

Penélope Cruz at BFI Southbank



Penélope Cruz has intoxicated and dazzled audiences since her first major role in *Jamón, Jamón* (1992) starring opposite **Javier Bardem**. **BFI Southbank** will launch August with a special preview of *Broken Embraces* (2009), her latest collaboration with **Pedro Almodóvar**, followed by an on-stage interview with both Cruz and Almodóvar (subject to final confirmation).

THE INDEPENDENT

Growing up in a working-class suburb of Alcobendas, north of Madrid, Penélope spent many hours at her mother's hairdressing salon observing women, their many differences and how they related to each other - an invaluable education which she so evidently absorbed. After studying classical ballet for nine years at Spain's National Conservatory, she turned to acting aged 15 when she won a talent contest and soon working in television, rapidly progressing to the big screen.

Cruz developed her craft working with Spanish directors such as **Fernando Trueba** and **Alejandro Amenábar** when starring in the **Oscar**-winning film *Belle Époque* (1992) and *Open Your Eyes* (1997), (later remade in the US as *Vanilla Sky* in which she reprised her role opposite **Tom Cruise**) respectively. Cruz has become one of the few European actresses to gain a standing in the American market in films such as Stephen Frears' *The Hi-Lo Country* (1998).

Her big success, however, came with Pedro Almodóvar's *All About My Mother* (1999), still considered one of Spain's finest ever films, with her emotive performance as Sister Rosa, a young pregnant nun who is dying of AIDS. There's no denying the magical chemistry between Pedro and Penélope which seems to accentuate the impact of their talents. This synergy was also apparent in 2006's *Volver* where they once again intensified maternal, filial and other female relationships with extraordinary insight.

A self-confessed perfectionist, Cruz has overcome the 'burden' of being stunningly beautiful and proved to be an actress of exceptional ability. Her **Oscar** acceptance speech for *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008) (the first Spanish actress to receive an **Academy Award**) was dignified, inspiring and humble - much like the woman herself.

PRESS CONTACT

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Film Programme

Jamón, Jamón



Spain 1992. Dir Bigas Luna. With Javier Bardem, Anna Galiena, Stefania Sandrelli. 94min. EST

Not since Bacall seduced Bogart in *To Have and Have Not* has an actress made such a fervent impact in her first major role as Cruz does here. In Luna's barmy homage to his fascination with Spanish sexual and eating habits, she plays a prostitute's daughter attracting the affections of two local men; a situation which ultimately leads to tragedy. A tale of burning desires and seriously harmful ham.

Belle Epoque

Spain-France-Portugal 1992. Dir Fernando Trueba. With Fernando Fernán Gómez, Ariadna Gil, Jorge Sanz, Maribel Verdú. 110min. EST.15

During the Spanish Civil War a handsome deserter is more than happy to take shelter at the provincial home of an elderly artist after spying his four beautiful daughters, of which Penélope plays the blushing, gangly youngest. One of the biggest-grossing Spanish films of all time, *Belle Epoque* proved that a Spaniard could make a period picture as polished and charming as any in European cinema.

Open Your Eyes Abre los ojos

Spain/France/Italy 1997. Dir Alejandro Amenábar. With Eduardo Noriega, Fele Martínez. 119min. EST. 15

César (Noriega) has it all – looks, charm, girls and money. That is until he meets Sofía (Cruz) at his own flashy birthday party. His obsession with her begins to turn very dark after his face is terribly disfigured in a road accident - or did he just dream that? Far more chilling and suspenseful than the US remake *Vanilla Sky*, in which Penélope reprised her role opposite Tom Cruise.

The Hi-Lo Country

USA-UK-Germany 1998. Dir Stephen Frears. With Billy Crudup, Woody Harrelson, Patricia Arquette. 114min. 15

Set in the twilight years of the American West, with the obligatory cattle-drives and testosterone-fuelled bar brawls, this is a cracking yarn about two best-buddy cowboys (Crudup and Harrelson) in love with the same married woman (Arquette). Cruz easily overcomes the language barrier in this, her first English-speaking role, as Crudup's ill-treated sweetheart; but it's her eyes that exquisitely betray her character's pain.

The Girl of Your Dreams La niña de tus ojos

Spain 1998. Dir Fernando Trueba. With Antonio Resines, Rosa Mariá Sardá, Jorge Sanz. 121min. EST

Reminiscent of a 'Springtime for Hitler' production and with a script as witty as Mel Brooks at his finest, this story of a troupe of Spanish filmmakers shooting a movie in the heart of Nazi Germany is a comic gem. Trueba gathers a top-class cast (even Hanna Schygulla pops up as Goebbels' wife) and Cruz is magnificent as the star of the film-within-the-film.

All About My Mother Todo sobre mi madre

Spain/France 1999. Dir Pedro Almodóvar. With Cecilia Roth, Marisa Paredes, Antonia San Juan. 101min. EST. 15

Following the sudden death of her teenage son, Manuela (Roth) travels to Barcelona in an attempt to find his father. Through old friends she meets a young nun (Cruz) and becomes the personal assistant to the actress her son so adored. Hailed as Almodóvar's 'coming of age' movie, and with a performance that made Cruz an international star, this is well worth a view.

Volver

Spain 2006. Dir Pedro Almodóvar. With Carmen Maura, Lola Dueñas, 121min. EST. 15

Almodóvar sets *Volver* in his native La Mancha, where the persistent, howling winds allegedly drive women to madness, suicide, murder... and flatulence. The result is a terrific female ensemble piece: often humorous and very moving. Penélope draws on all her strengths to play a woman refusing to become a victim, a performance that brought her worldwide acclaim after a series of lacklustre Hollywood movies.

Bandidas

France-Mexico-USA 2006. Dir Joachim Rønning & Espen Sandberg. With Salma Hayek, Steve Zahn, Sam Shepard. 92min.12A

Penélope teams up with pal Salma Hayek to play two contrasting bank-robbing cowgirls in old Mexico seeking revenge on a merciless land baron. The film was never going to emulate the success of their male outlaw predecessors, Butch and Sundance, but it is, nevertheless, rollicking good fun with mucho sex appeal. A rare opportunity to catch *Bandidas* on the big screen.

Vicky Cristina Barcelona

USA-Spain 2008. Dir Woody Allen. With Rebecca Hall, Scarlett Johansson, Javier Bardem. 96min. 12A

Two American girlfriends are spending the summer in Barcelona - half-heartedly researching Gaudí while enjoying the local wines - when they are unexpectedly swept away by an irresistible Spanish artist (Bardem). Allen's clued-up and very funny take on rich, clueless Americans abroad has top-notch performances from his four leading actors with Penélope given free rein with relish as the tempestuous first wife of Bardem.



Elegy

USA 2008. Dir Isabel Coixet. With Ben Kingsley, Patricia Clarkson, Dennis Hopper. 112min. 15

In this adaptation of a Philip Roth story, Kingsley plays an ageing college professor with a penchant for sexy young women, yet who struggles with jealousy and self-doubt when he embarks on a relationship with an elegant Cuban woman. Coixet does her best to make this a classy, intelligent movie, but ultimately it is Kingsley and Cruz's beautifully judged performances that make this worth viewing.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Booking information

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.00, concs £6.65 Members pay £1.40 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

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