

# *Arts Roundup: 38th Havana Film Festival 5*

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As the dust continues to settle after the 38th Havana International Festival of New Latin American Cinema the final numbers are all in. Regarding the competition there were 18 full length feature films, from seven countries.

There were galas, special presentations, 12 out-of-competition films, expositions, and tributes.

Clearly the 38th edition of the festival, with more than 400 films, had something for everyone.

Now that the much-awaited event has concluded, a review of the prizes, the guests, the dialogues, opinions, and the eternal disagreements between juries, critics, and the public is in order.

JG: The Mexican film *Desert or Desierto*, directed by Jonás Cuarón, won the Coral Prize for Best Feature Film, with performances by U.S. actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan and Mexico's Gael García Bernal. The movie is about a group of undocumented Mexican workers who attempt to cross the U.S. border through the desert that separates the two countries.

Director Jonás Cuarón comes from a "movie family." His father, Alfonso, won an Oscar as Best Director for *Gravity* (2013). Critics argue that *Desierto* came out ahead of more deserving films such as *Aquarius*, by Brazilian Kleber Mendonça; *Neruda*, by Chilean Pablo Larraín; or *The illustrious citizen* or *El Ciudadano Ilustre*, by Argentinians Gastón Duprat and Mariano Cohn.

Cortina musica de cinema

GJ: Although this is not the first time she has arrived in person, the Brazilian actress Sonia Braga captivated Havana once again, with her unassuming charm. This time around, Sonia Braga moved

audiences in *Aquarius*. As Clara, the lead character, she provided a memorable performance, receiving not only resounding ovations in theaters but recognition from the jury as well, this time on the mark, awarding her the Coral Prize for Best Female Performance. The International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) and Signis (World Catholic Association for Communication) also awarded their prizes to *Aquarius*.

Cuba's Luis Alberto García was awarded the Best Male Performance Coral Prize, for his performance as Esteban in *Before is not now or Ya no es antes*, by Lester Hamlet, while the film won the Viewers' Choice Prize.

JG: *Last days in Havana* or *Últimos días en La Habana*, from Fernando Pérez, with powerful acting by Jorge Martínez, received the jury's Special Prize, while the Argentine film, *El Ciudadano Ilustre*, chosen to open the Festival, only received the Coral for Best Script, although the film was awarded the collateral prize presented by the Cuban Cinematographic Press Association. *El Ciudadano Ilustre*, with a magnificent Óscar Martínez, is a film worth seeing. Its premise seduces from the very beginning: Daniel Mantovani, winner of a Nobel Prize for Literature, returns to his hometown to receive a distinction, but the trip becomes an infernal pilgrimage.

Neruda, Chilean director Pablo Larrain's sixth film, won two Coral Prizes, for Best Artistic Direction and Editing. Luis Gnecco as Neruda, said he was happy to witness the positive reaction of audiences

JG: *Neruda* had just been nominated for a Golden Globe as the Best Non-English Language Film, a kind of preview to the 2017 Oscars.

The presentation of the Coral of Honor, by actress Beatriz Valdés to Cuban filmmaker Enrique Pineda Barnet was moving. She played the leading role in his 1989 film *The Beauty of the Alhambra* *La Bella de la Alhambra*, for which he received a Coral at that time.

Among the galas, the most significant was *Snowden*, presented by its director Oliver Stone, well-known for his films *Platoon*, *Born on the 4th of July*, *Wall Street*, and *JFK*.

Stone held a press conference in the Hotel Nacional's Taganana Hall, during which he commented on the script for his biopic about Edward Snowden, describing the work as one of serious journalism and of filmmaking.

Stone also spoke of his admiration for Fidel, noting the leader's strong, powerful personality, adding that he had learned a great deal during the interviews he conducted for his films *Comandante*, 2003; *Looking For Fidel*, 2005; and *Castro in Winter*, 2012, saying he was impressed that Fidel never hesitated to standup and defend his ideas.

GJ: Among the Special guests was U.S. director Brian de Palma, who became one of Hollywood's most interesting new directors with his uncommon success making the first adaptation of a Stephen King novel, *Carrie*, in 1976, and later with *The Untouchables* (1987). Plus Colombian Víctor Gaviria, who received the Best Director Coral for *The animal's wife* or *La mujer del animal*, a film based on a true story, and Spain's Marisa Paredes, who has participated in several Festivals with films like *Profundo carmesí*, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*, and *Tacones lejanos*.

The San Antonio de los Baños International School of Film and TV was honored on its 30th anniversary, with a special Coral. The school was inaugurated during the 8th Festival by Fernando Birri, Gabriel García Márquez, and Julio García Espinosa, then ICAIC and Festival director, in an event presided over by Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro.

Current Festival President Iván Giroud began his brief opening remarks with "My first words are for Fidel; he was an inspiration and one of the great promoters of Latin American film."



**Radio Habana Cuba**