

Everybody Knows

Just two years ago (*Hill Rag* of February 2017), I predicted that Iranian director Ashgar Farhadi's latest film, "The Salesman," was "an excellent bet to be on the short list of the five films nominated for Best Foreign Language motion picture" of that year. Not only was it nominated, it won the Oscar in that category, the second time Farhadi had gained that honor (his first was the superb family drama "A Separation" in 2012). Since "The Salesman," he has been working on a film in Spain starring those two glories of Spanish cinema, Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz. That film has now opened on DC screens.

"Everybody Knows" (*Todos lo Saben*) is new territory for Farhadi, filmed in Spain in a new language and within a new landscape. Still, it has earmarks of his trademark style. It is a contemporary domestic drama involving several complex family dynamics, lacking any obvious political overtones, and eschewing any violent acts on screen. Still, it builds palpable tension and includes a late-blooming reveal that re-casts the whole plot.

Laura (Cruz) is Spanish woman long settled with her family and two kids in Argentina who has come home to her hometown to participate in the wedding of her younger sister Ana (Inman Cuesta) in a village outside Madrid. Her family is large, lively, and loud. The patriarch, Antonio (Ramon Barea), bellows about the house, where Laura's older sister Mariana (Elvira Minguez) lives with her husband Fernando (Eduard Fernandez) and other family members. Tied closely to the family is Paco (Bardem), a local vintner whose family were servants in Laura's household, and his striving wife Bea (Barbara Lennie). The bustle of wedding preparations leads into an exuberant, colorful wedding party lasting into the night.

Then this *simpatico* atmosphere turns dark. The lights go out, and Laura discovers that Irene (Carla Campra), her teen-aged daughter, is missing from inside a locked bedroom, and the whole family—even the whole town—is gripped with the kidnapping and who might have done it. Also, Paco, ex-lover of Laura (an affair about which "everybody knows") is concerned for her and throws himself into the search. In a note that weakens the drama, everyone agrees to keep the police out of it, though Fernando does consult with an old friend Jorge (José Angel Egido), a retired policeman. The plot thickens when phone messages are received from the kidnappers, demanding a daunting ransom, and Laura's troubled husband Alejandro (Ricardo Darin) arrives from Buenos Aires, looking for divine intervention.

The film's feel for Spanish life and relationships is a complement to Farhadi, given that he's working in an alien tongue and culture. Also, his typically intricate plotting is in full evidence once again, pulling the viewer into his story effectively. More problematic, however, is the dénouement, where what becomes a whodunnit ends with a whimper rather than a revelation. Where Farhadi still retains his touch, however, is in the handling of his actors. He fluidly guides a very accomplished, well-rounded cast headed by his two stars Cruz and Bardem (married in real life) and exuding their usual chemistry. By the way, the two do not really have "star turns" but are fully blended into the ensemble. Cruz gets a chance to transform herself from radiant to agonized while Bardem convincingly shifts gears from hail-fellow to village avenger, both very believably.

While not at the level, perhaps, of his Iranian gems, “Everybody Knows” is still a respectable effort for Ashgar Farhadi’s Spanish-language debut.
(The film, rated “R” for mature themes, runs for 123 minutes.)

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