London label IN.2 Films, which was launched in 2021 with Spanish distributor A Contracorriente Films. That may help explain the San Sebastián world premiere.

Audrey Diwan Opens San Sebastián

Traditionally, San Sebastián was an art pic haven, sourcing many of its bigger films from Toronto, staging their European premieres in the elegant Basque Belle Époque seaside city. Berger's *Conclave*, Mike Leigh's *Hard Truths* and Oppenheimer's *The End* all played at the Canadian festival, Leigh and Berger to acclaim. *Emmanuelle*, from Audrey Diwan (*Happening*) will, however, world premiere at San Sebastián, opening the Festival. Sales agent Goodfellas opened San Sebastián with "the European premiere of *The Boy and the Heron* last year and that went very well for them. So they were interested in repeating, and we



Emmanuelle.

wanted *Emmanuelle* in competition, because we love a lot the film," says San Sebastián director José Luis Rebordinos.

San Sebastián's New SVOD Punch

The Spanish festival hosts more bows from global streamers. It's a fitting place, since as of Aug. 24, Spain accounted for eight of the 20 titles in Netflix's historical Top 10s of the most-viewed ever non-English films and TV shows. One hit, horror-thriller *The Platform*, which chalked up 82 million views on Netflix, will now bow a second installment at San Sebastián. Netflix also world premieres two titles in the San Sebastián main competition: *In Her Place*, from Chilean double Oscar nominee Alberdi, her first fiction film, which is already sparking good word of mouth; and *The Man Who Loved UFOs*, from New Argentine cinema luminary Diego Lerman (*The Invisible Eye*).

A Spanish Film Industry Revolution

San Sebastián's 2024 Spanish lineup sees directors stepping up in scale or drawing more industry backing as big SVOD players — such as Spain's Movistar Plus+ and Prime Video — move into production on features aimed squarely at theatrical release or board a filmmaker's first original series. Iciar Bollain's competition contender *I'm Nevenka* will be the first title from a slate of six movies designed as "auteur event films" backed by Movistar Plus+ and announced this January. A special screening, *The Red Virgin* from Paula Ortiz, will debut in theaters across Spain on Sept. 27 as the first Prime Video original to get a wide theatrical release in the country. For decades, Spain has lacked big national film champions like France's Gaumont or Pathé, but with Movistar Plus+ and The Mediapro Studio upping Spanish pic production, it may be finally getting them. Certainly, indus-

try watchers will be tracking the reception of *I'm Nevenka* and *The Red Virgin* at San Sebastián and beyond.

New Talent

"We try to establish a balance between stars and name filmmakers and new directors," says Rebordinos. It may not be a coincidence — such is the Festival's appeal for emerging creators that first- or second-time directors have won its top Golden Shell three times in the last four years. This year, three titles from first-time creators competing in the main San Sebastián competition are sparking strong word-of-mouth: Laura Carreira's Scotland-set immigrant's tale *On Falling*, from Ken Loach producer Sixteen Films; *Bound in Heaven*, from China's Xin Huo; and world premiere *The Wailing*, from Pedro Martín Calero, starring Ester Expósito (*Elite*). "It's a classic horror film, in which you discover in the last quarter of an hour is talking about something important," says Rebordinos.

Other Buzz Titles

San Sebastián's depth in new talent runs much deeper, however. Buzzy titles selected for its New Directors competition include Akaki Popkhadze's Nice criminal underworld-set *In the Name of Blood*, elevated by its interplay of faith and family; and Koya Kamura's *Winter in Sokcho*, which captures the delicate unraveling of a young woman's search for identity and the complexities of human connection. Watch out too for *La Guitarra Flamenca de Yera Cortés*, the directorial feature debut of Antón Álvarez, better known as singer-songwriter C. Tangana, and highly recommended by those who have seen it. Awaited projects set to hit San Sebastián's Co-Production Forum include Brazilian Gabriela Amaral Almeida's body horror *She, Crocodile*, and *Only Love Exists*, from Berlin winner Natalia López Gallardo (*Robe of Gems*). Another project, *Her Lightness*, a tale of a woman's belated freedom, from Cuba's Rosa María Rodríguez, rolls off a bullish reception and multiple prizes at Locomo's Open Doors.

Basque Build

"Spanish cinema is on a roll, and most particularly Basque cinema," says Rebordinos. "There's so much industry — the 20 Basque titles at this year's festival were chosen from 100 submissions — and its cinema probably has never been better," he argues, citing Venice selection for *Marco*. Basque tax breaks are attracting international productions, which help local companies and technicians to hone their skillsets. The Basque Cinema has even grown a mini star system, he adds, pointing to Nagore Aranburu (*Flowers*), star of Alauda Ruiz de Azúa's *Querer*, the biggest series at this year's San Sebastián. Add world premieres of *The Platform 2*, and *I'm Nevenka*, and Basque film and TV has never been stronger at San Sebastián. Variety has been saying that year after year of late, but in 2024 it's particularly noticeable.

Callum McLennan and Rafa Salles Ross contributed to this article.

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