

## The Clan

Try picturing “The Sopranos” transferred to Buenos Aires, an upwardly mobile Italian-Argentine family that mixes family dinners with kidnapping and murder. Meet the Puccios of “The Clan,” a close-knit family striving for well being just after the Dirty War of military rule has ended with a newly democratic Argentine government in 1982. The family “business” isn’t exactly Mafia, however, but still depends on a legacy from the country’s civil war: Kidnapping the wealthy for ransom to keep their home fires burning

This family’s patriarch is Arquimedes Puccio (Guillermo Francella) an ex-intelligence officer who used to perform kidnappings for the generals and is still until the protection of the “Commodore.” Arquimedes likes the ransom money that allows his family to be well off and lets him expand his deli business into an upscale surf shop for Alejandro (“Alex”), the oldest of his five kids, to run. Alex (Peter Lanzani) is also a star rugby player, good enough for the national team, and his athletic renown allows him to make connections with children of well-off families that might be ransom candidates. Mom, Epifania (Lili Popovich) is the busy matriarch, a dedicated teacher and housewife who is great at turning a blind eye. Alex’s four younger siblings complete the sweet family group.

But Dad and his gang not only kidnap rich people, they keep them prisoner in the family basement where the sounds of their agonies can be heard upstairs. Then, after the ransoms are paid, the hostages are coolly bumped off. So no one can squeal. All while Arquimedes is saying grace upstairs over dinner or helping with a daughter’s math homework. It is this normal family dynamic intertwined with unforgiving violence that produces the tension in this tough film. The only question is when will their double life come crashing down.

It should be noted that the Puccio family and its criminal enterprises were actually based on the activities of a real family in Buenos Aires during the period. Their ongoing notoriety may have contributed to “The Clan,” written and directed by Pablo Trapero, becoming the largest box office draw in Argentine cinema history.

For Argentines, another element drawing filmgoers may be the role played by Francella. The actor has been known for 30 years as one of the country’s most popular comedians on screen and TV. Yet, in “The Clan,” the usually goofy Francella undergoes a massive makeover as a steely and chilling crime boss, with icy blue eyes overseeing his grim business with nary a smile—ever focused on “protecting” his family.

This reviewer found one glaring fault with this picture: a periodically grating sound track. Particularly accompanying scenes of strong violence, Trapero incorporates jarring rock music of the period--a most irritating effect. My guess is that the director was purposefully striving for this clashing effect on his audience, but for this one witness, it went beyond the pale.

*(“The Clan” is rated “R” for tough violence and sexual activity and runs 110 mins.)*

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