

WILD TALES

ARGENTINA 2014, 122 MIN

DAMIAN SZIFRON

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Revenge is a dish best served hot in this caustic compendium of anecdotes about the the injustices of the world.

With its exaggerated vision of societal tensions reaching boiling point, director Damián Szifrón's *Wild Tales* serves as a comically pessimistic barometer of the Argentine national mood, still defined by the nightmares of the economic depression at the turn of the century.

In Pedro Almodóvar's *Pepi, Luci, Bom...*, the post-Franco Spanish landscape became a hedonistic wonderland in which artists partied their way through the hangover of fascism. While Szifrón shares Almodóvar's (on production duties here) unique strain of dark humour, his characters' disenchantment manifests itself in a very different way, through the blunt force of violence. Imagine Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin* repurposed with an impish, bourgeois-baiting comedy streak.

This is a sharp, tightly directed anthology film comprised of six standalone shorts, linked by a potent brand of rage against the political machine. Szifrón reduces modern Argentinean society to a morass of gross absurdity that provokes its victims to action. Whether it's a yuppie wedding blighted by infidelity or a Kafkaesque world where arbitrary bureaucracy forms its own insurmountable power structure, each strand makes up a different shade of the same hell in which the characters face an unappealing choice — pay and relax or give yourself a heart attack. *Wild Tales* is about the unspoken third option: resistance. It's the ultimate bourgeois fear — the downtrodden subjects seeing the

fragile mortal behind the velvet curtain and deciding to tear the Emerald City to the ground.

While it moves at a fair pace, cantering from one form of elegantly constructed mayhem to the next, *Wild Tales*' satire plays broad, trading in the kind of high impact, low grade aphorisms that form the domain of stand-up comedy routines the world over. The narrative glibness is compensated for by a sleek aesthetic that lends the picture a sense of propulsion and visual wit. Indeed, the film excels in its mischievous sense of irony, always undercutting its calculated excesses with a sly wink. What is truly laudable is that, despite an outlook that veers towards the nihilistic, it is nimble and fleet-footed in its pursuit of societal rot, skillfully avoiding the hysterically overwrought bile of Bobcat Goldthwait's similarly primed *God Bless America*.

Szifrón's self-consciousness proves an unexpected asset to the film, tempering its more outlandish proclivities by rooting the contrivances firmly within the realm of the fable. The world of *Wild Tales* is palpably our own, but the events within it unfold with the artificially calibrated precision of a parable; even the title itself is an anachronism. The result is a state of the nation address ensconced in reality, but driven by the mythical aura of violence. With one notable exception, each protagonist takes ownership of his situation and becomes the modern incarnation of a folk hero. In this sense, the stories of *Wild Tales* are outlaw ballads for a new Argentina.

Craig Williams , Little White Lies

WRITING CREDITS: Damián Szifrón **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Javier Julia **MUSIC:** Gustavo Santaolalla

CAST: Salgado Darío Grandinetti | Isabel María Marull | Profesora Leguizamon Moníca Villa | Cocinera Rita Cortese

VOTING FOR *Finding Vivian Maier* A47 | B22 | C2 | D0 | E0 | Rating 90.1% | Attendance 75

Our next screening | **Force Majeure** | Tuesday 15 December 2015. 8.00pm
After witnessing an avalanche, the lives of a Swedish family starts to rapidly unravel.